

# Translation and semiotic mediation

Winfried Nöth

University of Kassel and PUC São Paulo<sup>1</sup>  
e-mail: noeth@uni-kassel.de

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**Abstract.** Translation, according to Charles S. Peirce, is semiotic mediation. In sign processes in general, the sign mediates between the object, which it represents, and its interpretant, the idea it evokes, the interpretation it creates, or the action it causes. To what extent does the way a translator mediates correspond to what a sign does in semiosis? The paper inquires into the parallels between the agency of the sign in semiosis and the agency of the interpreter (and translator) in translation. It argues that some of the limits and limitations of translatability are also the limits of the sign in semiosis. Since genuine icons and genuine indices do not convey meaning they are strictly speaking also untranslatable. Nevertheless, icons and indices also serve as mediators in learning how to translate.

## 1. Mediation: The agency of the sign and of its interpretant

This paper presents complementary Peircean perspectives to Peeter Torop's *Total Translation* and to his "Semiotics of Mediation" (Torop 2000, 2012) as well as to the Peircean theory of translation elaborated by Dinda Gorfée (1994, 2004). In contrast to the studies by these authors, who are concerned with semiotic aspects of translation proper, the present paper focuses mainly on translation as a metaphor to elucidate the process of semiotic mediation in general. Peirce often used the concept of *mediation* simply as a synonym of the concepts of *sign* and *representation* (cf. Parmentier 1985, Nöth 2011a). Translators are evidently also agents who mediate between speakers and hearers of different languages, but what do they have in common with the agency of signs in sign processes in general?

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<sup>1</sup> Postal address: Universität Kassel, FB 02, IAA, D-34109 Kassel, Germany.

It is well known that the interpretant of the sign must not be confounded with the interpreter in the sense of the addressee who interprets a message. *Interpretant* is Peirce's term for the third of the three constituents of a sign; it refers to the ideas which a sign conveys to its interpreters, the mental, emotional or behavioural effect of the sign on its addressees. In Peirce's words, it is "the proper significate outcome of a sign" (CP 5.473, 1907). The two other agents in semiosis are the *sign* in the narrower sense, occasionally also called the *representamen*, and the *object* represented by the sign, that is, the dynamical and the immediate object. The dynamical or real object is the object "as unlimited and final study would show it to be" (CP 8.183, EP 2: 495, 1909; CP 4.536, 1906); it can therefore only be incompletely represented by its sign. The *immediate object* is a mental representation of the *dynamical object*, an idea, knowledge, or mere notion which we have of the real object of the sign; in this sense, it is "the Object as the Sign represents it" (CP 8.343, 1910) or "the Object as cognized in the Sign and therefore an Idea" (EP 2: 495, 1909).

In the process of semiosis, the sign is a first, the object a second, and the interpretant a third. This triadic order corresponds to the temporal order in which the three play their part in the process of semiosis (e.g., CP 7.591, 1866). The sign comes first insofar as it is the first which we perceive before interpretation begins. Its object is the second insofar as it antecedes the sign as the knowledge which we must have to interpret it, whereas the interpretant is the third because it interprets the sign and its object.

Consider the example of a red traffic light. The *sign* pertains to the present, the moment in which a driver perceives it. The *object* antecedes it since it is the driver's knowledge of the traffic regulation and the awareness that the red light means 'stop'. The *interpretant* follows the driver's perception of the light since it is the habit of road users to stop when the traffic light has turned red. Peirce's semiotics is not a psychological theory of actual sign processing. The sign is not merely that which is first perceived before it is interpreted. Instead, it is a "power", a semiotic potency, which "is of the nature of a mental habit" and which "consists in the fact that something *would be*" (MS 675, ca. 1911, quoted from Balat 1990: 48, fn. 8).

Semiotic mediation occurs whenever "a *Third* [...] brings a *First* into relation to a *Second*" (CP 8.332, 1904), but since both the interpretant and, in the sense of a triadic relation, the sign, too, are phenomena of thirdness, both the sign and the interpretant mediate in semiosis, although in different senses. The *sign* mediates because it does not only represent its object but also fulfills

the task of bringing “the interpretant into a relation to the object, corresponding to its own relation to the object” (*ibid.*). Peirce uses the trivalent verb *to bring* to characterize the agency of the sign’s triadic mediation. The logic of the verb *to bring*, just like that of the verb *to give*, requires the collaboration of three participants (CP 1.363, 1890); it presupposes a bringer (“a triple relative term”, *ibid.*), something that is brought, and a receiver, to whom the object is transferred. According to this semiotic scenario, the *sign* is the bringer or deliverer of something; the *object*, which is some information about a reality that precedes the sign, is that which the sign is bringing, and the *interpretant* is the receiver of this delivery. To establish a correspondence between two things is to establish a triadic relation. The interpretant cannot be conceived of without the two other semiotic agents to which it is related.

In a different sense, not only the sign but also the *interpretant* is a mediating agency in semiosis. As a third, the interpretant mediates like all thirds mediate between a first and a second. More specifically, the interpretant of a sign is “a mediating representation which represents the relate to be a representation of the same correlate which this mediating representation itself represents” (CP 1.553, EP 1: 5, 1867, italics in original). In other words: the interpretant mediates by interpreting the sign as a representation of its object.

Peirce makes explicit reference to the affinity of the semiotic agency of the interpretant with the work of a translator when he uses the verb *to translate* to describe how the interpretant interprets its sign in the process of semiosis and how thought interprets thought in the process of reasoning:

Thought [...] is in itself essentially of the nature of a sign. But a sign is not a sign unless it translates itself into another sign in which it is more fully developed. Thought requires achievement for its own development, and without this development it is nothing. Thought must live and grow in incessant new and higher translations, or it proves itself not to be genuine thought. (CP 5.594, 1903)

Since signs are fallible, the growth of signs through the mediation of their interpretants is not a growth that manifests itself in each and every individual translation. Instead, it manifests itself “in the long run”, through the self-correcting mechanisms inherent in the evolution of human thought, which evolves in a “community of understanding”, sharing and presupposing a common “fund of collateral experience”, as Colapietro (2003: 197) puts it.

## 2. The interpretant as an interpreter, semiosis as translation, and the limits of translatability and interpretability

In English semiotic terminology, the term *interpreter* is actually ambiguous. An interpreter is either 'an addressee who interprets a message', or 'a person who translates spoken language'. Peirce has studied the semiotic roles of interpreters in both senses. In his terminology, the *utterer* and *interpreter* are the two persons engaged in a dialogue (Colapietro 1993: 10). The interpreter in this sense of an interpreting addressee is also of interest to translation studies (cf. Gorlée 2004: 248) but interpretation in this sense is not in the focus of this paper.<sup>2</sup> In order to avoid ambiguities, the term *interpreter-translator* will occasionally be used in the following to refer to the interpreter in the latter sense.

Above, we observed that the interpreter should not be confounded with the interpretant of the sign, but we also concluded that the interpretant is a semiotic mediator. If the interpretant is a mediator, its role in semiosis should be in some respect similar to that of an interpreter-translator, whose role is evidently also to mediate, namely between speakers of different languages. When an English interpreter translates a speech delivered by a French speaker into English, she mediates between the French speaker and the English audience insofar as her audience depends on her communicating the same ideas to them as those conveyed by the French speaker (cf. CP 1.553, EP 1: 5, 1867). This characteristic of mediation makes the role of an interpreter-translator similar to that of the interpretant in semiosis in general. Just as the interpreter-translator mediates between speakers of two languages, the interpretant mediates between the object and the sign by interpreting the message conveyed by the former to the latter (cf. Nöth 2011a). In which sense is the interpretant, which is a sign itself, a mediating agent in semiosis in general (cf. Nöth 2009, 2011a)? Is Peirce's use of this term merely metaphorical?

When Peirce first introduced the term *interpretant*, he explained it with the example of someone learning French who uses a dictionary to look up the

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<sup>2</sup> Notice that in traditional models of communication (cf. Santaella, Nöth 2004) the role of the interpreter in the sense of the addressee is usually not represented as the one of a mediator but as the one of a more or less passive recipient. The idea of passivity is also expressed in the patient suffix *-ee* of the term *addressee*. Peirce's term *interpreter*, with its agentive suffix *-er* in parallel with the one of its terminological counterpart *utterer* suggests much more the idea of an agent in semiosis than the term *addressee*.

meaning of *homme* and finds that it means *man*. In this context, the semantic correspondence of *homme* with *man*, ascertained by the dictionary, illustrates the role of the interpretant as “a mediating representation [...] because it fulfils the office of an interpreter, who says that a foreigner says the same thing which he himself says” (CP 1.553, W 2: 53–4, 1867). In this example the dictionary fulfils the same task as an interpreter-translator. Both do not simply mediate by substituting unknown words of a source language for known words of a target language; they mediate by establishing relations between signs and the objects these signs represent in two languages.

Interpretants and interpreter-translators are subject to similar preconditions of their ability to translate signs. The semiotically most fundamental prerequisite for translatability is the knowledge of or familiarity with the object of the sign. A sign cannot convey the idea of an unknown object and cannot make an interpreter acquainted with such an object. It can only represent an object with which the interpreter is already familiar. Peirce calls this prerequisite of felicitous semiosis “collateral observation” and defines it as follows: “By collateral observation, I mean previous acquaintance with what the sign denotes. [...] Collateral observation [...] is no part of the Interpretant. But to put together the different subjects as the sign represents them as related – that is the main [i.e., force] of the Interpretant-forming” (CP 8.179; EP 2: 494, 1909).

Hence, the familiarity with the object of the sign – which we need in order to understand the sign – cannot be created by an interpretant nor by a translator-interpreter. Just as the meaning of the colour word *vermilion* cannot really be taught to anyone who has never seen a sample of this particular colour, translators cannot convey the meaning of the words of a source language representing cultural idiosyncrasies unknown to an audience only acquainted with their own culture. For example, the meaning of the English word *Beefeater* remains largely concealed when it is translated by means of the paraphrase ‘traditional guard at the Tower of London’. This paraphrase does not tell us what the fancy uniforms of these guards look like, and it will not enable us to identify a *Beefeater* among a dozen of men in diverse uniforms. The object represented by a verbal symbol must be known before a hearer can understand it. This is why familiarity is a prerequisite of the translatability and interpretability of signs. Collateral experience of the object presupposes prior lived experience of the object of the sign, which no translation can convey on its own. For instance, to give another example, the full meaning of the word *passion fruit* is untranslatable to someone who has never tasted this fruit.

According to the quote above, translators and interpretants have the task of “putting together the different subjects as the sign represents them as related”, instead of making the objects of signs familiar. The interpretant and equally the interpreter-translator have the task to interpret how the signs of objects, whose familiarity must be presupposed, are related among themselves; how they are combined and how new meanings are created by combining them.

A trivial prerequisite of translatability and interpretability is the *knowledge* of the signs which are to be translated or interpreted and which Peirce refers to as the prerequisite of “acquaintance with the system of signs”. He distinguishes it from the prerequisite of acquaintance with the *object* of the sign as follows: “I do not mean by ‘collateral observation’ acquaintance with the system of signs. What is so gathered is *not* COLLATERAL. It is on the contrary the prerequisite for getting any idea signified by the sign” (CP 8.179; EP 2: 494, 1909).

The presupposed familiarity with the object of the sign has consequences concerning the possibilities of their translatability. Strictly speaking, only symbols are fully translatable. In fact, to learn a second language means to acquire the habit of associating signs with objects. Symbols are signs based on habits, and habits can be changed, whereas similarities between signs and their objects, as in the case of the icon, or existential relations, as in the case of the index, cannot be changed. Genuine indices and pure icons, therefore, are strictly speaking untranslatable. An index, such as a gesture of pointing or the indication of a temperature by a thermometer, needs no translation, nor do iconic signs such as pictures have to be translated. Translations of icons and indices are only necessary and possible to the degree that these signs are combined with conventional signs, such as numbers, words, or cultural symbols. When translators translate verbal indices, such as deictic words, or verbal icons, such as onomatopoeic words, they only translate their symbolic components.

It is true that translators can replace a verbal icon in the source language with a *similar* verbal image in the target language and a verbal index with a different index indicating the same object, but, depending on the degree to which they do so, they run the risk of diminishing translational equivalence. This does not necessarily mean a loss of meaning since translations can also be creative and lead to what Peirce calls a “growth of symbols”.

However, as Peirce also points out, symbols, and with them, translations, can only grow through symbols, and not through icons and indices. Although symbols “come into being by development out of other signs, particularly from icons, or from mixed signs partaking of the nature of icons and symbols”, it is also

true that “if a man makes a new symbol, it is by thoughts involving concepts. So it is only out of symbols that a new symbol can grow” (CP 2.302, c. 1895).

### 3. Icons and indices as mediators in translation and language learning

How mediation and translation contribute to the growth of symbols has been described by Peirce, who uses examples from vocabulary acquisition in language learning. Here, the role of the interpreter-translator evidently corresponds to the role of the teacher. Of course, in language teaching, the teacher’s mediation is not restricted to translation proper, i. e., to *interlingual* translation, as in the old-fashioned translation method of second language teaching. In the so-called direct method of foreign language teaching, teachers mediate through *intralingual* and *intersemiotic* translation. In *intralingual* translation, an unknown word of the source language is mediated through its synonym or paraphrase, which substitute simpler and known words of that same language for it; a more basic vocabulary serves to explain the meaning of new vocabulary. In *intersemiotic* translation, the teacher teaches new words by using nonverbal signs, such as pictures, films, scenic enactments, or gestures.

Peirce did not propose a full-fledged theory of translation, let alone a theory of second language learning. The purpose of his reflections on these topics was rather to illustrate the role of the sign and its interpretant in semiosis in general (cf. Nöth 2010b). Nevertheless, in the course of these reflections, he conveys most interesting insights into the nature of translation and language learning. Let us consider in detail how Peirce uses the scenario of learning and teaching to illustrate the affinity of the roles of a language teacher who translates a word with the role of the interpretant in semiosis. The example quoted above of how the meaning of *homme* can be learned from its translation was only a fragment of the following much more comprehensive reflection on how translations mediate in vocabulary acquisition:

Suppose we look up the word *homme* in a French dictionary; we shall find opposite to it the word *man*, which, so placed, represents *homme* as representing the same two-legged creature which *man* itself represents. By a further accumulation of instances, it would be found that every comparison requires, besides the related thing, the ground, and the correlate, also a *mediating representation which represents the relate to be a representation of the same correlate which this mediating repre-*

*sensation itself represents.* Such a mediating representation may be termed an *interpretant*. (CP 1.553 & W 2: 53–4, 1867)

According to this scenario, the word *homme* is at first only a potential but not yet an actual sign to the student of French. It has no effect on the student's mind and cannot create an interpretant as long as the student does not yet have the habit of associating the word with the idea of its object, that is, its immediate object. The dictionary, like an interpreter, informing that *homme* means the same as *man*, tells the student that both words represent the same immediate object, the idea abbreviated as the one of a 'two-legged creature'. With this immediate object, the student is familiar through the English word *man* and other signs representing it; only the habit of associating the French word with this object has not yet been acquired. Through the mediation of the dictionary, the unknown word can now be interpreted. The dictionary does not directly convey information about the meaning of the word *homme*, which is its immediate object (CP 2.292, 1903), but only indirectly or mediately through another sign, the English word, which the dictionary lists as semantically equivalent. This is why the dictionary provides "a mediating representation".

The above language learning scenario elucidates the agency of an interpretant in semiosis in general. The interpretant is a mediating representation. The interpretant represents the sign, which it interprets, as a representation of the same object which the sign also represents. Applied to the symbol *man* in English, we find that the interpretant, is the idea created by this word in a potential interpreter's mind. This idea or thought represents the same object which is also represented by the word *man* itself, namely the 'two-legged creature' with which we all are more or less familiar.

Above, we discussed Peirce's insight that a symbol cannot be made intelligible to an interpreter who has no collateral knowledge of the object represented by that symbol. When the interpreter knows nothing about the object, the missing acquaintance with it cannot be compensated for by means of translating the symbol into another symbol. The acquaintance with an unknown object can only be made through experience with the object itself or through new information about it. Symbols cannot convey any new information about their objects because they are only connected with their objects through the habit which associates the one with the other (Nöth 2010a). Habits lack creativity; this is why they cannot convey new insights.

Acquaintance with an unknown object can only be conveyed through an icon in conjunction with an index. Indices cannot give any information about

an unknown object by themselves, but they can draw the interpreter's attention to the object by saying (so to speak): "There it is!"<sup>3</sup> This is the first step in becoming acquainted with an unknown object. Ostensive definitions are based on this insight. The second language learner learns what the word *carrot* means when the teacher who adopts the direct method points to a real carrot; but the meaning of a carrot is not inherent in the pointing gesture itself.

The only sign from which new information about an unknown object can be obtained is an icon in conjunction with an index.<sup>4</sup> Knowledge of what a passion fruit is cannot be fully gained until we see and taste the real fruit, but an icon depicting this fruit can convey some knowledge about its colour and shape, and a synthetic simulation of its taste can even inform iconically about its taste. However, in order to convey the information that these signs are icons of a passion fruit, they must be accompanied by an index, such as a legend, that says: "This is a passion fruit." Without this index, these icons would represent the mere possibilities of some unknown fruit. A verbal icon, such as a detailed description of an unknown house, can serve to create a mental image of it and make us somewhat familiar with the object of this verbal description, but an index must tell us where this house (CP 2.287, ca. 1893).

The role of icons and indices in mediating knowledge about unknown objects is a topic which Peirce addresses in another example of language learning, this time in the context of first language acquisition.

A man walking with a child points his arm up into the air and says, "There is a balloon." The pointing arm is an essential part of the symbol without which the latter would convey no information. But if the child asks, "What is a balloon," and the man replies, "It is something like a great big soap bubble," he makes the image a part of the symbol. Thus, while the complete object of a symbol, that is to say, its meaning, is of the nature of a law, it must *denote* an individual, and must *signify* a character. (CP 2.293, 1903)

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<sup>3</sup> "The index asserts nothing; it only says "There!" It takes hold of our eyes, as it were, and forcibly directs them to a particular object, and there it stops" (CP 3.361, 1885).

<sup>4</sup> More precisely, icons can convey information about their object only in conjunction with indices. Peirce elaborates on them as follows: "Icons may be of the greatest service in obtaining information – in geometry, for example – but still, it is true that an Icon cannot, of itself, convey information" (CP 2.314, 1903), and: "A pure icon can convey no positive or factual information; for it affords no assurance that there is any such thing in nature. But it is of the utmost value for enabling its interpreter to study what would be the character of such an object in case any such did exist" (CP 4.447, 1903).

In this little first language learning scenario, the man's pointing gesture is the index that identifies the object of the verbal sign *balloon*. Despite the teacher's gesture and the child's apparent awareness of the balloon in the sky, the child's question, "What is a balloon?", testifies to his or her insufficient familiarity with the object of the sign. The icon of this object mentally evoked by the teacher by means of the verbal image of "something like a great soap bubble" contributes to creating the more fully developed mental image which the learner needs to associate this word with its object in the future.

Elsewhere, Peirce reflects once more on the nature of mediation in second language vocabulary acquisition. The language learning scenario seems very similar, but at closer inspection, we find that the relation between a verbal symbol and its object in ordinary language usage differs from the one between the word and its object in vocabulary teaching:

If a person points to it and says, See there! *That* is what we call the "Sun," the Sun is *not* the Object of that sign. It is the *Sign* of the sun, the *word* "sun" that his declaration is about; and that *word* we must become acquainted with by collateral experience. Suppose a teacher of French says to an English-speaking pupil, who asks "comment appelle-t-on ça?" pointing to the Sun, . . . "C'est le soleil," he begins to furnish that collateral experience by speaking in French of the Sun itself. Suppose, on the other hand, he says "Notre mot est 'soleil'" then instead of expressing himself in language and *describing* the word he offers a pure *Icon* of it. Now the Object of an Icon is entirely indefinite, equivalent to "something." He virtually says "our word is like this:" and makes the sound. He informs the pupil that the word, (meaning, of course, a certain *habit*) has an effect which he *pictures* acoustically. But a pure picture without a legend only says "something is like this:". (CP 8.183; EP 2: 495, 1909)

Three scenarios of vocabulary teaching are described in the above passage. The first shows a teacher who teaches the word *sun* to students who do not yet know what it means. Whether the learner is a child learning English as a first language or a student of English as a second language remains unspecified. The learner apparently needs to be made familiar with the English word that represents the sun, but the teacher knows that the learner is acquainted with the celestial body, the sun as such. The student's familiarity presupposed, the teacher first uses a nonverbal pointing gesture, an indexical sign reinforced though verbal indices (*See there! That is...*), whose object is the sun in the sky.

When the topic of the didactic dialogue turns to the word for the sun in English and the teacher says "That is what we call the 'Sun'", the object of this

complex sign is no longer the sun itself but the verbal sign which represents it, that is, the English word representing the object previously denoted by the pointing gesture. This means that the sun previously referred to as the object of a sign is now considered the sign of a sign, that is, a metasign. In the utterance “That is what we call the ‘Sun’”, the word *sun* refers to the word *sun* as a word of the vocabulary of English; the same word is no longer used in the sense in which it appears in everyday usage, that is, in object language, but in the sense of a sign of a sign. The teacher’s words exemplify language about language, that is, metalanguage.

The learner still unfamiliar with the English word *sun* knows the object of this unknown sign through other signs, the word *soleil* in the case of second language learning, or prior experience of having seen the sun in everyday life, as in the case of the child in first language learning. What is missing is the word that translates this otherwise well known sign into English. The teacher who teaches the English word representing an object with which the learner is familiar from other signs thus teaches the word *sun* as a metasign.

According to the Peircean semiotic framework, the three phonemes /sʌn/ are uttered by the teacher as a *sinsign* (or *token*), that is, as a particular sign uttered at a particular moment. As such, it also embodies a *qualisign*, the quality of how it sounds (cf. CP 2.255, 1903). What this *sinsign* serves to denote is a *legisign* (or *type*). The term *legisign* characterizes the word *sun* as a word of the sign system of the English language, irrespective of whether it is used in a particular situation or not. The particular metalingual use of the teacher’s utterance of the *sinsign sun* is thus the use of a *sinsign* to denote a *legisign*. The teacher’s metalingual utterance serves the purpose of making the learner acquainted with a new word. The intended interpretant is the learner’s future habit of pronouncing this word correctly. The collateral experience necessary to pronounce the word appropriately is the experience of hearing this and other pronunciations of it, not the knowledge and experience of the celestial body.

Although the object of the *sinsign* /sʌn/ uttered by the teacher is not the sun itself but the word *sun* as a *legisign*, the reference to the real sun is not lost with this utterance since the word *sun* as a *legisign* is in turn a sign whose object is the real sun. In sum, reference to the sun as a celestial body is embedded as a second object in the object of the *sinsign sun*, whose first object is the *legisign*, the word of the English language.

The next two didactic situations exemplified in the above scenario describe a lesson in which a teacher teaches the French word *soleil* to a student of

French, whose mother tongue is apparently English. This time, it is the student who produces two indexical signs denoting the *sun*, a gesture pointing to the sun and the utterance of the demonstrative pronoun “ça”. In the first of the two following didactic subscenarios, in which the teacher replies “*C’est le soleil*”, she uses the word *soleil* as the word of an object language since the referent of the verbal index *ce* (*C’est*) is indeed the sun itself. In the second scenario, in which the teacher says “*Notre mot est ‘soleil’*”, we are faced with a teaching situation as above: the teacher produces a sinsign of a legisign.

Peirce now specifies in addition that the sinsign uttered by the teacher in this scenario is iconically related to the legisign it denotes. In sum, when language teachers introduce a new word whose referent the students are familiar with, their utterance of this word is a sinsign embodying a qualisign which serves as an icon of a legisign.

The object of the iconic sinsign uttered by the teacher is “entirely indefinite” as long as it represents a mere acoustic quality. Any other word uttered in any other language would be equally indefinite as long as it remains only a mere sound. The student must learn to associate this iconic sinsign with the symbolic legisign as which the word functions in French. Peirce calls this necessary mental association of the sound uttered by the teacher with the word of the French language a “legend which the teacher must attach to the icon”.

A legend attached to a picture functions as an index pointing to the picture. The association that first needs to be made between the sound image and the symbolic legisign, the word of the French language, is thus an indexical one. In the long run, as the student’s language competence grows, the association first made indexically must become a habit, so that in the end the word first learned through an icon and an index finally becomes a symbol.

#### **4. Meaning, translation, and the interpretant of a sign**

Where do we find meaning in the process of translation? Is the translation delivered by an interpreter the meaning of its source text, and if so, is the translation then the interpretant of the text which it translates? Or should we look for the meaning of a sign in the object it represents? Meaning is both a matter of the object of the sign and of its interpretant. It is a matter of the former insofar as the object is “that with which the sign presupposes an acquaintance” (CP 2.231, 1910). The interpreter must be familiar with the object in order to associate meaning with the sign; otherwise the sign will remain meaningless.

Knowledge of the object of the sign is thus a prerequisite for understanding the sign. Peirce also associates the immediate object of a symbol, “the Object as the Sign itself represents it” (CP 4.536, 1905), with meaning. He does so when he calls “the complete immediate Object” of the symbol its “meaning” (CP 2.293, 1903; see also CP 1.339, 1893 and 2.308, 1901). Mostly, however, Peirce considers meaning in terms of the interpretation of a sign. “Meaning is the idea which the sign attaches to the object” (CP 5.6, 1907). The study of meaning requires “the study of the interpretants, or proper significate effects, of signs” (CP 5.475, 1906). More precisely, what is ordinarily called meaning is a matter of “the Immediate Interpretant, which is the interpretant as it is revealed in the right understanding of the Sign itself” (CP 4.536). Peirce explains, for example: “It seems natural to use the word *meaning* to denote the intended interpretant of a symbol” (CP 5.175, 1903). A translation should certainly convey a meaning that is equivalent to its source text. However, an actual translation and an actual interpretant created by a sign may fail to fulfill the task and create a meaning that does not correspond to the meaning of the sign with which they should be equivalent. This is why Peirce does not speak of actual interpretants and real translations but of the “intended interpretant of a symbol”. Notice that the meaning which he describes as the “intended interpretant” is not the expression of the intention of the utterer of this symbol but of the purpose of the symbol itself.

That meanings and interpretants have to do with translation is one of the cornerstones of Peirce’s semiotics. In 1893, for example, Peirce postulates that “the meaning of a sign is the sign it has to be translated into” (CP 4.132), and he defines meaning as “the translation of a sign into another system of signs” (CP 4.127). It was Roman Jakobson (1985: 251) who enthusiastically acclaimed this definition of meaning as “one of the most felicitous, brilliant ideas which general linguistics and semiotics gained from the American thinker”, asking: “How many fruitless discussions about mentalism and anti-mentalism would be avoided if one approached the notion of meaning in terms of translation?”

However, the Jakobsonian “translation theory of meaning”, as Short (2003; 2007) calls it, is not Peirce’s full theory of meaning. *Meaning*, as linguists use the term and as Peirce himself uses it occasionally, is only expressed in the form of *some* interpretants of a sign.<sup>5</sup> That an interpretant is not always the meaning

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<sup>5</sup> Short (2003: 223) even goes further and tries to solve the riddle of meaning by introducing a distinction between interpretations (as types of which interpretants are the tokens): “Thus, our gloss of the interpretant theory of meaning: rightly understood it does not mean

of a word is evident from our previous examples. The French word *homme* is one possible interpretant of its English equivalent, and it is true that in common parlance we can say that *homme* means *man*. However, as Short (2003: 218) has convincingly argued, in a strict sense, a word of a source language cannot properly be said to *mean* the word in the target language. The English word *man* can hardly be said to be the *meaning* of the French word *homme* although the former can help a learner of French to understand the latter. If all possible translations of the French word were to be considered its meanings, the word *homme* would have as many meanings as there are languages in the world in addition to those few meanings listed in a monolingual dictionary. We cannot say that the translation of a word or text into a target language *is its meaning* although it may serve as a tool to *reveal its meaning*. What we have to say more precisely is that the English word *man* and its semantic equivalent in French, *homme*, have the same meaning. Translators cannot discover the meaning of *man* in its French translation *homme* because they must know the meaning which both words have in common in order to find the equivalent word in the target language. Occasionally, translators can translate a word correctly without knowing their meaning. A translator versed in French phonetics and morphology may well be able to translate the English expression *good governance* correctly into French as *bonne gouvernance* without knowing what it means, but then translation is even less likely to reveal the enigmatic meaning of these two expressions which indeed mean the same, namely the ‘good way in which something is governed’.

What is then the meaning of a word in contrast to its interpretant? *Meaning* is not a key concept in Peirce’s semiotics and has no systematic place in it. When Peirce refers to *meaning* he likes to use quotation marks (CP 5.475, 1906) or speak of meaning as it “is ordinarily called” (CP 4.536, 1906). In Peirce’s semiotics, meaning is mainly a matter of the interpretant, but it also pertains to the object of a sign. In the case of a symbol, for example, it also pertains to its object since “the immediate object of a symbol can only be a symbol”, and “the complete object of a symbol, that is to say, its meaning, is of the nature of a law” (CP 2.293 and fn., 1902). The example of the traffic light above, whose object is a law, exemplifies this insight.

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that meanings are interpretants but, rather, that they are interpretations, albeit interpretations are not found apart from interpretants. Doubtless, some interpretations are not meanings. For misunderstandings must be ruled out, and perhaps some other categories of interpretation as well. The meaning of a sign is how it would be interpreted *properly*.”

The meaning conveyed by the immediate object of a sign, that is, by our previous knowledge of the object of this sign, and the meaning conveyed as the interpretant of a sign are complementary. Without the immediate object, that is, without a rich experience of what the sign means in reality and not only in the form of a general dictionary definition, our interpretation of propositions would have to remain vague and general (cf. Houser 1992: 497). The interpretant of a sign, says Peirce, “must be *conveyed*” from its immediate object “which is by this conveyance the ultimate cause of the mental effect. [...] The meaning of the sign is not conveyed until not merely the interpretant but also this object is recognized” (MS 318 41–42, alt. draft, 1907; Pape 1990: 382).

On the other hand, Peirce excludes reference of indexical signs to the objects they designate from the sphere of meaning when he states: “A *meaning* is the associations of a word with images, its dream exciting power. An index has nothing to do with meanings; it has to bring the hearer to share the experience of the speaker by *showing* what he is talking about” (CP 4.56, 1893). Here we see a difference between meaning and translation. Even though indexical words, for example the demonstrative pronouns *this* and *that* mean nothing but only serve to direct our attention to an object close-by or further away, these words can and need to be translated. Verbal indices are unintelligible unless the mental images of the immediate objects which they represent are evoked to reveal what the signs mean.

The notion of the *interpretant* also differs from the concept of meaning as linguists define it in its scope. In 1904, Peirce specifies: “We may take a sign in so broad a sense that the interpretant of it is not [only] a thought, but an action or experience, or we may even so enlarge the meaning of sign that its interpretant is a mere quality of feeling” (CP 8.332). The interpretant of a verbal sign can hence be a nonverbal sign, a gesture, a drawing, a painting, a piece of music, an action, or a feeling, or an artefact, but parallel with this broad concept of interpretant, Peirce’s broad concept of meaning is also apparent when he speaks about the “dream exciting power” of meanings (CP 4.56, 1893; see above). Translators-interpreters are not the only agents to convey the full intended meanings of their source texts. The words of their translations and the objects which these signs represent contribute to the creation of interpretants in their audience’s minds with an agency of their own, which is not the translator’s agency.

## 5. Translations as replicas of signs, semantic, and pragmatic meaning

Some of Peirce's remarks on meaning and translation must be understood as the expression of a logical perspective on meaning, which certainly differs from the translator's perspective insofar as the logician, at least in propositional logic, abstracts from some of the modal distinctions which are of importance to a good translation. For example, Peirce writes: "What we call the *meaning* of a proposition embraces every obvious necessary deduction from it" (CP 5.165, 1902). That which is deductible with logical necessity can obviously only be one kind of meaning since meaning is often vague and general.

The logical perspective on meaning has Peirce conclude, for example, that not only interlingual but also intersemiotic translations leave the meaning of translated signs unchanged: "One selfsame thought may be carried upon the vehicle of English, German, Greek, or Gaelic; in diagrams, or in equations, or in graphs: all these are but so many skins of the onion, its inessential accidents" (CP 4.6, 1906). Since thoughts are signs, what Peirce means here is that logically, the different interlingual translations of one and the same text are replicas of one and the same symbol, an idea which he expresses explicitly elsewhere. He develops this argument several times in 1904: "If two symbols are used, without regard to any differences between them, they are replicas of the same symbol" (EP 2: 317). "(For logical purposes) a whole book is a sign, and a translation of it is a replica of the same sign" (NEM IV: 239), and: "Replicas need not be alike as things *homo, man* [...] are the same signs" (MS 9: 2, 1904; cf. Johansen 1993: 151).

Logical equivalence is not only what translators strive for since they know that semantic equivalence is an ideal in interlingual translation that can never be fully achieved. Translators evidently need to pay attention to the subtlest distinctions even though these may be logically irrelevant. Among the semantic differences by which the tokens of one and the same symbol may differ and which Peirce thus considers as logically "insignificant" are "merely grammatical" differences, such as the one between the pronouns *he* and *him*, or "merely rhetorical differences" such as the one between *money* and *spondesime*, a slang word for money in Peirce's time (NEM IV: 255, 1904). Peirce knew well that from the point of view of rhetoric such differences were highly significant. He always paid much attention to matters of terminology and style

and was a translator himself.<sup>6</sup> In a footnote on semantic equivalence in language used in an informal dialogue, he gives a definition of semantic equivalence from the point of view of linguistic pragmatics: “Two signs whose meanings are for all purposes equivalent are absolutely equivalent” (CP 5.448, 1905). By this definition, the formal and the slang words for *money* as well as the forms of the English personal pronouns in their different cases would certainly not count as equivalent because they differ in their purpose of use.

Above, we concluded with Short (2003: 219) that a word of a target language and a word of a source language to which it is semantically equivalent are two signs expressing the same meaning. Evidently, the same also holds true for two words which are synonymous, paraphrases, or definitions of each other in one and the same language. To say that *tidy* means ‘neat’ or that *thief* means ‘someone who steals’ is imprecise. A definiendum does not *mean* its definiens. Instead, both are different tokens of one type or, as Peirce puts it, merely “different embodiments of all we believe about that symbol” (MS 731, 7, 1865; Johansen 1993: 160).

Like translations, synonyms, paraphrases and definitions serve to translate meanings without *being* meanings. Peirce gave several examples of how the meaning of a word can be translated by means of one of its verbal descriptions, for example, when he reminds his readers that the known characters of a dog include “it has four legs, is a carnivorous animal etc.” (MS 854: 2–3, 1911; Johansen 1993: 146) or when he describes the meaning of the word *woman* as ‘living adult being or having, or having had, female sexuality’ (MS 664: 9, 1910; *ibid.*: 147). Let us call this translation approach to the study of meaning *the semantic approach to meaning*.

However, in contrast to modern linguistic semantics that reduces meaning to the translation of complex words into simpler words (in the form of componential analysis) or referential meaning (in referential semantics), Peirce’s semantics always takes both modes of revealing meaning into consideration. He exemplifies the possibility of studying meanings by means of intralingual translation in his logical decompositions of words into their “characters” and holds the dimension of reference indispensable when he postulates the necessity of collateral knowledge. The two complementary

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<sup>6</sup> Despite his great interest in differences between languages (cf. Nöth 2002), and although he often worked as a translator himself, Peirce can certainly not be called a scholar in translation studies. For Peirce as a translator and a critic of translations (see MS 1514–1520), in particular from German, see Deledalle-Rhodes (1996) and Gorlée (1994: 115–18).

aspects of meaning are reflected in his distinction between verbal and informational knowledge. The study of meaning requires taking into consideration informational knowledge, which is experientially acquired and thus pertains to the dimension of the immediate object of the sign, as well as verbal meaning, which has the form of a translation into a paraphrase or of a verbalization of its “characters” (semantic features). The meaning of a word cannot be reduced to either of the two. These are the two sides of Peirce’s linguistic semantics.

In addition to the semantic theory of meaning, to which this paper had to be restricted, Peirce has also a *pragmatic* theory of meaning, which is most succinctly expressed in his pragmatic maxim that the meaning of a sign lies in its conceivable practical effects.<sup>7</sup> It was the comparison of the semantic and pragmatic approaches to meaning that finally led the pragmaticist Peirce to the conclusion that the pragmatic study of meaning is really superior to its semantic study. The reason is that verbal formulations merely express meanings and are therefore “very inferior to the living definition that grows up in the habit” (NEM III.1: 494, 1907; cf. 5.491).

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<sup>7</sup> For more details concerning this topic see Nöth (2011b). With respect to symbols which are intellectual concepts, Peirce describes the pragmatic dimension of words as follows: “In order to ascertain the meaning of an intellectual conception one should consider what practical consequences might conceivably result by necessity from the truth of that conception; and the sum of these consequences will constitute the entire meaning of the conception” (CP 5.9, 1907).

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### Перевод и семиотическое посредничество

По Чарльзу Пирсу перевод – это семиотическое посредничество. В знаковых процессах знак действует как посредник между двумя участниками – объектом (который он репрезентирует) и интерпретантом (вызванной им идеи, созданной им интерпретацией или обусловленным им действием). В какой мере действия переводчика как посредника можно рассматривать подобно действиям знака в ходе семиозиса? В статье рассматриваются параллели между действиями знака в семиозисе и действиями переводчика в процессе перевода. В статье утверждается, что некоторые границы и ограничения переводимости совпадают с границами знака в семиозисе. Так как настоящие иконы и индексы не передают значения, они, строго говоря, неперево-димы. Несмотря на это, иконы и индексы являются посредниками при обучении переводу.

### Tõlkimine ja semiootiline vahendamine

Charles S. Peirce'i järgi on tõlkimine semiootiline vahendamine. Märgiprotsessides üldiselt toimib märk vahendajana kahe osapoole vahel, milleks on objekt (mida ta representeerib) ja interpretant (tema poolt esile kutsutud idee või tema loodud interpretatsioon või tema põhjustatud tegevus). Mil määral vastab viis, kuidas toimib vahendajana tõlkija, sellele, mida teeb märk semioosis? Artikkel vaatleb lähemalt paralleele semioosis toimiva märgi agentsuse ja tõlgi (ning tõlkija) agentsuse vahel tõlkimises. Artikkel väidab, et mõned tõlgitavuse piirid ja piirangud on ühtlasi märgi piirid semioosis. Kuna tõelised ikoonid ja tõelised indeksid ei edasta tähendust, on nad rangelt võttes tõlkimatud. Sellegipoolest toimivad ikoonid ja indeksid vahendajatena tõlkima õppimisel.