

Posterity of Saussure's sign in the study of cultural meanings: A dialogue between Barthes and Hjelmslev

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Abstract. Saussure's proposals on the sign, formulated more than a century ago in 1916, continue to exert an undisputed authority on linguistics and social sciences. In semiotics, the dyadic model of the sign is continuously used, even in the context of reflections on non-linguistic objects. The tendency in semiotics has been to adopt the Saussurean theory of the sign and enhance it with Hjelmslev's findings, which has led to Hjelmslev becoming as significant as Saussure in the field of semiotics. In particular, it is to Hjelmslev that we owe the notions of *denotation* and *connotation*, which the present article aims at clarifying. Indeed, a misunderstanding still exists regarding the sense of these two concepts, that is to say, some forms of denotation are often – and wrongly – considered as connotations. Hence, this paper deals with Saussure's legacy; his legacy in Hjelmslev, as well as Barthes, since I shall refer to the propositions formulated by the latter in his *Mythologies* (1957) to clarify the distinction between denotation and connotation.

Keywords: Roland Barthes; connotation; denotation; Louis Hjelmslev; mythology; myth; sign; symbol

Ferdinand de Saussure's proposals on the sign, published more than a century ago in his *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), continue to exert an undisputed authority on linguistics and social sciences throughout the world. In semiotics, the dyadic model of the sign is continuously used, even in the context of reflections on non-linguistic realities. The tendency in semiotics has been to adopt the Saussurean theory of the sign and enrich it with Hjelmslev's glossematic terminology. This means that rather than speaking of 'signifier' and 'signified', structural semiotics

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prefers to retain Hjelmslev's terms of 'expression' and 'content'. In this way, it must be admitted that Hjelmslev, the continuator of Saussure, has become as important as the Swiss linguist.

It is to Hjelmslev in particular that we owe the famous notions of 'denotation' and 'connotation' (Hjelmslev 1971[1943]: 155), which I would like to clarify in the present article because a misunderstanding still prevails about the sense of these two concepts. Indeed, certain forms of denotation are often – and wrongly – considered as connotations. Hence this paper will deal with Saussure's theoretical legacy; his legacy in Hjelmslev, but also Barthes, since I shall refer to the propositions formulated by the latter in his *Mythologies* (Barthes 1957) to see more clearly what separates denotation from connotation.

With this in mind, the article will first seek to problematize the relationship between denotation and connotation. Then, it will take a look at Barthes' *Mythologies*, as it turns out that his commentators (Eco, Pezzini 1982; Zenkine 1997) saw in the 'myth' a particular version of connotation although it is, as we will demonstrate, a form of denotation. Finally, I will conclude by explaining that if Barthes's commentators made an error, from our point of view, with their analysis, it is because denotation presents, like connotation, a double articulated system. To this end, I will produce two models – one for connotation, one for denotation – which will enrich the further understanding of these two forms of language.

1. Various levels of meaning

1.1. Confusion between denotation and connotation

The relationship between denotation and connotation is a recurrent theme in semiotics, and remains topical (Greimas 1968; Rastier 2009[1987]; Klinkenberg 2000[1996]; Badir 2014). Without wishing to establish the history of the debate, we can for the moment simply say that denotation is *a self-evident meaning* and connotation *an atypical meaning which might appear to be secondary*. However, as Eco and Pezzini (1982) rightly point out, connotation does not replace denotation; it aggregates to denotation as the stronger meaning, because it helps to better capture the meaning of the reality being considered or discussed:²

² In *Précis de sémiotique générale*, Klinkenberg (2000[1996]: 249) also presents connotation as a stronger meaning than denotation, and states that considering the former as a *second* meaning is not a great idea: "Indeed, connotations are often described as added values, fuzzy values gravitating around a centre that would be neutral [...]. This is a mistake, [...] each unit has a connotation: even 'neutrality' is a connotation".

A connotation occurs when the elements of a language, already endowed with denotative expression and content, without losing their denotative capacities, express (through various conventions) an additional signified or content, that is, the connoted content. (Eco, Pezzini 1982: 33)³

Based on Hjelmslev’s teachings, Klinkenberg (2000[1996]: 248) depicts the connotative logic as follows, with a denotative analysis of the source material (Level 1) that becomes in its turn, for the connotative analysis, an analysable material (Level 2):

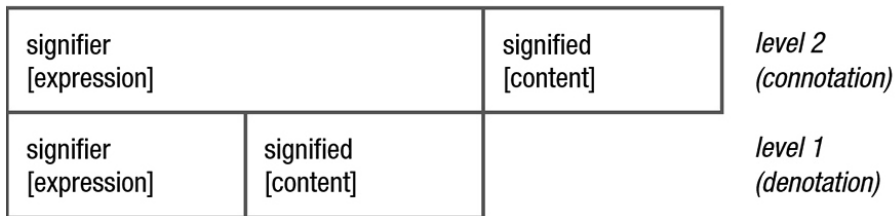


Figure 1. Denotation and connotation⁴ (Klinkenberg 2000[1996]: 248).

Now, if we choose ‘stiletto pumps’ as an example, we could first be tempted to say, in view of Fig. 1, that this object denotes high-heeled shoes and connotes a certain elegance. Yet this intuition – or preconception – is in fact erroneous, because if connotation certainly is to be considered as a supplementary meaning, it is important not to forget that this meaning must be atypical. Recognizing the elegant character of stiletto pumps, however, does not reveal any originality; rather, it is the acknowledging and internalization of a cultural fact. To put it another way, there is no connotation in the second characterization (elegance) of the stiletto pumps. We are only dealing with two denotative descriptions: an iconic denotation, since women’s high-heeled shoes are described as ‘stiletto pumps’ (this is normal), and an axiological denotation, since this type of accessory is recognized as ‘elegant’ (this is also normal). In short, identifying several levels of meaning to a given reality does not necessarily imply that there is a connotation hidden somewhere.

³ Translations from French are by the author of the article unless indicated otherwise.

⁴ Here is how Klinkenberg (2000[1996]: 248) exemplifies his diagram: “At the first level, the statement is a sign with a denotation (/a Jup/ [in Belgium] means ‘I want a beer of the Jupiler brand’ [...]). Taken as a global unit, at level 2, the statement constitutes in turn the signifier of a second statement, a statement that has itself a signified (this signified is, for example, ‘I am Walloon’ [...]). In this diagram, connotation constitutes consequently a detached meaning”.

1.2. Confusion between connotation and myth

In order to clarify the relationship between denotation and connotation, and consequently to grasp the dynamics of meaning within culture, a detour through Barthes's *Mythologies* proves to be opportune, since Barthes has built his semiological propositions on the same foundations as Hjelmslev, that is to say, on Saussure's writings on the sign. In particular, in his book, Barthes proposes to “demystify” a number of practices and objects of his time in order to display to what extent all these phenomena and artefacts are imbued with a “*petite-bourgeoise*” ideology (Barthes 1957: 229). In that respect, Barthes warns us that a reality always means more than just what it offers to perception, because it secretly supports a *mythology*. Namely, the objects and amusements of the 1950s were, for the author, “mythical speeches” that insidiously were supporting, promoting, and perpetuating the values of the bourgeoisie.⁵ With the intention of representing this level of profound meaning, Barthes took the initiative of doubling the structure of the Saussurian sign as depicted below – with this explanation preceding it (Barthes 1957: 186):

In myth, we find again the tri-dimensional pattern which I have just described: the signifier, the signified and the sign. But myth is a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a *second-order semiological system*. That which is a sign (namely the associative total of a concept and an image) in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second. [...]. Everything happens as if the myth shifted the formal system of the first meanings. As this translation is crucial for the analysis of the myth, I will represent it in the following way [...]:

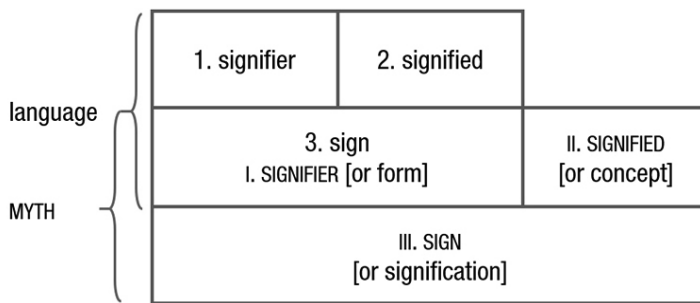


Figure 2. The mythical system (Barthes 1957: 186).

⁵ The term ‘speech’ refers to any two-dimensional, three-dimensional or situational reality that is already meaningful: “From now on, by *speech, language, discourse, etc.*, we mean any significant unity or synthesis whether verbal or visual: a photograph is a speech in the same way as a newspaper article; objects themselves can become a speech, if they mean something” (Barthes 1957: 182).

When we compare this figure with the one designed by Klinkenberg to describe Hjelmslev's connotative system (cf. Fig. 1), we can easily understand why Barthes's commentators (below) quickly came to associate the French semiologist's proposals with those of the Danish linguist. Apart from this analogous schematization (only reversed on the horizontal axis), it is the fact that Barthes has considered the myth as a second significant structure (thus capable of altering the meaning of a system already articulated around a content and an expression) that has led Eco and Pezzini (1982), and subsequently Zenkine (1997), to postulate that, in the case of myth, we are dealing with a connotative system:⁶

In the final part of *Mythologies*, this form [the hidden meaning of everyday life] is called *myth*, the object of a new discipline that "is part of semiology as a formal science and ideology as a historical science: it studies ideas-forms". The reference to Hjelmslev's definition of the connotative system is explicitly acknowledged here as a semiotics whose plane of expression is constituted by a pre-existing semiotics, and therefore capable of "adding" another signified to that of denotation. (Eco, Pezzini 1982: 36)

[According to Hjelmslev,] connotation is a second system in which the primary language constitutes the plane of expression (connotation produces new meanings by grafting them onto existing ones). The Barthesian "myth", conceived theoretically, is clearly a connotation system; a look at the scheme inserted in the postface of *Mythologies* [cf. Fig. 2, above] is enough to prove it, since the primary sign [...] is treated as a "form", namely as an expressive means for rendering the mythical "meaning". (Zenkine 1997: 113)

If, from a structural point of view, we can agree with Eco, Pezzini and Zenkine, we must recognize that in their analyses they fail to take into account the defining trait of the myth, which is to be unsuspected, self-evident, namely a "false Nature" (Barthes 1957: 199, 208, 223, 231). It is this omission that must be rectified because, as mentioned above, connotation is anything but discreet: it is something original,

⁶ Actually, Barthes wrote *Mythologies* without knowing Hjelmslev's texts. So, it is his commentators – and not himself – who have established a link between myth and connotation: "Without knowing Hjelmslev's work, the author [of *Mythologies*] used instead of 'connotation' an improper term, 'metalanguage'. Nevertheless, Barthes writes about connotation when he analyses the 'myths', that is, a second semiological system whose signifier is the form of a complete sign belonging to a first semiological system" (Zenkine 2010: 21). We have sort of a confirmation of this information in the terminology used by Barthes to name the elements of this mythical system. Indeed, in Fig. 2, we identify the Saussurian concepts of 'sign', 'signifier' and 'signified', and not those proposed by Hjelmslev, which would be 'language', 'expression' and 'content', respectively.

a dazzle. To sum it up, in the case of connotation and myth, we are not dealing with one and the same secondary system, but with two secondary systems that are quite distinct from each other.

1.3. Myth as a culture maker

In order to understand why Barthes conceives of the myth as a “false Nature”, it is worth pointing out that, for him, almost everything that constitutes the world is already invested “with a social *use* that is added to pure matter” (Barthes 1957: 182). What Barthes wants to make us aware of is that we no longer realize that we conceive everyday texts, images, objects, places, practices, and situations through the prism of the surrounding culture. Generally speaking, through the examples he takes from literature, photography, cinema, reporting, sport, show business, and publicity, Barthes seeks to demonstrate that the phenomena we conceive as self-evident – whose meaning seems natural – actually always turn out to be products of history: “Faraway or not, mythology can only have a historical foundation, because myth is a speech chosen by history: it cannot emerge from the ‘nature’ of things” (Barthes 1957: 182).

For example, until the day it was reported – particularly by the media – that in certain regions of the Andes the guinea pig was also used as food, it was generally taken for granted in the Western countries that this small rodent had no other vocation than to be a pet. Not to have been able to acknowledge the deeply cultural aspect of this domestic conception of the guinea pig means, for Barthes, to be in a mythology (a sort of blind belief). And more generally, regardless of the culture, thinking that realities can be taken for granted is, in principle, to be lost in a mythology.⁷

Actually, with his *Mythologies*, Barthes offers us a critical rhetoric. He invites us to go beyond the obvious and to realize that every time something seems natural, we are experiencing a myth, that is, a phenomenon “both historical and intentional” (Barthes 1957: 191). By emphasizing this historical feature, Barthes aims at making us aware that a myth is a semiotic construction that becomes stronger in time; it is along history – or individual narratives – that it acquires all its subversive force until it becomes a false Nature, leading us to forget that it has evolved from an intention.

In that regard, with our example of the guinea pig, we realize that this small rodent has become a pet for “Westerners” (no better term), because a person or a family in the “Western world”, at some point in history, took the initiative (on

⁷ It is by experiencing other cultures, or when other cultures emerge or migrate into our culture, that certain realities, that we might have thought natural, suddenly turn cultural.

purpose or without much thought) to welcome it into the home. As one thing led to another, we shall postulate, the “trend” of the domestic guinea pig then spread, until it became a custom that today is part of our global mores. In short, this example illustrates these two qualities of the myth that we tend to forget: historicity and obviousness. When Barthes (1957: 189, 202) states that the myth wants “to present itself both as a notification and a statement [that] transforms history into nature”, he indeed highlights this ability of the myth to alienate us.

Lastly, it is because the myth emerges at a given moment in history that Barthes also, and necessarily, sees an intentionality working in this phenomenon.⁸ As we have said, the author of *Mythologies* systematically blames the bourgeoisie for the myths of his time. “Wrestling”, the “new Citroën”, the “shocking photos”, the “ornamental kitchen”... For him, all these “speeches” are expressions of the bourgeois ideology, conceived as a mythology. And, actually, what we should conclude, because Barthes does not explicitly say it, is that this ideology no more and no less refers to culture itself. In other words, Barthes invites us to think of culture – the one of his time – as an *archi-language* (the ‘signification’; cf. Fig. 2), which constantly manifests a *bourgeois ideology* (the ‘content’) through the mediation of *material realities* – wrestling (practice), the Citroën car (object), the shocking photos (image) – functioning as mythical speeches (the ‘form’).

For the semiologist, culture *naturally* leads us to conceive the realities of the world as established *representations* (‘signs’) and not as *presences* (with sensitive and unique qualities).⁹ More specifically, Barthes observes that the myth (the *culture*, or the *bourgeois ideology* which underlies its content) follows a double movement: first, it transforms the material presences of the experience into hollow forms, by stripping them of any proper history; second, it injects into them a “new history”, its own¹⁰ (Barthes 1957: 191):

⁸ Intentionality does not necessarily mean a willingness to create mythologies. When the guinea pig began to be introduced into homes, the idea obviously was not that this domestication could become part of the mores in the long run.

⁹ For an in-depth study of these questions of “material presences” and “sensitive experience”, see the first part of *Sémiotique des formes de vie* (Perusset 2020b) or the introductory paper “*Les métamorphoses de l’objet*” (Perusset 2020a).

¹⁰ In the history that the myth aims to establish, Barthes sees a very hegemonic interest: “universalism, the refusal of any explanation, an unalterable hierarchy of the world”, here are the essential interests of the myth (Barthes 1957: 228). “For the very end of myths is to immobilise the world” (Barthes 1957: 229).

We must here recall that the materials of mythical speech (the language itself, photography, painting, posters, rituals, objects, etc.), however different at the start, are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth. Myth sees in them only the same raw material; their unity is that they all come down to the status of a mere language. (Barthes 1957: 186)

With the myth, we no longer seek to question the value and meaning of the realities we experience: *a reality that has become a myth no longer presents anything, it only represents*. And this is exactly the departure of the “primary meaning” of things – accessible at the time of their perception – that leads Barthes to say that, under the effect of the myth, we come to impoverish meaning, because myth produces an “economy of intelligence” (Barthes 1957: 229). That is, we observe a small rodent with white and beige fur (the ‘signifier’; cf. Fig. 2), we recognize that it is a guinea pig (the ‘sign’) and we immediately conceptualize it as a pet (the ‘signified’), without even thinking that this mammal may have other functions, such as serving as a meal... As Barthes (1957: 217) analyses this,

[...] a conjuring trick has taken place; it has turned reality inside out, it has emptied it of history and has filled it with nature, it has removed from things their human meaning so as to make them signify a human insignificance. [...] Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact. [...] In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident.

Finally, although we can always regret that myth prevents us from accessing plural meanings, by assigning to each reality an already established meaning (ready to be updated), we must also be aware that without it no culture could be constituted. By founding the meaning of the “things” of the world “in nature and eternity”, the myth effectively gives these things, as Barthes claims, a “clarity” (in the sense of obviousness) that participates in the strengthening and expansion of culture. Because it is “an *agreement* to the world, not as it is, but as it wants to be” (Barthes 1957: 230), it can be said that myth is coextensive to culture.

2. The structures beyond the speeches

2.1. Myth, denotation and connotation

As a result of mythologies, “speeches” (that is, realities of the world) acquire a cultural identity: an identity that claims nothing, that does not denote, that is self-evident. But which of the denotative or connotative systems capture such self-evidence? Of course, the denotative one, and it is for this reason that we have criticized the comparison made by Barthes’s commentators between myth and connotation.

Indeed, it appears to be clear that Barthes describes, with his mythologies, denotative systems. And if there was – and still is – a confusion, it is because the tendency has always been to link connotation to meanings that seem to express only defaults of normality. Now, what connotation actually reveals are not meanings that express defaults of normality, but *meanings that question culturally accepted meanings*. It is from this perspective that Rastier (2009[1987]: 125–126) is right when he states that the term ‘cop’ does not connote vulgarity, but denotes it (2009[1987]: 125–126), since it goes without saying – it is (culturally) normal – to consider ‘cop’ as a vulgar expression of ‘policeman’. Conversely, if the term ‘cops’ were used to *dignify* police officers, it would indeed be a connotation.

More generally, how can we easily distinguish a denoted meaning from a connoted one? With respect to Barthes’s teachings, we formulate the hypothesis that, in order to distinguish denotation from connotation, we must identify the authority that we believe to be responsible for the formation of the meaning we attribute to the considered reality. In other words, if we think that it is culture that is responsible for the meaning we attribute to the given reality, we must admit that its meaning is a denotation and that its overall identity is *cultural*. Conversely, if we believe that it is an authority other than culture that is the instigator of this meaning, we must declare that this meaning is a connotation and that the identity is *social*.

To illustrate this idea, we can look at branding, where intentional manipulations of meaning are systematically at work. To this end, we can remember that in the mid-2000s, the cosmetics brand Dove launched a worldwide campaign featuring women with “real curves”.

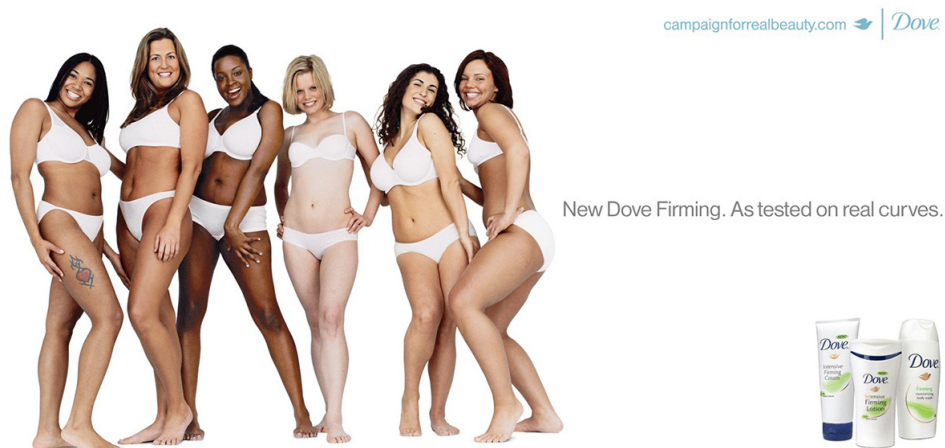


Figure 3. Dove advertising (2004).

This campaign made a lot of buzz because, until then, it was always thin women who were selected to promote beauty products. From a semiotic point of view, Dove established a break in the culture, and the presence of curvy women in underwear on its advertising was recognized by consumers *not as a cultural, but as a social fact*, intentionally produced by a clearly identifiable enunciative authority: Dove. Indeed, it is by distancing itself from cultural codes that Dove succeeded in connoting curvy women (the ‘signifier’; cf. Fig. 2) as canons of beauty (the ‘signified’). And if we are referring to connotation here, it is because consumers recognized that this meaning did not emanate from the culture, but from the initiative of a specific social entity.

In this way, we must acknowledge that, unlike popular belief, denotation is, like connotation, a double articulated system. And if there is a tendency in semiotics, and in linguistics, not to see this double articulation of denotation, as Klinkenberg’s modelling proves (cf. Fig. 1), it is because we are, as pointed out before, “at every moment immersed in a false Nature” (Barthes 1957: 231), never aware that what is denoted is in fact always motivated:¹¹

In fact, what allows the reader to consume myth innocently is that he does not see it as a semiological system but as an inductive one. Where there is only an

¹¹ This is exactly what Badir (2014: 209) means when he says of the “text considered by denotative semiotics” that “it is a text that is somehow ‘domesticated’ for its analysis”: “the meaning of the words that are [part of a denotative analysis] corresponds roughly to that given by the dictionary, among one or another of the meanings that the dictionary enumerates, or, by default, according to the generic meaning attributed to the word”.

equivalence, he sees a kind of causal process: the signifier and the signified have, in his eyes, a natural relationship. This confusion can be expressed otherwise: any semiological system is a system of values; now the myth consumer takes the signification for a system of facts: myth is read as a factual system, whereas it is but a semiological system. (Barthes 1957: 204)

2.2. Modelling denotation and connotation

What emerges from all this discussion is that we could model denotation and connotation the same way, by re-exploiting the structure of Barthes's mythical model (cf. Fig. 2). In that perspective, terminological particularizations would be necessary, however, since a denotative system, as mentioned above, establishes a cultural identity (typical of the social field), and a connotative system, a social identity (relative to an enunciative instance, inscribed in this field).

The horizontal tree diagrammes below show these two significant structures which are denotation and connotation. As can be seen, we have taken the liberty of rotating the Barthesian model 90° clockwise, so that these figures conform more closely to the trees generally produced in semiotics. Also, in order to comply with semiotic usage, we have chosen to retain, for each of the models, the Hjelmslevian notions of 'expression' [E] and 'content' [C] instead of the Saussurian notions of 'signifier' and 'signified', as adopted by Barthes. Lastly, we have introduced an additional level (n_1) incorporating the forms of the planes of expression and content of the "material presences" (the realities of the world perceived in the moment), in order to remind the reader that any formalization is always the result of a sensitive experience.

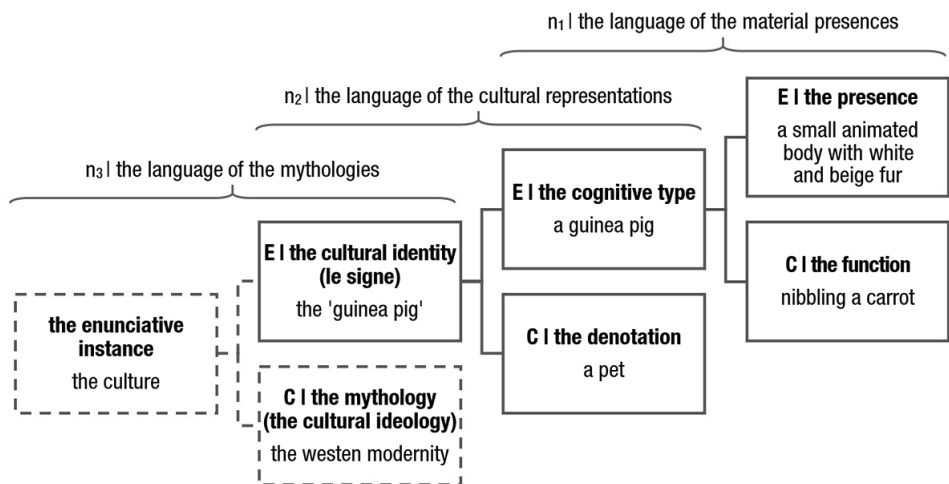


Figure 4. The denotation system.

With respect to this first system, we shall make three comments. First, we can observe that the language of the “material presences” is definitely an experiential language. Second, it must be noted that the content of this language relates to the function of the material presence at the moment it is experienced, that is to say, to what the presence is doing or to what it is used for in the situation (in this case, we have imagined a guinea pig nibbling a carrot). Lastly, we can explain the dotted lines of the boxes of the mythologies (n_3) by the fact that even if this mythical system exists, it is never taken into account by the community.

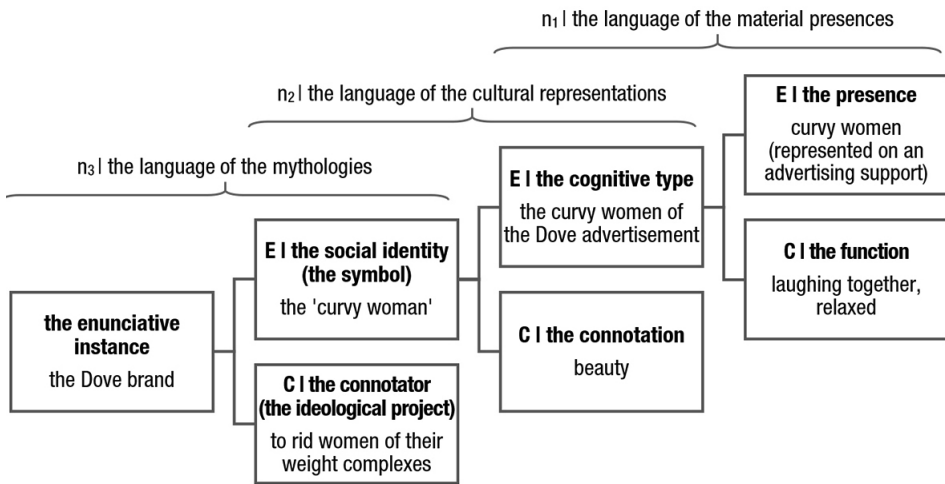


Figure 5. The connotation system.

This second model, which deals with connotation, also calls for several comments. Firstly, it suggests that an enunciative instance – a brand, a person, a group, etc. – can support a project through its actions and enunciations. In particular, this project appears to be of an ideological nature, since its connotative quality disrupts the order established by the culture. In the case of Dove, it can be argued that this project is – or was – *to rid women of their weight complexes*, since our mainstream culture tends to promote only thin waistlines.¹² Beyond this particular case, we must see that an ideological project can be determined at different degrees of generality, which means that if we want to be more holistic, we could also state that Dove's project is – or was – *to introduce new canons of female beauty*, or even *to fight against fashion diktats*, since the matter of age and facial appearance has also been thematized in its advertising.

¹² In this argumentation, I deliberately ignore the fact that brand projects are driven by economic imperatives. What matters here is the social dimension of the project, not its economic dimension, which is denotative.

Finally, in relation to this ideological project, we should be aware that it can only manifest through the mediation of *material presences*, those that the enunciative instance exploits to achieve its goals. It is under these conditions, and from this very moment, that *signs* of culture can then be seen as *symbols*: symbols of the ideology supported by the enunciative instance or, more synthetically, the very symbols of that instance. In the following extract, Klinkenberg (2000[1996]: 248–249) explores this process:

With connotation, we get into a symbolic system: the relation between the signifier and the signified of the connotation sign is the one that defines the symbol. Connotation is therefore an arbitrary sign. Since the symbolic function is transitive, connotations can interlock (levels 3, 4, etc.), in principle indefinitely. This system is ultimately pragmatic, and refers to a mythology or an ideology whose origins lie in the communication partners.

Klinkenberg's statement is interesting because it underlines that we produce, with connotation, interlockings of languages that can be repeated *ad infinitum*, since one connotation is always likely to refer to another connotation, and so on. But above all, this quote is intriguing because the author uses the term 'mythology', although we have said mythology refers to denotation. Thus, by this use, Klinkenberg actually invites us to realize that if, in principle, connotations can indefinitely interlock languages, these interlockings will necessarily stop when we are no longer able to identify ideologies behind the meaning.

In other words, connotation ceases when the enunciative instance at the origin of the ideological project can no longer be identified or, instead, when the enunciative instance is recognized as being a cultural identity (a sign). Typically, if the curvy women of the Dove advertisements connote beauty, the Dove brand, as an enunciative instance, denotes, at the social (non-economic) level, a project aimed at democratizing beauty (level n_4 , not present in Fig. 5, above; but taken into account in Fig. 6, below). Indeed, stating that the Dove brand has the ideological project of *democratizing beauty* or *ridding women of their complexes* is saying something obvious, it is stating a widespread observation, which we may have forgotten to have proceeded from a choice, to have been motivated by an ideology determined by a company in order to make a profit:

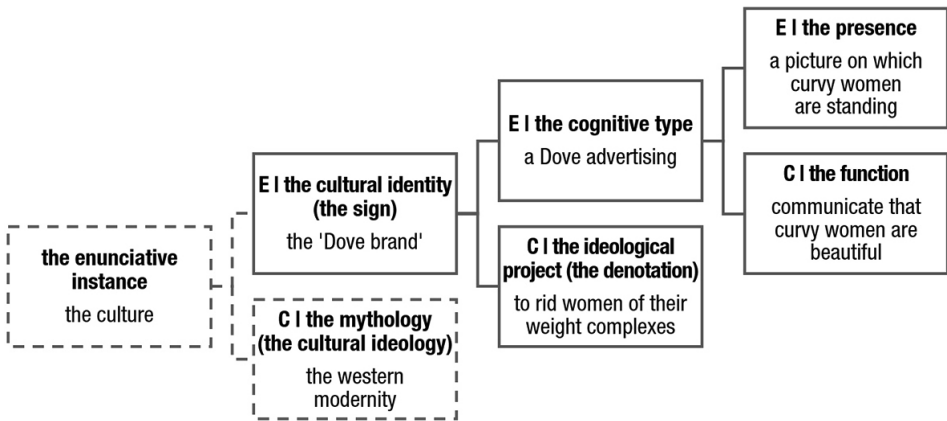


Figure 6. The mythification of connotations.

More generally, this last figure helps us realize that connotators – the ideological projects – can transform into denotators through the force of mythologies.¹³ It is this possibility of transmutation that explains why vulgarity (with reference to Rastier's example of the term 'cop', above) can connote in some cases and denote in others.

7. Conclusion

In the *Course in General Linguistics*, the term 'symbol' appears in only one place: at the point when Saussure problematizes the arbitrariness of the sign (Saussure 2005[1916]: 100–101). In this short passage, Saussure was already making a distinction between sign and symbol, actually quite the same as the one that was highlighted in the previous part. In Saussure's (2005[1916]: 100–101) terms:

The word *symbol* is sometimes used to designate the linguistic sign, or more exactly that part of the linguistic sign which we are calling the signal. This use of the word *symbol* is awkward, for reasons connected with our first principle [the arbitrary of the sign]. Symbols are never entirely arbitrary. They are not empty configurations. They show at least a vestige of natural connexion between the signifier and the signified. For instance, our symbol of justice, the scales, could hardly be replaced by a chariot.

¹³ Depending on the level of relevance selected for the analysis, places and functions change: a cultural identity can become a social identity when it is associated with a particular content or assumed by a particular enunciative authority.

In connection with the purpose of this paper, we can thus argue that the difference between signs and symbols relates to the *degree of awareness* of their arbitrariness, not to the arbitrariness itself. Namely, a sign appears to be a symbol to which no arbitrariness is attributed (which corresponds to denotation in our sense), and a symbol can be understood as a sign whose unmotivated trait is identified (which corresponds to connotation in our sense).¹⁴ In this way, we could find in Saussure's founding text the premises of the great intuitions of Hjelmslev and Barthes, as well as the relevant distinction we have tried to clarify in this paper between denotation-myth and connotation.

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¹⁴ This use of 'symbol' as 'motivated sign perceived as such' is also present in the writings on Germanic legends (see Saussure 2003: 376, 383).

Наследие соссюрской концепции знака в изучении культурных смыслов: диалог Барта и Ельмслева

Идеи Соссюра о знаке, сформулированные более века назад (в 1916 году), по-прежнему пользуются неоспоримым авторитетом в лингвистике и в социальных науках. Бинарная модель знака постоянно используется в семиотике – в том числе, в контексте размышлений о неязыковых объектах. В семиотике сложилась тенденция принятия соссюрской теории знака, дополненной идеями Ельмслева, что сделало Ельмслева столь же важным автором в области семиотики, как и сам Соссюр. В частности, именно Ельмслева мы обязаны понятиями денотации и коннотации, анализ которых предлагается в этой статье. В самом деле, до сих пор еще может иметь место недоразумение в понимании смысла этих двух понятий, когда некоторые формы денотации часто – и ошибочно – принимаются за коннотации. Статья посвящена наследию Соссюра и развитию его идей Ельмслевым, а также Бартом, к чьим положениям, сформулированным в *Мифологиях* (1957), мы обращаемся, чтобы прояснить различие между денотацией и коннотацией.

Saussure'i märgi järelkäijad kultuuritähenduste uurimisel: Barthes'i ja Hjelmslevi dialoog

Saussure'i ettepanekud märgi kohta, mis sõnastati enam kui sajand tagasi 1916. aastal, on lingvistikas ja sotsiaalteadustes ikka veel vaieldamatult mõjukad. Semiootikas kasutatakse pidevalt düaadilist mudelit, isegi mittekeeleliste objektide üle mõtisklemise kontekstis. Tendents semiootikas on olnud võtta kasutusele Saussure'i märgiteooria ning täiendada seda Hjelmslevi avastustega, mille tulemusel on Hjelmslevi semiootika vallas muutunud sama oluliseks kui Saussure. Tegelikult võlgname just Hjelmslevile denotatsiooni ja konnotatsiooni mõisted, mida käesolevas artiklis püütakse seletada. Nende kahe mõiste tähenduse osas on ikka veel levinud väärarusaamine, see tähendab, mõnesid denotatsiooni vorme peetakse sageli – ja ekslikult – konnotatsiooniks. Seega tegeldakse käesolevas kirjutises Saussure'i pärandiga nii Hjelmslevi kui ka Barthes'i puhul, sest denotatsiooni ja konnotatsiooni vahelise erinevuse selgitamisel viitan propositsioonidele, mida viimane on sõnastanud oma “Mütoloogiates” (1957).