

**Verbal and Non Verbal Language in the Discursive Network /
*Linguagem verbal e não verbal na malha discursiva***

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to examine meaning effects resulting from the intermediation between verbal and nonverbal language in the constitution of text/discourse. The guiding questions of this research are: Do words and images complement each other in texts? Are images autonomous? It is possible to conclude that the association between verbal and iconic codes is the most efficient way to interpret messages correctly and comprehensively.

KEY WORDS: Meaning Effects; Text; Discourse; Image; Speech

RESUMO

Este artigo tem em mira explorar os efeitos do sentido decorrentes da intermediação entre linguagem verbal e não verbal no processo de constituição do texto/discurso. Baseia-se a pesquisa na seguinte indagação: “A combinação palavra e imagem é complementar na conformação do texto?” “Existe autonomia da imagem?” A investigação conclui ser a associação entre as duas linguagens o meio mais eficaz para interpretação dos sentidos transmitidos pelo texto/discurso.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Efeitos de sentido; Texto; Discurso; Imagem; Fala*

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The analysis of images combined with verbal language raises some questions: Does the meaning of images depend on text messages? Are images autonomous?

This article intends, at first, to show that aspects regarding the interdependence between text and image as well as linguistic autonomy should be considered when verbal and nonverbal language is used in order to ensure accurate discourse analyses. It is worth mentioning that the complementary relation between text and image stems from their equivalence.

In this sense, Roland Barthes offers ideas related to the same question. The author defends the hypothesis that the understanding of an image is obtained through text mediation. He makes the following question: “Does the image duplicate certain of the information given in the text by a phenomenon of redundancy, or does the text add a fresh information to the image?” (1977, p.38).

By deepening the question, it is possible to find that it is still Barthes that explores the relation of reciprocal reference between text and image. It is the author who presents two ways to make reference: *anchorage* and *relay*. In *anchorage*, the text (a caption, for example) directs the reader to the understanding of the resources used to grasp the meaning of the image, accepting some of them and refusing others. The image leads the reader to work out the meaning chosen in advance. Thus, *anchorage* refers to the multiplicity of meanings that an image can elicit in a given culture and to the choice of one of these meanings in a special manner. The text offers a single interpretation, thus avoiding some meanings and, consequently, receiving others. Therefore, the text has an instructive and selective function.

The author clarifies that in *relay* text and image “stand in a complementary relationship; the words, in the same way as the images, are fragments of a more general syntagm, and the unity of the message is realized at a higher level” (BARTHES, 1977, p.41). If the two concepts are summarized, it seems that in *anchorage* the strategy of reference is targeted from text to image and in *relay* the receiver’s attention is directed from image to word and vice-versa.

If one looks at discourse from a practical point of view, what has been considered so far may refer, for example, to the hybrid nature of the advertising discourse that relies on the interaction between languages, requiring attention to verbal and iconic languages. In this type of speech, juxtaposed images work as a paraphrastic

unfolding of the verbal language, from which identity effects result. The eyes move from image to words and vice versa, reflecting the fundamental strategy of the advertising discourse, that is, the intent to persuade the reader to believe in the truthfulness of the image and, consequently, to arouse the desire to purchase the advertised product.

It is known that the relations of meaning production established between verbal and nonverbal language play a relevant role in contemporary mass media. Through the interaction between the two codes – verbal language and imagery - words and images invade mass media: Newspapers, magazines, and television, among other means, provoke ideas and emotions in individuals and in society.

In this interactive process, signifier and signified are related to each other in order to grasp meaning, and the word *image* acquires many meanings. According to Joly:

The contemporary image comes from far away (...) “Petrograms” if drawn or painted; “Petroglyphs” if engraved or carved - these images represent the first human means of communication. They are seen as images because they visually imitate people and objects of the real world (1996. p.17-18)¹.

According to Lalande (1999, p.517), one can use different terms in order to define image. It is called “a trace, an echo, a simulacrum, a ghost, an image of primitive sensation. (...) A concrete representation built by the spirit activity; new combinations of its forms or its elements, a result of creative imagination”². Notice that the multiple meanings of the word *image* are attributed here due to the subjectivity associated to it.

The representation of a wish, a reality, an intention, the image in current society, which is usually called “society of image,” is imbued with sociocultural values – hence its cardinal importance in the constitution of discourse. Characterized as a producer of sociocultural information, image is established, alongside verbal language, as a

¹ Text in Portuguese: “A imagem contemporânea vem de longe (...) ‘Petrogramas’, se desenhadas ou pintadas; ‘petroglifos’, se gravadas ou talhadas – essas figuras representam os primeiros meios de comunicação humana. São consideradas imagens porque imitam, esquematizando, visualmente, as pessoas e os objetos do mundo real”.

² Text in Portuguese: “ressaibo, um eco, um simulacro, um fantasma, uma imagem da sensação primitiva. (...) Representação concreta construída pela atividade do espírito; combinações novas pelas suas formas, senão pelos seus elementos, que resultam da imaginação criadora”.

historical document. As History is in constant movement and transformation, images are always being built. Baudelaire (2005), in 1846, stressed the role of images as instruments of a documentary memory of reality.

One can conceive image as a message that is elaborated over time not only as image/monument or image/document, but also as a direct or an indirect testimony of the past.

This fact allows us, when analyzing discourse image resources, to make the following questions: How can one interpret images produced in the past? What is the nature of image production? What is the historical, political and social situation of this production? How can images be constituted as visual sources – historical documents? What is the analyst's purpose when he/she is before assorted images about the same event?

Umberto Eco (1980) postulates that iconicity means transcribing, through graphic work, the cultural properties that are attributed to it (iconicity), for cultures refer to codes of recognition when defining their objects. The author still remembers that, besides the consciously produced images, there are those from unconscious content, laden with elements that exceed the intention of those who carried out the representation. These images are configured as elements of individual expression as well as portraits of ideologies of society as a whole: the social, economic, political, cultural, and religious context of an era.

As to language, this thought agrees with Lacan when he declares that image is signified and re-signified by words. In this way, linguistic and social structures consolidate images and reinforce their senses.

Thus, it is possible to explain the vast field of studies related to linguistic communication in marketing strategies in which a conceptual network is built with principles that approach each other, are intertwined, or are distanced from each other. It is a fertile territory of ideas and images that reach various levels of human subjectivity.

This is a current topic, explored in a peculiar universe of language where image invention is open to different crossed readings. These readings are subject to interdiscursive dialogues crossed by outward speech, bearing traces of other discourses. Thus, image is so powerful that it can convey themes and images from past to present memories. In this language of images (which frame words), echoes of alien voices –

either ancient or recent – emerge, illuminating faces and photos, whether remote or close, and shed light upon the mechanisms of memory.

Moreover, readers are overwhelmed with information that images, adjusted to various languages, evoke. A world vision based on a set of similar relations is projected. These relations, configured in images, or in the word, or harmoniously in both, are presented in a diversity of forms, which we will show in brief examples from comic books, editorial cartoons, photographs, and advertisements.

Comic Books, Editorial Cartoons, Photographs

Most messages in comic books result from the interaction between word and image – a series of fixed images, arranged in a particular sequence. A narrative is created – words, images, and balloons move, promoting the intersection of language and image.

According to Guyot (1994, p.11-13), in comic books, balloons are the most codified element, for they reflect the author's creative power. Balloons are seen as expressive iconic messages which evoke mental images articulated with text images, resembling a puzzle.

As an active genre in mass media communication, comic books condition meaning to the interaction between language and receivers, giving cardinal importance to the reader's power of interpretation. Unlike the cinema, the theater or other means constituted of verbal and nonverbal components, messages in comic books can only be understood as a whole, that is, to separate words from images leads to the risk of receiving incomplete or even unconceivable information. This whole understanding can even be explained by means of the narrative composition, a structural feature of comic books. The enunciative context is recognized by the reader due to the work as a whole.

On the other hand, editorial cartoons are a discursive genre, for they are illustrations aimed to satirize, through caricatures, current events. According to Santos (2007)³,

³ Text in Portuguese: “A charge não se limita apenas a ironizar, mas acrescenta ao cômico, criado pela deformação da imagem, um dado singular: a crítica que visa a levar o leitor a solidificar sua posição acerca de um determinado aspecto da realidade, sendo o foco principal os fatos políticos”.

Editorial cartoons are not limited to irony, but add a singular element to the comic, created by the disfigurement of images: criticism, which aims to lead readers to solidify their positions concerning a certain aspect of reality, whose main focus is political facts.

By nature, editorial cartoons go beyond the symbolic universe and reach an instance of social and cultural representation set in the political discourse – a critical image of the critique. In this type of discourse, values are successively built through vector images that produce meanings – images which represent social values within a political and historical context. Beth Brait (1996, p.34) also reminds us that:

Editorial cartoons are ironic, and such humorous practice is based on political critique. There is laughter and violence in caricature humor. Laughter lies in the ambiguity, deliberately contradictory, between what is said and the intended meaning.⁴

As to photographs, which depend on what is “known,” on the reader’s world knowledge, their interpretative reading is historical⁵. Photographs are credible only if they are seen as simple and accurate “copies” of reality. According to Barthes (1977, p.21-29), the meaning of a photograph can be attributed to three types of connotation: *perceptive* – when the picture is analogous to reality; *cognitive* – when the interpretation of the picture depends on world knowledge; *ideological* – when the picture is associated with reasons or cultural values. When a historian analyzes photos from a certain time in history, for example, it is possible to verify these three types of connotation, allowing him/her to identify the ideologies present at the time when the photographs were taken.

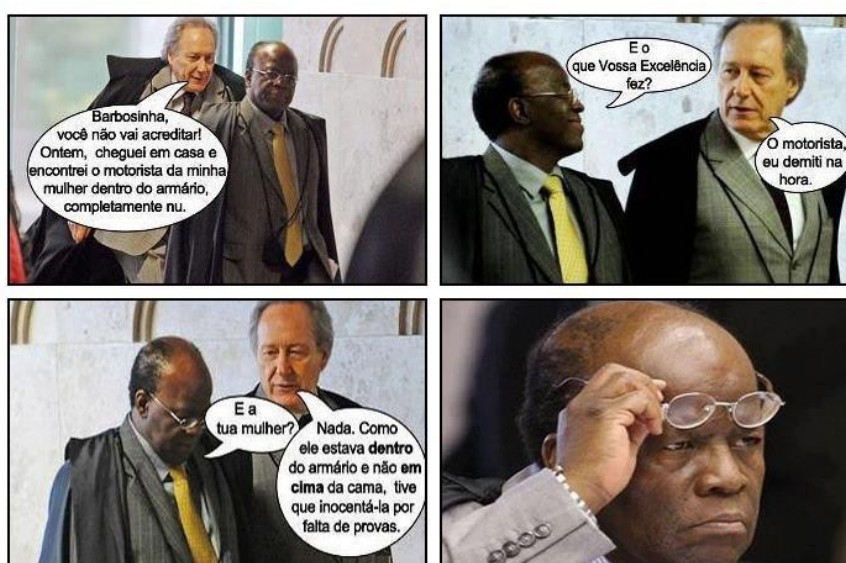
On this train of thought, Minardi and Schwartz (2010, p.116) mention the North American filmography on the Holocaust during World War II. In it, the Jews are portrayed as victims and perpetrators, alluding to the political situation of modern Palestine.

⁴ Text in Portuguese: “A charge se expressa pela ironia, cuja prática humorística se esteia na crítica política. No humor caricatural habita o riso e a violência. O riso está na ambiguidade propositalmente contraditória entre o que é dito e o sentido que se quer passar”.

⁵ It is important to remember that historicity is an essential condition for discourse interpretability.

Minardi and Schwartz (2010) comment that films (no matter when the time of the plot is) *are documents of the time they were produced*. Image/photograph historians and researchers should take “current” concepts into consideration as a valuable exercise to presentify the past. It is true that photo study methods require the study of its historicity – the active center of a network of inexhaustible relationships.

After articulating the reflection on comic books, editorial cartoons, and photographs presented above, the reader may enjoy the following editorial cartoon, which uses the comic-book style, illustrated with photos:



Balloon 1: Barbosinha, you will not believe your ears! I got home yesterday and I found my wife’s driver inside the closet, totally naked.

Balloon 2: And what did your Excellency do?

Balloon 3: The driver, I fired him immediately.

Balloon 4: And your wife?

Balloon 5: Nothing. As he was inside the closet and not in bed, I had to clear her due to lack of evidence.

Presented as a comic strip, this editorial cartoon⁶ builds a discourse whose core is the driving force of images and, at the same time, the convergence point of meanings, that is, the place where they are mutually interpreted. The characters who stare at each

⁶ The comic strip circulated on the social network. At: <http://prosaepolitica.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/barbosinha-ii.jpg>; Access on February 08th/2013.

other are ministers of the Supreme Court (STF) who played a key role in the so-called “mensalão”⁷ trial.

During the course sessions, the role of Minister Ricardo Lewandowsky was emphasized, for he looked vexed when searching for and presenting evidence that would justify the defendants’ sentences. He repeatedly justified not sentencing them due to the alleged “lack of evidence.” The argument “I had to clear him/her due to lack of evidence” was widely repeated and became a sort of “refrain,” a target of mockery among the session assistants – which went public through television.

It is possible to notice the facial expressions that illuminate their reactions: Minister Joaquim Barbosa’s countenance of ironic laughter turned into an expression of scorn, indignation – the glasses above his eyebrows as if helping him to wonder: “Am I really listening to this?”

His interlocutor, Minister Lewandowsky, seems to keep his calm countenance, being convinced that if “evidence is missing,” there is nothing he can do, except acquit the alleged guilty people. “Lack of evidence” represents the argument that exempts the Minister from any mistakes or missteps. Thus, this editorial cartoon fulfills its purpose: to satirize the Brazilian political scenario.

Advertisements

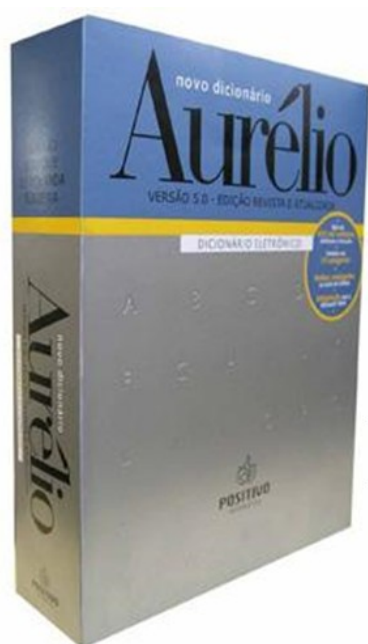
It has already been stressed that the hybrid nature of the advertising discourse requires attention to the two languages on whose interaction the persuasive efficiency of the advertising message is based. This type of discourse wants the image representation to be so convincing that it can be treated as reality itself. While publicity communicates values and ideologies in order to promote customers’ adherence, advertisements arouse the desire to purchase and persuade the action of consumption.

In this kind of speech, it seems that the sign more intensely emerges with social and cultural values impregnated in it, adopting certain rules that set the basic precepts of how to make an advertisement attractive and persuasive and to make it reach the greatest goal.

⁷ Translator’s Note: A vote-buying case of corruption in Brazilian politics.

It is common sense among scholars that advertisements bear no authorial imprint; there is an editor – a professional who adapts to the universe of standard advertising, shaping his/her writing to its governing laws. To Carrascoza (2002, p.125), advertising texts are single texts; editors are single editors. This Borgian idea can be proven right every time the editor composes – and not writes – an advertising text.

The following advertisement⁸ illustrates the considerations made so far on the advertising process:



GOOD
FOR
DUMMIES

In this ad, there is a text-image relationship. The text suggests a more recurring meaning with the expression “good for dummies,” which creates an effect of excellence, something transcendent in terms of value. At the same time, “good for dummies” evokes a popular saying – in Brazil – that allows the naming of a dictionary as the “father of dummies,” a term that Vilma Guimarães Rosa suggests should be replaced by “Gardens of Knowledge.”

While the expression “good for dummies” can be interpreted in a positive light, seeming to offer the accurate interpretation, since it is in harmony with the own nature

⁸ This dictionary’s advertisement was extracted from 2010 university entrance exam of Universidade de Campinas. At: http://www.comvest.unicamp.br/vest_antiores/2011/download/comentadas/portugues.pdf; Access on February 10th/ /2013.

of a dictionary, that is, a knowledge provider, in a negative light, the text “good for dummies” refers to the image of the dictionary in a playful tone, far from the true essence of a dictionary.

Hence, image and text are open to double interpretation. In advertising discourse, it is possible to verify that the message gets across by simultaneously decoding text and image in overlapping positions.

The following advertising⁹ text illustrates the aforementioned overlap:



A Petrobras não deixa a natureza virar peça de museu.

A manatees¹⁰ is neither a fish nor an ox and, if we do not pay close attention, it will be nothing. Petrobras does not allow nature to become a piece of museum.

We find the image of a manatee (*fish-ox*) exposed in a picture and, therefore, outside its own habitat, doomed to become extinct. Illustrating the image, the text “A manatees is neither a fish nor an ox and, if we do not pay close attention, it will be nothing” does not portray manatees as doomed to disappear, unless human beings take a good care of them.

In opposition to the text and the image, the second text (*Petrobras does not allow nature to become a piece of museum*) emphasizes the importance of

⁹ Petrobras text was extracted from 2009 university entrance exam of Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso. At: http://www.cev.ufmt.br/vestibular/concursos/ufmt2009/documentos/sobre_questoes_discursivas.pdf; Access on January 20th /2013.

¹⁰ Translator's Note: In Brazilian Portuguese, a manatee is commonly known as a fish-ox.

environmental preservation work – one of the priority goals of Petrobras, a company which prevents nature from becoming a piece of museum. Text and image combine to give a shout of praise to Petrobras.

Open Remarks

If the terms *meaning* and *sense* are defined from the general language meaning and the specific discourse meaning respectively, it is possible to verify the presence of both definitions ‘sacralizing’ the relations of meaning production established between verbal and the nonverbal languages.

The study of these relationships makes possible the examination of a kaleidoscope of internal and external images that inhabit our daily routine of speakers and readers of a language that is revealed in discourse networks. Words give meaning to the meaning of images. Images illustrate the weight of words. Texts foster harmony between words and images. Discourse absorbs words, images, and texts.

The interaction and complementarity of both codes open the way to the total and solid grasp of messages. Bear in mind, though, that the word is the stronger code – especially the written word – the capturer of ideas. In their pursuit, discourse networks of images are parallel and convergent.

In the interconnection of languages, a variety of consecrated forms registers social interactions, in which discourse succeeds in successively intertwining the threads of a network that is skillfully woven by resources of a linguistic-discursive nature.

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