Cognitive Semiotics Approach for Communication Development of Language Learners

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Abstract—Communication is a two way mode of expression between the encoder and the decoder. The role of communication in the human society is sharing the affective and cognitive attributes to interact. Many times communicated message failed to understand or process by the receiver. Researches proved that lack of skills in communication results to false understanding. The language has four communication skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) where the representations are in the forms of signs and symbols. The task of the language teacher is making the learner to construct meaningful semantic and syntactic representations by signs and symbols to enhance the communication competencies. The lack of thematic, vocabulary and grammatical structures insists the language learners to struggle in expressing their thinking in written and spoken form. Thinking depends on the cognition activities, i.e., Representation and Computation. Cognitive is an interdisciplinary study of the mental phenomena involving human mind in terms of perception, memory and language. Semiotics is the study of signs or symbols and Cognitive semiotics studies the relations between signs and language. This paper explores the role of cognition and semiotics in developing better and effective communication in spoken and written forms of Language learners by the Language teachers.

Index Terms—cognitive semiotics, communication skill, language learners

In the present decade of modern Education, it is essential that the schools be places that help students for better understand of complex, symbol-rich culture in which they live in. A new vision of literacy is essential if educators are serious about the broad goals of education: preparing students to function as informed and effective citizens in a democratic society; preparing students to realize personal fulfilment; and preparing students to function effectively in a rapidly changing world that demands command over communication. It is not alone related to technologies or information and communication technology or electronic communication. It is also a simple way of interaction to express the thoughts and feelings using verbal and non-verbal communications.

I. SEMIOTICS

Communication does not happen all of a sudden, it needs a speaker, receiver and the known subject or object going to be discussed. Semiology (semiotics) is the study of science of signs. The signs may be verbal and nonverbal. It is a type of scientific inquiry that studies virtually everything we do, use to represent the world around us and to make messages about something. Semiotics or semiology is considered as a subject, a movement, a philosophy, or science. The example of the bird is Peacock (is a sign in semiotics). The semiotician refers to the meaningful location of the context, to its meaning in specific contexts as referred, to the ways in which it generates meaning as a code-based, and to the ways in which a message is understood as interpretation. (Danesi, 1994). The subject matter and the key concepts of semiotics has always been the 'sign'. Semiotics studies every sign, icon, or symbol from traffic lights to charts and graphics on a newspaper, from commercial advertisements to icons on the web pages, from gestures to dance movements.

"Signs" is not a recent concept. It has origin from Aristotle, Hippocrates, Locke and many others, have contributed to the study of signs. Medieval philosopher John Locke and many others have shown interest in signs and the way they communicate. The etymology of the term semiotics is from Greek word sema- "marks, signs" (singular: semeion). It is defined as the science of doctrine of signs. The English philosopher John Locke (1696) first used Greek word 'seemeiootikee',in the modern sense. The word *semeiotica* is still used in Italy to refer to the study of symptoms in medical science.

Modern semiotics emerged through the work of two linguistics theorists: Swiss Linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and American philosopher Charles Saunders Peirce (1839-1914). These two philosophers inspired Charles Morris, Thomas Sebeok, Umberto Eco, and Roland Barthes. Ferdinand De Saussure published *Course in General Linguistics* in 1915. For Saussure, a sign has two components, the signifier or "sound-image", and the signified, or "concept". The relationship between signifier and the signified is arbitrary. He used the term "semiology" to refer to the systematic study of signs. The most widely used definition of semiotics comes from Peirce who is considered to be the co-founder of the semiotics along with Saussure. He defines semiotics as the "doctrine" of signs "stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity." (Peirce, 1958)

Although semiotics is both a sphere of inquiry and a meta-analytic tool that has been used in philosophy, anthropology, sociology and linguistics, examination of signs in an educational context is a relatively recent phenomenon. (Cassidy, 1982) The field of semiotics became popular since it has been used in theatre, medicine, architecture, puppetry, television, tourism, and now on the Internet. It includes study of how animals communicate (zoo semiotics), of nonverbal communication (kinesics), of aesthetics, of rhetoric, of visual communication, of myths and narratives, of anything that allows us to make meaning and sense of the world. (Danesi, 1994) Semiotics looks at how the meaning is generated in "texts" (films, television programs, fashion, foods, books etc.). The book we read conveys meaning beyond reading. It shows status, taste of reading and the style of writing, love towards the theme, integration, and so on. (Berger, 1982)

In his influential book, *A Theory of Semiotics,* Umberto Eco (1976) defines semiotics as "the discipline studying everything, which can be used in order to lie." Eco continues, "Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else." (Eco, 1976)

II. COMMUNICATION AND SEMIOTICS

Human beings talk, write, blink, wave, and codes of conduct. They put up signposts and erect barriers to communicate messages to other people. They produce and interpret signs. But even if no one intends to communicate anything, sign processes are taking place: A teacher interpreths the symptoms of the poor achievement of the learner and a police triggers an alarm when he saw the thief. Then, what is not a sign? Almost every action, object, or image means something to someone somewhere or sometime. From our gestures to what colour dress we wear is a sign that has meaning beyond the object itself.

III. CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

The meaning of signs or representations is dependent on social, cultural, and historical contexts. We construct meaning based on the physical appearance of the sign; our previous personal and cultural experience; time to time we live in; and context or place it occurs. There is not one meaning or interpretation of an each sign. There are multiple sides and points of view to each sign. As in James Mangan (1981) doctoral thesis, *Learning through pictures* provides interesting examples to illustrate both communication and cognitive limitations to the ability to understand pictures. These limitations must be taken into account when designing learning materials not only for rural villagers but the global villagers in the world. Mangan says "communication differences in perception is more subtle and numerous than most educators suspect."

The greatest difficulty for international language of signs is that the same denoted sign can have many different connotations. When messages are transmitted across cultures -whether based on age, economics, gender, ethnic background, location, it is decoded differently. For example, in many cultures eye contact between two individuals talking to each other is a sign of interest. In other cultures, it may indicate disrespect, insult. In other words, for something to be a sign, the viewer must understand its meaning. If you do not understand the meaning in the context used, it isn't a sign to use. (Lester, 1995)

W. V. Quine's famous example shows the impossibility of learning a language. Imagine yourself as an adventurous linguist comforted in some unknown territory hosted by a tribe. You are trying to learn their language, and at some point your host points his index towards a rabbit running in the distance and says "gavagai", what could you deduce from that? That "gavagai" means rabbit? Or "in the distance"? Or "brown-grey"? Or "this is our meal for tonight"? Or that *this* rabbit is called "gavagai"? Or that it means, "Go home!" If the indexical sign is not clearly identified, (and how could it be identified?), this iconic way of learning a language (word meanings by analogy with existing things) cannot work (Codognet, 1990). Every single thing has meaning and gives a different message depending on where it is located and who sees it. For instance the colour Blue is seen as trustworthy, dependable and committed. The colour of sky and the ocean, blue is perceived as a constant in our lives.

The definition of communication literacy has been changing rapidly. As Ernest L. Boyer said "It is no longer enough to simply read and write. Students must also become literate in the understanding of visual images. Our children must learn how to spot a stereotype, isolate a social cliché and distinguish facts from propaganda, analysis from banner, important news from coverage."

Today, gaining communication Literacy skills is becoming more important. Preventing a new generation to see television or use Internet is not going to solve the violence, hunger, or world problems. The more we learn about

television, use the Internet, the more likely we see and understand the world. As Len Masterman (1985) says, "Media are symbolic systems; not simply reflection of reality which must be accepted, but with languages which need to be actively read, and interrogated." Acquiring communication via digital literacy for Internet use involves mastering a set of core competencies. The most essential of these is the ability to make informed judgments about what you find on-line. (Gilster, 1997)

Cornellia Brunner and William Tally (1999) places emphasis on the importance of effective research skills in education and encourage educators to incorporate new media literacy skills into the curriculum to impart advance communication skills. In addition to reading, writing, and arithmetic, Rich Thome (1996) adds another R (research) in his article, *Fourth R is Research.* In the information and communication age, even though reaching information on the internet seems to be in our finger tips, finding a reliable resource and ability to make informed judgments about what one finds on-line requires new skills." (Gilster, 1997)

The aim of the Educator is to develop awareness about print and the newer technologies of communications so that students can get the best out of each in the educational process. Without understanding of languages and grammars, we cannot hope to achieve a contemporary awareness of the world in which we live (McLuhan, 1967). Carmen Luke (1994) and Marshall McLuhan (1967) talk about "grammar" and "language" of moving images. Musicians use notes and scales to communicate, dancers use movement, scientists use mathematical notations and language teacher uses stress, pause, intonation, gestures, verbal symbols and non-verbal symbols to communicate or interact in the classroom situation. But in many circumstances, the Language teacher finds difficult over communicating with all the signs of the language. The language teacher requires assistive technologies to fulfil the required demands of the communication process. Therefore the language teacher inducted digital media into the language classroom. It does not mean, language classroom is solely depending on digital media and language teachers are not required. The digital media is a supplementing process. The language teacher should use digital media where the language teacher fails to communicate over language signs. Language laboratory, film, television, commercials, and the Internet are texts and have their own language and grammar. Language is a social institution that gives us the rules and conventions and speaking is the action part that is based on language.

IV. CONCLUSION: EDUCATION AND SIGNIFICATION

Kimberly J. Sloan (1995) wrote a reflection piece on her "teachable moment." While I was working as a media specialist in a high school, I had an interesting incident. Teachers were required to save students' progress reports on a floppy disk, and then upload the file to the registrar's office though a school wide information system. One day, one of the teachers told me that the registrar received her file without any data. She was sure she followed all the directions in the manual and even the computer said "OK." It took us a while to find out which step she missed and why she thought she was right. When she saw "0K" (zero kilobytes), she thought it was "OK" meaning the message transmitted safely to the registrar's office. The teachers' role in education is critical and important. For Paulo Freire (1993), "Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students." Although it is almost impossible to understand each and every students' background and culture and their interpretation of the signs and symbols, as Sloan (1995) suggests "We can use our various interpretations of signs as a starting place for discussion of our often opposing value systems, to create interesting juxtapositions, and to investigate others "personal structures" to broaden our own experiences." In the millennium, we are going to be surrendered by more and more images from bulletin boards to Internet, from advertisements and banners to book covers. The Internet and new technologies creates new images, icons, symbols, and metaphors to study for us to make sense of the Cyberspace.

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