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## REVIEWS

### *PERSPECTIVES AND CRITICAL MODELS*

MICHAEL SHAPIRO, *The sense of grammar: Language as semeiotic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983. Pp. xi + 236.

Michael Shapiro's *The sense of grammar*, as its subtitle indicates, is concerned with language as "semeiotic." Specifically, it deals with the theory of signs developed by the American philosopher C. S. Peirce and with the application of that theory to language. Linguistic researchers associate the name Peirce with Roman Jakobson, who introduced semeiotic<sup>1</sup> concepts to much of the linguistic world, and Shapiro's actual linguistic analyses resemble nothing so much as Jakobson's work. For this reason, it is somewhat surprising that *The sense of grammar* is not more relevant to language in society research.

The volume is divided into two parts, the first a "theoretical prolegomena" dealing with the Peircean theory and with its potential applicability to grammar, the second a set of papers dealing with Russian phonology, morphophonemics, and morphology, and concluding with a general treatise on semantics.

It is important to bear in mind that Peircean semeiotics is philosophical in character, and Shapiro's abstractness and erudition reflect this. Peirce was concerned with epistemology, with the foundations of knowledge, the processes by which a human mind cognizes reality. Cognition for him involved "signs," wherein something (a representamen or sign vehicle) came to stand for something else (the object). At the simplest level, perceptual images, such as swatches of color, are posited by the mind as sign vehicles standing for some object that exists in reality. At the most complex level, segments of discourse encoding propositions are brought into relationship by the mind so as to form arguments. Between simple perception and complex reasoning lies a vast labyrinth of signs, and it was Peirce's intent to chart this labyrinth.

At first glance, such an endeavor seems too abstract to be of use in language in society research. In fact, however, the basic Peircean distinctions allow us to understand the kind of variation data that have supplied the focus for sociolinguistics and the ethnography of speaking. As Jakobson, Hymes, and others have noted, speech is multiply functional. On the one hand, it encodes the classical kinds of propositional meaning that are used as the basis for intuitionistic analyses of grammar, such as those proposed by Chomsky. On the other hand, and at the same time, it contains nuances that indicate social position, age, sex, as in the studies of Labov, and that go to make up "styles" and form the basis of poetry.

The Peircean framework, as admirably sketched by Shapiro in Chapter I, "Peirce's Semeiotic," provides the kinds of analytical distinctions we need to

comprehend this reality. Peirce distinguished between three types of relationship between sign vehicle and entity signaled: "the relation between sign and object may be [1] one of iconic resemblance (such as a portrait and the person portrayed), [2], of indexical contiguity and dynamic interaction (smoke and fire), or [3] of symbolic law (a habit, such as an item of language)" (40).

The "semantic" meaning of language, such as linguists study through glossing, through the difference test, and through introspection about grammaticality, involves language in the third or "symbolic" mode. A great deal of what is studied in language in society research, however, involves language in its "indexical" mode. There are actual co-occurrence relations between the speech signals and what they mean, for example, between postvocalic /r/ usage and social class in New York City, or between the intonation contours of a Kuna Indian chant and the ritual occasions of its use. Significantly, the Peircean framework suggests that we must study these "meanings" from the point of view of empirical correlations. The meanings are not, and in many cases cannot, be based upon native-speaker intuition.

There is much more to the Peircean framework that is relevant to language in society research. For example, Peirce also distinguished between three types of sign vehicle, "qualisigns," that is, sign vehicles that signal through some "abstractable quality only" (34); "sinsigns," that is, sign vehicles that are actual entities or occurrences, for example, what are nowadays called tokens in linguistics; and "legisigns," that is, the general types of sign vehicles apart from their specific instances. Most students of discourse are ultimately interested in legisigns, those sign vehicles that are general and recurring types. Yet what they actually study, and what forms the specific object of their research, are sinsigns, instances of discourse occurring in specified contexts. The Peircean framework can serve as an aid in their reasoning about how the legisign/sinsign gap is to be bridged.

For all of the potential of Peirce's semeiotic, there is actually little in *The sense of grammar* about language in society research. Most of what there is can be found in Chapter II, "Sketch of a Peircean Theory of Grammar," and this is based primarily upon the work of Henning Andersen. Shapiro makes reference to what he terms "physiognomic signs," "those elements which convey information about a speaker's age, sex, or specific identity" (77). Such signs, he says, do not form part of the "expression system of language." For this reason, he distinguishes them from "pragmatic" or "practical" signs, which do form part of that system, but which are not employed as symbolic meaning-differentiating "diacritics." These pragmatic signs have as their meanings the various components of the communicative situation as outlined by Jakobson (1960).

Shapiro's general lack of concern with language in society research is nowhere more evident than in connection with his discussion of "adaptive rules," that is, rules in accord with which "speakers adjust their speech to conform to community norms in accordance with their status and roles." These rules would presum-

ably encompass many rules of sociolinguistic variation, including those concerned with the realization of postvocalic /r/ in New York City English. Shapiro writes, however, that “in the long run such rules tend to be curtailed and eliminated, [even if] at any given point in the history of a language, every phonology has a number [of them]” (88). There seems to be no sense here of the importance of such variants as sign vehicles, as constituents of an enduring code in which social distinctions are reflected and through which they are created.

Shapiro’s book, while about the “semeiotics” of language, is not at heart about language use. Rather, it is about language as classically conceived since Saussure – language as a distributional phenomenon operating at the level of symbol. When it comes to the actual linguistic analyses in Part II (Language as Semeiotic), the volume has less to do with Peirce than with Jakobson. It is about the principle of markedness, indeed, markedness conceived in the sense of Jakobson as (to use the classification developed by Trubetzkoy) “binary privative markedness.”

The point of convergence between Parts I and II has to do with Shapiro’s hypothesis regarding markedness and the Peircean “interpretant.” According to Peirce, signs are fundamentally triadic in character. They involve a sign vehicle and an entity signaled, but they also involve an interpretant – “an effect in the mind of the interpreter” (47) created by the sign vehicle. According to Shapiro, in language the interpretant is to be equated with markedness: “markedness and interpretant are synonymous where the structure of the linguistic sign is concerned” (75). In this sense, therefore, the studies of phonology and morphology in Part II are Peircean; they involve the use of markedness theory. Students of Peirce may question this equation. However, it is this postulate, and this postulate alone, that makes Part II of the *The sense of grammar* semeiotic.

While Chapters III (“Phonology”) and IV (“Morphophonemics and Morphology”) will not be of central interest to language in society researchers, the final chapter (“Semantics”) about tropes and language change will. The discussion is highly abstract, with very little in the way of exemplification. Yet one can discern here much that is of interest about metonymy and metaphor. Especially intriguing is Shapiro’s notion of a “life cycle of tropes,” where metonymy (in which part stands for whole) gives rise to metaphor, metaphor to idiom, and idiom to lexeme, the lexeme in turn being revived through puns and other wordplays wherein the frozen morphemic constituents of lexical items are reimbued with significance. The model merits further empirical investigation.

In the last part of his chapter on semantics, Shapiro takes up the question of style. Here *Language in Society* readers will feel particularly uncomfortable. Shapiro means by “style” something different from what most language-use researchers would mean by this term. His construal is best thought of in terms of “having style,” having that flair which sets one apart from the crowd. From this perspective, the crowd by definition lacks “style.” Thus, Shapiro argues that “the choice of denim as a cloth for use in work clothes does not rise to the status

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of a semeiotic datum . . .," but a "student who wears jeans to a college classroom for the first time in an institution's history elevates denim to the status of a sign," begins a "style" (210). Language-use researchers will probably want to reject Shapiro's usage. They will want to think of the wearing of denim by workmen as a sign, just as they regard the phonetic correlates of social class as signs. Moreover, they will want to think of the style of the masses as just as truly a "style" as that of the elite.

Despite its promising subtitle, Michael Shapiro's book is not primarily about language as a multiply functional system of signs, employed by actors operating within schemata of purposive social action. Rather, this is a book about Jakobsonian markedness. Yet, *The sense of grammar* is of value to language in society researchers if only by virtue of its lucid explication of Peircean concepts. Such concepts may one day serve to ground variation and stylistic research in a theoretically sophisticated framework. Unfortunately, this potential of Peircean semeiotics is not actualized in the present volume.

## NOTE

1. Shapiro (x) has his own view of how Peirce wanted the term "semeiotic," ordinarily "semiotic," spelled. I will follow his usage here.

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ALAIN BERRENDONNER, *L'éternel grammairien. Etude du discours normatif*. Berne and Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1982. Pp. 125.

This work proposes to analyze grammatical speech so as to show that "its most innocent stylistic figures serve certain clearly identifiable functions" (9), by which Berrendonner means that grammarians participate in the maintenance of social hierarchy. The study is in a certain sense sociolinguistic, for the utterances selected are never examined in and of themselves, but in terms of the pragmatic effects they are supposed to have on their readers. What it analyzes is "the relation between texts and the conditions of their use in communication, as well as their function within social structure" (11). In fact, the author appears to use a sociolinguistic approach to deny the existence of linguistic structure. For this reason, it is crucial for linguists, including sociolinguists, to uncover the main hypotheses of this book. One of the main goals of sociolinguistics is to extend the domain of linguistic rules. Berrendonner, while pretending that he is himself a