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## BOOK REVIEW

### SEMIOTIC PSYCHOLOGY Speech as an Index of Emotions and Attitudes

by Norman Markel

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A review of a book could be basically written in one of two ways: (a) a formal one, describing in some detail the aim and content of the book, and (b) a personal one, reflecting the impressions and the gain the reviewer got from reading this particular book. The combination of these two ways could be reserved for the connoisseurs of the field or the subject matter of the book.

For a university teacher of Clinical, Health and Consulting psychology in a small post-war country it seems quite natural to use every opportunity to get a new book, especially one with an interesting title. I have used this opportunity. As a consequence I was confronted with a highly interesting book and a difficult task to write a review of it. The difficulty arises from the fact that it is quite complicated to write about a book in which most of the expressed views, as well as a great deal of the presented research is quite new to one. Thus the only way left to me was to write my personal and subjective view of the book.

But let me start with some facts about the book.

Written by a psychologist, professor of Communication Sciences, Linguistics, and Anthropology at the University of Florida, the book is in the first place a selective history of semiotic psychology as an academic discipline, which provides the reader with an understanding of the theoretical and methodological background of this discipline. It reviews the classic studies, much of which has been forgotten today although they were in many ways ahead of their time.

Semiotic Psychology provides accounts of interactional talk in interviews, conversations or written works, which should be of interest not only for social and clinical psychologists.

The Foreword, Contemporary View of Semiotic Psychology, contains lessons and conclusions held by Cynthia Gallois. She starts with the definition of semiotic psychology given by Markel. This definition states that semiotic psychology is "the scientific study of speech as an index of emotions and attitudes". It stresses the essential features of

semiotic psychology which is that it looks at speech behavior in the context of social and clinical psychology. It is also connected with semiotics because linguistic and paralinguistic signs are always viewed as indices of mental states.

Psycholinguistics with its emphasis on phonology, syntax and semantics on the language side, and cognition, communication and affect on the psychological side emerged as a distinct discipline at the end of 1950s. Chomskyan revolution of the 1960s, with its focus on syntax eliminated the semiotic trend from psycholinguistics. As a consequence psycholinguistics became isolated from social and clinical psychology. With the development of new theories in social psychology the study of language and communication was "handed over" to linguistics and sociology. Only few researchers in social psychology continued to work in the area, but the interest in spontaneous speech was almost lost.

By the mid- to late 1970s much of the research presented in *Semiotic Psychology* was almost forgotten by most researchers, and the study of language and communication was divided among several social sciences and humanities. Although at the end of 1970s there was a revival of interest in speech and nonverbal communication, much of the common language and concepts of the past had been lost. Recently a lot of interest centers on text and discourse analysis, but without the subtlety of the systems of content analysis used in earlier works reported in *Semiotic Psychology*.

In the Introduction to the book Markel presents five literature reviews and thus defines the large field of semiotic psychology. In Part I Markel describes the psychology of sign behavior, including the detailed description of learning theories applied to thinking, meaning and consciousness, and two chapters on emotive states, thus enabling the reader to understand the studies he reviews. In Emotive states I there are definitions of perception, illusions, stereotypes, prejudice and attitudes, as well as motivation, and culture and personality.

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Part II, *Speech signs*, has two chapters: *Linguistic Signs*, defining and describing phonetics, phonemics, morphemics, syntactic, and semantics, and *Paralinguistic Signs*, explaining the domain of paralanguage, Sapir's contribution to it, and Trager's taxonomy.

Part III, *Semiotic psychology*, contains three chapters: The Idiographic paradigm, The Nomothetic Paradigm, and Classic Experiments.

It could be said that Part I and Part II prepare the reader for the Part III, and the multidisciplinary research performed a few decades ago. The idiographic paradigm concerns itself with the practical application of linguistics to psychiatry, i.e. to psychiatric interview.

The best and shortest overview of the book was given by its author in his Conclusion. The author points out the statement made by Gallois that semiotic psychology is about "naturally occurring language and its meanings. It provides an understanding of the theoretical and methodological backdrop of a body of research, undertaken at a time when social and clinical psychology were still strongly linked to psychophysics on the one hand and to psychoanalysis on the other".

Obviously semiotic psychology is a multidisciplinary approach to the study of speech as an index of emotions and attitudes, but it could and should be of importance to all practitioners in clinical and consulting psychology as well.

Coming from an experimentally oriented school of psychology I would, of course, like to see some experimental validation of various measures described in the book. (e.g. Glesser scales). On the other hand, the book contains some refreshing and new ideas about speech as an index of emotions and attitudes, which is the main reason for my belief that psychologists should not miss reading it. It is a different book, written in a very interesting way. It gives one the opportunity to get acquainted with the main ideas of semiotic psychology, its history and development, present status and application, so what more can one ask for?

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