

SEMIOTICA

JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR SEMIOTIC STUDIES

REVUE DE L'ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DE SÉMIOTIQUE

Editor-in-Chief/Rédacteur en Chef
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Offprint/Tiré à part

Mouton de Gruyter
Berlin · New York

**Semiotics, linguistics, and psychoanalysis:
Keeping high and dry or getting your
feet wet!***

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'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.'
'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.' (Lewis Carroll 1981: 69)

Introduction

Although there are many and varied ways to study and link semiotics, linguistics, and psychoanalysis, there basically have been two theoretical and methodological approaches to this very complex and crucial subject:

- (i) the philosophical or rational approach, which compares and contrasts various theoretical aspects of language shared by these disciplines on a **metalevel** — i.e., those who prefer to remain high and dry on the more abstract level of theory; and
- (ii) the empirical approach, which tries to connect these disciplines by applying a particular theory of language and discourse to a specific corpus of therapeutic sessions — i.e., those who attempt to get their feet wet by applying abstract theory to the more concrete level of data.¹

It is not surprising that these two fundamental approaches have dominated the field, because they basically reflect the structuralist paradigm of the twentieth century which has dominated most of (what the French refer to as) *les sciences humaines* — 'the human sciences'. This European structuralist model most probably originated in the semiological linguistic framework proposed by Saussure (1916) as well as the psychoanalytic theories of Freud (1953–74) and others.² The structuralist paradigm which has served as a model for (what the English-speaking world refers

* Michel Arrivé, *Linguistics and Psychoanalysis* (=Semiotic Crossroads 4), trans. by J. Leader. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

to as) the social sciences (anthropology, psychology, sociology), semiotics, and literary criticism received much of its inspiration from modern linguistics.

Yet within this general structuralist framework as originally outlined in Saussure (1959: 16) where linguistics was to be part of a larger science of semiology (later to be known as semiotics), linguistics (as opposed to semiotics) often has been considered to be the better-defined discipline, and has even been viewed as the most developed branch within the larger structuralist paradigm. Anatoly Liberman, for example, states in his brilliant and provocative introduction to Propp (1984: xx) (reviewed by Tobin and Simms 1988):

In all discussions of structuralism, linguistics occupies a prominent place. Literary scholars, sociologists, and anthropologists [and psychologists — Y.T.] constantly accuse their opponents of underestimating or overestimating the achievements of modern linguistics. Such arguments create the impression that linguistic structuralism is something well-defined, which is wrong. Practically all European and American linguistics after World War I has been structuralist.

Language² from a Saussurean or sign-oriented point of view may be defined as a system of systems, composed of various subsystems which are organized internally and systematically related to each other (according to the semiotic notion of the linguistic sign), which is used by human beings to communicate.

Theoretically, this semiotic definition of language implies the dichotomy between *langue* — an abstract code composed of signals and meanings and their paradigmatic, or associative, and syntagmatic relationships; a complex code which is shared by a community of speakers; and *parole* — the concrete and seemingly chaotic realization of this complex abstract code exploited by individual speakers to communicate specific discourse messages in different linguistic and situational contexts. Many diverse models of linguistic analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, have been developed to describe, interpret, and explain (a) concrete, individual linguistic phenomena (*parole*) in accordance with (b) general, communal, and abstract theoretical tenets (*langue*) in various structuralist guises and under quite different names.³

Thus, the notion of a general structuralist model (following a basic linguistic orientation) may be viewed as a theoretical and methodological bridge between the abstract and concrete levels of human social phenomena (e.g., language) as illustrated schematically in Figure 1.

Very often, this notion of a methodological model (for linguistics, at least) has presupposed an analogy between the model itself and the phenomenon it purports to explain. This is not surprising, however, when

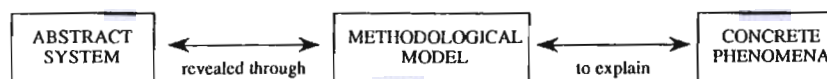


Figure 1. *The structuralist paradigm.*

we consider the fact that it is the analyst's definition of language which determines which linguistic phenomena are chosen as being important and relevant to the theory and the analysis. The model, therefore, is predetermined by the theoretical units found in the analyst's definition of language. Indeed, Saussure (1959: 8) himself maintained first that one of the chief tasks of linguistics was to define itself, and second, that the objects of study in language, unlike other sciences, are not given in advance. In short, for linguistics, it is the definition of language espoused by a theory that actually creates the object of study.⁴

Remaining high and dry: Discussions of symbol, sign, and metalanguage

The full title of the volume under review — *Linguistics and Psychoanalysis: Freud, Saussure, Hjelmslev, Lacan and Others* — emphasizes the European structuralist orientation of these disciplines. Furthermore, this book appears in a series devoted to the theory and methodology of French semiotic research in general and the Paris School in particular, which has been found at times to be a school which keeps itself fairly high and dry (Tobin 1991). As might be expected of a volume within this particular series, this book is presented in a highly systematic and structured way:

- Preface
- Introduction
- First part: About the Symbol
- Liminary Remarks
- Chapter I: The Symbol in Linguistics: Saussure and Hjelmslev
- Chapter II: The Symbol in Psycho-Analysis: Freud
- Chapter III: The Meeting of Two Symbols?
- Chapter IV: Freud and His Linguists: Sperber, Abel and Schreber
- Second Part: The Way of the Signifier
- Chapter I: Saussurian Signifier and Lacanian Signifier
- Chapter II: 'There is no Metalanguage': What does this mean?
- Epilogue
- Bibliography
- Index of Names and Concepts

In essence, this volume first presents a contrastive analysis of the concepts of the symbol and the sign and the role they play in linguistics (particularly in Saussure and Hjelmslev) and psychoanalysis (particularly in Freud) to see whether a coherent multidisciplinary connection may be found between the two. This is followed by a historical summary of Freud's and his linguists' (Hans Sperber, Carl Abel, and Daniel-Paul Schreber) thoughts on language concerning antithetical or polar meanings of words and their implications for the origin of language and sexual symbolism in the human unconscious.⁵ This is followed by a contrastive analysis of the concept of signifier as found in the isomorphic Saussurean versus the more separatist Lacanian views of the sign. The last chapter presents historical and contemporary arguments for and against the concept of metalanguage and metadiscourse (based on logic and the sentence rather than the sign) and its relation to Lacanian psychoanalysis.⁶ The book ends with an epilogue which leads us to the fundamental question consistently alluded to in the text: how to describe the objects of *Language and the Unconscious*, which is suggested as a subject for a future volume (to be written by whom?).

Jean-Claude Coquet states in his Preface that '[this] book is a salutary warning addressed to those readers, and they do exist, who are prone to pass judgement too uncompromisingly: Saussure is not as simple (or simplistic) nor Lacan as complex (or confused) as one might lazily think' (p. vii). This warning further supports our postulation both of the structuralist model found in Figure 1 and its theoretical and methodological derivation from linguistics: 'The reader will notice that, in this book at least, it is psycho-analysis which looks to linguistics for the theoretico-practical hardware it needs' (p. viii).

Freud's specific interest in words with polar meanings supposedly found in primitive languages is later used to connect language and psychoanalysis and to support one of his most famous hypotheses: that dreams 'excel in bringing opposites together and representing them in a single object' (p. ix).⁷ This connection between dreams, symbols, and language naturally leads us to the realm of the unconscious and the controversies concerning the possible connections between linguistics and psychoanalysis — in the guise of language and the unconscious — discussed in this volume (particularly in the chapters dealing with Lacan 1970: 62, 137, 148, 58 — who is cited in the Preface by Coquet):

'... there must be something between them.' Provided one observes precedence and makes, as is only right, linguistics the handmaid of psycho-analysis. We are a long way here from Freud. The chain of presuppositions removes any possible

doubt: 'language is the precondition of the unconscious'; 'the unconscious is the precondition of linguistics'. Surely the first steps to annexation! (p. x)

This direct and possibly causal connection between linguistics (language) and psychoanalysis (the unconscious) constitutes a major *leitmotif* running throughout this entire text: Introduction (pp. 1–7), Liminary Remarks (pp. 14–17), chapter 1 (pp. 21–44), chapter 2 (pp. 53–59, 64–70, 81, 86–87), chapter 3 (pp. 94–98), all of chapters 4–6 and the Epilogue.

This volume brings up many questions for linguists for whom the concept of symbol never really has been crucial to linguistics proper as it has been for the adjacent fields sharing the same structural paradigm such as psychology, anthropology, literary criticism, and, of course, semiotics. It is also true that most North American (as well as many 'modern' European) linguists may even find the concept of the sign to be far less crucial to their particular theoretical and methodological view of linguistics than the sentence. The author of this volume, however, represents the structural sign-oriented approach to language which underlies the Paris School as well as much of traditional French linguistics. Psychologists such as Freud and even Lacan, on the other hand, usually deal more with symbols and their hidden meanings as opposed to the concept of the linguistic sign representing an integral connection between a signal and its invariant meaning. Indeed, it may be said that the first part of the volume, comparing and contrasting the concepts of symbol and sign, illustrates a continuum ranging from the layman's non-technical use to the professional technical use found in the disciplines of linguistics and psychology today.

There also seems to be a bit of confusion concerning the concept of the linguistic sign as it is presented in this volume (at least from the point of view of the first reviewer). In particular, the concept of the arbitrary (or at least aleatory) relationship between the signifier and the signified is a major *leitmotif* dominating the first part of this volume. It might be important for the reader to remember that even the most seemingly arbitrary signs, when viewed individually and independently, may appear to be much more motivated and iconic when they appear together in larger grammatical systems. This give-and-take relationship between the relative arbitrariness of the signal and the invariant meanings of signs when viewed in alternative ways may have been overlooked by Arrivé.⁸

Furthermore, not enough attention is given to the very fundamental differences between the concept of the sign from the Saussurean versus the Lacanian points of view. Much of the Lacanian argument regarding the possible (and very un-Saussurean) separation of signified and signifier

(a major *leitmotif* dominating the second part of this volume) may be irrelevant or less crucial if one first realizes that the signifier part of the linguistic sign — the signal half of the sign — is not limited to dependent and/or independent words and morphemes, but might also include abstract signals such as zero (\emptyset), prosodic oppositions, word order, idioms, and expressions (which may appear in the form of entire sentences), as well as entire texts viewed as either independent units of form and meaning or as part of larger intertextual systems.⁹

More importantly, Lacan consistently views and defines the meaning of the sign in a highly specific and contextual way and never refers to or discusses the fundamental invariant nature of the signified — the meaning part of the linguistic sign — which is so crucial to the original Saussurean definition of the linguistic sign. Therefore one should remember that many of the issues regarding the existence or nonexistence of meta-language and metadiscourse found in the second part of this volume deal with concepts related to formal philosophical and sentence-oriented messages — as opposed to invariant sign meanings. Sentence messages are presented in their relationship to logic and truth value, which may have little or nothing to do with the original sign-oriented concept of language as a tool of human communication which underlies the Saussurean or semiotic definition of language. It is no wonder, then, that much of this volume is more rational, formal, and philosophical than empirical in its approach, and thus may leave some readers at least feeling high and dry.

Getting your feet wet: Linguistic analyses of psychotherapy sessions

The remainder of this review article will contain examples of linguistic analyses of psychotherapy sessions performed by the authors of this review article.¹⁰ These analyses were originally inspired by the concept of word systems in general and their application to family therapy sessions in particular (Aphex and Tobin 1988: chap. 8; Aphex et al. 1982a and b; Tobin 1989b) as well as other semiotic and linguistic approaches to text analysis which have been referred to as the 'from sign to text' and 'from text to sign' approaches (Tobin 1989a, 1990, 1993, forthcoming). They represent the alternative approach to linking semiotics, linguistics and psychotherapy which involves getting your feet wet in the pool of data culled from psychotherapy sessions. The specific sessions discussed here represent cases where the particular therapist involved felt that there was a breakdown in communication between therapist and patient. The goal of the analyses was to point out how, where, and why this breakdown

in communication may have taken place and provide the therapist with possible guidelines for future therapy.

Word systems in family therapy

A word system is a matrix of words within a spoken or written text with a common denominator which may be semantic, phonological, conceptual, or associative. Word systems are a junction where the conceptual plane converges with the linguistic plane. These junctions are characterized by their linguistic economy on the one hand, and their compactness on the other. A number of words are tightly connected to each other to the point that they create a 'tight word system' which contains the essence of the text. These systems can be regarded as the nucleus of the text — a nucleus which nurtures the theme of the text with a greater intensity than the sum total of the language employed throughout the discourse. Aphek and Tobin (1988: 3) contend that the concept of word systems may be a partial reflection and formulation of the unconscious in language and the speaker may not have actually intended to create these word systems nor even be aware of them.

In the method called 'word systems and family therapy', the basic words of therapy sessions and their systematic and individualized uses by members of a family in a therapy session are uncovered, revealing the internal thought world of patients and illustrating how the therapist — when made aware of these word systems — can influence the internal communication of a **patient system and thus bring about a change in the thought and behavior of the patient system**. Word system analysis of therapy sessions brings to light the fact that although all the participants may be using the same word to define and describe their problems, not all the participants in the therapy — including the therapist — may be attaching the same meaning to these words.

Examples of word systems in therapy include the following:

(i) Aphek and Tobin (1988: 126–130) show that in a specific family therapy session in Israel the English word *vacuum* became the key word or umbrella term describing the wife's (the Identified Patient) problem. An analysis of the language used in the session revealed that each member of the family — and the therapist — were using the word *vacuum* with a different idiosyncratic meaning. Thus, they were all unaware of the fact that they were talking about totally different individual problems because they were all using the same word throughout the session to describe the wife's problem. The authors then suggested to the therapist to switch to the Hebrew word *xalal* 'vacuum, space, void' instead of continuing to

use the English word *vacuum*. The introduction of this new word served as a catalyst to the members of the family to distinguish between and thus more clearly define the different specific individual meanings each one previously had attached to the word *vacuum* on both the intra- and interpersonal levels.

(ii) Tobin (1989b: 44–45) suggests, along similar lines, that key or leading words such as *life* versus *death*, *health* versus *sickness*, *sexuality* (in all its manifestations), *relationships*, *connections*, *guilt*, *responsibility*, *hope*, *survival*, *attachment* versus *loss* may be used in an individual and idiosyncratic manner by AIDS patients and their partners and families in therapy sessions. The more therapists can be trained to look for the systems revolving around these umbrella terms, the more it may be possible to open up lines of clearer intra- and interpersonal communication among people involved with the crucial issues that AIDS forces all of us to confront today.

Linguistic structure and therapy: Shared semiotic principles

The interface of linguistic structure and therapy can be reduced to five basic semiotic principles and sub-principles:

Principle 1:

- (i) **Therapy is an open system** — involving linguistic and extralinguistic sign systems (verbal language and body language).
- (ii) Language is an open system.
- (iii) Therapy sessions are the interaction between two open-ended systems — a linguistic and an extralinguistic one.

Principle 2:

- (i) Very often in therapy sessions there is a breakdown in communication — i.e., a lack of clear-cut communication.
- (ii) This lack of communication may be seen in the language of the therapy session and may reflect the behavior and pathology of the patient and his/her particular problem.

Principle 3:

- (i) This lack of communication may be reflected in and found in the intra- and interpersonal communication of the patient and therapist in the following ways:
 - (a) Intrapersonal communication patient him/herself
 - (b) Intrapersonal communication therapist him/herself

- (c) Interpersonal communication between the patient and the therapist when (a), (b), and/or (c) are not being appropriately construed [understood] by the patient and/or the therapist.

Principle 4:

- (i) The open-ended therapy session may be closed or cut off by the lack of open communication (i.e., understanding) between therapist and patient because one is misconstruing the language being used by the other (either misinterpreting the meanings and/or the strategies of communication being employed).
- (ii) Thus if a therapy session consists of questions (used to open the system) and answers (used to either close or further develop that opening) and the patient and therapist are not understanding the openings and closings appropriately, this will result in a loss or breakdown in communication which the participants may not necessarily be aware of while it is taking place.

Principle 5:

- (i) Therapy sessions reflect the individual styles (both linguistic and extralinguistic) of both the therapist and the patient, which contain certain individual strategies of communication and miscommunication.
- (ii) The failure to detect these individual styles by either the therapist or the patient can lead to a breakdown in communication.

These five principles will be illustrated in the following two cases.

The analysis

Case 1:

Mrs. T. is forty-three years old. She was referred to therapy by her general physician for reasons of her being 'restless, confused and probably psychotic'. Her history is strewn with many failures: a childless marriage came to an end in 1986. In 1987 she became acquainted with a Hungarian immigrant who lived with her. She was severely physically abused (broken nose, ribs and clavícula). She fled from her original town in the north of the Netherlands in mid-1988 (after she had been in hospital due to extreme confusion). She settled in the town where the therapist works. Her father died after she had notified him of her decision to divorce.

The therapist (Th.) found that the patient (Pt.) could not be interviewed along structured lines. She relates her story at a quick tempo and in a disconnected

way without establishing eye-contact. Her startled reaction to factual questions is by parring (silence) and staring at the therapist. She did not make a psychotic impression but shows a blunted affect. She seems to be doing little more than putting her associative thoughts into words irrespective of the presence and reactions of the therapist. Therefore this case exemplifies a lack of communicative interaction between the patient and the therapist.

Th. How has it been for you these past two weeks.

Pt. I have been with my mother, that was very nice.

Th. Could you tell me some more about that?

Pt. Well, there's no interest in me anyway, I went to Schiedam with the neighbour, she had also been at the Uithof (University Campus), because ... and ... well, yes, anyway, I was also picked up by that uncle, that was quite nice. The people and so are very different people than those there in the village, they are quite nice.

Th. So you have been with your mother and you have seen your mother. Was everything well with her?

Pt. Yes, she's always well and so.

Th. Healthy and so?

Pt. She is as healthy as a fish (Dutch expression).

Th. And have you been able to talk with her a bit? You don't see her very often do you. A lot to discuss with her?

Pt. Eh ... no, but she knew of those exams. She knows much more than I/you think. And she has all the telephone numbers. If I had had the telephone numbers I would not have become distressed.

Th. So she has telephone numbers that you also would have liked to have had.

Pt. Yes, nothing would have gone wrong, I mean and ... then it would have take a different course.

Th. What would have taken a different course?

Pt. In the first place there's my divorce (... mumbling ...) complaining very much, because it's terribly important.

Th. Complaining ...

Pt. My divorce has not been sorted out and I have not sorted anything out. So in the second place I am totally misplaced. And in the third place, eh ...

Th. Yes, the divorce isn't sorted out properly for you, you received no payments?

Pt. That's not what's important, what it's about and so but the law court didn't know the verdict because my lawyer was taken (away from me).

I have had three years work finding a good one and so anyway that's also a long story ... another person must always have it.

Th. Another person is always obstructing you.

Pt. Well if I ... there are always things, there has to be so much effort but before I've got it sorted out. Because I'm always busy, am always tracking things down and so. Then I must (...?) track down, track down bicycles; always busy with that kind of thing, because you know that everything is lost and so.

- Th. So you're tracking down a lot ...
- Pt. Well unconsciously and so, but then it might take years before I get some results. ... Then I'm away immediately. Because then it's right.
- Th. What are tracking down at this moment. What have you been busy with this past week. Which track?
- Pt. Oh it's only a bicycle.
- Th. If at the moment it's only a bicycle. When was it stolen?
- Pt. Eh ... it was Monday.
- Th. Yes, Monday.
- Pt. Eh, Thursday or so, it's also my own fault. But I'm so occupied with pharmacists and so because they're such terribly stupid jobs. And then I heard about my cousin, she was totally not allowed to do the course and her husband and she, they want only pharmacists in the business; and I think that's right and so: all that mess must go out. So they at least are honest and so: only pharmacists in the business and then you think if you can't become a pharmacist and so I mean if that's all not possible ... then everything must go out and so. That's how they think about it at the faculty. It's nice to hear it said in honesty and of those I get visits.
- Th. You were with your mother, weren't you?

In case 1 the patient is holding individual monologues which do not always appear to be internally coherent. The patient's monologues do not seem to be appropriate responses to the specific questions being posed by the therapist. This may be defined as a breakdown in communication on the interpersonal level between the patient and therapist. The lack of coherence of the patient's internal monologue — her intrapersonal communication — is apparent to the therapist but he may not be aware of it at the time of the session. It may be assumed, however, that the patient does understand the internal logic of her own intrapersonal communication and assumes that the therapist understands it as well: i.e., she may not be aware of the lack of systematic communication in the therapy session.

These lacunae in communication may be systematically found in the linguistic structure of the patient's monologues. The patient frequently uses connective words (*and, because, well, anyway, so, also, and so, I mean*) in a rather random way without any further elaboration. In other words, the patient cues the therapist through the use of these connective words that more relevant information is forthcoming, but then fails to provide that information. Thus, she is alerting the therapist to pay attention and listen for further important information and then not supplying that information. This leads to a clear-cut breakdown in communication: the speaker is making specific cues to the addressee but then not fulfilling the listener's expectations. This, of course, is followed by

the therapist's questions, which are not always linked to what the patient has actually said.

The therapist opens with general questions and the patient responds by talking about her mother. The therapist then asks for more information, and the patient responds with a monologue replete with discontinuous speech marked by empty connectives:

- Pt. Well, there's no interest in me *anyway*, I went to Schiedam with the neighbour, she had *also* been at the Uithof (University Campus), *because ... and ... well, yes, anyway*, I was *also* picked up by that uncle, that was quite nice. The people *and so* are very different people than those there in the village, they are quite nice.

These connective words are not directly connected to the mother, the subject of the question, but may be related to how the patient views her mother and her relationship with her mother. These connective words therefore are not being overtly connected to the mother (at least for the therapist), and he has no choice but to ask another direct question about the patient's mother, to maintain what he views as coherence in this communication. Whatever connection there might be between the mother and the neighbor and the uncle and the other people of the village and the patient, which may be apparent to the patient, is entirely lost on the therapist: a clear example of a lack or loss or breakdown in communication.

The therapist then tries to retrieve the thread of the conversation by asking the patient a direct question about her mother, to which the patient gives a general response followed by a non-connective *and so* which forces the therapist to ask about the mother's (physical) health — which may have been implied by the *and so*, which is then followed by a general Dutch expression.

- Th. *So* you have been with your mother and you have seen your mother. Was everything well with her?
 Pt. *Yes*, she's always well *and so*.
 Th. Healthy *and so*?
 Pt. She is as healthy as a fish (Dutch expression).

Once again, the lines of communication have been temporarily blocked. The patient has neither given a specific response nor provided additional information, despite the use of a connective phrase. This forces the therapist to ask a more specific but not necessarily a relevant question.

The therapist then poses direct questions concerning whether the patient could talk with her mother or not and the subjects the patient

and her mother actually talked about. These questions may be viewed as a direct request for specific and connected relevant information on the part of the therapist. This first question inspires a direct negative answer: *no* which is followed by a monologue about exams and telephone numbers which may or may not be connected to what the patient discussed with her mother. Here, once again, the new information is connected with *and* — whether or not this connection is clear to the therapist.

Pt. She is as healthy as a fish (Dutch expression).

Th. *And* have you been able to talk with her a bit? You don't see her very often do you. A lot to discuss with her?

Pt. Eh ... no, but she knew of those exams. She knows much more than I/you think. *And* she has all the telephone numbers. If I had had the telephone numbers I would not have become distressed.

The therapist then picks up on the new themes presented in the patient's monologue which are no longer necessarily related to the mother, the subject of his communication. His last question returns to the subject of the mother which has been lost in this non-connected communicative jigsaw puzzle where connectives either are not followed by anything or are used to connect topics whose connection is only apparent to the intrapersonal system of the patient. This idiosyncratic use of connectives leads to a breakdown in the interpersonal communication between the patient and the therapist.

As the session continues, other topics are introduced — which may or may not be related to the mother: the patient's divorce, her problems with her lawyer, the patient being obstructed by other people, her searching for things, her stolen bicycle, her exams, her pharmacy studies and the university. All of these topics are introduced and elaborated upon by non-functional connectives by the patient, and lead the therapist to ask what may appear to be questions which are not always related to the subject he originally wanted to talk about. It should also be noted that the therapist often introduces these questions employing the same connectives used by the patient, or by repeating her words.

As the session continues, the non-connective use of connective words continues to dominate the patient's intrapersonal monologue-like answers and the breakdown in the interpersonal communication between the therapist and the patient remains unchanged. In the end, the therapist returns to a paraphrase of his original question about the patient visiting her mother — a return to the zero point of the session from his point of view.

Th. *So* she has telephone numbers that you also would have liked to have had.

- Pt. Yes, nothing would have gone wrong, *I mean and ...* then it would have take a different course.
- Th. What would have taken a different course?
- Pt. In the first place there's my divorce (... mumbling ...) complaining very much, *because* it's terribly important.
- Th. Complaining ...
- Pt. My divorce has not been sorted out *and* I have not sorted anything out. *So* in the second place I am totally misplaced. *And* in the third place, eh ...
- Th. Yes, the divorce isn't sorted out properly for you, you received no payments?
- Pt. That's not what's important what it's about *and so but* the law-court didn't know the verdict because my lawyer was taken (away from me). I have had three years work finding a good one *and so anyway* that's also a long story ... another person must always have it.
- Th. Another person is always obstructing you.
- Pt. *Well* if I ... there are always things, there has to be so much effort *but in* before I've got sorted out. *Because* I'm always busy, am always tracking *and so*. Then I must (...?) track down, track down bicycles; always busy with that kind of thing, *because* you know that everything is lost *and so*.
- Th. *So* you're tracking down a lot ...
- Pt. Well unconsciously *and so but* then it might take years before I get some results. ... Then I'm away immediately. *Because* then it's right.
- Th. What are tracking down at this moment. What have you been busy with this past week. Which track?
- Pt. Oh it's only a bicycle.
- Th. At the moment it's only a bicycle. When was it stolen?
- Pt. Eh ... it's Monday.
- Th. Yes, Monday.
- Pt. Eh, Thursday *or so*, it's *also* my own fault. *But* I'm so occupied with pharmacists *and so because* they're such terribly stupid jobs. *And* then I heard about my cousin, she was totally not allowed to do the course and her husband and she, they want only pharmacists in the business. and I think that's right *and so*: all that mess must go out. So they at least are honest *and so*: only pharmacists in the business and then you think if you can't become a pharmacist *and so I mean* if that's all not possible ... then everything must go out *and so*. That's how they think about it at the faculty. It's nice to hear it said in honesty and of those I get visits.
- Th. You were with your mother, weren't you?

This therapy session — linguistically speaking — resembles two players playing a pingpong game using different sets of rules. The common denominator of the linguistic structure reflecting this lack of communication in this excerpt can be found in the seemingly idiosyncratic and inappropriate use of connectives by the patient, and their misinterpretation by the therapist. It was pointed out to the therapist that the connective words were always introducing new topics whose common

denominator was people, actions, states, and events over which the patient felt she had no control and thus added to her feelings of helplessness and powerlessness. Therefore — for the patient — there was a connection linking all the topics she introduced with connective words. This connection only became apparent to the therapist after a linguistic analysis revealed the invariant underlying feature connecting all the seemingly non-connective connective words used by the patient.

Case 2:

The patient A., a twenty-five-year-old man, youngest of eight children, is studying to become a teacher. His hobby is acting in amateur theatre. His complaint is that he has to live up to other people's expectations. He thinks that other people always look at him and criticise him. From his original family background, his experience is that his brothers and sisters always are better and have done everything already and that he never comes up with something new. He wants to be unique and bring something new into the world. As is clearly evident from this excerpt, the most blatant recurrent element in the patient's discourse is the long pauses (indicated by increasing numbers of dots) that fill his communication. These long pauses and hesitations are felt by the therapist to hinder his communication with the patient. Such a large number of pauses and hesitations which appear so frequently may be assumed to have a significant system of their own.

Th. How are things?

Pt. Em, good well good busy. Just before the holidays so considering that I have enough time to catch up on things very busy, perhaps my eyes are a bit runny; I don't know if it's visible

Th. It glitters, it looks as if you've got make-up on your eyes.

Pt. Yes that was this morning. I've tried to remove it but I didn't succeed.

Th. Have you had a performance?

Pt. Yes but, but with that sort of thing it's very busy. I've just had an exam, I've just come from there. All in all things are quite pleasant that is to say, yes if I'm busy, I have little trouble (.....?) you have less time to stop and stand; how things are going. If you don't stop and stand it seems to go well ...

Th. And if you do stop and look back what can you say about it?

Pt. em that I mm have discovered that I regularly need time for myself; being alone. That now and then eh I want to be alone for a while and if I can regularly do that I can maintain myself because I have discovered eh yes I, eh I have noticed that before that the presence of someone else as a rule is to me a threat em so that it costs me a lot of energy if someone is around, if I do that (.....?) that I'm too conscious of the fact that there's someone else.

Th. What is it that costs so much energy?

Pt. Eh, good question in eh .. asking myself

what the other is thinking of me at that moment, so eh yes
 Like a while ago, indeed it's a few years ago It's often when
 I'm reading in someone else's presence, then eh then I'm thinking
 about the other person so much, that I can't read. And then I have
 this idea that the other person is sitting and listening how long it takes me
 one page and that sort of thing so I'm attentive to whether the
 other person is paying attention to me.

Th. So, for example, to how long it takes you to read one page?

Pt. Yes.

Th. And how important is that to you that the someone else sees that; that
 someone else is aware that it takes you a quarter of an hour or
 five minutes?

Pt. Eh, I would say that it makes no difference to me, because
 but I notice that I'm paying attention to it. But I don't know why,
 why I pay attention to it mm That's also why I
 didn't admit for a long time, that I wanted to be alone sometimes. That I
 myself I more or less wanted to yes I thought: I must
 also be able to feel relaxed when there's someone else around even
 when my girlfriend's around, that costs me energy. Purely due to her
 being there.

Th. At the expense of what is your energy drained off?

Pt. At the expense of my concentration on other things for example:
 indeed reading, I don't pay attention to the text anymore Yes, also
 by the way, the idea that I can be distracted. I cannot concentrate properly
 on the text when I know I can be distracted
 Yes, I've always been afraid of
 being looked in upon when I do something, then I think eh if
 someone sees the way I do it, then probably I won't be doing it
 properly

Th. What surprises me is that it also occurs when you're with your
 girlfriend; because she is one of the few people that you feel at ease with.
 And, in general, you're not worried by people so you told me in a
 former session ... with whom you feel very much at ease with.

Pt. Yes yes yes, mm Perhaps my mother is the
 only one that I don't have these worries with

Th. And what makes her so special?

Pt. Em because she eh is not so critical
 she easily approves of something for example the read-
 ing that first, I don't think that she pays attention to how long it
 takes me to read a page on what ever and furthermore yes, I do
 find her judgement so important, but that judgement I don't find important.
 She shall I know that she shall never judge me on those things
 She will never say: 'Gosh, it is taking you a long time.', or, or quite
 not she never attaches conclusions or consequences to something.

Th. But what feelings does it give rise to when someone is watching you?

- Pt. Eh yes, then I feel rather rather watched yes, yes, I feel the same as when at other times I am being looked in upon.
- Th. What do you feel?
- Pt. Eh yes yes mm I think I am very much driven into a corner in any case that I have to defend myself.
- Th. Why should you defend yourself?
- Pt. mmm, yes well to, mmm to prove that I am not eh or or to prove that I am not eh not in the position, that — yes, perhaps I am in that position — that I am not in the position of the youngest. Because I was the youngest and thus the most stupid and so the one least capable.
- Th. Is that necessary now?
- Pt. Em no, not necessary but I think that proving myself still is still is a very important urge in me Whilst I myself don't think it rational; in any case I don't appreciate myself for it.
- Th. What could the reason be, do you think, that she pays attention to what you are doing?
- Pt. Well, then I think em eh obviously I am rapidly inclined to think: 'is it worrying you if, eh if you yourself are, are' I can imagine, for example, that I pay attention to it, because I think, because I am afraid that others are paying attention to me that I listen in on her: 'So, luckily enough I am still a page ahead of you', or something like that. That then I, eh ... could pay attention to that so that could also be a motive for her. I did not ask for this.
- Th. Exactly. You start thinking; you don't start to ask.
- Pt. Yes yes
-
- Th. Do you recognize this in other situations; that you think more about what motives others have than that you ask directly?
- Pt. I am not quick to ask that anymore anyway basically, as I have just mentioned: I am very apt at taking the wind out of other people's sails. If I only have the slightest inkling that someone could make a remark about me, I manoeuvre in such a way as to enable me to make the remark myself or in any case take the initiative to take the remark away from the other person.
- Th. In such a way you maintain your own reality.
- Pt. Yes.
- Th. By anticipating upon things they are confirmed. By walking to the kitchen you confirm your idea that someone could make a remark. So the world is full of people who could be paying attention to you.

The kind of hesitant communication, rife with pauses, that is found in the patient's discourse was described by the therapist as being tedious

and roundabout, boring and difficult to listen to, giving the therapist the urge to 'hurry him on'. It appears that the patient doesn't quite get to the point and the oppressive silences seem to lead to very little although they appear to be thoughtful or pensive. Furthermore, the pauses and hesitations are contagious (the therapist also begins to pause and hesitate as part of a chain-reaction to the patient's hesitant speech). Yet, if we are sensitive to the contribution of these pauses to the linguistic structure we can see that they are not only meaningful but systematic in their nature.

The patient's discourse is clearly marked for its interrupted structure. The pauses are not arbitrary but provide silences that take place in between remarks that are in a well-ordered sequence. The placement of these sequential pauses follows a pattern of its own. The pattern is from a vague, general-positive remark via shorter diminutive remarks to a more specific, mostly negative remark. Thus, the pauses serve to narrow the communication. The patient begins positively and generally and through his pauses and hesitations eventually reaches shorter, more clipped and mostly negative statements. In short, he appears to be 'closing in' on the specific (mostly negative) truths and assessments of himself and others that appear to frighten him.¹¹

The underlying theme behind his communication is that the presence of others is a threat — a fear of judgment, of not being understood or accepted. These negative fears were all preceded by lengthy pauses and hesitations which the therapist misinterpreted as a lack of interpersonal contact between him and the patient. Had the therapist been able to observe that the pauses were not only **annoying and frustrating but were** allowing the patient to narrow in on his problems he would have been more open to this specific intrapersonal communication strategy of this patient. Thus, he would not only be more open and tolerant to the hesitations and pauses but might be able to predict what might come next and exploit these themes in the therapy more efficiently. It is also very possible that the impatience the therapist felt may have further hindered the patient's communication.

Summary and conclusions

In this review article we have pointed out alternative ways of connecting semiotics, linguistics, and psychotherapy on both the theoretical and methodological levels. It should always be remembered that the interface between language and therapy is based on their both being open-ended systems of communication. We have presented specific case studies of

two therapy sessions in which there was a lack — to the point of a breakdown — of interpersonal communication between the therapist and the patient due to the therapist's lack of awareness of the patient's intrapersonal system of communication. In each case, by examining the linguistic structure of the communication, we uncovered some of the systematic communication strategies employed by the patient which had been previously overlooked by the therapist.

In the first case we found a consistent use of connective words which promised to relate further information but did not, thus leading the therapist to ask inappropriate questions. In the second case, we found a misinterpretation of the client's hesitant speech filled with frustrating silences and pauses. A more careful examination of these pauses revealed that they were well-ordered sequentially and followed a general-to-specific and a positive-to-negative listing of events and situations which were painful to the client: i.e., once again a significant and meaningful communication strategy. Our conclusion is that a semiotic model of linguistic structure can and should be applied to therapy and counseling to help therapists uncover the idiosyncratic intrapersonal strategies of patients in order to understand them better and treat them more efficiently and effectively.

Notes

1. Linguistic analysis of clinical therapy is not new and has been approached from diverse theoretical and methodological points of view (e.g., Labov and Fanshell 1977; Oxman *et al.* 1985; Pittinger *et al.* 1966; Spence 1979; Watzlawick *et al.* 1974; Wodak 1981, 1989). General perspectives on clinical therapy have been discussed in Litowitz and Epstein (1991). In this review article we will apply the concepts of word systems (Aphek and Tobin 1988; Tobin 1989b) and other semiotically oriented linguistics approaches to communication (Aphek and Tobin 1989/1990; Tobin 1988a), including the 'from sign to text' and 'from text to sign' approaches found in Tobin (1989a, 1990, 1993, forthcoming), to two therapy sessions. We will not deal here with the controversy of whether Saussure and Freud were aware of each other's work and the possible influences they may or may not have had on each other (p. 137, *et passim*). It must be mentioned, however, that Raymond de Saussure (the son of Ferdinand) was a patient of Sigmund Freud (pp. 123–124, 137 — attributed to Roudinesco 1982: 365).
2. The term 'structuralist' is being used here as an umbrella term which comprises various (and often seemingly antithetical) schools of twentieth-century linguistic thought from Saussure to post-Chomsky generative theories (e.g., Bierwisch 1971; Lepschy 1970; Le Roy 1967; Sampson 1980) (the last reviewed in Tobin 1986), as well as the currently popular fields of pragmatics and cognitive grammar, as well as structuralist and post-structuralist schools of literary criticism (e.g., Culler 1975, 1981; Pomorska *et al.* 1987) (the latter reviewed in Tobin 1988b) including the now popular Deconstructionist School (Derrida 1976). (I will not enter into a discussion of the deconstructionists

here since I firmly believe that one cannot 'deconstruct' anything unless there is an inherent *structure* there in the first place.) In the social sciences and in semiotics there is a plethora of structuralist-oriented work as well (e.g., Ehrman 1970; Hawkes 1977; Georges 1972; Lévi-Strauss 1963; Greimas 1976; Minuchin 1974; Propp 1984 — reviewed by Tobin and Simms 1988; Sebeok 1981).

3. The most famous of these, of course, is Chomsky's competence versus performance. I will not enter into a detailed discussion here between the Saussurean notions of *langue* versus *parole* and Chomsky's original competence versus performance, save to point out that: (1) the Saussurean notions are *sign-oriented* while the Chomskyan notions are *sentence-oriented*; and (2) the Saussurean notions separate the abstract code level shared by the community from the concrete and individual execution of the code, while the Chomskyan notions are related to individual speakers' rules of grammatical competence — an abstract individual notion which does not necessarily include or reflect in their concrete performance, but rather in their equally abstract intuitions.
4. This has been particularly evident on the so-called morpho-syntactic levels of language, as may be illustrated in the development of sentence versus sign oriented linguistic theories which have defined languages either as 'a set of sentences' or 'a system of systems composed of linguistic signs and the relationships between them'. I am specifically including in the latter group three Saussurean-oriented linguistic schools which have been overlooked in most of the histories of structuralist linguistics (cf. note 2). These linguistic schools are unique in that they have taken the notion of the sign seriously — i.e., as their primary unit of linguistic analysis. They are The Diverian or Columbia School of Form Content Analysis, the Guillaumean School of the Psychomechanics or Psychosemiology of Language, and the Jakobsonian-van Schooneveldian School — the last of which combines the Saussurean sign and the Prague School concepts of markedness and (semantic) distinctive feature theory. These three schools and their different concepts of what constitutes invariant meaning have been discussed, compared, and contrasted in Tobin (1985, 1987a–c, 1990: chap. 4).
5. A more sign- rather than word-oriented analysis of the phenomenon of Janus-like or *adad* roots and words (including the role of *metathesis* in form and polarity in meaning) in Hebrew and their connection to the origin of language may be found in Apeh and Tobin (1988: chaps. 5, 7; 1992).
6. Unfortunately, the references cited in the text and those listed in the bibliography do not always match. Some (Lacan 1966) are missing, and the text does not always differentiate between references published in the same year which appear in the bibliography as Lacan (1979a, b). There are also several typos — e.g., *2shiproust's* (p. 96), *is/in* (p. 163) — as well as possible infelicities or what may be referred to as awkward examples of 'translationese' in the French–English translation. The non-hyphenated term *psychoanalysis* which appears in the title is annoyingly rendered as *psycho-analysis* throughout the text as well.
7. Coquet takes this famous Freudian quote from Benveniste (1971: 69), who disagrees with Abel's and the others' designation of primitive (cf. primal herd) languages. Apeh and Tobin (1988: xii, 104, chaps. 5, 7; 1992) also cite this quotation in their discussion of single as well as metathesized roots with antithetical meanings revolving around basic polaric universal concepts (e.g., life and death, creation and destruction, putting together and taking apart, etc.) within Hebrew and other languages in the form of cross-linguistic word systems which can function simultaneously in the creation of a text by bilingual and multilingual authors. We would like to point out that it is also not by chance that these single and metathesized polaric roots appear in stories that have been labeled as 'dream stories'. The original Freudian dream citation, 'Dreams

show a special tendency to reduce two opposites to a unity or to represent them as a single thing', may be found in Freud (1958: 55).

8. The more arbitrary nature of individual linguistic signs as opposed to the more iconic nature of the same linguistic signs when placed in grammatical systems may be seen across languages in their systems of grammatical number. The signals of signs representing the singular are usually smaller than the signals of signs representing the plural, which in turn are often smaller than those signals representing the more highly specific and marked dual (or treble) numbers (Tobin 1990: chap. 5; forthcoming: chap. 2). By the same token, the signals representing more semantically or pragmatically complex so-called passive forms and constructions are also usually larger in size or more complex than their so-called active counterparts (Tobin forthcoming: chap. 8).
9. Further discussion on the various kinds of acoustic signals which constitute linguistic signs and the theoretical and methodological implications of these different kinds of signals and the concept of language synergies may be found in Tobin (1990: chaps. 2, 3; forthcoming: chap. 2). The postulation of 'the text as sign' and its role in discourse analysis is discussed in Tobin (1990, 1993, forthcoming).
10. The authors of this review article are a linguist, a psychotherapist, and a clinical psychologist, respectively, who are currently working together on a research project being supported by the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and Stichting Counseling Nederland. Similar research projects involving both linguists and psychologists include Aphek *et al.* (1982a, b), Labov and Fanshell (1977), and Pittinger *et al.* (1966).
11. A semiotic analysis of the role of hesitations, pauses, hedging, etc. and the order of presentation of positive versus negative information describing personal characteristics of clients in the discourse of fortune-tellers who present themselves as counselors and therapists can be found in Aphek and Tobin (1989/1990: chap. 3).

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