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SEMIOTIC METHOD AND CULTURAL PROCESSES IN BORDERLANDS¹

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to reveal or even to prove a usefulness of semiotic method of cultural processes in borderlands. Borderlands are understood not only as areas along political borders of nation-states but, above all, as a border marked by cultural processes taking place between the different languages, customs, economies, religions, ideologies, laws.

Author keywords: Semiotic method, cultural processes, borderlands

Introduction

The aim of this article is to reveal or even to prove a usefulness of semiotic method of cultural processes in borderlands. Borderlands are understood not only as areas along political borders of nation-states but, above all, as a border marked by cultural processes taking place between the different languages, customs, economies, religions, ideologies, laws. These processes taking place on border, which we can call the horizon difference. Not to simplify their complexity, they are characterized by

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dynamism and depth, run right synchronous and diachronic. Forces or vectors of social activities of individuals and groups in cultural borderland have changed reality by its dynamics.

To find out how these processes happened, Lotman goes back to the theory of communication based on Jakobson's principles: Sender (S) – Message (M) - Receiver (R) and add the second possibility: Sender (S) – Message (M) – Sender (S) (2008: 79). This latter possibility is especially important because the auto interpretation statement may produce a surplus of meaning what does mean that the interpretation of the meaning of the message is extended or even amended. In this way, the voice of researchers can enrich for instance the knowledge of such social phenomena.

By contrast, S –M - R causes a completely different dependencies and constraints. It is not that the recipient of the message will understand its meaning intended by the sender. To make the ability of full and identical understanding of the meaning of the message by the recipient possible, he would have the same opportunities and the same intellectual knowledge and cultural context as the message sender. This is the ideal situation, but in reality there are always some interferences, limiting the full reading of the message, according to the real transmission.

Analysis of the translation works can be a good example. The translation of the text, or a message from one language to another is never literal and an attempt to translate back already translated text will never be the same as the original. This also indicates the difficulties faced by translation non-text cultural phenomena, causing disturbances in understanding of the communication between diverse communities. This is a natural phenomena especially in borderlands.

Lotman directs his special attention towards the role of historical tradition in the meaning of the historically oriented messages (2008: 313). Knowledge of history, or inheritable historical memory of the region which is studied is essential to explain contemporary social phenomena which are interrelations between past and present, and it happens that history is more important than the present. So that historian is forced to work with the text, as a document descrambler. Semiosphere in which he works, is a temporal phenomena, thus it consists also of the achievements

of the past, sometimes hidden, reborn, revealing its meaning to the historian. In semiosphere as a whole culture, the order of the synchronous and diachronic coexists in very large spaces, mutually influencing each other. That is why history is important field of science, without which it is difficult to explain the cultural processes happening in semiosphere, including the borderlands.

According to Lotman (2008: 184) the symbol is called a narrative gene or a plot, it is the most durable continuum of culture. Elementary symbols such as the cross, circle, pentagram are at the heart of culture and their content is expressed by a universal message with the meaning available to each individual, thus Muslims call Christians crusaders. According to Lotman semiotic method of culture text studies based on three pillars such as: communication theory, not-genetic historical memory and sign-symbolic resources of the culture. Therefore these three elements are used in this article, to indicate the complexity of cultural phenomena in borderlands.

The theory of semantic processes

The modern understanding of the notion of culture is involved in communicative approach concerning the informative nature of the natural world and society. The achievements of physics and the contemporary genetics have influenced by the matrix observed by subject of the outside world which is called an information space and modified the classical definition of culture. This is the reason for taking cultural theory into consideration. It is worth mentioning that Tartu-Moscow School built up the cultural theory and gave new connotations to the concept of culture. Lotman (philologist) and Uspenski (mathematician) who were the main creators of this school and other members acting on different fields of science acknowledged that culture is the most important fact organizing social life. Without culture the existence of society is impossible, because “culture cover the whole inheritable information and ways of storing it”. These statements are trivial nowadays but the consequence implied by them are become essential for cultural science. Tartu-Moscow School directing their interest towards semiotics constituted and defined culture on the basis of Jacobson and de Saussure theory as a collective transcends

individuals intellect. The definition excludes Peirce theory, because his interests tended toward logic (Lotman 2009: 6) ; (Żyłko 2008). Jakobson, who established Prague school of semiotic, invented the basics of semiotics. Formula: - sender – message- receiver is of his authorship. This formula was become the basis for analyzing in semiotics, generating the creation of innovative cultural theory. This theory examines the meaning of message in various aspects, which Lotman gives the password - the culture text.

The culture texts not only cover the written messages but also other tangible and intangible cultural artifacts as a music, painting, architecture, symbols, characters, manners, science, law, etc. The clue of the substantial exist of the message or the culture texts is the consciousness of the subject. Cultural texts are expressed in natural language, which is the most developed system of character and the most universal means of communication as well. Natural language is a model of systemic character in culture.

The most important element is the meaning and significance of its content so that the essence of the process of communication is understanding and communication between the sender and the recipient. Above the natural language superstructures are secondary modeling systems that is partial languages support such organized cultural as law, science, ideology, etc. Natural language and secondary modeling systems immersed in the space of semiosphere covering the whole cultural processes. Science, but also religion are inevitably ingrained in natural language. It is a common source of all secondary modeling systems. But the studied reality for yourself fulfill an important role for science. Scientific models do not tend to construct “own world of denotation” but their aim is to adequately observe the processes occurring in the real world. It is also possible to describe the natural language in terms of recording of natural language however the purpose of terminology innovation (creation of terms-metaphors) is to recognise better this part of reality, which is the subject of the study (Lotman 2008 :20).

Lotman in „Uniwersum umysłu” is analysing the features of semiosphere, which is similar to biosphere. The semiosphere is a

multidimensional and structured space, enabling the existence of complex processes of the exchange of information.

It is characterised by the heterogeneity and the asymmetry what makes the whole culture system dynamic and changes constantly under the influence of social forces and other factors known as non-culture. Non-culture is an area acting on the periphery of culture away from the center of semiotic phenomena. The most "hot" places of the processes of semiosis are borders of semiosphere. The translation is being done by someone else's semiotics to our understanding of meanings in binary or the multilinguistic areas. The transformation and assimilation of that foreign to our one is also being done here. The images-equivalents of foreign culture are being created to make intercultural contacts possible. In our culture there are translations enabling a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of the message may alternatively entail obstacle or falsify information. The boundary separating the interior space of semiosphere from the external is a primary division. Roughly speaking, the entire space of semiosphere is crossed by boundaries of different levels, the borders of language, texts, ideas and ways of life. Semiosphere is traversed by numerous borders what make each message translate repeatedly what caused transformation or disrupt the meaning. Lotman has created a general theory of culture being multi-metaphor by defining natural language, secondary modeling systems, semiotic space, border semiosis, the center and the periphery of symbolic space .

Semiotic method and borderlands

This general model make possible to use it in cultural studies of borderlands. Semiotic theory of culture of Tartu-Moscow school is not limited to the exemplification related to artistic creativity. What is more, it concerns the science including sociology. Lotman in the "universe of the mind" situates the semiosis in the center of the culture, which is understood in most general sense. The center consists the natural language being the basis and secondary modeling systems superstructures on it. Language of the science can not exist without natural language, constituting its base. Any organized human activity forces the transformation of natural language to the meta levels.

Borderlands are an area where is the large amount of semiotic phenomena. These are peripherals that are characterized by excitation interest in the cultural center, directing attention to the social, economic and cultural processes. In the EU there are Euro-regions, privileged economic zones, offering grants designed to compensate for the difference, which are particularly visible on Polish-German borderland. The border is the source of the flow of various culture texts such as messages, meanings, symbols, languages, ideas, patterns of behavior which can be assimilated or reject, transformed and changed by border communities. The continuous dialogue can become a source of innovation and social conflicts as well. Kurcz describes a frontiersman as a specific product of dynamic forces having impact on the borders of nation-states. The dynamic forces entail greater sensitivity and a sense of the specificity of human actions on the other side of the border. Depending on the degree of positive or negative attitudes towards economic or intellectual achievements of the neighbors they stimulate imitation or cause rejection (Kurcz 2014b: 13). All this spectrum of behaviors expands the horizons of cognitive of borderlands inhabitants. These processes can be examined from the semiotics of culture viewpoint which is focused on in-depth interpretation of the meanings and the significance of the observed phenomena and culture texts as well.

„Polish borderland in transition” 1-4, ed. Z. Kurcz are comprehensive description of dynamic processes constructed by the policies of the EU and the nation states. They are not limited to the economic and social sphere, but they contain the range of the manifestations of cultural change. Semiotics of culture can explore the significance and meanings of these changes. In the Z. Kurcza’s article, "Europeanization and the nationalization of the borderlands" included in the third volume, of the above-mentioned publication, there is a completely new perspective on the functioning of borders in the EU. The two terms "Europeanization of the borderland" and "nationalization of borderlands" function in different semiotic spaces are constructed by the contemporary political and social reality. Europeanization is a theoretical and analytical notion which refers to “ the order based on the equality and the elimination of any subordination calling attention to Robert Schuman” (Kurcz 2014a: 38).

Whereas nationalization indicates that „duration of the traditional rivalry which determines the dynamics of the relations between nations and nation-states” (Kurcz 2014a: 34). The rivalry is characterised by the domination of the strong over the weak, richer over poorer leading to create the attitude of superiority and inferiority between nation-states. These are realities, and ideas about the fair distribution of wealth remain fiction. Owing to it Z. Kurcz mentioned in this article, in context of the supranational global institutions that prefer the interests of the richest, that these policies of Germany, who are claiming that Germany can not explicitly formulate their national interests in the name of political correctness and of belonging to the EU, which support the noble ideas, because it would disturb sense of functioning of the EU.

It is a position marked by diplomatic correctness, but it hides the true violence strength of the German economy. However, there is a semiotic space in which the relationship between superiority and inferiority is marginalized. This is the culture in narrower sense in view of the fact that the activities of people of science and art know nothing about national barriers.

Scientific discoveries, such as outstanding works of art are the common values of all humanity. Sporting and cultural events, conferences, publications, bilingual texts on the borderlands, can integrate distinct national community and contribute to the dialogue, which is acceptable to all the partners involving to.

The flows across borders of semiotic, including political matters, various ideas, whose circulation has changed or influenced the reality, play a great role in the integration or disintegration of societies. These concepts, calling previously known phenomena, but now being in the transformation, are exemplified in the publication "Polish borderland in transition, Vol. 3" Transborder (Rusek 2014: 53), europeanization and the nationalization of the border (Kurcz 2014a: 39), transnationality (Opilowska 2014: 34) indicate social facts happening now after Polish accession to the EU. All these terms, although there were earlier in natural language, the language of science have gained them a new meaning, which is a reflection of social processes in the Polish borderlands and in the center of cultural

phenomena. The borders of semiotic between europeanisation and nationalization appearing in the minds of participants in these processes and clearly marked by contradictory forces, or the interests of the national and supranational organizations like the EU, clearly marked by contradictory forces, or the interests of the national and supranational organizations like the EU, they are deeply felt by the societies.

Protection of national identity seems to be necessary due to the extreme movements and nationalist organizations on both sides of the Polish-German border. Protests of these groups, dissatisfied with the current direction of state policy, are often publicly manifested with the Nazi slogans. In the same way they completely deny the idea of peaceful coexistence of nations, that was proclaimed by Schuman - the precursor of the EU. The border of semiotic between Europeanisation and nationalization is insurmountable for the movements and extreme nationalist groups. Moreover the dissonance between the idea of economic and political coexistence of nations and the idea of domination and rule over other nations is becoming the border of semiotic. Signs, symbols (the flag of the EU, the Nazi cross), and political ideas are messages of the culture texts explaining the meaning or the importance of statements which has been claimed by the Eurosceptics, neo-Nazis or supporters of the EU. Submissions of moderate opponents of the EU take many forms from press articles, the use of television broadcasting and internet services to street protests. Anti-European trends with fundamentalist features do not have the possibility of the official media to being presented so their supporters have been protesting on the streets of big cities in a way far from accepted standards of behavior in public places. It is a non-culture existing on the periphery of the semiotic space with no approval from the center of the semiotic which - as we know - is the size of messages and organized texts passing by multiple borders inaccessible to extremism.

Semiotic method and the Islamic and Christian civilization

in the context of the completely new sociological phenomena which has currently happened associated with the wave of emigration from Africa and Asia to Europe, it is worth attention to take a look into Zagorski's article (2011: 11), taking the issues of dominance and the flow of

information between civilizations into account in reference to its values. The boundaries of the Arab civilization dominated by Islam and European civilization that is Latin - In terms of Koneczny – to our eyes are displaced. The enclaves which are being created are called according to Zagórski hybrid being. In Europe, particularly in Western part, there are more and more expansion of hybrid being in large urban agglomerations where Muslims are guided by Sharia law and benefit the privileges of citizens in the same time. The boundaries between civilizations approached us and we are witnesses of the attempts of their disappearance according to the ideas of peaceful coexistence of multicultural world. This is a difficult task, perhaps impossible to realize, and the observation of the behavior of Arab extremists and terrorist groups of the so-called Islamic State hostile to the values of Christian culture, denies the peaceful coexistence of vision of so different civilizations. The borders of nation-states of the EU are easier to cross instead of crossing the mental borders from newcomers from Africa. Cultural barriers, sharing semiotic space of Arab and Latin civilization are based on different canons value. The values of Western civilization are located in such axioms as: "... freedom, private property, the market, individualism, competition, the principle that majority has right and derived from this principle the social justice (Zagórski 2011: 11) and by Koneczny more general spiritual principles such as: goodness and truth and physical principles, such as: health and well-being combined with the category of beauty (Zagórski 2011: 25). The existence of inequalities in is the source of its dynamics favorable development in the economic and cultural sphere. Hence the superiority of Western civilization over the Arab civilization comes out. The Arab civilization is embraced by religious fanaticism, economic collapse and wars, except for the Saudi monarchy and the wealthy Arab Emirates, and is embraced by the political crisis as well, due to the disproportion between the archaic worldview derived from the Quran and modern science and technology achievements and the western economy. Arab civilization, once dominant, now experiencing a state of collapse, whereof Islamic religious leaders see the solution in the confrontation with the West. Arabs are looking for better living conditions in Europe however they hardly adapt to the acceptance of values of Latin

culture, in fact, they mostly do not wish it. Individual rights and civil liberties generally applicable in democratic Europe, in Arab civilization does not exist. The interests and rights of groups are rated higher, and religion fulfills functions not only ritual but orders rigorously the whole life of the community, including the ruling the state. Family law allows polygamy and maintains a privileged position of men in the settlement of matrimonial disputes. A man decides about divorce, and women are deprived of this right. One sees shortage of public law, and hence the acceptance of absolute power, for which the legal basis is the Quran (Bielawski 1986: 741); (Goudefroy-Demombynes 1988: 350). Moral relativism of Western civilization vs strict observance of morality in Arab civilization draws the impossible to cross border of semiotic between freedom of individuals and restrictions on freedom. This is obviously a simplification but it captures the difference of attitudes towards orders, moral and religious prohibitions. Extreme Islamist groups build hostile ideology of this distinction condemning "the Crusaders" (as Muslims call us).

Communication and society dialogue on the borders of nation-states in Europe (in the Schengen Area and beyond) is done completely differently because nation - state are linked by common values of Latin civilization. Even there was possible union of nation states. Common values, with the observance including of human rights ensure the safety of individuals, resulting trust in neighbors on the borders and enabling international contacts in various areas of economic and cultural life. Actual contacts between nations currently cause aggravation in borderlands. They have different faces, about it write authors of the articles in the publication "Polish borderland in transition" p. 1-4. The pursuit of equal opportunities, contacts, run a business, exchange of ideas about the failures of EU policy and how to repair it is a common idea, which determine aims in life in borderlands. The need for the dominance of rich countries in the EU is a result of their military and economic power. There is neither the appropriation of territories poorer countries nor control of their national policy however striving for peaceful coexistence. This is particularly important in the days of the threat of Islamic terrorist.

Fanaticism and relativism, in all its areas of meaning, seem to be important categories, describing the phenomenon, taking place in the Western world, more that they are located in the civilizational context. Huntington wrote that civilizations are not political but cultural organisms. One civilization can consist of several states or political entities (Huntington 2004: 53). For the West the problem is not Islamic fundamentalism but Islam being a religion of Arab civilization, whose followers are convinced of the superiority of their culture over the culture of the West, and therefore they are obliged to spread this culture throughout the world (Huntington 2004: 372). Muslim terrorists utilize these ideas, fueling a conflict between Islam and the Christian West.

Muslim terrorists as fanatical follower of Allah, they are capable of the crime, condemned by the whole civilized world, even by fellow believers. Relativism of Western culture is opposed to Arab fundamentalism because it appreciates the freedom of the individual in many dimensions. In Western culture coexist in harmony followers of many religions, and the West is the only place where the freedom and dignity of the individual, the rule of law, political democracy, freedom of culture are respected. These values prejudice the attractiveness of Western civilization and they are coveted by its uniqueness and not universalism (Huntington 2004: 550). Civilizations: Chinese, Turanian, Arabic, they do not know the concept of individual rights. Thanks to the expansion of Western culture it aroused interest of these civilizations, and is a threat to the absolutist regimes. The borders of meaning between fanaticism, fundamentalism and individual freedom of its appurtenant rights and multiculturalism and relativism, in the social semiotic space they seem to be borders between culture and non-culture. Non-culture is breaking into the center of the semiotic of Western civilization to impose their point of view and to make their points overriding.

Conclusion

Tartu-Moscow school method can be compared with the hermeneutic method applied in philosophy (Przyłębski 2005, Leśniewski 1998, Bronk 1998) and where are two parallel visions of research of culture texts. Both assume the historical interpretation of cultural processes, stress

the importance of communication theory for understanding the meanings of messages, acknowledge the importance of symbolism and symbol nature of culture. The interpretation of culture texts, defined as any cultural message expressed by the Tartu-Moscow school, seems to have a more general form of the hermeneutics method, because it comes under to links with the semiosphere, taken as a whole of human culture, while the philosophical hermeneutic method is mainly focused on the text - a work of literature, science, etc. This is a limitation that makes a philosophical hermeneutic method too narrow for sociological research, using the statistical method of quantitative research.

This article takes into consideration some current social phenomena and these phenomena have happened in the borderlands of policy and culture. The *borderland policies* are mainly dominated by interest in the economic sphere, including contacts aimed for the economic exchange of goods and services among inhabitants of border areas. Except for the economic dimension this exchange has the dimension of communication, because it enforces language knowledge of the neighbors on the other side of the border. On the other hand, the Europeanization of the borderlands means the inhabitants are beginning to be interested in the neighbours' history, customs, politics, culture as well as in similarities and differences in traditions and customs. These comparisons are not always profitable, sometimes even critical to the people on the opposite side of the border.

The semiotic method takes text and non-text messages into account in the interpretation of cultural facts. When the cultural periphery and the center of culture are touching observation and analysis of developments on the borders of semiosis they show the dynamics involving the collision and exchange of sense and meanings, and their impact on social reality. Europeanization and nationalization mentioned in the article, are two political phenomena contain opposite meanings, reflecting the messages sent by the conflicting political forces. The historical context of nationalization is associated with the experience of nation-states and arises from political interests. This context refers to nineteenth-century myth of nation-states and their absolute independence and sovereignty.

Whereas Europeanization is a contemporary political trend, proclaiming view of the impact of the economy and culture of the EU on countries outside the EU. It also expresses the ideas and passwords of peaceful coexistence of nations with different cultures. However, the contemporary political reality indicates difficulties in the implementation of this noble concept of co-existence of nation-states. Europeanization seems to be the ideal notion, particularly in the context of the influx of immigrants from North Africa and Asia, who collided with the civilization of the West, do not know how to function within, because they do not understand it. Messages delivered to them by the media inform about the material welfare of the inhabitants of the EU, but do not inform about the basic rights, duties, customs as well as cultural traditions .

They do not learn a respect for the diversity of the Christian civilization in the Western world. This is due to insufficient communication, the lack of knowledge of the language by immigrants and the lack of education and opposition to the cultural values of the EU is a great obstacle. They come to Europe in large groups, which are sufficient to contacts and whereby they do not integrate into European society. They do not respect European law, governed by its own rules of social coexistence in urban districts, being an Islamic diaspora. Better educated foreigners have a chance to get a good job and to integrate into European society. Migrants should have the opportunity to learn and acquire attractive professions that blurred the economic differences among them and the Europeans.

Some of the above mentioned problems associated with the assimilation of foreigners indicate the amount of work to be done to integrate them into European society. But also immigrants should express their willingness to cooperate and learn language and culture of the country they come to and where they want to live. Communication between us and them is a prerequisite for understanding and agreement.² This is possible only under certain basic conditions for understanding the sender and

² For more on this, see: Dyczek B., *Relacje między teorią a empirią w socjologii. Kontekst komunikacyjny* in: J. Żurko (ed.) *Komunikacja społeczna w perspektywie socjologicznej*, Wrocław, 249-259.

receiver of messages. Although the total identification is impossible by definition, however, the basic issues can be communicate.

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