

The Presence of the Body in the School Space (Semantic-Pragmatic Analysis)

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Résumé

Notre travail a pour objectif l'analyse sémiotico-pragmatique d'un phénomène parascolaire qui touche aux comportements des élèves au sein du lycée Allal El Fassi d'Ifrane, où nous avons exercé entre 2022 et 2024. Il s'agit de différentes formes significatives qui attirent l'attention et la réflexion en cherchant les signifiés des signifiants dessinés sur les tables de classe de l'établissement cité. En effet, le point commun entre ces dessins est bien évidemment la présence du corps souffrant, transgressif et porteur d'identité, comme forme ayant un pouvoir existentiel, sémiotique et pragmatique. Dorénavant, le rapport au corps est toujours mystérieux, absurde et sensé. À chaque fois que nous l'observons, nous essayons de lui attribuer une identité. Ce processus est le stimulus de construction du sens pluriel et perpétuel à cause de plusieurs facteurs sociaux, culturels, éducatifs, économiques et historiques... Nous nous interrogeons sur les raisons qui poussent les élèves à accomplir de tels dessins qui focalisent essentiellement sur le visage. La présence des cinq sens au niveau de la tête, son emplacement en haut du corps laissent entendre la supériorité de cette partie révélatrice et méconnaissable qui indique l'identité *idem* de la personne, mais également son identité *ipse* par rapport aux autres visages. À ce niveau, d'une part, la sémiotique permet de comprendre et d'interpréter une forme significative, à savoir le corps, en adhérant au flux infini de la construction du sens ; d'autre part, la pragmatique touche à l'usage comme acte qui signifie : c'est un dire (le dessin/le corps) et un faire (l'acte de dessiner lui-même).

Mots clés : sémiotique – pragmatique – corps – école – signification

Abstract

Our study aims to conduct a semiotic-pragmatic analysis of a parascholastic phenomenon that concerns students' behaviors within the Allal El Fassi High School in Ifrane, where we worked among 2022 and 2024. It focuses on various meaningful forms that attract attention and stimulate reflection by seeking the signifieds behind the signifiers drawn on the school's classroom desks. Indeed, the common thread among these drawings is, quite evidently, the representation of the body—suffering, transgressive, and identity-bearing—as a form endowed with existential, semiotic, and pragmatic power. From now on, the correlation with the body remains at once mysterious, absurd, and meaningful. Each time we observe it, we attempt to attribute an identity to it. This process acts as a stimulus for the construction of a plural and perpetual meaning, shaped by numerous social, cultural, educational, economic, and historical factors. We question the reasons that drive students to create such drawings, which mainly focus on the face. The presence of the five senses in the head and its location at the top of the body suggest the superiority of this revealing yet enigmatic part, which indicates not only the person's *idem* identity but also their *ipse* identity in relation to other faces. At this point, on the one hand, semiotics enables us to understand and interpret a significant form—namely, the body—by engaging in the infinite flow of meaning construction; on the other hand, pragmatics addresses usage as an act that signifies: it is both a saying (the drawing/the body) and a doing (the act of drawing itself).

Keywords : semiotics – pragmatics – body – school – meaning

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1. Introduction

Space and time bring to light the absurdity of existence, the being that never ceases to think about meaning, that never ceases to construct the significance of nothingness and of the existent. The latter is a material or an abstract entity, the tangible and the intelligible, the body and its

meaning. An entire history of bodies having existed, perceived or unperceived, everything depends on several uncontrollable factors up to the writing of these bodies of signs. The first bodily contact takes place within the womb as a space of primitive life, without any neglect of the initial process of running, by escaping from

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nothingness (in terms of performativity) « *le terme « performatif* » sera utilisé dans une grande variété de cas et de constructions (tous apparentés), à peu près comme l'est le terme « impératif ».¹ Moreover, the affective relation with the maternal breast, the alimentary organism, guarantor of being, signals this primordiality of bodily presence. Furthermore, the projection of the self, throughout the

bodily transformation from childhood to adulthood, passing through adolescence, demonstrates astonishment and the construction of the body and of meaning. At school, the body is constructed physically and intellectually, the biological and the ethical, a construction that reflects certain behaviours bearing witness to conflicts between the said and the unsaid, the expressed and the ineffable. So, what meaning can we attribute to the manifestation of the body in the school environment? How does the decoding process take place? What does the pragmatics of the body consist in?

2. Literature review

2.1 The body : a sentient entity

« *L'homme vit dans un monde signifiant. Pour lui, le problème du sens ne se pose pas, le sens est posé, il s'impose comme une évidence, comme un « sentiment de comprendre » tout naturel. Dans un univers « blanc » où le langage serait pure dénotation des choses et des gestes, il ne serait pas possible de s'interroger sur le sens : toute interrogation est métalinguistique.* »²

According to Greimas, meaning originates from a basic, denotative system in which everything is a signifier and all signifieds are possible; the starting point is expression. Expression facilitates the construction of meaning, which makes meaning inherently conventional, hence the unavoidable natural/conventional dichotomy. We convey meaning through our writings, our music, and our paintings because there is a shared understanding between sender and receiver regarding the basic tools that enable the construction of meaning. It is the “how” that has allowed for this encoding of meaning. Meaning is a process of coding and encoding; it is legitimate to study meaning, given that it is a truth; nevertheless, truth, in the humanities and, to a certain extent, in the exact sciences, is subjective. The study of advertising posters in relation to cultural aspects and the circumstances of the use of specific colors and shapes is not distinct from verbal expression; they are rich in sociocultural elements. Consequently, the deconstruction of bodily expression highlights the semiotic process of constructing and deconstructing meaning.

2.2 Being and meaning

« (...) *la reconnaissance d'une dimension autonome et homogène, d'un mode d'existence sémiotique, dimension sur laquelle se situent les formes sémiotiques, que l'on peut*

ensuite hiérarchiser, en distinguant différentes stases : le « potentiel », le « virtuel », l'« actuel », le « réalisé », qui, par leur ordre et leur interdéfinition, constitueraient les conditions nécessaires de la sémosis. »³

From a semiotic perspective, it is crucial to understand the quest we are undertaking and through which means. The construction of meaning is therefore at the centre of our concerns; we constantly attempt to establish a complementarity between manifestation and immanence, between the said and the unsaid, between meaning and being. In fact, thought is the stimulus of any action; one must have the idea that will become the object of action, which is what we highlight through the notion of “pre-existing knowledge”. Its emergence at the cognitive level assigns it a virtual, unmanifested status. At the moment of de-virtualisation, we resort to homogeneous and heterogeneous processes of actualisation before reaching the concretisation or realisation of the signifying being. Hence, the manifestation of meaning is, in a way, a manifestation of being; whether consciously or unconsciously, it has manifested itself in such or such a way in order to suggest such or such meaning. However, the identification of meaning is not an asset; it is so complex that a deconstruction of signification could trigger either a war or a seizure of power.

2.3 The sociocultural presence of body

« *Le schéma postural en question se présenterait comme une sorte d'image du corps propre modelée par l'habitus social. En ce sens, le « schéma postural » serait un schéma moteur figé par l'usage et caractéristique d'une sociotaxinomie.* »⁴

All semiotic reflection necessarily takes place in a social context, in a cultural context, indeed, the semiotician and the sociologist perceive the body in order to interpret certain meaningful attitudes while asserting that non-significance is endowed with meaning. By relying on the statements made by Rousseau in his Social Contract, States exercise a kind of power over behaviour. The body is indeed the object of manifestation whereas cognitive load is a fortiori the object of immanence. Is this stimulating knowledge acquired or innate? In fact, the biological and the social mark an interference between what we can acquire and what we want to acquire, the ability to do and the willingness to do highlight an infinity of conditions of success or failure beyond control and which can only be analysed a posteriori of production. At this level, the semiotic study

¹ Austin John Langshaw, *Quand dire, c'est faire*, Ed. Du Seuil, Paris, 1970, p.41

² Greimas Algirdas Julien, *Du sens I*, Éditions Du Seuil, Paris, 1970, p.p. 12-13

³ Greimas, Algirdas J. & Jacques Fontanille, *sémiotique des passions - Des états de choses aux états d'âme*, Ed. Seuil, Paris, 1991, p. 10

⁴ Idem, p. 158

of the body lies at the crossroads of disciplines: sociology, biology,

theology and ethnology. Hence, the body is a meaningful manifestation representing a sociocultural postural schema (*habitus*⁵) influenced by chemical reactions at the biological level and by religious or ideological beliefs inherited or constructed.

2.4 Body symbolism

« Ce qui circule sur le marché linguistique, ce n'est pas « la langue », mais des discours stylistiquement caractérisés, à la fois du côté de la production, dans la mesure où chaque locuteur se fait un idiolecte (...) et du côté de la réception (...) chaque récepteur contribue à produire le message qu'il perçoit et apprécie en y important tout ce qui fait son expérience singulière et collective. »⁶

Conveying meaning is a process of linguistic, pictorial, sculptural, and other forms of symbolization that depends, on the one hand, on the production, creation, and transmission of signs, and on the other hand, on the reproduction, recreation, and retransmission of signs. Indeed, we have multiple meanings for a single signifier and vice versa, to the extent that we have as many symbolized concepts for the same symbol. For example, the dove is used as a symbol referring to several symbolized meanings such as peace, justice, and love. Furthermore, in American culture, offering a dove's feather is a declaration of love, and it is the process of encoding and decoding that fosters either mutual understanding or conflict (Table 1). Furthermore, the symbolized meaning is always tied to a context; any interpretation requires linguistic, paralinguistic, and extralinguistic elements, including: culture, identity, society, and psychology.

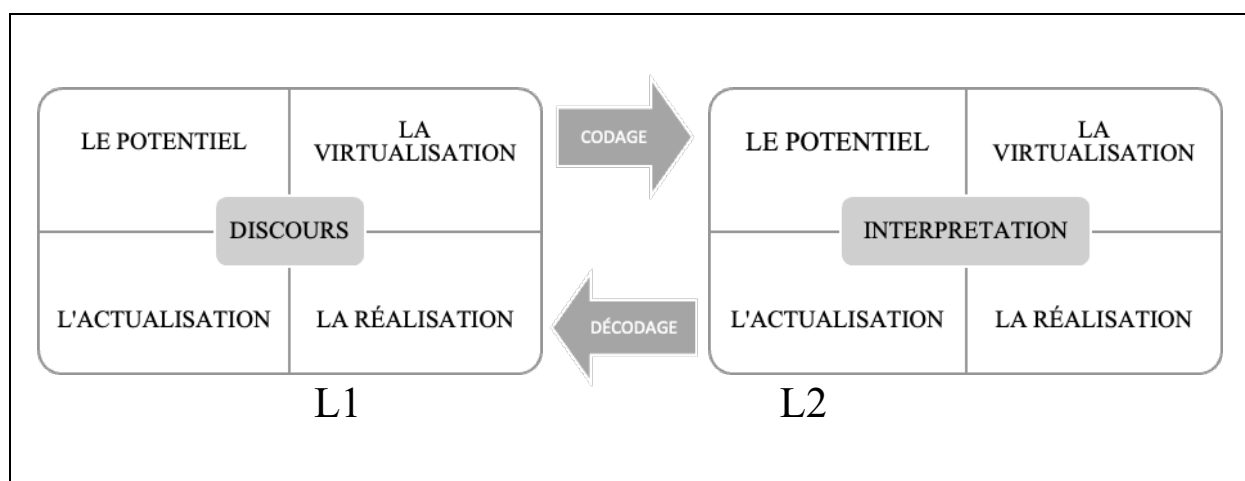


Tableau 1 : discours et interprétation

2.5 Saying and Doing : the pragmatics of the body

« (...) il y a des mots, des symboles, ou autres dispositifs conventionnels, qui signifient quelque chose ou expriment quelque chose ou représentent ou symbolisent quelque chose qui les dépasse, d'une manière qui est publiquement compréhensible. »⁷

In pragmatic terms, speech, as opposed to the pre-established system of "language", is an individual practice distinguished by semantic processes dependent on psycholinguistic, social, cultural factors, etc. The expressible is a social reality based on the conventional; it consists of institutions of meaning that ensure convention, such as: money, language, politics, school. Hence, linguistic, symbolic, pictorial or musical expression is also based on this conventional aspect, ensuring more or less inter-comprehensible communication. I state this in order to signify such or

such meaning; according to Searle, this intention is communicated through intentional, conventional "signs". In this sense, to insult someone, it is enough to call them an "idiot"; to thank a teacher, one only has to say "thank you". Moreover, if the purpose of communication is not intercomprehension, but rather conversational costs and benefits, for example: political debates, art, etc., we identify more implicitness and irony. Furthermore, the body is a pragmatic entity that expresses, through verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal means, coded meaning that must be decoded according to the initial coding process (conventional (explicit) versus implicit).

3. Method

The Moroccan educational system requires students to be at school between 34 and 36 hours per week, an average of 6 hours per day. The eclipsed presence of

⁵ Bourdieu, Pierre, *le Sens pratique*, Ed. Minuit, Paris, 1980.

⁶ Bourdieu Pierre, *ce que parler veut dire*, Ed. Fayard, Paris, 1982, p.16

⁷ Searle John R., *la construction de la réalité sociale*, Ed. Gallimard, Paris, 1998, p. 85

extracurricular activities and, due to the pressure of the learning process, the student enters a state of catharsis in order to express their emotions, ideas, perceptions and existence. In this sense, we opt for a semiotic and didactic analysis of the expression of the body and of meaning through drawings produced by students at the Allal El Fassi qualifying high school in the province of Ifrane. The corpus was collected within the aforementioned high school; it is a directive survey,

since we worked there, which allowed us to conduct this research in a dual role as both investigator and respondent. It is composed of drawings of heterogeneous bodies; however, we focused on the dominant manifestations of the human body without denying the presence of other species: cats, bees, flowers, dogs, etc.

4. Results





Dessin 5



Dessin 6



Dessin 7



Dessin 8



Dessin 9



Dessin 10

5. Discussion

The expression of the body is a plurilingual semiotic entity; according to the manifestational framework, meaning is constructed differently. In the school environment, students constantly communicate signs on walls, tables, boards, teachers' desks, etc. Very often, we associate these behaviours with ethics, education, morality; nevertheless, what can we recommunicate through these signs? According to Benveniste, even evidence must be questioned; in this sense, the whole of these communicated signs attracts and stimulates our attention at the time when I was a student, then as a teacher and as a researcher. Indeed, the initial observational inquiry allowed us to note a predominance of linguistic signs (names, sentences, proverbs), of the body (faces, human figures, animals), and to a lesser extent colours (black and red), and flora (trees, flowers). The frequent absence of painting workshops and extracurricular activities compelled these students to seek ways to channel repression; these drawings highlight a form of catharsis in the face of socio-educational, socio-didactic and socio-economic "conscious/unconscious" repression.

All of these drawings confirm the Greimassian enumeration of the expression of meaning: the potential => the virtual => the actual => the realised, an accomplished hierarchy— but what does it mean? It sometimes involves an identification and a face (Simo + V) (Drawing 3) – a heart-body and a declaration of love which may signify shyness in front of one's beloved (Drawing 4) – moreover, the talent of a dressmaker expressed through a dress in a perfectionist female body (Drawing 2) – furthermore, communicating one's talent in hairdressing through bodies and more specifically a

well-made-up face and styled hair highlights the repression in which these students lived (Drawing 1) – however, talent, good and happiness are not the only enumeration of expressed meaning; we also observe deformed, metamorphosed bodies and faces, attesting to a form of social melancholy (Drawings 5 and 6). The physical is, for some, the source of evil and/or intimidation. The body (face) that afflicts the painter is disfigured, denatured and tortured by a single means, namely the pen and the desk.

Indeed, the body, as a bearer of meaning, oscillates between semiotics and sociology, between signification and habitus, between freedom and institutions: so are human behaviours innate or acquired? Human existence varies between destiny, manipulation and orientation; being male or female (destiny) requires certain attitudes and reflections; being born in Morocco or in Australia may expose one to institutions that influence and/or orient you by transmitting a certain critical spirit, a certain culture, a certain religion, a certain emotional and/or social intelligence. This entanglement and interweaving of the factors that define human existence are illustrated in Drawing 10 through an absurd symbolic correlation. The student suggests the idea of a person who is located in another person's brain and that this person is controlled by two beings, two institutions, two beliefs, symbolised by flowers. Moreover, another unidentifiable person observes from afar; anonymity is deformed because the face remains incomplete, only the eyes, nose and eyebrows appear = the unknown other. « *Soi-même comme un autre suggère d'entrée de jeu que l'ipséité du soi-même implique l'altérité à un degré si*

intime que l'une ne se laisse pas penser sans l'autre. »⁸. This makes this incomplete image of the unknown, which intervenes in people's lives, an absolutely apt symbol.

Moreover, bodily symbolism is a manifestation of meaning whose aim is the expression of a representation of the world, of a constructed thought; the symbol and the symbolised allow the expression of the "repressed". Another notion that is also constructed during adolescence is that of "[l'əʃra] = friendship"; in Drawing 9, the painter-student highlights two beings, one next to the other, symbolised elements that refer to the journey that two friends go through together; at this level, friendship involves a process of sacralisation, it is sculpted on desks through bodily signs in order to grant it the eternal aspect of realisation, of existence. However, the decoding of signs requires objectivity; the conventional aspect is the guiding thread of all symbolic interpretation; nevertheless, decoding is neither truth nor falsehood, it lies within the order of the non-true and/or the non-false.

Finally, as Orecchioni affirmed – instead of distinguishing action and speech, it is relevant to consider that speech is a doing. An action that has an impact on the world, which makes speech a power that transforms the universe. Drawing is speech; the body is the sign communicated by a large number of students, illocutionary acts with distinct values, and which have as perlocution our very research work itself; others such as judgments: "dirtying desks is evidence of an ill-mannered student", and others are unidentifiable, which we were not able to observe. At this level, we consider that the pragmatics of the body is a perception that attributes to the body (verbal (expression) + non-verbal (gestures, drawings, facial expressions)) an illocutionary force that does not limit interpretation to the sole process of semantic decoding but rather to the act of decoding itself as action and through a post-interpretative socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural engagement. Henceforth, the pragmatics of the body perceives drawings as speech acts performed by interactants; the act of coding and decoding depends on the presence of each of the actants.

6. Conclusion

Finally, the body is a manifestation of meaning in perpetual construction; this manifestation could consist of linguistic signs "utterances", a human or non-human body "face, chest, eyes (synecdoche)" "dogs, cats, ducks", a drawing, a choreography, an orchestra, etc. Indeed, semiotics emphasizes the manifestation of the body as a set of signifying signs while projecting itself towards the level of immanence in order to reconstruct meaning. Moreover, the

pragmatics of the body focuses on the decoding of signs as a speech act that has an illocutionary value/force and

a perlocutionary impact. In this sense, the student-painter expresses meaning through drawings that translate repressed representations and thoughts.

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⁸ Ricœur Paul, *Soi-même comme un autre*, Ed. Du Seuil, Paris, 1990, p.14