# THE SEMANTIC MEANING IN THE SIGN SYSTEM OF A WORD

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**Abstract.** The article examines modern approaches to the study of words in linguistics, focusing on their phono-morphological and semantic structure. It examines concepts of the semiotic structure of the word, based on the unity of the signified and the signifier. A functional-semiotic model of the linguistic sign is presented through a dynamic geometric interpretation, which highlights elements of the expression and content planes.

**Keywords:** Semiotics, semantic connotation, semantics, Azerbaijani language.

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### SÖZÜN İŞARƏ SİSTEMİNDƏ SEMANTİK MƏNA

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**Xülasə.** Məqalədə müasir dilçilikdə sözün öyrənilməsinə yanaşmalar araşdırılır, onun fono-morfoloji və semantik quruluşuna diqqət yetirilir. Sözün semiotik strukturunun, mənalı və mənasızın vahidliyinə əsaslanan konsepsiyaları müzakirə edilir. Söz işarəsinin funksional-semiotika modeli dinamik coğrafi təsvir vasitəsilə təqdim olunur, bu da ifadə və məzmun planlarının elementlərini vurğulayır.
**Açar sözlər:** Semantika, mənalı konnotasiya, semantika, Azərbaycan dili.

### СЕМАНТИЧЕСКОЕ ЗНАЧЕНИЕ В ЗНАКОВОЙ СИСТЕМЕ СЛОВА

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**Резюме.** В статье исследуются современные подходы к изучению слова в языкознании, акцентируется внимание на его фоно-морфологической и семантической структуре. Рассматриваются концепции семиотической структуры слова, основанные на единстве означаемого и означающего. Приведена функционально-семиологическая модель словесного знака, представленная через динамическую геометрическую интерпретацию, выделяющую элементы плана выражения и содержания.
**Ключевые слова:** Семиотика, смысловая коннотация, семантика, Азербайджанский язык.

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### 1. Introduction

In modern linguistics, there is an increasing consensus that further development of grammatical theory directly depends on understanding the deep processes occurring within a word: its phonological-morphological and lexical-semantic structures, initial categorical-grammatical classification, interaction and interpenetration of lexical and grammatical elements, the ratio of linear-distributive and simultaneous-oppositional elements, discrete and non-discrete aspects, productive and relic elements, etc. Among these, the systematic organization of vocabulary-grouped into heterogeneous and overlapping categories of words-appears to pose the greatest challenge.

While the relationship between lexical and grammatical meanings is a central and pivotal issue in the comprehensive study of a word, there has yet to be a development of a

terminological system capable of rigorously and clearly expressing all the necessary connections and mediations between the content and form (in a broad sense) of the primary units of lexical analysis. This concerns not merely terminological inconsistencies or the preference for certain terms but rather a consistent interpretation of the essence of the meaning of a two-sided linguistic unit in the synthesis of lexical and grammatical aspects and so forth.

Questions related to the concepts of sign and word occupy a central place in language theory and linguistics. For several centuries, researchers have been trying to understand the essence of these concepts, their functions and their interrelation. Sign and word are the fundamental units of language and their role in communication cannot be overstated. However, despite this, there is no unified opinion in linguistic science regarding the precise boundaries and characteristics of these concepts.

Before delving into the various approaches to understanding the sign and the word, it is important to note that both of these terms are polysemous and are used in different contexts: from philosophical reflections on the nature of the sign to the practical aspects of language communication. Over time, various linguists, philosophers and semioticians have proposed their theories and concepts, attempting to explain how signs and words function in language.

Let us consider the views proposed by contemporary linguists who have studied the sign and the word.

In her article, Orrazdzhemal Kasymova analyzes the key aspects of the sign-based nature of language, emphasizing its role in the process of information transmission. She argues that signs are not merely linguistic units, but powerful tools that structure and organize communication. It is important to note that these signs are, in turn, conditioned and defined by the word as the fundamental unit of language [3]. O.G. Sharipov highlights that a word is the shortest yet most universal unit capable of designating various phenomena of reality-objects, qualities, actions, states and relationships. Furthermore, a word also serves as a channel for expressing human feelings, emotions and will. In this context, he points out that a word "unfailingly represents to our mind something central in the entire mechanism of language" [10]. The further development of the concept of word meaning can be found in the works of A.V. Pavlova, who identifies key aspects that influence the perception and interpretation of words. She emphasizes the limitations of language, such as the subjectivity of interpretation, the difficulties in conveying complex ideas and the risk of meaning distortion in translation. These issues underscore the importance of understanding word meaning not only from a lexical perspective but also within the context of philosophical and communicative aspects [7]. An interesting addition to the philosophical approach to word meaning is proposed by A.E. Kvinto, who defines meaning as a generalization - a specific act of thought. He views meaning as a phenomenon of consciousness that goes beyond simple designation and serves as the foundation for forming deeper concepts and perceptions [4]. In turn, A.V. Kravchenko asserts that a sign performs an important semantic function, allowing the interpreter to perceive something that is absent from current perception. This explains why signs not only transmit

information but also create new meanings, linking what we see with what is hidden from our direct perception [6].

The models proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure [2] and Charles Sanders Peirce [1] form the basis of modern views on language as a sign system. According to their theories, a word in a language represents a unit that is simultaneously a "signifier" (or expression) and a "signified" (or content). These two aspects, in their interconnection, create meaning. However, in real communication, the role of context, as well as cultural and social factors, significantly expands this interaction, making the meaning of a word multi-dimensional, contextualized and dynamic.

## 2. Semiotic Structure of the Verbal Sign

Unlike one-dimensional structures focused either on the expression plane ("signifier") or the content plane ("signified"), the semiological (or semiotic) structure is revealed based on the linguistic sign as a unity of the "signified" and the "signifier", i.e., the verbal sign. A verbal sign is a sign because it is recognized as representing or signifying something.

The triangle we propose below (Figure 1) was developed on the basis of the semantic triangle of reference of Charles Ogden and Ivor Richards.
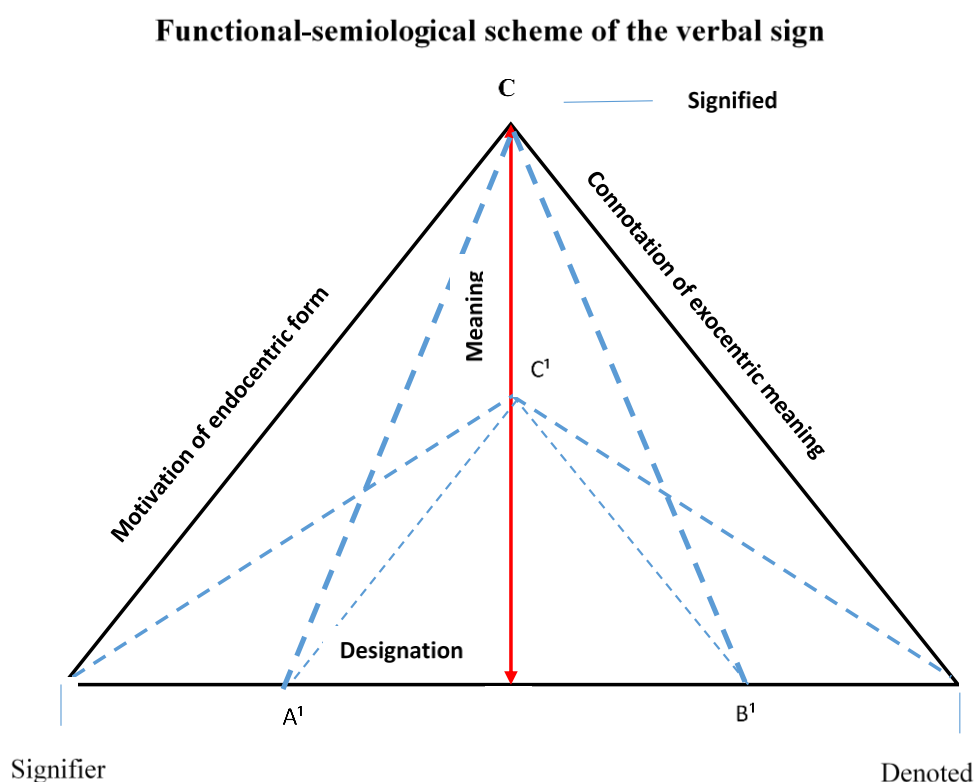


**Figure 1.** Functional-semiological scheme of the verbal sign

In all existing linguistic and semiotic concepts, three primary elements of semiosis are considered: linguistic form, the world of reality and its reflection in consciousness. In other

words, the "signifier" (the symbolic carrier of the verbal sign), the "designated" (the referential denotation) and the "signified" (the conceptual signification) constitute the essential vertices of the semiological triangle of the verbal sign. This is because the signifier cannot signify something without designating it, nor can it designate something without signifying it.

In the dynamic model of the semiological triangle (triangle ABC) proposed here, with equal movable sides (AC) and (BC) and height (CD) (Figure 1), the geometric points (A), (B) and (C), representing the three aforementioned primary elements of semiosis, form a system of functional lines delineating the contours of the endocentric structure of the expression plane (ACD) and the exocentric structure of the content plane (BCD).

The line (AB) (the base of the triangle symbolizing the verbal sign as a whole) expresses the relationship of designation that exists between the signifier (A) (the symbolic phonemic composition of the name) and the designated (B) (the denotatum as the object of designation, the "referential representation").

From the perspective of mathematical logic, the relationship of designation can be considered a binary function, i.e., a function of two arguments (A and B). Unlike designation, meaning represents a singular (unambiguous) function (the function of the signified C). The line AC, schematically representing the motivation of the internal form of the verbal sign, symbolizes the function of the structure of the expression plane, while the line BC (semantic connotation) symbolizes the function of the structure of the content plane. With the constant (unchanging) geometric point D, we conditionally associate the set of grammatical categorical constants inherent to specific parts of speech, word classes and subclasses.

## 3. Hypotheses of the Functional-Semiological Model

The heuristic value of this functional-semiological model of the verbal sign lies in its capacity to propose, among others, the following hypotheses:

1. The meaning of a word (CD) is a core element, ensuring both the functional unity of the expression plane (ACD) and the content plane (BCD) and the structural homomorphism between the form and meaning of the verbal sign.

2. With the same signified (C), no changes in the motivation of form (AC) or the connotation of meaning (BC), associated with shifts or displacements of the signifier (A-$A^1$) and the designated (B-$B^1$), can lead to a change in meaning. However, changes in meaning CD and $C^1D$, isomorphic to the transition of the signified C and $C^1$, automatically result in changes in the structures of the expression form and the semantic content of the word, though this does not necessarily require changes in the signifier or designated.

3. According to F. de Saussure's principle of the fundamentally unmotivated and dynamic nature of the relationships between the expression plane and the content plane-introduced into linguistic science by S. Karcevski as the "asymmetrical dualism of the linguistic sign" [9, p.42] - the dynamic model described above, with its movable sides representing various structural measures of form and meaning, allows us to postulate relevant combinations of the material-formal (substantial-structural) and semantic (conceptual-meaningful) elements

in the holistic unity of the verbal sign. This model also facilitates systemic and field-based comparative observations in specific categories of words (e.g., $A^1CD \cdot BCD$ and $ACD \ B^1CD$, $AC^1B^1$ and $BC^1A^1$, etc.).

### 4. Lexico-Semantic Analysis of Vision Verbs in Azerbaijani

In this article, to substantiate the proposed functional-semiological model of the verbal sign, we provide some examples involving the basic Azerbaijani verbs.

For a concrete analysis of the relationship between the plane of expression and the plane of content of an underived verb in Azerbaijani, we selected one lexico-semantic group-namely, vision verbs: görmək (to see), baxmaq (to look) and süzmək (to glance) [11]. However, considering the peripheral and metaphorically derived nature of the verb süzmək, we focus on the two primary underived verbs: görmək and baxmaq.

The root morphemes *gör-* and *bax-* are noteworthy. The latter is entirely unmotivated, while the former appears paronymically motivated due to the phonemic components **gö** and **r.** This segmentation aligns with certain semantic elements, even if their nature is general and not entirely definite. For instance, the existence of göz (eye) in Azerbaijani supports the hypothesis of potential signifying components gö, r and z. The component gö seems to associate with the concept of rounded shapes, as evident in:

- göbək (navel);
- gövdə (trunk, torso);
- gödən (womb);
- gömbə (round loaf of bread), etc.

This internal form underlies the naming of göz (eye), whose specific function is linked to gör- (to see). The elements z and r may symbolize, respectively, passivity or reflexivity and activity or causativity, as seen in the following pairs:

- süz (to float) - sür (to drive);
- gəz (to walk) - gər (to stretch);
- gizli (hidden), gizlən (to hide) - gir (to enter);
- cız (to scratch; to mark) - cır (to tear, to rip).

Thus, from the existing arguments in Altaistics supporting the primacy of either $r^2$ or **z**, which occur in the same morphonological positions [8, p.14], one can speak in some cases of their functional differentiation as the final consonant of a verb root.

### 5. Differentiation and Semantic Changes of Vision Verbs

1. When analyzing the lexical-semantic structure of a polysemantic word, the starting point is usually a specific lexicographic (dictionary) definition of its primary nominative meaning. This is natural, as all kinds of comparison and juxtaposition of parallels and first and foremost the identification and strict differentiation of their main and secondary, primary and

secondary meanings, follow from it. It is beyond doubt that the primary meanings of the verbs "baxmaq" and "görmək" are the same as those of the Russian verbs "смотреть" (to look) and "видеть" (to see), i.e., to direct one's gaze and perceive with sight, respectively [11].

2. Already this elementary lexicographic interpretation of the primary meanings of baxmaq ("to look") and görmək ("to see") allows us to postulate at least two semantic components in their lexical structure: one is general and unifying (visual activity of a person), while the other is specific and differentiating ("directing the gaze" and "perceiving through sight").

At the same time, when baxmaq and görmək are considered in a paradigmatic aspect, they are characterized by a certain sequence: baxmaq always serves as an antecedent and görmək as a consequent, since perception presupposes turning one's attention to the object of perception, but not vice versa (baxıb gördüm or baxdım gördüm, bax gör, etc.). Thus, the distinguishing component of the primary meaning of the verb görmək implicitly includes the distinguishing component of the verb baxmaq, similar to how in the paratactic pair axtarıb tapmaq ("to find after searching", literally "search and find"), tapmaq (finding) presupposes axtarmaq (searching), which can result not only in a positive but also in a negative outcome.

A comparative analysis of the lexico-semantic structures of the verbs baxmaq ("to look") and görmək ("to see") across the entirety of their conjugational and voice forms reveals certain patterns. These patterns are either associated with the neutralization of the opposition between the above-mentioned differential components of their primary meanings or with the extension of the actions contained in these differential components to other areas of human activity that are associatively conditioned and socio-historically established.

For instance, the primary meaning of the causative form of görmək, which appears in the forms göstərmək or görsətmək (colloquially also görkəzmək), corresponds to the primary meaning of the verb "to show". While this meaning is defined in the Dictionary of Modern Russian Literary Language [11] as "to allow to look at..., to present for viewing, examination, scrutiny", that is, linked to the primary meanings of verbs like "to look", "to gaze", "to examine", "to scrutinize" and so on, we nevertheless observe here a neutralization of the opposition between the differential components of the primary meanings of the verbs baxmaq ("to look") and görmək ("to see"). Indeed, "showing" is merely the causation of "viewing" and in this sense, there is no indication of either the causation of directing one's gaze or the causation of perception through sight. Compare, for example: Qapını acıb bayıra ona göstərdim ("I opened the door and showed him outside [so that he could look? so that he could see?]"). Moreover, the primary meaning of neither görmək nor*baxmaq has a causative voice form.

On the other hand, in the derivative-nominative meanings of the verbs baxmaq ("to look") and görmək ("to see"), there is a complete divergence in the lexico-semantic structures of these verbs. This phenomenon, partially similar in the Azerbaijani and Russian languages, can be explained as follows. In the derivative-nominative meanings of both verbs related to vision, the semantic weight of the differential components of their primary meanings increases. These components, as if having "grown stronger" and become independent of the sensory

aspect of vision, select (each according to its lexico-semantic nature) specific areas where their action applies. As a result, the shared component that united these verbs in their primary meanings into a group of verbs related to vision is lost. The following lexicographic facts related to the derivative meanings of the verb baxmaq ("to look") can be provided as evidence:

a) To examine, survey, browse, read or listen with the purpose of familiarization, verification or searching: filmə baxmaq - "to watch a film"; korrekturaya baxmaq - "to proofread (browse through) corrections"; həstənin nəbzinə baxmaq - "to check the pulse of a patient"; hər yerə baxmaq - "to look everywhere";

b) To pay attention, attribute importance, take into account, consider someone or something or take someone as an example: sözə baxmaq "to obey"; öz yoldaşlarına bax! "Take an example from your companions!";

c) To evaluate, consider or have an attitude toward something: Bu işə sən necə baxırsan? "How do you view this matter?";

d) To examine or discuss: məhkəmə işə baxacaq "The court will review (examine) the case";

e) To look after someone or something, oversee, care for or take responsibility: uşaqlara baxmaq "to look after children"; bağa baxarsan - bağ olar, baxmazsan-dağ olar "If you take care of the garden, it will be a garden; if you don't, it will turn into a mountain" (i.e., a wild or neglected place).

In contrast to its primary meaning, in all of the above-mentioned meanings-realized (just like the primary meaning) without anomalies in subject-object relations and without restrictions in conjugation forms-the verb baxmaq can also appear in the passive voice (baxılmaq). However, the (potential) exclusion of the passive voice marker for derivative meanings of this verb seems to signal limitations imposed on its subject-object relations and conjugation forms.

Such limitations are evident, in particular, in the following secondary meanings of the verb baxmaq:

a) Without an object. To think, deliberate or weigh an idea: Baxarsan, istəsən gələrsən ("You'll consider it and if you wish, you'll come").

b) Subject and object as inanimate entities (only in the third person). To face or be directed toward something: Evin qapı-pəncərəsi şərqə baxır ("The doors and windows of the house face east").

c) An impersonal subject and a personal or person-related object (only in the third person). To depend on someone, fall under someone's jurisdiction or belong to someone's competence: Qərarın məzmunu əksəriyyətin rəyinə baxır ("The content of the resolution depends on the opinion of the majority").

The sphere of extrapolation of visual perception is also very broad: dominating among all other forms of sensory perception of the surrounding world, it easily and freely replaces them. For instance, compare its replacement of auditory perception: ... səsini bu mərtəbəyə

qaldırdığını görməmişdi (B. Bayramov) - "... he (still) hadn't seen that he raised his voice to that extent"; ...danışdığını gördü (Mir Cəlal) - "... he saw that he was speaking". Additionally, such a specific meaning of the verb görmək, as "to receive, to know, to experience, to endure, etc.", realized in combinations with words like xeyir ("good"), ziyan ("harm"), ağır ("pain"), xəstəlik ("illness"), yaxşılıq ("kindness"), pislik ("evil") and others, seems to be entirely conditioned by the generalized sensory perception. Representing sensory perception in general, görmək can also encompass its mental consequences in the realm of abstract concepts, thereby acquiring meanings such as:

a) To realize, comprehend or become convinced of something: ...gördüzmü də vicdanımızı? (Sabir) - "...and did you see our conscience?";

b) To discern, to find: bir məntiqsizlik görürdü (S. Hüseyinli) - "he saw a logical fallacy";

c) To recognize, to be aware:...başlayar hesab etməyəki, görsün qazancı nə olub (C. Məmmədquluzadə) - "he will start calculating to see what the profit has been".

All of these meanings can be unified into one general meaning of mental perception. Thus, we see that the general laws of human psychological activity, in full accordance with historical and logical continuity, determine the stratification and directionality of the elements in the lexico-semantic structure of the verb görmək: Visual perception → Generalized sensory perception of the physical world → Mental perception of the spiritual world.

Naturally, the lexico-semantic structure of the verb görmək (as with most polysemous words in any language) also contains semantic elements that, from a synchronic perspective, are considered unmotivated, that is, idiomatic. However, it is important to note that cases of semantic unmotivatedness or insufficient motivation are generally compensated, first and foremost, by constructive conditioning. In other words, the specific nature of the syntagmatic relationships of the distributive elements is characteristic of the idiomatic meaning.

For example, the following derivative meanings of the verb görmək, which are more or less idiomatic in nature, are marked and to some extent justified by the peculiarities of logical-syntactic compatibility, typically combined with lexical and/or morphological compatibility:

a) Subject - agent, object - person. To grasp, to be sufficient: evimizdəki çay, qənd, yağ bir ay bizi görər ("The tea, sugar and butter in our house will last us a month");

b) Only with an indirect object - person in the nominative case (kimdən). To suspect: Adamlar həmişə bir fəlakətə düçar olanda kor şeytandan görərdilər (Mir Calal) ("People always suspected the blind devil when they were in misfortune");

c) Direct object (as well as subject) - only a person; quantifiers characterizing the degree of completeness of the action are permissible in the predicate. To bribe, to give a bribe: Dövlətli qabaqcadan qazını necə lazımdır görmüşümiş ("Molla Nəsrəddin tales") - "The rich man, it turns out, had properly bribed the judge in advance";

So far, the verb görmək has been discussed as a full lexical word. However, in modern Azerbaijani, there is also a homonymous auxiliary verb görmək, functioning in the abstract grammaticalized meaning of "to do, to perform, to carry out, to accomplish", etc.; for example:

Araq öz işini görmüşdü (İ. Musabəyov) "The vodka did its work..."; Heç bir iş görmür "Does not perform any work"; Tədarük görmək "To make preparations, stock, provisions, etc". To resolve the question of distinguishing the independent verb in one of its phraseologically connected meanings from the homonymous auxiliary verb, clear formal criteria are required. To verify this, it is enough to compare məsləhət görmək ("to advise, recommend") and təhsil görmək ("to receive education"). It is unclear here why "giving" (advice) and "receiving" (education), being semes of the same order, are not able to ensure the same position of the mentioned combinations in the glosseme görmək.

In our opinion, the decisive criterion for qualifying the verb görmək as an auxiliary verb should be a reliable indicator: the possibility of forming the passive voice görülmək, which is excluded in all other cases. Therefore, görmək (görülmək) in məsləhət görmək (görülmək) should be considered an auxiliary verb, while görmək in təhsil görmək is an independent verb, even though with a phraseologically connected meaning.

On the other hand, a phraseologically connected meaning does not necessarily imply a phraseological unit, for which the existence of a stable, fixed context with its uniquely possible minimum reference is necessary. In our view, essential features of a phraseological unit include not only the uniqueness of the key word but also the integrative nature of the phraseological meaning, the impossibility of explicitly expressing and revealing the content (lexicographical definition) of the semantically realized word, that is, the inability to isolate the meaning of the verb within the phraseology.

For example, gün görmək ("to live in comfort"), çox görmək ("to deprive") and some other phraseological units, each characterized individually by the degree of their idiomaticity, mandatory and optional elements of distribution. It is quite clear that a phraseological unit, as the primary unit of the phraseological level, cannot be considered on par with a lexeme, which is the primary unit of the strictly lexicological level. Perhaps even more unjustified is the inclusion in the overall lexico-semantic structure of the verb görmək of isolated, offshoot and fixed conjugated forms such as gör, görək, görüm, görəsən and others in the functions of modal words. Meanwhile, in the dictionary, the modal meaning of each such form is presented as a separate lexical meaning of the verb görmək, marked with a single label - a sequential number (13, 14, 15).

Yet, the task of a descriptive dictionary is not only to define the boundaries of individual words and sum up their meanings but also to hierarchically organize and systematize various types of meanings, not to mention identifying and distinguishing homonyms. In this regard, it is hard not to agree with the following formulation of one of the main tasks of lexicographical description: "When providing a semantic characterization of words in the dictionary, one should rely on a certain concept of lexical meaning..." [5, p.31].

**Conclusion.** Further comparative analysis of other polysemous verbs, identifying regular features related to their structural-semantic organization, will allow for the

establishment of important patterns crucial for a thorough study of the language structure. This will provide a deeper and more comprehensive interpretation of the essence of individual lexical meanings, lexico-semantic identities and differences within the framework of our functional-semiological modeling of the two-plane dynamic structure of words. Returning, in conclusion, to the aforementioned model and verbally explicating the graphical representation provided above, we can define the lexical meaning of a word as a socially-historically conditioned and linguistically fixed function of a virtual conceptual entity, which is intended to semiologically correlate, in each act of speech, the indexical-symbolic form of the verbal sign with the actual contentive meaning of the latter.

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