Symbolic Meaning Transfer in Drama as a Type of Active Visual Expression: A Semiotic Approach

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Abstract

The interdisciplinary study of meaning and communication concerns based on various sign systems is called semiotics. Theories created by anthropology, visual arts, film studies, semiotics, and other fields have replaced traditional research methods in many subjects. Although semiotics is seen as a single discipline, it is quite heterogeneous in terms of the techniques it uses and the goals it tries to achieve. Semiotics is an interdisciplinary method that is supported by various approaches and developed over various philosophical definitions of a particular object. In drama, audio-visual symbols are language, mise-en-scene, hand-arm movements, clothes, make-up, voice patterns of actors, etc. available with signs. Mime, circus, street theater, and opera can be counted as dramatic performance types. The subject addressed in this study is the analysis of the way semiotics is handled in the field of drama or theatrical works.

1. Introduction

Language is a way of human communication. Besides consisting of words spoken or written, it also consists of a system of symbols or signs. As Saussure (1959:67) focuses on the relationship between the sign system and the arbitrariness in language. In the sign system, we can see two main concepts "signifier" which refers to the name of the sign, and "signified" which exists in our abstract form and relates to the semiotics. Semiotics is the study of the ability to create and interpret signals. We, as humans, use, produce, and represent signs by talking, writing, or listening to music in our daily lives.

Semiotics focuses on the symbols, and how they are structured. This symbol system concerns the terms symbol, what the symbol means, verbal and nonverbal which relate to communication, or bodily communication. If we want to understand more about how humans or other signs affect us, and reflect what they want to tell in many ways like gestures, eye movements, or other aspects of appearances, we shall describe all of these by the signs system. In short, "Language can be concerned as a symbolic system that allows us to perceive the outside world" (Yalçın and Şengül, 2007:753).

The two features of the sign that we see in Saussure's study (1959:67), "signifier" and "signified" have an arbitrariness. In this way, we can explain that the signifier can be a sound, word, or a sign while the signified is a meaning, or concept that we understand.

We encounter signs in theater, drama, and cinema too much. The signs that we encounter in these fields "Help us to have more knowledge about our environment". For instance, appearances, gestures, make-up, "music", "dialogue", hand-body movements, and stage design mostly are features of the theater (Efe, 2001:25). According to Efe (2001:31), "When we hang a hollow picture frame on the wall, it does not go unnoticed that the stained spots inside the frame become apparent. This is the scene and the screen functions." The details are noticed thanks to the signs.

In light of the given expressions above, the general introduction of semiotics and the properties of the field is briefly explained. Mostly, Saussure's theories about semiotics are referred to. Lastly, the details of the semiotics field knowledge are highlighted with examples.

In this study, the texts, cues, and signs of the plays from William Shakespeare, Samuel Beckett, and Bertolt Brecht are gathered. Secondly, the texts, cues, movements, and stage-specific signs are analyzed. Finally, each sign are analyzed; the events that make up the fiction, and the signs and tools that determine the characters, from a semiotic point of view.

Purpose of the Study

To understand the complex and significant use of linguistic and semiotic elements in the audience-stage communication process in the art of drama, which is attempted to be addressed with a semiotic approach, the study analyzes the encrypted message in the play that is screened in cinema, theater, or television.

2. Method

Data Collection Techniques

For the analysis of the symbolic meaning transfer in the drama field, mostly the original theatre plays (or film versions of those plays) by William Shakespeare, Samuel Beckett, and Bertolt Brecht are used. The plays are Romeo and Juliet, Fin de Partie (Endgame) and Die Dreigroschenoper (Üç Kuruşluk Opera). The data is gathered by analyzing the cues, appearances of the characters (make-up, clothes, the color of the face, etc.), and gestures by analyzing the emotions given in the cues in those plays. For the analysis of the presentation of signs in theater plays, signs in four plays by four playwrights –Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, and William Shakespeare- are used. The signs are identified in terms of these criteria:

Sign systems other than drama: Architectural structure and the environment surrounding the construction (environmental conditions)

Sign systems that the actor can create: Personality, role balancing, text presentation, facial expression, physical motion and spatial motion, makeup, hairstyle, and costume.

Visual sign strings: Spatial positions of the actors, visual representation of the location of the event, color scheme, vehicles used, and lighting.

Text: Dictionary, syntactic and postal meaning of words, style, high/low tempo rush, individual matching of characters, general structure, harmony, timing, text/subtext as action.

Auditory sign systems: Music, and non-musical sounds.

Method of Analysis

In the analysis section of the study, firstly, the texts, cues, and signs of the plays Romeo and Juliet, Endgame (Fin de Partie), and Die Dreigroschenoper are gathered from William Shakespeare, Samuel Beckett, and Bertolt Brecht. Secondly, they are analyzed into the words, actions of words, actors, clothes, make-up, audience, and stage-specific signs. Finally, each sign are explained; the events that make up the fiction, and the signs and tools that determine the characters are examined separately and explained with a semiotic approach.

Operational Definitions

Sign: Aristotle asserts that a sign consists of three elements: the sign itself, the referent to which it draws attention, and the meaning it elicits, according to Sebeok (1994:4).

Semiotic Approach: "Semiotic approach" is "constructed by the specific mechanism of signification" (Aleksandrov, 2012:213). The signs are observed from the semiotical point of view.

Sign System: Saussure (1959:67) defines the sign system as a system that consists of two main concepts "signifier" which refers to the name of the sign, and "signified" which exists in our abstract form and relates to the semiotics.

Semiotics

According to Sebeok, *semiotics* is derived from the concept of a study of medicine *"semeiotics"* which is defined by Hippocrates (1994:4). Ramamoorthi defines the semiotics as "the study of sign system" (nd.:1). In the book *Cours de linguistique generale* written by Saussure, he uses the concept *semiology* for the first time, yet as Sebeok states, we generally use the term *semiotics* which is not a new concept for today (1994:5). As Sebeok (1994:4) suggests, Hippocrates as the founder of the term "*semeion,* "mark, sign" that stands for something other than itself". In addition to this description, Sebeok mentions Aristotle's state of the *sign* as an "object" of semiotics. According to Saussure's theory cited by Sebeok, the sign is "something physical" like "gestures", which is a "*signifier*"; and "the image or concept to which the signifier refers - which he called the *signified*" (1994:6).

Types of Signs

Sebeok summarizes the main types of signs: First one is *symptom.* Sebeok refers that, the term is defined as "a reflex of the anatomical structure" by Jakob von Uexkiill. For instance, animals have symptoms called "warning signs" which change by their "species" (1994:9). Second type is "signal" which includes traffic lights, alarms, danger signals, whistles, sirens, etc.". The other types of signs are icons, indexes, and symbols:

1) An icon may include similarity with its referent. As Sebeok states, photographs are icons because they visually represent their referents.

2) A symbol that indicates something or someone's existence, placement in time or space, or connection to something or someone else is referred to as an index, according to Sebeok. The words here, there, up, and down, for example, allude to the relative location of things when we are speaking about them. Many words also exhibit

an implicit type of indexicality. (1994:10, 11).

3) According to Sebeok (1994:11), a symbol is a sign that arbitrarily and conventionally stands in for its referent. He argues that, like objects, sounds, and figures, words have meaning. Sebeok claims that white is a color that might be symbolic of 'cleanliness', 'purity', or 'innocence', but the dark of 'uncleanness', 'impurity', or 'corruption'; and the list could go on and on. Each of these symbols has been formed by social convention.

4) The final type of the serial is the notion "name". The phrase is an "identifier" in some senses, such as a name. A name, a symbol, can be used to identify a person. Furthermore, extra names such as surnames, aid in defining the name's "identity referent" in more detail.

Signs in Theatre

According to Sahid (2013:50), "The elements like gestures, sound, sign system, hairstyles, and costume are called theater signs." These components have a significant influence in determining if a performance is successful. Ramamoorthi (nd.:1) refers to American Philosopher Charles S. Pierce who has a different viewpoint about theatre signs. According to Pierce as Ramamoorthi (nd.:1) refers,

An actor enters the stage area and sets down a wooden stool. After a few minutes, a man in rich king's costumes enters and sits on the stool as though he is sitting on a throne. "Here the similarity between the stool and the throne is very easily seen". Here the stool is an icon.

Another example of Pierce given by Ramamoorthi (nd.:2) is, "When four people carry Duryodana on stage, we understand that Duryodana is dead". As Ramamoorthi explains, although the death is not witnessed by the audience, the concept *icon* shows that actor is dead. Additionally, "Dramatic performance is a sign which the audience understands by convention that is through symbols, through the index and icon".

Aleksandrov (2012:213) focuses on many concepts about theatrical signs in his study. According to his inferences, there are some "mechanisms" of the theatrical signs:

1) A semiotic approach that is built using a particular theatrical signifying mechanism.

2) Detailed characteristics of the theatrical sign's location on the stage.

3) Particular sign properties, such as aesthetic signification that pertains to theatrical performance as a special phenomenon that results from sign interaction.

Aleksandrov (2012:213) points out some "remarks over the semiotic character of *thèatralitè*". According to him, the concept "theatricality (thèatralitè)" includes some units like "verbal expression, gestures, mimics, affectations, bodily and psychological conditions, visual imagery, musically – sound environment". "Theatrical act" includes "multiformity of sign-communicative systems" and "linguistic constructs".

Actor, Clothes (costume), Make-up, Audience, and Stage

Ramamoorthi (nd.:3) asks some questions about "actor as a sign":

1) What does the actor's posture on stage tell when you see him seated? Is the actor dejected? Is the actor considering anything? Is the actor from a royal family or general public?

2) What do the actor's outfits tell us about him or her? Is there a standout hue, and if so, what does it imply to you?

3) How do actors interact with one another on stage? How far apart are the actors from one another? What can be inferred about the status of the characters these actors are playing from the distance?

Actor

As Efe (Tr. 2001:51) defines, the actor has a difficult responsibility on the stage. According to Eco (1977:111), even when he tries to hide it, being drunk is a sign. The inebriated individual employs two tactics: He must be acknowledged as a real spatiotemporal occurrence and a real human body to be regarded as a sign. Efe (Tr. 2001: 51, 52) comments on this example as "here the drunken, beyond being a mere drunken sign, emphasizes one of the victims of alcohol in an imaginative opposite position". He adds, "An actor on stage is himself in his original manner of behavior (physical appearance, sound); on the other hand, the role change will become -the style of sound, clothes, make-up- the character on the stage".

Clothes (costume) and make-up

As Efe (Tr. 2001:55, 53, 59) defines, clothes and make-up have a great role in symbolic meaning. "Such appearances, as indicative signs, play a significant role in focusing the main character with flashy make-up, hairstyle, and clothing". Efe states that the clothes affect the actor's body movements; make-up affects "facial expressions". For example, "a sufficiently attractive wig can be an image of smugness, as well as an indicative function used to attract the audience's attention". In addition, "class differences of clothes and characters are emphasized: wealth, poor, chambermaid, police, soldier, doctor, etc.". As Sahid (2013:51) contributes, "a dress can show the socio-economic, psychological, even moral characteristics of its user."

Audience

Efe (Tr. 2001:61, 66) describes the role of the audience as "It is the audience who derives meaning from the text and the event while analyzing the forms in the monitoring process. He also explains that the audience is in charge of understanding and analyzing the signs however, each audience analyzes these signs differently. The author summarizes the role of the audience as follows:

The design of the sign weaves should be made according to this basic principle. And the main goal of dramatic production should be to keep the audience awake by projecting their universe, detaching the viewer from that moment of reality and capturing the expectations of the stage event.

As he points out, to keep up the audience with the flow of the play, there should be a flow that does not distract the audience and bore them. Efe describes the role of the audience with the difference between film and stage. According to him, in films, the director forces the audience to focus on the places he thinks will attract attention by adjusting the time and place of the audience with the help of the camera. In contrast to this technique, in the theater, the audience is freer to clarify the signs, scenes, and events.

Stage

Aleksandrov (2012:214) focuses on the sign "components on the stage and constructing of the stage semiosis" which is related to "the actor, transformed in the image, stage space, costume, music environment, communication with the spectator, and interpretation of the audience". Efe (Tr. 2001:60) points out Dort's expressions as follows, "If staging is to explain by signs, then representation should be to accelerate the indicators and to activate them within clearly defined time and place limits."

According to Efe's (2001:70, 73) analysis, there is a close relationship between the spotlight and the camera focus. It is similar focusing the attention of the audience on the stage in one direction and the director turning the camera into consideration and exposing the audience. The fact that the theater is realistic reveals its strengths. "Reflecting real objects with symbolic action" is proof of this reality.

Theatrical Communication

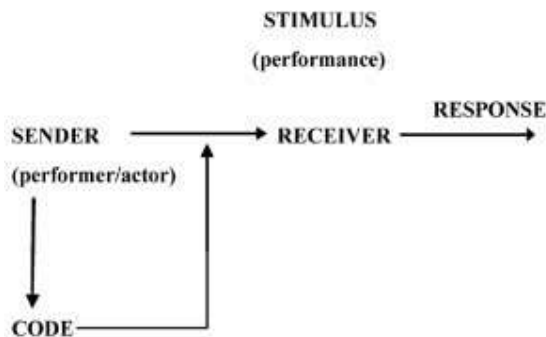Sahid (2013:55) presents a chart for introducing theatrical communication.

Figure 1.

According to Sahid, the meaning of the communication can only be deciphered by the recipient if they are conversant with the sender's code. The author also uses Eco's communication chart and explains the process:
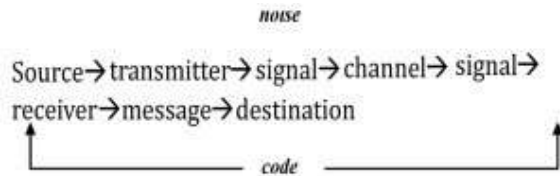

Figure 2.

The source can be a thought of the speaker or an actual action. "Transmitter can send a signal throughout a physical channel such as sound wave". One receiver, which could be the eye, ear, or another sensory organ, receives the signal. And it can be converted into a coherent message which can be called a destination.

Elam cites Franco Ruffini's response to Mounin's ideas, which states that if the sender and receiver are aware of each other's codes, neither of these conditions—that the two codes coincide, the messages be accurately translated, or the two-way communication takes place along the same channel—are necessary for communication to occur (1980:21).

According to Elam (1980:23),

> The transmitters take on the roles of the players' bodies and voices, as well as their metonymic gears (costumes, possessions, etc.), set pieces, electric lighting, musical instruments, tape recorders, movie projectors, and so on. Movements, sounds, and electrical impulses are examples of the messages transmitted by these bodies. These signals are chosen and syntactically ordered in accordance with a variety of sign- or signaling systems, and they can go through any number of the physical channels available for human communication.

Elam (1980:23) uses explanations of Barthes:

> According to the theatrical, dramatic, and cultural codes at his disposal, the spectator will interpret this complex of messages—speech, gesture, the scenic continuum, etc.—as an integrated text. The spectator will then assume the role of transmitter of signals to the performers—laughter, applause, boos, etc.—along visual and acoustic channels, which both the performers and audience members themselves will interpret in terms of approval, hostility, and so on. One of the key characteristics that sets live theater apart from other forms of performance—which may be thought of as a kind of "cybernetic machine" in this sense—is the feedback process and the interaction between audience members.

Drama

According to Elam (1980:60), drama is typically seen as a "given" presented to the audience as a complete, ready-made unit through the use of the performance. Efe (Tr. 2001:18, 23) defines drama as "a ball of staged events", also "reviving real or fictional events involving actions and interactions between people as events or events that are currently in the audience's eyes."

Efe (Tr. 2001:19, 23, 24, 25) separates the concepts of *drama* and *dramatic* differently. He states, "A murder, a football match can be considered as dramatic" because these events which are in reality, cause excitement and intensity of emotion in humans. In contrast to the term dramatic, the author defines drama as "fiction", and to represent this fiction, real objects, and people are used. "Drama simulates the events in the dream universe or reality or thought to be possible." He explains the drama in a practical way: "The ceremonies organized for kings and queens ascents, and the ceremonies held by the heads of state (as in the USA) are considered dramatic performances." Costume, stage design, make-up, etc. also contribute to the dramatic communication to be represented.

Signs in Drama

According to Efe (2001:30, 31), in drama, details are not perceived by all viewers in the same way. In drama, theater, or cinema, every detail gains meaning with signs and symbols. Semiotics includes three main types of signs: The icon, the sign, and the symbol. According to Efe's (2001) examples, "The dimming sky on the stage can be used as a sign of death, or the last discovery of a love, as a sign of unhappiness, or as a sign that emphasizes the elapsed time interval" (33). The impression of someone feeling the emotions of a traumatic incident, embarrassment, or loss of fear can be simulated by an actor crying on stage (33). "A lady comes to the stage, and this lady, shown to us analogously, reflects a fictional lady". He adds, "The director who shows us actors reflecting characters like Cleopatra, Ophelia or Hamlet, wants to tell us these characters are just like this" (34).

3. DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of the study is to analyze some theater and drama plays according to the sign strings. The analyses are carried out within the framework of the following items:

1. Architectural structure, environment
2. Facial expression, physical motion, makeup and hair, clothing
3. Visual representation of the location of the event
4. Vehicles used, lighting
5. Text, text as action, the referential meaning of words
6. Music

Bertolt Brecht
Die Dreigroschenoper

In this part of the study, the signs in Die Dreigroschenoper are analyzed.

In the play, the audience listening to the opera singer shows us where and how important the opera, music, or natural sounds are emphasized in conveying what is being said. What emphasizes this importance to us is that the person who tells the opera describes the event in a picture with his walking stick. In the play, captain

Macheath displays an authoritarian figure. It is proof that the people at the table raise their hats when the Captain enters the bar. In the play, the walking stick figure appears as an object of the authoritarian character. The Captain's hand signal to the waiter to clean the table, pushing the glasses with his cane shows us again that this person is an influential character. At the end of the first act of the play, a character reading a troubling note and closing his eyes with his hat signs that the first act is over. In the play, a shop clerk who sells beggar outfits says: "They are the five basic misery types that are guaranteed to affect the human heart, and they encourage people to voluntarily leave their money into that unnatural mood". The word "misery typing" gives us the "beggar" response. A messy, dirty, and scattered appearance appears as a sign of a beggar. The sign gives the idea that the person is poor and needy.

William Shakespeare
Romeo and Juliet
In the play, at the beginning of the game, the choir determines the course of the events with the words it says. It gives us information about the play flow. The actors in Romeo and Juliet are in a loop. Active issues throughout the scenario: Obstacles to love, hostility, fate, inability to meet, and death. So, these events are analyzed in detail. As a first step, we can combine the 'sender, object and receiver' headers with 'love, Juliet and Romeo' and create a scheme.

Sender= Love
Object= Juliet
Receiver= Romeo

Who helped them reconcile are the nanny and Priest Lawrence, subject Romeo, and the blockers are families, Paris (wanting to marry Juliet), Balthasar (bringing news to Romeo), Priest John (not bringing the news), the pharmacist (giving poison to Romeo), plague (delaying Priest John), wrong time, and death. Romeo appears as a character who wants to have Juliet. In the plot, Romeo and Juliet become valuable objects to each other. Whenever they desire to meet, they face an obstacle. Active events at the start, node, action, solution, and end of the play are analyzed:
1. In the beginning, there are two enemy families and their children who are in love with each other.
2. In the second section, Romeo and Juliet decide to marry secretly, but after Romeo kills Tybalt from the enemy family and exiles, we face the danger of marrying Juliet to Paris.
3. In the action part, there is a plan that Juliet takes pills and pretends to be dead, Priest John informs Romeo, and then Romeo goes to the cemetery and runs away with Juliet.
4. In the solution part, after false news is sent to Romeo and he thinks Juliet is dead, he commits suicide by drinking poison beside Juliet in the cemetery. Juliet, who learns the situation when she wakes up, daggers herself, and then the families regret it.
5. In the end, two hostile families reconcile, and a new order is established. As a result, the life cycle of Romeo and Juliet starts with life and ends with death. The cycle of families starts with hostility and the story ends with peace. In the story, the concept of "love" gives the image of a "victim". Innocent and naive lovers emerge from hostile families. Looking at them as victims, makes us think they are pure and innocent. There are opposite concepts and events in the play. All events go against each other:
Happiness – pain
Life- death
Reunification- separation
Hostility – peace
Love – hate
Action – fate
In the play, hostility turns into love, and order is established, but the lovers die before meeting. We can say, semiotics has an important effect on analyzing plays. The concepts, and the flow of events also give us the relationship between sign and textuality.

Samuel Beckett
Fin de Partie (Endgame)
In this part of the analysis, the elements used in stage editing mean to us semiotically, are analyzed.
     Light: In the play Fin de Partie, there is a grey light on the stage. This color is neither black nor white. By creating a fuzzy energy, this color attracts the audience's energy.
     Decor: There is no stage decoration, but there are items that actors must use. For example, because the character of Hamm is paralyzed, he needs a wheelchair, Nagg and Nell need a home to accommodate, and Clov needs stairs and binoculars to look outside.

Actor: The physical defects of the characters in the play can be considered as a sign of the missing and poor situations of the real world people.

Costume: Hamm looks sick with its robe and slippers. Instead of a bleeding wound in Hamm's head, bleeding his brain makes us think about the blood that came out. It is a reference to the theater that the handkerchief is red and Hamm is closed to the face at the beginning of the play, Hamm's bloody handkerchief is closed again when the play is over. The handkerchief is the theater curtain. So we can say that the handkerchief is an iconic sign.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the light of this study, the plays of Brecht, Shakespeare, and Beckett are analyzed. The scenario of Romeo and Juliet shows us that "intense emotions and rushed actions bring bad results" (Tr. Çakmak, nd.:138). Brecht's plays generally include choir and music. He claims that music is a commentary element that influences how the play interacts. Brecht asserts that behavioral language demonstrates the independent, occasionally communicative, and polyphonic relationship between the language used in theatre and the systems of behavioral sign or face expression (Tr. Efe, 2001:50, 56). In the play Die Dreigroschenoper, "A messy room that overwhelms you, incompatible clothes of brothel women, and tango by Mac band Jenny in the painting are cynical." These are important opinions and results cited and observed in terms of semiotics. The light, decor, clothes, and sometimes quotes used in the games give us the main elements that make up the game. They create an idea of the game in the audience's eyes. Sometimes, when a used quote is analyzed in text linguistics, we can perceive it as a sign, as the player's mimics will be in a way to support this quote. We examined plays from different semiotic perspectives. While some went actor-oriented, in some cases we analyzed event flow and character analysis, while in others it was purely décor and light. This showed us that we can approach everything we watch from different semiotic perspectives. Thus, by developing a versatile perspective, we may have gained the ability to distinguish and analyze each sign.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to analyze the signs around the representation of the plays of playwrights Shakespeare, Beckett, and Brecht and how these signs were used in their plays. To make these analyses, three theater/drama plays were analyzed. We investigated how signs are used in these plays in terms of light, decor, actor, costume, posture, texts in plays, etc. How these signs are used in games was analyzed. Three different analyzes were made including event flow and textuality, a general view of signs unit examinations, and stage decorations. The use of signs and character analyses have also been a major factor in the formation of plays and the art of drama.

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