

Intercultural Communication: Semiotics and reading brands

Lecture 10

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Semiotics

- Relationship between signs and meanings
- Arbitrary signs have different meanings to different people
- Common meanings may become “universal” (blue=cold, red=hot; red=stop, green=go)
- Cultures use language to categorize and name things (using prototypes)
- Things can be categorized differently in different cultures (e.g. more words for snow in cold countries than hot ones – why?)

Meaning isn't fixed – change over time

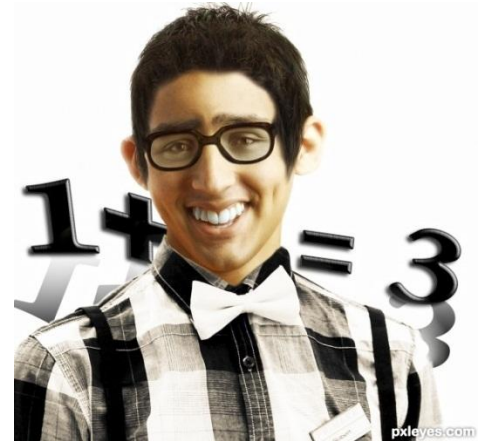
'NICE'

Today: 'nice' = pleasing, attractive.

In the middle ages: 'nice' = ignorant, stupid. (Latin:
nescire: to not know)

Neologisms: 'NERD',

'SELFIE'



Hipster

Hipsters are a subculture of men and women typically in their 20's and 30's that value independent thinking, counter-culture, progressive politics, an appreciation of art and indie-rock, creativity, intelligence, and witty banter. Although "hipsterism" is really a state of mind, it is also often intertwined with distinct fashion sensibilities. Hipsters reject the culturally-ignorant attitudes of mainstream consumers, and are often be seen wearing vintage and thrift store inspired fashions, tight-fitting jeans, old-school sneakers, and sometimes thick rimmed glasses. Both hipster men and women sport similar androgynous hair styles that include combinations of messy shag cuts and asymmetric side-swept bangs. Such styles are often associated with the work of creative stylists at urban salons, and are usually too "edgy" for the culturally-sheltered mainstream consumer. Despite misconceptions based on their aesthetic tastes, hipsters tend to be well educated and often have liberal arts degrees, or degrees in maths and sciences, which also require certain creative analytical thinking abilities. Consequently many hipsters tend to have jobs in the music, art, and fashion industries. It is a myth that most hipsters are unemployed and live off of their parent's trust funds.

<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=hipster>

How would You define...

- Lemming?
- Lumber Jack/
Lumbersexual?



The worlds dominant economic institution – TNC/MNC

- What we eat
- What we wear
- Where we work
- What we do
- How we spend our free time



Brand Personality

- Culture
- Iconography
- Ideology

Consumers receive smth. they can relate to, increasing the brand awareness and its' popularity



key brand elements

- logos and word marks, colors and typography that we are offering in our brand
- every detail has a meaning
- factors are integral for a connection with your target customer (without this consistency we will not be able to establish a level of trust which results in *brand loyalty*)



John Lewis: Man on the Moon 2015

- <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/nov/06/john-lewis-christmas-advert-age-uk>
- <http://www.theguardian.com/media/tvandradioblog/2015/nov/06/john-lewis-christmas-advert-who-is-moon-hitler>
- <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/nov/06/john-lewis-advert-christmas-loneliness-ageing>
- <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/nov/06/john-lewis-2016-christmas-advert-tears-twitter-and-twee-pop>
- <http://www.theguardian.com/media-network/2015/nov/06/man-on-the-moon-john-lewis-christmas-ad-2015-industry>
- <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/john-lewis-christmas-ad-2015-watch-the-man-on-the-moon-a6723606.html>

Meaning isn't fixed across cultures

The Toyota **MR2** had marketing problems in France.

The GM/Opel **Nova**, **Ford Fiera**, **Mazda Laputa** in Spain.

Ford Pinto in Brazil.

VW Jetta in Italy .

Clairol's hair iron, the **Mist Stick**, in Germany.

Why?

- *Understanding Customers*, Chris Rice (Routledge, 2011)
- *International Marketing*, Stanley J. Paliwoda & Michael J. Thomas (eds.), (Routledge, 2011).

Signs

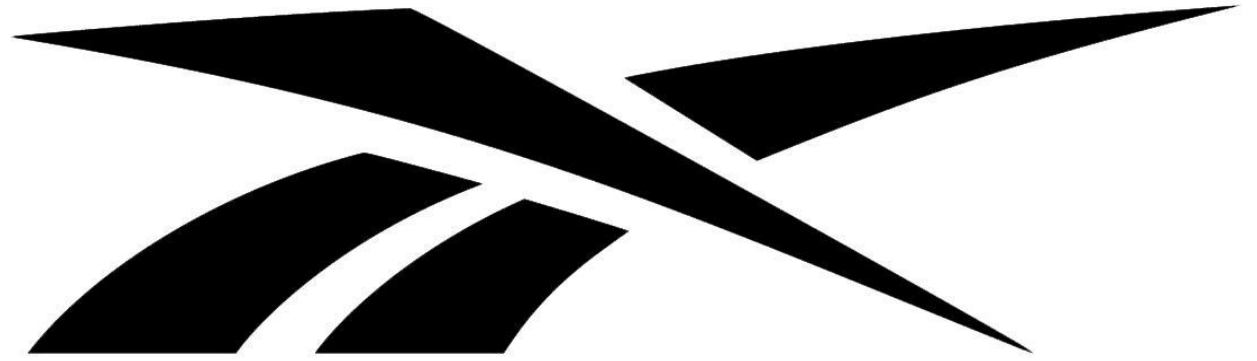
- SIGNIFIER: words, sounds, traffic lights, the smell of a rose, colour, a smile, etc.
- SIGNIFIED: mental image, concept it generates
- **Problem:** Different cultures → different semiotic systems

Problems with the 'signified'

We draw on our existing cultural knowledge which may be incomplete

– 'reebok' ???

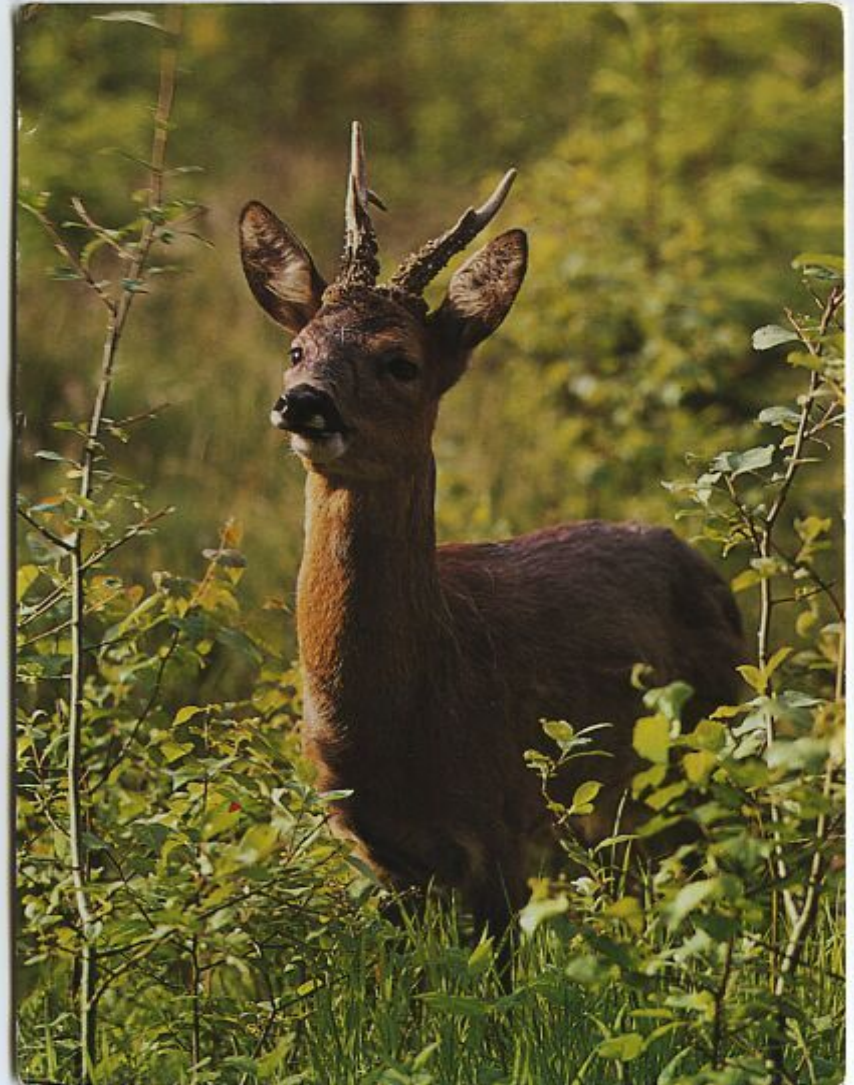
Reebok



Reebok

an antelope (*Pelea capreolus*) of southern Africa, having woolly brownish-grey hair

<http://dictionary.reverso.net/english-definition/reebok>



Knowledge helps us to categorize

If I meet an animal that:

- Has fur
- Has a long nose
- Has a wagging tail
- Has 4 legs
- Makes a barking noise

I assume it's a dog because these are my criteria for "dogness".

I may still be wrong – it might be a wolf or coyote, a reebok, or a weird kind of horse, etc.

More terminology to learn

- Langue/Language
- Parole
- Syntagm
- Paradigm
- Denotation
- Connotation
- Commutation test

Saussure: *langue* and *parole*

- Langue – the system of a language, its entire grammar and vocabulary
- Parole – language as it is spoken by a particular person in a particular place, complete with errors, hesitations, etc.

Saussure: syntagm and paradigm

- a sign is linked to another one (syntagmatic or associative relationship)
- a sign is substituted by another one (paradigmatic relationship)

Syntagm

Signs link together to generate meaning.

John loves Mary (signs=Subject Verb Object) not
Loves John Mary (VSO)

or

everything you are wearing today

T shirt, jeans, socks, underwear, shoes

or

all the camera shots in a scene in a film

Syntagm: snorkel +
diving suit + goggles +
flippers + air tank



Paradigm

Individual signs link in a syntagm. Each is chosen from a range of possible alternatives – paradigmatic choices.

- John adores Mary.
- John fell for Mary.
- John loves vodka.
- John would like to be Mary.

Paradigmatic range = all subject names, all possible verbs, all objects, etc.

Paradigmatic choices

- Grouped choices from sets of similar items in your wardrobe

Which shirt (from all your shirts)?

Which pair of socks (from all your socks)?

or (e.g. in a gangster movie)

Which hat (from all possible hats – woolly, baseball, fedora)



Which socks today? – choosing from the paradigm

3 paradigms: upper body, lower body, shoes = 1 syntagm



1



2



3





PARADIGMS

SYNTAGM



Paradigmatic choices

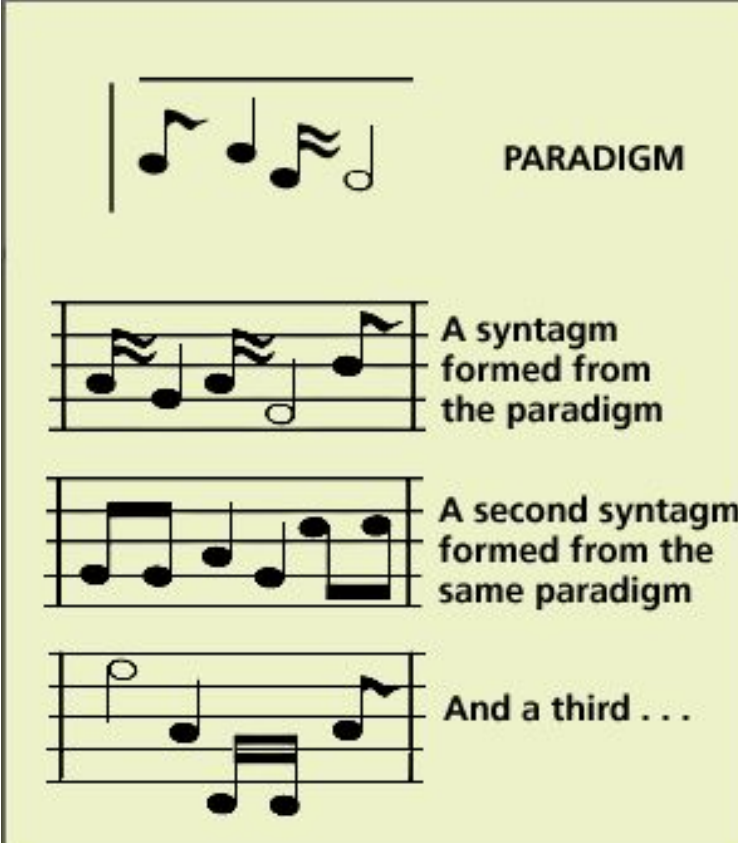
A newsreader says...

Taliban _____ attacked a building in Kabul today.



What might the missing word be? How many alternatives can you think of?

Syntagm and paradigm



The diagram is contained within a light green rectangular border. At the top, a horizontal line with a vertical bar on the left and a vertical bar on the right contains four notes: a quarter note, a quarter note, an eighth note, and a half note. To the right of this line is the word "PARADIGM". Below this, three musical staves are shown, each with a label to its right. The first staff contains a sequence of notes: an eighth note, a quarter note, an eighth note, a quarter note, and a half note. The second staff contains a sequence of notes: a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, a quarter note, and a half note. The third staff contains a sequence of notes: a half note, a quarter note, a quarter note, and a half note.

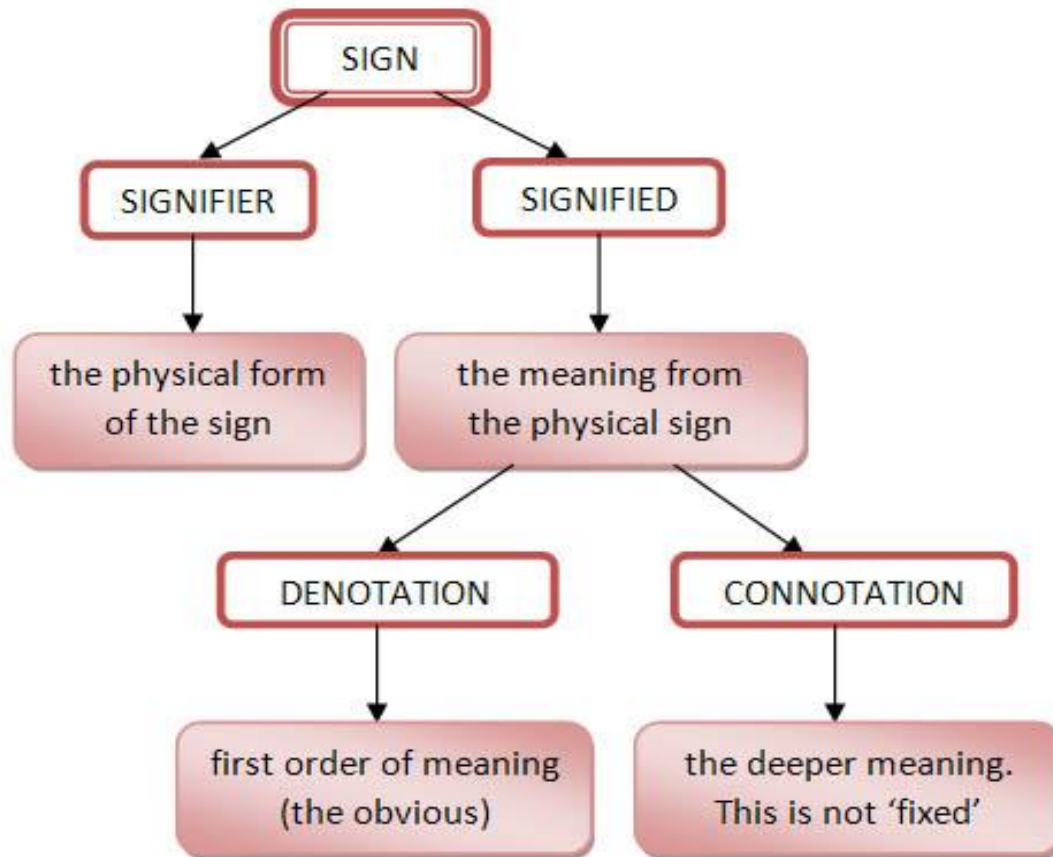
PARADIGM

A syntagm formed from the paradigm

A second syntagm formed from the same paradigm

And a third . . .

Denotation, connotation, meaning



Signification: denotation

The simple relationship between a sign and its referent.

3 is a code used in many cultures to signify the concept of number three.

“Red” is the English word for a colour in the spectrum – not blue, not white, not green.

“Mogadishu” is a word that means the capital city of Somalia.

Signification: connotation

- What a sign means, culturally.

In many cultures “red” connotes danger, anger, passion, revolution.

Connotations of signs are not always universal -
may be very variable

Example

- The word GUCCI

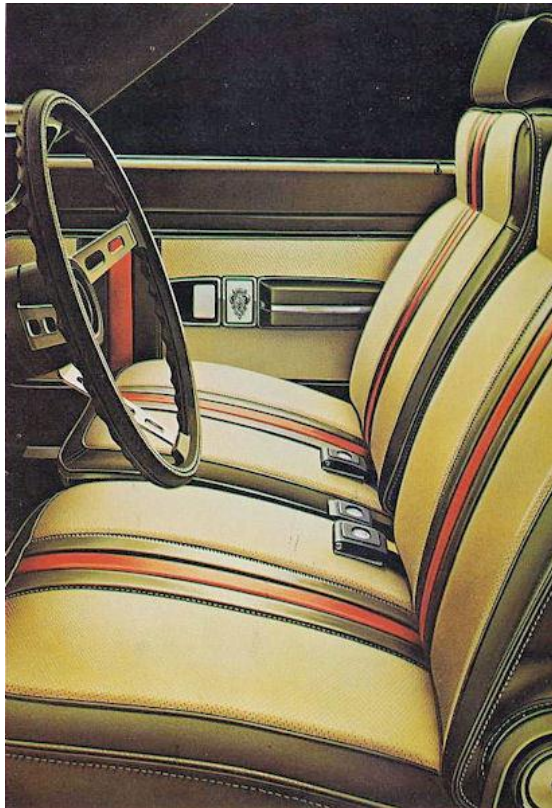
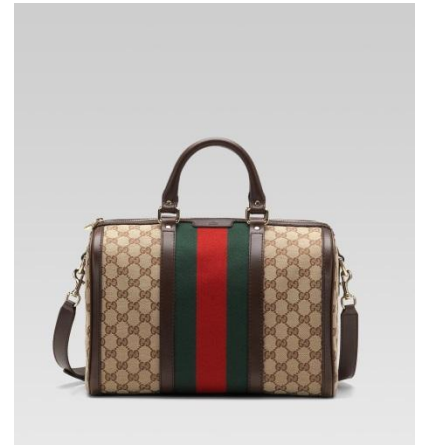
Denotes....what?

Connotes...what?

What's the signifier?

What's signified?

GUCCI



Guccio Gucci

(26 March 1881 – 2 January 1953)





Jan van Eyck The Arnolfini Portrait (1434)

Symbolic signs

(signifiers):

- lighted candle in chandelier
- convex mirror
- dog
- bride's hand on her stomach
- fruit on table

Possible medieval meanings (signified):

- presence of Christ, couple's passion
- eye of God
- marital faithfulness
- willingness to bear children
- Virgin Mary

Complete the chart, think of more

Denotation	Connotation
The colour white	
A clenched fist	
A red Ferrari	
The colour pink	
A snow-capped mountain	
A snake	

Commutation test

- A way of seeing if, by changing a sign in the paradigm, you change the meaning of the text.

Example: Marlboro ads (1954-1999)

Typical signs: cowboys, horses, open countryside, country music

Change these to: women, donkeys, a hotel, hip hop music



Marlboro: a typical syntagm. What are its paradigmatic signs?

Welcome to
Malboro Country.



SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING:
Smoking causes hypothermia
as well as premature death.

**Adbusters: a small
paradigmatic change**



Brokeback Mountain (2005) – shared signs, affects the meaning of both itself and of Marlboro