

Types of signs

Source: online material with required changes

- Icons
- Indexes
- Symbols



An icon

- An *icon* is a sign which would possess the character that gives it identity/significance, even though its object had no real existence in some cases.
- An icon and its object are similar in form or structure.
- Examples:
 - A photograph in the passport representing the passport holder.
 - A geographical map representing a country.

An index

- An *index* is a sign which would, at once, lose the character which makes it a sign if its object were removed, but would not lose that character if there were no interference.
- The index might be caused by the object. Examples:
 - A bullet-hole as sign of a shot
 - Smoke as sign of fire
 - Fever as sign of flu

A symbol

- A *symbol* is a sign which would lose the character that renders it a sign if there were no one to interpret it.
- The link between the sign and its object is purely conventional/ arbitrary/human-made.
- For Examples:
 - Traffic lights
 - Musical notes
 - Interaction of spies
 - Language
- Let us again examine these concepts with some pictorial-pleasure as examples:

C. S. Peirce's – Icon, Index, Symbol

- Every sign works in different way as well as on different level
- Some 'signs' are closely related to the things they represent and look exactly like them – these signs are called ICONS.
- All these images are iconic, some more motivated than others
- ICONIC signs communicate truth, reality, seriousness.



Index

- An index is a sign which is **related** to the object it represents but **not directly** or in a concrete way.
- For example, a **knock** on the door – an **index of arrival**. The knock is not ARRIVAL, it is not a direct representation of arrival, but it **indicates** arrival and is **connected** to that event.
- Most facial expressions work in an indexical way – because you cannot **represent** an emotion, we look for **signs** which **indicate** them e.g a smile is an index (or sign) of happiness. The smile isn't a direct representation of happiness.
- Indexes are used to represent abstract things – emotions, ideas etc.
- The smile and happiness on Kat's face might be misleading, let us see some more examples of indexes:



Symbol

- Symbols are signs which have NO link at all with the thing it represents.
- The only reason we know what they mean is because we have learnt what they mean over time.
- **Words** are symbols – there is no actual link between the word ‘table’ and the object because if there was, the word would be the same in all languages.
- People decide to give objects labels in an arbitrary, random way and as long as other people agree to these labels, we all know what each of the symbol means in the language.
- For example **pachyderm** or pachiderm is the random label (symbol) applied to which animal?
- Pachyderm refers to one of the Pachydermata, an obsolete order of mammals. Some of the pachyderms are Elephants · Rhinoceroses etc.
- What is this symbol?



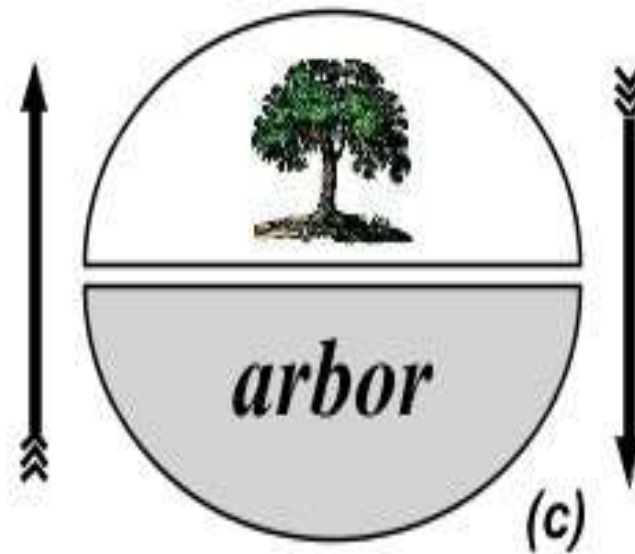
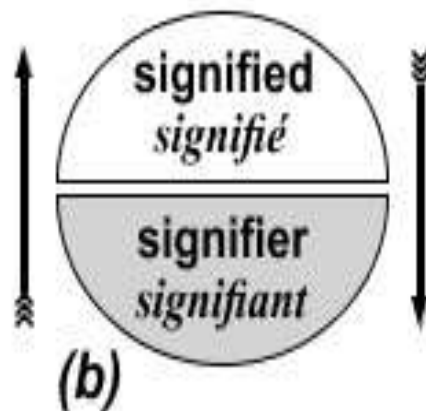
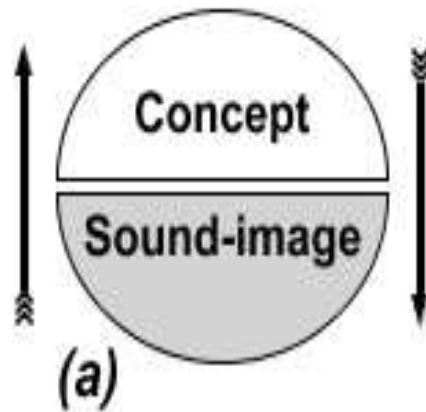
A sum up:

- **Linguistics**
 - Scientific Study/Analysis of language
- **Scientific means method or steps that makes the study scientific:**
 - Linguistics study the elements of language through scientific methods
- **Language has several important features, in which system of sign and systematicity of the sign system are most important ones**

Ferdinand de Saussure

- **Sign:**
 - combination of a concept and a sound-image
- **Signifier:**
 - the sound-image
- **Signified:**
 - concept

Saussure's world of Sign



Ferdinand de Saussure

- **Arbitrary Nature of the Sign**

- We have inherited language from our ancestors.

- Language is connecting sound-images

- A “fence” and the concept of



or



Ferdinand de Saussure

- **Arbitrary Nature of the Sign (2)**
 - Boundaries become blurred when we look at different types of “language”
 - For example body language, pantomime, spoken language, written language, deaf-mute language, sign language, Braille etc.

Ferdinand de Saussure

- **The Linear Nature of the Signifier**

- **Signifier** = sound-image
- it is measurable only in terms of time.
- Sounds fade away and die out in the air after some time
- **Problem:** when writing down the “sound-image”, the components of sound may get lost.

Ferdinand de Saussure

- **Immutability of the Sign**

- The **signifier** (sound-image) “is fixed, not free”
- “community itself cannot control so much as a single word;
- And thus it is bound to pre-form of existing language, traditional transmission of language
- **Problem:** modern language has added many different words (e.g. computers, “teen” language)

Ferdinand de Saussure

- **Immutability of the Sign (2)**

- Language is a law, not a rule which we can opt to follow.
- We inherit these laws from our ancestors.
- Language is a social “institution” and must be seen in the setting.
- “Speakers are largely unconscious of the laws of language.”

Ferdinand de Saussure

- **Immutability of the Sign (3)**

(1) **Arbitrary Nature** of the Sign

(2) **Multiplicity** of Signs **Needed** for Language

(3) System is “overly (or overtly) complex”

(4) Community does not care to change things

Tradition ⇔ follows no law ⇔ arbitrary

Ferdinand de Saussure

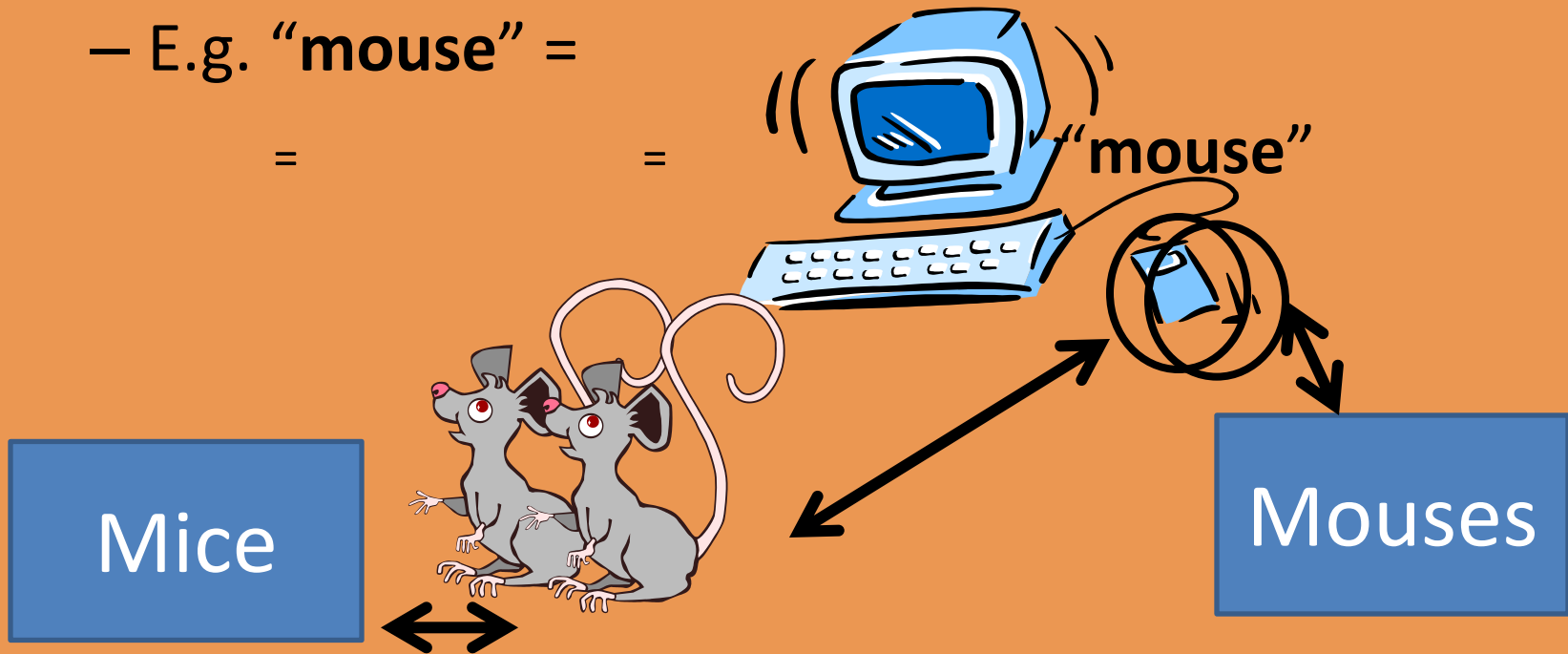
- **Mutability**

- Time changes the relationship between **signifier** (sound-image), **signified** (concept) and therefore the **sign**.

- E.g. “mouse” =

=

=



Ferdinand de Saussure

- **Mutability (2)**

- Language = product of both social force and time.
- It holds true even for artificial languages, such as Esperanto.
- That's all 😊