

Are We Always Translating Signs Whether We Know It or Not?

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This paper is an extended review-and-discussion of Professor Dinda Gorrée's recent book *Wittgenstein in Translation: Exploring Semiotic Signatures*. Professor Gorrée's volume focuses on Ludwig Wittgenstein's fragments, many of which ended up in enticingly interconnected books primarily edited by others, and Charles S. Peirce's stops and starts ending in mounds of unpublished papers, a fraction of which have found their way between book covers. Both authors challenge whoever might venture to translate them, especially when they have so much to say on vague and uncertain interpretations, which is to say, translations.

Yet another book by Professor Dinda Gorrée on translation. Impressive. This volume focuses on Ludwig Wittgenstein's fragments many of which ended up in enticingly interconnected books primarily edited by others, and Charles S. Peirce's stops and starts ending in mounds of unpublished papers a fraction of which have found their way between book covers. Both authors challenge whoever might venture to translate them, especially when they have so much to say on vague and uncertain *interpretations*, which is to say, *translations*.

Who better than Professor Dinda Gorrée is able to grapple with Peirce and Wittgenstein in a book on translation theory and practice? Indeed, *Wittgenstein in Translation: Exploring Semiotic Signatures* (hereafter *WT*) is as challenging as it is intimidating. Did I say intimidating? Well, yes. That it is. Intimidating, which is understandable, for *WT* attracts more than it upsets, enlightens more than it aggravates, elucidates more than it spreads dark clouds of confusion. It is a meticulously documented book, walking the reader through more intellectual real estate than s/he perhaps might desire. When the trek comes to an end, however, there is a nod signifying a successful journey with ample markers. Indeed, the reader will most likely conclude that Professor Gorrée meets her goal of constructing "a fresh landscape to Wittgenstein scholarship" through her dedication to the "microscopic and macroscopic view of semiotic translation criticism" (*WT*: 1).

I will offer an essay on this book with three motives in mind: (1) revealing problems when interpreting spoken and written language and creating their rendition in another language, (2) interrelating Wittgenstein and Peirce's concept of signs becoming other signs by way of their *reinterpretation*, that is, *translation*, and (3) revealing a few of my own thoughts that hopefully elucidate the

process underlying Professor Gorlée's adventurously written book in question. Perhaps my efforts will have been of some value to somebody out there. Perhaps. So, I begin by outlining...

How I intend to do it

But I must confess. I don't yet have any clear intentions. So I'll just let it all pour out, flowingly, which is proper for the sign process. Nevertheless, at the outset I really should provide at least a schematic outline revealing some goal; that's the minimal way of academic discourse.

Well, then, consider this: (1) *WT* offers a take on the nature of translation itself; (2) it does so with an implicit dialogic form involving Wittgenstein, and Peirce as a backdrop for the author's study of Wittgenstein translations over the years; (3) it provides helpful remarks on the semiotic quality of Wittgenstein's writing, from the *Tractatus* to *On Certainty* (a semiotic perspective in evolution); (4) it impressively outlines Peirce's theory of signs (which the author dubs "semi-translation"); and (5) it equally impressively renders account of the difficulties translators confront when attacking texts the likes of Wittgenstein's fragments and Peirce's sketchy and often incomplete papers.

WT stands straight and tall. In published form it's Professor Gorlée's own "final interpretant" on the issues she discusses. But there is no finality, I would submit. Professor Gorlée's thoughts will go on; reinterpretations of her text by others will change it into something other than what it was. However, the text is in published form, it is static. So it can't go on; yet it can't help but go on; it will go on; it will always be in the process of going on. In this essay I might be able to play a small role in this "going on".

With this in mind, I'll strive to offer a set of possible corollaries as complements to *WT*. In doing so, I offer ideas about issues therein discussed: certainty and its lack, doubt and belief, the categories, tone, token and type, abduction, induction and deduction, and I will add to these ideas vague signs and general signs and their inconsistencies and incompleteness, classical Aristotelian bivalent logic and what Peirce calls "logic of vagueness", and the "pragmatic maxim".¹ So much for preliminaries.² Let me begin by addressing the notion of...

1. See *Collected Papers* (references to the *Collected Papers* will be designated *CP*, followed by the paragraph number) 1.463-68, 5.447-57, 6.7-34, Hausman, Rosenthal "World", merrell *Meaning Making, Becoming Culture*, also *WT*: 174)

2. Peirce occasionally made mention of what he termed "logic of vagueness" as "logic" in "the broadest possible sense", "logic" fit for all seasons and all possible "styles of reasoning". Such "logic" would go against the grain of classical Aristotelian bivalent logic, at least insofar as it had been developed in Peirce's time (Haack). Peirce's notion of "vagueness" was later picked up by Max Black. It was also, of all philosophers, the obsessively analytical Bertrand Russell who, in a paper on vagueness, suggested that language is invariably vague and that vagueness is a matter of degree. More recently, vagueness has become the focus of Peirce studies by Brock, Chiasson, Engel-Tiercelin, merrell (*Semiosis, Signs Grow, Sensing Semiosis*), and Nadin ("Consistency", "Logic of Vagueness"), among others.

Sign-becoming

WT's "semiotranslation" intimately involves signs, especially with respect to their incessant process of becoming other signs. This is of the nature of *semiosis*. *Semiosis* involves cloudy vagueness becoming particular or individual signs taking on greater clarity as they are becoming signs of *generality*.

The process is by no means a matter of fleshless, unembodied or mentally derived thoughts and their ramifications removed from the concrete world. Rather, it is a matter of semiotic agents, sign makers and takers interdependently, inter-relatedly interacting – co-participating – with the *semiotic* stream of sign-becoming in order to render them more genuine signs whose meanings or interpretants are flowing toward their completion. Professor Gorrée interrelates the process with her semiotranslation, which entails "not a stable thing or artifact, but a continuous flow of ideas or fluid continuum" (WT: 38). Allusions to Heraclitus are forthcoming. Not only can you not step into the same river twice, you can't even step into it once, because once the step has been taken, once there's a sensation of the flow, the river will have already been in the process of becoming something other than what it was becoming. Each step into the river, however momentary, translates both the river and the agent of the stepping into other signs (WT: 292).

How can we say what a sign – specifically, a translated sign – was or is? Problematic. For it's already an-other sign. How can we say what it will have been at some future moment? We can't. Because, as Professor Gorrée points out in many ways throughout her book, both explicitly and implicitly, the process is nonlinear, diverging and converging and coalescing along many lines (see especially WT: 19, 56). Well, then, how can we say any-thing at all about a sign, especially a translated sign, which, as Peirce tells us and David Savan effectively articulates, is of the nature of all signs, since with each interpretation a sign has become translated into an-other sign. I repeat: it's a matter of process.

And process embraces more than mere bivalent either/or values. It takes in a "third way", which I will label the *middle way* – to be specified later. Professor Gorrée knows this well (WT: 46-48, 61). She discusses the nature of the Peircean sign consisting of a *representamen* (often what in ordinary parlance goes as a sign), an *object* (which can be, in addition to a mental thought-object or a physical world object out there, an act, occurrence or happening), and an *interpretant* (brought about through mediation between sign and object in co-participation with some sign maker or taker). Then she judiciously cites Savan regarding the object, and indeed all sign components, as "between true and false, correct and incorrect, acceptable and unacceptable" (WT: 47, Savan 27). This "inbetweenness" is the third – fluctuating and flowing – rivulet that keeps the process going. It's the *middle way*.

I would venture to suggest that this *middle way* is germane to process, and hence to the nature of signs becoming other signs. In line with the idea of process, in *middle way* thinking there is no "is", and for that matter there is no "what" and there is no "it". Nor is there any "when" or any "where". How can this be? we surely wish to ask. It must be, for the wellspring from which signs emerge holds no more than possible signs, signs that *might* emerge hopefully to become

what a sign taker perceives and conceives as what *is*, of such-and-such a nature, because it *must be* the case according to that sign taker's ways of sign making and taking within her particular cultural milieu. What a sign *might be* as possibility knows of no bivalent qualification of "is" in contrast to what it "is not", for it is no more than just that: possibility. It can possibly be one among many possibilities. What a sign is taken to be what *is* with respect to the object, act or happening with which it interrelates, it abides by bivalent logic insofar as it "is" what it "is" and cannot be other than what it "is".

A given sign's "isness" exists because it follows the ways of sign making and taking within the context of some particular culture. Which is to say that it could have been some other signs that emerged from the vast range of all possible signs in some time past; and its "isness" could well become some alternate "isness" at some future moment within a different cultural context. So whereas signs of "isness" stick to the tenets of classical logic (identity, Non-Contradiction, Excluded-Middle), possible signs and signs whose "isness" is context-dependent and can become other than what they are follow a *middle path*, the *middle way*, which is open to an *Included-Middle* between rigid eithers and ors, the binary horns of rigid classical logical principles.

How, then, can a model, or an image as it were, be formed of the Peircean processual sign? In spite of my wish for greater specificity, Figure 1 is the best I can offer. R stands alone without its other, O, and I – the third, the "inbetween", the mediator – brings about a meditative coalescence of R and O in the same way that it brings about coalescence between itself and R and O. The process is, so to speak, "democratic". None of the three sign components is necessarily any more important than the other two. Signs' flowing becomingness is periodically punctuated by fluctuations and breaks giving rise to heaves and shifts that yield what at the outset appears as completely new signs. I must add that the sign-model in question here is not merely "triangular"; nor is it two-dimensional. It is more appropriately three-dimensional, "tripodic", and when a dimension of time is included to yield the idea of timespace, it depicts virtually perpetual non-linear becoming.

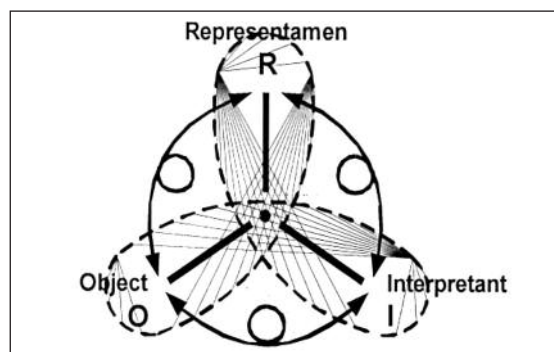


Figure 1.

For example, art as depiction of the world becomes unexpectedly strange in the hands of Claude Monet, Paul Cézanne, Vincent Van Gogh, and others; then the whole idea of art copying the world is upended by Pablo Picasso, George Braque, and others. Translations! Newtonian Euclidean space undergoes alterations thanks to James Clerk Maxwell and Michael Faraday; then it is replaced by Riemannian curved space by Albert Einstein (Shlain, Szamosi, Waddington). Translations! Semiotranslation eventually gives “‘familiar’ forms and shapes to ‘strange’ ones” (Anderson and Gorlée 242).

Flowing magma rather than petrified lava: Peirce’s categories of sign and mind

Peirce’s semiotics, consisting of the *physical world* (including signs), *experience* (signs of the *mind* interrelating signs “out there” with that to which the signs presumably and hopefully refer), and *mind* (signs “in here”), are by no means fixed pigeon-holes, but rather, they are relative to culturally and socially conventional world versions and their timespace contexts within which signs emerge.³

Peirce’s trio of categories embracing the whole of semiotics is, cryptically put – due to timespace limitations regarding this essay – as follows: Firstness is sign possibility, Secondness is sign actuality, Thirdness is sign probability, likelihood or necessity according to the prevailing conventions. The categories imply *feeling* and *sensing*, *perceiving* and *experiencing*, and *thinking* and *reasoning*; or metaphorically speaking, if you will, they suggest *stasis*, *movement* and *acceleration*.⁴ Peirce’s three-way process of R becoming R-O becoming R-O-I becoming R to initiate the process anew, or of Firstness-becoming Secondness-becoming Thirdness-becoming and back to mere possibility involves “cumulative and complex acts of translation”. Professor Gorlée writes that “communication, interpretation, and translation must be seen as almost autonomous” (*WT*: 46).

Translation from source text to target text sees the latter as nothing fixed but an indefinite range of indeterminate possibilities, that, to become actualised (Firstness), demand a choice and a selection after which there is a relative degree of determinateness and apparent fixity (Secondness). Yet, nothing is what it was; Thirdness calls for additions and deletions with every subsequent re-translation or reading, as indeterminacy flows into the mainstream. From possibilities there is no-sign, or a zero-sign, “nothing”, or “nothingness” in Peirce’s words (*WT*: 74, 102f, 238). This zero-sign is depicted by the point, the apex of the tripod, in Figure 1. The tripod allows, I would suggest, the image of Firstness becoming

3. “World version” and “timespace” come from Nelson Goodman (*Worldmaking*), and Einsteinian cosmology depicting the universe as a four-dimensional “spacetime” manifold (Kaku, Pagels *Perfect Symmetry*; see also merrell *Entangling Forms, Meaning Making, Becoming Culture*).

4. For further discussion, see *CP* 1,284-353, 2,227-307, Almeder, Esposito, Hookway *Peirce*, Mertz.

Secondness becoming Thirdness, and back again. Throughout the process, there is the silent, usually hidden but ubiquitous “betweeness”, the *middle way*, of Thirdness becoming from Firstness and Secondness. That is, what might possibly become can be both true and false, given a pair of different cultural timespace contexts, and once it has become what presumably “is”, it might be neither true nor false, for, through the *middle way*, at some future moment it might well be something new from within some alternate timespace context (merrell *Entangling Forms, Becoming Culture*, also *WT*: 218, 231-32, 235).

This, of course, plays havoc with classical bivalent principles of good logic and reason. Rather than *Identity*, there is *Identitylessness*, since all that is, is becoming something other than what it was becoming. Rather than *Non-Contradiction*, *Contradiction* is embraced, since what possibly is can conflict with what might also possibly be, given the world version and timespace conditions. The *Excluded-Middle* doesn’t always hold, since the *middle way* – *Included-Middle* so to speak – offers alternate possibilities, and if one of them is selected, the process goes back to its fountainhead for another, different flow. Translations all! – we can say of the entire process.

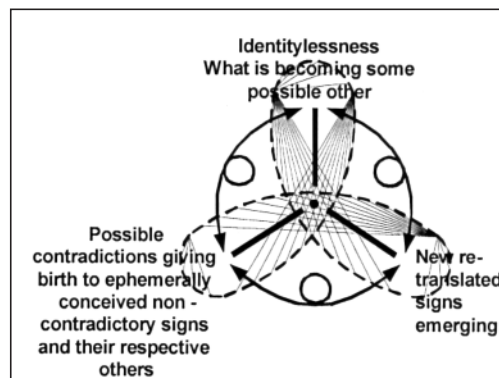


Figure 2.

Along these lines, contemplate Figure 2, if you wish, as a template for R-O-I, Firstness-Secondness-Thirdness, and Possible translation-Actual translation-Retranslation. Professor Gorlée implies as much, I believe – the “discovery process of interpretation and translation arises from an intellectual curiosity” (*WT*: 47). Now for a turn to...

Processes within the flow

The author of *WT* perceptively focuses on the role of tones, tokens and types. Patterning the three categories, they entail a *quality of feeling* (say, a sense of *yellowness*), the *instantiation of an individual sign* (this *lemon* here and now), and the *sign as a generality* (like the class of all lemons, it is, of course, ordinarily taken as *yellow*). Translation follows this same liquid weaving and wavering channel

(R \curvearrowright O \curvearrowright I, and Firstness \curvearrowright Secondness \curvearrowright Thirdness – where \curvearrowright implies processual nonlinearity, context dependency and non-bivalence). This involves transition from vagueness to *relative determinateness to alternatives* that, if fortunate, may find themselves swirling up to the surface and into the light of day.

The author also wisely ushers in Peirce's notion of *abduction*, a complement to *induction* and *deduction*, which are the customary focus of bivalent thinking to the exclusion of *abduction*. This entails processual flow: *abduction* (what *might be* the answer to an unexpected turn of events) \curvearrowright *induction* (what *has been* the case, but is now up for question) \curvearrowright *deduction* (what is *likely* the answer, given certain hypothetical conditions) (Frankfurt, Harris and Hoover, Hoffman, Pape). As Professor Gorrée puts it, abduction offers hardly any “logical reasonings”, only “free speculations” regarding a problem situation. Induction uses apparent “facts” to determine what is under ordinary circumstances the case, according to some general rule. Deduction uses given general rules to “find the solution to a problem” through counterfactual hypothetical reasoning (*WT*: 281).

This trio of terms likewise has a role in the translating process. Abduction is a play with possibilities, tones regarding how signs of the source language interrelate with signs in the target language; deduction puts the signs together to ascertain whether these signs and those signs bear sufficient likeness; induction pecks target language signs on the monitor in order to see how they fit with signs from the source language.

Professor Gorrée appropriately alludes to Wittgenstein's river metaphor in this regard (*WT*: 291f). The river itself is Firstness. It offers tones, opening up to abducted possibilities.⁵ The river bed as silt softly changes according to the river's rivulets, vortices, undulations and flow. The river's bedrock ordinarily suffers alterations with geological torpidity. However, when the river is at flood stage there can be violent upheavals, occasionally causing the bed to be displaced altogether (paradigm shifts: for example, the Earth as Center of the Universe α the Sun as Center) (see also *WT*: 78-82, 165).

On the surface, the river is flux, from flowing, to gentle eddies, to white-water rushes. The river bed guides it along and gives it some stability. But the river's rebelliousness never ceases to bring about changes in the river bed, depositing a little extra silt here, taking some away there, to leave only bedrock, cutting into the bank somewhere else, and occasionally changing the contours of the river entirely. Everything is in relative motion. The multiple lives flowing along with a human community make up a river; the community's form of life as a whole makes up the river bed. The background form of life holds the community's history; the lives within the community come and go, as the community's history unfolds. Given the ebb and flow, coming and going, rising and falling, swinging and fluctuating nature of forms of life, the number of varying

5. It bears mentioning that Professor Gorrée's allusion to Wittgenstein's river metaphor dovetails effectively with her frequent words on “language-games”.

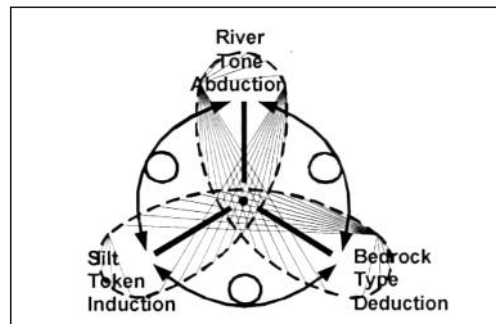


Figure 3.

forms of life within a culture is virtually equal to the number of individuals within that culture.

This is signs becoming signs! Translations! I offer Figure 3 for your contemplation. Let's now consider the possibility of...

Portmanteauing the flow

Elsewhere, I've considered a metaphor-model for sign-becoming, or signs translating signs: *portmanteau contradictory complementary coalescence* of word-signs (merrell *Processing Cultural Meaning, Entangling Forms, Meaning Making, Becoming Culture*). It is comparable to what Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner term cognitive "blending" (Fauconnier and Turner, "Blending", "Principles", *The Way We Think*). How so? Chiefly through inspiration from Niels Bohr's Complementarity Principle (Bohr, Murdoch, Plotnitsky), Werner Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle (Heisenberg, Smith), Kurt Gödel's incompleteness theorems entailing undecidability and inconsistency of complex logico-mathematical systems (Goldstein, Hofstadter, Yourgrau), Nelson Goodman's "New Riddle of Induction" (*Goodman Fact, Fiction*), and chaos theory (Bird, Pagels *Dreams of Reason*), quantum entanglement (Aczel), and complexity physics (Prigogine and Stengers). The intricacies are many, multifaceted, knotty, and ornery. Given space and time limitations, the most I can offer here is a few surface details.

Goodman writes about "Grue" emeralds according to the color categories developed by the citizens of a strange newly discovered culture. What they call "Grue" emeralds consist of what we would customarily call "Green" before time t_0 , but thereafter we would label them "Blue". In other words as far as we are concerned they change their color categories for no reason at all. "Grue", of course, is a *Portmanteau* word consisting of "Gr-" from "Green" and "-ue" from "Blue". Such *portmanteauisms* are common in literature – the paradigm case is Lewis Carroll's "jabberwocky" – as well as in much everyday speech. *Portmanteauing* speaking "Smoke/Fog" becomes "Smog", "Cellophane" is a combination of "Cellulose" and "Diaphane", "Blog" is a coalescence of "Web" and "Log", and quantum "Wave" and "Particles" characteristics were once referred

to as “Wavicles”. Newtonian “Space” and “Time” could become Einsteinian “Spime” or “Tace”. Carl Hempel’s “Inductivity Paradox”, placing “White swans” alongside the discovery of “Black swans” in Australia, could become “Whack” or “Blite swans”. Obviously the possibilities are unlimited.

Portmanteauing as semiotic modeling device

What does this have to do with semiotranslation? Quite a bit, I would suggest, that is, if we take *portmanteauing* as a metaphor-model regarding languaging processes. *Portmanteau* words, like all rhetorical devices, involve signs translating signs.

When taken literally and at face value, most of the signs making up *portmanteau* concoctions are at odds with one another, and many of them are contradictory, even inconsistent. As generalities organised into conventional linguistic taxonomies they simply don’t cut the mustard, for their flow has taken them swerving and slithering along tangential lines. So, they undergo change; they translate into other signs, signs that contradictorily complementarily coalesce – emerging from the “betweenness”, the *middle way* – in the process becoming creatively novel signs. Semiotranslatingly speaking, there is a herculean effort to avoid contradictions, inconsistencies, and any and all conflicts between signs from a source language and a target language. But problems inevitably rise up to haunt the translator. It becomes convenient to fudge a little in order to make words fit insofar as possible. Uncertainty remains, however. Well, then, if the signs don’t fit to our satisfaction, we can at least take them in complementary fashion, which, *semiosically*, is exceedingly more pliable. As such, like the Yin-Yang principle, there’s a little of one sign in the other sign, and vice versa.

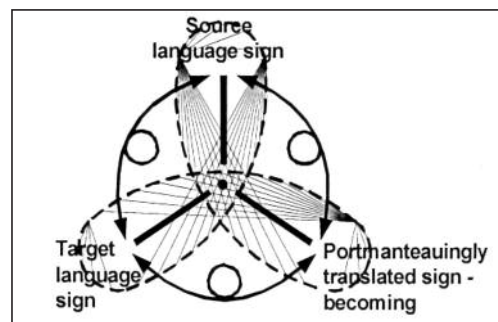


Figure 4.

Thus, I would invite you to ponder Figure 4. Bringing about a coalescence of Figure 4 with Figures 3, 2, and 1, we get the sneaky suspicion that translation isn’t a special case of *semiosis*; rather, *semiosis* is virtually codependent with translation. This equation includes us, as signs translated into other signs by signs in our world as we go along felicitously translating the world’s signs according to our world version and our conventions and their timespace contexts, as well

as our demands and desires and whims and wishes. To paraphrase Peirce, the universe is perfused with signs, if it doesn't consist in its entirety of signs. Once again, Professor Gorrée says as much.

Consideration of an-other "logic"⁶

Speaking of inconsistency and Gödelian incompleteness, consider the Possible Liar Paradox (as the surrogate of an imagined Possibly True Translation Paradox (Post "Possible Liar", "Paradox"; see also *WT*: 277). Think of a used car salesperson who takes us gently by the shoulder while telling us: "Look at that car. What a beaut! One owner, a little lady who used it to go to church and do some shopping once in a while. It purrs like a cat, is loaded with extras, and I'll let you have it for only \$19,999".

He's possibly truthful, possibly lying through his teeth, and possibly deceiving himself, possibly only wanting to make an honest buck, or whatever. What's that answer? How do we go about translating the signs? That's for us to decide, if we're up to it. If we assume he's telling us the truth, it's no more than a hopeful abduction, a *might be*, which could well be false. If we assume he's lying, by the same "logic", uncertainty raises its unwanted countenance. As sheer possibility of truth-telling or lying, the assumption could well be that he might possibly be both a liar and honest. After all, possibilities are no more than that: possibilities. In this case, it is also possible that he is neither lying nor truthful. He might honestly believe he's offering us the deal of a lifetime; he might be unaware of his fudging on the truth, even if just a little bit; he might be cajoled by his boss to say what he says, for his job is at stake; and so on. By the same token, Epimenides's Liar who says "I'm lying" might be referring to some previous utterance, to some utterance that he intends to spew forth in the next moment, or he might merely be joshing, or he might be slyly trying to tie us in a mental knot just for kicks. There are always alternatives within nonlinear, fluctuating, virtually chaotic conditions.⁷ What's the relevance of this apparently nonsensical parlance?

This: semiotranslation is an either/or affair under the best of conditions, but those conditions are relatively rare in everyday living, and even in mathematics, logic, and the sciences. Signs translating signs in order to keep the sign-becoming process going are most commonly a possible *either* or a possible *or*, or likely they might be *both* one thing *and* something else, and thus they can become *neither* the one thing *nor* the other, for there's always the possibility of something else, something creative, novel, perhaps even breathtakingly new. It's ready and waiting to begin emerging into the light of day. And... ah, now we sense it. It's

6. I use the term "an-other 'logic'" with respect to Walter Mignolo's allusion to the Mexican (Aztec) *Nepantla*, "betweenness", from when arise creatively coalescent images, thoughts, and words.

7. Compare this discussion of the Liar Paradox to Professor Gorrée's words on Mikhail Baxtin (*WT*: 214-16, 277).

neither this *nor* that but something becoming something else... then becoming something else... and so on. Semiotranslation, indeed life itself, is a virtually breath-taking, terribly confusing, perplexing, and occasionally ecstatic sense of becoming.

Perhaps I've launched this essay too far into outer space. Actually, all I wanted was fuzzily, cloudily, to extrapolate from *Wittgenstein in Translation* in order to see where it might take me. But wait... I sense another corollary bubbling to the surface in the form of a question...

Is the “pragmatic maxim” indeed as natural as can be?

Peirce's pragmatism remains attuned to the future, to the general thrust of the entire community of dialogic *co-participatory* semiotic agents within their respective world versions. It keys in on how our perception and conception of signs can fare in the *future* as a consequence of signs *present* and signs *past*.

Deduction occurs as if within some *atemporal setting*. Induction is the accumulation, predispositions and proclivities, and whims and wishes, of the sign maker and taker. Abduction is the *timeless spark of insight* when one becomes aware of that which *might possibly be* the case. Abduction, along with induction and deduction, comes into play with application of Peirce's *pragmatic maxim*. Actually, the maxim plays a major role in all facets of *semiosis*, whether we are speaking of science, technology, philosophy, the arts, or the coming and going of everyday life.⁸ In one of Peirce's various renditions of the maxim, we have the following:

Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object. (*CP* 5.402. also 5.2, 5.9, 5.18, 5.427, and *MS* 327).

Allow me to offer a simple illustration of the maxim. Suppose we consider the effect of water on salt, create an inference with respect to what would happen when the two come in contact, put it to the test, and we find our conception bears out our general idea regarding the nature of salt and water. The maxim is a matter of the subject's making what appears to be a possible case (Firstness) the most viable actual case (Secondness), at least for her at a given timespace convergence (Thirdness).

It is a method not for determining whether a collection of signs, characteristically in the form of a sentence or set of sentences, is timelessly and undeniably true. Rather, it is an indeterminately variable method for interacting with signs in such a way that the semiotic world with which they interdependently interrelate and interact appears to be the case, and in the process their *meaning* emerges

8. The maxim as presented in this essay, I must add, goes against the grain of the customary “cognitive” or “conceptual” interpretation of the maxim, as exemplified, for example, in Nesher (“Pragmatic Theory”, “Understanding Sign Semiosis”). My contention is that in addition to symbolic signs, it entails extralinguistic iconic and indexical sign processing.

as a *translation* of what the sign meant for the maxim user previously into what it now means. In other words, the sign has evolved into a sign with broader meaning; in other words, it is a newly *formed, informed, transformed, translated* sign.

The maxim enables signs –including the subject as sign – to lift themselves up by their own bootstraps as far as *meaning* is concerned. It essentially stipulates that the *meaning* of a sentence regarding what appears plausible is the product of all conceivable consequences presented by other sentences – and their own consequences – engendered from the original sentence. This product of all conceivable consequences entails *translation* of the initial signs into a series of conditional sentences, the antecedents of each of which prescribe certain interactions between the interpreter and the signs in question. The consequences ideally consist of observable sign phenomena that should or would make themselves manifest in the event that the original signs are indeed true. But truth is not really the goal. Rather, the task at hand is to draw *meaning* from the signs being processed by way of interpreter-sign interrelations and interactions.

The interpreter takes the initial signs and creates a hypothetical situation, and she puts it to the test in terms of a “thought-experiment in here” or by interacting with the signs’ objects, acts, and happenings “out there” in order to see whether she was right. If her hypothesis turns out to appear correct, at least for the time being, the possibility nonetheless remains that other hypotheticals may at future moments present themselves, compelling her to repeat the operation. If her initial hypothesis is eventually found deficient, then it’s back to square one for an alternative hypothetical, and she repeats the operation. And so on.

Putting this in terms of Peirce’s triadic sign processing, we have (1) “signs”, “salt” and “water”; (2) *semiotic objects*, *salt* and *water*; (3) and, after the signs and their objects have been mediated and processed by their respective *interpretants*, *meaning* emerges (entailing interdependent, interrelated inter-action of the signs, their *others*, and their *interpretants*, while we, as *interpreter-interpretants*, are becoming more extensively *inter-preted-translated* du-ring the process of our bringing about the signs’ *meaning-becoming* by way

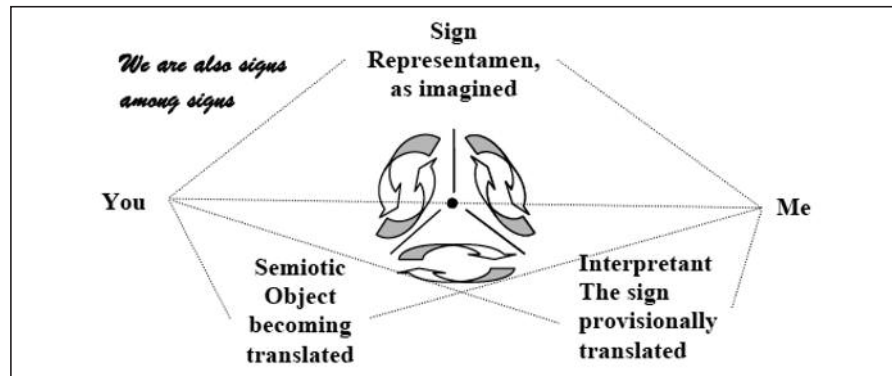


Figure 5.

of our *interpreting-translating* them) (see Figure 5). So, in actual practice following the pragmatic maxim, *salt* is placed in *water* and the *salt* dissolves, re-confirming the *meaning* of the signs in terms of “water soluble” and “solvent” as a consequence of their collaborating with us and our collaborating with them.

In this sense, no categorical Cartesian split exists between my mind and your mind when we communicate, or between our minds and our signs and the physical world: there is you and your social other, including me, and there is our interdependent, interrelated interaction with our signs and the physical world we share. I must stress this important non-Cartesian assertion: (1) our signs, our physical and mental worlds, and our conception of it all (including sign meanings) are interdependent (we can’t have any of them without the whole of them; there is no autonomy); (2) we are, in addition, interrelated and mutually interactive with our signs, which is to say that we make distinctions, given our predispositions, presuppositions, proclivities and prejudices, as well as our inclinations, wishes and whims, and we classify, categorise, qualify and perhaps even quantify our signs, our physical and mental worlds, and our thoughts, hopefully in a more tidy and manicured than messy and muddled fashion, so as to preserve some modicum of order.

Further qualifications

Notice how the maxim implies a combination of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness.

Peirce asks us to consider (Thirdness) the practical bearings of the effects (Secondness) that whatever is under consideration might conceivably have (Firstness). We have what we (deduce or) conceive would be or could be or should result if the (potentially induced or) perceived world were of such-and-such a nature, according to what we (abduce, conjecture or) imagine might possibly be the case. But since what emerges out of our imaginative faculties from the *middle way* – the Included-Middle – is not only unpredictable but virtually without definite limits, the nature of what we would expect to ensue according to the myriad ways our world could be perceived and conceived would be equally unlimited, given all possible times and places.

The maxim, in this regard, plays on our imagining what might possibly be the case in one of an unlimited number of socio-cultural timespace contexts. Thus there can be no closure, since tomorrow might usher in some unforeseen possibilities of imagination (Firstness) that might end in new probabilities (Thirdness) actualised by means of an altered world version (Secondness) (for further on the maxim, see Rosenthal *Peirce’s Pragmatic Pluralism*, Hookway *Pragmatic Maxim*; see also *WT*: 219).⁹

9. It bears mentioning that Professor Gorlée remarks on what she calls Wittgenstein’s “pragmatic maxim” regarding words as deeds (meaning in use) interrelates with Peirce’s “pragmatic maxim” (*WT*: 294).

Abduction is the way of knowing what might be, and once knowing (and meaning) in the active sense enters the scene, there is habituation and entrenchment of that knowing. However, abduction is an ongoing process. Consequently, whatever rules or modes of action might have been developed within a particular society at a particular time and place, the possibility always exists that those rules or modes of action might be changed in one form or another. This “one form or another” ultimately bears on the implication of infinity.

How does infinity enter into the equation? It doesn't, for in a manner of speaking the idea was there all along: the indeterminable range of *possible possibilities*. It is tantamount to the original conception of the mathematical zero, containing the wherewithal for engenderment of an infinite number of positive and negative numbers. Peirce considers the vast, multitudinous range of all possible possibilities in terms of the continuum, which is “all that is possible, in whatever dimension it be continuous” (Peirce *New Elements* 4.343). There is the continuum; then it is severed to reveal individual signs; then like signs are gathered together, and a general signs is created. And the process goes on.

The consequences of all that has been written

Regarding the continuum, classical Principles of Identity, Non-Contradiction, and Excluded-Middle do not apply to the range of all possibilities or to the processual changeability of all actualities within world versions and their time-space contexts. Within the continuum of possible possibilities, two contradictory sets of signs (the Earth as Center, the Sun as Center) can intermingle swimmingly with one another. There no is problem if the Principle of Non-Contradiction loses its strangle-hold, for after all, there is nothing more than possible possibilities.

There are indefinite other possibilities as well (for example, the Center as relative to particular Frames of Reference – Einstein's universe), that can gush up from the *Included-Middle*, between the horns of the presumed bivalent opposition (the Earth is Center, not the Sun, not a Star, and so on). The *Included-Middle* during the process pays the classical Principle of Excluded-Middle no mind at all, for it is attuned to something fresh and new from the wellsprings of possible abducted or conjectured responses (the Sun as Center, the Center as everywhere according to the timespace Frame of Reference, and so on).

This is to say that there must be a non-bivalent, non-linear, context dependent, loose, limber and vague “logic”, an-other “logic”, Peirce's “logic of vagueness”, that allows for divergent and coalescent “styles of reasoning” (Hacking “Language, Truth”, “Scientific Reasoning”). Hence, I would suggest, Professor Gorrée's frequent allusions to “vagueness”, “uncertainty”, “doubt”, and amorphic “belief”, “habit”, and “truth” and “falsity”. Semiotranslation lodged in classical logic becomes lethargic, stuck in its intransigent ways and means; flexible “logic” without semiotranslation has nary a chance of showing the stuff by which it nimbly does its “signs-becoming-signs” dance.

Professor Gorrée, I must add as a final note, performs her semiotranslative dance marvelously, even though she manages to hold onto her faith in the “one

final interpretant-sign” – which seems as natural as can be regarding philosophical discourse (*WT*: 326). With respect to language in the most general sense, however, I would suggest that we finite, fledgling, fallible semiotic agents can hardly hope for such a utopian state, for if we might happen to have found it, it would just be that: a state, fixed in all its characteristics. It would be utopian, for sure, the Grand Unified Closure of semiotics, holding the Theory of Everything. *Semiosis*, however, is always going on. It is process, and it will continue to play out its role, whether we like it or not and whether we might wish to rebel against its perpetual mutability or not.¹⁰

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10. Perhaps Professor Gorrée attributes the phrase “final interpretant-sign” to the manner in which philosophers are often prone to take a translated text: as if it was the “same” as the original. If so, I apologize.

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