

SOCIO-SEMIOTICS AS A JOURNALISM RESEARCH METHOD

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ABSTRACT - As it will be possible to observe, the confrontation between semiotics and sociology in the study of journalism should take on various shades of meaning. In the first place, it is not pertinent to conceive a field of study as a battlefield in which different disciplines confront each other. On the contrary, there are many points in common between sociology and semiotics. In the second place, we should recall that one of the classic counterexamples is that of quantitative content analysis, more characteristic of sociology, versus qualitative semiotics analysis. This confrontation is not new in the social sciences (Alvira, 1983). However, we should point out that we find ourselves facing a false dichotomy. The two methods are not incompatible, but rather complementary.

Keywords: Socio-semiotics. Journalism.

A SÓCIOSEMIÓTICA COMO MÉTODO DE PESQUISA EM JORNALISMO

RESUMO - Como poderemos observar o confronto entre semiótica e sociologia nos estudos de jornalismo deve ser tomado a partir das nuances. Em primeiro lugar, não é pertinente conceber um campo de estudo como um campo de batalha, em que diferentes disciplinas confrontam-se. Ao contrário, existem muitos pontos em comum entre sociologia e semiótica. Em segundo lugar, devemos recordar que uma das mais clássicas controvérsias é a que opõe a análise quantitativa, mais característica da sociologia, versus a análise qualitativa, da semiótica. Esta oposição não é nova nas ciências sociais (Alvira, 1983). Entretanto, devemos pontuar que estamos em face a uma falsa dicotomia. Os dois métodos não são incompatíveis, mas sim complementares.

Palavras-chave: Sócio semiótica. Jornalismo

LA SOCIOSEMIÓTICA COMO MÉTODO DE INVESTIGACIÓN EN PERIODISMO

RESUMEN - Como se intenta mostrar en este artículo, la confrontación entre semiótica y sociología en los estudios de periodismo debe ser abordada a partir de los matices. En primer lugar, no es pertinente concebir un área de estudio como un campo de batalla en el que se enfrentan diferentes disciplinas. Por el contrario, existen muchos puntos en común entre sociología y semiótica. En segundo lugar, es necesario recordar que una de las controversias clásicas es la que opone el análisis cuantitativo, más característico de la sociología, al análisis cualitativo de la semiótica. Esta discrepancia no es nueva en las ciencias sociales (Alvira, 1983). Sin embargo, debemos señalar que nos encontramos ante una falsa dicotomía: los dos métodos no son incompatibles, sino complementarios.

Palabras clave: Sociosemiótica. Periodismo.

The first question that would have to be faced is what our understanding is of socio-semiotics. For this purpose, the best thing is to resort to a classic. In 1988, Hodge and Kress (1991:261) proposed the following definition: “Social semiotics deals mainly with human semiosis as a social phenomenon with relation to its sources, functions, contexts and effects. It also deals with social meanings constructed from multiple semiotics forms, by means of texts and practices, in all types of human society and in all the periods of human history.” As it may be seen, these authors speak of “social semiotics” which is the terminology that in the Anglo-Saxon world refers to socio-semiotics.

Let us review a little history in order to explain the emergence of this socio-semiotics. In 1973, Paulo Fabbri, in his well-known article in *Versus* magazine, “*La comunicazioni di masse in Italia: sguardo semiotico e malocchio de la sociologia*”, announced the decadence of the sociological perspective as compared with the semiotics one in the study of journalism. For Fabbri, traditional sociology enters into crisis on going from the science of facts to the science of meaning. For this reason, semiotics is the most suitable discipline for the study of journalism. But perhaps it would be necessary to introduce various shades of meaning since there are different semiotics and different sociologies. Some are more appropriate than others for studying journalism. Furthermore, the subject of study of meaning and of discourses is not something that exclusively concerns semiotics. As Ferguson (2007:52) declares, “discourse and what is discursive have become key concepts in various areas: historical, academic and that of research. For whoever studies or researches the media, it is important to investigate how it happened that discourse and media discourse have become basic analytic and theoretical concepts...” As we shall see, the semiotics approach to journalism, while it is completely suitable in accordance with certain research objectives, is not the only one possible” (VERÓN, 1987:126-129) (ABRIL, 2007:96-104).

1 NEITHER SOCIOLOGY NOR SEMIOTICS: SOCIO-SEMIOTICS

As it will be possible to observe, the confrontation between semiotics and sociology in the study of journalism should take on various shades of meaning. In the first place, it is not pertinent to conceive a field of study as a battlefield in which different disciplines face each other. On the contrary, there are many points in common between sociology and semiotics. In fact, as Geertz (1976:34) points out, “sociology of knowledge should be called sociology of meaning,

since what is socially determined is not the nature of the conception, but the vehicles of the conception”.

In the second place, we should recall that one of the classic counterviews is that of quantitative content analysis, more characteristic of sociology, versus qualitative semiotics analysis. This confrontation is not new in the social sciences (ALVIRA, 1983). However, we should point out that we find ourselves facing a false dichotomy. The two methods are not incompatible, but rather complementary. Obviously, content analysis is a more suitable method for expanded corpus (Glasgow Media Group, 1977 and 1980), while semiotics makes possible very developed studies of reduced *corpus* (GREIMAS, 1976a).

Beltran (1989:33) takes an equidistant position between a “delirious humanism”, which rejects a quantitative approach to human or social phenomena, and those that reject any approach that is not quantitative and capable of being mathematically formalized. Beltran’s (1989:40) position is very clear when he points out the following:

I am not interested here in establishing preferences, but rather concurrences; quantitative and qualitative empirical methods are, each one of them, necessary *in sua esfera, in suo ordine*, to account for specific aspects, components or planes of the object of knowledge. Not only are they not mutually exclusive, but instead they need and complement each other, all the more insofar as the purpose of comprising the totality of the subject is more professed.

2 JOURNALISM RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

It is necessary to alert the reader to the fact that not all authors interpret methodology in the same way. On my part, I am going to follow the conceptualization proposed by Neuman (1994) or Del Rincón *et. al.* (1993) because this will enable me, on one hand, to highlight other methodological problems, and on the other hand, to recall the sources of the theories of communication. Del Rincón *et. al.* (1993) propose as a trichotomy the methods of social sciences: empirical-analytic, constructivist and socio-critical methodologies. Neuman (1994), on the other hand, utilizes the following terminology on establishing his trichotomy: positivism, interpretative social science and critical social science. I am going to adopt the terminology: positivist, interpretative and critical.

Before entering into each one of these methodologies, I would like to remind you that these classifications should not be understood

as insurmountable barriers, but rather as an attempt to organize knowledge. This means that, on occasion, among the different methodologies, there are points of connection and similarities or the differences are simply a problem of the intensity of the characteristic. For example, Neuman (1994:69) points out that “Positivism is based on *determinism*: human conduct is determined by causal laws over which human beings have little control. Interpretative social science assumes *voluntarism*: people have a wide margin of freedom to create social meanings. The approach of critical science is located between the two. It is partially deterministic and partially voluntaristic.”

Positivist methodology is the methodology closest to the natural sciences. Thus, it intends to establish a series of hypotheses that should be contrasted in an empirical way. However, it is not only a question of verifying these hypotheses in order to describe or explain analyzed reality, rather there is a declaredly predictive intention. Let us recall the positivist aphorism “to know in order to predict, to predict in order to be able to do”. That is to say, in the last instance, there is a desire for prediction to be able to control social phenomena. Orozco (1996:32-33) differentiates the positivist paradigm from the realist one. This latter which is a variant of the former does not intend to be predictive, but instead considers that it is necessary to arrive at the causes of events, the final explanations. Here, in the opinion of Orozco (1996:32), the majority of research on the effects of the communication media would be encountered.

Positivist methodology corresponds to the nomothetic sciences, which brings up the problem of whether it is applicable to the social sciences or only to the natural sciences. For Orozco (1996:29) in the social sciences “the explanation for events is not given by the event itself, but rather in the context, in the environment in which the events occur”. This is one of the many criticisms which the positivist model has received from the social sciences, when the model of the physical sciences is transferred to the model of the social sciences.” Another criticism of positivism is that it views “reality in a fragmented manner and by concentrating on the observable phenomena of reality it runs the risk of ignoring other dimensions of the latter. On the other hand, some social situations are difficult to observe without being distorted, and some studies can be unrepeatable or difficult to replicate.” (DEL RINCÓN et al, 1995:28-29). But, on the other hand, it is considered to be the only really scientific method. This method supports methodological objectivity since it requires research

techniques which are independent of the researcher and which permit repetition. Positivism considers that the only valid knowledge is that which is verifiable and measurable. Quantification is basic for positivist methodology. For positivism, the social sciences are “a method which combines deductive logic with precise empirical observations of individual conduct in order to discover and confirm a series of causal probabilistic laws which can be used to predict general models of human activity.” (NEUMAN, 1994:58).

Within the theories of communication, we would place the functionalist structural perspective in the positivist methodology. The usual techniques of positivist methodology are tests, laboratory studies, surveys, systematic observation and content analysis.

Interpretative methodology, which is sometimes called hermeneutic, is founded on the humanities, although socio-phenomenology, semiotics and socio-semiotics must be taken into account. Interpretative methodology seeks to discover the meanings of social actions, their practices and their discourses. That is to say, what an event is in itself is not as important as what the social actors interpret it to be. As Orozco (1996:33) points out, it is not so much a question of attaining objective knowledge but rather that of attaining consensual knowledge. With interpretative methodology, we find ourselves with

a *holistic-inductive-ideographic* research process, seeking an overall comprehension of the phenomena and situations studied. It utilizes the inductive path; concepts, comprehension of reality and interpretations are developed based on information. An appropriate social climate is created so that people can respond faithfully according to their experiences and way of life, keeping in mind the character of the phenomena and the context of the situations.” (DEL RINCÓN et al, 1995:29-30).

The criticism, which is customarily made of this methodology, regards its subjective character. It is said that the system for gathering information is relatively unreliable because the subjects can give incomplete data or the researcher can give a slanted view of reality. Although generalization is not one of the objectives of interpretative methodology, positivism considers that the particular does not constitute science, and therefore questions the scientific character of this methodology.

For Neuman (1994:62) “the interpretative approach is the systematic analysis of the meaning of social action through direct observation of people in their natural space in order to succeed in understanding and interpreting how people create and maintain their social worlds.”

Among the theories of communication with respect to interpretative methodology, we could include the Palo Alto School, symbolic interactionism, constructionism and ethno-methodology. The techniques most utilized by interpretative methodology are participative observation, laboratory studies, life histories, in depth interviews and discursive analysis.

Critical methodology is basically a rational reflection, which seeks to unveil the distortion which ideology, taken as false conscientiousness, produces in people's conception of reality. The intention here is to expand people's critical awareness because the dominant ideologies conceal their particular political interests under an appearance of rationality. It is a question of showing these contradictions plainly and denouncing the appearance of rationality which protects them. For critical methodology "social science is a process of critical analysis which should go beyond the superficial illusions which conceal the real structures of the material world in order to help people change the conditions and construct by themselves a better world." (NEUMAN 1994:67).

The criticisms that are customarily made of this methodology are that it is politically oriented, that it is based on a few specific values and that it is decidedly interventionist with regard to social reality. All this makes it lose objectivity and neutrality.

In critical methodology, with relation to the theories of communication, it would be possible to include the Frankfurt School, political economy studies, cultural studies and also socio-semiotics. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that cultural studies and socio-semiotics could also be included in interpretative methodology.

The usual techniques of critical methodology are observation of the social reality, life histories, in depth interviews and discursive analysis.

For some authors "Critical science incorporates the practices and objectives of both empirical-analytic and constructivist methodologies, and brings together empirical and interpretative accounts in order to facilitate its dialectical and critical purposes. Critical science seeks to recover the role of the theoretical for social theory and politics in general." (DEL RINCÓN et al, 1995:31).

One of the classical discussions among the different methodologies involves the criteria for rigor that they utilize. As some authors (DEL RINCÓN et al., 1995:32-35) point out, the criteria that regulate rigor are veracity, applicability, consistence and neutrality.

The criterion of veracity refers to the degree of reliability shown

by the research procedures and results. The criterion of veracity in positivist methodology is internal. That is to say, the variations that the researcher introduces in the independent variables should be the sole causes of the variations observed in the dependent variables. With respect to the results, veracity refers to the degree of correspondence that exists between the results obtained and the reality analyzed, which is considered to be unique and uniform. In interpretative and critical methodologies, "in order to achieve veracity, recourse is made to the criterion of credibility – parallel to that of internal validity – which is obtained by contrasting different sources of information, by means of dialogue and of rational argumentation, of processes of 'structural corroboration' and 'referential adaptation', contextualizing the situation." (DEL RINCÓN et al., 1995:33).

The criterion of applicability refers to whether it is possible to generalize the results of the research. While in positivism generalization is essential, the other two methodologies consider its importance to be relative. Above all, interpretative methodology raises the issue of up to what point do comparable situations exist, since the context and the circumstances change very rapidly. For this reason, speaking about transferability to other very similar contexts is preferred. With positivist methodology, generalization can be questioned as to whether it intends to extrapolate the results of laboratory experiments to everyday life. In any case, in order to obtain maximum generalization, the research situation is intended to be the most representative possible.

The criterion of consistence or stability refers to the degree of reproducibility of the research. This stability of results is, for positivist methodology, what gives the research reliability. In the case of the other methodologies, the issue of this possibility of reproduction is not raised, but rather whether the same results may be obtained from interpreting the same information with similar perspectives.

The criterion of neutrality indicates that the research cannot have its results conditioned upon the researcher's biases, judgments or prejudices and interests. For positivism, neutrality is achieved through objectivity. In critical methodology, the researcher is always considered to take sides, although in the other methodologies this is denied. Interpretative methodology is based on inter-subjective criteria which, by means of capability of confirmation, make it possible to detect the researcher's personal biases.

Lastly, I would like to point out that the study of mass communication in general, and of journalism in particular, has

postulated most of the time a multidisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary perspective (RODRIGO, 2001). Therefore it is absolutely pertinent that the basis for future research in this field is socio-semiotics, since in the latter the fundamental currents, semiotics and sociology, are synthesized, although we should also keep in mind the contributions of psychology, and also of anthropology. With relation to the trichotomy, which we have mentioned, in my opinion, sociosemiotics is situated between interpretative and critical methodologies, basically, but without disdaining positivism, or at least realism. In this sense, it would be a transversal methodology, although, as we shall see below, there are different types of socio-semiotics.

3 SOCIO-SEMIOTICS

From the field of specific semiotics, certain autonomy of sociosemiotics has been historically recognized. However, there does not seem to be much agreement regarding what socio-semiotics is or should be. We can distinguish basically two postures. In the first place, we find a unidisciplinary socio-semiotics, dependent upon the methodological criteria of discursive semiotics. This unidisciplinary socio-semiotics has as the subject of study discourses of the social area. In the second place, we would have a multidisciplinary socio-semiotics, which claims maximum autonomy based on the intersection of different sciences and methodologies in a common subject for analysis. This subject could be, for example, the process of the construction of the news (RODRIGO, 2005). In any event, it should also be recalled that "...it is neither possible nor convenient to apply social semiotics or any form of analysis of the discourse with mechanical, immutable methodologies." (FERGUSON, 2007:74). In the first place, a research work is not at the service of a methodology but rather the reverse applies: it is the methodology, which should be adapted to the research work. Accordingly, it is the subject of study itself and the research objectives that are going to decide which the most suitable methodology is. An overall study of the discourse of the news requires not only the analysis of its narrative structures but also of its production and of its comprehension (VAN DIJK, 1990). In the second place, the research work can also make its methodological proposals so that not only a communicative phenomenon is described and explained in it, but also the scientific community is offered a somewhat different way of approaching it.

Unidisciplinary socio-semiotics would be represented mainly by the orthodoxy of the Paris Semiotics School (Greimas and Courtés, 1982 and 1986). This socio-semiotics can be described as a socio-semiotics of the enunciated. The sources from which it derives are ethno literature and mainly socio-linguistics. Its purpose is the establishment of a socio-semiotics, which takes into account social connotations. For Greimas and Courtés (1982:391-394), some of the dimensions of this vast area are the following:

- a) A conception of the discursive order of a specific society (Foucault, 1978).
- b) The establishment of the veridical statute of the discourses in every society. That is to say, what is considered to be a “real” story and a “fictional” story.
- c) The determination of sociolects and of the socio-semiotics groups which utilize them.
- d) The recognition and organization of social discourses: westerns, soccer matches, dance, etc.

The empirical subject of socio-semiotics is defined by Landowski in the following terms:

(...) the group of discourses and of practices which intervene in the constitution and/or the transformation of the conditions of interaction between subjects (individual or collective). Initially concentrated on the study of systems (taxonomy of social languages, systems of social connotations), the problematic is reoriented in this way, little by little – starting from the narrative grammar – toward a better knowledge of the socio-semiotics processes (...)" (GREIMAS and COURTÉS, 1986:207).

This unidisciplinary semiotics’ relations with sociology are, on one hand, clearly distant. “Methodological coherence” is preferred to “interdisciplinary ambitions” (GREIMAS and COURTÉS, 1982:392). Sociosemiotics depends, seen from this point of view, on the development of general semiotics. As Landowski (1986:303) points out:

“If socio-semiotics has, for example, something to say today (little as it may be) about strategies (...), if it aspires also to reformulate certain key concepts of sociology – “authority”, “legitimacy”, “power”, for example – this is because general semiotics has provided it previously with some indispensable operating instruments, which have the name, very precisely, of semiotics of persuasion (to make one believe), semiotics of action (to make it be), semiotics of manipulation (to make it carry out) and on which is grafted finally semiotics of passions (...).

But, on the other hand, unidisciplinary socio-semiotics is also

belligerent with sociology. For example, considering that it cannot be said that analysis of the enunciated does not clarify better the nature of the enunciation that “sociological parameters, regardless of the substances, channels or media which are utilized for their manifestations (television, movies, collective sports spectacles, etc.), due to the fact that they all refer to one same significant universe and because the forms of discursive organization which are found in them are comparable.” Greimas himself (1976b:58-59) points out as characteristics of this type of discourses, on one hand, the disappearance of the instances of the enunciation or the appearance of a subject of the collective enunciation. On the other hand, social texts explicitly establish the form of utilization for the correct reading of them. Furthermore not only is there redundancy in the content, but also a reoccurrence of the forms.

If socio-semiotics is limited to the study of social discourses, including in the broad sense of the term, I believe that effectively unidisciplinary socio-semiotics is a suitable discipline. However, if it intends to go beyond the text, this must be done based on other principles.

Ferguson (2007:57) points out: “Semiotics has been defined as the science of signs, and it is undoubtedly a good way to analyze media messages. However, in order for us to become more familiar with this important analytic and philosophical tool we need to study other basic variables. I have already said that the sign is a relation: a relation between the signifier and the signified. In order for this relation to be established, there has to be someone who perceives the sign. This someone can be me, both if I am a member of a media audience as well as if I am addressing it.” In this same connection, Hodge and Kress (1991:12) declare:

Traditional semiotics assumes that relevant meanings are immovable and fixed in the text itself, so that they can be extracted and decoded by the analyst based on a system of coding which is impersonal and neutral, and universal for the users of the code. Social semiotics cannot assume that texts produce exactly the meanings and the effects that their authors expect: thus the confrontations and their uncertain consequences are what should be studied based on social action, and their effects on the production of meanings.

This idea that there is a profound meaning which semiotics can bring out is based on the conception of a text with a univocal type of correspondence; each sign would thus have a single meaning. But as Abril (2007:26) points out well:

Meaning is fluid, and although some discourses seem to regularly close their possibilities, the text normally functions as a multi-structured system of meaning, which moves from level to level, in such a way that its denotations become connotations in an infinite progression. Accordingly, one never arrives at a final reading. The reading of a critical semiotics never attains completeness nor is accomplished, nor intends to discover hidden meanings and bring them to the surface. It is rather a question of acting with a certain rigor and complexity, understanding the shape and structure of the texts and maintaining attention with respect to the relations of power introduced in them...

If we accept the view that meanings are negotiated socially and that they can give way to a discursive agonistics in which some meanings attempt to impose themselves on others (or more exactly, that certain interpretative communities try to impose a hegemonic meaning), we shall accept, along with the above-mentioned authors, that a signifier does not always refer to the same system of meaning. "The changes in its meanings depend on the various social and historical contexts, and on the different discourses which situated this signifier in certain very particular ways." (FERGUSON, 2007:60).

Along this line, Abril (2007:26-27) points out that it is necessary to keep in mind – this author refers to visual texts but this would be capable of extrapolation to written texts – the cultural historical conditions of production, distribution and consumption-reception of the texts in the following way:

- a) "In the first place, reading them contextually, that is to say, interpreting them within the framework of the institutions, practices, textual models and technical environments in which they are objectified and interchanged." (ABRIL, 2007:26).
- b) "In the second place, interpreting them reflexively, that is to say, with reference to the effects which, as much as textual practices, they produce on their own context. And even more, having in mind that whatever our perspective might be, it will also have a contextual and reflective character, and therefore determined in a historical-cultural manner." (ABRIL, 2007:27)
- c) "In the third place, interpreting the text discursively, as produced by a subject (individual or collective, self-referring or not, better or worse identified) which acts on it and at the same time is constituted as an enunciating agency in some specific space-time coordinates and with relation to real or virtual enunciated agencies (addressees)." (ABRIL, 2007:27).

In my opinion, along in this line there are two fundamental concepts, which are very much related, for socio-semiotics of the journalistic discourse. One of them is that of multiplicity of meanings and the other is that of inter-textuality.

With relation to multiplicity of meanings let us recall with Ferguson (2007:73) that “If in the media the meaning is linked to the possibility of the multiplicity of meanings, this is due to a large part to the social contexts in which the message is received and then decoded and interpreted, and also to who is doing the interpretation. The texts are kept obstinately identical, while their meanings can experience slippages and changes with the passage of time.”

With reference to inter-textuality it should be recalled that texts are read based on their relation with other texts. Let us recall that the first activity carried out by a user/receiver of a means of communication is the interpretation which he makes of the media discourse. He makes this interpretation based on his knowledge, his experience, his life history, his sentimentality, etc. Furthermore this interpretation can cause inter-textual and extra-textual interactions. Inter-textual interactions are produced because the texts which individuals have read and interpreted dialogue between themselves. In breaking news, for example, this is very clear because inter-textual relations are being established between the different events, although they also dialogue with other accounts, which the person remembers.

Extra-textual interactions would be those with relation to which Orozco (2001: 44-46) calls interactions of the second order in which the communicative interaction is not produced with the communication media but with other persons, with regard, for example, to the television report – that is why we call them “extra-textual” because they go beyond the televised text itself.

This leads us again to the other concept, in line with what we are explaining, which is that of multiplicity of meanings. It is not a question of a discourse having the intention of multiplicity of meanings, but from the point of view of the interpretation all discourses have multiplicity of meanings.

As Orozco (2006:23) points out:

The RS (Reception Studies) have assumed ‘multiplicity of meanings’ as a characteristic or trait of any reference. Not only is it understood therefore that production of meaning is carried out by the confluence or convergence of various references (which is also the case), but that none of them is monolithic, with a single meaning, or definitive, but always susceptible to different interpretations, diachronically and synchronically. What, therefore, is converted into the subject of research in the RS is taking into account the possible combinations and/or ‘negotiations’ between different elements in the media interchanges in order to comprehend the very production of meaning, the interpretative fortresses and the meanings which result from all that.

Let us recall, following Hall (1987:136-138), three types of decoding which can occur in the reading of a journalistic text. The first one would be the dominant-hegemonic, which is that which follows the interpretative proposal of the producer of the discourse. The second is the negotiated one, in which we have a mixed interpretation between the dominant-hegemonic and that which is opposed to this. The third one is that of opposition, in which an interpretation contrary to the proposal of the producer is made. In exoinmanentist socio-semiotics (ABRIL 2007), the appropriation which the subjects make of the media discourses is kept very much in mind. As we have seen, a concept which is taken from sociology is representation, which is the capability that the social actors have of going beyond the constrictions imposed by the social structure. As Orozco (2006:23) points out,

The RS also assume the 'representative capability' of the social subjects as a condition involving the possibility for negotiation of meanings and the production of meaning on the part of the social subjects. Not only the simple recognition that the members of the audiences are active, but the fact that their activity is not a mere reaction to stimuli, without therefore being always conscious, but which obeys socio-culturally established models, learned and developed throughout their lives and their peculiar historical aspect with the media in question. For this reason, the RS avoid determinism and recognize the creativity and the personal initiative of the subjects in their communicational interchanges. Creativity witnessed not only in the individual aspect but, in the last instance, in the cultural, social, historical and political aspects.

As Ferguson (2007:74) states, "The dynamics of social semiotics sustain themselves thanks to an interminable negotiation of the relation between a series of messages and discourses and the consequences and correlates of these discourses."

As can be seen, the fundamental concepts of this socio-semiotics revolve around how a person inserted in a specific historical, social, cultural and personal context takes possession, in concrete situations, of the media accounts constructing his particular discourse based on different inter-textual and extra-textual interactions.

Along this same line, Ferguson (2007:74) states: "In every analysis of social semiotics and of the discourse there is – and there must be – certain dynamics. These dynamics have to deal with the contradiction in the meanings and also the presence of contradictory meanings, sometimes in the same text. And it is precisely these dynamics that enable the reader or the analyst to approach a text on a level which transcends the mere formal identification of its

characteristics. Meaning was, is and will be a controversial area.”

Thus, in accordance with these ideas, socio-semiotics of journalism intends to take into account, for example in the case of the production of discourses by the communication media, the organization of the communicative work, the communicative industries' incidence in the latter and the political and economic dependencies which place conditions on the entire communication industry; socio-semiotics should go beyond exclusively textual analysis, including that which refers to reading, as Barry Jordan (1986:48) points out: “The fact of taking into account the phenomenon of inter-textuality suggests that the subject of the analysis is not simply the text, nor necessarily the field of public knowledge to which the text is related, but rather something very much more subtle and complex which has much to do with the reader's biography and social environment; this is what puts in motion that concrete combination of elements which function together in reading.” The passing from the model reader to empirical readers (RODRIGO, 1995: 90-97), the study of audiences, the analysis of the effects of the media, etc. are necessary. For this it is indispensable that socio-semiotics of journalism is multidisciplinary.

In fact, from the Semiotics School of Paris itself, Claude Chabrol pointed to a “psycho-socio-semiotics” of a multidisciplinary nature. Chabrol (1982:180) considered that it was not a question of a simple collaboration between two disciplines: “(...) It is necessary to create a new theoretical space, homogeneous with its own principle of pertinence, its specific generality, that of a discursive psycho-socio-semiotics.” On my part, it is not so clear whether it is necessary to create a specific space or whether socio-semiotics should regain possession of its transversal, nomadic and hybrid nature. In what we are in agreement with Jordan (1986:52) is that “It is very difficult, for example, to analyze the problems of the production of the text, of the readings of the text or compose the social history of its different activations by means of the isolated text, by itself”. In order to study the production, circulation and consumption of the discourses of the communication media, something more than textual analysis is needed. Although it is also possible to make the semiotics study a part of the process, for example, of journalistic production (RODRIGO, 1995:151-156). In any event, for socio-semiotics, as Ferguson (2007:14) states: “Every study of the media is inextricably linked to the social context of its production and utilization. This means that studying the media implies studying much more than the media.”

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