

LEXICON GRAMMATICORUM

A Bio-Bibliographical Companion to the History of Linguistics

Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged

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Peirce, Charles Sa(u)nders, b. Sep. 10, 1839, Cambridge, MA, USA. d. Apr. 19, 1914, Milford, PA, USA generally regarded as the founder of philosophical pragmatism, and, with F. de Saussure, of modern semeiotic, and also as one of the founders of mathematical or symbolic logic.

P. was also deeply absorbed by linguistic researches throughout his life, learning languages in remote areas while travelling on geodetic surveys. His first published paper was on Shakespearean pronunciation. A natural scientist by training and the son of the eminent mathematician Benjamin P., he developed the philosophical basis of semeiotic in a series of articles in the late 1860s ("Questions concerning certain capacities claimed for man", "Some consequences of four incapacities"). There P. levelled a devastating critique of Cartesian philosophy and foundationalism, arguing that all cognition is irreducibly triadic, of the nature of a sign, fallible, and thoroughly immersed in a continuing process of interpretation. He considered his semeiotic (as he spelled it, in contrast with current usage of "semiotics" as an inclusive term for all the various studies of signs) as a general theory of logic, and saw language as but a portion of semeiosis. Some of P.'s letters to Lady Welby were included in the appendix to Ogden and Richards' *The Meaning of Meaning*, and, with C. Morris' largely unacknowledged appropriation of P.'s ideas in his influential monograph *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (1938), P.'s ideas were problematically brought to the linguistics community.

P.'s writings are pervaded by triadic divisions, which, given that he felt himself to be at heart a mathematician, he expressed most basically in numerical form as Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. While still in his 20s, P. first began to formulate these divisions using personal pronouns: I (Firstness), IT (Secondness), and THOU (Thirdness).

In P.'s evolutionary cosmology, Thirdness, or triadic relation, or semeiosis, is considered to be a fact of the universe and not simply limited to the human mind, and therein lies the difference between P. and Kant, and between P. and much of modern linguistics and language theory. By P.'s semeiotic realism language does not simply refer to things outside of signs. Though largely of a conventional nature, language is a mode of conduct, and as such, produces conceivable consequences and is normatively bounded.

In its abilities to body forth new possibilities for conduct, to determine and be determined by further experience, and to communicate valid generals bearing conceivable consequences, language is real, in P.'s non-modern version of semeiotic realism. Both his realism and pragmatism are theoretically at odds with the positivism and behaviorism of Morris, and to the nominalist conventionalism of Saussure and more recent poststructuralists. Though linguists and semioticians have been most fascinated by P.'s elaborate triadic technical divisions of signs, such as icon, index, and symbol and type, token and (usually ignored) tone, the larger philosophical outlook and anthropology underlying those divisions have yet to be incorporated into linguistic studies.

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