

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Semiotics of Culture and Language* by Robin P. Fawcett, M. A. K. Halliday, Sydney Lamb and Adam Makkai

Review by: Greg Urban

Source: *Language in Society*, Jun., 1987, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Jun., 1987), pp. 281-291

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4167846>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Language in Society*

JSTOR

REVIEWS

and able to overcome these at least partially cultural barriers could find the study interesting.

Reviewed by MARY E. WILDNER-BASSETT  
Zentrales Fremdspracheninst  
University of Hamburg  
Von-Melle-Park 5  
2000 Hamburg 13, West Germany

(Received 6 January 1986)

PERSPECTIVES AND CRITICAL MODELS

ROBIN P. FAWCETT, M. A. K. HALLIDAY, SYDNEY LAMB, AND ADAM MAKKAI  
(eds.), *The semiotics of culture and language, Vol. 1: Language as social semiotic*. London and Dover, N.H.: Frances Pinter, 1984. Pp. xxvi + 169.

\_\_\_\_\_, *The semiotics of culture and language, Vol. 2: Language and other semiotic systems of culture*. London and Dover, N.H.: Frances Pinter, 1984. Pp. xxvi + 187.

Not in the darkness of nihilism, but rather in the light of positive inquiry, one may ask why the term "semiotics" is used in the title of this two-volume collection. Semiotics has come to have a broad as well as a narrow sense. In its narrow sense, it refers explicitly to work utilizing a specific conceptual framework for the analysis of signs and sign-functioning. The two schemes recognized within semiotics as narrowly defined are associated with the work of C. S. Peirce and F. de Saussure, the latter, indeed, often being differentiated by a separate label, "semiology."

In a broader sense, however – attributed by the editors of *The semiotics of culture and language* to a 1962 remark by Margaret Mead – semiotics refers to the study of "patterned communication in all modalities," regardless of the conceptual framework employed. It is in this broad sense of semiotics that the present collection of articles is to be understood.

The papers gathered here grew out of a 1975 symposium, whose aim was "to promote the integration of linguistics and cultural anthropology." According to the editors, the authors of these papers "would now like to claim explicitly that their work, too, qualifies as semiotics" (xvi). Reasonably, we may ask "why?" Turning the lens of semiotic inquiry back upon this volume itself as sign vehicle, it is possible to see certain situationally strategic factors behind this choice. However, the factors are different for each of these volumes.

Volume 1, *Language as social semiotic*, takes its title from an earlier work of the same name by M. A. K. Halliday, whose article leads off this collection. Each of its five papers – by Halliday, John Regan, Yoshihiko Ikegami, Jeffrey Ellis, and Ruqaiya Hasan – deals with some aspect of the empirical study of

## REVIEWS

language or language use not normally considered within the confines of what is arguably mainstream formal or intuitionistic linguistics.

Halliday's paper, "Language as Code and Language as Behavior," focuses on the acquisition of dialogic competence in children, and, specifically, in Nigel, whom we have heard so much about in previous works. Halliday is the theoretician whose shadow is cast across the pages of these volumes, and it is fitting that his article should open with a sketch of the theoretical edifice he himself has been constructing.

The foundation for this edifice is London School linguistics. Its salient characteristics are an emphasis on: (1) linguistic function as the organizing principle for linguistic form; (2) the attempt to relate language as code to language as behavior, an opposition that is especially heightened within intuitionistic linguistics; (3) the attempt to situate language as code within its cultural context, and language as behavior within its speech situational context; and (4) the idea of "system," that is, the notion that language as both code and behavior must be seen in terms of "choice" among different elements.

Empirically, Halliday focuses on dialogue, which he views as a type of linguistic behavior continuous with exchange behavior more generally. He analyzes dialogue in terms of three levels: social context (participant roles of initiating versus responding), speech function (giving versus demanding), and lexicogrammar (indicative versus imperative mood, and utterance explicitness versus inexplicitness). Making use of this framework, Halliday analyzes some sample parent-child dialogues involving Nigel at between two and seven years of age. He traces the origins of the dialogic system to Nigel's prelinguistic (gestural and vocal) behaviors starting at age eight months. Halliday concludes that the "foundation for the adult system of dialogue" has been laid by age two.

With respect to the broader purposes of this volume, Halliday's paper is exemplary. Semiotics illuminates language use as a kind of signalling behavior. Specifically, dialogue can be seen as a mechanism for regulating linguistic interactions between social actors, for articulating their pursuit of goals (e.g., obtaining information, eliciting behavior from others, expressing emotion) with a set of socially agreed upon means. Moreover, the form of those means has its origins in developmentally more primitive "goals" or communicative functions.

John Regan's paper, "Metaphors of Information," is in many respects complementary with Halliday's. Whereas Halliday focuses on the domestic workshop of dialogic language behavior, that is, parent-child interactions, Regan focuses on the broader societal workshop - teacher-student interactions in the classroom. Regan's rich data base includes tape recordings of interactions in thirty-six different classrooms in six countries (Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, Canada, England, and the United States).

Unfortunately, the data have yet to receive careful scrutiny, and this paper remains largely programmatic and unsatisfying, filled with suggestive ideas un-

## REVIEWS

woven together into a cohesive intellectual fabric. Most important among these ideas is that classroom interactions – through what questions are asked, what responses are rewarded, and so forth – create and reflect an implicit model of what knowledge is. At the same time, Regan claims that teacher praise is really given in accord with the rhythm of discourse, of cycles of question and answer, “rather than according to the difficulty of an answer” (44). In other words, classroom interactions may transmit to children a model of knowledge that is tightly discourse bound, having to do more with the pragmatics of interaction, with when and how to say something, than with the semantic content of the utterances themselves.

Suggestive as Regan’s paper may be, readers may question the editors’ judgment in publishing it in its present condition. We want to see Regan carefully dissect a single text, bringing his penetrating insights into contact with the data they purport to illuminate. Alternatively, he could base his arguments on statistical results of a crosstext comparison. Unfortunately, he does neither, and the reader comes away from this paper disappointed.

Yoshihiko Ikegami’s paper, “How Universal is a Localist Hypothesis,” contrasts sharply in empirical focus with the discourse-centeredness of the papers by Halliday and Regan. Ikegami’s paper is concerned exclusively with language structure, with what Halliday calls “language as code.” Specifically, Ikegami is concerned with the classic “localist hypothesis,” namely, that there is a formal analogy between, on the one hand, how grammars encode existence in physical location and change in location, and, on the other, how they encode states and changes more generally.

While the paper appears to diverge from the framework put forth by Halliday, one notes that it in fact investigates one of Halliday’s central theoretical claims, namely, that linguistic function organizes linguistic form. In this case, a localist hypothesis may be seen as one instance of a general hypothesis that functional analogy furnishes the basis for formal analogy.

The precise significance of Ikegami’s findings with respect to the functional analogy hypothesis must be teased out. Basing the analysis principally on a contrast between English and Japanese, Ikegami shows that the analogy is made differently in the two cases. To take but one example, in English change in locus is represented by two basic schemata: X GO/COME TO Y, for example, “a letter came to John,” and Y RECEIVE X, for example, “John received a letter.” The schemata can be extended by analogy to change in possession, for example, “first prize went to John” and “John received first prize.” In Japanese, there are correlates to the two locational change schemata. However, change in possession can be analogized only off of the second schema.

Ikegami argues that the differences between Japanese and English in regard to the localist hypothesis have a typological basis. Broadly speaking, the contrast is between an agent-oriented and an event-oriented language. English emphasizes

the role of agents and allows semantic nonagents to be treated grammatically as agents, for example, in the "first prize went to John" example. Japanese suppresses agentivity in favor of an event orientation.

The significance of these findings with respect to the functional analogy hypothesis is not drawn out in Ikegami's paper. Focus instead is on the differences between English and Japanese as regards the analogical extension of the forms used to encode location and change in location. If the findings are correct, however, we can see in them a confirmation of the general hypothesis, simultaneously as they require a modification of the specific one. Japanese, like English, functionally extends the analogy from physical localization and change to state and change more generally. However, it does this in keeping with a general event, rather than agent, orientation.

Jeffrey Ellis, in his paper "Some Speculations on Language Contact in a Wider Setting," explores yet another empirical area within the terrain ignored by intuitionistic linguistics. It begins explicitly with one of the themes that runs throughout this two-volume set, the question of the relationship between language and culture: "what light is thrown on the relation between language and culture . . . by the contact relations between languages and cultures?" (81). Moreover, Ellis approaches this question from a functional point of view compatible with that outlined in Halliday's paper.

Ultimately, however, Ellis's paper is less suggestive about general principles, more bogged down in mapping out the complexities of contact, than might be considered reasonable. It is organized in terms of a typology of language contact: (1) bilingualism; (2) Becker-type Sprachbünde, wherein there is limited lexical and phraseological borrowing; (3) Balkan-type Sprachbünde, the classic type of Sprachbünde, wherein there is considerable sharing between languages at all levels due to prolonged contact; and (4) pidgins and creoles.

This typology is related to the language and culture problem by means of a chart (84), showing which sections contain information relative to various aspects of the problem, namely, to questions of linguistic function, to the relationship of language to social context, to contact between cultures generally as manifested in oral literature, proverbs, and so forth, to linguistic relativity, to registers, to "semiotic methodology," and to "information retrieval." Unfortunately, these issues are nowhere brought together and discussed in a more synthetic way.

The conclusion to this paper is appropriately brief and circumspect: The paper suffices "to demonstrate some of the complexities of the possible relations between the study of languages in contact and the investigation of the place of language in social semiotic and culture generally" (98).

Ruqaiya Hasan's paper, "Ways of Saying: Ways of Meaning," is an elegant piece, the proportionality in whose title reflects the central theme of the research, that stylistic differences go along with and may be the embodiment of cultural differences more generally. In this paper, she focuses on the differing "seman-

tic” and more broadly cultural styles of middle-class English and Urdu, specifically with respect to an implicit versus explicit contrast.

Elaboration of this latter distinction may be the single most important methodological contribution of this volume. By explicitness, Hasan means the degree to which a linguistic signal can be correctly understood without reference to the surrounding speech context, or to the discourse context in which the signal is employed. She thus focuses upon a class of empirical phenomena that is of critical importance to functional linguistics – signals that are intrinsically context-dependent.

Hasan distinguishes a number of possibilities within the implicitness parameter. The implicitness may be *endophoric*, depending upon discourse context (e.g., “dill will,” which is rendered eminently interpretable within the discourse context “Phlox won’t grow on rocks. Dill will.”); or it may be *exophoric*, depending on factors in the speech situation (e.g., “don’t,” which depends upon knowledge of the context for its interpretation). Within the exophorically implicit signals, there is a gradation toward explicitness from *instantial* exophorics (e.g., “don’t”) to *intermediate* exophorics (e.g., “don’t touch the books,” where the books may be present in the context) to *restricted* exophorics (e.g., “did the man come,” where some definite referent is involved, but that referent is not immediately accessible in perceptual terms) to *formal* exophoric (e.g., “tell you later,” where ellipsis is recoverable entirely by syntactic rule).

Hasan’s central empirical claim is that cultures, and in particular middle-class English and Urdu cultures, differ in regard to the overall implicitness of style. Middle-class English culture of language is more explicit, Urdu more implicit, in style. Hasan’s evidence for this conclusion is not quantitative, but rather qualitative, a study of the kinds of devices that are available in the two languages for communicative purposes.

Readers will be reminded of Bernstein’s arguments about restricted codes, and Hasan does not shy away from this comparison. However, she has provided an interesting and new methodological framework within which the problem of context-dependency may be studied, and it is one that merits evaluation on its own terms.

It is now possible to return to the original question, why group these diverse papers under the heading “semiotics”? The semiotic function of semiotics is arguably threefold. First, it unifies the kinds of nonintuitionistic, largely functional analyses of language and discourse described on these pages into a single endeavor. Second, by virtue of an iconism with the term semiotics as narrowly defined, which has associated with it an elaborate theory and methodology, it suggests commonalities in the disparate methodological apparatuses employed and even the possibility of a common theory. Finally, third, the title of the volume – *Language as social semiotic* – which is also the title of Halliday’s 1978 book, sets up Halliday’s theoretical framework in specific as the unifying theory underlying these various papers.

## REVIEWS

From the standpoint of Peircean semiotics, it seems unfortunate that the narrowly defined tradition is not more in evidence on these pages. Specifically, the purposive functional orientation promoted by Halliday could be enriched by a conception of sign modes, of how signs accomplish their communicative purposes. Nevertheless, the general trend represented here is to be applauded and encouraged. The group of researchers working outside of, and in some measure in opposition to, formal intuitionistic linguistics needs more consciousness of itself, of its methods, and of its purposes. This volume contributes to that consciousness.

In an asymmetrical world of only partial mirror imagery, the relationship between Volumes I and II of *The semiotics of language and culture* makes sense. Where Volume I focuses on issues of language and language use, Volume II casts a glance at “nonlinguistic” semiotic systems. Where the former rallies against the pure formalism of mainstream linguistics, the latter toys with the application of those formal methods to the broader nonlinguistic world.

Volume II, *Language and other semiotic systems*, consists of six papers. The first three form a group, each dealing with the use of semiotics within a particular academic discipline – psychology (W. C. Watt), literary studies (L. M. O’Toole), and architecture (Donald Preziosi). Here again, one may ponder the significance of the term semiotics, though some of these papers show more awareness of the narrowly defined tradition.

W. C. Watt’s paper, “As to Psychosemiotics,” is a somewhat whimsical piece, as indicated in its opening: “my purpose here is to treat of the concept of and term ‘psychosemiotics’ – to define it, to defend it, and finally to discard it.” Yet it has a serious purpose and is ultimately a significant article. It endeavors to analyze aspects of the English alphabet as a sign system and to consider which sorts of semiotic model are psychologically adequate.

It is in stressing the necessity of psychological evidence to corroborate semiotic interpretation that this paper assumes a general theoretical importance. Watt’s assumption is that, for a model to be truly adequate, it must not only illuminate the sign phenomena under study, but must actually describe what is in the heads of sign users. Readers will recognize in this the “God’s Truth or Hocus Pocus” problem discussed by Burling for componential analysis. Watt argues the need for psychological experimentation and developmental studies of the acquisition of semiotic competence, together with whatever historical evidence may be available, to deal with it.

To take one example, at an early age, children writing English randomly reverse letters. Suddenly, they get them all right except “J,” “N,” and either “S” or “Z.” Watt uses this developmental evidence to argue that children have made a generalization. An inspection of the alphabet shows that, of the twenty-six letters, eleven are symmetrical, so that reversal makes no difference. Of the remaining fifteen, eleven consist of either a vertical stroke plus right augmenta-



tion (e.g., “B,” “F”), or of another letter plus right augmentation (e.g., “Q” is “O” with a right augmentation). The only remaining letters are the four mentioned above, which are constructed in a different way. Thus, a semiotic analysis arguing for a “right augmentation” feature in the alphabet has some psychological validity.

From a broader perspective, however, in terms of this volume as a contribution to the semiotics of nonlinguistic systems, and to the study of relationships between language and nonlinguistic systems, it must be observed that the present article makes a contribution in neither area. Watt approaches the alphabet as a linguistic system, and he uses the same methodology (distinctive feature analysis) that dominated the structural analysis of language as a distributional phenomenon. The nondistributional semiotic aspects are ignored, for example, the way in which the written alphabet may be an “icon” of spoken phonology, making phonologically similar units graphically similar as well (“P” and “B,” “S” and “Z,” etc.) The latter might illuminate the kind of methodology that is necessary in moving away from language *per se*.

L. M. O’Toole’s piece, “Two Models of Narrative Structure,” in contrast with the other articles in this volume, deals squarely with the problem of linguistic hegemony over the semiotics of culture. O’Toole contrasts a classical literary analysis with a “generative model,” as developed by Zholkovsky and Scheglov. The latter model is based loosely on the methodology of intuitionistic linguistics, or, at least, on a “similarity between art and language” (33). The empirical focus is “Two Gallants,” a short story from Joyce’s *Dubliners*.

The actual analyses are too complex for discussion here, and, indeed, the classical method, which involves categories such as “plot,” “narrative structure,” and “point of view,” is actually presented in one of O’Toole’s earlier papers. However, the conclusion is worth noting: “I shall continue to prefer an analytical [i.e., classical] model for my own work, since . . . (it) seems to keep a firmer rein on productive intuitions than does the highly formal step-by-step derivation of the synthetic [i.e., generative] model” (43).

Preziosi’s paper, “Relations between Environmental and Linguistic Structure,” which focuses on architecture, seems to take an opposite tack. Its purpose is to find analogies between the semiotic organization of architecture, on the one hand, and that of language, as a Saussurean system of distribution, on the other. His is a richly complex and highly abstract piece, containing no actual empirical analyses, but offering a wealth of individual insights.

The principal conclusions of this paper may be summarized as follows: (1) “the built world shows an equivalent relationship to ‘animal architecture’ that human language shows to animal communication” (51), insofar as human architectural meanings are grounded in Saussurean “relational connectivity between elements;” (2) architecture shares properties with both spoken and written language, with the latter because of the perduring quality of the sign vehicle; (3) like language, architecture can serve a variety of communicative functions (“emo-



tive, phatic, cognitive, conative, metacommunicative, and poetic”); (4) “speech acts occur in a linear stream over time, while built forms occur in a tripartite space-manifold in time” (53); (5) architecture may be analyzed in terms of a “formal syntax;” and, finally, (6) while environmental and linguistic structures differ in their manifestations, the “equivalences become more frequent in the direction of core organizations and behaviours” (65).

Evidently, Prezioni ascribes to the view that, as semiotic mechanisms, language and architecture are fundamentally homologous.

The second three papers in this volume also form a group, each purporting to be a general theoretical statement. Sydney Lamb’s paper, “Semiotics of Language and Culture: A Relational Approach,” proposes that the stratificational theory of language, on which he has been working for years, can be extended to a theory of culture. The first half of his article outlines the stratificational theory of language. The second half applies the theory to culture.

Stratificational theory draws for inspiration on Hjelmslev’s glossematics, and this is evidence that the formal distributional core of language is to be taken as the model for the semiotic organization of culture. Culture looks essentially like a set of interrelated constituent structures, with logic gates as nodes. These structures and their interrelations organize elements into networks. It is important to emphasize that Lamb’s vision is relational, that semiotic analysis for him consists in looking for structures of relations.

How is this view applied in practice? Lamb’s procedure in this regard is to demonstrate that a stratificational model can be used to illuminate what anthropologists normally regard as facets of “culture,” that is, activities, the organization of social groups, the nature of roles, and taxonomies. One senses here more a restatement of what is already known than an empirical analysis leading to fresh discovery. Thus, in connection with activities, we are given the example of a stratificational representation of the American dinner, which consists of an optional appetizer, followed by an optional soup, followed by a salad, followed by a course consisting of meat, vegetables, and rice or potatoes, followed by coffee and dessert. The examples are all of this sort, being exercises more than insightful analyses.

Lamb concludes his discussion with a general overview of how language articulates with rest of culture. Lamb claims that the relationship between the lexico-grammatical system and the “conceptual system” may be analogous to the relationship between strata within the linguistic system (e.g., between the phonemic and morphemic strata). He speculates further that the relations between conceptual system and “the various perceptual and motor systems” may also be stratificational in nature.

With respect to the broader objectives of this volume, Lamb’s paper is the first of three theoretical statements and gives a synthetic overview of the “semiotics” of culture. In many respects, the view is compatible with, though distinct from,

the kind of semiotics proposed by Halliday. Principally, it lacks Halliday's orientation to purpose and function. The vision is one in which culture looks in essence like the core of language.

Ashok Kelkar's task, in his contribution, "Prolegomena to an Understanding of Semiotics and Culture," is on an even more grand scale. Kelkar is interested in creating a general conceptual scheme, which he calls semiotics, for understanding the nature and role of signs in human life. In certain respects, the general task he has set himself may be compared with that of the father of American semiotics, C. S. Peirce. Peirce's semiotics was ultimately linked to epistemological concerns, and traces of this orientation may be found as well in Kelkar's work. However, Kelkar's point of reference is more centrally the philosophy of language and the works of Fodor, Grice, Searle, Strawson, and Zipf.

In this impressively sweeping article, Kelkar builds a conceptual edifice of semiosis out of some elementary materials: "to begin with, there is the universe and the organism within the universe" (102), interacting with its environment. The universe is described in terms of "S-events" (stimulation of organism by environment), "I-events" (processes internal to the organism), "A-events" (overt responses by the organism), and "E-events" (events in the universe outside the organism). Semiotic description consists in isolating chains of such events.

The essential semiotic event, however, is a duplex chain, one chain ( $I_1-S_1-E_1$ ) representing the "signant" (or signans or sign vehicle), the other superimposed chain ( $I_2-S_2-E_2$ ) representing the "signate" (or signatum or meaning). The essential secret of the sign is the process whereby the sign vehicle stimulus ( $S_1$ ) becomes linked not just to internal changes having to do with its own nature ( $I_1$ ), but as well to the internal changes ( $I_2$ ) having to do with a distinct external stimulus ( $S_2$ ) (the meaning).

Scholars familiar with Peircean semiotics will recognize in this the behavioristic interpretation of Peirce developed by Charles Morris. Kelkar is sensitive to this possible behavioristic interpretation and cautions against it, but makes no reference to that earlier tradition. The reader is left with a sense of puzzlement about Kelkar's relationship to it. There seems to be so much terminological overlap ("ground," "contiguity," etc.), yet there is no mention of even a single Peirce scholar. Nevertheless, reading through these pages makes for a fascinating voyage, as Kelkar manipulates his fundamental concepts to account for a variety of sign phenomena.

It is impossible to do justice to Kelkar's article in this short review. Kelkar develops the system to account for cultural semiosis, intention and language, meta- and object-sign-systems, and so forth. The article is highly abstract, with no actual analyses of concrete data. Indeed, one wonders what some of the later lists of opposition can possibly mean, for example, "(i) environment binds; objectivity principle, (ii) environment releases; opportunity principle, (iii) Open

Society: Urban: Policies, (iv) Adult: Ego: Experience, (v) Realism; Artha; Rajasa" (128). Ultimately, the article becomes cryptic, its words a set of clues to meanings only their author has grasped.

*Language in Society* readers may find themselves skeptical about the empirical value of Kelkar's work, about whether any real theoretical advance has been made over the Peircean tradition, and about whether some of the later parts of this article can be rendered comprehensible. Nevertheless, as a spectator, one can marvel at the energy that went into the creation of this system and hope that its utility and scholarly bearings will be later explicated by its author.

Robin Fawcett's article, "System Networks, Codes, and Knowledge of the Universe," concludes this foray into semiotic theory. This is intended as a synthetic and summing up piece, giving an overall shape to the two-volume set. It is also intended to answer a single central question: "what is the relationship [between culture and language] and how close is it" (135).

Fawcett's view of language derives principally from Halliday. Language is to be understood as one among the many semiotic codes (e.g., gestures, "self-presentation systems," such as "choice of house, clothing, idiolect and dialect, car, etc." (147), and "other artefacts"). The dictum here is that all codes are analyzable in terms of "system networks" of choices, as discussed in connection with Halliday's own paper. In other words, Fawcett tacitly accepts the hegemony over culture of methods for analyzing the distributional core of language.

For readers interested in a general overview of Halliday's approach, the first half of this article is useful, although Fawcett's summary is overly cognitive and lacks the subtleties of Halliday's own work, wherein "function" is conceptualized as the organizing principle for form. However, it is the second half of this article that is its intended contribution.

Here Fawcett sketches a model of the relationship between language and culture. "Culture" is conceived in cognitive fashion as part of the individual's "knowledge of the world." Knowledge is implicitly equated with memory, and there is long-term and short-term knowledge, shared and idiosyncratic knowledge. Culture is, of course, shared and generally long-term knowledge. As an afterthought, Fawcett refers to "discourse grammar" as a knowledge of behavioral options, but asserts without justification that this knowledge is "not part of knowledge of the universe" (157).

Fawcett's general model is one in which actors are problem-solvers with "needs," "affective states," and "knowledge of the universe," and a set of behavioral options which includes language, "other codes," and "other programs of options in behavior." Fawcett illustrates this model with a hypothetical case – the mother of a family instructing her child to give a piece of fruit to another child. Strikingly, the argument here is that "cultural knowledge is not involved" (168), because the speaker has merely made use of behavioral knowledge of semiotic codes. The culture-specific form of family relationships, and of

## REVIEWS

the semiotic interactional devices employed, is thus not part of "culture." Were the speaker discussing William Tell, then cultural knowledge would be involved.

The intellectual landscape here seems so hopelessly impoverished as to render dreary Fawcett's entire discussion. If socially transmitted semiotic systems do not form part of "culture," then we have effectively banished this concept from the kingdom, to a realm where, as the old cartographers used to write, "here there be dragons." Fawcett has failed to grasp the significance of Halliday's main contention, that "culture *is* a configuration of semiotic systems" (Vol. I, p. 8).

In the "whole bloomin', buzzin' confusion" of any academic present, it is always difficult to perceive what future historians will pick out as the main trends, the directions in which a field is moving. Yet the present is also replete with signs pointing the way, if only those signs can be read. This two-volume collection is one such sign. Through it can be apprehended an academic present in which the study of signs itself is of importance.

However, this reality cannot be apprehended without some sense of disquiet. The two-volume set, with due exception for certain authors, represents the use of semiotics in terms of two tendencies, which are dangerously opposed. On the one hand, there is a semiotics which grasps the limits of formalism. It seeks to explore empirical areas where formalism cannot go. It looks for methods and for theory that might be more appropriate to its subject matter. On the other hand, there is a semiotics which proclaims the hegemony of formalism, which seeks to discover in all sign systems properties of the core of language, and which fashions the world of action and actors after a cognitive map. Alas, this is the kind of dangerous academic world in which we live, and the present two-volume collection is one of its weather vanes.

Reviewed by GREG URBAN  
*Department of Anthropology*  
*University of Texas at Austin*  
*Austin, TX 78712*

(Received 22 January 1986)