

## PREFACE

# A synthesis of linguistic theories of communication on a philosophical basis

The Polish linguist and semiotician Elżbieta Magdalena Wąsik has been preparing for a long time a monograph on the epistemological foundations of linguistics and the theories of communication, and now this outstanding synthesis is available for readers interested in these most essential and innermost problems of semiotics. If we could say that the 20th-century humanities experienced ‘a linguistic turn’ in many dimensions, starting from the well-known statement by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* that “Grenzen meiner Sprache sind Grenzen meiner Welt”, we might also call this period the age of semiotics: from Ferdinand de Saussure’s structuralism to Russian formalism and subsequently *via* structuralism to the Paris School of Algirdas Julien Greimas, language has been the center of Claude Lévi-Strauss’s ‘Copernican revolution’ in the humanities. On the other hand, the semiotic approach also grew from its primary language-centered position to the cultural field covering all human communication and signification, including the one of the nonverbal sign systems. Yet, the linguistically based theories that emerged were so numerous that it became hard to classify and master them.

Elżbieta Wąsik’s treatise, exploring the linguistic dimensions of the self, offers an elegant solution to this challenge, assuming the standpoint of the speaking, writing, and communicating subject. Of course, this would not have been possible in the semiotic context before its postmodern turn and reevaluation of subjectivity as the origin and core of all human communicating existence. The Anglo-Saxon school of analytic philosophy had made its own linguistic turn a long time ago, and in some cases, this approach was in dialogue with European structural linguistics and its continuation in various semiotic schools. Moreover, having departed from the pragmatist semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce, in which language was no longer in the center of study at all, it arrived at the Tartu school of cultural semiotics, which was launched from a strictly linguisti-

cally based definition of its core issues of culture, and which also remained dependent on it with its notions of text, semantic gesture, primary and secondary modeling systems, etc.

However, very few initially saw anything promising in the field of continental hermeneutic-phenomenological and existentialist philosophy. It is just from this ground that the reflections of Elżbieta Wąsik are stemming. She does not propose or propagate any systematic theory of her own but instead elaborates on a very personal and innovative discourse and metalanguage of her own in order to scrutinize all these extremely diverse phenomena. When going through her book, the reader may encounter not only a broad and profound European erudition along with knowledge of the historical roots of many scholars and schools, but also a very up-to-date paradigm of the most recent theoretical efforts in the field. As such, the monograph will have a great pedagogical value in the academic curricula.

Elżbieta Wąsik launches right at the beginning of her fundamental conviction that what is involved in communication and language is a human self who is situated in his/her lifeworld (while alluding to the concept borrowed from Edmund Husserl). Hence, the self is not an entity living alone in his/her *Dasein*, this is not a solipsistic universe but the one of interaction and intersubjectivity. Language and understanding of any message in the act of communication are possible only in this personal-subjective background. Thus, the philosophical problem of the self, in its deepest meaning, constitutes the fulcrum wherefrom all the contemporary theories of actuality, which Wąsik offers us as an overview, can be observed and judged in their entirety. Neither axiology nor even metaphysical questions, without omitting hard-science approaches to linguistic activities, are forgotten in this extremely rich and well-reasoned study. Accordingly, even quite fresh and actual ecological and biological aspects are taken into account, in the same sense as Thomas A. Sebeok spoke about the semiotic self in different species, not only among human beings.

The book *Linguistic Dimension of the Self in Human Communication* has been divided into twelve different chapters that guide the reader through vast panoramas of semiotic issues. They deal with speech, existential models, identities, ecological issues, creativity, pragmatism, group encounter, polyglotism and multilingualism, transcendental self, and ethical issues of how to be tolerant in intercultural communication.

In what precedes, I have shortly highlighted some most attractive points of the author's discourse in order to contemplate upon its purport. Hence, what I wanted to add is that the journey through the diverse cases of selves in communicative signifying activities has been entirely completed by Wąsik's research work.

It goes without saying that not all relevant semiotic theories are dealt here, and thus much of the semiotic reflection still remains to be examined in the light of her phenomenologically or existentially based approach. Yet, we do not evaluate the studies on the basis of what is not there but due to the things said there. So, the picture of the self in communicative actions is definitely complete and rich enough to help us to orient ourselves towards the epistemology of all these core issues. Finally, I would say that Elżbieta Wąsik's treatise is a true and rare contribution to the field of humanities being concerned with signs and meanings in action.

*Helsinki, February 9, 2020*

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