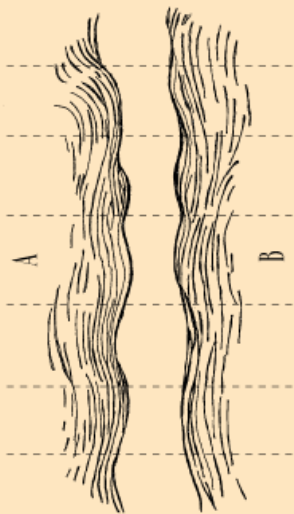


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# EXPLOITING THE ARBITRARY: THE OPACITY-TRANSPARENCY DYNAMICS IN THE PATTERNS OF LANGUAGE USE OF THE NATH PANTHI DAVRI GOSAVI COMMUNITY

Avinash Pandey

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**Abstract.** The principle of arbitrariness is given the status of first primordial principle in Saussurean theory of language. The importance of this principle has duly been recognized in subsequent linguistic theories, especially Structural Linguistics. However, the inherent tension, in his ‘writings’ – lecture notes and manuscripts –, between the conception of language as a tool for communicating something and the conception of language as a self-sufficient system of signs has remained a relatively under-discussed aspect of the Saussurean principle of the arbitrariness.

Saussure emphasized that the two aspects of the sign – signifier and signified – formed an inseparable synthesis. The relation between the two is conventional and systemic. Structural Linguistics develops the conception of language as a self-sufficient system of signs and consider grammar as a way of *internally limiting the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign*. Words derived from other words are less arbitrary than the parts they are composed of. The systemic nature of grammar makes language learnable by increasing the level of *transparency* within the linguistic sign.

The other conception of language – a system for communicating something – too is present in Saussurean theory. The *boeuf-Ochs* example<sup>1</sup> is a clear indication of this presence. The view that linguistic systems offer different ways of saying the same (or at least similar) things suggests the possibility of *increasing the opacity of language* by decreasing the level of transparency of the linguistic system. The presence of slangs, jargons, argots in all linguistic traditions clearly indicate that language-users exploit this possibility to suit their communicative needs i.e. fulfil various *social functions*.

The true complexity of the Saussurean principle of Arbitrariness of the Sign can be understood only by examining the transparency-opacity dynamics in language-use of various communities. The present paper seeks to examine this dynamics in the language use of the Nath Panthi Davri Gosavi (NPDG) people – a nomadic community in India which relies on begging for its livelihood. The community, along with using its mother tongue – a variety of Marathi -, has developed another variety, referred to as Parushi, for intra-group communication in presence of strangers. The paper argues that development of Parushi is indicative of the above-outlined inherent tension in Saussurean conception of language.

## 0. Theoretical Preliminaries

The first principle of Linguistics – Arbitrariness of the Linguistics Sign – has been a widely discussed and debated concern not only of linguists but also of scholars working in the areas we normally designate under the umbrella of humanities and social sciences. Given these intense engagements with the notion of arbitrariness, the phrase ‘Arbitrariness of the Linguistic Sign’ has come to acquire subtle variations in meaning. I would therefore like to begin my presentation with a brief statement on my understanding of the first principle of Linguistic Sign:

To my mind, Saussure is primarily a linguist who belongs to the tradition of historical-comparative linguistics which flourished in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. His major concern was to examine and study the nature and the underlying basis of language change. His linguistic tool-kit was decidedly the same as that of the Comparativists

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<sup>1</sup> See [Saussure 1959], especially page 68.

of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, though nature he thought that the Comparativists misunderstood the nature of their tool-kit.<sup>2</sup> With our exclusive focus on Part One (General Principles) & Part Two (Synchronic Linguistics) in the *Cours*, we tend to forget (and often not read) Parts Three, Four and Five of the *Cours*. My understanding is that Part One and Two are theoretical preliminaries to Parts 3, 4 & 5 and form their underlying basis. It is not a coincidence that immediately after introducing the fundamental principles of the linguistic sign in the chapter *Nature of the Linguistic Sign*, Saussure moves on to discuss the Immutability and Mutability of the Sign. Gaining a foothold into understanding the nature of language change is at the heart of the *Cours*.

Such an understanding of the *Cours* explains why the Principle of Arbitrariness forms the first principle of the Linguistic Sign. This principle is most clearly and effectively seen in linguistic systems and thus language occupies the first place amongst sign systems i.e. in semiology. A corollary of the principle of Arbitrariness is the principle of Immanence i.e. the principle that the key to learn/decode a linguistic system lies within the system itself. A linguistic system is autonomous in this particular sense. The principle of immanence forms the basis of the Saussurean claim to Linguistics as a science. The principle of arbitrariness is thus, for Saussure, the keystone of his project of establishing Linguistics as a science. The link between arbitrariness-immanence-semiology-science is a tight one.

An awareness of the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign is a metalinguistic ability, a result of cross-linguistic comparison, the kind which was commonly practiced in Comparative Linguistics. The discussion surrounding the *Ochs-Boeuf* example can be understood only from this perspective.

A question which this paper poses is: Is this perspective purely that of the linguist? Or can it be part of the speaker's knowledge of language? The dominant response to this question, at least within linguistics, has been influenced by a monolingual approach to language: we not only have a clear separation between the synchronic (psychological) and the diachronic (material, non-psychological) but also between the synchronic and its underlying semiological basis. While the synchronic is the domain of the speakers of the language, its underlying semiotic basis is something which the linguist needs to discover and make explicit. Arbitrariness is seen mainly as the concern of the semiological perspective and not that of the speakers.

The paper puts this dominant perspective into question. Given that a monolingual speaker is a fictitious entity and that we all are multilinguals, it would be natural to expect speakers to compare the languages they have access to and thereby to possess an explicit awareness of linguistic variation and the metalinguistic ability which comes along with it. Arbitrariness, being one such metalinguistic ability, is something which the multilinguals are aware of and often exploit during the course of communication. We find evidence of such an exploitation of the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign in the patterns of language use of the Nath Panthi Davri Gosavi people. The paper examines this evidence and discusses the consequences of such manipulation of arbitrariness to the opacity-transparency dynamics within the communication patterns of a community as well as its implications for Saussurean theory. Before that, in the next section, let us concretize the discussion by examining the patterns of language use exhibited by this community. I will start with a brief note on this community.

## **1. The Parushi language of the Nath Panthi Davri Gosavi community**

### **1.1. The People**

In order to understand the living conditions and the linguistic behaviour of the NPDG people, it is important to place them in the context of the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871, which was imposed by the British Colonial State on the people of the Indian Subcontinent.

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion, see [Normand, 2004], especially page 101.

In the village-based economy of precolonial times, there were a large number of individuals/groups/communities which existed on the margins (literally) of the village system. These people were, in Marathi, referred to as 'phirraste/bhatke' (nomads), a term used to refer to a miscellaneous group of people, the 'others' of the village-economy. These included pastoral hunter-gatherers, goods and service nomads, entertainers, religious performers etc. A significant number of these people had become *phirraste* due to loss of livelihood brought about by the policies of the colonial state. The state was not interested in the traditional means of livelihood of the people living in the subcontinent but wanted to promote activities which were beneficial to the colonizers [Brown, 2001]. The lack of a stable address on the part of these bhatke's made the colonial administration look upon these groups with suspicion as it was difficult to locate and identify these people.

Some of these groups were *notified* (an official term) under the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 and were declared to be hereditary criminal tribes (not just habitual offenders as viewed by elites in the pre-colonial times). The colonial state treated these notified tribes in a manner akin to prisoners of war. Besides the notified tribes, other phirraste/bhatke too were treated with suspicion. In absence of a stable address, the oppressive state apparatus tied these people to the police station so that they could not move from one area to another without police permission, nor could they settle in the outskirts of a village without informing the police. The local police station became their 'stable' addresses. They were constantly hounded by the police and were held responsible for all sorts of crimes which might have occurred in the area where individuals/families belonging to these communities happened to pass. The untold sufferings and humiliations which these communities were subjected to, by the colonial empire, forms one of the darkest chapters in the acts of barbarism conducted in human history.

After Independence, these notified tribes were denotified (again an official term) through the Habitual Offenders Act 1952 of the Government of India. *The Habitual Offenders Act, Bombay 1959* refers to the groups coming under the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 as *Vimukta Jatis* (literally "Freed Castes"), listed as Group A of Nomadic Tribes, while *bhatke* which relied mainly on begging (*bhik*) were listed in Group B of Nomadic Tribes. Even though the groups were 'freed', in actual practice nothing much – or too little - has changed for these people. In real terms, the relation between these people and the police has hardly changed.

As per the 2001 census of India, there are 14 VJNT and 29 NT (Group B) tribes in Maharashtra. The strength of the VJNT is around 3% of the population while the Group B of Nomadic Tribes form 2.5% of the population. The combined strength of the *Vimukta Jatis* and the Nomadic Tribes (Group B) in Maharashtra is around 5.5 million, though scholars claim that the actual numbers range between 10 -12.5 million.

The Nath Panthi Davri Gosavi community is classified under Group B of Nomadic Tribes (NT) as per the The Maharashtra Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, De-Notified Tribes (*Vimukta Jatis*), Nomadic Tribes, Other Backward Classes and Special Backward Category (Regulation of Issuance and Verification of) Caste Certificate Act, 2000 [Maha Caste, 2000]. In some of the states of North India, the Nath Jogi community is included as part of the DNT (Ex-Criminal Tribes) category [Sharma, 2011]. We shall focus only on the NPDG community in Maharashtra.

The NPDG are *bhatke-bhikari* (literally nomad-beggars), i.e. this community relies on begging as its main source of livelihood for which they wander from one place to another all over the country. They are worshippers of *Nath* hence *Nath Panthi*. They carry a *damru* (a small two-headed hour-glass shaped drum) hence *Davri* and they beg for flour hence *Gosavi*. Thus the name Nath Panthi Davri Gosavi. The NPDG people claim to originally hail from various villages in the Solapur district of Maharashtra. My primary informant reports his original village to be Bahmni, Sangola Taluka, Solapur District, Maharashtra.

Generally a group of NPDG people consists of four-five families (around 30 people) which wander together. Before they can temporarily settle in a place outside a

particular village or city, in their *palas* (tents), they need to report to the police and prove their identity and show papers from the local police station of their previous stay.

People from this community are generally quite resourceful. For example, they have developed around 20 begging methods ([Bhosale, 2008] pages 75-77). In recent times, young women and children accompany men during begging rounds. This exposes them to all sorts of harassment and sexual violence. The average income of the family is around ₹ 50-100 per day (around a swiss-franc a day). Therefore most members of this community live a life of penury. The literacy rate in the community is around 1% and the number of highly educated people are extremely few. Educational levels, though, are on the rise in the up-coming generation.

### 1.2. Language-use in the NPDG community

Given their lifestyle, it is not surprising that individuals belonging to the NPDG community are highly multilingual. They traverse the length and breadth of the land on foot, meeting all kinds of people, interacting with them, begging. Naturally they would need to interact with people using the language of that particular region. It would require control over language and some persuasion to ensure income through begging. It is common to meet individuals from this community with a working knowledge of about half a dozen languages. One of my informants had a working knowledge of around 12 languages. Thus, they use the local languages to communicate with strangers.

For intra-group communication, the NPDG people use a variety of Marathi which for the purpose of the paper will be referred to as Nath Panthi Davri Gosavi Marathi (DGM). DGM can be termed as the mother tongue or ‘native language’ for most individuals in this community.

For intra-group communication *in the presence of strangers*, especially if they perceive some sort of threat from them and therefore want to exclude the strangers from communication, the NPDG people use a linguistic variety which they (and others) refer to as *Parushi*. *Parushi* may also be used for intra-group communication even in the absence of strangers for speaking about topics considered to be taboo. In any case, the correlation between *Parushi* and ‘negative’ topics is quite strong.

The linguistic status of *Parushi* is debatable. Has it been developed as a code-language [Mande, 1985], or is it a remnant of the original language of the NPDG people [Bhosale, 2013], one whose use has been gradually lost by the community, thereby acquiring the form of a code-language.

It is the study of the pragmatics of *Parushi* of the NPDG people<sup>3</sup>, as a linguistic variety, which is of primary concern to the theoretical discussion which I wish to undertake in this paper. Language-use crucially depends upon the background information as well as the conditions under which the *common-ground* for communication is established. Therefore any study of the patterns of language-use has to crucially address itself to the background information and the common-ground of communication. I hope that the above discussion fulfils that need at least to a certain extent.

### 1.3. Characterizing *Parushi*

In order to secure an entry point into the linguistic variety referred to as *Parushi*, let us consider a typical sentence in *Parushi*:

i.	ʈʰala	məki	gəsəla
	keep-quiet	stranger (male)	has come

Keep quiet, the man (not from our community) has come

But

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<sup>3</sup> The term *Parushi* is used for linguistic varieties used by other communities just as the Gondhali community. These varieties are not discussed in this paper.

## Exploiting the Arbitrary

- ii.    ? tʰala                      d̄ʒogɪ                      gasəɪla  
           Keep-quiet                man (from the community) has come

The oddness of (ii) comes from use of the word *d̄ʒogɪ* (man from the community) instead of *məki* (male stranger). Furthermore the term *d̄ʒogɪ* (though used in a slightly different sense here) is easily recognized by speakers of Marathi (and other languages) while the term *məki* is not. Consider another example in comparison with (i):

- iii.    tʰala                      məkiŋ                      gasəɪli  
           keep-quiet                stranger (female)            has come

A few immediate observations:

- a. The forms *məki* and *gasəɪ* are opaque to Marathi speakers, unless, of course, they have knowledge of Parushi.
- b. The term *gasəɪ* has a general meaning which covers come/go/shift. It is vague with respect to directionality of movement.
- c. There is a clear distinction between strangers and individuals belonging to the community.
- d. There is gender agreement between the subject and the verb. The pattern of agreement as well as the agreement marker is similar to that of Marathi.
- e. The morphological correspondence between the two gender forms (male & female) is one that is observed in Marathi.
- f. There is no explicit distinct auxiliary. This phenomena is common in spoken Marathi.

Similar observations can be made for the following sentences:

- iv.    kʰəp|a kʰəp|a tʃiŋ|ɾa            gasərləj  
           run    run    police            have-come  
           (Run away! The police is here)
- v.    tʃɪa            məkɪŋɪ ŋə                      məla            bəkkə|ɾakul|ja səŋ|ja.  
           That            stranger-woman ERG            me            lot-many bhakri gave  
           (That lady gave me many bread)
- vi.    mi ek ɾakul|ɪ tʃəŋ|kɪŋ əŋ|li  
           (I brought one bread home from my begging.)
- vii.    meka| kʰuts|lɪŋ gas|əvə/ meka| kʰuts|səl  
           (Take away the fish/pick up the fish (and take it away))
- viii.    pʰugəɪɾəŋe gəvŋə ŋikəɪlə  
           (The horse kicked)
- ix.    tʃɪa liwki kəŋ|ŋi bʰəɪni nəɾə tʰəll|ɪt  
           (That girl has big houses)
- x.    kʰəŋə vəi|tʰlə ka  
           (did you eat?)
- xi.    məki rədz                      tʃiŋ|gəŋi vəi|tʰto  
           (The man drinks alcohol everyday)

Some further observations:

- a. **All** functional terms, without exception, are those used in Marathi.
- b. The syntax of these sentences do not violate any constraint of Marathi syntax.
- c. The morphology of all words in these sentences obey all constraints of Marathi morphology.
- d. No phonotactic constraint of Marathi phonology is violated in any of these sentences.
- e. These observations apply to all the data collected from various informants. Thus, if we understand the system of language as consisting of a grammar and a lexicon then the grammar of Parushi is identical with that of Marathi.
- f. If we focus on the content words, then **some** of the words in the above sentences are typically Marathi words while others can be said to belong to Parushi.

- g. The use of Marathi words is similar to that found in other varieties of Marathi. In this sense there is nothing remarkable about them.
- h. The Parushi words are opaque to users of Marathi in the sense that knowledge of Marathi would not help in identifying the meaning of the Parushi words.
- i. Some Parushi words are derived directly from common Marathi words. Examples:  $k^h\text{uts}\bar{a}l$  from  $\text{uts}\bar{a}l$  (pick-up);  $k^h\bar{a}p[\alpha]$  from  $p\bar{a}l$  (run) etc.

From the set of observations given above, we can conclude that as far as the system of language is concerned, characterizing Parushi would involve an exclusive concern with the lexicon.

### 1.3.1. The Lexicon

Upon a closer look at the lexicon of Parushi, one realizes that it is not a complete lexicon in itself, even in sub-domains i.e. only Parushi words cannot be used to conduct a discourse. A sentence *may* consist of only Parushi words (as in viii. above) but not an entire conversation/discourse. There are no songs, stories, narration of incidents etc. which could be conducted using only Parushi words. On the other hand, discourse is possible in DGM without any recourse to Parushi words.

One explanation could be that Parushi words and grammar has been gradually forgotten by the community ([Bhosale, 2013], pages 83-96). However this possibility seems unlikely as Parushi words share very special characteristics:

- a. Parushi words are those which the NPDG people use in hostile and dangerous situations, which these people might face during the course of their interactions with the state, strangers etc. where communication needs to be swift and effective while excluding the elements which might be harmful to the NPDG people. There are Parushi words which the NPDG people use while earning their livelihood.
- b. Taboo words are often Parushi. Examples: words related to private parts, excretion etc.
- c. The NPDG people are concerned with religious symbols and rituals. Therefore they would like to portray a spartan lifestyle, for example that is typically expected from the priestly class. Thus there are Parushi words for mutton, fish, alcohol etc. but no Parushi words for wheat, rice, jowari etc
- d. As a consequence, large number of Parushi words have a ‘negative’ orientation, as far as the NPDG people are concerned. Thus, no Parushi words exist for positive emotions, kinship terms, colour terms, directions, planets, stars, calendar terms, time, metals, flora and fauna (except those animals used by them in their begging, diet etc.) etc.
- e. The semantics of Parushi words show a ‘coarse’ level of semantic differentiation. We do not observe the fine differentiations of meaning, which these people show while using DGM. Consider for example words from the above examples:

- $v\bar{a}i\bar{t}$  is used for both eating and drinking;
- $g\bar{a}v\bar{a}$  is used for legs/limbs as well as footwear;
- $g\bar{a}s\bar{a}r$  is used for come/go/shift etc.
- $k\bar{e}m\bar{t}\bar{a}$  is used for cow/bull/ox

In general, Parushi words are semantically vaguer than words in DGM, in spite of both being used by the same people.

### 1.3.2. What is Parushi?

Given these characteristics it seems more feasible to argue that Parushi is a lexicon developed for a special linguistic function rather than a language which has gradually been pushed out of use.

Parushi is then a subset of a lexicon, but of which language? Can we have an autonomous lexicon which could be ‘attached to the grammar of a language’ (here Marathi)?

Is Parushi a subset of the lexicon of Marathi language? Given the perspective of language as a system, there is no structural argument against considering Parushi



lexicon as a part of Marathi, as it obeys all the constraints of Marathi grammar. However, Parushi has never been considered part of Marathi language, even by the NPDG people. How do we account for this perspective? It is here that the notion of language as a tradition comes to the fore. Parushi has never been part of the Marathi speaking tradition and hence is not part of Marathi. There is a consensus between Marathi speakers on this evaluation. These are important questions, especially for Saussurean theory which sees language as a social product. Let us try and relate the above discussion of Parushi with the Saussurean theory of signs, especially the principle of arbitrariness.

## 2. Challenges posed by Parushi to Saussurean theory of Linguistic Sign

### 2.1. The opacity-transparency dynamics in Language

The patterns of language-use associated with Parushi clearly indicate that the use of Parushi in a given situation is to limit the comprehension of the message to the individuals which belong to the NPDG community and thereby exclude the potential threat elements. One cannot imagine two people having a free-wheeling conversation in Parushi. It is used for quick communication whereby the interlocutors are signaled a sort of warning or alert regarding an impending threat, potential danger and the action to be taken in response to it. The transfer of the message should take place at a speed which would allow other members of the group to take action immediately. Communication - where high speed is a major constraint - is understandably *telegraphic* in nature when there is no time for complex processing mechanisms. Processing has to be fast and frugal.

The development of a linguistic variety in response to such a social need results in:

- Simplification of outer forms resulting in a lowering in the complexity of morphological forms.
- Reduction in the inner form of language resulting in 'coarse' semantics.

What Parushi seems to be doing is create an opacity<sup>4</sup> in the language-use, an obstacle for the 'outsiders' in understanding the message. This opacity is of course for the 'others'. For individuals belonging to the community the message is probably more transparent than any other message encoded in DGM, as the message is often simple and clear and requires less processing effort due to reduced complexity. What is opaque for one maybe transparent for another.

Of course, this sort of situation is not something that we are oblivious of. The uses of Amerindian languages in the WWII is a good example of such a use. Very often formal communication, especially government communication, expert talk etc. are coded in this sort of way. In any multilingual situation, individuals often switch to composing messages in specific codes to include some and exclude others. However, as we would all agree, in such cases, the primary function of the code is not to create opacity in language-use. Such a function is only secondary and highly contextual. In the case of Parushi, however, creating opacity seems to be the primary function. Given the constant hostility to which the NPDG people are exposed to, Parushi seems to have been developed as a defence mechanism to enable members of this community to act together and protect themselves. This defence wall has been created by exploiting the radically arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign to fulfil a particular communicative function.

What we observe with Parushi is a socially motivated attempt to create an opacity, for some, in the message by exploiting the arbitrary nature of the sign. What we observe is a more dynamic relation between opacity & transparency than what is commonly acknowledged in linguistic literature. Providing a principled explanation for such

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<sup>4</sup> I am using the term opaque to mean lack of comprehension on the part of the listener(s). In the same vein, transparency in communication is a measure of the way in which comprehension is promoted by use of specific expressions.

motivated opacity created through arbitrariness is a challenge for any structural approach to language, more so for Saussurean theory of Linguistic Sign.

## 2.2. Parushi and the Referential function of Language

The Ochs-Boeuf example is important in understanding the Saussurean approach to language. Later developments in Saussurean theory have ignored this example, often giving the impression that Saussurean theory of language treats the referential function of language as secondary<sup>5</sup>. Language is used in real situations, to talk about reality. Saussure has a sense of this, as seen in his *Writings*, though this theme is not well developed in the *Cours*.

Theories of Reference treat denotative meaning as basic to language, while associative meanings are treated more as a result of encyclopaedic knowledge rather than linguistic knowledge. Such a compartmentalization of meaning fits neatly in the Saussurean paradigm which distinguishes between system and use, wherein system is treated as basic and independent of use. Following Benveniste, we can say that the system is semiological, a function of the system while use is semantic, a function of discourse [Benveniste, 1981].

However the use of Parushi words involves not only a word-world semantics but also encodes the speaker's evaluation of the situation. The very use of Parushi involves such an encoding. While we do observe such uses of language while using linguistic varieties such as Marathi, English, French etc. it is not as regularly done as in the use of Parushi or at least not with the level of awareness observed in Parushi. It seems that the primary function of Parushi is to convey *connotative* meaning and not *denotative* meaning, as is often assumed for 'normal' language use [Sornig, 1981]. The use of Parushi involves a pragmatic encoding of the situation in its various aspects:

- The assessment of the situation by the speaker;
- A determination of relationship between the interlocutors;
- Achieving the intended perlocutionary effect on the addressee(s) and ensuring the exclusion of other kinds of interlocutors.

Saussure's criticism of attempts to reduce language to a naming-process are often misconstrued. Saussure found the view to have its merits but stated that in absence of the notion of linguistic value, any account of the naming-process would be naïve. The effects of his engagements with language as a naming-process can be observed in his formulation of the linguistic sign as a *double entity* i.e. as being constituted through the relationship between the signifier and the signified.

We observe the same naming process in Parushi. Parushi is *naming* of one that shall not be named – a taboo. Naming, most commonly, involves the lexicon. Hence we can understand Parushi as a form of *lexical innovation* ([Sornig, 1981], pages 66-68), which helps its users to deal with the hostility and fear they are constantly exposed to. Construed in this fashion, we can state that the process of naming - not only its pragmatics but also its semantics - involves not only the semiological system but also the context in which naming occurs. A clear manifestation of this dimension can be observed in Parushi.

## 2.3. Parushi and the Semiotics of Language

The characteristics of language-use involving Parushi can be seen as a powerful evidence in support of Saussure's principle of Arbitrariness. Here we have a lexicon which consists of radically arbitrary words. Parushi words are arbitrary in every sense: they are mono-morphemic, their use is based on convention i.e. they are

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<sup>5</sup> One possible explanation for the relative neglect of this example in subsequent Saussurean literature is that reference is primarily seen as belonging to the domain of parole and the literature was exclusive in its focus on langue. For a more detailed discussion on this position see ([Normand, 2004], pages 88-106).

recognized by the entire NPDG community, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is unmotivated etc. The relationship between the signifier and signified is not ephemeral, as often seen in slangs, but is relatively stable.

Furthermore, Parushi words do not involve a mere replacement or rule-based modification of the signifier, as seen in Pig-Latin, which keeps the relationship between the signifier and the signified intact while changing the outward form of the signifier. Furthermore, lexicalization in Parushi is not dependent upon that of Marathi. For example, the semantics of the word 'māki' (stranger male from another community) can be expressed only periphrastically in Marathi.

However, the way in which Parushi words acquire linguistic value, in the Saussurean sense of the word, is not clear. How are meanings structured in Parushi? Words in Parushi do not form a semantic field in any domain or sub-domain. Saussure stated that a word acquires its value in relation with surrounding words. It is very difficult to maintain that a Parushi word is surrounded by other Parushi words. It would be more appropriate to say that the surrounding words for Parushi include Marathi words. How then do Parushi words acquire *value*? Several options can be explored:

- a. Could we say that Parushi words constitute more of a signalling mechanism embedded within Marathi? In such a case Parushi can be seen as a reduced form of language, more of a naming-system without linguistic value. But can such a situation be envisaged in a Saussurean scheme of things?
- b. Can we say that Parushi and DGM share the same semiotic system?
- c. Does the semiotic system of Marathi generate the semiotic system of Parushi? At the face of it, this option seems quite plausible. But this option assumes that Parushi has a semiotic system of its own. That does not seem to be the case.

Either of these options pose difficult questions to the Saussurean theory of linguistic signs.

### 3. Concluding Remarks

The above discussion suggests that it probably does not make sense to talk about semiotics of a linguistic system but that we should rather think of the semiotics of the language-user, i.e. we need to shift our gaze away from the code (text) and towards the language-user. Once we do this it becomes possible for us to put a step forward towards handling the issues discussed above.

As discussed above, the user is multilingual. Therefore his semiotic resources would be multilingual too. When I speak three languages, I do not possess three semiotic systems but rather one<sup>6</sup>. It makes eminent sense to claim that the semiotics of an English speaker in England would be different from that of an Indian though they may be speaking the same 'language'. The received practice in Linguistics has been to keep the text at the centre of our theorization and question the role of the context in interpreting the text. A shift in gaze would involve keeping the context at the centre of our theorization and ask questions about the role of the text in the context. Such a move would enable us to get a foot-hold into the opacity-transparency dynamics, the pragmatics of naming as well as to set up the semiotics of the multilingual user.

A theoretical move of this sort can only be based on the premise that there is no inherent gap between the semiotic system of language and the discursive function of language. The theoretical gap between the system and its use needs to be done away with. We need to examine language as an activity rather than the activity of language. Inspiration for such moves can be found in the writings of Saussure. There is an inherent tension in Saussurean thought which problematizes the separation of system and use.

One indication of this tension are waverings regarding a suitable terminology for the linguistic sign. Another indication is Saussure's analogy of language as money.

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<sup>6</sup> This view finds support in recent findings in the field of language and brain. While language production, in bilinguals, is seen to be dual, comprehension is unified. For details see, [Hickok & Poeppel, 2000].

Saussurean literature, to my mind, has over-emphasized the language as chess analogy and ignored the language as money analogy. I think we need to restore the balance in Saussurean thought and bring in the discursive function of language. We can derive inspiration in the most telling of all Saussurean analogies, an analogy which clearly shows us the way ahead:

“Language, or indeed any semiological system, is not a ship in dry rock, but a ship on the open sea, Once it is on the water, it is pointless to look for an indication of the course it will follow by assessing its frame, or its inner construction as laid out in an engineer’s drawing.

On to my second point, since I said above that two things followed on from the adoption of a sign system by a community. Which is the real ship: one in a covered yard, surrounded by engineers, or a ship at sea? Quite clearly, only the ship at sea may yield information about the nature of a ship, and, moreover, it alone is a ship, an object available for study as a ship. This is the second point. [Saussure, 2006]

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