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Semiotics and political discourse in the post-truth era

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Abstract: The concept of post-truth has been on the world's agenda since 2016. Perhaps this concept, which is frequently encountered in political life, provides the speaker with a freer speaking platform. Politicians, instead of presenting the reality to their constituents as it is, want to reshape this reality according to their own ideology and present it to the recipient. Politicians have certain objectives in creating such a virtual reality. These aims can be listed as keeping the voters, increasing the voting potential, and attracting undecided voters to their favor. The common result of all these aims is to gain political power or to remain in the existing power. Post-truth reality is constructed relatively more easily in social media environments. The construction of reality can be through beliefs or emotions. In such ways, the recipient is tried to be persuaded, and thus behavioral change is achieved. One of the most necessary subjects for this artificial reality atmosphere is the anti-subject. The idea that the anti-subject does not know the truth that we (you and I) know and believe and is trying to destroy it is the main theme of post-truth discourse. Politicians try to persuade the voters to believe in their own truth by expressing this idea to them. There are many examples of this around the world. In this study, firstly, the concept of post-truth is examined and its various definitions are discussed. The distinctions between the concepts of real and truth are analyzed and then it is explained how and for what purposes the concept of post-truth is used in politics. Following the comparison of post-truth and fake news, the concept is discussed within the framework of sender-receiver interaction in terms of communication. The concept is tried to be elucidated with the modalities such as /convincing/, /believing/, /being/, /appearing/. Besides, using the semiotic square, the study also

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tries to reveal the different purposes and forms of use of the concept of post-truth. As a result, it has been observed that the concept of post-truth is effective in many areas of contemporary societies, and rather than real information, expected and desired information has become more important.

Keywords: semiotics; discourse; politics; post-truth; fake news

1 Preliminary remarks

Post-truth, fake news, and ways of making society believe in different forms have begun to be used in public and political debates. In this period, “post-truth” is one of the most remarkable concepts in the political field that has been used frequently for years and has been questioned in scientific circles. Again, the Oxford Dictionaries chose “post-truth” as the word of the year in 2016. In 2016, there were two world-shaking agendas such as Brexit and the US Presidential Elections. When we consider examples such as the covering up of facts, the dominance of emotions over reason, and lying in front of the public, it should be said that the choice of “post-truth” as the word of the year is quite reasonable. Depending on the recent political developments, the concepts of “post-truth” and “fake news” have entered and used much in daily life: In 2016, Donald Trump won the presidential election against Hillary Clinton in the USA, and with the Brexit referendum held in the United Kingdom under the leadership of Nigel Farage in 2017, new issues began to be discussed in the political arena, with the United Kingdom leaving the European Union.

Ralph Keyes states that in the past, people would feel shame and guilt when they lied, but nowadays, people change the facts to appear innocent, and this is what he calls the post-truth (2004: 15). Keyes, in his book *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life*, elaborates on issues such as the devaluation of honesty, lying, dishonesty, and ethics. This situation is often encountered in politics. In the political world, other oppressive politicians want to hide behind the new situation and maintain their power: Donald Trump in the United States, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Marine Le Pen and Eric Zemmour in France, Narendra Modi in India, Nigel in England. Names such as Farage, Beppe Grillo, Matteo Salvini in Italy, and Viktor Orban in Hungary can be given as examples of the abovementioned situation. According to Socrates, ignorance can be cured, and if a person is ignorant, he can be taught. The real threat comes from those who are arrogant enough to think they already know the truth. Donald Trump’s claim that “if he loses the elections, the reason for this defeat will mean that there was fraud against him” shows that the truth no longer matters (ABC News 2020). As a result of carrying out disinformation campaigns against the societies they address, politicians appear to have found the

courage to adapt the truth to their own truths instead of presenting the truth. What is specific to the post-truth age, then, is not the disregard for the idea of *knowing* reality, but for the existence of reality itself (McIntyre 2022: 31). Another point that should not be overlooked is the widespread idea that some facts may be more valuable than others, depending on what a person wants to be true. “Post-truth concepts and reality become a part of daily life after the mentioned political events” (Lorusso 2021: 308). The concept of post-truth describes a political and media structure in which a speech relies on its correctness rather than its credibility and its adequacy with the facts. Contrary to popular belief, Henrik Enroth argues that the post-truth state is not about disbelief in facts, the spontaneous fall of truth, or the overtaking of reason by emotion, but the words, actions, and misdemeanors of notorious people (2021: 10). Politicians with a post-truth political purpose have a populist purpose. For De Cleen, they exploit and reinforce prejudice and ignorance among specific population segments through lies and deceptive propaganda (2018: 270). The sole purpose of a politician is to stay in power. For this purpose, the politician creates an enemy if necessary. This enemy is often created by marginalizing the other party. Some of the representative concepts of this enemy can be listed as “other”, “he”, “outside”, “enemy”, “opponent”, “opposite” etc.’ (Çanakpınar 2021: 70). They are adjectives imposed on the other party to affect the buyer (consumer, voter, reader of a scientific article, reader/viewer in the media, etc.) in a planned way. These people state that they defend the interests of the people they live in and even the country. Therefore, they want to lead societies democratically. In this process, they say, in a way, that there is a reason for what they do. However, it should not be forgotten that there is incomplete or incorrect information in the information disclosed to the public. Use of post-truth or fake news; self-seeking politicians try to create a particular perception in the recipient for their purposes by using all the features of rhetoric. The world of politics is a field of human activity in which what is right and wrong is constantly debated. This area has a deliberate spread of conspiracy theories, deception, nonsense, and ignorance (Block 2019: 70). It is not the transmission of the truth but the persuasion of the buyer by presenting real or fake news in an orderly manner. Fake news in the context of truth is presented to the buyer. For example, war correspondents present events as they wish as personal testimonies without special envoys ever going to the field. In other words, the news written at the desk can be edited as desired. Of course, the buyer exposed to this post-truth discourse will suffer here. As Jean Baudrillard said, the world is now a world of simulation. Post-truth news shows how the media is used to create simulations in people’s minds (Baudrillard 2014:13–14). For example, it has been revealed that many of the posts trending on social media in the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian conflict are actually images from other parts of the world. To give two examples of the most important of these: The first was the claim that “terrorists beheaded children in Israel”, which Netanyahu spearheaded to spread, and the other was the allegation that

“*Hamas Forces Captured a Young Israeli Woman*”. However, it was later revealed that the shared images belonged to a Palestinian social media phenomenon named *Rosey*.

Within the framework of news theory, it is necessary to analyze the functions and positive and negative aspects of post-truth communication. Semiotics is also interested in this subject, like many other disciplines. Post-truth looks at the news in the context of communication from the point of view of the veridictory modality. Lying is a cultural phenomenon and concerns cultural semiotics. Of course, the fiction of the narrated event is also of interest to narrative semiotics. The post-truth also has to have consistency within itself. Even if the information in the declaration is the most absurd, dangerous, or unnecessary, to persuade and influence the recipient, it is necessary to prepare and organize the notice in a specific logical order. In doing so, narrative theory and logical data should be considered in arranging a post-truth statement. It is crucial that fake news is believable. The public, who is the recipient of the information that is told by transforming the truth into fiction in the form of a narrative, will experience a dilemma between reality and post-truth information. Post-truth utterances that create conditions conducive to participation in a group and its interests can be spoken of as success or failure, depending on the arrangement of the fiction.

The concept of post-truth denotes the truth, but this is seen as an alternative reality because such truth is not a generally accepted, always valid reality. This concept indicates a reorganization of that reality in cases where generally accepted objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than public appeals. In other words, another “false reality” presented to the buyer emerges next to the actual reality. The concept of post-truth refers to situations where objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appealing to emotions and personal views. In other words, the verifiable perception of reality in the post-truth era will be a secondary factor in the formation of meaning, which is described by sensations, emotions, and passions.

Post-truth, the distorted presentation of the truth is about beliefs on the one hand and emotional impulses on the other. While the sender wants to convince, he also wants the receiver to believe (convincing). In the emotional sense, perhaps the person does not want to know the truth as it is but wants to hear and know it in a way that pleases him.

These emotional impulses of the buyer have a critical function in persuading him. What psychology/psycholinguistics does is to make the desired behavioral change in the recipient by dominating these impulses. The authenticity of the information, such as current political behavior, advertisements, or newspaper reports, is always a matter of debate. Changing reality can happen in other areas as well. For example, different purposes may be targeted by changing scientific data.

These scientific data have chilling results, and scientists can give a small amount of it so as not to lead societies to fear. Alternatively, politicians can change scientific data to serve their purposes. Reformatting scientific data and presenting it as if it were real information creates undesirable situations for the receiver. In both cases, scientific truth is being reformed. It would be correct to associate the situations in which reality is reshaped in advertisement statements, in the discourses of politicians, and in some cases in scientific narratives, with the concept of “post-truth”. Depending on the concept of post-truth, new concepts are also used. In short, concerning the concept of post-truth, fake news, and infodemic have also been widely used. The importance of digital media is great in feeding both post-truth and fake news. The fake news epidemic is a concept produced by imitating the covid-19 pandemic, a worldwide epidemic in the 2020s that caused a significant break in the lives of societies in this period.

Post-truth is one of the most common situations in political discourses. The far-right leaders in recent Europe (and generally in many countries) have created different identities for themselves through new virtual environments, social sharing platforms (Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, etc.), and new media. The concept of post-truth, in general, denotes a social change resulting from the mass availability of new forms of digital communication and, in particular, the corresponding technological supports. They create a virtual identity in society as a morally pure, clean, sincere identity instead of the corrupt side of politics. If this situation is evaluated in terms of semiotics, the identities /being/ and /seeming=appearing/ can differ. For example, today’s self-seeking politicians try to make their buyers accept an identity they want to be seen, not their real identity. Politicians prefer discourses that can influence the masses, mobilize their emotions, and keep them together. Therefore, in the post-truth era, the impact of what is said comes to the fore rather than what is said. Therefore, in order for the masses to come together, enemies that do not actually exist are created through discourses (Weissman as cited in Alpay 2019: 30–31). These can be foreign powers, terrorist organizations, spies, or those who do not want the country to develop. In short, today’s right-wing European politicians reveal a secret identity (/being, not seeming=appearing/). There is a small quantity of insidiousness here. What such politicians do is quite a distortion of the truth through narration.

Moreover, these distortions can be everywhere, from private life to national and international relations. Of course, what is expected is the formation of a correct identity (/being, appearing/). While an open identity is an expectation, politicians in the post-truth world create a sneaky identity (see Table 1).

Fake news or the fake news epidemic, even giving false information, indicates the forms of examination about whether the information produced after the truth is healthy. Fake news produced after the truth may make the buyer happy at that

Table 1: Truth versus post-truth.

Contemporary politicians		
In the truth era		In the post-truth era
/Being, appearing/ Accuracy, clarity	vs	/Not being, not appearing/ Secrecy, sneakiness

moment. Nevertheless, this news can be used for evil purposes. The results of fake news that will affect the country's election in the press may not be as innocent as expected. Then, in the post-truth period, there is a move towards an era where people can be easily motivated and used for different purposes. For example, if a piece of innocent fake news in advertisements is a situation that will affect public health, the results may be unexpected ways.

2 The concept of “post-truth”, signification of post-truth and fake news

Most succinctly, these concepts can be defined as information pathology. Well, can these concepts be a form of presentation that reveals another logic of social meaning? According to Angelo Di Caterino, the concept of “post-truth” can be considered a social transformation of the “fake news” concept (2021: 2). Fake news is a situation that societies living in the post-truth era are exposed to. These social uses indeed introduce ambiguity to media discourse and fuel the truth crisis. In fact, it can be said that the concept of post-truth is a political concept. Politicians lie on many issues. However, lying is not something that politicians resort to when they are stuck or when they cannot get out of a situation. They resort to lying in order to create a universe for themselves and to convince the masses in this universe they have created. In other words, there is a conscious and planned act of lying. The world's problems today are quite chaotic and surreal for a human being. But lying by those in power is nothing new. In fact, writers such as George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, and Neil Postman have warned humanity of what awaits us when certain truths are denied by those in power. When we look at history, it will be seen that those in power or those trying to seize power have resorted to lies. Richard Nixon's Watergate Scandal and US President George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq in 2003 are the most well-known examples. Politicians and their supporters are able to present and discredit the truth as they wish thanks to today's new media opportunities.

Jacques Fontanille mentions two dimensions of truth to describe the post-truth situation: The first one is the referent on which the truth is based (personal, ordinary, universal, etc. referents). The second one is the referent aimed to get something done in which the facts are placed. In short, they are about verificatory referents and verifiable referents. In the first, there is a somewhat subjective truth such as “my truth”, “our truth”, and “known truth”. In the second, there is a referent in which post-factual and post-truth follow each other, and referrals are based on these practices. Every semiotic universe, text, and utterance presupposes a typical internal verificatory referent. In order to distinguish between the two types of referent (verificatory and verifiable), it is necessary to identify the domain each refers to 2021: 190–191. The verificatory referent belongs to the individual or collective moment of enunciation. The verifiable referent develops on the conditions of truth used by the collective actant of the referent.

In order to better define the post-truth, it is necessary to distinguish truth from reality. Reality is what is observed. On the other hand, truth is truthful: what is true, what corresponds to what exists. The truth will therefore consist of a correspondence, an agreement between discourse and reality, that is, between what I say and what is (the real). The concepts of “realism” and “truth” are also separated in the context of formal logic. “The truth is the relationship between the individual formation of a thought, sentence, or proposition and the referent to which some things are affirmed” (Ducrot and Todorov 1979: 333). Suggestions (utterances) that consist of a fictional structure (e.g., literary discourses) have no referent, indicate a fictional situation, and the question of truth in these sentences will be devoid of meaning.

Such a corpus can also be the subject of discourse semiotics, culture, or literary semiotics. Truth concerns society. In this respect, the cultural side can be mentioned. Lying is, in a way, a question of culture. Lying is also related to cultural semiotics in this context. As a general impression, it can be said that the concept of “post-truth” refers to a wide semiotic field. Defining culture as a communication phenomenon based on meaning systems, fake news, its presentation to the receiver, and the information interpreted as post-truth are all seen to be a problem of interpretation and communication. It concerns cultural semiotics.

3 Truth/reality, post-truth/fake news and communication

Nowadays, we are frequently confronted with fake news both on the internet and on television. In his latest book, *The Death of Expertise*, Tom Nichols (2017) stated that situations in which ordinary people increasingly challenge experts are becoming

more common. In other words, information can be provided without the need to be an expert to express an opinion on a subject, and this can be served as if it were normal. As a result of such situations becoming increasingly common, the fake news frenzy is becoming unbearable. So how can this epidemic of fake news be dealt with? Traditional and new media organizations have a lot to do in this regard. There are various platforms to control fake news that grows like a snowball every day. For example, in Turkey, Teyit.org is a verification platform that analyses the accuracy of questionable content on the internet based on open sources. However, of course, such platforms are not enough and new ones are being added to the fake news storm every day. Therefore, today, it is necessary to be much more meticulous to distinguish between truth and lies. A 2018 report published by Soros Open Society found that Turkey is the second most vulnerable society to fake news (second lowest in media literacy among 35 European countries) (Lessenski 2018: 3). This means that facts and truth are under threat in today's politics.

In the age we live in, feelings, not facts, have become more important. In this age (there are examples in the past as well), where political facts are subordinated and the truth becomes even more insignificant, it is important who produces the utterances and under what conditions they are presented to which recipient. The post-truth, fake news, and infodemic, which are close concepts to each other, can also be considered general communication problems nowadays. In terms of communication theory, an utterance is prepared by the utterance subject within its parameters and presented to the receiver of the utterance. Here, an utterance is transmitted, and there is an exchange of information between the enunciation subject and the receiver of the enunciation. Here, the situations related to the subject of enunciation and the receiver of the fake news (enunciated utterance) can be questioned:

- In terms of purposeful production, the enunciation subject produces fake news; there is a particular purpose in producing this utterance and transferring it to the receiver of the enunciation. For example, fake news is produced to influence the recipient of the enunciation.
- In terms of the receiver of the enunciation, it aims to get information about a subject that s/he does not know, misknows, or knows little by taking this message and signifying it. However, if the receiver of the enunciation is unwittingly exposed to fake news, s/he is likely to suffer from it. Accordingly, the news is false, and the accurate information has been hidden from her/him.
- So, is it possible to talk about a third subject in transmitting a false post-truth message? In a fictional case, of course, it can be. For example, two people talk in advertising. The third person is the consumer. Two people speaking in advertising are enunciators in reality. Both can be players of fake news. The consumer

is the receiver of the post-truth, fake news, or fake news infodemic. It will be the consuming subject that will be harmed.

All kinds of messages produced by people are for communication purposes. Information not transferred from the sender to the receiver has no specific function or purpose. There is a matter of information transfer in communication by using all kinds of linguistic or non-linguistic signs. The point at issue here is the content of the message. As it is widely known, there are subjective situations of the sender more or less in every statement. It is the sender's ideology, explicit or implicit goal, and expectation. Each message created has a specific purpose. The message can be handled and analyzed through communication theories, semiotics, or another theory.

It is also vital for the receiver to perceive and make sense of the message. In other words, it will be essential to make sense of the concepts of post-truth, fake news, and fake news epidemic in terms of communication. How well the receiver understands the message transmitted by the sender is essential. That is, the information that the receiver makes sense of is important. For this reason, everything should be arranged well in every message created. Although there is the transmission of the truth, in this transmission, it is a matter of whether the transmitted information is factual. That is to say, different oppositions, such as lie/truth, believing/convincing, and being/appearing, are at the forefront of the situations that need to be considered in the signification, interpretation, and analysis of post-truth fields.

Truths are not absolute, or timeless, and do not respond to objectivity (Lorusso 2021: 313): Whenever we discuss objectivity, we claim that we are guaranteed something we cannot assure or secure. The realities depend on the criteria of truth that we define culturally. So, how can "truth" manifest itself in the post-truth era, can it really exist, or who and how can confirm that "truth" is the truth? Finding answers to all these questions is difficult, but some estimates may be made. In relation to that, Johannes Angermuller mentions an implementation called the "Strong Programme" (Angermuller 2018: 1) in his discourse studies. Insisting on truths, this program is rooted in the founding traditions of "French" and "Critical" Discourse Studies. According to Strong Programmers, there is no "truth" that can be explained by wisdom; because, in our age, there is almost no absolute truth but solid and practical discourses.

4 Convincing/believing

Instead of framing, cutting, selecting, and discussing the exciting elements of reality, a very different situation occurs in political discourses, advertising statements, and

Table 2: Convincing versus believing.

	Convincing	Believing
Manipulation	Sender convinces the subject	Subject believes/does not believe
Sanction	Subject convinces the sender	Sender believes/does not believe

television discourses. Here, truth and fiction, truth and lie, and truth and deception are presented to the buyer as intertwined. According to Greimas and Courtes, in the semiotic diagram, “convincing” is a situation that the sender wants from the subject. So /wanting to do/ or /having to do /generally means /convincing/. Convincing means that the subject begins an act in order to do an act. Believing is in opposition to convincing (/make-believe/). While the sender wants to /convince/, s/he wants the receiver to /believe /. We can also see the modal ‘to persuade’ as the state of persuasion or the act of persuading. In short, believing is an activity performed by the receiver of the enunciation who performs her/his interpretive act. Convincing (/make-believe/) is the enunciation subject (enunciator) activity responsible for the persuasive act (Greimas and Courtes 1979: 77). Kalelioğlu states that in the actantial model used in the semiotic analysis, there is a mutual convincing/believing struggle between the sender and the operator subject. In the manipulation phase, the sender convinces the subject. The subject believes or does not believe. In the sanction phase, the operator subject convinces the sender. The sender either believes or does not, see Table 2 (Kalelioğlu 2018: 141–142).

These acts of believing and not believing are related to the news content and the act’s success. It is more plausible not to believe fake news. Similarly, the fake news epidemic is closer to not being believed. Naturally, since the post-truth does not match reality, it is more reasonable not to believe it. Whether the news is true or fake may not be so important to the sender, who has a specific purpose. The sender may also want to give the receiver exact information or manipulate her/him by giving false information. The last situation has reached a dimension that transcends borders.

Countries have become involved in each other’s domestic affairs through new virtual platforms, social sharing platforms (Facebook, Flickr, Foursquare, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Tumblr, Twitter, Whatsapp, YouTube, etc.), and new media. Serious arguments have been made that Russia interfered with the 2016 presidential election between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump with highly sophisticated propaganda tools (Vinogradoff 2016). *These may increase in the future. The illusory reality effect can be mentioned here* (Nelson 2022: 4). The primary purpose of the sender is to influence and persuade the receiver for her/his purposes. A lie is also a form of

persuasion. The receiver is not always persuaded by telling the truth. Sometimes an impressive lie can be more effective than the truth.

If the receiver believes the lie s/he tells, there is no problem here. “The persuasive act, one of the cognitive performance forms, depends on the enunciation condition in the case of the convocation made by the enunciator and consists of different modalities” (Greimas and Courtes 1979: 274). These modalities ensure that the receiver of the enunciation accepts the proposed enunciative contract and that effective communication occurs. Causativeness, “which is vital in the persuasive act, sometimes explains the formation of the subject to be modulated and sometimes the possible act of the subject. Persuasive action is considered under two aspects: cognitive action and persuasive action” (Greimas and Courtes 1979: 275). To persuade means to lead someone to believe something with a logical argument or appeal to someone’s feelings. Convincing is to give someone irrefutable proof of her/his guilt. Forcing someone to accept something is necessary or true with evidence or irrefutable reasoning.

Cognitive action refers to the information that is conveyed to the recipient. The persuasive action, on the other hand, shows the way the message is arranged and fictionalized. In the first case, the persuasive action is interpreted as a cognitive action aimed at reconciling the receiver of the enunciation with its semiotical becoming (or a part of this being). This semiotic becoming is seen only as a manifestation by the receiver of the enunciation. In the second case, that is, in the case of persuasion aimed at provoking someone else’s performance, the persuasive action constructs its modal programs within the framework of manipulation structures.

The modality of belief can affect different modalities. For example, intuition (/being able to believe/) or hope (/wanting to believe/) is related to the coexistence of belief and other modalities. In this regard, Aldo Bizzocchi classifies all possibilities of belief, see Table 3 (Bizzocchi 2014).

The truth/lie situation is related to two areas: In one, the accuracy of the information (truth) is in question, while in the other, the information is not correct (lie). On the other hand, these two situations are opposite and exclude each other. Where there is truth, there is no lie, or where there is a lie, there is no truth. Traditional communication theory has always been concerned with the correct transmission of the “message”, whether the message coming out of the mouth of the sender and the information perceived by the receiver is the same. The problem of the communication situation’s truth concerns the message’s referent.

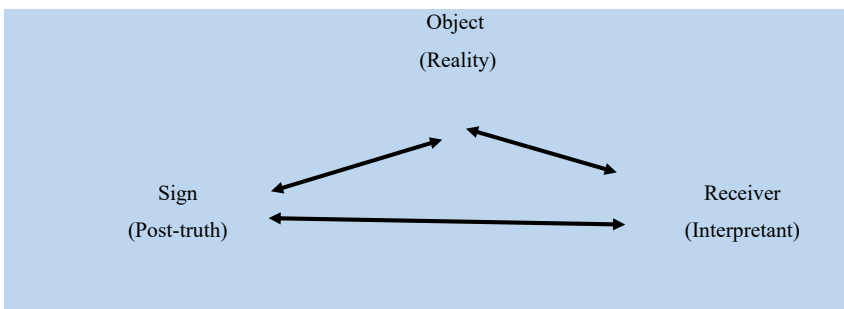
The perception of the information by the receiver, that is, its signification, is the performative dimension. The transfer of information concerns a communication situation. However, the recipient’s interpretation of this message is a situation of signification. In the 1960s, Roman Jakobson describes how communication occurs and the necessary elements for communication: First, a sender and a receiver are

Table 3: Belief-related modality.

Belief-related modality	Simple meta-concept
Being able to believe (to be able to believe)	Reliability
Having to believe	Common sense
Wanting to believe	Broad vision
Being able to believe (to be able to believe)	Intuition
Having to believe	Unsensible religious belief
Wanting to believe	Hope
Being able to believe (not able to believe)	Taboo
Not having to believe	Alienation
Not wanting to believe	Prejudice
Not being able to believe (not be able to believe)	Ethical (moral, conventional) censorship
Not having to believe	Critical meaning

necessary. There must be a message to be transferred between these two. Finally, for the sender and receiver to establish healthy communication, there must be a standard code, channel, and referent. In order to signification, this information should be arranged according to a particular code and presented to the receiver. It is essential for the realization of communication. In other words, the three concepts mentioned – post-truth, fake news, and fake news epidemic have a signification and communication situation in which this is applied.

“When Peirce’s semiotic triangle (object, representamen, and interpretant) is considered in terms of culture, it transforms into the world, text, and interpreter” (Deledall 2021: 77). The post-truth situation can be thought of as a sign (text). The object is the reality, and there is coding in the transfer of this object to the interpreter (see Figure 1). There will be subjectivity in this process. So, to understand the logic of

**Figure 1:** Reality triangle.

post-truth as the logic of culture, we need to examine these terms, remarkably, how the concept of “reality” has changed.

The concept of post-truth refers to situations that “objective facts are less effective in forming public opinion than appealing to emotions and personal opinions” (Di Caterino 2020: 3). These two forms of the sanction phase */believing/* and */convincing/* can be put forward due to epistemological judgment. If */convincing/* arises from the manipulation stage (the sender convinces the subject), the sender believes or does not believe in the sanction stage. If the subject does not believe in this act of believing, the act does not take place.

Convincing means knowing and recognizing the reality after a specific denial or a certain doubt. Convincing is not a passive state; it is a natural action. It signifies the transition from one believing stage to another. “To the extent that the enunciator performs (convincing) a persuasive action, the receiver of the enunciation forms his interpretive act and an epistemic judgment based on the utterances of the situation that s/he has been exposed to or faced” (Günay 2018: 248). There is a relationship between the epistemological situation and belief. Both decision-making and truthfulness clarify the act of believing.

The alethic modality reveals that content is truth. Belief judgment is a kind of epistemological condition indicated by the action */to believe/*. “From the semiotic point of view, we can speak of an epistemological structure if the modality of believing affects a situational statement (whose predicate is a modalized act of ‘to be’)” (Greimas and Courtes 1979: 129). Such a structure allows us to show the categories of the epistemological modality on the semiotic square, see Figure 2.

The epistemic modality states the true judgment in the utterance: certain, not certain, possible, impossible. The acceptations of dual actions with nouns can be: The idea of certainty is opposed to the idea of impossibility, contradictory with the thought of uncertainty. In the same science, the idea of impossibility is also

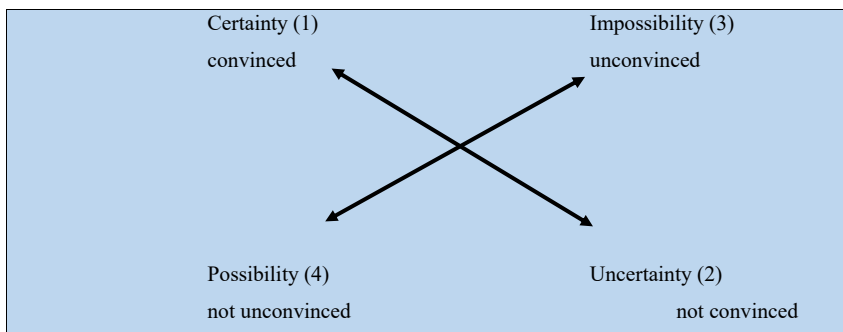


Figure 2: Epistemological modality.

contradictory to probability. Certainty includes possibility, and impossibility includes skepticism.

5 Being-appearing

Discussion of the problem of truth in utterance-discourse can be interpreted primarily as the recording (and reading) of signs of authentication. “Post-truth is a particular social context in which truth is not defined by a coercive verification process in the empirical reality relationship” (Di Caterino 2021: 2). There is a standard of authenticity based on experience rather than a standard of accuracy based on verification. Faced with the reconstruction of truth, the semiotician knows that s/he has the concept of verification and positions it starting from the following point: “Truth, secret, untruth, and deception. Thanks to signs of affirmation, an utterance-discourse is seen as true or deceptive, untruth, or secret” (Greimas and Courtes 1979: 417):

/being, appearing/: Truth, Evidence

/being, not appearing/: Secrecy, Insidiousness

/not being, appearing/: Untruth, Simulation

/not being, not appearing/: Deception, Ambiguous

A semiotic square inferred from here in terms of confirmatory modality might look like Figure 3 (Brandt 1995: 5).

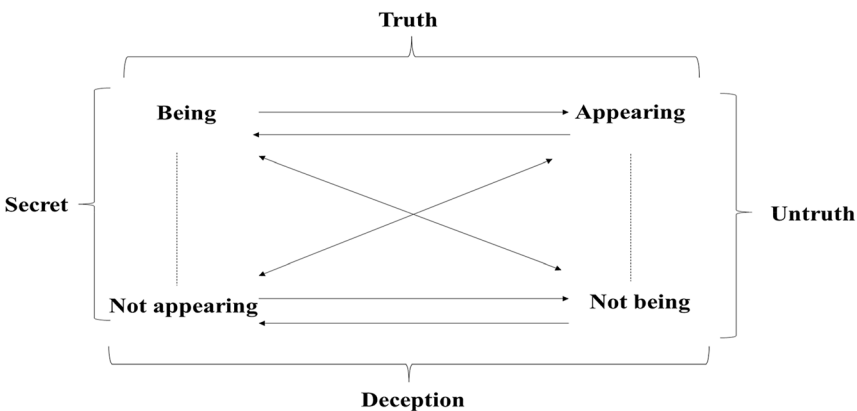


Figure 3: Being versus appearing.

“Truth is found in appearances and in the results of verification, that is, in a series of operations that produce similarity to reality, constitute the truth, and aim to produce the truth within the discourse” (Lloveria 2022: 4). This confirmatory construction in no way guarantees to convey a truth that is the enunciator or receiver of the enunciation at the two ends of the communication line or in the appropriate situation of this mechanism which is wholly dependent on an elevated epistemological mechanism by providing a certain enunciative coherence. The enunciation subject (the enunciator) speaks in vain about the object of knowing which s/he communicates, that s/he “knows”, and that s/he is “sure” that this thing is clear. These speeches cannot provide to be believed by the receiver of the enunciation. In order for knowledge to be adopted by the enunciator and the receiver of the enunciation, a state of true believing must be placed at both opposite poles of communication.

6 Conclusions

Recently, contemporary societies have been faced with situations where reality is distorted and reconstructed, such as post-truth, fake news, or fake news epidemic. It is no longer the transfer of the expected truth to the receiver, but the presentation of the information, the truth, or the truth, which is rearranged by the expectation of the sender in a way that will affect the receiver. In a democratic regime, when the political preferences of a government are contrary to the principles and values, propaganda is used through the media. So, truth is denied and facts are redefined.

From a semiotic perspective, the post-truth approach concerns epistemic modality. The recipient’s belief or disbelief depends on the truthfulness of the reality presented. The voter is, usually, asked to believe the presented information. Of course, the accuracy and reliability of the provided information are related to the presence of the veridictory modality. Although the given information is expected to be true (*/be-appear/*), it is clear that the information is false (*/be-not-appear/*).

In coordination with the rise of populism in societies, fake news is used in various social communications. It meant breaking with social reality. It was a question of re-presenting the reality in a different way that societies lived every day. Semioticians, sociologists, and political scientists have begun researching this post-truth form of communication and the societies living in this situation differently.

Today, with the existence of social media, any news can be quickly circulated and spread very quickly. This situation is one of the factors that support and spread post-truth environments. In addition, echo chambers, which can be defined as the individual being in contact with the people he/she sees close to himself/herself and hearing only voices similar to his/her own as a result of being closed to the thoughts of people with different opinions, have also paved the way for the proliferation of

post-truth environments and discourses. In other words, echo chambers are the adoption of the same opinion without any questioning and it becomes impossible to believe in the real truth. It is seen that it is quite difficult to reach the truth in such an environment. For this reason, traditional and new media must provide the conditions to present the truth to society.

False news and misinformation during crisis periods such as elections, conflicts, and wars cause serious damage to the perception of truth, and the spread of this news causes many negativities. Fake news, which can threaten the national security of countries, can also bring security problems for people and organizations. Journalists who try to distinguish fake news from real news need to be supported, and the foundations must be laid for world citizens to access accurate information. Although confirmation/verification sites are not a definitive solution, they can make a positive contribution to the process. In this post-truth era, every country can take action to improve public awareness in order to combat fake news. For example, it can educate its citizens on media literacy so that they can access accurate information, impose serious sanctions on media outlets that publish fake news, or impose some restrictions. However, individuals should personally increase their awareness in order to access accurate information and distinguish the difference between truth and lies.

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