

SHUSHANIK H. PARONYAN AND GRIGOR A. GHAZARYAN

*Yerevan State University*

## **Transcultural communication and national identity: A cultural and semiotic analysis of Armenian and British banknotes**

### **ABSTRACT**

The aim of the present article is to study how the interplay of the symbolic system of language, both visual and verbal, can impart core cultural values of a particular socio-cultural group of people. Linguistic analysis of Armenian and British paper currency is carried out to demonstrate that the monetary system of a state, and currency in particular, can reflect aspects of national identity and become part of national culture.

The need for a linguistic study of multimodal communication is quite timely in the so called 'modern Information Age'. Online platforms, when compared to print media solutions, host information in a qualitatively different way. Still, in both cases preference is given to the use of less space and fewer words in transmitting information. Hence a visual or pictorial representation of some idea in combination with verbal communication becomes an efficient method of conveying relevant information.

The pragmatic and semiotic analysis of Armenian and British paper currency (GBP and AMD) in the present article reveals some differences in the way in which multimodal channels of communication are used. At the same time, it becomes evident that the socio-cultural information on the banknotes is the result of far-reaching state policies which aim at highlighting certain principles and values.

**KEYWORDS:** culture, multimodality, pragmatics, speech act, semiotics, core values, verbal communication.

### **1. Introduction**

The analysis of different issues related to culture has become extremely popular in linguistics. With the development of interdisciplinary fields such as sociolinguistics, pragmatics, neurolinguistics, psycholinguistics, etc., the scope of linguistic analysis has become wider, including linguistic as well as non-linguistic perspectives on the analysis of language use. This broad outlook has opened the possibility to describe

and interpret similar or even the same phenomena, realia and activities in a number of new ways. Consequently, the apparent diversity of language use in a variety of contextual settings has led to the idea that these diversifications can be explained by addressing cultural issues. Culture is seen not only as an established mental blueprint – a kind of silent information stored in the individual's (sub)conscious mind (customs, values, beliefs, mentality and so forth), but also as an expression of certain visible mental and physical activities, constructions and artefacts (e.g., speech, education or architecture) (Samovar et al. 2010; Paronyan 2018).

The present paper focuses, therefore, on a novel area of research in linguistics – the expression of cultural values on banknotes via certain symbolic messages. The aim of the paper is to analyse various modes of communication, visual and verbal, which impart and disseminate some of the core cultural values of a particular socio-cultural group of people. However, the paper does not invoke an empirical perceptually-oriented study of how Armenian and British natives judge the semiotic combinations presented to them on the banknotes. Instead, the analysis, by predominantly examining the level of expression, tries to reveal how core cultural values of a national group can be conveyed via multimodal texts, considering paper currency as a concrete example. For this purpose, British and Armenian samples of paper currency – 10 and 5 GBP banknotes as well as 5000 and 10000 AMD banknotes – are chosen as objects of analysis of the multimodal textual information, which is carried out within the frames of Cross-Cultural Pragmatics and Semiotics through the use of a qualitative research methodology.

## **2. Communication as transaction of multimodal meaning**

In linguistics, we are mainly concerned with the transaction of meaning – the final product of brainwork carried out subconsciously and/or consciously and converted into the form of verbal and non-verbal signals. This is, or, better to say, this was the province of linguistics as one of the branches of the humanities. In fact, initially, the focal unit of linguistic analysis was the verbal sign – whether written or oral (later on – electronically mediated, as well). In the course of time, non-verbal and paralinguistic cues (such as gestures, mime, body movement, volume, tone of voice, speed etc. in oral speech and punctuation marks in written speech) came to the fore of linguistic analyses as bearers of transferrable meaning (Kendon 2004; Hirschberg 2006; Wharton 2009 and 2012). With the development of electronically mediated communication, where a vast number of symbols called emoticons and emojis are used to send information, linguists began to explore quite a specific research topic

– that of the iconic representation of meaning (Herring 2001; Christal 2004; Krohn 2004). Hence it can be stated that the linguistic analysis of the multimedia symbolic representation of meaning opened new areas of research where verbal and non-verbal communication cues and images combine to express joint information.

This type of informativity, which can be viewed as a kind of interaction of various shades of meaning, served as a background for the recent multimodality theory. This theory developed within the frames of communication theory and social semiotics, where the message is complex and can be interpreted as a result of the interplay of different communication resources or modes (Gunther 2010). The modes that are used to compose the overall message vary from linguistic, textual or aural, to visual and other forms of communication. It is generally held that the simultaneous use of different resources increases the semiotic value of communication and creates a special form of meaning which determines how the target audience receives a message. Interestingly, when it comes to message production or publication, the trade-off is usually between the amount of energy (and time) spent on encoding information in order to compose a message or to create a resource and, on the other side, the amount spent on decoding a message or using a resource.<sup>1</sup> Most often multimodality is applied in the study of online resources, in different types and genres of writings as well as in educational practices, and uses different types of medium, e.g. oral and written speech, visual images, videos, electronic media, and the like (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006; Kress 2010; Gitner 2016).

In this paper a specific medium of communication, the banknote, is analysed in order to reveal the interplay of the socio-cultural and banknote denomination information which is imparted with the help of verbal and visual modes. Thus, the banknote is viewed as a text in which different types of meaning are conveyed via different modes of communication. We can therefore assume that by analysing these explicit representations, some of the cultural values which reflect the collective viewpoints of a particular group of people can be revealed.

### **3. Currency as communication and expression of socio-cultural values**

The interrelation between language and culture is unmistakable, and it has been explored and verified by extensive linguistic research (Wierzbicka 1997; Everett 2005; Duranti 2009; Ahearn 2012). Language and culture are closely connected,

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, it is well known that publishing in paper ('encoding') is more expensive as compared to digital solutions; on the other hand, reading online publications ('decoding') drains more of our mental energy (Jabr 2013).

the former being a social and conscious expression of thought, and the latter being an implicit set of values, a specific way of thinking which can be expressed through communication.

It is thanks to the parallel development of the Semiotics of Culture and Semiotics of Text between the 1920s and 1990s that we now have a wider perspective that allows for a consideration of cultural phenomena in the light of cognitive processes, where each system of signifiers in any sphere of human life corresponds – through a process of reading – to a group of specific practices and techniques. As coders and decoders, as writers and readers of culture, we have started seeing processes of signification (semiosis) in a logical structure, and it is due to Semiotics that we have managed to grasp the link between ‘everyday tastes and mindsets on the one hand, and the social processes of ‘big history’ on the other’ (Кнабе 2005: 27). In the same way, the complex concept of national identity has been described both as a ‘subjective construct’, which includes, among other things, a strong sense of national affiliation as part of the individual’s identity, and as a ‘social construct’ (Tartakovsky 2012: 1851).

At this point, a question arises: How can currency (banknotes, coins) be related to language, culture and national identity? To answer this question, let us try to describe currency by referring to its conceptual rather than economic aspect.

Viewing currency as a form of existential realia, A. Makolkin defines it as a ‘transferable, migrating symbol of one’s collective identity, a metaphor of historical collective consciousness, expressing the vital group mythopoesis’. He also highlights its social aspect, as seen by Aristotle in his *Politics*, connecting the invention of currency with the social need to measure and diversify objects ‘according to their usefulness for a particular group of people at a certain time’ (Makolkin 2003: 74-75). The idea that money measures not only the value of goods but also of people possessing it leads us to question of how a currency becomes perceived as ‘value’ or as an ‘indicator of value’. In order to explain the perception mentioned, it is necessary to go through the strategies of institutionalization and persuasion which can be summed up in the following three points, re-contextualizing the concepts of dominance, reciprocity and identity first introduced in International Relations theory (Goldstein, Pevehouse 2007: 4-9).

1. Implying/stressing the physical value of currency, in comparison with other materials, such as salt, shells or other objects historically used as money. This naturally lays an emphasis on how the material<sup>2</sup> is found and refined (if gold), how it is produced (if

---

<sup>2</sup> Banknotes would clearly fall under the group of ‘Solid matters’, if considered through Thomas Sebeok’s classification of signs according to channels (Sebeok 1976:30), which means

banknote). The resources spent on producing money (coins or banknotes), are thus symbolically equated with the effort that citizens exert in order to receive money. Here we deal with the principle of reciprocity. It should also be noted that citizens who use the banknotes issued by the state have reciprocal contribution to the provision of certain collective goods. By using the banknotes issued by the state, citizens reciprocally contribute to establishing the value of the material, thus participating in a process of 'state building'.

2. Implying/stressing its ideological value; i.e. persuading the target group that using a specific currency is better, nobler, and more valued since it concerns the members of the respective community and automatically implies the user's belonging to the community or to the state that officially uses that specific currency. Here, the underlying persuasive tactic is based on the principle of identity, since it signifies belonging to a certain group, nation or state.

3. Making the target group accept the currency, by dictating the rule of using it and creating its demand which naturally implies that without that specific currency the target group will be deprived of the fundamental means of socio-economic interaction. Here the logic is based on dominance which coerces the citizens to use banknotes in exchange for the basic opportunity of financial and economic integration in a given society.

Now let us turn to the social-semiotic aspect of communication, through the prism of which currency can be evaluated. Interestingly enough, the expression 'money talks' has a metaphoric meaning, implying the importance of currency in the social life of people. We can also interpret this expression literally, meaning that any unit of money communicates certain information: its nominal value (e.g. 50 GBP or 5000 AMD), its national or territorial sphere of functioning (e.g. Great Britain or Armenia), and its social status (e.g. the British pound, unquestionably, is of higher status compared to the Armenian dram (AMD), which is recognizable by a small group of people living in Armenia and outside its territory).

It goes without saying that banknotes should also be considered instruments of interaction at interpersonal, intra-state, inter-state and supra-state levels. Currency, depending on its origin and prescribed function, is typically created with the assumption of being circulated within the boundaries of a state (intra-state circulation), between various states (inter-state circulation), and/or as a single currency to form the basis of an economic and monetary union (supra-state cir-

---

that matter is used in order to manufacture objects that serve as signs for communication. To take the application of the given theory a step further, we could say that here we deal with 'pluripersonal' message exchanges (For this type of message exchange the following example has been considered by Sebeok: in the oral tradition of the Eskimos, 'the myth-teller speaks as many-to-many, not as person-to-person' (Carpenter 1960; quoted in Sebeok 1976: 28), namely interaction between sender (government/banks) and receivers (people).

ulation). The latter, for which the Euro serves as a valid example, is, however, outside the scope of the present paper, since here we aim at juxtaposing the message-carrying functions of two national currencies – British and Armenian.

Lastly, let us try to show what the initial, traditional conceptualization of the value of banknotes looks like when we place it in the model of the Peircean semiotic triangle which shows the basic structure of a sign. A sign is ‘anything which is so determined by something else, called its Object (in our example it is gold), and so determines an effect upon a person’ (in our case, on public perception of the value of banknotes), ‘which effect I call its Interpretant, that the latter is thereby mediately determined by the former’ (Peirce 1998: 478).

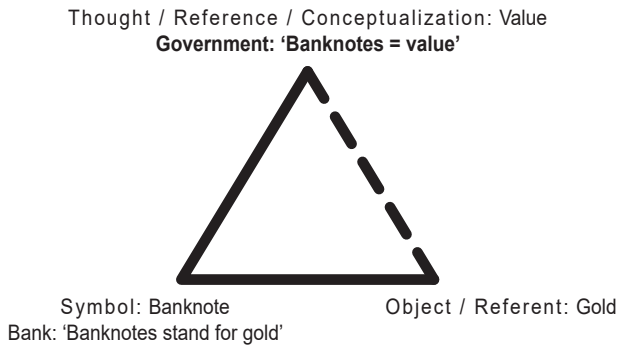


Figure 1. ‘Money’ in the Peircean semiotic triangle

The persuasion in the given case starts from the diacultural (organizational, i.e. the banks) level and is ratified afterwards by the government at a wider, paracultural level. Thus, what the bank implies is ‘Money [represented also by banknotes] is value, because the state possesses equal value expressed in gold’<sup>3</sup>. State guarantee can thus be seen as an ‘imposed interpretant’, which is not a ‘social convention’ as such, but rather an ‘institution-driven convention’. In fact, the direct link with the real object is not obligatory since there may be no gold in the state banks at all. As aptly noted by Y. N. Harari in speaking about post-truth, there is no strict division between ‘knowing that something is just a human convention’ and ‘believing that something is inherently valuable’. As he notes: ‘When most people see a dollar bill, they forget that it is just a human convention. As they see the green piece of

<sup>3</sup> This idea refers to the traditional conceptualization of the relationship between banknotes and gold – a relationship that saw its decline with the end of banknote’s convertibility into gold in the 1970s, when the value of money was already based on legal tender, and the value of banknotes was no longer related to gold or silver (Lannoye 2015: 281-285).

paper with the picture of the dead white man, they see it as something valuable in and of itself. They hardly ever remind themselves, ‘Actually, this is a worthless piece of paper, but because other people view it as valuable, I can make use of it’ (Harari, 2019: 279).

Having analysed the social-semiotic aspect of the information that can be conveyed via currency in general, let us focus on the socio-cultural values that the banknotes can communicate. Cultural artifacts come to prove the immeasurable complexity of the notion of culture. Furthermore, the cognitive interpretation of the items said to belong to the cultural sphere has revealed the existence of two different forms of ‘materialization’: tip-of-the-iceberg and bottom-of-the-iceberg cultural values. According to B. Peterson, the first group includes the external display of cultural values, anything that can be perceived with the senses, such as language, architecture, food, music, clothing, art and literature, emotional display, gestures, leisure activities and sports. The second group includes ‘silent’ markers of cultural values, for example, notions of time, beliefs about human nature, rules about relationships, motivations for achievement, tolerance for change, attitudes about men’s/women’s roles (Peterson 2004: 20-21).

In our attempt to define the ‘place’ of currency in the system of cultural values, we can state that it has a double nature. On the one hand, we can speak of its tip-of-the-iceberg materialization – the realization or actual display of money in the form of banknotes and coins which can be perceived with senses (we can see, feel or touch them). On the other hand, we can speak about its bottom-of-the-iceberg materialization – the social stance of a group of people toward this medium of exchange: the notion of wealth; the role of money in personal relationships and in a certain society; motivations for gaining money; attitudes about money and social status.

Thus, we can say that currency is no doubt a cultural entity. Still, in the end, what makes it culture-specific, what details relate it to national identity? The answer may be the following: each state/nation uses its own monetary system: the dollar is used in the USA, the pound in Great Britain, the ruble in Russia, the yuan in China, the dram in Armenia, etc. Yet this may not be a sufficiently inclusive answer, especially now that the euro is accepted as a monetary unit in culturally different countries that are members of the European Union. The dollar or ruble can also be used as a form of exchange in some countries other than the USA or Russia. Hence the answer to the question of what makes currency culture-specific might be found in another domain. As we have stated before, our research is based on the assumption that ‘money talks’, in the sense that it imparts certain

information. This fact makes us believe that the culture-specific characteristics of currency should be sought in the realm of multimodal communication. Let us specify the cultural message that can be communicated via conventional realia, such as banknotes and coins.

If the speech of individual speakers can be called idiocultural (in H.J. Vermeer's terms), then the relatively institutionalized expressions of realities can be seen as examples of what the given institutions use in order to send messages to their audience. Such is the example of banking institutions whose functions include the design and issuing of currency.

Truly enough, the real value of any money is its nominal value – the amount of gold it corresponds to (in theory). Thus, the higher its nominal value the more value can be ascribed to it by its users. Still, this is not the only information communicated by a piece of paper or metal, otherwise we would have blank paper with its nominal value stamped on it. Instead, we have had rich money-making traditions throughout history, when the rulers of different countries produced coins and banknotes to commemorate certain historical figures, places or events. Hence, along with the Arabic figures 1, 2, 20, 50 and others, certain culture-specific information can be shown on the banknotes. The combination of these informative elements endows these artifacts with some idiocultural characteristics.

This information is provided at different layers of communicative content conveyed via banknotes. The first layer is financial and professional information. This layer of communication is conventional and institutionalized so that it enables the official and legal exchange of a banknote, contrary to any other 'piece' of paper having different, similar or even the same markers but considered as a fake note. Thus, we can find information on banknotes that is usually conveyed with the help of figures and words (e.g. indicating the name of the country where it was issued, the nominal value of the banknote, the name and signature of a finance official – the treasurer or finance minister). The banknote also contains information about the year of issue, series number and some other kinds of specific information valid for a restricted circle of professionals such as bankers, financiers and the like, not for ordinary users<sup>4</sup>. These are clearly diacultural markers originating from the financial/banking sphere.

The next layer of information conveyed via banknotes is presented pictorially, with the help of symbols conveying national-cultural identity (federal symbols

---

<sup>4</sup> Note: No doubt, the problem of safety markers is quite actual for banknotes at present but this is out of our interest in this paper.



like stamps, seals and emblems) and pictures presenting specific socio-cultural, historical information (historical figures, historical sites, places and events, to mention but a few) which pertains to or is made part of the paracultural (national cultural) level. Sometimes another layer of information may be communicated verbally, conveying the motto of the cultural group, e.g. *In God We Trust* on the dollar.

The use of citations and idiocultural artefacts, directly associated with the figure on the banknote, pursues an objective which is not that of 'measuring people', (hence it is not a statistical and reflective process), but of bringing the masses up to a common benchmark of recognition and esteem for the objects in question.

A banknote is a channel of communication<sup>5</sup>, a vehicle which takes both idiocultural and diacultural elements (in particular, quotes, images of artwork, etc.) to a wider paracultural sphere of interpretation, reference and use.

In this context it appears natural that modern state coins and banknotes display a multidimensional semiotic network, as aptly noted by H. Haarmann (1990:19), who specifies:

There are signs related to numerical system and to numerals which are valid in a given speech community. In addition, symbols are used which are associated with a country's national and political history [...] The understanding of what is essential to a state's image and, therefore, what is considered valuable to feature on coins and banknotes as symbols of national culture differs considerably from one society to another.

As demonstrated by the socio-semiotic and socio-cultural outlook on currency, ever since the invention of paper money, banknotes have happened to be the most widespread carriers of information (including cultural), by virtue of being in circulation constantly. We may therefore assume that the opportunity of spreading information through the means of money is and remains an effective psychological and cognitive instrument. Proceeding to the pragmatic and semiotic analysis of the Armenian and British banknotes, we will show that currency can readily be used, among other functions, as a means of defining identity at state/national levels, currency is in fact used by governments in a carefully designed policy of nation-building. Furthermore, we will explain how these mobile monuments that

---

<sup>5</sup> Currency and other circulating vehicles have been viewed as 'ubiquitous' tools that can promote identity: 'Well-designed postage stamps are a natural semiotic vehicle for circulating symbols and icons of national identity and unity. Because they are so ubiquitous, they are seen and handled by the general population, along with money, more than any other instrument of government.' (Child, 2005: 108-137).

are charged with cultural-historical value can function as a means of conveying coded messages concerning bottom-of-the-iceberg cultural values.

#### **4. A pragma-semiotic multimodal analysis of Armenian and British banknotes**

Banknotes, as bearers of material information and socio-cultural values, can convey a vast array of diverse information. Thus, we assume that the text of the banknote is a combination of verbal stimuli expressed via words, pictorial stimuli expressed via visual images and, finally, appraising stimuli presented via figures and written in words.

For the purpose of the present linguistic analysis, four recently issued banknotes – two Armenian and two British – have been chosen. Leaving aside some important technical, professional and economic issues related to a banknote as a unit of currency, we will focus on the informative aspect of the newly issued banknotes, treating them as multimodal communication samples.

Banknotes generally circulate for a long period of time and, therefore, their endurance is of special importance. However, due to certain socio-economic, historical, geopolitical or other circumstances, the monetary system of a state may undergo changes or innovation.

##### **4.1 Armenian banknotes**

In 2018 the Republic of Armenia issued new banknotes in commemoration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian national currency – the Armenian Dram (AMD).

These banknotes differ from the old ones not only in their technical parameters but also in the quantity and quality of the imparted information. Hence, we can say that they are more communicative and informational than the older notes. Let us examine what information these banknotes convey and try to explain their cultural value in terms of multimodality, conducting our analysis on the example of the 1000 and 10.000 AMD banknotes. The newly issued 1000 AMD banknote features the renowned Armenian poet Paruyr Sevak, on the backdrop of two ringing bells<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.cba.am/en/sitepages/detailsnncbrabanknotescirculated3.aspx?nominal=1>

The official website of the Central Bank of Armenia describes the design of the front as *'Portrait of Paruyr Sevak against the background of the fragments from his manuscripts and the images of the bells'*, whereas the back of the banknote is described as *'Monument to Paruyr Sevak in Yerevan against the background of his house and his birthplace village Zangakatun'* (Central Bank of Armenia)<sup>7</sup>. The chosen subject is unsurprising, as Armenians are a nation with an ancient tradition of literacy and writing. The poets and writers, who put to use the Armenian language and, in doing so, contributed to its survival, have always been highly respected. Sevak's portrait is in the foreground while the pen on the left side and the pages containing written texts in the back imply that the person in the picture is a writer. In the background, one can notice the image of bells, a church and people waving their hands desperately. No verse or quote can be read on the banknote. However, it is obvious that the background images allude to one of Sevak's most celebrated poems – 'The Unceasing Bell Tower'. The poem is dedicated to Armenian priest and composer Komitas, founder of the Armenian national school of music who collected and transcribed pieces of Armenian folk music and introduced this music to wider audiences in Europe. Unfortunately, Komitas belonged to the generation of Armenians who witnessed the worst pages of Armenian history, the Armenian Genocide of 1915, with all its atrocities, after which he developed a mental disorder and spent the rest of his life in psychiatric hospitals in Paris, where he died in 1935. The idea of the bells tolling unceasingly is used by Paruyr Sevak in his poem as a symbol of incessant grief and as a bleeding wound that makes Armenian souls shout about their sorrowful past experience. Hence, the imagery on the banknote symbolizes some bottom-of-the-iceberg cultural values which are essential for Armenians as a small nation whose existence and survival have often been violently endangered. These values are preserving the Armenian identity via language and literature, and the commemoration of the victims of the Armenian Genocide. This is a clear example of iconic representation of meaning.

Let us proceed to the analysis of another sample of Armenian currency – the 10.000 AMD note which features the Armenian composer, founder of Armenian classical music Komitas Vardapet (Father Komitas)<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> See Banknotes in circulation / Banknotes of the Republic of Armenia / Official Website of the Central Bank of Armenia <https://www.cba.am/en/sitepages/detailsncbrabanknotescirculated3.aspx?nominal=1>.

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.cba.am/en/SitePages/detailsncbrabanknotescirculated3.aspx?nominal=4>

The image of Komitas symbolizes two cultural aspects which are important for Armenian identity – the revival and evaluation of Armenian folk music and the commemoration of the victims of the genocide.

Again, the official descriptions are fairly simple and general: front – ‘*Portrait of Komitas Vardapet against the background of the fragments of his manuscripts and Armenian landscape*’, back – ‘*Monument to Komitas in Etchmiadzin against the background of the building of Gevorgian Seminary and the fragments from the frescos of the seminary’s hall*’ (Central Bank of Armenia).

However, a close study of the images reveals that Komitas Vardapet is depicted on the backdrop of two distinct sign systems of notation – khazes (traditional Armenian system of musical notation, used to transcribe religious Armenian music since the 8th century, and scarcely known to the public at large) and the traditional notation system – which symbolizes Komitas’s contribution in the development of the art of writing and interpreting Armenian classical liturgical music (traditionally written in the khazes system) and bringing the knowledge about that unique sign system to international recognition (Tahmizian 2003: 23). A closer look makes it possible to view the notes from the canticles by Komitas and discern a few words, such as Հայր մեր [Hayr mer] (Our Father), which imply that a notation of the Lord’s Prayer is presented. On the right side, against the faded background of a painting by the renowned Armenian artist Martiros Sarian, there is a line from Komitas’s original version of the traditional Armenian dance Unabi. Thus, the imagery on the banknote symbolizes core values which are among the bottom-of-the-iceberg cultural values forming Armenian national identity – faithfulness to God, willfulness to preserve Christian faith, respect for old Armenian traditions, revival of old Armenian traditional folk music, and regard for historical past events, particularly through the memory of the Armenian Genocide. Thus, we can state that the image of Komitas himself is an indirect reference to both the tragedy of the Genocide and the enduring power of the Armenian culture. Furthermore, the notes from the canticles and the words *Hayr mer* (Our Father) represent meaning via pictorial and verbal modes. The integration of several semiotic resources or modes of communication clearly reinforces the message conveyed in the banknotes.

What can be naturally inferred from the analysis of the newly issued Armenian drams is the idea that the Armenian banknote designers have opted mainly for a pictorial-iconic way of encoding information. The general model of designing Armenian banknotes appears to be the following:

Image of Figure X + Icon(s) representing the most well-known work/accomplishment of Figure X.

## 4.2 British banknotes

In contrast to many of the Armenian banknotes, one can find both pictorial and textual signs on British pound notes, for instance on the five pound note which was issued in 2016 and features one of the most famous political figures in Britain – Sir Winston Churchill, the British statesman, orator, and prime minister who rallied the British people during World War II<sup>9</sup>.

Below Churchill's portrait, we read: *'I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat'*<sup>10</sup>. The sentence that is presented on the banknote is a famous quote taken from Churchill's historic and inspiring speech given by him to the House of Commons on 13 May 1940. Hence the picture of the Houses of Parliament with Big Ben, confirming the power of the British state and its parliamentary system, can be seen in the background.

The pragmatic analysis on the speech act level reveals that the quote on the banknote, which is a declarative utterance, is a flashback to a particular historical moment and historical figure. In order to interpret the multifold message it carries, one should know the context in which Churchill made his famous speech. Politically and historically, Churchill's speech, which was made at a period of military menace by Nazi Germany, is said to be a speech that lifted the spirits of the British nation and encouraged them to fight against the enemy. Pragmalinguistically, it can be interpreted as a commissive, an act of promise – a discourse, by the commitment of which the speaker undertakes a future act: there will be victory at all costs. Given the present period of time and placing this political figure and his famous utterance in the context of modern British history, the quote *'I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat'* appearing on currency, acquires a more general meaning and can be interpreted in economic terms, suggesting that 'you can achieve your goal if you work hard'. This propositional content can also be interpreted as an indirect directive – an advice given to the British people, which, if followed, will guarantee success and prosperity.

The interplay between the symbolic systems – verbal and pictorial – as well as the powerful symbol of Churchill himself, echoes core cultural values of the English people, such as courage, pride for military victory, diligence and industriousness.

The same inferences can be made in relation to the ten pound banknote, which contains the portrait of one of the best-known 19th century English novelists,

<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.flickr.com/photos/bankofengland/29231186640>

<sup>10</sup> International Churchill Society, <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1940-the-finest-hour/blood-toil-tears-and-sweat-2/>, accessed June 2019.

Jane Austen, and a quote from her famous novel *Pride and Prejudice*: ‘*I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading!*’<sup>11</sup>

Leaving aside the fact that this sentence sparked controversial opinions since those words ‘were spoken by one of Austen’s most deceitful characters, Caroline Bingley, who has no interest in books’<sup>12</sup>, we can state that they are pronounced by Jane Austen herself, whose portrait appears on the banknote. From a pragmatic viewpoint, the quote on the banknote presents a performative utterance, a direct realization of an assertive speech act, affirmation of a propositional content the speaker believes to be true. What makes this utterance special is the fact that the performative ‘*I declare*’ does not represent a declarative speech act since it does not change the status or condition of a situation. Admittedly, it simply represents the world the way the speaker, who is Jane Austen (more precisely, Caroline, who is Jane Austen’s mouthpiece in this case), believes it is, trying to make the words fit the world. A question arises in this connection: why does this assertive statement appear on the British national currency? What cultural implicature does this multimodal code convey? One possible explanation may be the necessity to emphasize the importance of language, the English language and literature as essential cultural elements. The need to do so may be motivated by the fact that with the growing number of migrants and the ongoing process of shaping the multicultural mindset of British citizens it becomes important to highlight one of the cultural values of Britishness – their love for reading and high evaluation of literary work. Another possible explanation could be the idea to call to the attention of the public the role of women in shaping British culture.

Here we deal with another combination of verbal and pictorial symbolic systems through the use of which values, such as love for literature and literacy in general, are expressed. It may be assumed that with the growing number of immigrants, that is, non-British population in Britain, it has become necessary to promote literary works that help instill a sense of British national identity in the people.

The model of message transfer used in the British banknotes is verbal or word-based, and iconic (pictorial or image-based) at the same time. It can be summarized as follows:

Image of Figure X + one of the most well-known quotes from Figure X.

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.flickr.com/photos/bankofengland/35848097251>

<sup>12</sup> Jane Austen banknote unveiled –with strange choice of quotation, *The Guardian*, 18 July 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/jul/18/jane-austen-banknote-unveiled-with-strange-choice-of-quotation>.

The analysis of the examples above leads us to think that a government's decision to use this or that symbol on the banknotes is also a decision to raise a specific symbol (be it a popular object or a prominent person) to new levels of popularity both at national and international levels. In doing so, the government also expects the public at large to accept the 'added cultural value' on the banknotes; thus, in the example of the Armenian banknotes, the users are expected to accept the fact that Komitas or Paruyr Sevak are truly notable figures who deserve to be featured on Armenian banknotes. Furthermore, the use of images both in the foreground and background can be motivated by the desire to reinforce certain aspects of national identity and to highlight cultural implications.

The following chart depicts the process whereby images of objects and/or figures representing intellectual, ideological and aesthetic value in a given culture/society are used by banknote designers and publishers for the purpose of imparting a certain 'cultural value' to the banknotes. This process is a binary one, and the signs used on the banknotes, in turn, automatically become relevant to the context in which they are placed and acquire new meanings in a process where they are expected to be interpreted as 'representing value'. This is how the interpretant (also known as the mental image) actually becomes a new sign, producing new interpretants in the process of semiosis.

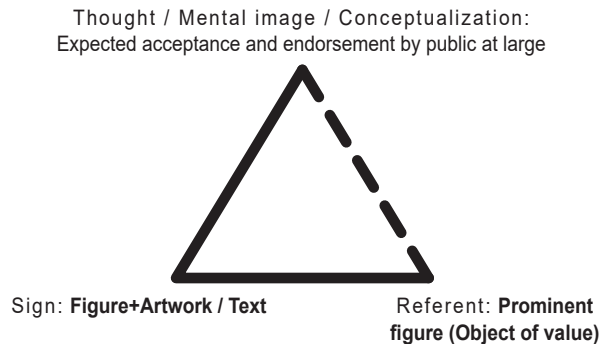


Figure 2. Banknotes in semiosis

It is the semantic and synergic interplay between word and image that intensifies the human experience of decoding the message. It should be remembered that however strong the determining impact of culture might be on our response in decoding an image, the act of interpreting per se remains inevitable. Referring to the division and relation between the 'seeable' and the 'sayable' or 'display' and

'discourse', W. J. T. Mitchell (1996: 51-52) suggests that '[...] In the act of interpreting or describing pictures, even in the fundamental process of recognizing what they represent, language enters in the visual field. Indeed, the so-called 'natural' visual experience of the world, quite apart from the viewing of images, may be much like a language.'

Based on these observations, we may say that there is a certain planned course of communication taking place among governments (through the institutions that issue banknotes) and the respective public. Through a language that efficiently combines text with images, this unidirectional communication serves its purpose of spreading carefully selected messages and instilling cultural values in the people who actually use the vehicle of the mentioned messages for other (economic) needs.

The expected acceptance and endorsement of the messages / values by the public at large should be seen within the context of relatively far-reaching perlocutionary acts (such as enlightening, inspiring, or otherwise affecting the receiver of the message), and this holds true in all cases where we can regard language, as Karl Bühler would put it, 'not as the possession of the community or the product of the community, but as the builder of the community and the bearer of the community or as coin of the realm in the exchange of signs' (Innis 1982: 110).

## 5. Conclusions

This study has combined two analytical frameworks – social semiotics and cross-cultural pragmatics – to study the multimodal textual information and unfold the silent codification of some cultural values behind the information provided on currency in general and in two specific case studies. Thus, the pragmatic and semiotic analysis of Armenian and British banknotes indicates that currency is a multimodal text which communicates information about actual nominal value, but also about cultural values and viewpoints of a nation. By virtue of their multimodal communicative content, banknotes are clearly related to language, culture and national identity.

From the analysis of the Armenian banknotes as excerpts of cultural texts composed via different modes of communication, we can conclude that their general design is almost entirely confined to the use of iconic signs in which even the textual parts are close to undecipherable for the inexperienced eye; as a result, they can be considered as mere ornaments/elements of (or pertaining to)



the object of value. The culturally essential information is conveyed/ implied via symbolic images having communicative value for a group of people who share mutual background knowledge. Thus, the general model of message transfer used in the Armenian banknotes is iconic (image-based or pictorial) and can be best summarized as follows: Image of Figure X + Icon(s) representing the most well-known work/accomplishment of Figure X.

British banknotes, in contrast, are enriched with both pictorial and textual signs, used in such a complementary way that endows the textual parts with at least micro-contextual characteristics (due to their juxtaposition with the image of the author of the quote). Moreover, in the act of 'borrowing' a quote from a cultural, historical or literary figure, the government of the respective state endorses the latter at a paracultural level and offers it to the public, entering into a one-sided perlocution with the users of the banknotes. The model of message transfer used in the British banknotes is verbal or word-based and iconic (pictorial or image-based) at the same time, and can be summarized as follows: Image of Figure X + one of the most well-known quotes from Figure X.

In the cases of both Armenian and British banknotes, the socio-cultural information (irrespective of the modes used to convey it) can be seen within the context of a carefully designed policy of nation-building. Paper money naturally serves as a mobile carrier of the above-mentioned information, and is intentionally 'charged with' cultural-historical value. Hence, the study of national currency can become a significant gateway to understanding the bottom-of-the-iceberg cultural values of any given society.

## REFERENCES

- Ahearn, L.  
2012 *An Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology*. Wiley-Blackwell Publishing.
- Child, J.  
2005 'The politics and semiotics of the smallest icons of popular culture. Latin American postage stamps', *Latin American Research Review* 40 (1), 108-137.
- Crystal, D.  
2004 *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Duranti, A.  
2009 'Universal and culture-specific properties of greetings'. In: A. Duranti (ed.) *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 188-213.

- Everett, D.  
2005 'Cultural constraints on grammar and cognition in Pirahã' *Current Anthropology* 46 (4): 621-646.
- Jabr, F.  
2013 'The reading brain in the digital age: The science of paper versus screens, Neuroscience.' *Scientific American*,  
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/reading-paper-screens/>
- Gitner, S.  
2016 *Multimedia Storytelling for Digital Communicators in a Multiplatform World*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Goldstein, J. S. – Pevehouse J. C.  
2007 *International Relations*. 8th Edition. New York: Longman.
- Haarmann, H.  
1990 *Language in its Cultural Embedding: Explorations in the Relativity of Signs and Sign Systems*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Harari, Y. N.  
2019 *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*. UK: Random House.
- Herring, S.  
2001 'Computer-mediated discourse'. In: D. Schiffrin – D. Tannen – H. Hamilton (eds.) *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 612-635.
- Hirschberg, J.  
2006 'Pragmatics and intonation'. In: R. Horn – G. Ward (eds). *The Handbook of Pragmatics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 515-538.
- Innis, R.  
1982 *Karl Bühler: Semiotic Foundations of Language Theory*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Kendon, A.  
2004 *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kress, G.  
2010 *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. New York: Routledge.
- Kress, G. – van Leeuwen, T.  
2006 *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. New York: Routledge.
- Krohn, F.  
2004 'A generational approach to using emoticons as nonverbal communication', *Journal of technical writing and Communication* 34, 321-328.
- Lannoye, V.  
2015 *The History of Money for Understanding Economics*. Createspace Publishing.
- Makolkina, A.  
2003 'The Euro: The sign of an ultimate existential reality'. *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 26 (1), University of Toronto Press, 74-83,  
<https://utpjournals.press/doi/10.3138/uram.26.1.74>, accessed November 2021

- Mitchell, W. J. T.  
1996 'Word and image'. In: R. S. Nelson – R. Shiff (eds.) *Critical Terms for Art History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 51-61.
- Paronyan, S.  
2018 'Language elements of foreign culture in the narrative: A pragmatic approach.' *Armenological Issues Bulletin*, 1 (13), Yerevan: Yerevan State University Press, 153-165.
- Peirce, C. S.  
1998 *The Essential Peirce*. Volume 2. Eds. Peirce edition Project. Bloomington I.N.: Indiana University Press.
- Peterson, B.  
2004 *Cultural Intelligence*. Boston, London: Intercultural Press.
- Samovar, L. – R. Porter – E. McDaniel  
2010 *Communication between Cultures*. Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning Press.
- Sebeok, Th.  
1976 *Contributions to the Doctrine of Signs*. Bloomington: Indiana University and Lisse: The Peter de Ridder Press.
- Tahmizian, N.  
2003 *Ardi Khazabanoutiun (Modern Armenian Neumology)*. Pasadena, California: Drazark Press.
- Tartakovsky, E.  
2012 'National identity'. In: R. J. R. Levesque (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Adolescence 1849–1862*. New York: Springer.
- Vermeer H. J.  
1983 *Aufsätze zur Translationstheorie*. Heidelberg.
- Wharton, T.  
2009a *Pragmatics and Non-Verbal Communication*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
2012b 'Prosody and meaning: Theory and practice'. In: J. Romero-Trillo (ed.) *Pragmatics and Prosody in English Language Teaching*. New York, London: Springer, Dordrecht, 97-116.
- Wierzbicka, A.  
1997 *Understanding Cultures through their Key Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Кнабе, Г. С.  
2005 *Семиотика Культуры: Конспект учебного курса, Москва: Российский государственный гуманитарный университет*.  
<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/banknotes/50-pound-note>, accessed November 2021  
<https://www.cba.am/am/SitePages/ncbrabanknotescirculated.aspx>, accessed November 2021

**SHUSHANIK H. PARONYAN**

Yerevan State University

paronyan\_shushan@hotmail.com

ORCID code: 0000-0001-6997-731X

**GRIGOR A. GHAZARYAN**

Yerevan State University

g.ghazaryan@ysu.am

ORCID Code: 0000-0002-1693-4882