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Research Article

# Semiology and a Semiological Reading of Power Myths in Education \*

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## Abstract

By referring to the theory of semiology, this study aims to present how certain phrases, applications, images, and objects, which are assumed to be unnoticed in the educational process as if they were natural, could be read as signs encrypted with certain ideologically-loaded cultural codes, and to propose semiology as a method for educational studies by means of a sample analysis. Semiological reading means to interpret the objects that surround our visible environment not just with their primary meaning but also based on their cultural codes, their metaphorical meanings. The signs that surround our environment present us with an order of myths that hide political meaning and naturalize this meaning. In this regard, reading signs and making a political analysis or analyzing the ideological codes of myths adds up to the same thing. In this study mythicized discourses within the educational process were analyzed based on the semiological reading approach. In this reference frame, the cover photograph of the Social Sciences Textbook adopted for use by the 5<sup>th</sup> grade in primary schools under the Ministry of National Education (MNE) during the 2011-2012 school year was analyzed as a sample, taking into consideration the principles of semiological analysis. It was concluded based on the signs included in the image that values recognized as the building blocks of a capitalist economy such as “technology,” “industrialization,” “progress,” “growth,” and “enrichment” were transferred through a mythical presentation.

## Keywords

Sign • Semiology • Myth • Education • Power • Ideology

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Semiology is a way of understanding the world as a system of relations, the main unit of which is the “sign.” As suggested by Umberto Eco, a sign is a lie; it is something that is presented in lieu of another thing (Eco, 1976). Semiological reading is to read the objects that surround us based on both their primary meanings and their cultural codes (metaphorical meanings). According to the French philosopher, Roland Barthes, semiology is based on understanding the systems of signs, analyzing their operative structures, and thus explaining the structure of the world of meaning (Barthes, 2005). J. Baudrillard, on the other hand, considered the semiological approach regarding objects in the reference frame of a consumption ideology, and this approach was underscored as a social logical analysis, which classifies or categorizes the objects and tells their uses, or as an analysis towards the political function of an ideology that dominates the discriminative social function borne by the objects (Adanır, 2009; Baudrillard, 2009). In that sense it can be argued that objects are transformed into cultural-social signs along with maintaining their existence as material objects, and thus all people who are exposed to these signs start to bow to these cultural codes (Adanır, 2009).

In the reference frame thereof, Barthes focuses his attention on the presentation mechanisms of political powers in a society within a universe of meanings surrounded by signs. In accordance with the Barthesian semiological approach, elements and objects of all life styles can be recognized as a product of a certain total structure, as appearances of a systemic organization. Furthermore, each bears a connotation beyond its denotative meaning with regard to the fact that each element or object is an integral part of that system. We can find in many culturally produced objects (or in natural objects that we attribute meaning to) a narration or an expression of the structure formed directly (deliberately) or indirectly through the discourse of power. In this sense, applying the Barthesian perspective, each and every visual element involved in the educational process from the architecture of school buildings to the physical structure of the classes, to the textbooks, course materials, pictures, photographs, and symbols, can be read as “signs” that bear a connotation beyond their denotative meanings. They are packed with cultural codes (Apple, 2006; Bernstein, 1990; Giroux, 2007; Spring, 1997).

Semiology as a method of analysis, is generally applied in the fields of Media and Cultural Studies. It should also be used more frequently in the field of Educational Sciences in order to analyze the visual characteristics of educational processes on the grounds that semiology allows the ability to attribute meanings to objects in regard to the entire social sphere.

Therefore, the main aim of this study is to sketch a theoretical framework regarding the semiological approach that could also be considered as a requirement in the field of

educational studies. The aim is to propose a methodological expansion and by means of an exemplary semiological analysis on a sample photograph, to propose semiology as a method for the field of Educational Sciences. This is done by demonstrating that many visual elements within the educational process can in fact be read with the help of analysis as a sign containing certain ideologically-loaded cultural codes.

In this respect, the present study will first present the theories regarding the theoretical background of semiology, specifically in the framework of Saussure and Barthes, and underscore examples of how these theories have been used as a method in the field of social sciences. The study will present, in light of the aforementioned framework and by means of critical semiological analysis, which myths have been formed or activated by the visual elements as introduced during the educational process, school environment, and text books.

In that sense, it is worth discussing whether there is a similar, power-centered, semiotic siege (Barthes, 2005) in the educational field as it is with all other fields where social relations are manifest. As a matter of fact, the philosophers of Critical Education argue that mass education as organized for the needs of capitalist economy is an ideological cultural process overrun through programs and content (Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2007; Spring, 1997). With regard to the perspective of critical education, all innocent-looking elements, physical forms, styles, objects, pictures, etc., that are used during the educational process carry meaningful values that belong to the ideology of the power along with their primary meanings (Bernstein, 1990; Giroux, 2007).

Whether the elements of visual education along with the program contents within the educational process serve as signs encrypted with cultural codes that reflect values towards the reproduction of the ideology of power (Bernstein, 1990) is an issue that needs to be studied. In this respect, the objects, photographs, and other visual elements that encompass us at school during the educational process should also be semiologically analyzed. Therefore, the issue is whether at least a part of the signs that occur in the educational process serve as mediators for the construction of certain power myths, and if those signs reflect an ideology of power, then which values are trying to be mythicized in the example photograph. This constitutes the main problem of the present semiological analysis based on the foregoing modes of reading, if it is to serve as an example for educational science.

A semiological analysis can help understand the visual elements in the educational process and the images and associations they create that serve as mediators for the “heroic” transfer of some values that belong to a political power. Such an analysis may support the argument that myths are instilled in our memories via unconscious imagery as cultural codes during the educational process. In that respect it can be noted that the educational process today is dominated by myths such as “technology,”

“growth,” “production,” “development,” “global market,” and “efficiency” that naturalize the capitalist relations of production.

In the context thereof, an exemplary analysis will be made in order to pave the way for the use of semiology as a method of analysis in the field of educational sciences. To that purpose, a semiological analysis will be made of a photograph chosen for this analysis in order to test the hypothesis. In this framework, taking into consideration the principles of semiological analysis, the present study will include an analysis of the signs on the cover photograph of the Social Sciences text book (Başol et al., 2011) for 5<sup>th</sup> graders in primary schools as chosen by the Ministry of National Education for the 2011-2012 school year. This analysis will attempt to identify which power values were transferred in a mythical presentation via those signs.

### **A Theoretical Reference Frame for Semiological Principles**

Semiology is a science discipline that studies sign systems such as language, codes, signals, etc. F. de Saussure envisaged semiology as a science which would “study the life of signs within society” (Guiraud, 1994). For Peirce, a sign is a thing that stands for something else in all respects (Vardar, 1998). Semiology, on the assumption that human beings approach all subjects of interest via signs, analyzes this phenomenon. In this respect, “we perceive the word via signs means we perceive it indirectly, without mediation” (Akerson, 2005, p. 16).

de Saussure (1998) asserts that signs unite a sound/image and a concept. A sign is a meaningful unit, which is interpreted as ‘standing for’ something other than itself. In short, a sign is a unit that is associated with another thing yet it is not that other thing in itself. It can be said that human beings are encompassed by various systems and signs that form the aforementioned systems. One needs to know the code in order to understand the sign. For instance, in order for us to be able to understand the word “apple” we need to know the code of that language, there should be a concept which reflects the image of an “apple” in our minds that is associated with what it looks like (Akerson, 2005; Rifat, 2008; Vardar, 1998). According to Saussure, linguistic sounds that compose words correspond to a concept in our minds, and that “sign” is the unity of both the word composed of such sounds and the concept of that word in our minds. For Saussure, a sign is “comprised of a sound/image, of the trace of linguistic sounds left in the mind as well as a concept of a phonetic narration and content” (de Saussure, 1998; Vardar, 1998, p. 77). In other words, a sign is a dyadic composition of the signifier and signified.

Let’s take a look at the “door” signifier. The union of the concept of door as the “signified,” (i.e., a concept identified as a way to pass through, a place with an opening and closing mechanism) and the phonetic trace of d-o-o-r as the “signifier”

is called the sign (de Saussure, 1998). Saussure applied this concept to the following similar schema to explain the concept of “sign.” As suggested by Saussure, signs are conventional and the code is the language of the spoken convention. In other words, one needs to know the language, or if not, the individual code of that sign (the signifier should correspond to something signified in them in order for that sign to make sense).

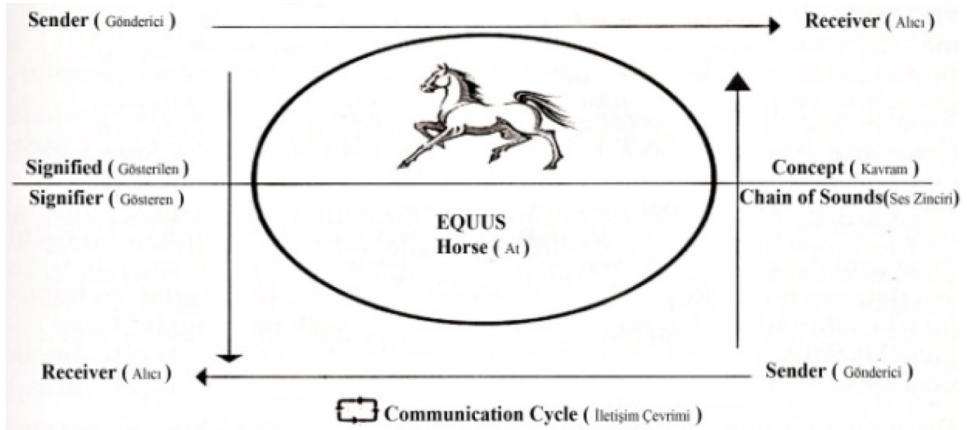


Figure 1. Communication cycle (Akerson, 2005).

In that sense, the sign of an object is not the word that is its name. The sign of an object is the composition of the word and the concept that has left a mark in our minds. Otherwise, the word *Equus* in Latin or *at* in Turkish would not correspond to the object “horse,” but only the word *horse* would correspond to the object “horse.” Accordingly, a sign is not a link between a thing and its name, but between the signifier and the signified (Akerson, 2005; Vardar, 1998).

For Saussure along with such linguists as Peirce, Jakobson, and Hjelmslev, signs have other references composed of connotations beyond their communicative function that directly denote the object based on its literal meaning, which inspired R. Barthes in semiology (Rifat, 2008, pp. 28–125). What Saussure called associative relations, where each linguistic unit is associated with different features of the speaker or audience, Jakobson thought of as defined human language with duties beyond mere communication, and Hjelmslev made efforts to explain a sign as a composition of literal meaning and connotations (Rifat, 2008, pp. 28–125). These influenced Barthes in his efforts to transform semiological principles almost into a science of discourse. In that respect, how Barthes applied semiological principles in his studies and how he interpreted them in his perspective is more important for the present study.

## **Analyses of R. Barthes with regard to Metaphorical Meaning and Ideological Contents**

Semiology has been an important approach especially for cultural studies since the end of the 1960's (Atabek, 2007). Barthes aimed for semiology to cover all cultural objects with the theory of metaphorical meanings of signs. Therefore, while some linguists limited themselves with conscious, deliberate, communicative phenomena, "R. Barthes ties various phenomena (objects or signs) of no communicative purpose, yet having meaning (such as dressing, furniture etc.), with semiology through the concept of signification and focuses on the relationship between signs and secondary signified or connotative signified meanings. As a result, he is separated from communicative semiologists who limit signification to the mechanism between the merely signified and that which is directly or primarily signified" (Vardar, 1998, p. 90). For this reason, connotative semiology undoubtedly has a future because society is constantly developing systems of secondary meanings apart from the basic system provided by the human language. Barthes thought that the empire of signs loaded with connotations besieges our universe of meaning. For him, language is built up entirely on ideological connotations. Because of this, "nothing is actually more ideological than linguistics most of the time" (Barthes, 2005, p. 180). In this sense, "analyzing signs in the world means to struggle with a certain purity of objects" (Barthes, 1990, 2005, p. 286).

For Barthes (2005) each object has a meaning which transcends its use. For instance, the look of a telephone always has a meaning independent from its function: A white telephone suggests an idea related to luxury, or womanhood or feminineness. There are phones used by bureaucracy, or outdated phones which suggest thoughts of a certain time period. Similarly, a fountain pen inevitably suggests prosperity, simplicity, seriousness, and fantasy, etc.. The dishes from which we eat our food always have meaning, and when they seem to have no meaning they definitely intend to have no meaning. Therefore, there is no object that escapes from having meaning (Barthes, 1990, 2005, p. 197).

In that respect all objects are part of a discourse in the context of their connotation. There are many semiological analyses by Barthes where the connotations of objects were analyzed. In many of his studies, especially *Mythologies* (1957), Barthes semiologically analyzed the mythical presentation formed by departing from the metaphorical meanings of objects in many phenomena such as fashion, love, wine, dressing, furniture, food, beverages, culture, etc.

Barthes made a similar semiological analysis on a photograph that might serve as an example for the present study. In his article "Rhetorique de l'image" (1964), Barthes analyzed an advertisement photograph for the Panzani spaghetti company (Barthes, 1964, as cited in Akerson, 2005, pp. 184–187).

For Barthes, as is seen in the following photograph, the message of the advertisement is composed of three layers: linguistic message, unencrypted visual message, and encrypted visual message. The first message is composed of the labels and the script. The second layer, the unencrypted visual message, is composed of familiar things such as spaghetti packs, nets, tomatoes, etc. These two layers are in the sphere of literal meaning. However, the essential sphere that truly makes the advertisement is the layer of connotative meaning. Here Barthes distinguishes the signs and interprets the same with regard to cultural background (Akerson, 2005).



Figure 2. Advertisement of Panzani.

In the photograph for instance, while the fresh tomatoes and peppers are in the “signifier” position with lively colors, the Italian references are in a “signified” position for the French. Italian association is also reinforced at the linguistic level. In the connotative layer, the word “Panzani” clearly suggests Italian. These signs might not have any importance for an Italian, as they don’t have the same value in Italy, but to the French, they suggest Italy to via the touristic clichés in France.

Another signified aspect in the photograph is that the net with food coming out of it is in a signified position for those shopping in a market. The next connotative stage of this signified aspect is freshness. In other words, no canned goods, only fresh food will be used to cook. Barthes’s analysis coincides with a time when many French women were starting to work. On one hand, a woman has to work, and on the other hand, she also has to feed her husband/children healthily. However, there isn’t time to prepare fresh food, which is essential for healthy nutrition. This tension is removed by bringing Panzani together with packed-fresh canned food. This combination allows canned food to incorporate the qualities of fresh food. In other words, it is as if by selecting Panzani products, working women are using fresh products so there is no prick of the conscience. The Italian references suggest a holiday with plenty of sun. Holidays are a pleasurable and easy part of life, so in this way, cooking with Panzani

is pleasurable and easy. The connotation of the artistic style in the photograph is the use of still-life, which enhances the value of Panzani and adds prestige and nobility to the brand name (Akerson, 2005, p. 187).

All these explanations indicate that the images in fact are encrypted in a third layer. In other words, we perceive tomatoes not as plain tomatoes but with another value via a certain cultural code. The relevant cultural and ideological codes of the time also play a role in the formation of such connotations. For instance, a man with a black eye is perceived as a pirate not a blind man. These are clichés, or encrypted visual signifiers (Akerson, 2005). In that sense it is possible to see all objects innate to life styles in society as a product of a total structure, the views of a systemic arrangement with regard to the empire of signs that are in fact ideological in a sense and loaded with such connotations that encompass our universe of meaning (Barthes, 1999, 2005).

In that sense, the unity of objects surrounding us that bear connotations can easily be used as an apparatus for presenting mythical thanks to the cultural codes and meanings contained in them. In his analyses on signification forms, Barthes intended to reveal how ideology operates and how by the same means of mythicizing the naturalized and hidden social relationships which emerge in capitalist ideology, they become naturalized through myths and made to belong to everyone. The truth is inequality which stems from power conflicts becomes unnoticed through myths, and this is ensured by the formation of a higher language (Barthes, 2005; İnal, 2003). In that sense, myths should be understood as a language which covers the truth (Barthes, 1990), a story by which the world is explained to us (Hamelink, 1991; Özgür, 2006). For Fiske, a myth is a story which enables culture to be explained or understood as a reality, or as certain views of nature (Fiske, 2003). These myths, which make the world we live in meaningful, carry a history with themselves, but in order for them to be natural the meanings that they propagate should not be historical or social. On the contrary, they should appear highly natural. In fact, myths mystify or hide their historical roots and as a result, their social and political dimensions (Fiske, 2003; Özgür, 2006).

The semiological analyses of Barthes on myths suggest the idea that through means of certain uses of objects, a similar mythos is also possible in the field of education as well as with each and every field in our environment. According to the critical education approach, educational contents utilized as apparatus of power aim to mythicize and thus naturalize values pertaining to capitalism through all processes in and outside of school. In all countries under the dominion of capitalist programs, the contents, knowledge, physical structures, books, and even objects and pictures all have the purpose of shaping social perception towards the normalization of a life style



based on commodification (Apple, 2006; Ayers, 2012; Foster, 2012; Giroux, 2007; Spring, 1997). From this perspective, many physical setting styles, books, contents, images, etc., included in educational processes appear as an ideological supra-language or a semiological source in this sense. From this perspective, the present study will take a point of departure during the analysis of the photograph. The thesis that visual elements in the field of education are loaded with ideological connotations to reproduce power through higher language will be performed, similar to the power of higher-language analysis of Barthes on objects of fashion and advertisement. In that sense, the purpose of this study is to propose semiology as a method in the field of educational sciences in order to semiologically analyze or deconstruct symbols that are loaded with an ideology that reproduce power.

### Method

In general terms, semiological analysis is one of the approaches of textual analysis. Semiology tries to analyze texts as a structured whole, related to the structural analysis and the latent connotations of studies. In structural analysis, the way a meaning is formed is studied on the basis of its relation between the signifier and signified, through syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations on the horizontal and vertical axes. While the form is the syntagmatic dimension, the content is the paradigmatic dimension. Where the syntagmatic analysis focuses on the visible structure of a text, paradigmatic analysis tries to find the paradigms underlying the visible content of the text. A paradigm is a set that is composed of signifiers and signified. Paradigmatic analysis includes the comparison and contrast of each signifier presented in the text with a signified element not involved with the text (Atabek, 2007, p. 78).

Oppositions have a rather practical function in the comparison of synonymies. Paradigmatic analyses may also be applied to popular culture. A similar example of using oppositions came from Jim Kitses, who analyzed the Western film genre by applying a series of oppositions (individual-social, nature-culture, etc.) (Chandler, 2001 as cited in Atabek, 2007).

Semiological analysis is generally applied to visual texts. Semiological analysis, which proposes a method of relating the system in which the message operates through special text, is considered to be a less reliable method compared to the positivist social-science approach due to its subjectivity. However, this does not undervalue semiology. Having been perceived at the same time as a poststructuralist method, semiology is interpretative to a large degree and therefore it is inevitably subjective. The interpretations of multiple experts should be sought in order to transcend this subjectivity. Semiology can also be applied to photography, advertising, shopping, and fashion studies (Atabek, 2007, p. 80). The fundamental factor in semiological

analysis is that it is imperative to have the highest level of information regarding the selected object of analysis. For instance, if pilots are to be semiologically analyzed, one should know the meaning of the many codes related to flight (Atabek, 2007; Stokes, 2003).

A sample must be formed in a semiological analysis that would allow for the testing of the hypothesis. The analysis should include the following stages. The first phase of semiological analysis contains a meticulous definition of the contents of the text or images. One should focus on the plain areas first. Such points as “How many are there?” “How they stand?” and “What is their position?” are important for determining the content of the images. Thereafter, the text and its relation to the image should be considered. “Which colors were used?” “What was shown with the images?” For instance, point of view provides an important potential towards meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996 as cited in Atabek, 2007). It allows people, places and things to be described from above, below, at eye-level, from the front, the side or the back. Two of these dimensions are classified as a horizontal and vertical degree. In case of a vertical angle, it would be a symbolic power. If you look at something from above, it means that you are doing this from a symbolic power position. If you look up at something, that something has some kind of symbolic power over you (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996 as cited in Atabek, 2007). For instance, a frontal view helps create maximum relation. Spectators directly confront with what is in the picture. Photographs symbolically make us relate as equals to the people who in fact have very considerable power over our lives (for example, politicians), or it can make us look detachedly at people who we are involved with (Jewitt & Oyama, 2007).

In the second phase of the analysis, textual interpretation should be launched. First, one-by-one, and then collectively, things and meanings as implied by each sign should begin to be discussed. Here the connotations of the text should be considered. What are the relationships to the images? How do the two meaning codes operate interrelatedly? (Atabek, 2007; Stokes, 2003) A semiologist should consider the relation between the signifier and the signified, but at the same time reveal the meaning by analyzing the relation between the signs in a mixed message (Atabek, 2007; Moriarty & Shay, 2007; Stokes, 2003). The third phase includes the dissection of the cultural codes. One should seek what kind of cultural information is needed in order to understand the text.

Finally, in the last phase, one should endeavor to attain generalizations with regard to the analyzed text. What can be said about the meaning of the text in question? How can the different codes in the text be categorized? Eventually, the analysis should be checked with respect to whether the hypothesis has been validated or not (Atabek, 2007; Stokes, 2003).

Semiological analysis points out the analytical process of ideologically-loaded codes. Therefore, semiology should be used as a form of analysis more frequently in the field of Educational Sciences. This is due to the fact that despite the criticism of neoliberalism and education, power relations have been frequently studied in the scope of critical education, and semiological analysis as an analytical method based on the concrete signs that reveal the foregoing relations has not been applied adequately. In this sense, it seems that there is a gap in the literature for studies which apply semiological analysis. Therefore, this study aims to propose semiology as a method for studies to be performed in the field of educational sciences.

For that purpose, a photograph suitable for testing the hypothesis that education in Turkey, as with the entire world, is entrenched with mythical narrations that present values of the capitalist relation of production in the context of a reproduction of power as part of a most natural life style, as well as the adoption of these values without question, will be analyzed as an example in line with the principles of semiological analysis.

The present study will analyze through the principles of semiological analysis the cover photograph of the Social Sciences text book (Başol et al., 2011) as prepared for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade of primary education schools by the Ministry of National Education for the 2011-2012 school year.

This semiological analysis will focus on the syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions of the photograph in question and try to concentrate more on the connotations of the signifiers, at this point departing from the Barthesian approach, in the way the form and content are intertwined. Therefore, as suggested by Atabek (2007), by departing from the preliminary knowledge, the present study will focus on the connotations and signify the cultural codes both culturally and historically based on the relationships between the signifiers that are present or absent in the photograph through comparisons and especially by way of contrast.

In line with the phases of semiological analysis, the content of the image will firstly be explained by focusing on denotations. The colors, objects, people, postures, positions, oppositions, the action in the photography, and the points of view will be considered. Then the foregoing will be used as semiological resources for the second phase, the textual interpretation and signification of the interrelations of the images. The photograph was interpreted in general terms in light of the cultural codes, historical information, semiological resources, interrelations, and connotations. The conclusion follows upon the discussion as to whether the foregoing analysis supports the hypothesis or not.

## Power Analysis with regard to Encrypted Signs in the Educational Process in Turkey

For the purpose herein, the following cover photograph from the Social Sciences textbook that was adopted by the MNE for use by 5<sup>th</sup> graders in primary schools under the MNE during the 2011-2012 school year was taken into consideration.



Figure 3. The cover photograph of the Social Sciences text book (Başol et al., 2011).

On first encountering the image, a composition made up of three different photographs draws one's attention. The uppermost first photograph of the composition positions Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, his friend, and a crowd of people behind them respectively as signifiers. The signifiers in the second part of the composition, today's Ankara Kizilay Square, are a part of Guven Park, a fountain, people wandering around the fountain, children that are playing, cars, lamp posts, lighting systems, buildings, crowds of people, and a "holistic" view of the city. The

third and lowermost picture shows farmers working in their fields, agricultural tools, an ox cart, the old, young, and children farmers, their clothing, and animals from the first years of the Republic as signifiers.

First, taking into consideration the general structure of the composition made by these photographs, one should address the point of view established by all three photographs. The photograph that is seen foremost and most able to be related to by the spectator (most likely intended to be the students and teachers given that it is a text book) is Kizilay Square in the middle, the photograph that narrates today's Turkey. Thus, the view we are asked to position ourselves in is the photograph in the middle that indicates today's Turkey. The first photograph with Atatürk exerts a symbolic power upon the spectator due to its higher viewpoint from the spectator. Two people, Atatürk and his friend, are at the center stage of the photograph. Nevertheless, the crowd of people behind them adds to the symbolic power over the spectator. This uppermost photograph points out a target, given that it is above the eye level of the spectator and due to the gestures and marks of the signifiers, Atatürk and his friend. The target is today's Turkey, the second photograph, with which we have already identified ourselves with fully. The lowermost photograph is placed at a point below eye level, where we can position ourselves as having a symbolic power over it. This position also suggests that the relevant period is a matter of the past and that now we enjoy a more superior and developed status.

It can be claimed that in terms of colors the uppermost photograph denotes a past period for being black & white, but also a look into the future and pointing at a target in terms of the hand gestures, whereas the lowermost photograph denotes drought, poverty, and datedness as associated with its sepia color. With the photograph in the middle, technology and development are denoted, thanks to its gray and bright colors along with plentitude, fruitfulness, and naturalness due to the dominance of the color green that can't go unnoticed.

As can be seen, a story of development is depicted by this structure, built up by the association of the three photographs, the markers, and the positions of the signs included therein. The totality of the image implies a progressive march in the wake of the modernization and enlightenment perspective as set by Atatürk. Naturally, for the purpose of semiological analysis, one should consider which photographs were chosen for the composition and how the latter was formed. Therefore, connotative interpretations can be added by analyzing the cultural codes in addition to the images first associated with by the photographs. Here, the first explanations based on denotations will gradually be followed by a deeper analysis with the help of focusing on the connotations of the signifiers in the photographs, the relationships between signs (contrasts/comparisons), and the preliminary cultural-historical information (Atabek, 2007; Jewitt & Oyama, 2007; Moriarty & Shay, 2007).

As far as the first photograph is considered, the use of Atatürk as a signifier requires us to review our preliminary cultural and historical information about the world and Turkey. As far as the first photograph is concerned, it can be said that Atatürk represents one of the most important steps in the process of the notion of the enlightenment and modernization of Turkish society (Kaliber, 2002; Köker, 2000; Timur, 1997). This process can be depicted primarily as a westernization or reflection of the Western notion of enlightenment in Turkey. The Western notion of enlightenment points out certain developments, some of which can be considered as gains of humanity, such as the supremacy of the value of reason over Middle-Age scholasticism, the development of scientific thought, secularism, progressivism, and the development of republics as opposed to feudal and monarchy systems (Giddens, 2010; Harvey, 2006; Touraine, 1995).

However, a critical approach to the notion of enlightenment in the frame of reference to the Frankfurt School would introduce such analytical interpretations as the fact that the supremacy of the bourgeois was ensured in lieu of monarchies, that republics were in fact capitalist and imperialist hegemonies, that rationalism was transformed into instrumentalist reason as predicated upon coercion, and that alongside industrialization, progressivism meant the enrichment of capital in lieu of the masses and the progression of capitalism (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1996). In a sense, “there emerged a suspicion that the enlightenment project, contrary to its goal, was destined from the very beginning to transform into a universal suppression system in the name of the ideal of the liberation of human beings. This is the bold thesis as set forth by Horkheimer and Adorno in their book, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1972)” (Harvey, 2006, p. 26). In the light of the foregoing criticisms against the Western notion of enlightenment, the modernization and westernization process in Turkey can also be interpreted as an extension of a similar enlightenment and gradual process of capitalization (Boratav, 2002; Koçak, 2002).

Having been further accelerated by the introduction of post-1980 neoliberal policies, the capitalization process in Turkey has been carried forward by the present governments at an ever faster pace, furthering the target of progression in the midst of the heated-up debate on the dilemma of Kemalism vs. Islamist-conservatism (Boratav, 2009; Gerger, 2012; Tezel, 2002). Therefore, the photograph in question should be read as a process of modernization embodying all contradictions with positive and negative developments as with the European Enlightenment. Also indicated by the connotative contrasts engendered by the signifiers in the image, the historical process in Turkey, albeit with certain differences, followed a similar path as did Europe, going from monarchy to republic, from the feudal mode of production to capitalism, and from an agriculture-based economy to industrialization (Boratav, 2002; Koçak, 2002).

In the context thereof, our attention is first drawn to analyzing the direction pointed out by Atatürk and his friend through their looks and hands in the photograph. The connotation of the sign that becomes manifest by Atatürk's mark is familiar to almost all individuals in society. This gesture on the one hand evokes the meaning of Atatürk's apothegm, "The future is in the skies," and thus emphasizes how important science and technology are for a newly founded country. On the other hand, it refers to the goal of the country to attain a significant level of civilization that surpasses western societies in the future. This target is underlined by the fact that Atatürk's friend looks elsewhere, as if by diversion, not to where Atatürk points out. Combined with the sequential order of the photographs, the said look implies future-orientedness. The target pointed at by Atatürk with the help of the look of Atatürk's friend is suggestive of the level that today's Ankara has attained as provided in the central image. The target level of development that could only be reached by following the course of development based on the scientific and technological advancements as indicated by Atatürk is clearly shown by the direction to which Atatürk's friend looks by placing his hand on his forehead. This direction is positioned to point at the middle of Kizilay Square exactly, suggesting the ultimate point that today's "New Turkey" has reached. The view of Kizilay Square demonstrates "industrial production," the existence of which is indicated with the reinforced concrete buildings, hundreds of cars, and illumination and electrical systems as signifiers.

This view of Kizilay Square, which is replete with industrial products (signifiers), denotes a technical advancement and constitutes a connotative layer in the context of "technological development" when compared to the opposite signifiers, or brought together with the photographs of the farmers working miserably at their fields during the first years of the Republic. In other words, industrial products such as cars, buildings, and illumination systems are compared to the signifiers composed of the primitive agricultural tools used in the field and the apparel of the working villagers during the first years of Republic.

In this perspective, the difference between the developmental images as provided in the photographs of the past and present of Turkey are so huge that the signs constituted by the connotations pointing at "technique" and "development," allow the attribution of mythical values to such concepts as "technology" and "development" that can be reached with industrial production and a heroic presentation thereof. In other words, the signs produced by the said photographs mobilize at first sight the myths of "technology" and "development." At this point, shopping malls and skyscrapers that are abundant in today's Ankara and Turkey yet "absent signifiers" in the photograph can be considered complementary signs for the developmental image. As a matter of fact the Kizilay Square photograph indicates all the above as heroic processes, developmental processes, the goals of which were set before, as shown by the signs that are both present and absent in the photograph.

Here we can say that the mythical presentations formed by that and similar signs are in use in the field of education as it is in the fields of media, politics, art, and other social spheres, and that they occur as a form of interpretation of the truth via mythicizing or in the form of re-presentation upon modification thereof in order to create a desired social perception for certain purposes.

In that respect, myths should be considered a language that covers the truth or representation of truth via narration (Barthes, 1990). The meanings as created by myths which represent the life we live in a way that makes sense for us seem to be natural apart from being historical or social. Myths hide their historical, social, and political roots and codes, and therefore the social and political dimensions mystify what is social (Fiske, 2003).

The signs included in the cover image of the Social Sciences textbook for 5<sup>th</sup> graders in primary schools indicates, in a sense, a mythical representation of reality. For instance, a situation regarding an historical sequence was provided with such mythical representations as “self-sacrifice” and “production,” and even story-lined in collage with the “comfortable” view of today’s Ankara. The “development” and “growth” process, as we understand from the photographs, which continue today at a fast pace, are presented as a proud story by combining the contrasts between the photographs. For instance the contrasts originated from presenting the oxen and even the agricultural tools towed by men during the first years of the Republic together with the motor vehicles of today’s Ankara, the dominant yellow color, the connotation of which suggests drought, of the relevant period together with the green and well-watered view of Kizilay Square seem to announce how a proud development has been achieved. The connotations of the signifiers composed of the objects of today’s industrial production versus the signifiers of the early Republican period that symbolizes poverty and drought, seem not only to present us the greatness of riches, technique, and growth, but also how technological advancement and industrial modes of production were able to create a natural and green world. This representation of reality can easily create the illusion of how natural, green, and livable places our cities are, where in truth we are being poisoned due to air pollution while living in a sea of concrete buildings.

While the yellow-colored (signifier) drought view (sign connotation) and primitive tools (signifier) suggest poverty and underdevelopment (sign connotation), the level of plentitude and prosperity that have been attained through gradual industrialization (sign connotations) are represented by the pool and watery view (signifiers) in Kizilay Square. The image of plenitude, prosperity, and wealth allowed by industrial growth and development as accelerated by today’s neoliberal policies is better understood when the miserable countenance of the early Republican-period villagers



are compared to people comfortably hanging around the fountain in today's Turkey. Here the fact that storylining is supported by the presentation of the comfortable life style as a myth should be noticed. This is because the idea that the aforementioned "comfort," which can be inferred as a connotation, brought happiness (connotation) to people living in Turkey was presented in such a way that a child carrying a heavy burden (signifier) in her hands, who had to work with her parents in the field as depicted in the image from the early Republican period was presented together with the photographs of children (signifier) playing free as the breeze near the fountain in today's Ankara. However, it must also be noticed that in this mythical storyline any signifier element that might shadow the happiness image, e.g. the existence of thinner addict-children snuggled down in a nook inside Guven Park just adjacent to the Kizilay Square, as a "non-existent signifier" in the selected image, was either put out of sight or ignored.

The association of the signs in all three images clearly presents that the story of growth and development of Turkey was realized by the industrial mode of production, as established by means of science and technology. The storyline of the entire cover image composed of three distinct images present such elements as "technology," "industrialization," "progress," and "comfort" as myths. We understand from the way the signs are presented and the opposing views of the early Republican period and today that the entire industrialization and development process was considered as the most important way and principle that could provide society with comfort and prosperity, thus happiness. Therefore, the mythical presentation of the signs inevitably suggests that the way to Westernization and also for transcending Western civilizations as indicated by Ataturk, can only be followed by loyally sticking to the ideals of industrialization and growth as is also the case with today's governments.

Industrialization and growth as reflected in the above-mentioned cover image are in fact the manifestations of efforts to establish capitalism in Turkey by imitating Western examples (Gerger, 2012) with their particular characteristics of technology, urbanization, spaces created inside the city, and an increase in urban population (Giddens, 2005, p. 96). As with all capitalist modern cities, the rushing of people and their promenade, which indicates idleness in leisure time, are seen together in the image depicting today's Turkey. These images suggest a daily lifestyle stripped of poetry as asserted by Lefebvre to point out the difference of daily life styles supported by the spread of modern urbanity from previous types of societies. To Lefebvre, the expansion of capitalism resulted in the fact that everything in life became ordinary, that what was "unpoetic" in the world ensured its all-inclusive supremacy. In other words it prioritized what is economical, instrumental, and technical, and excluded all the aesthetics of the entity (Giddens, 2005; Lefebvre, 1971). Furthermore, for Lefebvre, as can be noticed with the photograph in question, there are two factors

which cause daily life that relies on narrow, focused routines in the modern world to become empty and banal. First is the prominence and lack of aesthetic form for the commoditized space within the “constructed milieu” of modern urbanity, and second is the isolation of human experiences and activities embedded in the texture of social life for the entire community (Giddens, 2005; Lefebvre, 1971).

Technology, one of the most fundamental characteristics of modernism, along with urbanization acts as a symptom of industrial production and mechanization. The gradual mechanization of modern city life creates a calculated approach toward nature and society, destroying the associative link of the individual with it. Such a mechanized order would require ordinariness and emotionlessness as the dominant mental attitude. Life loses its magical aspects, and nature has only problems, no more mystery. Everything, including human beings, must become predictable and calculable. Therefore, for human beings who live in the age of technology, alienation from oneself, from society, and from the reality of nature becomes inevitable (Pappenheim, 2002).

In reference to this, George Simmel, in his article “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” asserted that on one hand we were liberated from the subjective dependence in urban life and thus embraced a far higher degree of personal freedom, yet on the other hand, in return for this, we tended to approach others as if they were objects, instruments. For him, people bow to a strict discipline in their perception of space and time and surrender to the hegemony of calculating economic rationality in urban life. Furthermore, urbanization also leads to the development of a certain attitude, indifference, as Simmel calls it. This is because one can only tolerate the extremities of modern life (as is seen in the batting around of people who are indifferent to each other in the image pertaining to today’s Ankara) by subjecting the complex stimuli which arises from the rushed life to elimination (Simmel, 1991). Accordingly, it can be understood that large-scale urbanization has been the cradle of modernist movements due to the emergent need to cope with the psychological, sociological, technological, organizational, and political problems stemming from this. In a sense, modernism is the “art of cities” and finds its natural residence in cities (Harvey, 2006).

In this sense, to the same extent as with the city photograph analyzed in this paper, modern capitalist cities surround us as a universe of signs with all the elements residing therein, as suggested by Barthes (Barthes, 2005). Raban refers to a similar observation in his book “Soft City.” To him, a city is essentially a “marketplace of styles,” which is determined by the production of signs and images (Harvey, 2006; Raban, 1974). According to Lefebvre (2013), the components of the city style, in other words, the signs of the city (such as streets, ground, stone, asphalt, pavements etc.) are the signs of gathering. The center of the city phenomenon is centralism. Everything

that brings the city into existence is realized as if the city can always improve itself further. Accordingly, the city is considered and emerges as “mixed.” Therefore, there emerges a contrast between cities as venues of denseness and natural spaces. According to Lefebvre, agriculture places itself into nature, produces in line with *Physis* (nature), and leads it rather than forcing it. Villagers do not disturb the cycle of space and time. Industry, however, grasps nature and shows no respect, captures its energies and forcefully controls it. Industry destroys nature since it produces things, commodities that cannot be natural. Cities are a venue of trade. Hence, cities unite all markets, national or global, agricultural and industrial products, capital markets, labor markets, and even the market of signs and symbols (Lefebvre, 2013). In this sense, cities speak with their own style and this style is generated by the realization of urban signs in meaningful unity. As far as the cover photograph is concerned, which is analyzed here by tracking styles, it can be said, that the signs seen in the relevant fragment denoting modern Turkey such as industrial products, technology, urbanization, and population pertaining to modern cities correspond to another style to the extent that it indicates modernism, the style of capitalism and economic form of Western ideology for modernity (Touraine, 1995).

As was mentioned before, the images bearing such contrasts as rural vs. urban and agricultural vs. industrial in the cover image in question also represent the transition to modernism as was also the case with Europe. It was suggested that it was impossible to consider modernism separate from capitalism (Harvey, 2006; Touraine, 1995). For instance although Anthony Giddens, as based on the debate of R. Dahrendorf on Marx, suggested a difference between “Industrial Society” and “Capitalist Society”<sup>2</sup> he underscored that both theories were explained by the idea of modernization, which constituted their common feature. To him, the key idea in modernization theory was that “underdeveloped societies were stuck to traditional institutions which they had to get rid of in order to have the economic welfare reached in the West. Even with that, sometimes “modernization” only means “Westernization.” Assuming all industrial societies were fundamentally the same, this would be an easy deduction to reach”

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2 Giddens says that Ralf Dahrendorf preferred to apply “industry,” a more comprehensive term, rather than the term “capitalist” to understand Western societies in his book, “Class and Class Struggle in Industrial Society,” written as a clear criticism of Marx. For Dahrendorf, “industrial production” was not a transient guest in history and most likely it would stay with us forever one way or another. He said that “capitalism” was only a way of organizing industrial society, a transient form limited to Western European societies of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Marx considered private property of capital as a first characteristic of capitalism. However, Dahrendorf claimed that Marx was wrong based on the idea that the control of industrial production was in the hands of administrators, especially in large companies which hold further control of economy today. To him, contrary to industrialization, it was evident that capitalism was a transient guest in history. Capitalist society was only a subtype of industrial society; in fact it was a little more than a mere stage in the development of industrial society. For him capitalism would disappear through a rather smooth social development process steered by economic changes that had been seen essentially in the diffusion of industrialization. On the other hand, Marx believed that capitalism could be transcended only via a revolutionary change process that would give rise to socialism, a very different type of society (Giddens, 2005, pp. 29–30).

(Giddens, 2005, p. 28). Despite the debate on the difference between Industrial and Capitalist Society, Giddens considered “modernity as a universal production and supervised effort, having the four main dimensions of industrialism, capitalism, industrialization of war, and control over all aspects of life,” (Giddens, 2010, p. 29; Touraine, 1995, p. 44). In this sense one should notice the fact that capitalism was established as a power throughout the world with modernism.

In this reference frame, taking into consideration the codes of the signifiers pertaining to modernism and industrial production as provided in the image in question, one can easily observe the adventure of the establishment of capitalism in Turkey with modernism. Mainly the capitalist economy was introduced in the Ottoman period on the one hand by the Westernization movements and the British-Ottoman Trade Agreement. On the other hand, private-sector industrial enterprises beginning from the Tanzimat (Reform) period (Genç, 2009), coupled with the “national economy” notion that promoted the formation of national industrial bourgeoisie alongside the effect of the Union and Progress Party between the years 1908 and 1922 transformed the economy into a form of national capitalism. Due to the fact that there was no bourgeoisie class in Western terms, the effort was made upon proclamation of the Republic to establish first a national capitalism by adhering to the notion of a national economy between the years 1923–1929 (Boratav, 2009). However, the establishment of a capitalist economy in western terms accelerated after Mustafa Kemal abandoned the statist economic policies in the 30’s and prioritized private enterprises, thus siding with the liberal economy. This was demonstrated by his support for the Prime Minister, Celal Bayar, who would pave the way for private enterprises and adopt policies to provide the gradual transfer of the industrialization steps from the state to the private sector (Koçak, 2002).

However, Boratav (2002) also asserted at this point that “A common, if not universal, prerequisite for the establishment of a capitalist social system is the resolution of political power and superstructural problems via a bourgeois revolution,” (Boratav, 2002, p. 346). The goal of establishing a bourgeois class perforce from outside resulted in the fact that a bourgeois revolution in no way could have been properly completed during the years 1908 and 1980, when capitalism tried to become engrafted. Thus, capitalism in Turkey had a militarist character alternating between populist and military regimes, even creating a longing for bourgeois democracies (Boratav, 2002; Çelik, 2001; Gerger, 2012). As a result, the neoliberal economic policies launched with the 1980 military coup –or neoliberal coup (Ercan, 1998)– highly accelerated the course of capitalism in Turkey. One can also easily see on the grounds of the recent privatization policies that the efforts for establishing a version of capitalism peculiar to Turkey have continued, taking the most intensive form together with the acceleration of the neoliberal policies in the 2000’s (Ercan, 1998; Gerger, 2012).

As can easily be seen by an overview of the holistic story of the image in question, this feature can be understood better by the storyline provided in the composition of the images, i.e. from the poor and agricultural view as depicted in the image pertaining to the early republican period to the epic story of development transitioning from feudalism to capitalism as demonstrated by the signs of industrialization, urbanization, and technology in today's republic. Atatürk, his friend, and a crowd of people behind them indicate the foremost actors of such development and the social support they have attained. This photograph, perhaps not in the framework of secularism but with regard to the policies aimed at accommodating a capitalist system, points at the fact that today's governments also follow the tracks of the aforementioned change and actors thereof. Therefore, it is not so surprising to observe that a text book adopted to be used in the schools today is full of symbols of capitalism, or the signs in which the elements of a capitalist social structure are mythicized. With respect thereto, one can conclude that the signs representing the transition to modernism in Turkey present the basic building blocks of capitalist power such as development, industrialization, technology, comfortable living, urbanization, production, progress, and enrichment as myths by means of the signs included in the image in question and the story formed by the mythical presentation thereof.

### **Conclusion**

With this example of semiological analysis based on the front cover image of the Social Sciences textbook for 5th graders in MNE primary schools, it can be asserted that semiological analysis can be applied as a method in the field of Educational Sciences. Furthermore, it can also be stressed that semiological analyses can fill a gap in the Educational Sciences literature on the grounds that the theses, especially in critical education studies, can be based on concrete samples. Moreover, one can argue that the visual elements in the educational processes can be interpreted as cyphered signs containing cultural codes. In this sense, as with many other fields, it can be claimed that the form of the symbol construction is organized to also mobilize power myths in the field of education. If the efforts of power to reproduce its own conditions for maintaining power (Althusser, 1991) are believed to be more than a mere illusion, then it isn't an exaggeration to assert that the establishment and presentation of the universe of signs generates a discourse of power. It is obvious even in this minor example, that education is a field of discourse where such signs are released. Therefore, one can conclude that the field of education is exposed to the danger of being paralyzed as a sphere, where the myths perpetuating power structures are produced and conveyed.

From the perspective of students, who are the target of this education, these signs can be seen by taking semiological principles into consideration as a plain image

with no meaning unless the codes are known. Nevertheless, the actual, crucial point is that the unfortunate target of this education is programmed to be taught the codes of these signs in order to denote meaning to society. In other words, educators are occupied with teaching everything so these codes can denote a meaning. As a matter of fact, the field of education is invaded by such myths as production, consumption, technology, progress, development, industrialization, commerce, enrichment, growth, and gaining strength, as well as the honorable wars fought to these ends. The most important target of this education is for raising the necessary labor force for industrial production (Aksoy, 2005; Kurul, 2012; Özsoy, 2002; Ünal, 2002).

With respect to this, when one also considers the context of the dialectics of the Enlightenment of Turkey, it is noticed that the entire field of education is designed with elements to reproduce the capitalist social formation in the reference frame of the historical, social, and political context in which the capitalist understanding of power is based. As is seen with the semiological reading analysis here, one can conclude that visual signs loaded with ideological cultural meanings in the image were placed as the building blocks of a storyline that mythicize the social lifestyle and values of capitalist ideology when analyzed in light of current cultural and historical knowledge. In this sense, it is seen that as with the entire world, education in Turkey has also been used as a tool for conveying the ideology of power both in terms of the content and the way the formal establishment has been woven with such signs as styles, objects, and images. Consequently, it can be argued that education is a field established on signs as determined by and carrying the traces of power relations, and that “semiology” can be used as an important method of analysis in the field of educational sciences on the grounds that it interprets the discrete signs in support of the claims that are proposed.

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