

ON THE NATURE OF 'SIGNIFICATION':

A GENERAL SURVEY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT

The paper tries to grasp the genealogical trajectory of the concept and nature of 'signification' which is generally a much-discussed term in the works on semiotics by the pre-Saussurean and post-Saussurean philosophers. It traces the history of its formulations from the Aristotelian conventionalism up to Saussure's (1857-1913) work of *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916) and beyond. Improving John Locke's idea of words as signs, Saussure articulated the correlation of sound and its consequent thought manifested in words as a 'form' in its social use of verbal signs. In the latter half of the 18th century, Condillac's observation on the dependency of thought on language was exciting. In this context, influenced by the American Pragmatist School of Thought, Peirce empirically constructed a typology of meaning. The later tradition of semiotic thought also supported its ever-flourishing development exploring exhaustively further clarification of different modes of signification by a host of well-known philosophers like Jacobson, Barthes, Derrida, Eco etc. In this sense, it draws a brief account of the history of systematic theorisation of the concept 'signification' in a complex social sign system.