

January 1965

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE ARROW SYMBOL

when used in

1. Public Signs
2. Complete language sentences and statements in Semantography

The arrow symbol as a directional sign is used all over the world. However it must be accompanied by a word as EXIT, TOILETS, etc., telling the onlooker the direction to follow in order to find the exit, the toilets, etc. Without the addition of a word the arrow will convey no meaning. Still there are other difficulties in interpretation of the arrow when used in public signs, and Rudlof Modley, a pioneer and expert in pictorial representation sums them up as follows

Two-dimensional symbols in a three-dimensional world

by Rudolf Modley

from his article

GRAPHIC SYMBOLS FOR WORLD-WIDE COMMUNICATION

in the book SIGN IMAGE SYMBOL edited by Prof.G. Kepes, published 1966 by George Braziller, New York (by permission)
(page 123)

"The fact that graphic symbols generally must be in two-dimensional form can lead to problems. This is particularly true of highway signs, but occurs with other symbols too.

Highway signs are two-dimensional signs mounted approximately at right angles to the direction of, and facing, the traffic they are intended to serve. It is obvious that a two-dimensional, vertical sign cannot realistically display a horizontal direction. There is no horizontal surface on such a sign. We have therefore come to accept a vertical directional arrow (pointing up) as meaning "straight through" or "straight ahead." In most cases this arrow points straight up although in some cases the down-pointing arrow is still used. We have thus a widely used sign in which the vertical arrow means not "up" but "straight ahead." However the same sign is used, for instance, on elevators and escalators to indicate "up," or when pointing down, to indicate "down."

The use of the vertical arrow as meaning straight ahead and the diagonal or horizontal arrow as indicating a direction makes it impossible to use this type of representation to express an up or down in the roadway itself, i.e. uphill or downhill. This has forced the designers of highway signs to shift from the straight-on view represented by the directional signs to a cross-section view. Head-on views and profile views are thus arbitrarily intermixed in traffic signs.

While most traffic-control devices seem to have been accepted in the areas in which they are in use, the designer will have to test carefully to determine if the intended public really is able to go along with the artificial interpretations which the design medium imposes on him. Tests made by the United Nations indicate considerable areas of misunderstanding. Symbols therefore must be taught and learned."

The last sentence quoted above is the most significant one "Symbols therefore must be taught and learned." Most designers won't recognize this simple truth. They, and the onlookers are victims of a self-deception. Usually, every pictorial sign is accompanied by a word underneath. Onlookers read the word in a glance and quite suddenly believe that the symbol itself is "self-explanatory". Usually it isn't. This becomes clear when we imagine that the word underneath is written in the Greek, or Cyrillic, or Arabic alphabet, or in the Latin alphabet, but in a language the onlookers don't understand. We must therefore take Modley's words to our heart:

"Symbols therefore must be taught and learned."

When we now turn to the second use of the arrow symbol, namely in complete language sentences and statements in semantography, it may seem that the difficulties are aggravated, but this is not so, and this paper has been written to dispel any doubts and misunderstandings.

The use of the arrow symbol in complete language statements

A complete language written in phonetic symbols (for instance English), or ideographic symbols (Chinese) or pictorial symbols (Semantography) is written on a two-dimensional writing pad without regard to the three-dimensional world. Hence arrows used in semantography do not point anywhere in space, as they do when used in public signs. But of course, they refer to the three-dimensional world, as any statement written in any language does. . Herebelow are then the first uses of the arrow in semantography

 forward
  backward
  door, gate
  entrance
  exit

The symbolization of forward expresses first the writing of words as we go forward  in our writing from left to right. When we want to look up a word written before we have to go backward  in our line of writing. The second expression of forward and backward is the usual one when used in speech and writing. To this we shall come in a later paragraph.

Those who write in Arabic and Hebrew might object to the symbolization of forward and backward, because they write from right to left. But as said above, this first explanation of the arrow is not important. What is important is what we mean by forward and backward when writing in English or Arabic. Moreover, in Arabic, Hebrew, and Chinese (from top to bottom) international symbols as for instance in mathematics, or chemistry are written from left to right, because otherwise confusion would result. H_2O when written from right to left results in nonsense O_2H . Hence, this difficulty is non-existent once the learner has learned to interpret the arrow meaning in the semantographic sense.

Another difficulty may arise when we try to use the semantographic symbol in a public sign. Normally an arrow is used and the word, as for instance:

 EXIT or EXIT  depending in which direction the exit is to be found. But when we want to write this meaning wholly in semantography we may encounter at first a difficulty in symbolization as shown below

  TO THE EXIT
   TO THE EXIT

But we shouldn't use the second combination showing two arrows in opposition. (contradictory) Once we use semantography on public signs we should use the arrow as pointing in three-dimensional space. Hence we can write on the walls of a corridor

 TO THE EXIT
  TO THE EXIT

on the left wall of a corridor

on the right wall of a corridor

or on both sides of the exit itself



At first, we may think that confusion would be the result when we use the arrow in the forward meaning, and also in the backward meaning. But this confusion exists in fact in all languages. Political parties from the extreme right to the extreme left publish papers with the impressive titles FORWARD, ADVANCE, AVANTGARD, PROGRESS, etc.etc. Millions of people, literate or illiterate are taken in by this semantic deception, but not those who have learned the semantographic rule which applies to every arrow symbol. Once the boy and girl, man and woman has learned this simple rule it will apply it to such statements in any of their languages with salutary effect.

The semantic rule for any meaning of any movement in any direction

Children in the primary school, and even in the kindergarten can be taught to ask 2 simple questions whenever they hear or read a word which means a movement in any direction. Such words are forward, backward, progress, advance, etc. The 2 questions to ask are: WHEREFROM? and WHERETO? Forward? Forward wherefrom and whereto? Backward? Backward wherefrom and whereto? Progressive? Wherefrom and whereto?

In other words: whenever we think or speak of a movement we must think of 2 signposts, the starting post, and the finishing post, or the starting line and the finishing line. In Semantography, these 2 lines are made visible as follows

 line
  START, DEPARTURE
  PROGRESS
  ARRIVAL, STOP

A traveller starts from London and progresses towards Glasgow. In London is the starting line, and in Glasgow the finishing line. Then he returns to London. Now Glasgow is the starting point, and he goes backward, or he progresses forward towards London. Suddenly we see that the meanings forward and backward become meaningless. They take on a meaning only if we state the starting line and the finishing line. Hence, the direction of the arrow in statements written in semantography is of secondary importance. Indeed, we may write them both ways

start, departure or start departure arrival, stop or arrival, stop

Now we can use these 2 symbol combinations in timetables, on blackboards, on gates and platforms, anywhere in bus stations, railway stations, air terminals, and shipping wharfs, and even on roadsigns as shown below.

In every railway station there is a big board showing the DEPARTURES and the ARRIVALS of the various trains, at various times, and on various platforms. Now we can add the symbols to the words as shown below

However, should we write complete statements in semantography then we will use the first symbol form, as for instance on the blackboard for LATE ARRIVALS. To write the complete sentence in semantography we need to know a few more symbols

point line before after time early late

point before line/point after line dial before time after time

Train No. 7 will arrive late by 15 minutes (or at 8.30 a.m.)

The STOP symbol on vertical road sign posts and on the horizontal road surface

In order to indicate STOP on the highway some countries show a policeman with both arms outstretched. This is a good pictorial presentation of a real situation a policeman directing the traffic at a crossing. But as a small black outline on a vertical signpost it could - at night, fog, rain, at high speed, or at a distance, and with an intoxicated driver - be mistaken with a graphic presentation of a crossing, the vertical line of the policeman's body indicating a major road, and the thinner line across of the outstretched arms looking like the minor road to be crossed. In short, it would not mean a HALT, a STOP! For this reason, a horizontal line is used to indicate STOP in some countries.

But the semantographic symbol for STOP could be better, because it can be used on the vertical signboard AND on the horizontal road surface too

STOP STOP

painted on the vertical sign post painted on the horizontal road surface

Once the motorists are accustomed to see the painted arrow being stopped by the horizontal bar across on the road surface, we can use this symbol also to tell them not to cross the center line at certain spots as curves, hillcrests, etc. At present, the centerline is doubled in most countries to mean DON'T CROSS. But now we have a vivid picture to show him that he must not cross. This involves showing the arrow at an angle to the centerline, indicating that the curved movement to the ~~right~~ ^{left} is stopped. This is shown below

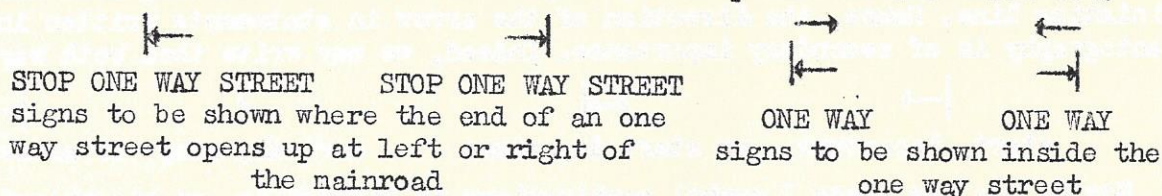
DON'T CROSS double DON'T CROSS

center line

Let us be reminded that many accidents happen on those dangerous curves and on hillcrests when speeding motorists, intent to overtake the car before then, disregard the double center line and cross it, hoping that no car will come from the other side. Too often a car comes and a head on crash results, killing not only the culprit, but also the innocent driver of the other car, and the passengers in both cars. The additional slanted STOP, DON'T CROSS sign could be very beneficial and the small expenditure in having them painted would be worthwhile.

The semantographic STOP symbol for "One way" streets

Now we can use the stop sign also for "one way" streets, and herebelow are the arrangements for wall signs, or sign posts where a one way street opens up at the left or right side of the main road, and also the signs to be used within the one way street, especially where a smaller street ends in an one way street and the motorist must be told which direction is permitted and which not.



We can use this stop symbol anywhere, as for instance on both sides of a door to mean STOP! NO ENTRY!

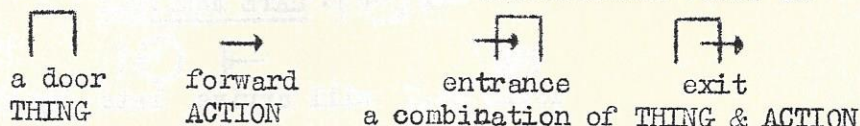


STOP! NO ENTRY!

This stop symbol can also be used on machines, switches, and appliances where we want to tell the user not to move the switch or anything else in the direction that is barred.

The "grammar" of the arrow symbol

In conventional grammar we have the noun and the verb as the main parts of speech. But a noun can be anything. A verb can be a noun, as The Movement. Even the Ahs and the Ohs are nouns. Hence, in semantography the notion of the noun is abandoned, and instead the two aspects of the physical world are taken to signify MATTER and ENERGY, or in common words material THINGS and physical ACTIONS. Hence, the physical ACTION corresponds to the conventional verb. In the symbols we have then



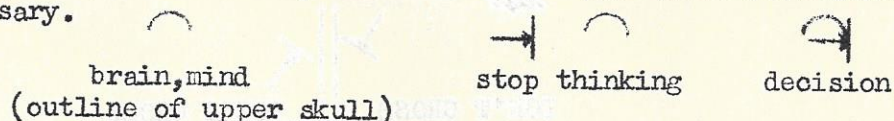
A door remains a door only. It becomes an entrance or an exit if someone or something moves through the door.

The semantics of the arrow symbol

We have learned already on page 2 to ask 2 questions whenever we hear or read a word which contains the arrow symbol in semantography, that is which indicates a movement in a certain direction. These 2 questions are: WHEREFROM does the movement start?, and WHERETO does the movement go? On time tables and in railway stations, in airports and on the motor roads we know WHAT is moving: people and vehicles. But in general, if we hear or read of progress, advance, etc., we must ask a third question: WHAT IS MOVING? All 3 questions together say: WHAT is moving, WHERETO and WHEREFROM? Political parties which call themselves progressive may move people from their homes into concentration camps. They may move bricks and mortar for building schools or prisons. In short, the word progress itself is meaningless, and utterly misleading. We must teach therefore children and adults to ask the 3 questions WHAT? WHEREFROM? and WHERETO?

The use of the arrow symbol in the mental world

As there is still a little space left on this 4th page, we may show how the arrow can be used for the symbolization of those words which refer not to the outside world, but to the inside world of our brain. The brain is symbolized by the outline of the upper skull which covers the material mass the brain. We use the 2 indicators to indicate the THING, the brain, and the ACTION of the brain. These indicators for THING (□) and ACTION (→) are put on top of the symbols, but a little acquaintance of the symbols will show that these indicators are usually not necessary.



With the stop symbol in front of the brain symbol we get the meaning of "stop thinking". But when the thinking is going on inside the brain, and we come to a stop inside the brain, then we have made a decision of some sort. But these symbols are not necessary for the usual traffic symbols shown in the previous pages. They are only shown here to prove that semantography can be used to symbolize any meaning needed, even mental meanings.

The End