



Review Article

Volume 2 Issue 2 - March 2018  
DOI: 10.19080/JPFMTS.2018.02.555585

J Phy Fit Treatment & Sports

Copyright © All rights are reserved by Klimov Mikhail Yuruevich

# Sport as a Semiotic Structure



**Klimov Mikhail Yuruevich\***

Associate Professor, Department of physical education, Altai state University, Russia

Submission: March 07, 2018; Published: March 20, 2018

\*Corresponding author: Klimov Mikhail Yuruevich, Associate Professor, Department of physical education, Altai state University, Russia, Tel: 89039957808; Email: [michaiklimov@yandex.ru](mailto:michaiklimov@yandex.ru)

## Abstract

*Sport is a corporal competition with strict rules with an aim to determine the winner. Sport is a conditional, gaming system, which communicative sign structure has no practical value. Analysis of sports as a structure allows you to select the category of form (rules) and content (the competition). There is one more category - value (determining the winner), expressing the very essence of sport. In semiotics category of value, along with form and content is of essence in nature. The term value itself is derived from sign. If the form expresses "what" the content-"how to", then the value meets "why". These semiotic categories do not relate exclusively to the sport, you can select them in any cultural phenomenon, with unquestionable signs of significant organization. E Benvenist defines culture as "human environment, all which in addition to carrying out biological functions attaches to human life and activities form, value and content".*

## Introduction

Definition by Ferdinand de Saussure says that language is a system of signs that indicate concepts, the most important of all systems in semiologic phenomena [1,2]. Therefore, learning of sport as a semiotic system should be started with the language: to examine sport as a language with its own specific system of signs, concepts and formal organization; compare the language of sports with universal language and identify their similarities and differences.

The fundamental position in Linguistics is a view of language as a form in relation to thinking. E. Sapir said: "Language as a structure of some kind is a form of thought, a tool of the value expression" [3]. The specifics of sport as a language is as follows: the language can be classified as verbal, natural and universal, the language of sport is visual, artificial and reserved. Greimas assigns natural languages a privileged position because they provide a starting point for changes and end point for transfers [4]. However, a language can be examined as the basis or foundation, according to Lévi-Strauss, "it is designed to establish the structures based on it, sometimes more difficult, but similar type corresponding to the culture, examined in its various aspects" [5] (in our case, the semiotic structure of sport).

In the semiotic structure of sport the form is understood as competition rules that are language by its nature. Let's use the definition of language by de Saussure: "A language is a grammatical system, virtually existing in everyone's brain, to be more precise, in entire aggregate of individuals, as the language does not exist fully in neither of them, it exists only in group." [2]. It is easy to note that the rules are well within the scope

of this definition: in any competition the athlete must perform only actions arising from the rules. Even if two players chase the ball in a vacant lot in the absence of judges and spectators, they are guided by some conditional system, virtually existing in their consciousness. This conditional system as well as the language for the speaker determines their actions: If they throw the ball by hands, then this is volleyball, if by foot-soccer.

Examining of "the form" categories in sign-semiotic system of sport lets us make a conclusion: sport as a semiotic structure has common signs with language as a linguistic structure. We can say that an iconic sports organization is subject to the same laws and regulations as that language. There are also significant differences. Firstly, sport is an artificial semiotic system. Date of birth of many sports is considered the appearance of universally accepted rules. So the game that could be called a prototype of soccer is known in England from the XI century. The official birthday of football-the year 1863, when the English Football Association adopted universal rules for football. Regarding to language this date cannot be determined (even approximately). De Saussure believed that language is a social product, a combination of essential conventions adopted by the collective to ensure implementation, functioning abilities of speech activities that has every native speaker. Although the language is a convention adopted by agreement, it formed naturally and independently from the will of the collective. Also a language changes spontaneously and randomly - it does not intend something (according to words of de Saussure).

The rules of sport were not artificially created originally; they had been repeatedly changing by the conditional

agreement of the relevant sporting organization. Secondly, sport is a closed semiotic structure. The whole system of rules and relationships which can be qualified as a significant communicative organization aimed only for the service of sport itself. The language is a great mediator. This is not only a mean of communication between people; language establishes relationships of men with the world and with himself. Thirdly, sport is a visual sign system. Texts of such kind are primary in relation to the sign. Visual text is not discrete and does not break into signs, but divides into different characteristics. In a language the sign is always primary. Signs written in a certain sequence form a discrete linguistic text.

The next stage in the structural analysis of sport will be studying of the competition, which is in the semiotic structure of sport category named the content. In Linguistics, language as the form is contrasted by speech and its activity, expressing the content. De Saussure determined speech as an individual act of will and mind, including:

- a) Combinations in which the speaker uses the language code to express its thoughts;
- b) Psychophysical mechanism, allowing him to objectify these combinations.

The combination is a sports term that has the same meaning as in Linguistics, and if speaking about psychophysical mechanism we will mean the body movement (running, jumping, dribbling, throws, blows, etc.) used in sport for these combinations, the definition of Saussure completely captures the essence of sporting competition. Anyway speech is purely a linguistic term and is not really suitable for use in a sporting context, even semiotic. In Linguistics, is also used the term "text": separated articulated hypostasis of speech (according to the phrase by Lotman). In semiotics, the term text is has much broader meaning than in Linguistics. Semiotics interprets the text as a communicative act, transmission of messages, and content of statement and in this sense it is suitable for structural analysis of the content categories in sport.

The content of sport is a competition-physical contest of two or more opponents. In sport there cannot be an individual act of expression. The actual content of the competition, the essence of sporting contest, suppose the presence of the opponent. Even if an athlete is making a single attempt to establish the record of diving on a balloon into the stratosphere, he competes not only with himself, but with the opponent who has made the previous record.

Sport originally is a communication system that exists only as a collective act of expression and calling not only the sense function of the text, but also its meaning, interpretation. This is one of the main principles of sport as a semiotic structure. Sport can be denoted exactly because it is a collective product, a communicative system. In the semiotic structure of sport the category content is represented in the physical (body)

competition. The denoted one here becomes the body of an athlete: gestures, moves, postures acquire the meaning of a sign. To express some content, these signs should line up in a certain syntagmatic row - the code, to acquire the sense, the meaning. Competition always involves an opponent, therefore the code of one athlete faces with another's one (or with many). To get the necessary result-the victory in the competition-each of the opponents does best to outdo the other: to realize his code and to destroy enemy's code. The interaction of these codes forms the text of the competition, which is perceived by the audience. The main points that determine the codes and the text of the competition are opponents' idea (intention) and the implementation of this plan. Dynamic interaction of these moments, their struggles determines the nature of the text, make up the main content of the competition.

Compulsory presence of an opponent and his code defines the dialog of the competition text. In Linguistics, dialog relations are relations between all sorts of utterances in speech communication. Russian linguist MM Bakhtin presents this definition: "Any two statements if we compare them in semantic plane will be in dialog relation" [6]. In the semiotic structure of sport dialogical interaction of codes of the opponents does not exhaust dialogic relations of the competition text. Dialogic relations include all participants of the competition: athletes, judges and spectators. Bakhtin philosophically represented text as an expression of consciousness, something reflective (subjective reflection of the objective world). When the text becomes an object of our cognition, we may talk about the reflection of the reflection. This definition, in our view, expresses the essence of sports text. The rules of the competition, representing the category of the form in sport, are always objective - they are, as given, are independent from the will of the players. The competition itself, being as a content of sport, is always subjective, because it includes the contrary not only in the process itself (the opponents), but also in its assessment (the fans). The result of the contest, expressing in the sport the category of the meaning has dual content: it is objective in its form-as a necessary result of competition and subjective in its content-as an ambiguous reflection of the result.

Sports competition can have many different forms: a single match or mileage, two-rounded match (at home and visiting), a qualifying tournament for the championship, the championship itself, consisting of a certain number of rounds, etc. As defined by the Eco, the structure will have a meaning if it functions as the code that can generate various messages. "The position can be structured if it meets the following two conditions: it must be a system with intercom; and this connection, invisible when viewing a single system can be found while examining its transformations, due to which in two different systems can be found commonalities" [7]. Commonalities which are inherent to any contest are a system of lottery or a format (match, tournament, and championship), the event itself and outcome (final result). The necessary conditions for competition are -

all participants before the start are on an equal position, and after finish the only winner is brought out. Competitions, as a rule, consist of several stages and are not limited with only one stage. Such long competitions cannot not be visual by way of perception, thus the content of the competition is passed as a verbal description or formed as a table or a protocol, which is essentially the same written text. Such a text can be represented as an inter text, describing the content of the competition by the means of common language.

Sport is represented as a visual sign structure with a closed system of communicative relations. This is the peculiarity of sport in comparison with language and other semiotic structures. We will define visual communication of competition as the “visual sports text”. Sports competition is a single semantic unit, in which the visual sports text is seized by the audience in its pure form (perceived directly), and fixed a certain result. In sports, directly related to sport games, such a separate sports event is called the “game”. The term game is multi-valued and is used in different contexts. The term “game” denotes any sports event as a unit of competition. Visual sports text can be perceived directly within a certain time interval between the beginning and the end of the game. The game is limited by temporary, spatial or conditional scopes (90 minutes, 100 meters of the race, a player or a team gaining the required amount of points first). The result of the game becomes a part of the sports text of the competition and has an impact on the determination of the winner. A game can be divided into smaller units (round, period, time) and the results of these units add up to the overall outcome of the competition. The intermediate nature of a game in relation to competition, does not change its conditions: it (the game) always starts with score 0:0, although it admits dead heat final outcome. The competition may coincide with the game, if it consists of one

stage, or takes place in a short period of time. Visual sports text consists of interaction between participants’ codes of sports game. The minimum number of codes is two (boxing, tennis, chess), the maximum is not limited (mass marathons involve thousands of people).

There are two types of sports visual codes. In the first case, the competitors are present in the game simultaneously. Interaction of opponents’ codes takes place directly here-athlete’s code varies depending on the opponent’s code. This code we define as the diacode. As well as in dialogue, there can be two or more participants of diacode. The second case: the opponents in the game are presented not simultaneously but one by one. One athlete (or a team) appears on the sports ground with the previously prepared code. Code interaction occurs indirectly-competitors do not interfere in each other’s codes. This is what we call monocode. Monocode can be represented by two athletes (pair skating) or more (group synchronized swimming). A necessary condition here is one team affiliation. The text of the game is always represented by the whole product - it does not matter whether it is formed of diacodes or monocodes.

As mentioned above, sport is a closed conditional gaming communicational sign system. Visual sign structures that make up codes, text and language of sports, we define as Basic. In sport, there are another signs serving for the basic sign structures. Generally, any item that is included into sports competition is a sign by its nature. These signs we call subsidiary. There is a great amount of subsidiary signs: pucks, sticks, balls, rackets, skates, football boots, form and its color, emblems of clubs or coats of arms of the country on this form, sports grounds and stadiums, scoreboards, gestures of referees, red and yellow cards, scarves, fan hats and jerseys with paraphernalia of their favorite club, etc.

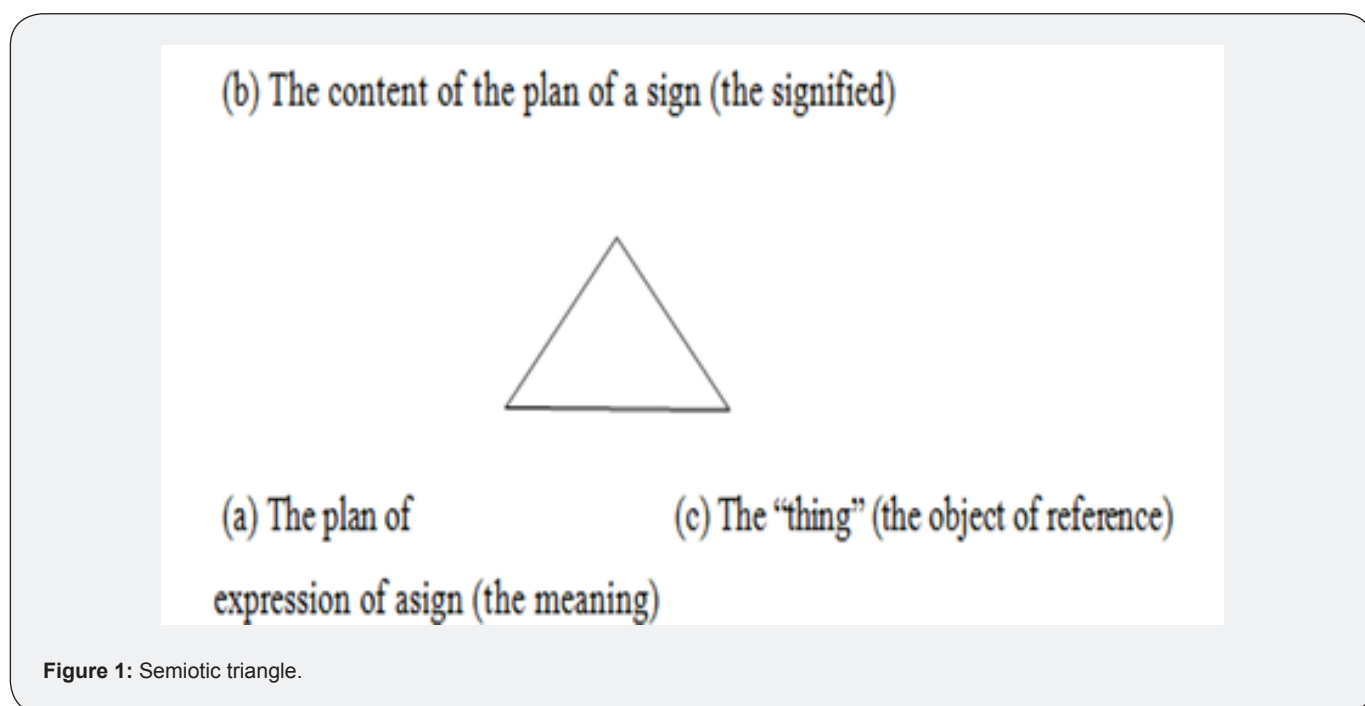
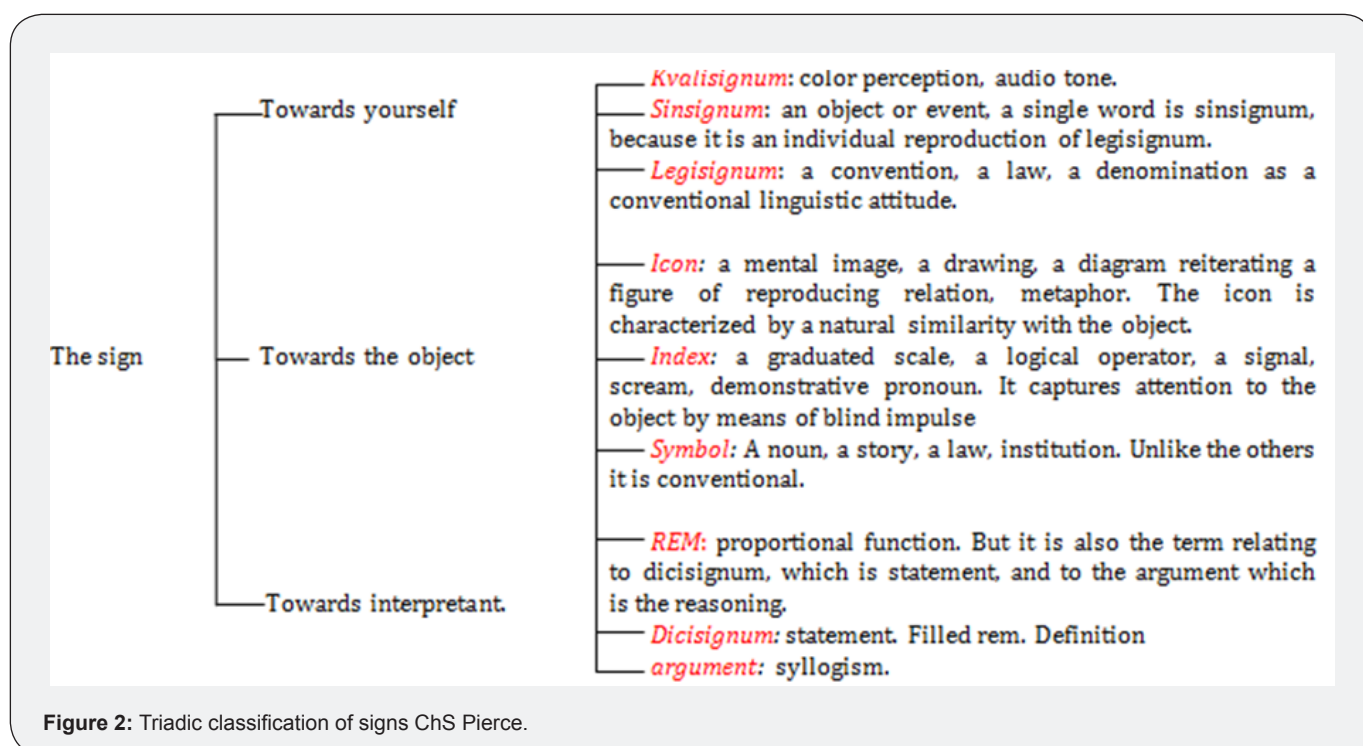


Figure 1: Semiotic triangle.

A process in which something functions as a sign, Morris called semiosis. Semiosis involves three factors: the thing that appears as a sign (significant mean by Morris's classification); the thing that indicates the sign (designat); the impact, in virtue of which the relevant thing turns to interpreter as a sign (interpretant). Based on these three members of the ternary relations of semiosis, Morris examines binary relations: of one signs with the others (syntactic dimension of semiosis), signs to their objects (semantic dimension of semiosis) and signs to interpreters (pragmatic dimension of semiosis). Syntactics, semantics and pragmatics are involved in studying of these measurements [8]. From the position of our study, we note that syntactic studies the category of form, while pragmatics deals with content and semantics-meaning. Among other classifications of signs the best known is Peirce's classification, which was based on the same principle of ternary. Ternary classification of Charles S. Peirce examines a sign in relation to

itself, to the denoted object and towards interpretant [9] (Figure 1).

While the logical analysis of Peirce's classification we should note that on each level-both the sign and its relations - there is a gradual (via representation) ascent from a simple form (compliance and submission) to the complex one (the convention and the law). A ternary principle of building this classification basically follows traditional notion of a sign, known as semiotic triangle [10]: There are many variants known, representing the semiotic triangle. According to Mechkovskaya, opened by stoics triad "the signified-the meaning-the thing" remains logical-semiotic invariant of searches or as the coordinate axis of a single system. By its nature, this triangle expresses interaction of three categories, claimed us- form (the meaning), content (the thing) and values (the signified). These categories are present on each level of the semiotic structure-in sign, text and language (Figure 2).



A necessary condition of any semiotic system existence is the compulsory presence of categories of form, content and value. The triad serves a distinctive feature of semiotics comparing with other structural entities. Ratio of categories in each structural element changes and the forefront always becomes one of them, whether the form, content or value. Based on triadic classification of Peirce, we present a classification of sports signs, where each unit corresponds to a certain visual phenomenon of sports communication: There is also a group of signs classified as values, which we define as *the key signs* (Figure 3). The interrelation between these signs expresses the result of sports game. In linguistic literature this concept corresponds to the term "keyword". Regarding visual sports

text key signs reflect the process of achieving a result, help to comprehend the meaning of the game better. Key signs reveal semantics of games, they belong to the category of value, and the value or the meaning in sport expresses the result. As in every sport result is determined in accordance with their specific rules and has a different manifestation, and then key signs gain different incarnation. In sports games key signs are productive actions that define the score of the match. In football and hockey they are goals, in basketball and volleyball-points, in athletics-seconds and centimeters, in weightlifting-kilograms and grams. *The key signs* are also the results of individual segments of a match: half, period, set.

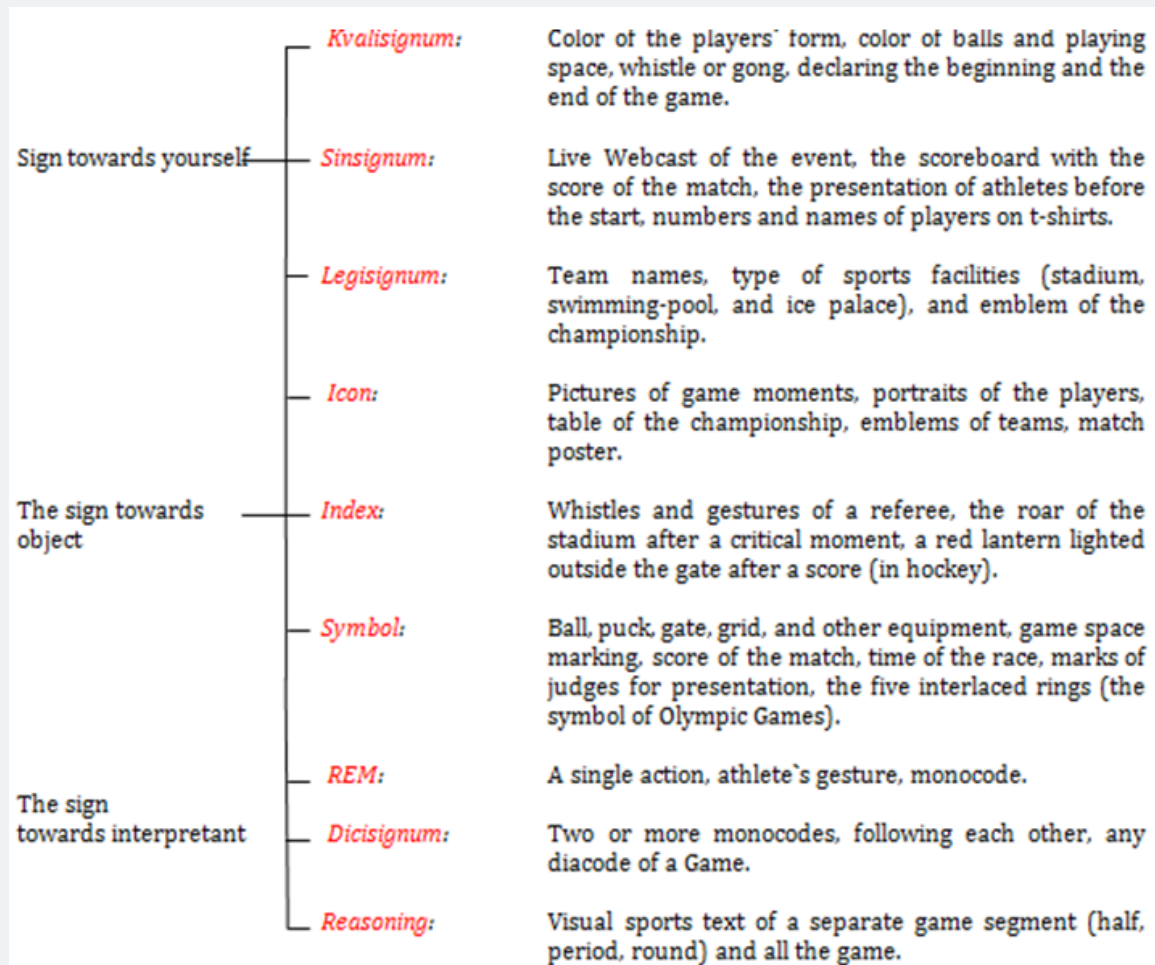


Figure 3: Classification of sports signs.

On the second level of the perception of the game, when the visual sports text translates into graphic, *the key signs* are transformed into official technical protocol of the competition. The main function of *the key signs* is to specify the process of understanding. Key signs act as an expresser of common sense, the result of game, that combine the main content of the competition text. Thus, they contract information. The contracting occurs due to the "secondary" information, and the remaining one, provided by key signs, is the most significant. Lukin noted that these statements are true particularly concerning non-fiction texts [11]. The result, as a sign that expresses the value category, is the crucial key sign. The entire text of the game can be contracted to a single result. In sports, there are several criteria to determine the result. Based on these criteria, all sports can be divided into a number of common groups and create a semiotic classification of sports, which would be based on the result as a sign that expresses the value category.

### A Semiotic Classification of Sports According to the Criteria of the Outcome

a) Quantitative criteria of result. They include sports, where the winner is determined by objective indicators related to the system of measurement (the shortest time,

maximum weight, the greatest height and length): athletics and weightlifting, skating, swimming, skiing, and cycling.

b) Qualitative assessment of results. Sports with subjective statements: figure skating, gymnastics, diving, boxing, wrestling.

c) Conditional criteria of determining the result. These are sports, where wins the team with the largest amount of conditional objective points (goals in football, points in basketball); or the smallest (penalty points in equestrian sport). They include all sports games.

d) Complex criteria of evaluation. Here can be combined: the quantitative, qualitative and conditional indicators (in various combinations) in ski jumping the length of the jump is added to the assessment of the jump technique. This group includes all the all-rounds, including different sports: modern pentathlon (combines equestrian, shooting, fencing, swimming, and cross), Nordic combined (ski jumping and ski race), biathlon (skiing and shooting).

Thus, the semiotic structure of sport is a unity of form, content and meaning. The same triadic division has any significant structure on any level of its building-in the sign, text

and language. The category of form in the semiotic structure of sport is expressed in rules of the competition, which are language by its nature. The content is competitions that can be represented as a text, composed of athletes' codes. The meaning of sport comes down to identifying of a winner. In the semiotic structure of sports, we define it as a result expressing the category of value.

### References

1. Benveniste E (1974) *Obschaia lingvistica*. Progress, Moscow, Russia, pp. 446.
2. Saussure F De (1977) *Trudy po jasykosnaniy*. Progress, Moscow, Russia, pp. 696.
3. Sapir E (1993) *Isbranhie trudy po iashicosnaniu I kulturologii*. Progress, Univers, Russisa, pp. 656.
4. AJ Greimas (2004) *Structurnaia semantica: Poisk metoda*. Academicheskii proekt, Russia, pp. 368.
5. Lévi Strauss C (2001) *Structurnaia anthropologia*. Exmo press, Russia, pp. 512.
6. Bachtin MM (1979) *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*, Iskusstvo, Moscow, Russia, pp. 424.
7. Eco U (2004) *Otsutstvuiaschaia structura. Vvedenie v semiologiu* - St Petersburg. Simposium, Russia, pp. 544.
8. Morris CW (2001) *Osnovania teorii snacov. Semiotica: Anthologia*. Academicheskii Proekt, Ekaterinburg: Delovaia kniga, Russia, pp. 392-422.
9. Pierce CC (2001) *Is rabothi "Elementhi logici: Grammatica Speculativa"*. Semiotica: Anthologia. Academicheskii proekt, Ekaterinburg: Delovaia kniga, Russia, pp. 392-422.
10. Mechkovskaja NB (2004) *Semiotica: Lashik. Priroda, Cultura: Cours lecthii*. Academia, Russia, pp. 432.
11. Lukin VA (2005) *Hudohgestvenii text: Osnovhi lingvisticheskoi teorii. Analiticheskii minimum*, Russia, pp. 560.



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License  
DOI: [10.19080/JPFMTS.2018.02.555585](https://doi.org/10.19080/JPFMTS.2018.02.555585)

### Your next submission with Juniper Publishers will reach you the below assets

- Quality Editorial service
- Swift Peer Review
- Reprints availability
- E-prints Service
- Manuscript Podcast for convenient understanding
- Global attainment for your research
- Manuscript accessibility in different formats  
( Pdf, E-pub, Full Text, Audio)
- Unceasing customer service

Track the below URL for one-step submission

<https://juniperpublishers.com/online-submission.php>