



## Linguistics in the Future of Studies in Religion: Buddhism and Semiotics

Certain aspects of Semiotics are similar to aspects of Buddhist philosophy, especially when the linguistic discipline is expanded to include post-structuralist theories. Structuralism is founded on the idea that the subject is constructed through pre-existent linguistic/ cultural formations (Pāli; saṅkhāra). This approach is seen as too pseudo-scientific for post-structuralists who deny the possibility of ever pinning down the structure behind a particular language usage. Signifiers produce whole strings of signifieds - constellations of possible interpretations - that are evoked in a vast variety of particular contexts. The world becomes a vast signifying surface beyond which we cannot look without bringing the unruly senses under control, and by refusing the obstructions (kilesas) and hindrances (nivarāna) that colour perception.

The Buddha, Foucault and Derrida all offer intuitions into the fact that 'reality' is a construction. At birth, we are initiated into a negotiated reality, in which truth is constantly under review and in which each 'correct' perception is ultimately the result of a compromise. The empty sign takes on new meaning when it stands for something desired; it becomes filled with our plans, hopes and imaginings. Only through the eradication of the causes of suffering can the world be seen in its true colours. A certain degree of detachment is required to recognise that dissatisfaction, or anger, or lust changes the way the object looks. It is exactly this process of desiring which causes the sign to be polluted: our attachment to the object distorts our perception of it.