
Cartographic meaning made in use: Reconsiderations of Jacques Bertin's *Sémiologie Graphique* as a translation

Francis Harvey^{a,b,*}

^a Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography, Germany - f_harvey@leibniz-iftl.de

^b University of Warsaw, Poland

* Corresponding author

Keywords: Bertin, semiotics, translations, cartography praxis

Abstract:

This paper considers how Bertin's approach to cartographic design and production was presented in the original French text and English and German translations of Bertin's *Sémiologie Graphique*. The presentations emphasize some still intriguing differences in the French originals, English and German translations. Translations into German and English of the 1974 French text vary at first glance in subtle but ultimately significant ways, especially regarding the use of the term system to designate the overall organisation of the cartographic design and production processes and the interpretation of the actions and agreements necessary in Bertin's monosémique conceptual framework.

Whereas the French 1974 text and its English translation retain a shift in Bertin's presentation of the map as an instrument for information processing, the German translation emphasizes a system for communication that requires an arrangement between author and reader. The French original and English translation point to the map as an instrument, which stresses the importance of 'making' agreements between author and reader. The conceptual ambiguity arising in a comparison of the translations suggests that even though underlying semiotic multiplicity is required to be eliminated in the Shannon/Weaver-based model of communication in the original and translated texts, the differences between instrument and system metaphors for maps points to conceptual differences in the practices of cartography, institutional arrangements and the use of maps in these different cultures.

Relying on the concept of boundary objects from science and technology studies, these differences suggest ways cartographers consider matters of translation, as well as how they regularly negotiate the complex terrain between semiotic concepts and practical map design in different cultural, institutional and linguistic contexts. Considering the different ways cartographers evoke the concept of system, with its structuralist roots, seems most relevant to finding common points of reference in cartography and related fields.

Acknowledgements

The project is co-financed by the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange within the NAWA Chair programme. grant agreement PPN/PRO/2020/1/00004/U/00001