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Guido Ferrari and Aldo Nemesio
*Semiotics and empirical research*

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Semiotics and empirical research

This issue of *Versus* presents and discusses the encounter between semiotics and empirical research. A comparison between different perspectives and practices can help us understand the reasons and the purposes of different methodological choices. There was a time when, in semiotics, it seemed strange even to mention "empirical" methods. Then things have gradually changed. In 1979 Umberto Eco published *Lector in fabula*, a book where the author showed a strong interest in the dynamics of reading, and even described an empirical test on readers of Alphonse Allais' *Un drame bien parisien*¹. On another side, scholars working in domains of applied semiotics — Jean-Marie Floch is the first name that comes to mind — in the 1980s transcended the borders of strict textual analysis. Also in more theoretical domains, experiments on empirical methodologies have been actually carried out in semiotics for several years, albeit without giving rise to a proper in-depth debate. Past volumes of *Versus* devoted attention to the topic, with articles by Norben Groeben², Sigfried Schmidt³ (founder of IGEL, the International Society for the Empirical Study of Literature and Media) and Aldo Nemesio⁴ (co-editor of this issue and organizer of the 14th international conference of IGEL in Turin in 2014). A glance at the program of the 2014 Turin conference (http://www.igel2014.unito.it) shows a wide international interest in empirical research on texts, attracting researchers coming from 30 countries. Empirical methods have been used for several years in textual analysis, and it seems now time to start a deep debate on the topic.


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As it is usually conceived, empirical research on texts is an interdisciplinary project that studies the production, the distribution and the use of texts, with the aim of meeting the same standards as contemporary scientific procedures. In times of hard competition among scientific methods, it is possible to assume that empirical research could be able to offer more solid foundations.

The articles published in this volume present recent work on the field, discussing topics such as the effects created in readers by literary techniques, actual procedures put in place by interpreters in reading and interpreting different kinds of texts, bidirectionality in poetic metaphors, semantic noise, foregrounding, defamiliarization, generative grammars for narrative structures, cognitive load involved in reading, game testing, the effects of new technologies on film viewing, Twitter and talk shows, the role of empirical evidence in interdisciplinary research.

The encounter between semiotics and empirical research promises to be very fruitful. It also seem clear that today research on texts is a very complex interdisciplinary project, requiring the cooperation of several disciplines. Semiotics has much to say about it, and of course much work to do: it could be a truly valuable effort, in a critical period of necessary growth and transformation of its theoretical perspectives.
Guido Ferraro and Aldo Nemesio, *Semiotics and empirical research* TEMI SEMIOTICI / SEMIOTIC THEMES: EMPIRICAL RESEARCH IN SEMIOTICS