

ANGELS SING: AN ATTEMPT TO ANALYZE THE SEMIOSIC DIMENSIONS OF UKRAINIAN CAROLS

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ABSTRACT: The present paper seeks to outline a theoretical framework for the study of Ukrainian Christmas carols by exploring the potential of Peirce's and Morris's ideas on semiosis. Christmas carols are viewed as signs that "act" in the space of Christian religious culture. Entering a dispute with Morris we single out three dimensions of semiosis: code (the study of the nature of sign vehicles), informational (the affiliation to knowledge as a set of relatively stable collective interpretants), and cultural (the relationship with the system of values in the mind of the interpreter). Proceeding from the suggested dimensions, methodological underpinnings of the semiotic interpretation of carols are substantiated: formal or codosemiotic approach, cognitive or infosemiotic approach, and communicative or sociosemiotic approach. The discussion is focused on the following arguments: 1) codosemiotic approach serves to describe the means and rules of encoding Christmas carols; 2) infosemiotic approach makes it possible to discover the action of carols becoming informative which occurs through establishing correspondences between the components of the basic semiotic triad: reality, knowledge, signs; 3) sociosemiotic approach allows the correlation of the space of mind for the production of semiosis and value adherence in multi-layer cultural processes. Following the logic of the approaches the paper presents the following issues: 1) the etymology of the term "kolyada" (Ukrainian for "carol"); 2) the genre characteristics of carols and the discursive attribution of the genre; 3) code dimension of carols' semiosis: verbal and musical coding; 4) classification of Ukrainian carols based on the informational dimension of semiosis; 5) tendencies of the current development of carols discussed in the context of the cultural dimension of semiosis. The arguments are substantiated by references to different Ukrainian carols selected mostly from Hnatiuk's collection (1914) and the last published Christmas songbook (2023).

Il presente contributo intende delineare un quadro teorico per lo studio dei canti natalizi ucraini, esplorando il potenziale delle idee di Peirce e Morris in

merito alla semiosi. I canti natalizi vengono considerati come segni che “agiscono” nello spazio della cultura religiosa cristiana. Entrando in dialogo critico con Morris, si distinguono tre dimensioni della semiosi: quella codica (relativa allo studio della natura dei veicoli segnici), quella informazionale (afferenza al sapere inteso come insieme di interpretanti collettivi relativamente stabili) e quella culturale (relazione con il sistema di valori presente nella mente dell’interprete). A partire da tali dimensioni, si fondano i presupposti metodologici per un’interpretazione semiotica dei canti: un approccio formale o codosemiotico, un approccio cognitivo o infosemiotico, e un approccio comunicativo o sociosemiotico. La trattazione si articola attorno ai seguenti argomenti: l’approccio codosemiotico consente di descrivere i mezzi e le regole di codifica dei canti natalizi; l’approccio infosemiotico rende possibile individuare l’azione informativa dei canti, che si manifesta mediante la costruzione di corrispondenze tra i componenti della triade semiotica fondamentale: realtà, conoscenza, segni; l’approccio sociosemiotico permette di correlare lo spazio mentale della produzione semiotica con l’adesione valoriale nei processi culturali multilivello. Seguendo la logica di tali approcci, l’articolo affronta le seguenti questioni: l’etimologia del termine “kolyada” (canto natalizio ucraino); le caratteristiche di genere dei canti e l’attribuzione discorsiva del genere; la dimensione codica della semiosi dei canti: codifica verbale e musicale; una classificazione dei canti natalizi ucraini basata sulla dimensione informazionale della semiosi; le tendenze attuali nello sviluppo dei canti, discusse nel contesto della dimensione culturale della semiosi. Le argomentazioni sono supportate da riferimenti a diversi canti natalizi ucraini, selezionati prevalentemente dalla raccolta di Hnatiuk (1914) e dall’ultimo canzoniere natalizio pubblicato (2023).

KEYWORDS: Ukrainian Christmas Carol, Semiosis, Interpretant, Code/Informational/ Cultural dimension of semiosis, Codo/Info/ Sociosemiotic Approach

PAROLE CHIAVE: Canto di Natale ucraino, Semiosi, Interpretante, Codice/ Informazione/ Dimensone culturale della semiosi, Approccio codice/informativo/ sociosemiotico

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another: “Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us”. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger
(The Holy Bible, Gospel of Luke 2:15–16)

1. Introduction

Ten years ago at the twelfth World Congress of Semiotics several leading semioticians were asked to give brief answers to the question “What is the main challenge for contemporary semiotics?” In his reply Massimo Leone emphasized the idea of common perspective and finding new courage: “worrying less about what the world thinks of semiotics; worrying more about what semiotics thinks of the world” (Kull and Velmezova 2014, p. 537). Today semioticians “think of the world” trying to understand contemporary civilization. The latter includes human existence and the ontology of culture, particularly the problem of archetypes of national mentality (Krymskyi 2008, p. 6). At different stages of cultural history projections of the world onto consciousness express fundamentally different ways of holistic understanding of being and our presence in it. These projections are fixed by sign systems, which en masse define the environment of human existence reflecting the systemic parameters of the world and the way it is organized. Each type of consciousness has its own characteristics of the representation of cultural objects that embody the corresponding experience. The object discussed in this paper is the Ukrainian carol, which is viewed as a special sign in the space of Ukrainian culture that embodies a unique form of communication and understanding of the world.

2. Methodological underpinnings

To outline the theoretical foundations of the research we turn to the potential of the ideas of Peirce and Morris regarding semiosis. Peirce interprets it as the action of sign, while Morris sees it as all processes in which something functions as a sign. We share Morris’s view that semiotics “is not concerned with the study of a particular kind of object, but in ordinary objects in so far (and only in so far) as they participate in semiosis” (Morris 1938, p. 4). Eco (1979, p. 16) claims that it is in this sense that one must take Peirce’s definition of the ‘standing-for’ power of the sign “in some respect or capacity”. He also adds that “the interpretation by an interpreter, which would seem to characterize a sign, must be understood

as the possible interpretation by a possible interpreter” (*ibid.*, p. 16). The original statement that every semiotically oriented study is actually about the action of sign belongs to Peirce, who was the first to call this action “semiosis” or “semeiosis.” He applies both forms of the term in the article “Pragmatism,” written in 1907 (Peirce 1998, p. 411), where he provides the doctrine of the triadic nature of sign and the joint action of its three components. This doctrine was developed by Morris, who revealed the potential of semiosis — “process in which something functions as a sign” (Morris 1938, p. 3) — and described its dimensions. In fact, the latter made his theory well-known. Morris distinguished: 1) the formal relationship of signs to other signs (syntactic dimension); 2) the relationship of signs to what they signify (semantic dimension); 3) the relationship of signs to interpreters (pragmatic dimension). These dimensions can be described differently if we choose to proceed from the notion of the interpretant. The latter is triadic and constitutes an inseparable unity of the primary, conceptual, and cultural interpretant (Andreichuk 2021, pp. 119–126). Distinguishing these interpretants we define three dimensions of semiosis: code, informational, and cultural, and three levels of the sign’s action: the level of perception, the level of reference, and the evaluative level (fig.1) (*ibid.*, pp. 138–146).

The code dimension of semiosis displays the primary interpretant’s connection to the object and involves establishing the relatedness of the representational means (Peirce’s “representamen” and Morris’ “sign-vehicle”) to a particular code.

For example, the coding of carols occurs using verbal, musical and ritual-behavioral codes. The concept of code is inseparable from the concept of information. The latter is externalized via means of representation, the assortment and arrangement of which determine the information. Thus, the second dimension of semiosis is established through the relationship between the means of representation and the notional interpretant. If the object determines the means of representation, then these means determine the notional interpretant, which provides the connection between the recognized object and the concept of that object. The core characteristics of this interpretant are a) mental nature (mental projection of the object) and b) affiliation to knowledge as a set of relatively stable, objective, and collective notional interpretants. Since knowledge

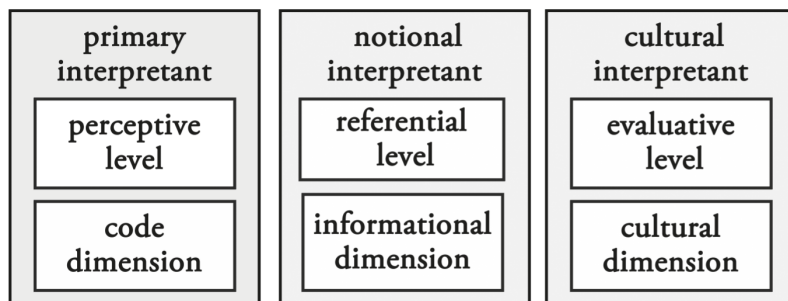


Fig. 1. Levels and dimensions of semiosis.

becomes information in the process of transmission, we propose to apply the term “informational dimension” to the second dimension of semiosis, as one concept actualizes another in consciousness and tunes consciousness to that second as informationally significant. The function of representation makes the sign vehicle the expression of a concept. Thus, if the first dimension ensures the identification of the carol as a song (musical plus verbal codes), then the informational dimension establishes a connection with the event semantics of the text.

The third dimension of semiosis is related to cultural interpretant, which reflects the evaluative perceptions of interpreters. This dimension correlates with Morris’ pragmatic rules but is interpreted more extensively: the connection between mentality and culture, expressed through the system of evaluations and values in the consciousness of the interpreter. At the evaluative level of semiosis, the encoded sign is identified as a component of culture thus the research focuses on the relation of the representamen and its internal object and the integration of this relation into established systems within the cultural space. For example, the system of values in any given period of Ukraine’s history is reflected in the multiplicity of carols. One of the most famous Ukrainian carols “Nova radist stala” (“New Joy has Come”) has several textual variants relevant to different historical events: from the times of the Sich Riflemen of the UPA⁽¹⁾ to post-war deportations and Stalin’s

(1) Sich Riflemen — the name used for regular military units of the Ukrainian People’s Army (UPA) which operated from 1917 to 1919 and was formed from Ukrainian soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian Army and volunteers. For more details see Subtelny 2009.

imprisonments in camps. But alongside the descriptions of suffering, we discover an unyielding faith⁽²⁾:

A new joy has come, which has never been before,
A little bird flew over the fields of Ukraine.
The little bird flew, bringing us news,
That Ukraine has not perished — Ukraine has risen
(Christmas Songbook 2023, p. 41)

To justify the legitimacy of distinguishing three dimensions of semiosis (fig.1) we refer to the following considerations: 1) the sign has the power to generate interpretants and through them exerts influence on the interpreter; 2) the representamen generates a) the primary interpretant, which ensures the identification of the code; b) the notional interpretant, which provides reference to the external object of signification and c) the cultural interpretant, which fixes the sign's belonging to a certain conventional system by determining the value of the internal object; 3) the study of the dimensions of semiosis involves a) identification of the code (code dimension); b) discovering the relation of code units and external objects (informational dimension) and c) establishing the relation of code units and internal objects (cultural dimension).

3. “Kolyada”: a sign in the space of culture

3.1. *The Spirit of History: the etymology of “kolyada” in the Ukrainian language*

The carol is an explication of discursive semiosis defined as a communication-oriented process of generating texts of culture. Like any other sign, the carol is a) encoded, that is, ready for transmission and interpretation through the representation of a series of conventional means that provide the framework in which the text acquires meaning; b) informative, as it performs a communicative function and c) culturally marked since any generation of meaning is already an act of culture in

(2) Ukrainian carols are translated into English by the author of the article.

its broadest sense. The entire set of verbal and non-verbal codes, their informational content, and cultural interpretation allows to identify carols as a distinct genre — “kolyada”.

The interpretative perspective of the term “kolyada” or its “philosophical grammar” is reflected in its etymology. In *The Etymological Dictionary of the Ukrainian Language* (EDUL, vol. 2, 1985, pp. 526–527) “kolyada” is interpreted as “an ancient ritual of celebrating Christmas holidays with songs; a ritual Christmas song; a reward for caroling”. It is noted that the word is often used in the diminutive form “kolyadka”: “a ritual Christmas song, the ritual of caroling”. In this same dictionary, we also find metonymic meanings, such as “a book that contains Christmas songs, a songbook” or “a gingerbread in the shape of 8, which was given to carolers.” The word formation paradigm is made up of adjectives, verbs and several noun forms including “pokolad”: a refrain to the carol in honour of the host. The compilers of the EDUL suggest that the Proto-Slavic “kolęda”: “New Year; Christmas; New Year’s or Christmas Eve gift; caroling (rituals and songs)” is an ancient borrowing from Latin: “Calendae (Kalendae)”: “calends” “the first day of the month, the day of debt payment” related to “calare”: “to call, to summon”⁽³⁾, akin to Proto-Slavic “*kolkolъ”: “bell”, Ukrainian “ко́локiл”, and possibly also to Ukrainian “ка́лякати”: “to chatter, to babble; to roar, to grunt” (EDUL, vol. 2, 1985, p. 527).

Ukrainian scholars support the idea (Zaslavskyi 2017; Poliek 1925), that Ukrainian Christmas holidays that follow one after another resemble the Roman January calends associated with the cycle of winter holidays⁽⁴⁾ that were celebrated lavishly — with masquerades and street festivities. Therefore, the origin of Kalendae should be sought in the Latin “calare”, which is related to the Greek κάλανδα.

One more version is proposed by Serhii Plachynda — a Ukrainian writer and ethnographer (Plachynda 1993, p. 62). He argues that

(3) This relation is also mentioned in the etymological dictionary of Latin where “calendae” (the first day of the month) is derived from the Proto-Indo-European *kelhr/*klhr “to call, to summon” (de Vaan 2008, p. 82). In this dictionary, the word is spelled with the initial C, though, the Romans used the letter K, not C, and explained this by saying that they borrowed the word from the Greek καλῶ – “I call”.

(4) The festive cycle, common to the entire Greco-Roman world, began with Brumalia in honor of the Thracian Dionysus (from November 24 to December 17), encompassed Saturnalia and Opalies (from December 17 to 23), and culminated in the Kalends (from December 23 to January 1).

Kolyada is the name of the ancient Ukrainian goddess of the sky, mother of the Sun, and wife of Dazhboh. She is recognized as a deity associated with rebirth that was celebrated at the end of the year. Plachynda believes that the name originates from the word “Kolo” — an ancient name for the Sun.

3.2. *Genre features: affiliation to the type of discourse*

From the perspective of cultural semiotics, genre is interpreted as a complex sign (an indivisible unity of signs) “acting” in the cultural space. The semiotic process of interpretation is fundamental for the concept of the sign. Discursive communities objectify their intentions in such signs or groups of signs that are adequately interpreted by all participants in the “model” situation. We consider genres to be repeated functional unities of signs in a repeated communicative situation. Each genre always belongs to a definite type of discourse; however, in case of carols this belonging remains a contentious issue, as characteristic features of different types of discourse have harmoniously converged in the carol. As the latter displays features of folk creativity it is inseparable from religious consciousness. Zakhara asserts that:

Indeed, religion is a special form of social consciousness that permeates virtually all forms of consciousness. It reflects, in its own way, the great life experience of humanity, a system of emotionally-charged representations and experiences, values, norms of life, and moral ideals. Religion cultivates such humanistic values as love, goodness, tolerance, compassion, mercy, a sense of duty, and justice. All this finds vivid expression in the carol, which pertains to folk creativity rather than to theology (Zakhara 2004, pp. 43–44).

Thus, on the one hand, the carol should be considered the expression of folk theology, and on the other hand, it directly pertains to the transcendent, the highest objective reality. This allows carols to be referred to philosophical discourse with its ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions. The ontological dimension concerns the representation of the spiritual and material realities of the world, which

serves as the starting point for understanding the essence, the primal foundation, and the structure of being. The epistemology of carols touches upon the question of the knowability of the world and the ability of thought to accurately reproduce the phenomena of the objective world. The axiological aspect of carols is primarily related to the feeling and experience of universal and national values that play an important role in justifying the basis for actions and motivating behaviour.

Carols provide examples of discussing key problems of the surrounding world and the role of spirituality in their resolution.

There are a few arguments in favour of referring carols to mythological discourse. Mythology is a “reservoir of symbolic creativity and deep emotional sensitivity” (Medynska 2006, p. 116) and mythological discourse serves for the externalization of mythological consciousness through the linguistic coding of mythological representations. For example, in the oldest Ukrainian carols, we find the myth of the creation of the world, when “there was neither heaven nor earth,” but only “the blue sea”:

Oh, how it was before the ages. Oh, give me God!
Oh, how there was neither heaven nor earth. Oh, give me God!
And there was only the blue sea. Oh, give me God!
On that sea, fires were burning. Oh, give me God!
By those fires sat the saints. Oh, give me God!
(Christmas Songbook 2023, p. 11)

In other versions of the carol, it was a yew tree (or three yew trees) that stood in the middle of the blue sea and three doves, or three falcons sat in it discussing how to build the world. The birds decided to dive to the bottom of the sea and retrieve the gifts of the sea, from which to create the world: from the golden stone — the sun, from the silver one — the moon, from the sand — the stars, from the silt — the earth, from the spider web — the heavens (Ostapchuk 2023). According to a later version (already associated with Christianity), three chairs stood on three sycamores and the the Lord Himself, Saint Peter and Saint Paul were sitting on them. The Lord sent Peter to the bottom of the sea to retrieve yellow sand, to scatter it all over the world and to create “heaven with stars, earth with flowers.” Neither Peter nor Paul was able

to do this, and finally, the Lord Himself, diving deep into the sea, gathered sand, scattered it, and created heaven and earth.

Ukrainian carols collected in different regions of Ukraine provide many examples of the use of mythological motifs that reach deep antiquity, echo pagan worldview and attest to the connection of carols with everyday labour and the strong belief in their incantatory–magical power. The latter is expressed in the preservation of views that caroling serves the purpose of ensuring that the livestock and children grow well and that things go well in the household (Kyrchiv 2002, p. 41).

Some ritual mythological carols gradually transformed into Christian ones and gained popularity as a genre of religious discourse. The informational dimension of such carols most commonly displays their relatedness to the Nativity Story, and their cultural dimension exhibits reverent attitude to Christian values. Kylymnyk writes that:

In the 18th century people in Ukrainian churches used to sing their ancient pre-Christian carols during the Holy night Service. In the 19th century the Moscow clergy waged an extraordinary battle against carols in the Ukrainian church. However, when nothing could be done, it was allowed to sing carols from God's Songbook (Kylymnyk 1964, p. 39).

The mentioned “God's Songbook”⁽⁵⁾ was published in 1790 by the Basilian monks of the UGCC⁽⁶⁾ from the Pochaiv Lavra. It was a collection of religious songs that included pieces from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, created by teachers and students of the Kyiv–Mohyla Academy and teachers from other collegiums, and performed by itinerant cantors, poets, and musicians. The original edition contained 238 songs, including 24 carols: 19 in Ukrainian and 5 in Polish. Among them, the most famous are “God Eternal is Born”, “New Joy”, “Heaven and Earth Now Rejoice”. When the church declared ancient Ukrainian carols “pagan” and even forbade their singing, Metropolitan of the UGCC Andrey Sheptytskyi came to their defense and declared

(5) Stored at the Internet Archive. Mode of access: <https://archive.org/details/sucho-id-00000443-print-hist-pochaiv-1825/mode/2up> (last access 10 May, 2025).

(6) Ukrainian Greek–Catholic Church.

that they were a part of Ukrainian culture that attested to the high religiosity of the people. Only church carols were sung in churches, and over time they increasingly displaced archaic ones, becoming folklorized. The people used melodies from well-known carols, adding new texts. Hnatiuk, in the foreword to the XXXV volume of the Ethnographic Collection, which was published by the Ethnographic Commission of the Shevchenko Scientific Society⁽⁷⁾ in 1914 (in two volumes) and contained a unique collection of carols⁽⁸⁾, speaks on this matter:

[...] church carols, while they also have their own unique beauty, differ in language and spirit from folk carols as much as heaven differs from earth. Saying nothing about the origin of the two! While folk carols are a product of the common people and originate from the pre-Tatar era, church carols are the creation of spiritual writers and date back to the 17th – 18th centuries (Hnatiuk 2019, vol. 1, p. V).

For obvious reasons the carol can also be considered a genre of ritual discourse, as it is a component of a ritual act. Ethnologists suggest that initially the ritual embodied communication between the world of the living and the world of the ancestors. The winter solstice, from which the length of daylight began to increase, was considered the portal through which ancestors from the Afterlife entered our world. For them to bless the descendants with prosperity, they should have been well received and treated to a festive dinner. The carolers played the role of “grandfathers from the other world” and hid their faces behind ritual masks. They also turned their fur coats inside out to show that they were from another world. They sang carols at the window and the hosts rewarded them through the window: first with ritual bread, then with sausage, and approximately from the eighteenth century, they were given money. As early as the seventeenth century, the ritual of caroling with the Star, which was an attribute of the Vertep (Nativity performance), where roles were performed by carolers, was formed. The history of the vertep in its various meanings has been the subject of many

(7) The Shevchenko Scientific Society was founded in 1873 to promote scholarly research in Ukraine.

(8) Served as one of the main sources for selecting examples provided in this paper.

studies, among which the work of Ivan Franko (1906), published in the Proceedings of the Shevchenko Scientific Society in Lviv, is one of the deepest. Since the carol is the main attribute of the Nativity play, its inclusion in the ritual discourse also seems justified.

We believe that carols should be referred to the discourse of ritual singing that was shaped in the process of Ukrainian ethnos formation and includes several genres. Filaret Kolessa divided them into two groups: 1) connected with different seasonal works and holidays like carols, *vesnianky* (spring ritual songs), songs to celebrate Trinity, harvest festival songs etc.; 2) pertaining to important events in life like ritual songs sung during the wedding, the funeral etc. (Kolessa 1938, p. 36). Discourse of ritual singing is a valuable treasure of Ukrainian ethnos and manifests its unique traditional culture.

3.3. *Code dimension of Ukrainian carols*

The code dimension of carols is two-fold. Firstly, it is encoded using linguistic units of different levels which make up a repeated sequence of signs. Secondly, this set of signs is set to music or meant to be sung. Discussing the first code we use the term “text” in an extended semiotic sense to refer to “a structure of messages or message traces which has a socially ascribed unity” (Hodge and Kress 1988, p. 6). A system of linguistic signs as an abstract structure is realized or instantiated in each carol and is constantly being reproduced and reconstituted in texts. Typical forms of texts specify the genre of carol and are a major vehicle for their transmission. Ukrainian carols are characterized by the uniformity of metrical and compositional structure. The classical full carol consists of four independent parts: an introductory part (*zaspiv*), main part, part with wishes (*pokoliad*) and a refrain, though there are a lot of carols sung without *zaspiv* and *pokoliad*. The latter can even function as a separate type of carols (see the next paragraph). Most commonly it is a ten-syllable verse with a refrained structure like “Oh, give God.” As early as the late nineteenth century, Potebnia (1887) drew attention to the uniqueness of the poetic coding of carols and emphasized that it follows the general principles of folk versification and corresponds to the most ancient Slavic strophic (stanzaic) design, rhyming, and

metrical schemes of epic verses. Potebnia conducted a detailed analysis of their meter and provided the following formula: $[(5 + 5) + \text{refrain} + (5 + 5)]$. Kolessa (1938) also discusses the poetic meter of carols $5 + 5$ starting from the earliest records and showing how the forms were regularly expanded or varied in detail.

However, from another perspective, a carol is a Christmas song. Its sung nature is the characteristic feature of the genre. A poem is set to music and the linguistic code combines with the musical one. The latter is archaic, and its musical mode differs from that of other “divine songs” especially from liturgical “sung genres” like hymns or church chants (Kachmar 2015). Unlike instrumental music that has no text and is expressive precisely because it “says” nothing, carols’ musical code contributes decisively to the atmosphere of the verbal code. The language of carols is lyrical and dramatic, and this is reflected in the musical mode. Applying Tarasti’s (2002, pp. 71–85) existential semiotic concept of *situation* defined as “a continuous intermingling of happenings that represent various modes of being in the real contexts in which they occur” (*ibid.*, p. 72) we claim that situatedness of carols can be compared to a musical mode described as a type of musical scale coupled with a set of characteristic melodic and harmonic behaviours. Jacobson assigns the musical sounds to the kingdom of signs emphasizing that the elements of music are not simple sounds (sonic substances) but count insofar as they are the goal of intentional act (Jacobson 1971, pp. 551–553). Musical signification parallels verbal signification thus linguistic terminology is applied to discuss the former. Speaking about the carol we describe it as a musical “text” where “the elements are arranged according to the principle of narrative sequences, thereby becoming a signifying continuum” (Tarasti 2002, p. 87). This definition correlates with the definition of the verbal text mentioned above. These two texts cannot function without mutual support. Acoustic situations get listened to as virtual situations, as articulations of narratives, that are metaphors of unfolding situations, acts and events (Ojala 2023, p. 294).

Carols are ceremonial and considered to be a type of “folk Christian hymns” (Koshyts 1993, p. 6). Their melodic formula is rather simple with successive gradation of homogeneous structural units that correlate with syllables in the verbal text and make up periods that consist of phrases: antecedent and consequent. Each phrase includes two motives

— ascending and descending. The main part of the carol traditionally reveals the theological content of the feast, and the music mode combination creates the play of “light and shadow”: the joy of feast and knowledge of God’s wisdom. The joy can be different and has more gradations than “cheerful — sad.” Usually, the melodic formula highlights words connected with joy and wonder like *rejoice*, *celebrate*, *cheer* etc. or *wonder*, *miracle*, *fascination* etc. “Up and down” tones may also illustrate the opposition of Heaven and Earth. This “emphatic rhythm” (Kostiukovets 1993) is also found in refrains where it adds to major — minor opposition in carols, for example in “*Rejoice! Oh, rejoice, earth, the Son of God is born!*” the initial major part changes to minor starting with “earth”.

Outstanding researchers of Ukrainian carols (Kolessa 1970; Dey 1965; Ivanytskiy 2009) show how “musical dynamization” correlates with verbal coding creating the unique code dimension of carols’ semiosis and showing its inseparable connection with their informational dimension.

4. Types of carols: informational dimension of semiosis

The study of the informational dimension of the semiosis of carols provides the basis for their classification based on the carols content. Kolessa studies the carols’ themes and reduces their entire variety to five main groups: 1) agricultural; 2) military (knightly); 3) fairy-tale-apocryphal (echoing pre-Christian elements); 4) love; 5) biblical (apocryphal, gospel) (Kolessa 1938). Hnatiuk’s classification (Hnatiuk 2019) is based not on themes but on the consideration of the addressee: carols for the host, hostess, sons, daughters, etc. Taking into consideration the informational dimension of semiosis, which establishes a connection with the event semantics of the text, we propose to distinguish historical, mythological, evangelic, apocryphal, eulogistic, and life-related carols.

4.1. *Historical carols*

In a series of carols, we hear the echoes of the knightly and early princely era of Ukraine. Most often such carols contain military

motifs, for example, a warrior helps his commander win a girl during a military campaign or plans to sail down the Danube to serve the lord of Constantinople; or the lord, with his servants, chases the horde, rescues captives, kills the hostile king in a knightly duel, or captures him and returns from war with rich spoils. For example, in the carol from Ivan Vahylevych's collection "Oh, on the clearing, and on the green grass":

Oh, early in the morning!
The Rus' king is riding a horse,
Is riding a horse,
gathers the army...
His yard was taken by the horde,
The horde took it,
the Tatars seized it...

My most loyal servants!
Some bring forth the sharp sword,
Others lead out the Persian horse.
Let me ride, I will chase the horde,
I will take my yard back...

(Folk songs 1983)

In the carol *Are you sleeping, O lord-master?* we find a resonance of the historical siege of the High Castle in Lviv in 1648 under the overall command of Colonel Maksym Kryvonis, which took place during the national liberation war led by Bohdan Khmelnytskyi. The High Castle, which until then was considered inaccessible to the enemy, was taken for the first time in the entire history of its existence:

And among them the oldest lord,
The oldest lord named [name].
Before him — his servants,
Carrying hats, and asking him:
Let us, sir, go to Poland for war,
To Poland for war, to serve
the queen.

— I will not let you go — I will go
with you!...
He is riding his horse and
turns towards the city of Lviv.
Oh, when he turned, Lviv trembled,
Lviv trembled, the whole world
was horrified.

The spirit of the princely era, the chivalric and Cossack epic, is conveyed in historical carols, which are full of vivid imagery and visualization of heroic events.

4.2. *Mythological carols*

These carols are the oldest. They present a picturesque mythological representation of the world, the sun, the moon, the stars, and various natural phenomena. Here we find the mythologeme of the world tree with three peaks and birds — creators of the world on it, embodying the ideal of organic unity and interaction between humans and nature characteristic of primitive beliefs. When discussing mythological discourse, we have already provided examples of carols that verbalize mythological representations. In Hnatiuk's collection, there are no such pre-Christian carols, but we find elements of mythological perception of the world.

And this master has white courtyards,	Let's buy ourselves a silk ribbon,
God, give us!	As we measure it, we will know.
At his yard, three kings stand.	The land is bigger — mountains, valleys,
Oh, they stand, they stand,	Mountains and valleys,
and they argue.	and meadows too.
Oh, one says that the earth is bigger,	The sky is smaller, for
Oh, the second says	it is even everywhere.
that the sky is bigger.	There is one king — the bright moon,
Oh, the third says: Let's not argue!	And another king — the brilliant sun,
	And a third king — the gentle rain.

(Hnatiuk 2019, vol. I p. 64)

In another version of the carol, which contains this mythological motif, the Lord, who says that the sky is larger, sends Peter to measure the sky and the earth with a silk cord. And the Lord's words are confirmed: "The sky is larger, everywhere even. The earth is smaller, with mountains and valleys" (*ibid.*, p. 65).

4.3. *Evangelic carols*

This type of carol is the most widespread. They are based on the Nativity story, which is told in the Gospels of Matthew 2:1–16

and Luke 2:1–19. Carols glorify the newborn Jesus, recounting the story from the Gospel and taking as a model the Biblical doxology “Glory to God in the highest.” For example, in the ancient carol “Three Kings and Herod,” (Hnatiuk 2019, vol.1, p. 27) it is described how the Blessed Virgin gave birth to her son “in Bethlehem, in a poor manger,” “then angels descended from heaven and informed the shepherds in the fields,” and the shepherds came to worship the newborn. It also tells us about the star that guided the Persian kings to Bethlehem, who offered all their treasures and sincerely gave gifts to the newborn child, and about the story of Herod, who ordered to find the child and to slay him. Most modern carols belong to the evangelic tradition, such as “Heaven and Earth Now Rejoice,” which mentions angels, kings, shepherds, and in the concluding part contains the doxology:

And we sing of the Born One, and we sing of the Born One
Let us give glory to God!
“Glory in the highest, Glory in the highest” —
Let us sing to Him!

(Christmas Songbook p. 43).

As mentioned earlier, this carol was first published in the “God’s Songbook,” although it appeared much earlier. It is most likely that this is a Ukrainian carol, though there is a Polish-language version “Dzisiaj w Betlejem” that was first printed in 1878 in the songbook of Jan Sidlecki (Christmas Songbook, pp. 44–45).

4.4. *Apocryphal carols*

In apocryphal carols, the Nativity story intertwines with legends and tales that are not found in the Holy Scriptures. Usually, such carols contain agricultural, fairy-tale, or modified biblical motifs and essentially describe a miracle:

Oh, by the river, at the spring,
 A little swallow was bathing.
 Oh, that is not a swallow,
 But the Holy Mother.
 Holy night, bounteous night (refrain).
 She gave birth to her son.
 And bathed and wrapped him.

Bright little moon, swaddler,
 And the dawn, little blanket,
 And the sun, little pillow.
 As they brought him to the church,
 The bells themselves rang,
 The church itself opened,
 The altars were covered,
 The candles themselves were lit

(Hnatiuk 2019, vol. 1, p. 39)

Most commonly these carols refer to the Biblical event in the context of traditional peasant life. The miraculous birth was taking place in a traditional Ukrainian barn or sheepfold, shepherds were grazing sheep under a sycamore tree in a green field, and the angel from heaven “poured a barrel of wine, treated all the shepherds, and the barrel was still full” (Hatiuk 2019, vol. 1, p. 36). Apocryphal carols revive images and poetics of ancient ritual songs and in this sense come closer to those authored by poets. Some of the latter became folk songs, such as *In Bethlehem the star shines*, in which, when the Blessed Virgin is giving birth to the Son “angels play on a pure golden bandura,”⁽⁹⁾ and the kings — “on a pure silver bandura,” and the shepherds — “on a copper bandura,” and the kobzars⁽¹⁰⁾ — “on an ash tree bandura.” The image of a miracle is created: a heavenly–earthly orchestra of angels, kings, shepherds, and kobzars. And this orchestra creates the image of Ukraine:

Dear Jesus, this is your people,
 Give, God, God,
 Happiness, freedom, the fate of the people, give, God
 (Christmas Songbook 2023, p. 59–61).

(9) A traditional Ukrainian musical instrument with many strings.

(10) Ukrainian bards who sang to their own accompaniment, played on a multistringed kobza or bandura.

4.5. *Eulogistic carols*

Elements of praising individual persons can be found in various types of carols; however, there are those that exclusively extol the entire community or specific individuals (hostess, young man, young woman, widow, orphan, etc.). There are all kinds of eulogistic ancient carols. Some are sung in honour of the whole household, all the villagers, and all the guests, while there are also those, and mostly so, that are sung only in honour of a particular person, for example: a priest, a host, a hostess, a young man, a girl, a child, or an elder. That is why every old carol ends in such a way that after singing the proper carol, a song of honour and goodwill is immediately sung for the person for whom the carol was performed. This refrain is called “Pokolad”. The addressee principle was applied by Hnatiuk while organizing the corpus he collected. The eulogistic carols emphasize the ritual culture of human relationships, a subtle sense of ethics, and the high poetry of words. Primarily thanks to these carols, we gain a coherent understanding of the domestic life of the patriarchal family, agriculture, hunting, fishing, housing, buildings, domestic and wild animals, culinary practices, and musical instruments. For example, in one of the carols from the subgroup *The Housewife is Adorned*, the housewife is praised, who has “outfits for three storerooms”: stockings, boots, dresses, a shirt, a belt, a cap, a scarf, a fur coat, a ring, and golden fabric. And she stores everything “in little pantries and in little chambers” (Hnatiuk 2019, vol. I, p. 223). And the master has great wealth:

Oh, you our lord, lord (name),	On them are tablecloths all made of silk,
In your house, just like in paradise...	On them are plates
You have oxen all in pairs,	all made of precious materials,
You have plows all made of gold,	You have fields, like the meadows,
You have yards all made of timber,	You have bread, like the quiet Danube...,
You have tables made of viburnum,	

(Hnatiuk 2019, vol. I, p. 157)

Further, they praise the host for everything he has in the field, in the barn, and in the chests.

In eulogistic carols addressed to the family, we find the image of the paradise tree with three tops, where the host is on the first top (“gray

falcon”), the hostess is on the second (“gray hen”), and on the third — the children (“swallows”). Eulogistic carols as if transferred people to some other world, close and dear to them, yet completely different from the one in which their poor, distressed life passed. They glorify the greatness of a human being. These are poetic hymns to the master–farmer, the warrior–knight, the hunter, the guardian of the clan and family, the creator of prosperity and a happy life.

“Pokolad” is the organic component of this type of carols. It is usually solemn and at the same time poetic and sincere:

And after that word, we ring the bells,	A harvest of bread,
We ring the bells, we pray to God,	and God’s grace to all.
To God in heaven,	As rich as fat, peace among people,
for the health of all:	Among kings and landlords,
And grant, Oh God,	May holy God give everyone,
a harvest of bread,	Wellness and happiness.

(Hnatiuk 2019, vol. 2, p. 290)

The carolers bless the whole family, not forgetting the servants and the livestock, with a long life and good profit and harvest.

4.6. *Life-related carols*

The analysis of the corpus of carols by Hnatiuk and texts from several other collections shows that many carols contain figurative descriptions of life situations and events, which, however, are filled with symbolism and maintain the solemnity of this genre. For example, “The Nightingale in the Garden”:

Our host has a new chamber,	Oh, the wild oxen kicked up,
A new chamber and	And broke the garden–vineyard,
a vineyard garden.	They draw away the nightingale.
And in that little garden,	Oh, the close neighbours gathered:
The nightingale sings beautifully,	Brought the gray oxen,
Cheering up the new chamber,	Planted the vineyard garden again,
and the garden–vineyard,	And lured the nightingale again
and the master of the house,	
and the mistress.	

(Hnatiuk 2019, vol. 1, p. 119)

Life-related carols tell stories how the host sets up the apiary, how he plows the wheat, how he sows. Often such texts contain apocryphal motifs, when the Lord Himself walks behind the plow, and St. Paul leads the oxen, and St. Nicholas sows, and the Holy Virgin carries breakfast. This type of carol also includes those that describe women's work: how she sews for her husband or for the church, goes to fetch water, bleaches fabrics, prepares meals, and so on. Such carols often incorporate exaltation motifs.

Thus, the informational dimension of the semiosis of carols provided the basis for the identification of six types: historical, mythological, evangelical, apocryphal, eulogistic, and life-related carols⁽¹¹⁾.

5. "Kolyada" in modern Ukraine: Cultural dimension of semiosis

Despite the diversity of types of ancient and modern carols, they share the orientation towards the formation of cultural narrative identity. Paul Ricoeur defines it as a type of identity that a person has access to through the mediation of narrative function and explains that this can be the story of an individual or a historical community. This story must make sense considering what it was, what it is, and what it will be. It must have two main modes: constancy (sameness) and selfhood (self). The first refers to permanence in time — the psychological and physiological continuity, while the second refers to selfhood, which we interpret as agency. Identity is inseparable from consciousness and memory (Ricoeur 1991).

The analysis of the cultural dimension of the semiosis of carols allows to reveal a key aspect of identity — the sense of belonging to culture. The latter intersects with such "related" terms as society, civilization, tradition, and nation (Bruni 2023, pp. 123–124). Thus, our relatedness to culture is also related to how we evaluate social reality from the perspective of "living" past and "living" present. The spiritual principle of such an evaluation is the nation that brings together the past and the present. The first is the "great legacy of memories" and the desire to immortalize

(11) Besides these types one can find parodies and humorous carols in Hnatyuk's corpus. They are not numerous, and their dimensions of semiosis require separate consideration.

the received heritage, the social capital on which the national idea is based, the common glory in the past and the common will in the future (*ibid.*, p. 128) Thus, the narrative identity that defines the cultural dimension of the semiosis of Ukrainian carols will be presented as a result of the interpretation of the set of values that determine the answers to three questions: Where did we come from? Where do we stand now? and Where are we heading? The very concept of values has often been considered a way to “measure” culture. For example, in the opinion of Geert Hofstede, who interprets culture as the collective programming of the mind, values are seen as a tendency to prefer one situation over another. Each new value is incorporated into an organized system of values, which remains relatively stable but can reflect the experiences of the community at a specific time. Members of a cultural community share common values because they share a common history (Hofstede 1984, p. 18).

Analyzing the cultural dimension of the semiosis of carols, we discover that their narrative identity reflects the changes occurring in the life of the Ukrainian national community, which modify individual values and focus attention on the events that are significant for this community. Thus, the Kyiv state added to the Christmas traditions carols about princes and their retainers, the Hetmanate — about hetmans and the Cossacks, and the national liberation movement of the twentieth century — about Sich Riflemen, the 21st century — about the soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. For example, the bard from Ternopil, Oleg Vitvitsky, wrote the carol *There in Bakhmut*, which glorifies the Savior and our faith in His support in this terrible war⁽¹²⁾:

Our family – all of Ukraine,
Both the Armed Forces
and the Territorial Defense,
Under God’s banner
We are heading to victory!
“Christ is born!”
“Let us glorify Him!”

(12) Also authored the *Partisan Alphabet* — a poetic narrative about the life and adventures of a young soldier of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army named Alyarmyk and his friends. For each letter of the alphabet, words and terms have been selected that illustrate the history of the national liberation struggles of Ukrainians during the World War II.

This is a nation-shaping carol, as a nation is not created by ethnographic independence or the antiquity of origin — but only by that mystical force (mystical, because its causes have yet to be clarified), which is called “the will to live.”

6. Conclusions

The culture of ethnos speaks a unique language. Ukrainian Christmas carols constitute an important part of national culture and represent a separate genre of ritual discourse. This genre undoubtedly is an extraordinarily multifaceted object of study for semioticians. The article proposes a semiotic approach to the analysis of carols using the code, informational, and cultural dimensions of its semiosis. Reference to the ideas of Charles Pierce and Charles Morris regarding semiosis allowed to outline the theoretical foundations of the research and to justify the legitimacy of distinguishing three levels (perception, reference, evaluative) and three dimensions of semiosis (code, informational, cultural).

At the initial stage of the research attention is drawn to various approaches of interpreting the etymology of the term “carol”. The subsequent discussion deals with the discursive attribution of carols. The long history of the development and the variety of forms and plots make the issue of referring carols to the concrete type of discourse rather complicated. There are arguments that support their reference to religious, philosophical, mythological and ritual discourse. The paper substantiates the claim that carols belong to ritual singing discourse and this claim is supported by the analysis of the code dimension of carols’ semiosis. The latter is proved to be an inseparable unity of verbal and musical codes where melodic formulas correlate with rules of folk versification.

In the subsequent part of the paper the attention is focused on the informational dimension, the analysis of which allowed to come up with the typology of carols, specifically identifying and describing historical, mythological, evangelical, apocryphal, eulogistic, and life-related carols.

Finally, it should be emphasized that a carol, encoded verbally and musically, has, firstly, functional value for the interpreter in certain

historical conditions; secondly, artistic value, as the magnificent “sung poetry” and thirdly, cultural and nation–shaping value for Ukrainians as it functions as our unique native artistic representation of spiritual treasures.

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