Sociolinguistic Cryptology

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Date: November 6, 2025

Preface

This publication assembles three articles released on November 6, 2025 and devoted to Sociolinguistic Cryptology (SLC). The aim is to offer an integrated overview that covers: (i) the methodological demarcation from Endolinguistics, (ii) the comparison with oracle-based studies, and (iii) the interdisciplinary theoretical canon that grounds the discipline. Each section preserves the original structure and is accompanied by Chicago-style references linked to the primary sources.

Sociolinguistic Cryptology: Delimitation and Methodological Foundations

Introduction

1. Motivation of the article

While collaborating on fieldwork we identified a recurring confusion: treating endolinguistic codes as “social symbols” applicable to political or cultural phenomena. Such confusion makes it necessary to delimit Endolinguistics precisely and, in parallel, to propose a dedicated discipline for symbolic-social phenomena: Sociolinguistic Cryptology (SLC).

Endolinguistics, the discipline that studies the binary and ternary consonantal structures present in linguistic macrosystems, has demonstrated its validity for analysing stable intra- and interlinguistic regularities. However, when these structural codes are interpreted as tools to explain conjunctural social phenomena—political campaigns, cultural movements, media events—methodological confusion arises. The result is a loss of rigour for Endolinguistics and, at the same time, the inability to examine coded symbolic-social phenomena properly.

The confusion is far from trivial: it attributes to Endolinguistics an object of study that does not belong to it, whilst leaving without an adequate theoretical framework the systematic study of coded, socially oriented forms of discourse. Consequently, this article pursues two main objectives: (i) to reframe and shield Endolinguistics against improper uses, and (ii) to propose Sociolinguistic Cryptology as an autonomous discipline with its own definitions, typology, and minimum method.

2. Central thesis

Endolinguistics and SLC share an interest in structures but not in their object.

Endolinguistics. It models consonantal structures (binary/ternary) as logical-mathematical models embedded in languages. It also studies endolanguage understood as the informatics of human language in its binary/ternary codes and in the depth of linguistic levels. Although SLC may be inspired by endolinguistic results, it is neither the same discipline nor does it pursue the same goal.

Endolinguistics works with specific units of analysis: words/lexemes and their families within coherent linguistic macrosystems. Its validity does not depend on speaker intention or media context, but on systemic coherence and interlinguistic regularities. As has been shown in multiple studies on binary codes (such as F-L for FILIA) and ternary codes (such as K-P-R, M-T-R, K-L-D), Endolinguistics identifies deep structures that transcend surface historical and

cultural variations.

SLC. It studies opaque or concealed social codifications in discourse (double audience, filter evasion, cryptolects, Aesopian language, covert signalling) using public and falsifiable criteria.

SLC, by contrast, operates with different units: utterances, discursive frames, communicative strategies, and discursive timing. Its object is the socially coded message, not the deep structure of language. Whereas Endolinguistics explains why words belong to structural families, SLC maps how certain lexemes are strategically mobilised in specific social contexts.

3. What Endolinguistics is NOT

It is not social semiotics, hermeneutics of current affairs, campaign analysis, or symbolic readings of political events. Its validity does not depend on speaker intention or media context. It is structural and deep with respect to its object: endolanguage.

A common mistake is to attempt to explain the social effect of a political slogan such as “law and order” through endolinguistic analysis of ternaries like L–K–S or R–D–N, or through etymological kinships. This analysis confuses two different levels: the deep structural level (the object of Endolinguistics) and the pragmatic-social level (the object of SLC).

Endolinguistics does not extract socio-political conclusions from its codes. When we identify that words such as “glad” (Germanic) and “cálido” (Latin) share the ternary K-L-D, we are establishing a structural and psychological relation, not a relation of strategic use within a specific social context.

4. What Endolinguistics IS

It is the study of binary/ternary codes strictly consonantal within coherent linguistic systems (macrosystems) displaying stable intra- and interlinguistic regularities. The unit of analysis is the word/lexeme (and its family), not the social event. Endolinguistics certainly considers shared social and psychic functions of words, but its object is endolanguage, not conjunctural phenomena.

The basic methodology, documented widely in research on endolinguistic codes, consists of:

- Identifying binary/ternary codes and regular phonetic variants within the macrosystem. For example, in the Indo-Iranian-European system we identify seven abstract consonantal groups: M (labial nasal), N (any nasal except M), P=B=F=V (labials except M and N), T=D=TH (coronal stops and non-sibilant fricatives), S (sibilant fricatives), R=L (laterals, rhotics), K=G=H (laryngeals, dorsal stops).
- Tracing lexical families and cognates while respecting filiations. The classic example of the ternary K-L-D, which connects “glad” and “cálido”, shows how apparently unrelated words share a deep structure.
- Validating through systemic coherence, not through social correlates. An endolinguistic code is validated by its consistent presence across multiple languages within the macrosystem, rather than

by its use in specific social contexts.

Endolinguistics studies endolanguage as the “informatics” layer of human language that structures meaning across levels. This deep structure is stable and transcends conjunctural variation.

5. Need for a parallel discipline

When the object is the socially coded message (e.g., double audience, algospeak, Aesopian language under censorship), the appropriate framework is not solely Endolinguistics but also SLC, which operates with other units (utterances, frames, creative spellings, discursive timing) and other validation criteria, particularly symbolic ones.

The need for SLC stems from recognising that there are social codification phenomena requiring a specific theoretical and methodological framework. These phenomena share features that distinguish them from Endolinguistics’ object of study:

- Conjunctural temporality: they operate in specific social-temporal contexts rather than in stable linguistic system regularities.
- Relevant intentionality: the sender’s and/or receiver’s intention, whether conscious or not, is central to understanding the phenomenon.
- Pragmatic unit of analysis: they examine complete utterances, discursive strategies, interpretive frames, not merely the consonantal structure of isolated words.

5bis. Interdisciplinarity and methodological articulation (SLC)

SLC is interdisciplinary by design. It integrates frameworks and tools from semiotics and hermeneutics (to model connotations and interpretive horizons), sociology and anthropology (for group contexts, ritual, power), cognitive psychology and neuroscience (for measuring subliminal or implicit effects such as priming, reaction times, memory), discourse linguistics and pragmatics (implicature, presupposition, relevance), computational methods (NLP, stylometry, network analysis, burst detection, sequential models), and game/signalling theory (costs/benefits of covert signalling). This convergence allows the detection of hidden meanings in social phenomena while preserving falsifiability and reproducibility.

Concise map of potential connections (non-exhaustive):

- Semiotics/Hermeneutics: coding/connotation; fusion of horizons.
- Sociology/Anthropology: secrecy, subcultures, performativity, institutions.
- Cognition/Neuroscience: implicit measures; sensitivity to covert cues.
- Discourse linguistics/Pragmatics: implicatures, frames, deixis, euphemism.
- Computer science/NLP: topic modelling, embeddings, keyword-in-context, diachronic change analysis, detection of substitutions (algospeak), semantic graphs.
- Game/Signalling theory: models of double audience and plausible deniability.
- Cryptography/Security: formal analogies of obfuscation and side channels.
- Forensics/Law: corpus chain of custody, evidentiary standards.

- Statistics/Causality: quasi-experimental designs and out-of-sample validation.

Triangulation principle: an SLC hypothesis is more robust when it combines (i) semiotic/interpretative evidence, (ii) quantitative measures differentiating audiences, and (iii) computational traces (usage patterns, co-occurrences, temporal evolution), all with contextual controls.

6. Operational definition of SLC

SLC is the systematic and verifiable study of forms of social coding in discourse that:

(i) produce differential readings across audiences;

(ii) preserve plausible deniability for the sender; and/or

(iii) evade human or algorithmic filters;

(iv) remain outside social consciousness (social unconscious), i.e., their natural domain includes the subliminal and the non-thematised.

This operational definition distinguishes SLC from other approaches to discourse analysis. It is not simply about connotations or reading between the lines, but about a systematic study with specific validation criteria.

SLC also sets out an interdisciplinary triangulation protocol: every hypothesis about social coding should seek convergent confirmation from at least two methodological families (e.g., semiotic-hermeneutic + computational, or cognitive + network analysis), documenting limits, biases, and rival alternatives. Such triangulation reduces over-interpretation risk and strengthens the detection of hidden meanings (social unconscious).

7. Demarcation principle (rapid test)

Unit of analysis

- Word / consonantal code → Endolinguistics

Endolinguistics works with words and lexemes, analysing their binary or ternary consonantal structures. For instance, it studies ternary K-P-R in words related to knowledge, power, and relationship, or binary F-L in words related to kinship and affection.

- Utterance / situation / strategy → SLC

SLC works with full utterances, communicative situations, and discursive strategies. It examines, for example, how a political slogan functions as a double-audience code, or how certain expressions evade algorithmic filters on digital platforms.

Intentionality

- Not central in Endolinguistics (intentionality belongs to the second level of language, the said), though it may be considered philosophically as an effect of use.

Endolinguistics studies structures that exist independently of speaker intention. The code K-L-D connecting “glad” and “cálido” (warm) exists as a deep linguistic structure, not as the outcome of a specific communicative intention.

- Central in SLC (conscious or unconscious for sender and/or receiver). The essence of SLC is the concealed phenomenon.

In SLC, intention—whether conscious or unconscious—is foundational. A double-audience message requires the sender to intend (even unconsciously) to communicate something to a specific group while maintaining a literal reading for other audiences.

Temporality

- Endolinguistics: stable system regularities.

Endolinguistic codes remain stable across time and cultures within a macrosystem. The ternary M-T-R connecting concepts of mother, earth, and death appears consistently in multiple Indo-European languages over millennia.

- SLC: platform dynamics and conjunctures.

Social coding phenomena are conjunctural, specific to social and temporal contexts. An algospeak code that evades platform filters today may become obsolete once algorithms are updated.

Useful metaphor: SLC studies “the social coding game on the surface” built upon the deeper endolinguistic codes (more stable). They are complementary. Here we delimit the object only.

Validation

- Endolinguistics: interlinguistic systematicity and systemic coherence.

Validating an endolinguistic code requires demonstrating its consistent presence across multiple languages in the macrosystem, with regular phonetic variations and semantic coherence.

- SLC: double audience + plausible deniability + contextual evidence (and empirical traces of the hidden component).

Validating an SLC hypothesis demands multiple lines of evidence: showing that different audiences interpret the message differently, that the sender can plausibly deny the coded meaning, and that contextual and empirical traces exist for the hidden component.

8. Rigour and shared vocabulary

To avoid ambiguity, “code” means:

- In Endolinguistics: consonantal structure (binary/ternary) and its combinatorics at the macro-linguistic level.

An endolinguistic code is an abstract consonantal structure representing a deep semantic relation. For example, binary P-M links concepts of father and mother; ternary K-L-D links concepts of heat, light, and depth.

- In SLC: social coding procedure (discursive encryption of social messages and symbols).

A social code is a procedure through which a message is encrypted in discourse to communicate something to a specific audience while maintaining a literal reading for others.

Both disciplines work with “cryptology” in different senses: Endolinguistics with structural combinatorics; SLC with pragmatic-social encryption.

9. Typical scope of SLC

Double audience (dog whistles)

Includes subliminal signals: an in-group decodes, the out-group receives a neutral/literal reading. A classic example is a term with a literal meaning acceptable to the general public yet activating specific meanings for the target group.

Filter evasion (algospeak / moderation)

Phenomena in which users adapt their language to evade algorithmic or human moderation. This includes creative orthographies, character substitutions, or variations that preserve meaning for humans but evade automated detection.

Aesopian language under censorship

Forms of expression that allow critical or dissident messages under censorial regimes, using metaphors, allusions, or indirect references comprehensible to the intended audience but not actionable as evidence for authorities.

Cryptolects / anti-languages in subcultures

Specialised languages developed by subcultural groups to communicate internally while excluding outsiders. They may include jargons, argots, or fully developed languages.

Covert signalling for risk-controlled coordination

Communicative forms enabling groups to coordinate or identify one another without exposing themselves to external observers. They often rely on subtle cues, shared references, or patterned communicative behaviour.

10. Basic SLC methodology (synthesis)

Coding hypothesis

“X works as a code for group G in context C with purpose P,” where:

- X is the discursive element (word, phrase, symbol, etc.);
- G is the intended group;
- C is the context;
- P is the purpose (double audience, evasion, coordination, etc.).

Paired corpora

Emissions + receptions (two audiences). It is crucial to build a corpus of coded emissions alongside the audience reception corpus.

Validation tests

- Stable differential reading (effect between audiences): demonstrate that distinct audiences interpret the message significantly differently.
- Plausible deniability: show that the literal reading remains defensible.
- Mechanistic evidence: measure the mechanism that enables coding (lexical substitutions, timing, imagery, etc.).
- Controls and rival explanations: rule out alternative explanations (e.g., coincidences, mere stylistic preferences).
- Operational replicability: ensure that the detection and validation protocol can be applied by independent teams.

Safeguards

- Explicitly state when an audience’s interpretation fails (negative evidence).
- Document all hypotheses considered and rejected (prevent confirmation bias).
- Maintain an audit trail (sources, annotations, decisions).

11. Baseline scenario that must not be confused with SLC

Before attributing social coding to any ambiguous nucleus we must establish the baseline scenario: that the phenomenon belongs to Endolinguistics (linguistic structure), to general pragmatics (irony, politeness), or to mere connotation.

12. “Do not confuse” example

Endolinguistic research identifies the ternary K-P-R across languages in concepts linked to “vision/knowledge”, “power/government”, “relation” (e.g., sapere, sapere, sapere, sapere?). This does not imply that any contemporary use of words with the K-P-R ternary constitutes social coding. The ternary expresses a deep structural relation, not a covert message.

13. Relationship between both disciplines

- Endolinguistics supplies deep structures (macrosystemic resonances).
- SLC studies strategic articulations over those structures (discursive microdynamics).

14. Supporting theoretical framework (without esotericism)

SLC requires an interdisciplinary canon grounded in public, falsifiable methods (see the third article in this compilation for details).

15. Purpose of SLC

To identify, model, and validate socially coded phenomena—double audience, filter evasion, covert coordination—maintaining scientific rigour and clear demarcation from esoteric claims.

16. Contribution of this article

- Establishes the demarcation between Endolinguistics and SLC.
- Defines SLC with falsifiable criteria.
- Outlines the methodological core (hypotheses, corpora, validation, safeguards).
- Provides rapid tests to avoid conflating fields.

17. Scope and limits

Focused on conceptual demarcation and methodological synthesis. It does not present case studies or quantitative exercises; those will be developed in dedicated research.

18. Expected outcome

To provide non-confused criteria so that the growing interest in coded discourse can be channelled into rigorous, falsifiable research programmes.

Minimal glossary (for paper terminology)

- Binary/ternary: consonantal structures identified by Endolinguistics.
- Double audience: message with differential readings for distinct audiences.
- Filter evasion: strategies to bypass moderation.
- Cryptolect: coded language exclusive to a group.
- Hide effect: degree to which a code remains undetected by the general audience.

Conclusions

This article has established a clear demarcation between Endolinguistics and Sociolinguistic Cryptology, two disciplines that, while sharing structural concerns, have different objects of study. Endolinguistics examines the deep structures of language—the binary and ternary codes underpinning the semantic relations between words—whereas SLC examines social coding phenomena in discourse—the ways in which messages are encrypted to communicate with different audiences.

Such demarcation is fundamental for preserving the rigour of both fields. Endolinguistics should not be used to explain conjunctural social phenomena, and SLC should not be conflated with deep structural analysis. Both disciplines are valid and rigorous, each with its own object, methodology, and validation criteria.

Proposing SLC as an autonomous discipline provides an adequate theoretical-methodological framework for studying social coding phenomena that are real and significant but do not fall within Endolinguistics' domain. With its interdisciplinary outlook, strict validation criteria, and triangulation protocol, SLC can substantially enhance our understanding of how social codes operate in discourse.

Dialogue between both disciplines is possible and productive, provided their demarcations are respected. Endolinguistics supplies the "structural ground" on which social coding phenomena are built, while SLC explores how words are strategically employed in specific social contexts. Together—without conflation—they contribute to a more comprehensive and rigorous understanding of language and human communication.

Theoretical Foundations of Sociolinguistic Cryptology: An Interdisciplinary Canon

Introduction

Sociolinguistic Cryptology (SLC) rests on an interdisciplinary theoretical corpus ranging from hermeneutics and semiotics to signalling theory and the sociology of secrecy. This article organises that canon into thematic currents and establishes the logical connections with Endolinguistics, which examines the deep structures of language through binary and ternary codes.

SLC operates on the "structural ground" supplied by Endolinguistics. Whereas Endolinguistics identifies deep consonantal structures connecting seemingly unrelated words (for instance, the ternary K-L-D linking "glad" and "cálido"), SLC studies how these words, bearing their endolinguistic structures, are strategically employed in specific social contexts to create double-audience codes, filter-evasion strategies, or covert signalling.

The theoretical canon is presented in eight main currents, each contributing concepts and methods for analysing social coding in discourse.

1. Hermeneutics and Semiotics: Operating "Sign → Meaning" without Esotericism

Hans-Georg Gadamer — Truth and Method

Contribution to SLC: Gadamer develops a philosophical hermeneutics explaining how tradition and horizon operate in interpretation. His concept of "fusion of horizons" (Horizontverschmelzung) is central for understanding how different audiences interpret the same message from their own cultural and historical horizons.

Application in SLC: SLC leverages Gadamerian notions to justify interpretive protocols without lapsing into arbitrariness. When a message functions as a double-audience code, we recognise that audiences inhabit distinct horizons, yet those horizons are publicly analysable through empirical methods.

Connection with Endolinguistics: Endolinguistics identifies deep structures that transcend particular horizons (e.g., the ternary K-L-D appears across Indo-European languages). Building on Gadamer, SLC explains how such deep structures are actualised within specific interpretive horizons, producing differential readings.

Umberto Eco — A Theory of Semiotics

Contribution to SLC: Eco elaborates sign typologies and meaning-production processes, setting interpretive limits that prevent overreading. His distinction between “open” and “closed” texts, and the concept of the “model reader”, supply public criteria for what counts as a valid interpretation.

Application in SLC: SLC uses Eco’s typologies to enforce public criteria when analysing social codes. Formulating a coding hypothesis requires specifying the sign type and the interpretive limits considered admissible.

Connection with Endolinguistics: Endolinguistic codes are “closed” in the sense that they display systemic regularities. Grounded in Eco, SLC describes how these closed structures open into multiple social interpretations, always within explicit interpretive boundaries.

Yuri Lotman — Universe of the Mind / Semiosphere

Contribution to SLC: Lotman models cultures as semiotic systems (semiospheres) in which signs and meanings circulate. The semiosphere concept helps to map the spaces through which social codes travel, revealing how codes move among subcultures and audiences.

Application in SLC: SLC employs the semiosphere model to understand how codes operate within specific semiotic spaces. A double-audience code functions because different groups inhabit different sectors of the semiosphere yet share intersection points where the code can be deployed.

Connection with Endolinguistics: Endolinguistics uncovers structures shared across languages in a macrosystem. Building on Lotman, SLC explains how these shared structures become actualised in distinct cultural semiospheres, producing context-dependent social codes.

Complements: Barthes, Ricoeur, Kristeva, Derrida

- Roland Barthes — Mythologies: His account of myths as second-order sign systems helps SLC analyse how certain social codes naturalise specific meanings.
- Paul Ricoeur — Interpretation Theory: Ricoeur’s conception of interpretation as appropriation clarifies how audiences take ownership of codes.
- Julia Kristeva: Her notion of intertextuality elucidates how social codes are built through references to prior texts and contexts.
- Jacques Derrida: Although deconstruction can drift toward relativism, Derrida’s analysis of différance and deferral illuminates how codes rely on difference and postponement of meaning.

2. Pragmatics, Speech Acts, and Relevance: Foundations for Double Audience and Opacity

H. P. Grice — “Logic and Conversation”

Contribution to SLC: Grice formulates conversational implicatures and cooperative maxims (quantity, quality, relation, manner). Implicatures are essential for detecting concealed layers of meaning that remain implicit in literal statements.

Application in SLC: SLC relies on Gricean implicatures to spot social coding. Apparent violations of conversational maxims (deliberate ambiguity, unexpected brevity, etc.) may reveal double-audience codes. Plausible deniability hinges on the possibility of sustaining a maxim-consistent literal reading.

Connection with Endolinguistics: Endolinguistics studies deep structures independent of conversational intention. Grounded in Grice, SLC clarifies how those structures become active in specific speech events where implicatures trigger differential readings.

J. L. Austin — How to Do Things with Words & J. R. Searle — Speech Acts

Contribution to SLC: Austin and Searle show that utterances perform social actions. The distinction between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts is key for identifying codes operating beyond literal content.

Application in SLC: SLC uses speech-act theory to determine when an utterance functions as a social code. A message may bear a literal illocution (a declaration) while conveying a coded perlocution (signalling group membership). Double audience depends on multiple perlocutionary layers coexisting.

Connection with Endolinguistics: Endolinguistic structures exist regardless of specific speech acts. Building on Austin and Searle, SLC explains how those structures are mobilised within speech acts to deliver social coding.

Dan Sperber & Deirdre Wilson — Relevance: Communication and Cognition

Contribution to SLC: Relevance theory explains interpretation through cognitive economy. Optimal relevance helps formalise differential readings: distinct audiences consider different contextual assumptions worthwhile.

Application in SLC: SLC adopts relevance theory to understand how double-audience codes manage cognitive effort. The hide effect arises because the general audience finds no additional relevance in the coded layer, whereas the target group does.

Connection with Endolinguistics: Endolinguistics documents structures that are relevant for the linguistic system at large. SLC, via Sperber and Wilson, shows how these structures manifest in contexts where relevance becomes audience-specific.

3. Discourse Analysis and Framing: Coding/Decoding Mechanisms

Stuart Hall — "Encoding/Decoding"

Contribution to SLC: Hall's model demonstrates how messages are encoded by producers and decoded by audiences, allowing dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings. It provides the matrix for formalising the path "sender → code → audiences".

Application in SLC: SLC adopts Hall's model to formalise double-audience operation. A message carries both a literal layer and a coded layer. The general audience decodes the dominant reading; the target group decodes the coded layer as an oppositional or negotiated reading.

Connection with Endolinguistics: Endolinguistic codes belong to the deep encoding system of language. Building on Hall, SLC explains how these structural encodings are activated within specific social coding/decoding processes.

Erving Goffman — Frame Analysis

Contribution to SLC: Goffman shows how frames organise experience and supply interpretive cues. Reframing accounts for how meaning shifts when a new key is applied.

Application in SLC: SLC leverages frame analysis to understand codified "keying" and reframing. A double-audience code functions because it makes distinct frames available: the target group recognises the coded frame, while the general audience remains within the literal frame.

Connection with Endolinguistics: Endolinguistic structures provide deep semantic frameworks. With Goffman, SLC explains how these deep frameworks are actualised in social frames that enable coded interpretations.

Robert Entman — "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm"

Contribution to SLC: Entman operationalises frames with four functions: problem definition, causal diagnosis, moral evaluation, and remedy suggestion. This operational clarity is

valuable for SLC.

Application in SLC: Analysts can specify which frame functions differentiate audiences when a code is present. Divergent moral evaluations or causal diagnoses often reveal audience-specific decoding.

Connection with Endolinguistics: While Endolinguistics maps deep organisational structures, SLC—grounded in Entman—shows how those structures surface within particular discursive frames.

Complements: Raymond Williams, Herman & Chomsky, George Lakoff

- Raymond Williams: Provides cultural materialist tools for linking codes to hegemonic formations.
- Edward Herman & Noam Chomsky — Manufacturing Consent: Illustrate how media filters condition encoding and decoding; useful for modelling structural constraints on coded discourse.
- George Lakoff — Frame semantics: Adds cognitive-linguistic insight into how frames activate metaphoric structures that may support coding strategies.

4. Platform Moderation and Socio-Technical Contexts

Tarleton Gillespie — Custodians of the Internet

Contribution to SLC: Gillespie analyses how digital platforms govern content moderation, revealing the socio-technical constraints that motivate filter-evasion strategies.

Application in SLC: Understanding moderation regimes helps formulate hypotheses about why users adopt certain codes (e.g., algospeak). Platform policies become contextual variables in coding hypotheses.

Sarah T. Roberts — Behind the Screen

Contribution to SLC: Roberts documents the labour and decision processes behind content moderation, highlighting the human element and discretionary practices.

Application in SLC: SLC incorporates these insights to model how moderation teams interpret or miss coded messages, informing the design of empirical tests on hide effect and detection thresholds.

Complement: Platforms studies and infrastructure research

Works on socio-technical assemblages (e.g., Gehl, Plantin, Ananny) help situate coding phenomena within governance structures, API affordances, and surveillance regimes.

5. Dog Whistles and Aesopian Language

Ian Haney López — Dog Whistle Politics

Contribution to SLC: Provides a comprehensive theory of racial dog whistles, documenting how coded appeals preserve deniability while mobilising specific constituencies.

Application in SLC: Supplies empirical cases and analytical criteria (audience segmentation, historical cues) for modelling double-audience effects.

Tali Mendelberg — The Race Card

Contribution to SLC: Offers experimental evidence on implicit racial messaging and the conditions under which coded appeals succeed or fail.

Application in SLC: Helps calibrate hypotheses about audience thresholds, backlash effects, and the importance of contextual priming.

Lev Loseff — On the Beneficence of Censorship

Contribution to SLC: Analyses Aesopian language in Russian literature under censorship, detailing strategies for hiding critical content.

Application in SLC: Supplies typologies of oblique references, narrative displacement, and metaphorical signalling adaptable to contemporary coding analysis.

Paul E. Smaldino & Jeffrey C. Turner — "Covert Signaling Evolves When Groups Are Heterogeneous"

Contribution to SLC: Formalises covert signalling using evolutionary game theory, showing when covert codes are evolutionarily stable.

Application in SLC: Provides mathematical baselines for modelling costs, benefits, and audience composition in coding scenarios.

Complements: Work on subcultures, slang, and anti-languages

Studies of cryptolects (Halliday), queer coding, or subcultural jargons (Baker, Chauncey) expand the empirical range of SLC while emphasising historical specificity.

6. Disinformation, Propaganda, and Influence Operations

Claire Wardle & Hossein Derakhshan — Information Disorder

Contribution to SLC: Establish a taxonomy of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation, including mechanisms that rely on coded messaging.

Application in SLC: Offers analytical categories for distinguishing between accidental ambiguity and deliberate coded manipulation.

Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris, & Hal Roberts — Network Propaganda

Contribution to SLC: Demonstrate how network structures amplify strategic messaging and frame alignment.

Application in SLC: Provides data-driven methodologies (network mapping, media ecosystems) for tracking the dissemination of coded discourse.

Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy, & Sinan Aral — "The Spread of True and False News Online"

Contribution to SLC: Quantify diffusion dynamics for true versus false content on social media.

Application in SLC: Helps evaluate whether coded messages exhibit distinctive diffusion signatures compared with overt content.

Thomas Rid — Active Measures

Contribution to SLC: Offers historical accounts of disinformation and covert influence techniques.

Application in SLC: Supplies comparative cases of how covert signals are embedded within broader influence operations.

Samuel C. Woolley & Philip N. Howard (eds.) — Computational Propaganda

Contribution to SLC: Analyses automated amplification, bot architectures, and computational messaging.

Application in SLC: Informs hypotheses about algorithmic detection, bot-mediated diffusion, and the integration of coded lexicons into automated campaigns.

7. Secrecy, Ritual, and Social Order

Georg Simmel — "The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies"

Contribution to SLC: Offers foundational sociology of secrecy, including social functions of concealment and trust.

Application in SLC: Provides criteria for identifying when secrecy confers group cohesion and how secrecy thresholds regulate code dissemination.

James C. Scott — Domination and the Arts of Resistance

Contribution to SLC: Describes hidden transcripts and the performative negotiation of power.

Application in SLC: Helps model how coded discourse allows subaltern groups to critique power while maintaining deniability.

Mary Douglas — Purity and Danger & Victor Turner — The Ritual Process

Contribution to SLC: Douglas analyses symbolic boundary maintenance; Turner examines liminality and ritual inversion.

Application in SLC: These frameworks help understand how codes mark group boundaries (purity/impurity) and operate within liminal phases or ritualised performances.

8. Formal Cryptography and Information Theory

Auguste Kerckhoffs — "La Cryptographie Militaire"

Contribution to SLC: Kerckhoffs' principle (security relying on key secrecy rather than algorithm secrecy) parallels the need for public methodological transparency in SLC.

Application in SLC: Inspires methodological openness: hypotheses, metrics, and procedures should be transparent even when specific coded lexicons remain confidential for ethical reasons.

Claude E. Shannon — "Communication Theory of Secrecy Systems"

Contribution to SLC: Shannon's information-theoretic approach to secrecy systems formalises entropy, redundancy, and equivocation.

Application in SLC: Provides mathematical analogies for modelling signal/noise ratios, the information cost of coded messages, and the limits of detection.

Complements: Modern cryptography, steganography, obfuscation studies

Research on steganography, differential privacy, or obfuscation (Brunton & Nissenbaum) offers conceptual tools for understanding how coded messages hide within plain texts or data streams.

Conclusions

This article has outlined the theoretical canon of Sociolinguistic Cryptology, organised into eight main currents that furnish conceptual and methodological foundations for the study of social coding in discourse. Each current contributes specific tools integrated into the SLC methodology:

- Hermeneutics and semiotics (Gadamer, Eco, Lotman) provide interpretive frameworks and public criteria limiting overreading.
- Pragmatics and relevance (Grice, Austin, Searle, Sperber & Wilson) explain how covert layers arise in speech acts and how audiences compute meaning.
- Discourse analysis and framing (Hall, Goffman, Entman) model the encoding/decoding process and the role of frames.
- Platform governance (Gillespie, Roberts) highlights socio-technical constraints prompting filter evasion.
- Dog whistles and Aesopian language (Haney López, Mendelberg, Loseff, Smaldino & Turner) deliver empirical typologies and formal models of covert signalling.
- Disinformation and propaganda (Wardle & Derakhshan, Benkler et al., Vosoughi et al., Rid, Woolley & Howard) contextualise coded messages within broader influence ecosystems.
- Secrecy and ritual (Simmel, Scott, Douglas, Turner) reveal how secrecy sustains group boundaries and hidden transcripts.
- Formal cryptography (Kerckhoffs, Shannon) supplies methodological analogies grounded in information theory.

The logical connection to Endolinguistics is evident: Endolinguistics furnishes the structural bedrock (binary/ternary endolanguage codes) upon which SLC operates. Endolinguistics analyses why words share deep structures; SLC examines how those words acquire strategic functions in social contexts to generate double audiences, evasion mechanisms, or covert coordination.

Together, these currents equip SLC with rigorous, falsifiable, and operationally clear tools, avoiding esotericism while enabling the systematic study of coded discourse.

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Sociolinguistic Cryptology and Oracular Studies: Epistemological Delimitation and Methodological Foundations

Introduction

Sociolinguistic Cryptology (SLC) shares with oracular studies and symbolic cosmologies an interest in discovering hidden meanings and underlying patterns in discourse and human communication. Yet this apparent similarity can lead to fundamental methodological confusions. This article draws a clear line between SLC—as an empirical-discursive, falsifiable discipline—and traditional oracular systems and symbolic cosmologies, which operate through non-falsifiable criteria and revealed authority.

We refer to oracular systems and symbolic cosmologies as the set of traditions—astrology, tarot, numerologies, hermeticisms—that seek to orient social life via analogies and non-falsifiable correspondences. They differ from SLC, which is interdisciplinary, empirical-discursive, and falsifiable, and which operates on corpora, audiences, and double-reading tests.

The Central Question: Superficial Similarities, Fundamental Differences

Shared interest in the hidden

Both SLC and oracular studies are interested in meanings not explicit on the surface of discourse or symbols. Both seek to uncover layers of meaning hidden from most observers. However, this superficial similarity conceals fundamental epistemological and methodological differences.

SLC seeks hidden meanings that are empirically verifiable through public and replicable methods. Oracular studies, by contrast, operate through systems of correspondences and

analogies dependent on initiatory traditions, revealed authority, or non-falsifiable belief systems.

Different objectives

SLC: To provide scenario frameworks and hypotheses concerning social coding phenomena that can be validated or refuted via empirical evidence. SLC does not offer deterministic predictions; it formulates hypotheses about how social codes function in specific contexts.

Oracular studies: To provide orientation, situational diagnosis, or to reveal a hidden order of the world through systems of correspondences and analogies. These systems typically deliver predictions or interpretations that are not falsifiable via standard empirical methods.

Map of Traditions and Their Relation with SLC

1. Esoteric traditions

What they seek to explain: the hidden order of the world and of the self through systems of correspondences and analogies.

Typical method: correspondences, analogies, initiation. Esoteric systems such as Hermeticism or spiritual alchemy operate by positing correspondences between different levels of reality (microcosm–macrocosm, above–below, etc.) and require initiation to access deeper meanings.

Examples: Hermeticism, spiritual alchemy, Gnostic traditions.

Epistemic status: non-falsifiable. Validation depends on initiatory tradition and revealed authority rather than on public empirical testing.

Distance from SLC: remote. SLC demands public, replicable, falsifiable methods. Whereas esoteric traditions rely on initiation and revealed authority, SLC employs procedures any researcher can apply and verify.

2. Religious mysticism

What they seek to explain: ultimate meaning, union with the sacred, the transcendent sense of texts and symbols.

Typical method: symbolic exegesis, inner experience, interpretation anchored in revealed tradition.

Examples: mystical Jewish Kabbalah, Sufism, Christian mysticism.

Epistemic status: theological/mystical. Validity depends on faith and religious tradition, not on empirical criteria.

Distance from SLC: different sphere. Mystical traditions operate in the domain of faith and religious experience; SLC is empirical-discursive. Both may address symbols and hidden meanings, but their validation criteria are incompatible.

3. Divinatory arts (mancies)

What they seek to explain: guidance or situational diagnosis through systems of correspondences between signs and meanings.

Typical method: oracles, spreads, horoscopes, interpretation of signs according to established systems.

Examples: astrology, tarot/cartomancy, I Ching, palmistry, tasseography.

Epistemic status: pseudo-scientific/ritual. Although some systems (such as the I Ching) possess deep philosophical traditions, their divinatory use is not falsifiable using standard scientific methods.

Distance from SLC: remote. SLC is neither oracular nor prescriptive. Divinatory arts produce predictions or guidance about future or present situations; SLC formulates hypotheses about how social codes operate in specific contexts without deterministic forecasting.

4. Numerologies

What they seek to explain: meaning in numbers and letters via numerical and symbolic correspondences.

Typical method: gematria, isopsephy, arithmologies. Assigning numerical values to letters and searching for correspondences and hidden meanings.

Examples: Kabbalistic gematria, modern Pythagorean numerology, numerical correspondence systems.

Epistemic status: non-falsifiable. Numerological systems rely on ad hoc rules and correspondences that cannot be empirically validated.

Distance from SLC: remote. SLC avoids ad hoc rules and seeks empirical validation. Numerology operates with fixed correspondences established by tradition; SLC formulates hypotheses that must be corroborated empirically.

5. Modern occultism

What it seeks to explain: power and will through symbols and ritual practices.

Typical method: ceremonial magic, sigils, invocations, systems of magical correspondences.

Examples: Golden Dawn, Thelema, modern ceremonial magic.

Epistemic status: non-falsifiable. Efficacy is assessed using criteria internal to the system, not public empirical evidence.

Distance from SLC: remote. SLC does not work by magical efficacy or correspondence systems. Occultism seeks power and transformation via symbols and rituals; SLC seeks to understand how social codes function through empirical methods.

6. New Age and syncretisms

What they seek to explain: wellbeing and life mission through eclectic blends of esoteric traditions.

Typical method: eclectic esoteric combinations, symbolic therapies, motivational narratives.

Examples: “energy” practices, channeling, alternative therapies based on symbols.

Epistemic status: eclectic, non-falsifiable. They combine elements from multiple traditions without unified validation criteria.

Distance from SLC: remote. SLC requires operationalisation and clear validation criteria, whereas New Age systems rely on eclectic, non-falsifiable assemblages.

7. Historical symbolic pseudosciences

What they seek to explain: social/psychic traits via naturalised signs and correspondences.

Typical method: naturalised analogies, correspondences between physical signs and psychological or social characteristics.

Examples: phrenology, classical graphology, physiognomy.

Epistemic status: refuted/controversial. These disciplines have been empirically discredited or lack scientific validation.

Distance from SLC: remote. SLC publishes negative results and controls biases, whereas these pseudosciences relied on forced correlations without proper controls.

8. Academic symbol hermeneutics

What they seek to explain: shared cultural meanings via interpretive analysis of symbols and texts.

Typical method: semiotics, myth criticism, symbolic anthropology, interpretive analysis.

Examples: Barthes, Durand, Lotman, the cultural semiotics school.

Epistemic status: academic (humanities). They work through interpretive methods validated in scholarly contexts.

Distance from SLC: close in interpretive method, but SLC adds empirical validation. Academic hermeneutics share with SLC an interest in hidden cultural meanings, yet SLC incorporates empirical criteria (double audience, plausible deniability, triangulation) beyond pure interpretation.

9. Memetics / cultural semiology

What it seeks to explain: diffusion of units of meaning through cultural models and network analysis.

Typical method: cultural modelling, network analysis, study of meme/frame diffusion.

Examples: meme theory, frame analysis, studies of cultural diffusion.

Epistemic status: mixed scientific programmes. They combine interpretive methods with quantitative analysis and formal models.

Distance from SLC: near. SLC can integrate memetic and cultural-semiotic methods with empirical data. There is significant methodological convergence, although SLC adds specific validation criteria for social codes.

10. Conspiratorial meaning-making narratives

What they seek to explain: an all-encompassing explanation of social order through forced correlations and pareidolia.

Typical method: pareidolia, forced correlations, searches for hidden patterns without proper controls.

Examples: conspiratorial “numerology”, symbol-based conspiracy theories, exhaustive readings of any ambiguity.

Epistemic status: non-falsifiable/biased. They operate via confirmation bias without safeguards against overinterpretation.

Distance from SLC: opposed. SLC maintains anti-overreading safeguards, publishes negatives, and works with rigorous validation criteria. Conspiratorial narratives pursue totalising confirmation; SLC formulates specific hypotheses that can be refuted.

What SLC Adopts and What It Discards

What SLC adopts from symbolic traditions

- Cultural symbol repositories: SLC acknowledges that oracular systems and esoteric traditions have built rich repositories of symbols and correspondences that may inspire hypotheses. Historical study of symbol usage can inform hypotheses about their function as social codes.
- Rhetorical typologies: Hermeneutic and esoteric traditions have developed sophisticated typologies of figures, tropes, and discursive strategies that SLC can adapt, provided they are empirically operationalised.
- Frame histories: Historical analyses of how interpretive frames have been used and transformed can be valuable to SLC when examined with empirical methods.
- Diffusion analysis (memetics): Methods developed in memetics and cultural semiology for studying the spread of meaning units can be integrated into SLC with appropriate empirical controls.

What SLC discards

- Revealed authority as evidence: SLC does not accept the authority of initiatory traditions, revealed texts, or spiritual masters as evidence. All evidence must be public and replicable.
- Non-falsifiable inferences: SLC rejects correspondence systems and analogies that cannot be validated or refuted empirically. If a hypothesis cannot be falsified, it lies outside SLC's domain.
- "Total reading" of any ambiguity: SLC rejects the impulse to detect hidden codes in every ambiguity or coincidence. It requires specific empirical evidence and controls against overinterpretation.
- Deterministic predictions: SLC does not offer predictions about the future or definitive meanings of symbols. Instead, it formulates hypotheses about how social codes operate in specific contexts, acknowledging their probabilistic, contextual nature.

What SLC replaces

- Documented corpora: Instead of relying on tradition or revealed authority, SLC works with documented corpora of emissions and receptions open to scrutiny by any researcher.
- Specific metrics: Rather than fixed correspondence systems, SLC develops metrics such as double-audience indices, plausible deniability, and hide effect, all subject to empirical measurement.
- Methodological triangulation: Instead of depending on a single interpretive approach, SLC combines interpretive, computational, cognitive, and structural methods to validate hypotheses through independent converging evidence.

Golden Rule to Avoid Mixing Fields

Fundamental criterion

- If the truth criterion is initiatory/revealed → esoteric hermeneutics (not SLC). When the validity of an interpretation depends on initiation, spiritual authority, or revealed texts, we are within esoteric hermeneutics, not SLC. SLC requires all validation criteria to be public and accessible.
- If the truth criterion is public, replicable, and can yield negative results → potentially SLC. When a hypothesis can be empirically refuted and validation methods are replicable, it lies within SLC's potential domain.

Application examples

- Example 1: Interpreting a political symbol

- Esoteric approach: "This symbol has a hidden meaning according to hermetic tradition; only initiates fully understand it." - SLC approach: "Hypothesis: this symbol functions as a double-audience code, activating specific meanings for the target group while maintaining a literal reading for the general audience. Evidence: (1) surveys show differential readings, (2) corpus analysis reveals strategic usage in defined contexts, (3) cognitive measures show differential activation."

- Example 2: Analysing a speech

- Numerological approach: "The number of words, letters, or numerical values reveals a hidden meaning according to established correspondences." - SLC approach: "Hypothesis: certain keywords operate as signals for the target audience. Evidence: (1) computational analysis uncovers co-occurrence patterns, (2) experiments show differential recognition, (3) historical analysis shows the strategic evolution of use."

The Scientific Outlook of SLC

No deterministic predictions, but scenario frameworks

SLC does not deliver deterministic predictions about the future or definitive symbolic meanings. Instead, it offers scenario frameworks and hypotheses about how social codes function in specific contexts.

Probabilistic, contextual, and dynamic nature

SLC recognises that social coding phenomena are:

- Probabilistic: not all members of a target group interpret a code identically, nor does every code work in every context.
- Contextual: a code's performance depends on social, historical, and cultural settings. What succeeds in one context may fail elsewhere.
- Dynamic: social codes evolve. A code used to evade filters today may become obsolete once filters change.

Empirical validation and falsifiability

SLC operates with empirical validation criteria that include:

- Double audience: evidence that different audiences deliver distinct interpretations.
- Plausible deniability: evidence that the sender can sustain the literal reading without admitting the coded layer.
- Contextual/temporal persistence: evidence that the effect persists across contexts and over time.
- Hide effect: measurement of how far the code remains outside general awareness yet effective for the target group.
- Triangulation: convergence of independent sources of evidence (interpretive, cognitive, computational, structural).

Publication of negative results

Unlike oracular systems that seek confirmation, SLC publishes negative results when hypotheses fail. If an hypothesis cannot be empirically validated, it must be rejected or reformulated. Reporting negative cases is essential for disciplinary progress.

Convergences and Potential Collaborations

Academic hermeneutics

As noted, academic hermeneutics of the symbol (semiotics, myth criticism, symbolic anthropology) share with SLC an interest in hidden cultural meanings. SLC can integrate interpretive methods from these disciplines while adding empirical validation.

- Collaboration example: a semiotic analysis of a symbol's historical use can inform an SLC hypothesis about double-audience functioning, subsequently validated empirically.

Memetics and cultural semiology

Methods developed in memetics and cultural semiology to study the diffusion of meaning units can be incorporated into SLC with proper controls.

- Collaboration example: analysing how social codes spread through networks can be combined with double-audience and hide-effect measurements for a fuller understanding.

Cultural repositories as hypothesis sources

Oracular systems and esoteric traditions provide rich symbol repositories, correspondences, and typologies that can serve as hypothesis sources for SLC, provided those hypotheses undergo empirical validation.

- Example: historical study of symbol usage within esoteric traditions can inspire hypotheses about their modern use as social codes, which must then be empirically tested.

Limits and Precautions

Avoiding overinterpretation

Working at the SLC–oracular interface risks overinterpretation: seeing hidden codes everywhere. SLC must maintain strict safeguards:

- Anti-overreading protocols: explicit criteria for when a hypothesis fails.
- Context controls: ensure hypotheses are context-specific, not overgeneralised.
- Publication of negatives: report cases where hypotheses do not hold.

Distinguishing cultural correspondences from social codes

It is crucial to distinguish between:

- Cultural correspondences: historical associations between symbols and meanings embedded in shared culture.
- Social codes: discursive encryption procedures with differential readings and plausible deniability.

Not every cultural correspondence functions as a social code; evidence of differential readings and plausible deniability is required.

Preserving epistemological boundaries

Maintaining clear epistemological boundaries between SLC and oracular systems is vital. Inspiration from esoteric repositories must always be transformed into empirically testable hypotheses.

Conclusions

This article delineates the boundary between Sociolinguistic Cryptology and oracular/symbolic cosmological studies. Although both seek hidden meanings, they operate under fundamentally different epistemological and methodological criteria.

SLC stands out by:

- Public, replicable validation criteria.
- Falsifiability and willingness to publish negative results.
- Scenario-based hypotheses rather than deterministic predictions.
- Methodological triangulation combining interpretive, cognitive, computational, and structural methods.
- Safeguards against overinterpretation.

The golden rule is clear: if validation relies on initiation or revelation, we are outside SLC. If validation is public, replicable, and open to negative outcomes, we are within SLC's potential domain.

While SLC can draw inspiration from esoteric repositories and collaborate with academic hermeneutics or memetics, it must always maintain empirical validation and clear epistemological limits. In doing so, SLC contributes to a rigorous, scientific understanding of social coding phenomena without sacrificing methodological clarity.
