ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on the role played by linguistic process, especially by discourse types, in the interpretation of human activity, in the context of professional practice. Based on Saussure’s real work, the first part presents the way semiotic units and linguistic signs have been conceptualized in his theory, discussing the implications of this conceptualization for human significant process. The second part presents the results of empirical analysis of interviews with nurses concerning their nursing practice. It brings out the different action figures put forward by the nurses, as well as the dependence of these figures on the discourse types and others linguistic choices. The third part discusses the status of action figures: a first approach focuses on their role in development, based on the production of meaning about professional activity; and a second approach demonstrates that action figures may be considered as macro-signs, or semiotic units.

KEYWORDS: Discourse types; Action figures; Semiotic units; Development; Professional activity.