

Saussure: A Few Steps Away from Enunciation

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Abstract This paper engages in reflection over concepts of language and sign from a semiological conception as presented by two great names of modern linguistics: Ferdinand de Saussure, in *Writings in General Linguistics* and in *Course in General Linguistics*, and Émile Benveniste, in *Language Structure and Society Structure* [free translation] and *The Semiology of Language*. The work involving these concepts intends to show man in language even when linguistics studies sought to determine a worthy object that guaranteed linguistics would be considered science. Thus, reading *Writings* unveils a Saussure whose principles, especially those targeted at the sign value, disconnects us from approaches conceiving linguistics as merely attached to the signifying matter of language.

Keywords Language, Semiology of the language, Enunciation

1. Introduction

This article aims at (re)visiting Ferdinand de Saussure and some concepts established from his work, realizing what this means for linguistic studies when language is object of research and analysis. We do not intend to (re)invent a discussion but rather revisit some of existing ones, for their importance, necessity, and for enunciative duty.

These considerations about sign, language, man, society are subscribed herein with the purpose of showing they have long been discussed. But we are willing to think language — first and foremost, the sign — from one perspective: that of Ferdinand de Saussure one step away from enunciation. Which enunciation? That of Émile Benveniste's semiology of language. Let us attempt this path.

Furthermore, we justify our reflection based on Saussure's question in his First Conference held in Geneva in 1891: Do you seriously think that studying language would need, in order to be justified or apologize for existing, to prove being useful to other sciences?¹ [1] Silence remains toward that question; however, so does the eagerness to answer it, or at least think about it, and the challenge endures. After all, Saussure himself [1] states at the same Conference:

[...] man without language would perhaps be 'man', but not someone who would compare, even if approximately, to the man that we know and that we are, because language, on the one hand, was the most formidable tool of collective action, and on the other hand of individual education, the instrument without which the individual or the species would never be able to aspire developing, in any sense, their native faculties.²

That language, a feature of man, Saussure studied is the foundation of reflections proposed herein, reaching a relationship at this moment very dear to us: this man in language, envisioned by Émile Benveniste in his linguistics of enunciation. To this end, we have organized the theoretical discussion in three steps: 1) The relevance of Saussurean principles; 2) The understanding of arbitrariness and the value of a sign; 3) The language, a place of otherness — that of enunciation —, having as core the semiological principle of the linguistic system.

2. Ferdinand de Saussure, a Beginning

In early twentieth century, Genevan Ferdinand de Saussure undoubtedly made the studies of Linguistics as the science of language possible throughout the century. Concerned with human behavior regarding social facts as part of a system of social conventions and values enabling men to live in society, communicate with each other, and observe the need for a general theory of signs, Saussure

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¹ Vocês pensam seriamente que o estudo da linguagem teria necessidade, para se justificar ou para se desculpar por existir, de provar que é útil às outras ciências? (2002:127)

² [...] o homem sem a linguagem seria, talvez, 'o homem', mas não um ser que se comparasse, mesmo que aproximadamente, ao homem que nós conhecemos e que nós somos, porque a linguagem foi, por um lado, a mais formidável ferramenta de ação coletiva e, por outro, de educação individual, o instrumento sem o qual o indivíduo ou a espécie jamais poderia aspirar desenvolver, em algum sentido, suas faculdades nativas. (2002:128)

began Semiology studies with important contributions to Linguistics and Social Sciences in general.

We believe Saussure's primary influence in modern Linguistics is based on something he never wrote. It was between 1907 and 1911³ as a professor at the University of Geneva (after several research studies and classes conducted in Paris and Berlin), where he delivered his three courses on General Linguistics, that Saussure effectively offered advances in Linguistics studies. His studies were based on his discontentment about reflections regarding the nature of language proposed then. He questioned his predecessors because he believed that they did not think in a more pertinent way about what they studied. He criticized comparative grammarians and philologists of the time on account of them supposedly being unable to create real Linguistics for not caring about the nature of the object. Their method was exclusively comparative, as if there was a universal abstract model, a set of cracks and gaps that each language had to fill with some elements, thus mixing synchronic and diachronic perspectives of language. The synchronic task would be to show how, at a certain stage of the development of a language, historical elements were organized in a particular system of a given language.

Saussure's accuracy while elaborating conceptions and criticisms prevented him from publishing his studies, as noticed in the following excerpt from a letter⁴ he wrote in 1894 to Antoine Meillet about an article he had submitted to an editor:

[...] but I am upset with all this, and with the difficulty of writing even ten sensible lines about linguistic matters. For a long time, I have been mostly concerned about the classification of the points of view from which we deal with them: and I am increasingly aware of the huge amount of work that would be necessary to show the linguist what he is doing... The complete inadequacy of the current terminology, the need to renovate it, to do so, the need to demonstrate what kind of object language is, continuously deteriorates my pleasure for philology, although I do not have any other wish dearer to me than that of being obliged to reflect on the nature of language in general. This shall lead me, against my will, to a book in which I shall explain, without any enthusiasm or passion, why there is not a single term used in Linguistics that has any meaning for me. Only after that, I confess, I shall be able to restart my work from the point where I interrupted it.⁵ [2]

³ This moment is where the Courses in General Linguistics took place, conducted by Saussure in the University of Geneva. The first course was carried out from January 16 to July 3, 1907; the second one from the first week of November 1908 to July 24, 1909, and the third one from October 28, 1910 to July 4, 1911.

⁴ Letter dated January 4, 1894, in "Lettres de Ferdinand de Saussure à Antoine Meillet", Cahiers Ferdinand Saussure 21 (1964) [2].

⁵ [...] *mas eu estou aborrecido com tudo isso, e com a dificuldade de escrever sequer dez linhas sensatas a respeito de assuntos lingüísticos. Por longo tempo estive, acima de tudo, preocupado com a classificação dos pontos de vista a partir dos quais nós os tratamos: e estou cada vez mais consciente da imensa quantidade de trabalho que seria necessária para mostrar ao lingüista o que ele está fazendo... A total inadequação da terminologia corrente, a necessidade*

This fragment of the letter explains why Saussure never wrote the book mentioned. With his death in 1913, peers, admirers and former students, the editors⁶, gathered writings, notes, observations from the classes of the three courses held in Geneva. In 1916, they published Course in General Linguistics⁷, organized by Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye, with the collaboration of Albert Riedlinger. While Course in General Linguistics has not been written by Saussure himself, the editors were criticized for the liberty taken when interpreting and quoting some examples for concepts that would not have been given by Saussure. Nonetheless, Bally and Sechehaye's admirable work is recognized for the courage to make public what Saussure deemed significant and fundamental in the study of language, creating a whole universe of possibilities for furthering his researches, deepening, enriching, and advancing in the realm of human language. Perhaps the destiny of Linguistics would have been different if the organizers of Course in General Linguistics had not dared to publish the courses held in Geneva, the courses they had witnessed. Saussure's teachings gathered in Course in General Linguistics undoubtedly establish his place as linguist in the history of Modern Linguistics.

In the eighteenth century, scholars were concerned about mental categories and sought to exemplify them in language. In the nineteenth century, matters were historical. Facts, evidence, demonstrations were sought, separating the study of language from the study of the mind. Thus, in the nineteenth century the interest in word as sign or representation was lost and then understood as form that should be compared to other forms to establish relations between languages, taking them as comparable systems. The most important thing at that time for Linguistics was to observe the form the historical evolution of which was important to trace. The object of study in Linguistics was no longer sign as representation whose rational basis (relationship with the mind) should be unveiled and/or

de reformá-la, para fazê-lo, de demonstrar que espécie de objeto é a linguagem, continuamente deteriora meu prazer pela filologia, embora eu não tenha nenhum desejo mais caro que o de ser obrigado a refletir sobre a natureza da linguagem em geral. Isto me levará, contra minha vontade, a um livro no qual explicarei, sem entusiasmo nem paixão, porque não há um único termo usado em Lingüística que tenha qualquer significado para mim. Só depois disso, confesso, serei capaz de recomeçar meu trabalho a partir do ponto em que o interrompi. (1979:9).

⁶ Testimonies of the inauguration of a linguistics that led towards a story that we tell and invent and do until nowadays. Now, for example. But this is another story – that of the editors being testimonies, a concept developed by Italian Giorgio Agamben. [3]

⁷ Beata Stawarska in Saussure's Philosophy of Language as Phenomenology brings a philosophical approach to the saussurian reception in America. Although we are aware of the importance of his work, we will not address it in our discussion, given our proposal, which is to reflect the concepts of language, language and sign based on a semiological conception of the language derived from Saussure and Benveniste. Unlike the linguistic bias, whose principle places the researcher in the field of language as the norm for any and every manifestation of language, Beata Stawarska proposal provides English-speaking researchers with the philosophical implications of Saussure's thought.

deepened, but rather the form whose similarities and historical links with other words should be found. A process of understanding language as a system that is put into operation had begun.

Saussure opposes precisely to this treatment given to Linguistics. In an interview to Pierre Daix linguist Émile Benveniste [4] mentions, “Saussure refused almost everything that was done in his time. He thought that current notions had no foundation, that everything was set on unverified assumptions, and above all that linguists did not know what to do.”⁸

Saussure first addressed the problem of sign, conceiving language as order of representation; he highlighted that a linguistic form cannot be defined if it is not treated as a sign; he considered that signs are constituted only by their relationships with other signs, and it is not possible to study them individually as representations; he (re)established the relationship between the study of the mind and language, considering that the study of language reveals the mind is not a set of primitive perceptions or natural ideas but general structuring and differentiating operations used to make things mean something.

Although essentially criticized by Saussure, nineteenth century studies brought an important issue to linguistics studies: comparing languages through formal models of grammatical elements, through which words unite and differentiate was significant for a better understanding of the notion of language as a system—a system of forms governed by their own laws—formal and autonomous, as an object of knowledge. Language is no longer studied as the very own form of thinking, as a representation of the relationship between mind and world.

During that period comparison, fundamentally based on the analogy between the systems, was the method used. Without denying the merit of their studies, Saussure criticized those grammarians regarding them not having been able to effectively establish real Linguistics, and not worrying in determining the nature of the object, which in turn raised the question of them not having formulated synchronic and diachronic issues in/of the study of language.

In Depecker [5], we find an interesting reflection on that matter, when he highlights Saussure’s First Conference at University of Geneva in November 1891: “the objective of linguistics is then to examine the general laws of language.”⁹ This can only be understood if we look again to Saussure’s Writings in General Linguistics and First Conference, November 1891, observing Saussure’s words (2002: 129) [1]:

And, remarkable phenomenon, the theoretical observations that those who concentrate their studies in one or another special branch make — such as Germanic, Romance — are much more

⁸ Saussure recusava quase tudo o que se fazia no seu tempo. Ele achava que as noções correntes não tinham base, que tudo repousava sobre pressupostos não verificados, e sobretudo que o linguista não sabia o que fazer.

⁹ [...] o objetivo da linguística é então o de examinar as leis gerais da linguagem. (2012:31)

appreciated and considered than observations from linguists who embrace a larger number of languages. One can notice that the last detail of the phenomena is also their utmost reason, therefore extreme specialization can effectively serve to extreme generalization.¹⁰

This shows that Saussure referred to a generalization of these comparisons of the observed linguistic facts. This is what one observes to understand the facts of language. As Depecker [5] says, linguists cannot merely compare but rather must generalize. That was what Saussure meant while criticizing his fellow linguists.

Further studies—mainly those of neogrammarians—were better conducted and therefore more significant for the nineteenth century. Among them: Sound changes are considered consequences of a change in the realization system, although the fact itself would not change words; results of comparative studies are put in historical order, in an attempt to explain results from comparisons; analogy gains space for it actually describes the formation of certain words, while not constructing clear notions of synchrony and diachrony yet, because it focuses too much on historical perspectives and does not recognize the systemic, grammatical nature of the phenomenon they were studying. Benveniste [6] rescues Saussure’s statement about the importance of synchronic studies:

[...] language, in its operation, knows no historical reference: all we say is understood in a current context and within speeches that are always synchronic. Not a single part of history is mixed to the living use of language.¹¹

When addressing once more the problem of the sign, Saussure realized that more than history representation is the basis of a subject so that one can distinguish relevant from non-relevant, functional from non-functional. Thus, the Genevan linguist returned to the notion of representation. Saussure acknowledged Linguistics as a branch of Semiology, the general science of signs and sign systems. Before him, it was said that Linguistics did not belong neither to natural sciences, nor to historical sciences, but rather to Semiology. As stated in Course in General Linguistics [7],

[...] the task of the linguist is to define what makes language a special system in all semiological facts. [...] For us [...] the linguistic problem is, first of all, semiological [...] If one wishes to discover the real nature of language, it would be necessary to initially consider it in what it has in common with all other

¹⁰ *E, fenômeno notável, as observações teóricas que trazem aqueles que concentraram seus estudos em tal ou ramo especial, como o germânico, o românico, são muito mais apreciadas e consideradas do que observações dos linguistas que abraçam uma série maior de línguas. Percebe-se que o último detalhe dos fenômenos é também sua razão última e que, assim, a extrema especialização pode servir eficazmente à extrema generalização.*

¹¹ [...] a linguagem, no seu funcionamento, não conhece nenhuma referência histórica: tudo o que dizemos está compreendido num contexto atual e no interior de discursos que são sempre sincrônicos. Nenhuma parcela de história se mistura ao uso vivo da língua. (1968/2006c:32) [6]

systems of the same order.¹²

Semiology is based on the assumption that, to the extent that human actions or productions express meaning and to the extent that they operate as signs, there shall be an underlying system of conventions and distinctions that makes this meaning possible. Therefore, where there are signs there is a system, hence there is relationship, there is arbitrariness, there is convention.

Such concern can be seen in Saussure in *Course in General Linguistics* [7]:

[...] when Semiology is organized, it should ascertain whether the modes of expression based on entirely natural signs —such as pantomime— rightfully belong to it¹³. Assuming Semiology welcomes them, its main objective will not cease to be the set of systems based on the arbitrariness of the sign. Indeed, every means of expression accepted in a society at first lays in a collective habit, or a convention, which is the same. [...] One can say that the entirely arbitrary signs better realize than others the ideal of the semiological procedure; that is why language, the most complete and most widespread system of expression, is also the most characteristic of all; in this sense, Linguistics can be established in a pattern of all Semiology, although language is nothing but a private system.¹⁴

If signs were natural, there would be nothing to analyze. But if they are conventional, the conventions they are based on shall be researched, revealing the underlying system that makes up certain signs. Which in turn means: where there is knowledge, there is an underlying system to be explained. Such reflections are justified by the fact that, if the meanings attributed to objects or actions of a group of individuals of a same culture are not casual phenomena, then there should be a system of signs — semiological — of categories and rules distinct of combination.

Semiology was, therefore, born from Saussure's project in which the life of signs within social life (natural languages, images, gestures, road codes, rites, habits) was object of study. In this sense, one might say that Linguistics is included in Semiology, but Saussure stresses out that there is a paradox because Semiology presupposes Linguistics.

¹² [...] a tarefa do linguista é definir o que faz da língua um sistema especial no conjunto dos fatos semiológicos. [...] Para nós [...] o problema linguístico é, antes de tudo, semiológico [...] Se se quiser descobrir a verdadeira natureza da língua, será mister considerá-la inicialmente no que ela tem de comum com todos os outros sistemas da mesma ordem. (2006:24-5) [7]

¹³ Comment by Tullio de Mauro (1967, p. 100-101), note 139. [8]

¹⁴ [...] quando a Semiologia estiver organizada, deverá averiguar se os modos de expressão que se baseiam em signos inteiramente naturais — como pantomima — lhe pertencem de direito¹⁴. Supondo que a Semiologia os acolha, seu principal objetivo não deixará de ser o conjunto de sistemas baseados na arbitrariedade do signo. Com efeito, todo meio de expressão aceito numa sociedade repousa em princípio num hábito coletivo ou, o que vem a dar na mesma, na convenção. [...] Pode-se dizer que os signos inteiramente arbitrários realizam melhor que os outros o ideal do procedimento semiológico; eis porque a língua, o mais completo e o mais difundido sistema de expressão, é também o mais característico de todos; nesse sentido a Lingüística pode erigir-se em padrão de toda Semiologia, se bem que a língua não seja senão um sistema particular. (2006:82) [7]

3. Linguistic Sign and Arbitrariness — Language

Saussure was concerned about the nature of linguistic sign, describing it as an entity of two inseparable sides that unite a meaning¹⁵ to an acoustic image¹⁶. Thus, the language sign is a two-sided psychic entity. One can think of two elements that are closely linked, reclaiming each other; they are interdependent and inseparable. The signifier does not exist outside its relationship with the signified, because the same relational movement creates and establishes one and the other. These concepts can never be considered separately. From then on, linguistic sign is thought as being double at origin.

One of the properties of linguistic sign is its arbitrariness—the relationship between its constituent elements in unmotivated. According to Saussure [1], in *Course in General Linguistics*,

[...] arbitrary should not convey the idea that the signified depends on the free choice of who is speaking, because it is not at a single individual's reach to change anything in a sign, once it is established in a linguistic group; he insists on saying that the signifier is unmotivated, that is, arbitrary in relation to the signified, with which it has no natural link in reality.¹⁷

Saussure's concern in making it clear that the linguistic sign always unites an acoustic image to a concept, an idea, a psychic evocation rather than a thing is clear. The two sides involved (signifier and signified) in the linguistic sign are both psychic, and as Saussure proposes they are united in the human brain by an association link, having the signifier evoke a plane of expression and the signified evoke a plane of content—different from signification, which is a process, an act that unites signifier and signified, the product of which is sign. That makes the concept of sign according to Saussure different from classic concepts considering it thing and reference.

Simon Bouquet [9] emphasizes Saussure's concept of arbitrariness is important for it supports the concept of value. Bouquet criticizes the editors of *Course in General Linguistics* on the account of them not paying attention to

¹⁵ For Saussure, meaning is the same as concept, that is, the mental representation of an object or a social reality where the individual is. It is important to stress out that such representation is conditioned by the sociocultural development that surrounds the individual all the time.

¹⁶ For Saussure, according to *Course in General Linguistics*, the acoustic image is not the material sound, something purely physical, but the psychic impression of that sound. According to Carvalho (2000, p. 27), it should be remembered that later Jakobson and the Prague School of Phonology would definitively establish the distinction between material sound and acoustic image. The first became the object of study of Phonetics, and the second became the consecrated object of study of Phonology. [14]

¹⁷ [...] arbitrário não deve dar a ideia de que o significado dependa da livre escolha de quem fala, porque não está no alcance do indivíduo trocar coisa alguma num signo, uma vez que esteja ele estabelecido num grupo linguístico; ele insiste em dizer que o significante é imotivado, isto é, arbitrário em relação ao significado, com o qual não tem nenhum laço natural na realidade. (2002:82) [1]

the ambiguity of the word “sign” while replacing Saussure’s propositions (as checked in his manuscript) with their own formulations, and stresses out that arbitrary

[...] is used by Saussure to refer to two very distinct relationships: It has value, on the one hand, for the internal relationship of the sign, between signified and signifier; on the other hand, it has value for the relationship that unites the terms of the system of a certain language between them¹⁸.

These issues are important because the concepts of sign and arbitrariness of the sign trigger several theoretical stances. Saussure assigned great importance to the fact that language is not a nomenclature, because a language does not only assign arbitrary names to a set of random concepts. We know that language establishes, on the one hand, an arbitrary relationship between a signifier of its own choice and, on the other hand, architects a signified of its own choice as well. These elements (signifier and signified) are part of a system and are defined by their relations with other elements within the system, determining the combination units and rules that constitute the linguistic system. Thus, when studying language as a sign system, one is granting importance to its essential features, i.e., those decisive elements for the signifying function of the language, or rather, elements functional within the system in which they create signs are different from each other. That is the issue of similarities and differences of/in language.

All these considerations made about the issue of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign evoke yet another one primary in Saussurian theory of language: Language is form, not substance, since language is a system of mutually related values. Analyzing a language is precisely to expose its system of values. It is necessary to identify relationships and oppositions which delimit signifiers, on the one hand, and the signifieds, on the other hand, so that the linguistic sign that emerges from the network of differences that constitutes the linguistic system can be constituted.

We can detect a central issue in Saussure's studies: When observing language, social facts are analyzed because distinctions and relationships assigned meaning by a certain society are important. While revisiting reflections over language, Saussure [1] draws attention to the fact that language aims at becoming intelligible, which is of absolute need in any human need, once it is characteristic of every society. These relationships which are possible through language as systematized, studied, generalized by Saussure are the focus of this paper. That language which moves human community, as Saussure used to say, is targeted herein.

A linguist will, therefore, study a system of social conventions and facts at the core of the linguistic research. Saussure always stressed out the importance of adopting the

correct methodological perspective and of seeing language as a system of socially determined values, rather than a collection of substantially defined elements.

Taking Saussure’s notes, in Culler's work [2], we exemplify:

The utmost law of language is, we dare say it, that nothing can reside in a single term. This is a direct consequence of the fact that linguistic signs are not related to what they name, and for this reason ‘a’ cannot name anything without the aid of ‘b’ and vice versa; or, in other words, both have value only by their differences between themselves, or none of them has any value, in any of their constituent elements, rather than through this same network of differences forever negative. [...] As language does not consist of any substance, but only of the isolated or combined action of physiological, psychological and mental forces; and as, despite all of our distinctions, all our terminology, all our ways of talking about it are shaped by the involuntary assumption that there is substance, one cannot fail to acknowledge, first of all, that the most essential task of the linguistic theory shall be to unravel the state of our basic distinctions. I cannot grant anyone the right to elaborate a theory avoiding the job of defining, although this convenient procedure seems to have satisfied language studies up to now.^{19,20}

These relationships which unite linguistic elements happen in two planes, each of which producing different values from these elements. One is the plane of syntagma, the other is the plane of associations. The combination of signs takes place in the plane of syntagma, which is supported by the terms opposed one to the other and which are in a spacial opposition, coexisting in a linear and irreversible extension. The chain of speech is presented in this plane. Thus, two elements cannot be said simultaneously, because each term gains its value in opposition to the one which precedes it and/or succeeds it. Syntagma is concurrently continuous, fluent, chained; however, it will only construct meaning when articulated. Therefore, the terms are united in praesentia and are actualized in this syntagma scope. As for the second plane, that of associations (or paradigmatic—as understood later),

¹⁹ Unpublished notes by Ferdinand de Saussure. *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 12, 1954, p. 55-56, 63. Cited in Culler (1979, p. 42-43). [13]

²⁰ *A lei última da linguagem é, ousamos dizê-lo, a de que nada pode residir num único termo. Isto é uma consequência direta do fato de que os signos linguísticos não estão relacionados com o que designam, e de que, por isso, a não pode designar nada sem a ajuda de b e vice-versa; ou em outras palavras, ambos têm valor apenas pelas diferenças entre si, ou nenhum deles tem valor, em qualquer de seus constituintes, senão através dessa mesma rede de diferenças para sempre negativas. [...] Como a linguagem não consiste de nenhuma substância mas apenas da ação isolada ou combinada de forças fisiológicas, psicológicas e mentais; e como, não obstante todas as nossas distinções, toda a nossa terminologia, todas as nossas maneiras de falar dela são moldadas pela suposição involuntária de que há substância, não se pode evitar reconhecer, antes de tudo mais, que a tarefa mais essencial da teoria linguística será deslindar o estado de nossas distinções básicas. Não posso conceder a ninguém o direito de elaborar uma teoria evitando o trabalho de definição, embora este procedimento conveniente pareça até agora ter satisfeito os estudos da linguagem.* (1979, p. 42-43). [2]

¹⁸ [...] é empregado por Saussure para se referir a duas relações bem distintas: ele vale, de um lado, para a relação interna do signo, entre significado e significante; vale de outro lado, para a relação que une entre eles os termos do sistema de uma língua dada. (1997:234) [9]

each element forms a virtual mnemonic series. Here the terms are united in absentia, i.e., they also gain value because they are what others are not and due to what is absent in the relationship with the other signs, but they are essentially distinguished by opposition from correlated elements, not chosen, therefore absent.

Hence a solidarity of the system to which those signs belong: They maintain relationships of contrast with the signs surrounding them (in the syntagmatic axis) and relationships of opposition with the signs interchangeable with them (in the paradigmatic axis), which highlight their specificity. According to Bouquet [9], a message is a linguistic phenomenon to the extent that it is articulated and structured in itself in horizontal reference and to a set of possible choices which are equivalent/opposite in vertical reference. This is the value of the linguistic sign.

To Saussure, operations necessary to determine a linguistic sign assume that this sign is related to others and repositioned in the scope of an organization, because the linguistic elements have no reality independently from their relationship with the whole. In these relationships, it is identified that the sign has a value, i.e., according to how it is established in a given list of elements, it has one value not the other. In *Writings in General Linguistics*, Saussure [1] states:

Whatever its most particular nature is, language, such as other types of sign, is first of all a system of values, and this is what establishes its place in the phenomenon. Indeed, all kinds of value, even using very different elements, is based only on the social environment and social force.²¹

This reflection makes it clear that collectivity creates value. It makes it clear that language is social, otherwise it does not exist. Nothing exists out of this collectivity. And men are within this collectivity. Men talking to other men. Hence, we find ourselves in a different level — that of enunciation.

Next, let us take a look at a place of otherness.

4. Language: A Place of Otherness, a Place of Enunciation

Let us start this reflection with two metaphors in Saussure and Benveniste, respectively, regarding the unique place that language occupies in semiology: “language, or the semiological system, whatever it is, is not a boat in the boatyard, but a boat in the seas”²² [1]; “language appears to me as a landscape that moves (it is the place of

transformations)”²³ [10].

Considering matches and mismatches between Saussure and Benveniste, we announce both names in a gesture of relationship whose consequences of this act contribute more than they are useless to think on language problems. And from the numerous aspects in which they meet, two may be highlighted as leading to this place of otherness—the place of enunciation: Language as system, which established the Science of Linguistic, and language as heritage of a collectivity.²⁴

Thus, the unpredictability of the boat in the seas, as well as the moving landscape which is language challenge us to think about this language course that finds in the system its primary place for them to signify in a place of otherness: the place of enunciation. Saussure [1] is categorical when stating “it is only the system of signs that became a thing of collectivity that deserves the name of system of signs.”²⁵ And he adds: “it is made to be heard among several or many, not to be heard alone.”²⁶ Saussure’s insistence on the social aspect of the sign is enough to think language as a boat in high seas, or as the place of transformations, an aspect that is emphasized by Benveniste [1], regarding the issue of meaning in his last words spoken in *Collège de France*.

And what is the reason for this place? One of the dearest notions within Saussurian principles, sign value, is that which allows us to problematize not only the transition from sign to discourse, because we know about the impossibility of that task, but to reflect about the social force [1] or the cohesive power [11] that enables us to think about language in an absolutely necessary relationship with society, with collective survival. While we can only know if a boat is a boat in the ocean, the sign is only made possible when accepted in social conditions of human life. The semiological aspect, therefore, is only valid when social collectivity is accepted as one of its internal elements.

One year before proposing *The Semiology of Language*, Benveniste [6] presents, in *Convegno Internazionale Olivetti*, some principles from which we can think the relationship between language and society. The first of them is to take “language and society in synchrony and in a semiological relationship.”²⁷ that of interpretant and interpreted, and language is the interpretant of society, because it contains society. The second one concerns the place of language regarding the analysis of society, i.e., language as a system. To the extent that, under the conditions

²³ [...] a língua aparece para mim como uma paisagem que se move (ela é o lugar de transformações). (2014:194) [10]

²⁴ In this article, Saussure’s notion of collectivity is considered synonym of Benveniste’s society at fundamental level; therefore, an institution constructed from the same need as language.

²⁵ [...] é apenas o sistema de signos tornado coisa da coletividade que merece o nome de sistema de signos.

²⁶ [...] ele é feito para se ouvir entre vários ou muitos e não para se ouvir sozinho.

²⁷ [...] língua e sociedade em sincronia e numa relação semiológica. (1968/2006c:97) [6]

²¹ Seja qual for a sua natureza mais particular, a língua, como os outros tipos de signos, é antes de tudo, um sistema de valores, e é isso que estabelece seu lugar no fenômeno. Com efeito, toda espécie de valor, mesmo usando elementos muito diferentes, só se baseia no meio social e na força social. (2002:250) [1]

²² [...] a língua, ou o sistema semiológico, qualquer que seja, não é um barco no estaleiro, mas um barco lançado ao mar. (2002:248) [1]

of language itself, “men who speak are never witnesses of the linguistic change.”^{28, 29}

According to Benveniste [11], language works as a “machine for producing meaning,”³⁰ a feature from which we can interpret society in relation to its own structure. It is not language that produces meaning. It is meaning that makes language exist. Like language, society as a complex of experiences is also presented as a boat in high seas. It is impossible to predict its trajectory.

By addressing this place of otherness of language, taking Benveniste’s reflections between 1968 and 1969 as basis, we can view two different approaches for language. First, in *Language Structure and Society Structure* [free translation], emphasis is on the necessary relationship between language and society in which both are considered in a semiological relationship—of interpretant and interpreted. That is an embryonic notion of the principle of interpretance of language, which will then be further developed in *The Semiology of Language*. In this sense, Benveniste [6] does not take language only as interpretant of society; the author raises it to “a particular situation in the universe of signs”³¹ because language is “the interpretant of all other linguistic and non-linguistic systems.”³² And what is the reason for this condition?

Stepping aside from Peircian notions of the nature of sign, Benveniste [6] joins Saussure to propose a semiology that is proper of language. It is at this point that Benveniste goes beyond the Geneva master. For Benveniste [6], the core of this issue is in considering the relationships among the systems the object of semiology. In addition, he asserts that, beyond unclear generalities, the fundamental thing is to define the “value of the sign in the sets in which one can study it.”³³

This reality is already announced in *Course in General Linguistics* when Saussure addresses the paradoxical notion of linguistic value, which is composed of: “1st one dissimilar thing, which could be exchanged by another whose value is yet to be determined; 2nd of similar things that can be compared to that whose value is at stake.”³⁴ [7]. Thus, if it is

²⁸ This autonomy of language as a system reports us to Agamben’s reading (2008) while distinguishing archive and testimony in the book *Remnants of Auschwitz*. Under an ethical conception of subject, Agamben (2008) retrieves one of the principles of Saussurian linguistics which states there is nothing that can predict the operation of language, once it is presented as a set of signs already established prior to any act of the word. Therefore, language is found among a possibility of happening within a subject. It is through the subject that language may or may not find existence or place.

²⁹ [...] os homens que falam não são nunca testemunhas da mudança linguística.

³⁰ [...] máquina de produzir sentido. (1968/2006b:99) [11]

³¹ [...] uma situação particular no universo dos signos.

³² [...] o interpretante de todos os outros sistemas linguísticos e não linguísticos.

³³ [...] valor do signo nos conjuntos nos quais se possa estudá-lo.

³⁴ 1° uma coisa *dessemelhante*, suscetível de ser trocada por outra cujo valor resta determinar; 2° por coisas *semelhantes* que se podem comparar com aquela cujo valor está em causa. (2006:134) [7]

only possible to grant language the possibility of interpretant because it constitutes a system, the linguistic value “is only truly determined by the confluence of what there is outside [of language],”³⁵ i.e., in the relationships of discourse [7]. Let us take Saussure’s own example: a value cannot be immediately fixed to the word sun without considering what surrounds it; that is because “there are languages where it is impossible to say ‘sit by the sun.’”³⁶ [7]

It is Saussure himself who announces the impossibility of establishing the value of the sign far from the circumstances of use that define it. What is necessary to be distinguished, therefore, is in the dual significance of language: what is semiotic and what is semantic. The property of language being signifier is not merely the fact that it is “the most common system, the one that has the widest field, the most frequently used and — in practice the most effective.”³⁷ Benveniste [6] points out that it is exactly the opposite: this condition of language being the interpretant of every signifying system “is a consequence, not a cause of its preeminence as a signifying system, and only a semiological principle can explain this preeminence.”³⁸

The semantic plane is different, and that is where language is shown as a landscape that moves. From the place of language as sign to the place of otherness which is enunciation there is no passage but rather two different domains: the semiotic and the semantic. The signifying basis needs to be acknowledged by society, it is only a possibility of being language, or the “required material of enunciation.”³⁹ [6]. The semantic domain must be understood, since at every act of appropriation a new enunciation and consequently a new value is implied. These two dimensions from which language is articulated allow “supporting significant purposes about significance. It is in this metalinguistic faculty that we find the origin of the interpretance relationship by which language encompasses the other systems.”⁴⁰ [6].

According to Benveniste [10], “Saussurian doctrine only covers, under the species of language, the semiotizable part of language, its material inventory.”⁴¹ A statement acquires meaning only in a specific situation, which, “at the same time, configures this situation.”⁴² [10]. After all, man is within

³⁵ [...] só é verdadeiramente determinado pelo concurso do que existe fora [da língua].

³⁶ [...] línguas há em que é impossível dizer ‘sentar-se ao sol’. (2006:135) [7]

³⁷ [...] o sistema mais comum, aquele que tem o campo mais amplo, o mais frequentemente usado e — na prática o mais eficaz.

³⁸ [...] é uma consequência, não uma causa de sua preeminência como sistema significante, e somente um princípio semiológico pode explicar essa preeminência.

³⁹ [...] material necessário da enunciação.

⁴⁰ [...] sustentar propósitos significantes sobre a significância. É nesta faculdade metalinguística que encontramos a origem da relação de interpretância pela qual a língua engloba os outros sistemas.

⁴¹ [...] a doutrina saussuriana cobre apenas, sob as espécies da língua, a parte semiotizável da língua, seu inventário material. (2014:192) [10]

⁴² [...] ao mesmo tempo, configura essa situação. (2014:193) [10]

language. There is no man without language, nor language without man, without society. It is in this society, by language, that signs gain meaning and construct culture: everything that develops man, mainly by language here and now.

5. Conclusions

Let us recall Saussure's question [1] at the First Conference held in Geneva in 1891: Do you seriously think that studying language would need, in order to be justified or apologize for existing, to prove being useful to other sciences?⁴³ Saussure does not admit this issue to be justified. Doing so would be "refusing it [Linguistics] an object of its own."⁴⁴ It is Saussure [1] who also claims "language, on the one hand, was the most formidable tool of collective action, and on the other hand of individual education, the instrument without which the individual or the species would never be able to aspire developing, in any sense, their native faculties."⁴⁵

Being in 1969 and looking at the past—especially at Writings in General Linguistics—makes us realize there has always been the presence of man in language. It makes us realize that language as a system is not merely signifying matter, because it is a system of values, whose existence is justified only when tested in collectivity. Looking at the past from this place of otherness—the place of enunciation—makes us notice a Saussurian figure that was one step away from enunciation, because his thoughts on language have always addressed man. His method inscribes him in the terrain of language, of system, from which stems Linguistics worthy object. But Benveniste meets him with the proposal of a "second generation" semiology, based not on Saussurian notion of sign, but rather on discourse, on principle of subjectivity, on insertion of man in language, in the world, in society, in discourse.

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⁴³ *Vocês pensam seriamente que o estudo da linguagem teria necessidade, para se justificar ou para se desculpar por existir, de provar que é útil às outras ciências?* (2002:127) [1]

⁴⁴ [...] *recusar a ela [à Linguística] um objeto próprio*. (2002:128) [1]

⁴⁵ [...] *linguagem foi, por um lado, a mais formidável ferramenta de ação coletiva e, por outro, de educação individual, o instrumento sem o qual o indivíduo ou a espécie jamais poderia aspirar a desenvolver, em algum sentido, suas faculdades nativas*.