

From/in the word in action, discourse and power: philosophical dialogues /

Da/na palavra e(m) ação, discurso e poder: diálogos filosóficos

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Received: May, 15th, 2020. **Approved:** May, 26th, 2020.

Como citar este artigo:

DARÓZ, Elaine Pereira. From/in the word in action, discourse and power: philosophical dialogues. *Revista Letras Raras*, v. 9, n. 3, p. 214-226, jun. 2020.

ABSTRACT

Philosophical clashes in the ancient era focused on questions about man and his social relations. Among the issues discussed, the relevance of language in this signification process man in the world is a point of agreement between them. In the wake of language studies, language appears as something different, encouraging scholars to understand it from different theoretical perspectives. Considering that the discourses are structured in a relationship between actuality and memory, in this work we seek to walk the paths trodden by philosophers and scholars of the language over time – namely Aristotle, Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel Pêcheux – to better understand the complex process whereby subjects and senses are mutually and concurrently constituted. In our reflection, we take into account the different conditions of production in which these reflections were developed, taking as a guiding link the dialogicity inherent in the relationship between subject and language, pointed out, in its own way, by the philosophers presented here. Throughout our reflection, we understand that the discourse, as a place of materialization of ideology, is an instance of power in and through which the relations of tension inherent in the practices between the subjects are founded.

KEYWORDS: philosophers, language, discourse, antiquity, actuality.

RESUMO

Os embates filosóficos na era antiga se debruçavam sobre as questões acerca do homem e(m) suas relações sociais. Dentre as questões discutidas, a relevância da língua(gem) nesse processo de significação do homem no mundo é um ponto de concordância entre eles. Na esteira dos estudos da língua(gem), a língua surge como algo diferente, incitando os estudiosos

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 <http://dx.doi.org/10.35572/rlr.v9i3.1701>

a compreendê-la a partir de em vertentes teóricas distintas. Considerando que os discursos são estruturados numa relação entre atualidade e memória, buscamos neste trabalho percorrer os caminhos trilhados por filósofos e estudiosos da língua(gem) ao longo dos tempos – quais sejam Aristóteles, Mikhail Bakhtin e Michel Pêcheux – para melhor compreendermos o processo complexo pelo qual sujeitos e sentidos se constituem mútua e concomitantemente. Em nossa reflexão, levamos em consideração as diferentes condições de produção em que essas reflexões foram desenvolvidas, tomando como elo norteador a dialogicidade inerente à relação entre sujeito e língua, apontada, a seu modo, pelos filósofos aqui apresentados. Ao longo de nossa reflexão, compreendemos que o discurso, enquanto lugar de materialização da ideologia é uma instância de poder na e pela qual se fundam as relações de tensão inerente às práticas entre os sujeitos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: filósofos, língua(gem), discurso, antiguidade, atualidade.

1 Initial Words

[...] pretending, then the stories become more true than the true cases they tell [...].¹

José Saramago

From the beginning, language has been conceived as a way of socialization, through which we can transmit information, facts, ideas, wishes, remember events; in short, it has been a vector of communication between men that enables the establishment and maintenance of social values through the transmission of inheritance and, with it, values and practices.

Intrinsically linked to the broadening of social relations, the development of language in primitive man is, according to Diakov & Kovalev (n.d.), *pari passu* to the acquisition of production and acquisition of consumer goods, as man's first experience in collective life. According to the authors, it is thus because a practical conscience is constitutive of language and of the subject. The practical conscience is; the way through which it became possible the development and improvement of techniques and the manufacture of instruments that allowed them the well-being and, above all, their social establishment. .

In *The mind of the primitive man*,² Boas (2011) states that no people are immune to the influence of other social groups, since the assimilation and/or incorporation of inventions and ideals of their neighbor(s) is inherent to the civilizing process, in order to mitigate and/or favor the living conditions of a given community. Thus, it is the knowledge and improvement of techniques (to be) incorporated by the community that provide a degree of (in)dependence and domination of a people in relation to the others.

This relationship between language and knowledge, and more specifically to know-how-to-do, brought implications to man, both in his physical structure, gradually moving from primitive man to *homo*

1 Our free translation. In the original language, Brazilian Portuguese: [...] fingindo, passam então as histórias a ser mais verdadeiras que os casos verdadeiros que elas contam [...] (SARAMAGO, 1982).

2 In the language version, Brazilian Portuguese: "A mente do homem primitivo" (BOAS, 2011)

sapiens, as well as in the structure of the social organism through the collective economy and the institution new practices (DIAKOV; KOVALEV, n.d.). In these terms, language is constitutive of the subject's relationship with the world, being a relevant pillar of support and maintenance of power within the social structure.

Unlike previous civilizations – which had vast territories and whose State strength to impose their tasks on citizens was sufficient for the establishment and support of a political-administrative organization – Greece occupied a geographically smaller territory and, therefore, with a less numerous population; however, politically more heterogeneous (AYMARD; AUBOYER, 1962). In front of frequent foreign threats that, in this context, were becoming more dangerous, it was left to the State to establish a relationship supposedly closer to its citizens, discreetly inciting them to consent in the face of what they could not / should extract by coercion.

In the midst of plural societies, divided into multiple city-states in a recurring territorial and political dispute, philosophers flourish to address issues pertinent to man and/in society. On the role of Philosophy in the understanding of man and/in society, Audrey Azoulay, general director of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (named Unesco), states that "philosophy is an inspiring discipline and a daily practice that can transform societies ", which "awakens minds and forces the confrontation between opinions, helping to build a more tolerant and respectful society³ ".

In view of the hate speeches that emerge and consolidate in our society and go along with practices of intolerance and disrespect, sometimes naturalized in the social bosom, we seek, through dialogues between the philosophers Aristotle, Bakhtin and Pêcheux, a better understanding of the notion of discourse as an instance of power. Thinking about the complexity of such reflections, we will present brief considerations on the studies of these philosophers. For that, we take as a guiding link the points of approximation of these studies, as well as the different socio-historical and ideological conditions in which these studies were developed⁴.

2 From the word in motion, Aristotelian rhetoric: a means of persuasion, convincing and power

3 Speech delivered on November 21, 2019, in a statement about World Philosophy Day. Available at <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/11/1695351>> Retrieved on Jan. 5. 2020.

4 This article is the result of reflections and research related to the postdoctoral internship, supervised by PhD Lucília Maria Abrahão e Sousa, at the University of São Paulo / FFCLRP, with the support of FAPESP's funding body (Protocol nr 2018/13017 -2) . During the postdoctoral internship, the tracking of the level of perception and perception, for a better assessment of the senses about discourses about woman, relatively stable that resonate nowadays, which produce effects on the practices of contemporary practices.

From our reflection and research, we observed that a dialogicity that affects the subject's relationship with the other, his interlocutor, and the implications that arise from it are inherent to language. Regarding this relationship, in his book *Politics*, Aristotle (1988, p. 5) states that

[...] The man is a civic animal, more social than bees and other animals that live together. Nature, which does nothing in vain, has only given him the gift of the word, which we must not confuse with the sounds of the voice. These are just the expression of pleasant or unpleasant sensations, which other animals are, like us, capable of. (our free translation)

Thus, Aristotle was determined to investigate language, the essence of this human potential, in order to study the paths through which men travel in their relationship with the world. Conceiving language as a natural faculty of man, the author focuses on rhetoric, taking as a primary element the relevance of otherness between the self and the other for the establishment of man in the social sphere.

In *Rhetoric* (ARISTÓTELES, 1990), the Greek philosopher states that rhetoric is an art that is not reduced to language experts only, but its knowledge enables citizens to produce speeches that allow them to demonstrate, argue, persuade, convince the auditor of their convictions, making it possible for the listener to make a judgment on the situation presented to him. Among other aspects, his studies aim to provide subsidies to better discern the means of persuasion inherent to the discourse on any issue. In this perspective, his studies present the paths that make up the speeches.

For the author, the speaker seeks, in his argument, ways to convince the listener of his convictions about the theme of his speech. At this stage, it is considered that all sayings pre-exist, leaving the speaker to extract what best suits him in the arrangement of his arguments, in accordance with his convictions. The provision refers to the formal arrangement of parts of the speech, a mechanism by which the speaker organizes the way of saying (and about) the arguments that are based on his speech. Therefore, he finds in the next stage – namely elocution – the materialization of his speech through textualization, that is, the ordering of words and phrases that will compose the argumentation in view of his discursive position on the subject in question. The action, in turn, is the stage in which the speaker effectively acts on the theme and on the listener through discourse, implying gestures, mimics, and voice intonation; those being fundamental elements intrinsic to the discourse.

As stated by Aristotle (1990), the discourse is based on three genres according to the audience on its purposes: political or deliberative, judicial, and demonstrative. The deliberative power is primarily interested in understanding the nature of things, good or bad according to what is convenient or harmful, to advise or advise against, persuade or dissuade the listener. In the judiciary, having the court as its

locus, the hearing resides with the primary purpose of establishing justice through laws that govern citizens in cities. The speaker / auditor is responsible for clarifying, qualifying and judging the facts. In the demonstrative speech, the objective is, in general, to praise or censor the audience.

Thus, by means of a rational method about the process by which the man signifies in society, Aristotelian studies point to a constitutive dialogicity of social relations marked in the discourse by a triple determination, whoever the speaker is, the subject of which it is spoken and the listener. The character of its audience – young, old, noble, plebeian – as well as the psychosocial conditions that permeate the discourse are also associated with this determination. In this perspective, Aristotle points, then, to a constitutive heterogeneity of the discourses, which traverse the subjects in taking a position in the discourse.

According to the philosopher (ARISTÓTELES, 1988, p. 5)

We all have the habit of addressing our investigations, not according to the same thing, but according to the objections of those who contradict us. And even when we are the ones who make the objections, we do not take our investigation beyond the right point where we can no longer make them.(our free translation)

In consideration of this constitutive dialogicity of the discourses, for Aristotle one of the distinctive features of the relationship between subject and language is communication. The dialogue would be its commonplace, then; a possible route for the exchange of experiences and sensations intrinsic to the relationship of man with the world, a path to be traced aimed to the search for verisimilitude, to the detriment of an absolute truth, as his predecessors believed.

From the reflection hitherto exposed, we can see that communication is a much broader process than the mere transmission of information. Ruled by specific principles and purposes, it takes place in the social, having as its main characteristic the dialogicity, that is the interaction between the subjects. And it is from this perspective that Mikhail Bakhtin (1979; 1988; 2002), the other philosopher of language who, in Russia, since 1929⁵, focuses on the understanding of discourse as an inherently dialogical and heterogeneous activity.

3 In the living language, dialogism in practice

5 Although Mikhail Bakhtin has studied about language since 1924, his works were only known in the West from the 1980s, when he gained notoriety, being a reference for reflections on language until the present day.

According to Bakhtin, “the true substance of language is not constituted by an abstract system of linguistic forms, but by the phenomenon of verbal interaction carried out through enunciation and enunciations”⁶ (BAKHTIN; VOLOSHINOV, 1979, p. 173). It is through verbal interaction established by the language with the speaking subject and with the previous texts that the word becomes real, and takes on different meanings according to the context. Under this bias, language is conceived, in Bakhtinian studies, in relation to human action, in other words, as a social-interactive phenomenon.

In *Marxism and the philosophy of language*⁷, Bakhtin (1988) affirms that the utterance is a phenomenon of verbal interaction, full of echoes of other statements, previous texts already said, forming a link in the chain of verbal communication. According to his dialogical view, it is in verbal interaction that the word becomes real and takes on different meanings according to the context. In the discursive process, each utterance refutes, confirms, complements and depends on other statements, being guided by the interlocutor. The dialogicity of the discourse has, therefore, a double orientation, directed both to the discourses of others, constitutive to it as well as to the other of the interlocution.

For the author (BAKHTIN, 1988), every utterance is heterogeneous, since there are, at least, two social voices, two social positions, in any statement. In the conception that a word is always addressed to someone, for the author the subject becomes aware of himself during his relationship with language, and with which we called here the exteriority presented in the character of the real or imaginary interlocutor as well the previous speeches, as we have already said before. Under this bias, the other plays a fundamental role in the subject's relationship with the language, since, envisaging his interlocutor, the enunciator can anticipate his speech. Dialogue, in turn, is understood as a space of tension for voices that circulate socially and that are carried with value judgments.

In this conception, dialogism occurs in the articulation of multiple social voices - in the form of quotation marks, quotation, direct or indirect speech - that are marked by every speaker. And it is through this understanding of how language works that the author states that “the discourse lives outside itself, in its living orientation on its object: if we deviate completely from that orientation, then our naked corpse will remain in our arms, about which we will know nothing, nor of its social position, nor your destiny”⁸ (BAKHTIN, 2002, p.99).

If the experiences lived are multiple, plurivocality is the condition for the functioning of the sign that, constitutively ideological, moves in a dense and tense layer of discourses, enabling the relations of

6 Our free translation.

7 In the Brazilian Portuguese version: *Marxismo e filosofia da linguagem* (BAKHTIN, 1988)

8 Our free translation.

approximation and confrontations of different social forces. According to the author (BAKHTIN, 2002), this happens because the language is alive and common to different social classes, making it possible for the sign to become an arena where class struggle develops.

If by the word – in the discourse, therefore – that the individual means in the relationship with the other, the social is the locus that makes this realization possible. Thus, refuting both the abstract objectivism and the idealistic subjectivism in force in language studies at the time, Bakhtin focuses on the understanding of the conditions of enunciation, intimately linked to social aspects, taking as a starting point the inherent heterogeneity of all discourse, having verbal interaction as constitutive of the subject's meaning process in the world.

The intrinsic relationship between subject, language and society, intrinsic to the process of signification of the subject in his relationship with the other and with the world, was also the object of reflection by the French philosopher of language, Michel Pêcheux. Pêcheux (1988 [1975]) takes discourse as his object of study, conceived as constitutively contradictory, since it is essentially heterogeneous.

From this perspective, as stated by Orlandi (2001), language is understood at action in society, considering man in history, the processes and conditions of language production. In this context, the establishment of the Discourse Analysis subject in the 1960s, in France, became an essential point in the understanding of the power roles that materialize in language.

4 Discourse analysis: from the language in action, discourse and power

The Discourse analysis of the line of Pêcheux takes place in the intersection of Linguistics – in a reinterpretation on Saussurean studies, from which language is thought as a constitutive element of the subject, and no longer outside the speaker as the current Historical conception. Its fundamental point is the Althusserian historical materialism, more precisely the notion of ideology as a practice that materializes in the language; and, still, some notions of Psychoanalysis, especially concerning the issue of the subject, affected by the unconscious, to the detriment of a notion of subject fully centered on reason (ORLANDI, 2001). In this context, Pêcheux aims to foster dialogues, establishing points of approximation or confrontation, in order to rethink the discursive and social practices aiming at their transformation.

In a shift from the concept of language as being homogeneous and stable as thought by the structuralist linguistics then in force, Pêcheux (1969; 1975; 1983) points to its historical reality, insofar as it brings within itself already established discourses in the society that become the basis to the following discourses. The constitutive historicity of the language allows us to think of its other inherent characteristic:

the ideological charge that materializes itself in it. For the author, it is so because the relatively stable sayings in the social sphere allow the resonance of certain senses naturalized by the current order in silencing other possible senses (PÊCHEUX, 1988 [1975]). Under this perspective, language is thought from its heterogeneity as a place for the materialization of class struggles.

Thus, language should not be understood as a place of agreement, but, above all, a place of conflict between subject and meaning. This is because, constitutively heterogeneous – since exteriority is its constitutive element – language is conceived as a privileged place for the manifestation of ideology, the place where it materializes itself.

According to Orlandi (1999, p. 15), "in Discourse analysis, we aim to understand the language making sense, as symbolic work, part of the general social work, constitutive of man and his history"⁹. In contrast to the understanding of an abstract system of signs, language is understood in operation, that is, considering man in history, in view of the processes and conditions of language production.

Considering language as a condition for the possibility of discourse, Pêcheux operates a shift between the Saussurean language/ speech dichotomy (SAUSSURE, 1967)¹⁰, and conceives discourse as an "effect of senses". For the author, this is because the senses are not fixed *a priori*, but are established in the continuous and uninterrupted movement in which subject and senses are constituted according on the subject's position in the discourse (PÊCHEUX, 1988 [1975]).

The position of the subject in the discourse is the result of the process of ideological interpellation, which is the inseparable condition for being a subject. Intrinsic to this process is the identification of the subject to certain meanings concerning his ideological affiliations, as well as the socio-historical-ideological conditions to which he is inserted in the production of discourse (ALTHUSSER, 1970).

Taking into account the Althusserian studies, we can see that ideology plays a major role in directing the senses, in order to induce members of society to accept the tasks assigned to them without resistance. According to Althusser, it is the role of ideology to hide its functioning in language in the form of an absolute truth, providing the subjects with an evidence effect. Such evidence effect is possible due to the naturalization of certain senses/discourses to be stabilized concerning the interests of the current ideology (ALTHUSSER, 1967).

9 Our free translation. In the original language, Brazilian Portuguese: "na análise de discurso, procura-se compreender a língua fazendo sentido, enquanto trabalho simbólico, parte do trabalho social geral, constitutivo do homem e da sua história (ORLANDI, 1999, p. 15)

¹⁰ As we had already said before, in a reinterpretation of Saussurean studies, for Pêcheux (1988 [1975]), language is not an abstract system, nor is speech outside the individual. For the author, which is constitutively heterogeneous, it implies both the socio-historical factors inherent to it, and the subject's position, intrinsically linked to the ideological affiliations to which he is identified in the production of discourse.

Corroborating with Althusser, Pêcheux considers that Ideology and the unconscious are functioning-structures, whose common character is “to conceal its own existence within its functioning, producing a fabric of evidence in which the subject is constituted” (PÊCHEUX 1988 [1975], p. 9). For this, memory plays a major role in regulating the senses.

According to the author, memory is a structuring element of the discourse. It is through memory that certain senses are taken up while others are silenced, or even erased (Pêcheux 1999 [1983]). For the author, reproduction is marked by paraphrastic processes within the discourse, while the displacement, sliding of senses takes place through polysemic processes, made possible by the structuring/destructuring mechanism inherent to the discursive functioning, making the speeches/senses always liable to become others.

Considering the intrinsic relationship between subject, language and history, Courtine brings a reflection on the place of memory in the regularization of the senses. Furthering Pêcheux's studies, Courtine (1999) affirms that it is through what has already been said – present at the intradiscursive level of the constitution of the senses – that certain senses are taken up, either in the form of pre-built, that is, direct quotes, paraphrases among others; or through a crossing of senses, that is relatively stable meanings that resonate in current sayings, thus operating a reproduction / updating of these senses. In the intradiscursive axis, on the other hand, there is the level of the formulation of the words, whose words / meanings are updated, making room for gaps, failures, lapses, displacements, since they are inscribed in different conditions of discourse production consonant with its current time.

Corroborating with this thought, Orlandi (2003, p. 32) states that,

The discourse is not private property. The words are not ours. They mean by history and language. What is said elsewhere also means in "our" words. The subject says, thinks he knows what he says, but has no access or control over the way in which the senses are constituted in him.(our free translation)

From this perspective, the discursive subject is understood both in his submission to the ideology that has always been there (ALTHUSSER, 1970), and affected by historically inscribed meanings that resonate today in their own way .

Such considerations allow us to think that the discourse is not an entity closed in itself, with ready senses *a priori*. Rather, it is understood in the discursive approach as a complex unit of meaning, affected by its socio-historical and ideological conditions of achievement. According to Pêcheux (2004 [1981], p. 245),

[...] if it is through the intertwining between language and history that the senses are updated, the reductionist view of language as a logical-formal system, an instrument for communication, promotes an erasure of dissimilarities and dissimilarities in order to mask the political practice, becoming a powerful weapon for the domination and sustaining of power(our free translation)

Taking the discourse as an object of study, the author takes a new look at the relationship established between subject and language to think about the emergence of the senses, becoming a powerful weapon for the transformation of social practices.

Regarding this new theoretical object that emerges in language studies, Malidier (2003, p. 15-16) states,

The discourse seems to me, in Michel Pêcheux, to be a real knot. It is never a first or empirical object. It is the theoretical place in which, literally, all its great questions about language, history, the subject are interlaced. The originality of the theoretical adventure of the discourse is linked to the fact that it develops in the double plane of theoretical thought and the device of discourse analysis, which is its instrument.(our free translation)

The transition from the conception of language that serves communication between subjects, to the notion of discourse, as a contradictory space where class struggles unfold, allows us to better understand the reproduction / naturalization of certain sayings in the social context, in view of the movement in and by which subjects and senses are constituted mutually.

5 Discourse in the intertwining of subjects and the senses: some final remarks

The need for communication is presented in the history of mankind since its evolution in transmitting the heritage of each people has led (and leads us) to the incessant search to understand the phenomenon of language.

From the considerations presented here, we observe that communication has always been the object of observation and reflection over time. And so, in the wake of language studies, the philosophers taken here allow us to observe the common point: the pre-occupation in understanding the relationship that is established between the subject and the language, as well as the effects that come from that relationship.

For Aristotle, the possibility of refuting and/or demonstrating arguments, convincing, persuading the other, the auditor, in order to achieve his own purposes in communication is inherent to language. In this relationship, it is possible to reach the credible, and not the truth itself, since it is inaccessible to man.

Thus, we observe that the Greek philosopher points to the equivocality of language which, affected by external factors, makes it possible for all arguments to be subject to replies, confrontations and questions.

When conceiving language as a living and heterogeneous entity, Bakhtin denounces the ideological burden inherent to the linguistic sign, opening possibilities to think about the constitutive tension of the relationship between subject and language, and therefore, of the discourse. In this relationship, dialogicity is a primary factor in the process of constitution of the senses, through which man relates to the other and to the world giving rise to a plurality of signification.

Following the paths of language studies, in the discursive approach the notion of discourse and subject, constitutively heterogeneous, allows us to rethink the relatively stable meanings in the social bosom, since ideologically overdetermined, considering the power relations that are inscribed in it, and materialize in social practices. Under this bias, the discourse is a place of instability in which subjects and meanings are constituted, being always liable to become others, since they are in continuous movement in this process of signification.

The complexity of the relationships that are established between the subjects goes beyond the questioning of specialists in language studies, and it is also the object of reflection in works of fiction. In his book *Memorial do Convento*, having Blimunda as a central character, Saramago states that “[...] if we could count the cars that move along these paths of coming and going, near or far, we would reach two thousand and five hundred[...]but men, if we want to see them, have to be closer”¹¹ (SARAMAGO, 1982, p. 239-240).

Along this path, we were interested in taking a close look at the meaning process inherent in the subject's relationship with language. In view of the trajectory of the senses over time, the notion of discourse thought from the relationships that are established in the social sphere guided our reflection, having as a guiding link the dialogic character inherent to it.

Taking into account the web of discursivity that intertwine subjects and senses, it is worth mentioning that, when addressing philosophical thoughts, we do not propose a generalization of such complex questions about the functioning of language and the subject's way of inscribing in the discourse, nor an absolute truth about the constitutive process of the subjects relationships in the social sphere.

Taking the current word – the discourse, therefore, as a place of materialization of ideology – the discourse can be understood as an instance of power in which the relations of tension inherent to social

11 Our free translation. In the original language, Brazilian Portuguese: “[...] se pudéssemos contar os carros que se movem ao longo desses caminhos de ir e vir, perto ou longe, chegaríamos a dois mil e quinhentos [...] mas os homens, se quisermos vê-los, precisam ser mais perto” (SARAMAGO, 1982, P. 239-240)

practices are founded. The dialogue between different currents of thought – already proposed by Pêcheux since the genesis of the discipline – provided us with greater subsidies for the reflections presented here. We believe that a better understanding of the ideological functioning in the speeches allows us, especially nowadays, to denaturalize the discourses considered evident, in order to enable a transformation of social practices in contemporary times.

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