

Language in social reproduction: Sociolinguistics and sociosemiotics

Patrizia Calefato

Department of Linguistic Practices and Text Analysis, University of Bari
Via Garruba 6, 70122 Bari, Italy
e-mail: patriziaccia@gmail.com

Abstract. This paper focuses on the semiotic foundations of sociolinguistics. Starting from the definition of “sociolinguistics” given by the philosopher Adam Schaff, the paper examines in particular the notion of “critical sociolinguistics” as theorized by the Italian semiotician Ferruccio Rossi-Landi. The basis of the social dimension of language are to be found in what Rossi-Landi calls “social reproduction” which regards both verbal and non-verbal signs. Saussure’s notion of *langue* can be considered in this way, with reference not only to his *Course of General Linguistics*, but also to his *Harvard Manuscripts*.

The paper goes on trying also to understand Roland Barthes’s provocative definition of semiology as a part of linguistics (and not vice-versa) as well as developing the notion of communication-production in this perspective. Some articles of Roman Jakobson of the sixties allow us to reflect in a manner which we now call “socio-semiotic” on the processes of transformation of the “organic” signs into signs of a new type, which articulate the relationship between organic and instrumental. In this sense, socio-linguistics is intended as being socio-semiotics, without prejudice to the fact that the reference area must be *human*, since semiotics also has the prerogative of referring to the world of non-human vital signs.

Socio-linguistics as socio-semiotics assumes the role of a “frontier” science, in the dual sense that it is not only on the border between science of language and the anthropological and social sciences, but also that it can be constructed in a movement of continual “crossing frontiers” and of “contamination” between *languages* and disciplinary environments.

1. Critical sociolinguistics

In one chapter of his *Saggi Filosofici (Philosophical Essays)*, the Italian version of which is edited by Augusto Ponzio (Schaff 1978: 121–139; now in Schaff 2003), Adam Schaff proposes a method for founding the discipline called “sociolinguistics”. At the time in which the essay was written this discipline was still considered a “young” field of research, at least in its independent determination in comparison with the other sciences of the language. Schaff starts off from the very term “sociolinguistics”, which was a neologism at that time, to consider the two components, the “social” and the “linguistic”, connected by — what he calls — a “reciprocal relation” (Schaff 1978: 123). Talking about reciprocity eliminates any alleged separation often implicit in expressions like “language and society” that assume the separate existence of a language without society or of a society without language, the existence of a language before society, or *vice versa*. Schaff says that this is certainly not a new problem, if we consider that these aspects were studied long before the denomination “sociolinguistics” opened the way for setting up an independent field of research.

Schaff divides this reciprocity into two perspectives corresponding to the goal and the competence of sociolinguistics: “A) Influence of language on society; B) Influence of society on language” (Schaff 1978: 123).

At this point, it is necessary to make a clarification that is not of only terminological value. It is well-known that in many languages including German (and Schaff writes his essay in German), there is only one word to define both Italian words *lingua* and *linguaggio*, whereas in other languages, the difference between the two words (*‘lingua’* and *‘linguaggio’*) permits a better expression and comprehension of the relative conceptual differences¹. *‘Linguaggio’* is the specifically human modelling device, preceding the need for communication and objectified in products consisting of verbal and non-verbal

¹ The Italian terms *‘linguaggio’* and *‘lingua’* have been translated using the word ‘language’ but where it is necessary to distinguish one from the other, the Italian term has been left in Italian between inverted commas (Translators’ note).

signs; whereas '*lingua*' is the result of this modelling in the field of verbal signs (see Ponzio 2002: 54–55). We may add to these definitions that, as Rossi-Landi claims, '*linguaggio*' consists of "*lingua* in addition to common speech", that is to say natural language within the framework of all those common interlinguistic techniques by virtue of which it is possible to understand and translate (Rossi-Landi 1980 [1968]). Therefore, when Schaff employs the term '*die Sprache*', it is necessary to consider the different ideas, which come between the two corresponding terms in Italian.

As for point A), the influence of language on the society, Schaff writes:

Language is born from society especially as a resonance to man's need to communicate; in this sense it is a social product, a product of the social cohabitation of men. But, once it is born, language starts to exert an effect on social life and this occurs in different ways (Schaff 1978: 124)².

On the one hand there is the problem of how thought and human knowledge are linguistically forged — here we can use the term "language" — that is, we could also say "are forged in the language". Schaff calls it "linguistic noetics". On the other hand there is, however, a field of research which concerns the influence of language on human activity, which Schaff calls "pragmalinguistics".

Not all scholars accepted that "the social" assumes central importance in the first of the two issues. In fact, for many scholars the way how thought and human knowledge get linguistically forged, is a question concerning individual factors. As an example we can quote venerable Chomsky, who denies value to a science called "sociolinguistics" since in his generative grammar the innate structures in human beings make language possible both as competence and performance. Another example would be the articulated trends which deal with the "mind-body" problem from the neurobiological perspectives. According to Schaff, however, the linguistic noetics concerns the

² Schaff's quotes come from the Italian translation of his book. The English version is from the translator of the present article.

social aspect, since we are “concrete subjects in the knowledge process” (Schaff 1978: 124) and not isolated individuals, “we always think with the help of and within the framework of a specific language” which represents “the necessary means of knowledge of *social order*” (Schaff 1978: 124). Here the term “*lingua*” is rightly used but the deliberate ambiguity with the more general term “*linguaggio*” is by no means out of place, since Schaff’s positions are critical both towards the innate Chomskyan universalism and the extreme relativistic theory, which insists that human thought is completely submerged in natural language so that it is influenced by the natural language according to a differential influx. According to Schaff, sociolinguistics receives “one of the constitutional elements of its true field of scientific competence” from the specific problems of the linguistic noetics, as well as its “concrete tasks of research” (Schaff 1978: 130).

Twenty-five years after the publication of the Polish philosopher’s essay, we can still say that these tasks are related to the fact that we “think linguistically”, in the dual and complex sense that we think in language, but this language is the (social) product of the activity that we call “*linguaggio*” which models the human world as a social world in its innate principles. We may also say: we think *inter-linguistically*, the mother tongue itself is multilingual, in the sense that our entry to “*linguaggio*” through “*lingua*”, our abandoning the infant condition, already assumes sociality and plurality of signs of which “*linguaggio*” is made up (not only verbal ones).

As we have said, “pragmalinguistics” concerns the influence of language on human activity” (Schaff 1978: 130). According to Schaff, a very important component of this field of research and the work of sociolinguistics is represented by the analysis of the influx of language on stereotypes, a topic which Schaff later developed in his book entitled *Stereotypes and human behaviour* (Schaff 1987). It is very significant that this element of analysis is contemplated within the framework of what we may rightly define “critical sociolinguistics”, that is the sociolinguistics whose tasks include analysing and making generally understood the role of linguistic manipulation, not only for speculative reasons but for overall social behaviour. Stereotypes always

imply an emotional component, induce social behaviour, and produce value systems and ideologies (Schaff 1978: 134). In this regards, sociolinguistics may formulate questions like: “How do value systems existing in society change? How do they react in the sphere of social activity? How are they connected to the behaviour of socially active men?” (Schaff 1978: 135). These questions lay the precise basis for a science of language as human science in a “critical” sense.

As for the influence of society on language, according to Schaff, it may be well summarised by the definition of Hymes, one of the “fathers” of sociolinguistics, who claims that sociolinguistics must be considered as “the means of speech in human communities, and their meaning to those who use them” (Hymes 1974).

This perspective considers sociolinguistics not as a static “photograph” of the states of the language in relation to the social collocation of the speakers, but as a discipline respectful of language as a socio-cultural process. Schaff intuitively knows, for instance, that at the period in which he wrote this text, an absolutely essential task of sociolinguistic research was to consider “the linguistic variations in developing Countries” (Schaff 1978: 136). Naturally, the notion of development denotes a “linear” and probably a too optimistic idea that in the light of facts proved to be extremely illusory, especially in many of those countries that were then defined “developing countries”. In spite of this, the attention paid by Schaff to considering how the structural changes have a direct influence on linguistic changes, not only concerns the complex phase of post-colonial industrialisation, but can also be well suited to the current globalisation phase. Indeed, it is a question of considering the processes of sociolinguistic transformations concerning not only aspects such as enriching one’s lexicon and syntactic variations, but also and fundamentally, “the pragmatics of language, that is to say its relation with social activity” (Schaff 1978: 136). This is a relation in which questions regarding the close mixture between communication and social reproduction and the connection between languages and new technologies today act in an essential way.

The sociolinguistics that considers all these aspects mentioned in Schaff’s essay, has a philosophical-critical basis. According to this pro-

ject, sociolinguistics examines dynamically and problematically what is linguistic as social and what is social as linguistic. Now it is important to add a second level: the semiotic, more precisely the socio-semiotic one. By this, we mean a research field in the centre of what there is a sign, and more extensively, the verbal and non-verbal sign systems, which constitute “the social”, articulated into concrete processes of meaning generation.

2. Social reproduction and the theoretical basis of sociosemiotics

We have already mentioned the fact that expressions such as “language and society” are to be avoided, because they seem to imply the separate existence of the two terms, although it is sometimes clear that expressions of this kind are used in an almost “conventional” sense, fully aware that there is no language outside society and vice versa. As Rossi-Landi says, language co-extends with society, which is of course made up of many other institutions, but sees language “interwoven in the mesh of everything” (Rossi-Landi 1985: 237). In this perspective, however, Rossi-Landi extends both the concept of “language” and that of “society”, opening up the former in the direction of the “sign systems” and transcribing the second in that of “social reproduction” (Rossi-Landi 1985: 237–238). The co-extensive presence of language in society may thus express a presence of the sign systems in the complexity of social reproduction. Rossi-Landi writes: “[...] all operations of social practice, in their same essence, are sign operations” (Rossi-Landi 1972: 306).

And then:

We need to talk about sign systems, not only of language. The question of the position of language in social reproduction is that of the position of language among the other sign systems and it must be continuously translated into this (Rossi-Landi 1985: 239)³.

³ The English version of Rossi-Landi’s quotes is of the translator’s.

It is well known that social reproduction is always at the basis of Rossi-Landi's theoretic formulation (Rossi-Landi 1985: 27–84), “it is all the processes by means of which a community or a society survives, getting bigger or at least continuing to exist” (Rossi-Landi 1985: 238). The three phases in which it is articulated are: production, exchange and consumption. Sign systems act as movers of social reproduction and at the same time they are produced, exchanged and consumed in them. The concept of “sign system” contains the element of the completed transformation of a “body” in a “sign”, that is of something residual to semiosis, (Rossi-Landi 1985: 137–166).

The sign, and more precisely sign systems, are thus the basic concepts on which sociolinguistics intended as sociosemiotics is founded. At the basis of Rossi-Landi's sociosemiotic reflection there is the topic of the production of sense in the social aspect: this reflection is characterised, as has already been mentioned referring to Schaff, as *critical*. In order to define “critical”, we must refer to its dual philosophical valence. On the one hand Kantian, that is to say “critical” as an examination of the conditions which render sense possible. And on the other hand Marxian, that is to say “critical” as carefully revealing the ideological character of each manifestation of sense in society. The critical semiotic approach starts from the awareness that communicative planning and social organisation seem to have standardised human needs. By “standardisation” we mean flattening and distorting the human aspect for the unknowing repetition of communicative programs and alienated behaviour. A large part of Rossi-Landi's research concerns the same ambivalence of what he called “common speech”, that is, the common condition of the possibility of natural languages, since the common sense (with stereotypes as its peak), is an integral part of and is reproduced by the natural language, and also because all the ideological connotations which survive in the language as the result of an oppressive and alienating social planning.

Apart from the tradition which refers to Rossi-Landi's reflections, socio-semiotics principally expresses itself along two other traditions: discursive socio-semiotics and social semiotics (Bernard 1995; Calefato 1997: 18–22). The fundamental lines of the former have been

developed by Algirdas Julien Greimas (1991). According to Greimas, the notion of “discourse”, intended both as a linguistic entity and socio-cultural constraint (Marrone 2001: XXV), interprets the fact that a society only exists according to the sense given to it by the individuals and groups that make it up. As Greimas sees it, sense is underpinned by two fundamental organising principles: narrativity and figurality. The “semiotic object” is generated on the basis of “narrative universals”, that is categories and stable operating modes, which basically use the characters of Propp’s isolated narration in the magic fairy tales, on the one hand, and the taxonomic relations derived from Aristotle — contrariety, sub-contrariety, contradictoriness, complementarity, expressed in the “semiotic square” on the other.

On the contrary, the concept of “language as social semiotics” elaborated by Halliday (1983) represents the intersection point between sociolinguistics of the Anglo-Saxon area (especially Basil Bernstein) and sociosemiotics in general. Language is mainly assumed to be verbal language and therefore considered in its fundamental role in the socialising process, of transmitting culture and social system *tout court*. According to Halliday, language, organized according to a grammatical structure, contains an innate semantic potential. A relation of dependence is thus set up between the grammatical system and the semantic system, in the sense that the former structures the latter. It is the language that produces social meanings, contexts, situations. Fundamental notions resulting from this definition are ‘linguistic variety’, ‘register’ and ‘dialect’, considered not from the empirical point of view, that is to say as simple “recordings” of language events, but as situation contexts which are organized and signified by the language as a whole.

Halliday’s legacy in sociosemiotics is currently being developed, especially in the field of communication theory, by Gunther Kress who along with Robert Hodge has authored the volume *Social Semiotics* (Hodge, Kress 1988), in which social semiotics is integrated with critical awareness influenced especially by Marxism and by Foucault. Kress and Hodge propose the principle of “logonomic systems”

intended as “A set of rules prescribing the conditions for production and reception of meanings” (Hodge, Kress 1988: 4). Those in a society who are called upon to produce and those who receive the social meanings prescribe logonomic systems, so that it is possible to distinguish between “production regimes” and “reception regimes” (Hodge, Kress 1988: 4). It is an interesting and original development of Foucault’s conception of the order of discourse, suited to the mass-media communicative systems of our age.

At this point we can propose a comparison between the conceptual fields which derive from the notions of sign system, discourse, semantic potential and logonomic systems. All these fields actually concern an extension of the “linguistic” dimension from language to signification and significance. We use these two last concepts in the sense introduced by Charles Morris (1964), that is to say associating values to signs, the axiological directionality of social meanings. How do the sign systems structure these values? How do social discourses direct behaviour, prejudice, and implicit meanings of language? Which semantic potential acts as a “trigger” within a social reproduction which is today basically communication regulated by alienating logonomic systems?

Today it is possible to propose sociosemiotics which does not take the complexity of the approaches laid out here into consideration in a scholastic and schematic way, but in an open and free manner. All these approaches have valid intuitions for theory and praxis, especially in the context of the increasingly explicit development of the sign dimension of the social, in the form of general and planetary social communication which characterises our age.

3. Language and social discourse

In this respect it is obligatory to refer to another author whose work we may today consider in many senses a fundamental reference point for a semiotic foundation of sociolinguistic analysis: Roland Barthes, especially his critic of contemporary ideology and myths. In fact,

Barthes also has the merit of having introduced the critical approach to semiology (we use this term in a French speaking context referring up to at least the beginning of the 70's), having "dissected" the ambivalent ideological power of sign systems in which common sense, stereotypes and mythology of our present are organized. Barthes held, most certainly in a manner of provocation and defiance, that there is no sense what is not uttered or "spoken" by language, and that opposite to what Saussure had stated, linguistics includes semiotics (Barthes 1974a: 3–5; Barthes 1974b). Rossi-Landi has, however, always objected to Barthes, saying that verbal language is not the only big sense "container", because it, in the meaning of "language" plus "common speech", is "spoken" by the alienating linguistic structures (Rossi-Landi 1972: 11–12). The pre-eminence of linguistics, therefore, may be defiance, as it often happens with Barthes, but it can also be shaped by the situation of alienation which remains in the sphere of language.

In one of his essays of 1970, *La linguistique du discours*, Roland Barthes introduces the concept of "linguistics of the discourse" or "translinguistics" (Barthes 1970a: 191). Unlike linguistics in the strict sense, whose object is the text, the object of translinguistics is discourse (Barthes 1970a: 192). Both, says Barthes, work with a single substance, that of spoken language; but while text has a purely communicative aim, discourse varies according to further aims. Barthes suggests the following definition of "discourse":

Any finite extension of word, unitary from the content point of view, expressed and structured for secondary purposes of communication, culturalised by different factors to those of language (Barthes 1970a: 192)⁴.

As Benveniste (1971) wanted, linguistics would use the *sentence* as its upper limit, as a "link between text and discourse" (Barthes 1970a: 193); whereas the territory of translinguistics may be situated "beyond

⁴ Barthes' quotes come from the Italian translation of his article. The English version is of the translators'.

the sentence". If, writes Barthes, still following Benveniste's formulation and more generally the typical procedure of structural analysis, sense is acquired when a unit of one level is included among the units of an immediately higher level (Barthes 1970a: 193) and if the sentence is "the last level of linguistic integration and the first level of translinguistic integration" (Barthes 1970a: 194), it is on social praxis that discourse is to be articulated and to acquire its sense and its "reference" (Barthes 1970a: 194–195). In this perspective, the task of translinguistics is that of "codifying the reference", always making the notions of "context" and "situation" (Barthes 1970a: 196) stand out.

Barthes made these considerations in the phase of full maturity of his "system" (see Marrone 1994). His "provocative" preference for linguistics including semiology that contained in his previous *Elements of Semiology* and that overthrew Saussure's concept (Barthes 1974a), appears in this context to be a methodological choice for a science where each system and process of the object is modelled on spoken language in which "the subsequent signs predominate significantly over the simultaneous ones" (Barthes 1970a: 191). The succession, the linearity, the fundamental "irreversibility of the message" (Barthes 1970a: 191) which characterises the translinguistic systems thus opens, *beyond the sentence*, onto an immense territory, consisting of the whole universe of "situations", that is of the social praxis where according to Barthes, the language is exposed to "secondary communication objectives" and to "different factors" (Barthes 1970a: 191) of culturalisation.

In this framework, we may, therefore, consider language to be the product of human verbal linguistic activity, articulated in a system and in a process which gives life to infinite varieties of natural languages and is subject to the variation in history and use. Discourse, however, may be seen as putting language into practice, a communicative praxis in which the fundamental fact is that a linguistic system is rooted in its speakers and in "where" the speaker is located, in what roles and hierarchies the language produces. In the light of the definition mentioned above, it is important that those "different factors" which Barthes talks about be inserted in the verbal dimension. It is possible

to extend Barthes' notion of "linguistics of the discourse" to that of "linguistics of social discourse", where the latter refers to all the social practices of language, and where it opens to the multiplicity of "*langues*" and "*langages*" from which social communication is created. In this sense, language can not be considered without its speakers, that is to say, without its actors and its subjects "embodied" in the world. This need, which appears every time articulated language comes to the fore, is the same necessity that gave birth to sociolinguistics as a discipline characterised, unlike general linguistics, by the special attention paid to the relation between language and its speakers (Berruto 1995: 67).

All the most recent and careful research in the field of sociolinguistics and sociosemiotics, intended in the broadest sense, considers both how language changes speakers and is, in turn, modified by them, and how the same notion of "speaker" considered in the current context of communication and in relation to the role of the media in the present time, extends and not only metaphorically, to fields which go beyond the verbal level and which make even the simple definition of "environment made of words" (Simone 2000: 29–49) controversial. At this point it is interesting to reflect on the articulated and linear nature of the objects of such linguistics, since certain systems different from language but nevertheless based on it, are characterised by "simultaneity" — for instance, "simultaneity" is typical of the communication and language of digital and IT media and of the knowledge model they convey.

4. The system, the process, the social

In the introduction to the updated Italian edition of the essay *Language and Society* (now called *Language and Social Context*), originally published in English in 1972 (Giglioli 1972) and in Italian in 1973 (Giglioli 1973), Giolo Fele and Pier Paolo Giglioli introduce the texts contained in the book — fundamental texts for sociolinguistics — stating that, in general terms, this discipline "studies language as a

social phenomenon” (Giglioli, Fele 2000: 7). Sociolinguistics differs from linguistics, in the narrow sense of the term because its interests include:

any attempt to study language not from inside the system or the code (as the linguistic tradition in the strict sense of the term does), but in any possible deviation in relation to the use that any community of speakers may make of it (Giglioli, Fele 2000: 7)⁵.

Schematizing further, Fele and Giglioli claim that linguistics is interested in everything that concerns the “internal logic of the system”, everything that “remains still and fixed” and that “does not depend on the context” on linguistics, whereas variability, mutability and the concrete use of any linguistic system by the speakers concerns sociolinguistics (Giglioli, Fele: 2000: 7–8). Indeed, the “linguist” examples (meaning “the linguists brought as examples”) referred to by the authors, especially Bloomfield and Chomsky, belong to a linguistics that is not interested in variation, mutation, and context and that, on the contrary — as in the case of Chomsky’s generative-transformational linguistics — expressly rejects these kinds of issue. In spite of this, Fele’s and Giglioli’s observations can not be considered pertinent to the structural linguistic tradition with semiotic background, in particular Ferdinand de Saussure on the one hand, and the Prague circle, with its evolution through Roman Jakobson, on the other.

Incorporating the study of language in a system according to a model or the structural activity, as Barthes called it (Barthes 1972: 308), means disassembling and re-assembling an “object” so that the operating rules of the “object” itself can be manifested in the disassembly/re-assembly. The structure then makes something apparent that, as Barthes says, stayed invisible in the “natural” object. Therefore, talking about a linguistic “system” allows us to perceive language not as nomenclature, but as a group of fundamental elements, dependent on one another, associated according to particular links and modelling.

⁵ The English version is of the translators’.

From the structuralist point of view, these links are defined as binary opposition links. Values are relational and combine differences.

There is an anti-structuralist prejudice in the current interpretation that denies socio-linguistic interest to these twentieth-century approaches, engaged in mainly considering the structural hold of the notion of sign (verbal or generally linguistic) inside the “system”. This anti-structuralist prejudice has partly been implicitly criticized here when we included Barthes’s works — heir, even if “heretic” to the structuralist trend — among the main contributions to the foundation of sociolinguistics on semiotic bases. However, a further in-depth study can explain not only the limits of this prejudice, but also the complexity of the notion “social” from a semiotic point of view.

We can start with the well-known statement from the *Cours de linguistique générale*, written by the two pupils Bally and Séchehaye on the lectures Saussure gave between 1906 and 1911: Speech has both an individual and a social side, and we cannot conceive of one without the other (Saussure 1959: 8).

The individual side is exactly that of *parole*, of the single word; the social side is that of the *langue*, of the linguistic material which works “by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of the community” (Saussure 1959: 14). The “contract” element conceals the imprint of a philosophy “of exchange” at the base of Saussure’s linguistics, for which “social” is synonymous with “collective” (Ponzio 1973: 153–161) and *langue* joins individuals bound to one another by a contract. However, this “social aspect” is at the basis of the notion of sign’s arbitrariness, which is fundamental for Saussure’s semiology. Arbitrariness, that is the fact that the signifier is unmotivated in relation to the signified, on the one hand “holds together” the linguistic system, like a game of chess as “artificial realization of what language offers in a natural form” (Saussure 1959: 88), and on the other hand it is socially established. The theme of the arbitrary nature of the sign is one of the Saussurean questions which has raised most controversy and discussion (De Mauro 1978: 414–416). Regarding the relation between the arbitrary nature of the sign and the system,

Saussure's *Cours* offers an example taken from a non verbal semiotic field, that is, the polite formulas:

Polite formulas, for instance, though often imbued with a certain natural expressiveness (as in the case of a Chinese who greets his emperor by bowing down to the ground nine times), are nonetheless fixed by rule; it is this rule and not the intrinsic value of the gestures that obliges one to use them. (Saussure 1959: 68)

It is interesting to note how — without prejudice against the pre-eminence of the verbal that the *Cours* tends to confirm compared to other semiological systems — the example of the polite formulas allows us to understand the conventional, not natural nor symbolic nature of the sign in general. It may not be by accident that this happens when we use a non-verbal system as an example. In spite of this, almost wanting to confirm the opinion of Barthes in his *Elements of Semiology*, the previous quote proceeds as follows:

Signs that are wholly arbitrary realize better than the others the ideal of the semiological process; that is why language, the most complex and universal of all systems of expression, is also the most characteristic; in this sense linguistics can become the aster-pattern for all branches of semiology although language is only one particular semiological system. Saussure 1959: 68)

It has been pointed out that, by virtue of a greater attention to Saussure's lessons, the concept of "arbitrary" is better defined as "unmotivated". Benveniste on the other hand, unlike Saussure's *Cours*, clarifies how the relation between signified and signifier is more necessary than arbitrary (De Mauro 1978: 415). Actually, in the structuralist logic, both "unjustified" or "arbitrary" on the one hand, and "necessary" on the other, work equally if it is a question of demonstrating the non-naturality of the linguistic sign system, first of all of the verbal one. But this non-naturality does not mean "non-social", on the contrary, in spite of all the arguments about the concept of "social" as "collective" in the context of the *Cours*, as we noted above. De Mauro underlines the fundamental importance of the relation

existing between the theme of the arbitrariness of the sign and the method of the synchronic analysis in order to recognise the central role of the element of sociality in Saussure. Synchrony and diachrony are for the *Cours* the two guiding principles of linguistic analysis: the former refers to a “state of language”, the second to a “phase of evolution” (Saussure 1959: 81). If the sign is arbitrary through the coexistence of signified and signifier inside one and the same system, it follows, as De Mauro writes: “that all the value of a sign depends, through the system, on the society which keeps the complex of the system alive in a certain way (De Mauro 1978: 424)⁶.”

In the *Cours*, sociolinguistics has found a paradox (called “Labov’s paradox” after the name of the “father” of sociolinguistics who introduced the terms): if on the one hand it is the *langue* which constitutes the social element of the language, whereas *parole* constitutes the individual one, the importance that the former assumes in Saussure’s method contrasts with the perspective of the synchronic analysis, about which the *Cours* states:

Synchrony has only one perspective, the speakers’, and its whole method consists of gathering evidence from speakers; to know to just what extent a thing is a reality, it is necessary and sufficient to determine to what extent it exists in the minds of speakers. (Saussure 1959: 90)

The paradox is: if the speaking subjects have to bear witness to the synchronic reality of the language, *parole* would be the central element in the analysis of variation, a key concept for sociolinguistics. Let us quote some more parts of the *Cours*: “It is in speaking [*parole*] that the germ of all change is found. Each change is launched by a certain number of individuals before it is accepted for general use.” (Saussure 1959: 98). This is a contradiction which Voloshinov replied to well before Labov by criticising the *langue/parole* dichotomy and proposing a theory of utterance in which the social is seen in a materialistic perspective. Despite the paradoxicality, it is however possible

⁶ The English version is of the translator’s.

to recognize the complex value of Saussure's method, that is to say the possibility of looking at things in a dual, "two-pronged" manner.

5. From *parole* to utterance

In Saussure's *Cours* "society" is defined as a social mass, a speaking mass (Saussure 1959: 71, 77–78), compared to which the signifier, which also seems to have been freely chosen in relation to the idea it represents, appears to not be free but imposed: "The masses have no voice in the matter, and the signifier chosen by language could be replaced by no other." (Saussure 1959: 71).

Since the linguistic sign is arbitrary, it "escapes from our will", its law is a thing which is "tolerated" (Saussure 1959: 71). It is precisely the arbitrariness of the sign which "protects language from any attempt to modify it" (Saussure 1959: 73). In this sense, the strong expression that Barthes uses when he defines language "fascist" can be considered legitimate (Barthes 1981: 7–9). It is also interesting to note the reference made in the *Cours* to non-verbal sign systems like fashion, which is not entirely arbitrary, because "we can deviate only slightly from the conditions dictated by the humanbody" (Saussure 1978: 7576). In *The Fashion System*, however, Barthes contrasts this statement, by declaring — with a message directed at Benveniste — that it is not the linguistic sign which is arbitrary but in language "a general law rigidly limits the power of the users on the system" (Barthes 1970b: 217). With this, however, Barthes only confirms what is written in Saussure's *Course*, where "arbitrariness" certainly does not mean freedom of the users on the system, in fact, far from this.

However, in language, what De Mauro calls a "dialectic between continuity and transformation" (De Mauro 1978: 421), between immutability and mutability and between arbitrariness and historicity is established. If language is "all the linguistic habits which allow a subject to understand and make itself understood" (Saussure 1959: 75), in order for it to be language a "speaking mass", a social force which combines its action with that of the time is required (Saussure 1959: 76).

As has been mentioned, Voloshinov radically criticised the concept of “social” in his formulation where he defined “abstract objectivism”, in which the Saussurean theory is explicitly included as it had been passed down from the *Course*. Voloshinov firstly criticises the “system” of linguistics, the offspring, he says, of philology:

At the basis of those linguistic methods of thought which lead to the creation of language as a system of legally identical forms, there is the *practical and theoretical orientation towards a study of others' dead languages, preserved in the monuments of writing* (Voloshinov 1999: 190)⁷.

According to Voloshinov, linguistics inspired by objectivism has inherited an indelible trademark of its philological origin. Although the epistemological division between linguistics and philology is explicitly declared in the Saussurean *Course*, Voloshinov does not believe that the passage has been completed. He asks what a philologist is:

[...] the philologist is always and wherever a describer of “secret” writing and words and a master, an informer of what is deciphered and transmitted by tradition. [...] The first philologists and the first linguists were always *priests* (Voloshinov 1999: 193).

The land on which the ancient philosophy of language was constructed, says Voloshinov, consisted of the Vedic doctrine of the word, the Logos of ancient Greece and the biblical philosophy of the word. Like the ancient Vedic priest, the contemporary linguist is dominated by the magical, sacred role of the word of others with which they cannot manage to make their own word interact properly, which is experienced without feeling the thickness, as if it were a “usual dress” (Voloshinov 1999: 194).

Indeed, as has been recently discovered through the publication of Saussure’s so-called *Manuscripts of Harvard*, the Indian culture held great interest for the Genevan linguist. “I, personally, do not believe in the possibility of freeing India in a summary manner” (Saussure 1994:

⁷ Voloshinov’s quotes come from the Italian translation of his article. The English version is of the translator’s.

99), he wrote, ridiculing the western pretence of reducing something like 3000 years of language and culture into superficial formulae. What Saussure was particularly fascinated about was the linguistic structure of the Vedic hymns, which according to him had been transmitted unchanged for 30 centuries by means of oral transmission from master to disciple., in an area which includes a population of 200 million inhabitants (now almost 900). Saussure states how Vedic poetry is literally full of anagrams, linguistic games and cryptograms with names. This characteristic allows for the “almost superhuman” absolute absence of different versions in the Veda, which Saussure defined as a sort of universal principal, without an author (whether divine or human) and inspired by the idea of the pre-existence of the word, of the sound, of the vocal figure which designs the objects, compared to the objects themselves.

According to Voloshinov, linguistics as an offspring of philology has assumed monological utterance as its basis of analyses, ignoring the social dimension, which he calls a *social utterance* (Voloshinov 1999: 202–203). According to Voloshinov and the Bahtin school where he belonged, the concept of “utterance” exceeds the notion of individual *parole* as opposed to *langue*. The dispute that Voloshinov held against Saussure, probably influenced by the theories of Marr, assumes an understandable vehemence in the context of the theoretical debate in the first few years of the 20th century in Europe, both in the linguistic field as well as more generally within that of human sciences. However, the contribution of the so-called “school of Bahtin” to overcoming the “abstract hypostatising objectivism” (Voloshinov 1999: 185) of a linguistic system designed as a group of invariable and indisputable standards lays the the foundation for a materialistic and dynamic vision of language intended as a social practice, whose main lines are indicated below.

Language is carried out in discourse and discourse is articulated in utterances, that is in operations of “starting to speak”, of ideological “positioning” in it, by social subjects. The utterances in turn are realised by means of enunciated words, by means of complete verbal realisations which we may consider minimal communication units. Utterance

establishes the social dimension of language, considering the fact that it assumes at least one speaker and one listener in order to be realised. This means that a social relation consists of at least “two sides”. The standard structures of utterance, whether they concern orality or writing as “relatively stable types” of utterance, constitute *discourse types*. Conversation, dialogue, monologue, reading, direct reply, indirect speech etc. are “simple” discourse types, or as Bahtin defines them, “primary” ones. Then, there are more complicated (or “secondary”) discourse types, like literary genres (novels — detective, erotic, epistolary, etc.; poetry; epics; tragedy, and so on). The types of discourse are varied and can consist of as little as one word or be as long as a novel of several volumes. The primary types are a part of the daily reality and of immediate verbal communication, while the secondary types are a part of a more complex cultural communication, above all written.

Talking about utterances of daily life and types of discourse connected to this, let us consider Voloshinov’s claim that the “form” of the dialogue represents the most natural form of language (Voloshinov 1999: 244–245). We talk about “form” of dialogue here and not of “type”, in order to distinguish between a characteristic connected to the social dimension of language and a type of discourse which we commonly and explicitly manage to recognise as a dialogue. The dialogicity of which Voloshinov and Bahtin talk, is also present in what we usually define as “interior monologue”, as well as in the diary or autobiographical “speaking to oneself”, in which the discourse is always broken down into separate remarks, into questions and answers through which the multiplicity of “I’s” who make up the so-called individual subjectivity is developed.

Voloshinov is highly critical of the sanctifying attitude in front of the authority of the word by others which he details in his own linguistics of abstract objectivism, and to oppose it, he proposes a pragmatic approach to the relationship between “one’s own” words and words of the “others”, or between one’s own *discourse* and that of the others, to put it better. He uses two expressions derived from Wölfflin to define two styles of others’ discourse transmission: *linear* style and *pictorial* style. Concerning the former, he writes: “its basic

tendency is to create clear external frameworks of others' discourse with a very weak internal determination" (Voloshinov 1999: 249). In the latter case, however, "language elaborates the ways for a more subtle and malleable inclusion of author's reply and comment in others' discourse" (Voloshinov 1999: 249).

A typical aspect of this latter direction is the development of "mixed variations" of others' discourse transmission. Apart from the more malleable variants of direct discourse, there are two other variants that are important and are analysed by Voloshinov through a comparison between different languages: indirect improper discourse and, above all, free indirect discourse which, "further weakens the confines of the others' utterance" (Voloshinov 1999: 251), and the significance of which has been noted by Ponzio (Ponzio 1999b: 39),

Social orientation of the utterance, its plurivocity — whether it be explicit, potential or understood — comes from the constitutional dialogicity of the word, from the fact that in any case the verbal sign does not only need to be identified, recognised, decoded, but above all it has to be understood in its response, as if the interpretation assumes the form of the reply to the phrase of a dialogue. The interpreter of responding comprehension (Ponzio, Calefato, Petrilli 1994) is what the utterance of daily life always calls for. Even when the mere level of the sign system and of identification would be sufficient to recognise the meaning of an utterance, social comprehension always concerns content and aspects of the discourse which transcend the sign system and identification, often concerning the implied part (verbal or extraverbal) of the utterance.

Therefore, the utterance does not "reflect" the extraverbal situation as if it was simply transmitting a meaning produced before through language: in the annunciation the situation is interpreted and evaluated, it is in the annunciation that the meaning made up of both verbal and extraverbal material, and expressed both in signs and in values, is reproduced, circulates and enriches. Utterances produce contexts, in other words they produce effects of sense, feelings, values, behaviour, social roles, hierarchies, differences. Language is basically always action, praxis, relation.

6. Languages, language, communication

In a reconstruction of the history of the linguistic trends between the end of the 19th century and the first few decades of the 20th century, Roman Jakobson recalls the controversy on the Saussurean *Course* risen in his *Theses* of 1929 by the Prague linguistic circle of which he was a leading figure. Jakobson acknowledges as fundamental Saussure's intuitive understanding (derived from the stoic concept) that the sign has two facets, the perceptible *signans* and the intelligible *signatum* (Jakobson 1971: 717). The two Latin terms are used by Jakobson instead of the Saussurean *signifiant* and *signifié*: the same choice is also followed by Rossi-Landi, who underlines how these two terms of Augustinian origin are more correct both in order to overcome the “mentalistic ambiguity of the Saussurean *signifié*” (Rossi-Landi 1985: 151), and in respect to a dynamic and non-static function of semiosis. Every *signatum* may indeed become in turn the *signans* of something else, in a multilevelled and open semiotic process.

As regards the Saussurean notions of synchrony and diachrony, Jakobson blames the *Course* for remaining anchored to a “neo-grammatical” concept of diachrony, although it had anticipated the new structural approach to the synchrony of language (Jakobson 1971: 721). The controversy of the “Prague circle” towards Saussure actually consisted in the greater attention that they paid to the fact that the diachronic transformations of language, starting with the phonological ones, exist in the functioning of the system. These considerations are emerge against the background of what Jakobson calls a “nomotetic” viewpoint of seeking laws within the framework of human sciences (Jakobson 1971: 656). As a result of this, no linguistic change can be understood or interpreted without referring to the system that undergoes it and to the function that the change has within the same system. At the same time, no language can be described fully and adequately without taking into account the changes that are in progress. In this perspective Jakobson writes:

The diachronic linguistics of today examines the succession of dynamic synchronies, confronts them, and, in this way, delineates the evolution of a language in a wider historical perspective, with due attention not only to the mutability of the linguistic system but also to its immutable, static elements (Jakobson 1971: 721).

De Mauro, in the notes to the Italian translation of the *Cours*, underlines the fact that the Prague Circle controversy can be removed by considering how in Saussure the opposition between synchrony and diachrony is not in the “things” that the researcher is occupied with (in *matière*), but in the point of view, the *objet* of the linguistic analysis (De Mauro 1978: 427). Without prejudice towards these considerations, which have had a significant role in the history of 20th century linguistics, the point of view of critical socio-linguistic analysis founded on a semiotic basis should be put forward in this context. In particular, pointing out the relationship between synchrony and diachrony helps to acknowledge the modelling role played by the sign systems in the complex articulation between the instances of change, experimentation and mutability that they convey, and the internal resistances, “necessary” but often operating in an alienating manner, innate in social reproduction of which the sign systems themselves belong to.

It is, therefore, of particular importance today to read again some observations made by Jakobson both on the relationship between linguistics and sociolinguistics and between language and other communication systems. Jakobson includes linguistics within the framework of semiotics, intended as a general science of signs, in the same way as it was foreseen, nominated and delineated in Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*: “*semeiotiké* or the ‘doctrine of signs’, the most usual whereof being words” (Jakobson 1971: 657). The Lockian term of “semiotics” was maintained by Peirce, whereas Saussure proposed “semiology” to indicate the general science of signs considered in their relationship with language. According to Jakobson, both Locke and Saussure were right to consider language “the central and most important among all semiotic systems” (Jakobson 1971: 658). However, a comparison between language and other types of sign is of

vital importance for linguistics itself because it shows what properties are shared by the various sign systems and which ones are, on the other hand, specific to the verbal (Jakobson 1971: 658).

The sociolinguistic approach comes within this framework. Jakobson reminds how all the various questions advanced under the label of “sociolinguistics” require the same structural analysis common to all other linguistic perspectives (Jakobson 1971: 667). Following this framework, Jakobson lays the basis for what we could define a sociolinguistics that is at the same time functionalist, since it considers above all the functional varieties of language, and interpretative because it assumes that there is co-determination between linguistic behaviour and social facts (Berruto 1995: 29). Jakobson says that a linguistic community has at its disposal:

more explicit and more elliptic patterns, with an orderly scale of transitions from a maximal explicitness to an extreme ellipsis, 2) a purposive alternation of more archaic and newfangled distinctions, 3) a patent difference between rules of ceremonial, formal and informal, slovenly speech (Jakobson 1971: 667).

On these bases, social rules are established in a community which allow, prescribe or prohibit the word or silence, in accordance with what could be defined as ceremonial rules under linguistic practice. Moreover, continues Jakobson, our linguistic performance is governed by a competence of monological or dialogical rules which are determined by social behaviour. For instance, verbal relations between the transmitter and the receiver build the grammatical categories of gender and person. In the same way, the role covered in language by the rules connected to the social role, to the sex, or age of the interlocutors, forms a linguistic “challenge” to the idea of a static and uniform language. The structuralist sociolinguistic approach says Jakobson, dispels the myth of uniform linguistic communities, highlights the role of centrifugal and centripetal forces on a territorial and social plane, opens in the speakers the awareness of variations, of distinctions and of changes in the verbal system, also opening the

metalinguistic consciousness which forms “a crucial intralinguistic factor” (Jakobson 1971: 668).

There follows an essential passage:

Since verbal messages analyzed by linguists are linked with communication of nonverbal messages or with exchange of utilities and mates, the linguist research is to be supplemented by wider semiotic and anthropological investigation (Jakobson 1971: 669).

Linguistic analysis and social analysis therefore proceed in an integrated manner: the Jakobsonian references are above all to Trubetskoj, founder of structural phonology and an important member of the Prague circle, and to Benveniste, theorist of utterance; but also to Lévi-Strauss and to Rossi-Landi. Indeed, the “natural” job of the linguist, according to Jakobson, is that of bringing out the primordial significance of the concept of “communication” (Jakobson 1971: 663) for the social sciences. Jakobson reminds us how Trubetskoj had conceived the idea of the integrated sciences of communication back in 1926, Benveniste assumed the problem of discovering the common basis to language and to society and of comparing their fundamental units, Lévi-Strauss proposed an integrated science of communication including social anthropology, economy and linguistics (Jakobson 1971: 663), and Rossi-Landi, in the same period in which Jakobson wrote these texts on communication (1960’s), considered goods as particular types of messages (Jakobson 1971: 665).

Basically, what comes from these Jakobsonian writings of the 1960’s is the idea of a semiotic basis for the study of language as social communication. A particularly crucial insight in the perspective of the technological revolution, whose embryonic features began to develop in those years, is contained in the speech which Jakobson made in Milan in 1968 at the conference *Languages in Society and in Technique*, sponsored by Olivetti. Here he proposed a classification of signs according to the way in which they had been produced: either directly organic or instrumental (Jakobson 1971: 701). Amongst the visual signs for instance, gestures are directly produced by the bodily organs, while painting and sculpture imply the use of instruments. Amongst

the auditory signs, the word and vocal music belong to the first type, while instrumental music belongs to the second. Jakobson writes that even when the telephone or the radio reproduce the “organic voice”, it always remains such. However (and here lies an interesting insight by Jakobson),

the wider diffusion in space and time does not remain without influence upon the relation between the speaker and his audience and herewith upon the makeup of messages. (Jakobson 1971: 701)

The changes within the framework of what Jakobson called “new media” (now a common expression but very new at the time), produce significant effects, important for linguistic and sociological research, both in the context of production and perception of messages (Jakobson 1971: 702). Here Jakobson makes direct reference to the telephone and to the radio, as well as to cinema which has been transformed from a simple mechanism of reproduction of the image into an intricate and independent semiotic system (Jakobson 1971: 702). These considerations allow us to reflect in a manner which we now call “socio-semiotic” on the processes of transformation of the “organic” signs into signs of a new type, which cannot be simply defined as being “instrumental”, but which articulate the relationship between organic and instrumental in a new and complex manner, expanding the confines of the organic and at the same time “naturalising” the instrumental element.

In the same text, Jakobson defines the difference between communication and information: in his opinion, whereas the former implies a recognisable transmitter, the source from which the latter is issued is not recognised as the transmitter by the message interpreter (Jakobson 1971: 703). In any case, this difference, whether it be shared or not, has many theoretical implications on what are today commonly described as sciences of communication, which often have to do with a semiotic model in which it is certainly impossible to recognise a transmitter as a primary source of messages — see, for example, the case of telecommunication networks. According to Jakobson, the study of language in relation to other communication

systems also takes into account the necessity of distinguishing between homogeneous messages, which use a single system of signs, and syncretic messages based on a combination of different sign systems (Jakobson 1971: 705). These combinations are found in different social forms, as anthropology has demonstrated by studying for instance societies where poetry has developed not as a spoken but a sung verse (Jakobson 1971: 705). Jakobson adds that “modern culture develops the most complex syncretic spectacles, such as musicals and in particular cinematic musicals, making joint use of several auditory and visual semiotic media” (Jakobson 1971: 705).

A characteristic of current cultures and societies is the widespread metalinguistic awareness (that consists of a crucial intralinguistic factor, to use Jakobson’s expression) of the generalised presence of syncretic sign systems in which not necessarily the verbal language, or not only the verbal language plays a dominant role. This does not mean that “only today” communication is articulated in complex systems, quite the contrary. However, the fact that communication has pervaded all social reproduction constitutes, almost retroactively, the reason why metalinguistic consciousness lives in a world, an *Umwelt*, as Sebeok would say, in which several sign systems interact. In the following pages these concepts will be specified.

7. Society as the human *Umwelt*

As has been said, Italian “*linguaggio*” means a modelling device of the world: this device is something unique to human beings amongst the earth’s living creatures, as both Sebeok and Ponzio have demonstrated (Sebeok 1990; Sebeok, Petrilli, Ponzio 2001). Of course, every living being, from the most biologically elementary, has a way of organising its “world”, its surrounding environment, its *Umwelt*. One of these modes may be for instance the “territory” for most mammals. However, language only structures the human *Umwelt*, that world whose “limits” are actually, as Wittgenstein said, the limits of language, because it is language which simulates it, represents it, organises it.

Language as a modelling device comes before speaking and communicating, that is those eminently verbal activities which are articulated in languages, in discourses, in utterances. Language is the result of what Sebeok has called human *adaptation*, originating about two million years ago with *Homo sapiens*. Speaking is externalising and it is the outcome of this modelling system based on *syntax*, in other words on a sequential and regulated organisation of signs.

The infant, who, as we say, “learns to speak”, possesses language even before being able to reproduce words and sentences: their crying and their rhythmical gestures, first, their goo-goos and their babbling, are all forms by means of which young human beings organise their bodily matter in space, in time, in relation to their needs and above all in relation to the others who are around them — first of all the mother or the father. The deaf and dumb and subjects who do not have listening or speaking capacity due to some physical handicap, still have language in the sense of the modelling system, on the basis of which it is possible for them to practice all internationally recognised forms of communication and articulate even in different linguistic areas.

However, it would not be correct to think that this modelling activity, which we have called “*linguaggio*” and which we have distinguished from speaking, is something “internal”, a “content” of being human, one of its biological “faculties”. Language is not a system included in human consciousness, because what we call “consciousness” *is* language itself, and is a historically and socially determined context even in its “natural” functions and components. If it is true that speaking is a consequence of language, it is also true that human communicative systems increase the functions and the techniques of language itself and improve the non-verbal ability of human beings enormously. Making a distinction between language and speaking is useful on a theoretical level in order to avoid improper simplification which defines language as an instrument for communicating, at the same time considering the communication according to the unidirectional and monological model of a passage of information from a transmitter to a receiver that understand one another as a result of a common semantic code. However, the distinction does not imply an

absolute separation: on the contrary, amongst the different terms — language and speaking, language and communication — there is a lively and always current interaction. Indeed, what is the specifically human *Umwelt* if it is not the social context, the human relation between individuals?

While animals *are* their modelling devices, human beings *objectify* their modelling devices, i.e. the language and its “syntax”, and are capable of reproducing them and externalising them through speech and communication. Here, “objectification” means the anthropological category that indicates the historical and social forms in which human nature is expressed. Human linguistic activity, either as language-consciousness, or as “linear” organisation called speaking, is part of the social mechanism of objectification. In this sense, speaking intervenes retroactively on language, even managing to modify the forms and the structures, and thus showing the close relation that exists between our significant social practices and our consciousness.

If for the living creatures of our planet there are different *Umwelten*, that is different “worlds” surrounding each species, or better, that each species manages to perceive and structures in relation to its own nature, the human being is characterised by living above all in relation to others, in more or less rudimental forms of *society*. Human societies differ from all the assorted forms of animal aggregation because by using language humans are capable of objectifying the social context in the sense explained above, in other words they are capable of reproducing and planning, not only their natural conditions of life, but also and in a significant manner, their reciprocal relations. This does not mean, of course, that human beings are characterised by an “inborn” desire for survival and natural evolution, on the contrary: war, genocide, destruction of others’ lives and of nature are part of those social plans which human beings are unfortunately capable of realising, as history recalls, even in the most alienated, criminal and “crazy” forms.

Language allows human relations to be objectified, since it is, in turn, implicated by these relations: indeed the conditions that have permitted homination are above all of a social order, that is they are

based on the human need to establish a relation with others. This relation, however, comes before what is usually called communication. “Relation with others” actually means first of all giving a form to a common feeling, a common meaning. It means learning, interacting with the other body, the expressions of signs which articulate this common signifying. It is, in effect, from a certain point of view, an activity which has to do with “communicating”, in the etymological sense of “sharing” more than “transmitting” or “informing”. Sharing a complex system of discontinuous features — the signs — which organise the matter and transforming it into society; that is in an articulated network of relations between human beings, and between human beings and “world”.

Language, intended in this way, *is* society, in the sense that the first matter that language “transforms” and organises into signs is the relation with others, it is the social context. A fundamental part of this transformation is the relation of sex, on the basis of which *gender* is produced as a semiotic category, in which the man-woman difference is articulated socially and culturally.

As Rossi-Landi writes, “society is the aspect assumed by matter on a human level” (Rossi-Landi 1985: 32). Linguistic matter is a system in which social values take shape: in this sense it should not be separated from the model through which we look at the production processes of these values, that is through which we look at the *formation* of matter itself. It is closely and constantly connected to the model and to the project which organises this complexity, to that dimension of the language which makes it a simulating apparatus of the matter itself, although this dimension can never be considered exhaustive and gratifying.

“Language” as a modelling device is applied to materials made up of different types of signs. For instance we can talk about the language of dance, articulated in movements and positions of the body in space; about the language of music, articulated in rhythm; about language of dreams, of photography, of cinema, of the way of dressing, of cooking. In order to create a culinary “dish” for instance, we must select the ingredients, manipulate them by following a recipe, that is a “narrative

plan” organised in sequences, appraise one or another according to the situation, mix the flavours so that, at the moment of eating they are also capable of “telling” the procedure which has led to the creation of the dish itself. And even clothes, our mantle, the objects with which we cover ourselves, the signs that influence us or which decorate us are forms through which our bodies enter in relation with the world and between one another. Dressing in any society and culture is, therefore, a type of design, of simulation of the world, valid for society and for the individual, which is made in signs and objects through which the body is situated in time and in space in its surrounding environment. What articulates the way of dressing is a sort of socio-cultural syntax that we shall call “customs” within the ritual functions of clothes and of traditional societies, “fashion” in the context of the aesthetic functions of clothing and the culture of modernity. Despite being in different historical, social and geographical situations, human beings have always had a very particular relationship with the clothes, with the objects that they wear and with the “artificial” signs of the body, based on the conviction that internal relations between these elements and between this and the body are regulated by a judicious logic, whether it be collective or idiosyncratic. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962) made an exemplary description of this phenomenon, through the anthropological study of what he has called “patchwork”, that is the “savage” art of connecting objects apparently without common connections, but whose “collection” is, however, presented from the point of view of the subject who realises it, as an organised and homologous system compared to the “world”, as a language, as a “piece” of society materialised in objects, styles, rites, ways of appearing corporeal.

A dish or some clothes, however, if they are “above all” signs in which the respective languages are articulated are also different from signs, they are “extra-sign residues” or “bodies”, as Rossi-Landi calls them (Rossi-Landi 1985: 137–166). Of a certain food we eat the “body”, apart from the sign, that is apart from what we have called “dish”. We cover ourselves with heavy clothes or with a pair of socks because they keep us warm, as well as for cultural, social, geographical and fashion

reasons. Basically, with non-verbal systems, or those made up of both verbal and non-verbal matter, there is also a non-sign dimension apart from the sign dimension that lets them be defined as “languages”.

Verbal language is, however, entirely made up of sign material, articulated on a phonological, morphological, syntactical, semantic and pragmatic level. This explains why we use the term “*linguaggio*” — which, however, conceals a privileging of the aspect of the verbal — to indicate modelling procedures which can also be exerted on non-verbal material: indeed the word “*linguaggio*” shows how much these procedures are manifested in the verbal better than in other fields. At the same time, the verbal method allows us to consider how societies that have privileged other modelling systems can exist, as the other modelling systems (for instance, clothing, music, gifts) are in any case homologous to what the linguistic verbal system represents for societies and cultures which basically articulate the production and reproduction of meaning through verbal matter.

8. Communication-production

The sign dimension of the social has characterised the history of cultures and civilisations: to support this just think of the totally sign nature of natural languages and thus of the socio-linguistic categories under them, or of the symbolic function of non-verbal sign systems like food and clothing. Sign systems show their operating mechanisms like motors of relations between individuals, like modelling devices of the world, like principles of meanings and of values. In this sense the sign systems can be defined as communication systems. In his *Scheme of social reproduction* (Rossi-Landi 1985: 27–45), Rossi-Landi defines communication as social reproduction, that means as the whole situation of production-exchange-consumption of goods and of messages, which he considers all signs in his “homology model”. It is not only the moment of exchange — which would appear to be the most naturally exposed to this — that assumes the communicative dimension (which is expressed for instance in aspects like advertising

persuasion techniques, marketing strategies, etc.), but also the other two, production and consumption. This becomes evident above all in the present time, whatever it may be called: “post-industrial”, “post-Fordist” etc. Indeed, the manifestations of sign production-communication range from the telecommunications, IT, cinema, remote work industries to processes of automation and training; consumption as communication includes elements like the consumption of telephone, electricity, IT, television, “satellite”, etc. and should also be considered in the light of its so-called “fluidation”, that is its mobility, flexibility, hybridation.

Production, exchange and consumption are currently three moments which are now almost completely intersecting one another. Their structural similarity, which establishes a homology inside social reproduction itself, is already hidden in Rossi-Landi’s reflections, particularly on the level that Rossi-Landi calls “global production” (Rossi-Landi 1985: 82–84). This concerns the fact that a given explicit artefact, whether it be verbal or non-verbal, “tells” so as to say, shows the productive totality that generated it, for instance a language, a material culture, mankind as a whole. Many signs-goods of our present explicate globalised social reproduction from which they were produced, within which they exchange and consume themselves: from jeans, to Coca-Cola, to IT writing to credit cards. The main socio-semiotic feature of these signs-goods is that of containing in themselves a communicative value, to be communication alone, both as sign-goods produced and in sign-goods exchanged and consumed.

The blend of goods and signs, proposed since the 1960’s by Rossi-Landi, means that the value of goods is above all considered as a social relation. This relation now implies that the value of an object consists not so much of its functionality — of its value of use — and not even of its exchange value intended in the traditional sense. In the current period which can be defined as the period of total communication, the value can be intended as being the communicative value whose measure is above all based on innovation and speed.

The concept of innovation is much less hazardous than what we might think: indeed it concerns the generalised sign quality of social

reproduction, as various recent projects have shown, amongst which we can point out here the *Green paper on innovation* of the European Commission. A creative process, a service, a research, a development programme, an object, can be called “innovative” firstly from a communicative perspective, since innovation must be socially represented as such, it must be based on social discourses which circulate and which are reproduced both inside restricted groups (for instance a company, a public commission, a government), and within extended communities on mass levels. In this sense the truthfulness of the social discourse which supports innovation, depends on the capacity that this discourse has for circulating “as if” it were true, to respond to expectations and removed meanings, to construct styles of life, to interact with other discourses.

Moreover, paradoxically and paraphrasing an expression of Benjamin (1995), regarding innovation, we can talk about its semiotic destructive character, that is about the fact that the impossibility to use a means of production or a consumption good concerns its wear as a sign and not as a “body” (Rossi-Landi 1985: 137–166). Indeed “scraping” the old and replacing it with the “latest innovation” occurs in every phase of social reproduction as a result of communicative techniques which, to the detriment of the so-called “old”, exploit totally sign elements, like modularity, speed, design, “virtualisation”, personalisation. Boundless examples with direct reference to the present can be made to support this: from the philosophy itself that regulates the idea of software; to the role of design in the car industry, of hi-fi and household electrical items, to the concepts of time, space and body connected to the mass diffusion of mobile phones; to consumption on the Web.

8. Open sociosemiotics

It has been previously demonstrated how language is an intrinsically social factor, it is society *tout court*: an important consequence of this arrangement is that, however and wherever sociolinguistics as a

science of language may direct its research, it cannot help taking into consideration fundamentally the manner, the procedure, the forms through which the social relations are modelled and take shape in language. Differences, roles, hierarchies, are some of the forms that social relations assume when they are modelled by language.

The key concepts of “official” sociolinguistics until now, like for instance “variability” and “linguistic variation”, “communicative situation”, “linguistic community”, cannot therefore refer only to language as a “downstream” product of the linguistic production process, but should basically be put in relation with the whole meaning generating procedure called “language”. When linguistic systems, like for instance a natural language are considered “products”, then it will be important to point out how much these systems manage to “say” about their production and generation processes, and of their operation as motors of social relations. For instance, if a natural language is to be examined from the point of view of sexual difference, the “empirical” analysis of the texts, of grammatical and syntactical structures, of lexemes, must be supported by theoretical analysis of the procedures of social discourse through which those constructs have been produced and forms by means of which they model the order of the social discourse itself.

The concept of “plurilinguism” is central in this vision, inasmuch as it is intended not principally as plurilinguism of “*lingue*” (in the line that has until now inspired the analysis of bilinguism, of diglossia, of sectorial languages, of dialects, of registers, etc., as “flagship” areas of socio-linguistics), but as plurilinguism of “*linguaggi*”, of types of discourse (pluridiscoursiveness), of voices (polyphony), which acts as a condition of possibility in all the manifestations of *lingua*, including those indicated above.

However, there is another important element to underline. If language is considered to include verbal and non verbal material, the meaning production processes are to be considered in different areas, which can indeed see verbal language as that in which social relations are defined in a more macroscopic and significant manner, but which must also consider the field of non-verbal languages. In this sense,

socio-linguistics is intended as being socio-semiotics, without prejudice to the fact that the reference area must be *human*, since semiotics also has the prerogative of referring to the world of non-human vital signs.

The fact that socio-linguistics as an independent science of language was also created as a reasonably explicit echo of those political, cultural and social movements that had the merit of introducing a radical cultural relativism around the 1960's, certifies its occasionally critical function of all the supposed universalisms. This component of opening and stabilising in social practice also makes socio-linguistics in the sense of socio-semiotics a "frontier" science, in the dual sense that it is not only on the border between science of language and the anthropological and social sciences, but also that it can be constructed in a movement of continual "crossing frontiers" and of "contamination" between *languages* and disciplinary environments.⁸

References

- Barthes, Roland 1970a. La linguistique du discours. *Signe-Langage-Culture*. La Haya: Mouton & Co.
- 1970b. *Sistema della Moda*. Torino: Einaudi. [Original edition 1967. *Système de la Mode*. Paris: Seuil.]
- 1972. *Saggi critici*. Torino: Einaudi, [Original edition 1964. *Essais critiques. Sur Racine*. Paris: Seuil.]
- 1974a. *Elementi di semiologia*. Torino: Einaudi. [Original edition 1964. *Eléments de sémiologie*. Paris: Seuil.]
- 1974b. *Miti d'oggi*. Torino: Einaudi. [Original edition 1957. *Mythologies*. Paris: Seuil.]
- 1981. *Lezione*. Torino: Einaudi [Original edition 1978. *Leçon*. Paris: Seuil.]
- Benjamin, Walter 1995. Il carattere distruttivo. *Il carattere distruttivo. L'orrore del quotidiano*. Millepiani 4. Milano: Mimesis. [Original edition 1931]
- Benveniste, Emile 1971. *Problemi di linguistica generale*. Milano: Il Saggiatore [Original edition 1966. *Problèmes de linguistique générale*. Paris: Gallimard.]
- Bernard, Jeff (ed.) 1995. *Socio-Semiotics*. Monograph no. by S- *European Journal for Semiotic Studies* 7(1/2).

⁸ English translation from Italian by Elena Barretta and Malcolm Clark.

- Berruto, Gaetano 1995. *Fondamenti di sociolinguistica*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
- Calefato, Patrizia 1997. *Sociosemiotica*. Bari: B.A. Graphis.
- De Mauro, Tullio 1978. *Note*. In: Saussure 1978: 365–466.
- Giglioli, Pier Paolo (ed.) 1972. *Language and Social Context*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- 1973. *Linguaggio e società*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Giglioli, Pier Paolo; Fele, Giolo (eds.) 2000. *Linguaggio e contesto sociale*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Greimas, Algirdas J. 1991. *Semiotica e scienze sociali*. Torino: Centro scientifico editore [Original edition 1976. *Sémiotique et sciences sociales*. Paris: Seuil.]
- Halliday, Michael A. K. 1983. *Il linguaggio come semiotica sociale*. Bologna: Zanichelli [Original edition 1978. *Language as Social Semiotics*. London: Arnold.]
- Hodge, Robert; Kress, Gunther 1988. *Social Semiotics*. Oxford: Polity.
- Hymes, Dell 1974. *Foundations in Sociolinguistics. An Ethnographic Approach*. Philadelphia: University of Penn Press
- Jakobson, Roman 1971. *Selected Writings II. Word and Language*. The Hague, Paris: Mouton.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude 1962. *La pensée sauvage*. Paris: Plon.
- Marrone, Gianfranco 1994. *Il sistema di Barthes*. Milano: Bompiani.
- 2001. *Corpi sociali*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Morris, Charles 1964. *Signification and Significance. A Study of the Relation of Signs and Values*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Ponzo, Augusto 1973. *Produzione linguistica e ideologia sociale*. Bari: De Donato.
- 1999b. *Presentazione*. In: Voloshinov 1999, 9–47.
- 2002. *Il linguaggio e le lingue*. Bari: B. A. Graphis.
- Ponzo, Augusto; Calefato, Patrizia; Petrilli, Susan 1994 [1999]. *Fondamenti di filosofia del linguaggio*. Laterza: Roma-Bari.
- Rossi-Landi, Ferruccio 1972. *Semiotica e ideologia*. Milano: Bompiani.
- 1980[1968]. *Il linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato*. Milano: Bompiani.
- 1985. *Metodica filosofica e scienza dei segni*. Milano: Bompiani.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de 1959. *Course in General Linguistics*. New York: Philosophical Library. [Original edition Bally, C.; Sechehaye, A.; Riedlinger, A. (eds.) 1916. *Cours de linguistique générale*. Paris: Payot.]
- 1994. *Manoscritti di Harvard*. [Parret, H. ed.] Roma-Bari: Laterza.
- Schaff, Adam 1978. *Saggi filosofici*. Bari: Dedalo. [Original edition 1975. *Humanismus, Sprachphilosophie, Erkenntnistheorie des Marxismus. Philosophische Abhandlungen*. Wien: Europaverlag]
- 1987. *Gli stereotipi e l'agire umano*. Adriatica: Bari. [Original edition 1980. *Stereotypen und das Menschliche Handeln*. Wien: Europaverlag]

- 2003. *Sociolinguistica*. Bari: Graphis. [Original edition 1976. *Soziolinguistik*. Wien: Europaverlag.]
- Sebeok, Thomas A. 1990. *Penso di essere un verbo*. Palermo: Sellerio [Original edition 1986. *I Think I Am a Verb*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.]
- Sebeok, Thomas A.; Petrilli, Susan; Ponzio, Augusto 2001. *Semiotica dell'io*. Roma: Meltemi.
- Simone, Raffaele 2000. *La Terza Fase. Forme di sapere che stiamo perdendo*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
- Voloshinov, Valentin N. 1999. *Marxismo e filosofia del linguaggio*. Lecce: Manni [Original edition 1929–1930. *Marksizm i filosofiya yazyka*. Leningrad: Priboj.]

Язык в процессе социальной репродукции: социолингвистика и социосемиотика

В статье рассматриваются семиотические основы социолингвистики. Начиная с определения термина «социолингвистика» философом Адамом Шаффом, статья сосредоточивается на понятии «критической социолингвистики» итальянского семиотика Росси-Ланди. Основа социального измерения языка кроется, по мнению Росси-Ланди, в феномене «социального воспроизводства», которое охватывает как вербальные, так и невербальные знаки. Судя по соссуровскому «Курсу общей лингвистики» и по его гарвардским рукописям, его термин *langue* можно рассматривать именно в таком контексте.

Далее в статье предпринимается попытка разъяснить провокативное определение Роланом Бартом «семиологии» как части лингвистики (а не наоборот!) и развить с этой точки зрения понятие производства коммуникации. Статьи Романа Якобсона 1960-х гг. позволяют нам рассматривать в социосемиотическом (как это сейчас называется) ключе превращение знаков «органического» типа в знаки нового типа, в которых соотносятся органическое и инструментальное. Исходя из этого, цель социолингвистики — быть прежде всего социосемиотикой, т.к. семиотика не ограничивает себя рассмотрением исключительно человеческих знаков.

Социолингвистика в качестве социосемиотики берет на себя роль «пограничной науки» в двух смыслах: как по той причине, что она служит границей между наукой о языке и гуманитарными и социаль-

ными науками, так и по той, что она конструируется в ходе постоянного «перехода границ» и «смешения» между «языками» и дисциплинами.

Keel sotsiaalses taastootmises: sotsiolingvistika ja sotsiosemiotika

Käesolev artikkel räägib sotsiolingvistika semiootilistest alustest. Artikkel alustab termini “sotsiolingvistika” määratlusest filosoof Adam Schaffi poolt ja keskendub itaalia semiootiku Rossi-Landi “kriitilise sotsiolingvistika” mõistele. Keele sotsiaalse dimensiooni alus peitub Rossi-Landi poolt “sotsiaalseks taastootmiseks” nimetatud fenomenis, mis hõlmab nii verbaalseid kui mitteverbaalseid märke. Saussure'i *Cours de linguistique générale*, aga ka tema Harvardi käsikirjade põhjal otsustades võib ta terminit *langue* just selles võtmes mõista.

Edasi üritatakse artiklis mõtestada Roland Barthes'i poolt üsna provokatiivselt defineeritud “semioloogiat” kui osa keeleteadusest (ja mitte vastupidi!) ning arendada sellest vaatepunktist lähtudes kommunikatsioonitootmise mõistet. Roman Jakobsoni 1960ndatest pärit artiklid võimaldavad meil sotsiosemiotiliselt (nagu seda praegu nimetatakse) käsitleda “orgaaniliste” märkide muundumist uut tüüpi märkideks, milles suhestuvad orgaaniline ja instrumentaalne. Sellest vaimust kantuna oleks sotsiolingvistika eesmärk olla ennekõike sotsiosemiotika, ilma et eeldataks kitsalt vaid inimestega tegelemist, kuivõrd semiootika privileegiks on see, et tegeletakse ka mitte-inimlike märkidega.

Sotsiosemiotiline lingvistika võtab endale “piirteaduse” rolli kahes mõttes: ühelt poolt kui piir täppisteaduste keele ja humanitaar- ning sotsiaalteaduste vahel, aga teiselt poolt moodustub sotsiolingvistika pideva “piiride ületamise” ja *keelte* ning teadusvaldkondade vahelise vastastikuse “segunemise” kaudu.