

LANGUAGE AS DISCOURSE: A RICOEURIAN REFLECTION ON THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE QUESTION IN STRUCTURAL LINGUISTICS

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Abstract

Language is discourse in as much as by its use, one communicates with another in diverse ways. An understanding of its social and ontological functions is realized in the articulation of speech as the use of language. This cognition follows the perspectives of ordinary language philosophy which is generally construed on the inter-animation of meanings among constituent words or parts of the sentence. This is at variance with structural linguistics' account. For descriptive success it considers only the form of language which linguistic elements inter-relate as in a system. Is language synonymous with its description alone or its communicative use by people? A phenomenological understanding of language underscores both and explains it as a synthesis of a dialectical process as is encapsulated in Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology. The critical, phenomenological and analytic methods are employed in this study. It is discovered that linguistic science adopted the descriptive principles of structuralism. Under its rubrics structural linguistics circumvented the semantic angle in the ever reoccurring but meaning-creative events of language whenever it is being put to use. A philosophy of language complements this objective side to the study of language. The studies further revealed that it was exigent for linguistic science to follow the principles of structuralism in seeking for a homogeneous and unified field as its object of study. Thus, a philosophy of language must anchor around the subject, the 'linguistical' being without whom there will be nothing to be said and explained at all whose existentiality straddles the historical, psychological and sociological conditions of being. Future studies on the human person in its relationship to language

and the world of realities must continue to exploit this philosophical perspective that linguistic science turned its back on.

Introduction

Language is exercised in various communicative functions: to *say* and to *say* about, to *mean* and to *refer* to an extra-linguistic reality. Interestingly, most of the disciplines in the social sciences and humanities such as philosophy, anthropology, linguistics, sociology, psychoanalysis, history, literature, etc run programmes that deeply anchor on language such that language is a household name in these fields of study. But in none of these fields of study do we find systematic philosophical explanation of the very nature, complex and diverse communicative functions of language. Most of them give a one-sided account of the phenomenon, thereby paying attention to only a part of what is logically a whole. It can be said that their proponents drew inspiration from the postulates of structuralism which common concern is for a unified descriptive theory of knowledge carried out in line with the objective principles of science. To realize this modern scientific methodology, structuralism preoccupied itself with structural arrangements among related units of a given state. As applied to linguistic science under the auspices of Ferdinand De Saussure, what is explained of language became a reversal of the relation between system and history, between the subject and the speech events which is his or her creative and recreated instances of the use of language.¹ Thus, structuralism reduces language phenomenon to logic of the necessity construed as a system of sign relations. In the first place, this paper exposes and examines philosophical [semantic] implications of structuralism in linguistic science. Then, it brings into a synthesis the merits of the axioms of structural linguistics and a reflection on the phenomenology of language. The paper argues that language is *discourse* in as much as by it, one accomplishes that existential act of speaking and writing, talking, hearing and reading and expressing the fact that one heard and understood, correctly or otherwise. Of course,

¹. Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*. Edited by Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 31 1

structural principle in linguistic science has its merits; it provides the form for the objective account of language which opposes itself to speech, the very fountain of language. This perspective has to be balanced in a dialectic that interprets the phenomenology of human speech as provided in ordinary language use philosophy, among others. This synthesis draws from hermeneutic phenomenology of the French, Paul Gustav Ricoeur (1913-2005). The concern in this paper is to explain how speech which is the actuation or manifestation of language is discourse.

Conceptual and Theoretical Review

The concept *structure* [Latin, *structura*] is “to pile” or “place together.” Figuratively, it means “arrangement” and “order.”² Hence, *structure* is synonymous with constituting a framework or system of internal relations among the linguistic elements as an autonomous field of study. Godfrey O. Ozumba in *Introduction to Philosophy of Language*, defines structuralism as a modern philosophical theory which holds that “there exists an underlying system or structure in every meaningful thought, expression, body of ideas, truth, language, etc.”³ In the *Dictionary of Philosophy*, Frolov explains that structuralism, a “scientific methodological trend” that arose in the beginning of the 20th century in reaction to “positivist evolutionism” had, as its task to reveal the structure of objects. It used the structural method of research produced by mathematics, physics and other natural sciences. Characteristically, he observed, structuralism focuses on “describing the actual state of the objects under investigation, to reveal their timeless properties and to establish relations between fact or elements of the system under investigation.”⁴ But how do proponents go about this Frolov further states that:

Departing from the set of facts observed initially, structuralism proceeds to reveal and to describe the inner

². William Collins, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/structuralism>

³. Godfrey O. Ozumba, *Introduction to Philosophy of Language*, (Ibadan: Hope Publication, 2004), 128

⁴. I. Frolov, ed., *Dictionary of Philosophy*, Second revised edition, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1984), 405

structure of the object (its hierarchy, and interrelations between elements at each level), and further on to create a theoretical model of the object.”⁵

Though he did not use the concept 'structure' himself, but 'system', it is Ferdinand de Saussure who formulated the principles of structural linguistics in his *Course on General Linguistics*. The book was published posthumously in 1915 from a transcription of his students' 1907 -1911 Lecture Notes, and some personal notes by the Swiss scholars, Charles Bally and Albert Séchehaye. According to Dosse, their intention was to “establish the arbitrariness of the sign” and to show that “language is a system of values established neither by content nor by experience but by pure difference”, opposition and identities.⁶ With the Russians, namely: Roman Jakobson, Karcevski and Trubetzkoy they came up with a set of common viewpoints which made reference to the foundation laid down by Saussure. They presented these at the International Conference of Linguists at The Hague in 1928.⁷ *This method of interpretation and analysis was therefore, applied in linguistic science, literature, and society and specifically in linguistics, sociology and anthropology, among others.*

It was Chomsky who developed a “comprehensive theory of the structure of language” that explains a child “mastery of the syntactic determinants of grammaticality.”⁸ Lyons defines a generative grammar as “set of rules which, operating upon a finite vocabulary of units, generates a set (finite or infinite) of syntagms (each syntagms being composed of a finite number of units) and thereby defines each syntagm to be well-

⁵. Frolov, ed., *Dictionary of Philosophy*, 405

⁶. Dose, Francois, *History of Structuralism: The Rising Sign*, 1945-1966 vol. 1, Translated by Deborah Glassman (Minneapolis, London: University of Minneapolis Press, 1997), 44 in https://monoskop.org/images/0/03/Dosse_FrancoisHistoryof_Structuralism_1_TheRising_Sign_1945-1966.pdf. Accessed: 04/04/2023 08:31:10 AM

⁷. Dose, *History of Structuralism*, 44

⁸. John Lyons, *Language and Linguistics An Introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 108

formed in the language that is characterized by the grammar.” By syntagm he means a “combinations of grammatical units(or, in phonology, of elements) which are not necessarily ordered sequentially.”⁹ Influenced by the rationalists, Chomsky espouses a mentalist theory of language in which the mind/body relation explains the specific “properties, structure and organization.”¹⁰ In *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* he acknowledges that reference to linguistic creativity help overcome the limitation of focusing on grammar of particular languages and to seek the universalizing regularities that govern all languages. By 'creativity' Chomsky understands that each language “provides the means for expressing indefinitely many thoughts and for reacting appropriately in an indefinite range of new situations.”¹¹

Language as Construed in Structuralism

In line with the principles of structuralism, language is being explained as a structure or system of internally related units. The only purpose for this abstract conceptualization is the convenience of its description. As applied to linguistics Saussure's idea on structuralism holds, according to Godfrey O. Ozumba, that “language taken in isolation from the context of concrete expression, and from the historical evolution of such forms of expression, constitute a self-regulating object of scientific enquiry and forms a system whose intrinsic arrangement lends itself to description.”¹² In his classical work, *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure defines, classifies and articulates the study of language [*langue*] as a system. To account for this, it was necessary to abstract a set of universal principle common to all language users:

If we could embrace the sum of word-images stored in the minds of all individuals, we could identify the social bond that constitutes language. It is a storehouse filled by the members of a given community through their active use of

⁹. Lyons, *Language and Linguistics*, 125

¹⁰. Chomsky, *Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin and Use*, 12- 13

¹¹. Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: THE M.I.T. PRESS, 6, <https://www.pdfdrive.com/aspects-of-the-theory-of-syntax-d184505987.html> Accessed: 3/21/23 10:29 AM

¹². Ozumba, *Introduction to Philosophy of Language*, 128

speaking, a grammatical system that has a potential existence in each brain, or, more specifically, in the brains of a group of individuals. For language is not complete in any speaker; it exists perfectly only within a collectivity.¹³

De Saussure goes on to oppose language to the human speech in general [*langage*] and treats it as suitable object of the linguistic science. This science requires a sphere of object which it can unify. This sphere cannot be found in speech, because in all its aspects it is “many-sided and heterogeneous” and; simultaneously straddles several areas, namely, the physical, physiological, and psychological and while it “belongs both to the individual and to society ... we cannot discover its unity.” He continues that on the contrary, language is “a self-contained whole and a principle of classification” so that given “first place among the facts of speech, we introduce a natural order into a mass that lends itself to no other classification.”¹⁴ Besides, it is possible to reduce linguistic signs (which constitutes language) to “conventional written symbols, whereas it would be impossible to provide detailed photographs of acts of speaking.”¹⁵ De Saussure states that:

...in language there are only differences without positive terms. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system.¹⁶

Saussure proceeds to describe *langue* in terms of differential conceptual values, namely, distinction between the *signifier* (*signifiant*), the sonorous sound-image and the signified (*signifié*), that is, the sign, say, the word “tree” synchrony and diachrony, etc all of which are expressed

^{13.} Ferdinand De Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 3rd edn., ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1915), 13-14 in <http://home.wlu.edu/~levys/courses/anth252f2006/saussure.pdf>. Accessed: 6/6/2022 9:04:20 PM

^{14.} De Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 9

^{15.} De Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 15

^{16.} De Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 120

within the limits of structure or system of **signs**. Thus, the language-system not only has a structure; it is itself the very structure in linguistic science. There are two conceptual levels of structure: the phonological structure and the syntactic structure. These operate at independent levels.¹⁷ The language system:

...presupposes the existence of a finite inventory of elements and finite vocabulary of (simple) units, together with set of rules (of perhaps several kinds) which interrelate the two levels of structure and tells us which combinations of units are sentences of the language- system and, by implication, which are not.¹⁸

The phonemes is the minimal contrastive unit of sound in a language. It forms the grammatical structure and is the smallest unit of grammatical analysis. It had given rise to an earlier postulate that “all the phenomena that people talked about under the heading of grammar could ultimately be broken” down into morphemes. Language is a system of sign relations but what the linguistic signs unite or signify is not a thing or a name, but a concept and a sound-image (signified) of that reality in question.

Semantic Implications in Construing Language as System

The conception, 'structural linguistics' refers to the linguistic science which descriptive paradigm is articulated according to the principles of structuralism. From the foregoing, it is necessary to ask at this point how structural linguistics' account of language is flawed and the implications are for a philosophy of language. The first implication is in taking intuition as its empirical datum. A major concern for which linguistic science falls short is how to empirically access its object. It takes the mind as repository of universal conventional values and disposition of individual speakers within a linguistic community. To access the mental manifestations of the speakers, linguistic science takes on *intuition* as its investigative object and claims that the speaker's intuition is an “infallible source of information” about the grammar of the speaker's

^{17.} John Lyons, *Language and Linguistics: An Introduction*, 61.

^{18.} Lyons, *Language and Linguistics*, 62.

language.”¹⁹ A speaker's intuition about his or her native or other language would be his or her internally generated grammatical rules for which he or she immediately understands correct and incorrect sentences, etc in that language. A speaker's intuition is evidence of his or her competence in that language. But intuition lacks and cannot produce the kind of verifiable 'evidence' that empirical analysis requires. Moreover, this would be insurmountable task for linguistic science given its circumscription field of study. That is why David Crystal argued that the “production of intuitions is a complex process in which the internally represented grammar must interact with a variety of other cognitive mechanisms including those sub-serving perception, motivation, attention, short term memory and perhaps a host of others.”²⁰ It is obviously difficult to access intuition as empirical datum since intuition is mental. The descriptive process of linguistic science would have to be intra-mental. By implication it will lose its claim to objectivity.

Besides, in its form of analysis one witnesses an ontological overthrow of the primacy of the subject and inter-subjectivity in communication and language/discourse as meaningful, intentional acts, which refer to things. These elements are of core value in philosophy of language and constitute the very essence and features attained in discourse. Given the epistemological implications in the above, namely, that the virtual system of sign relations, arbitrarily made to signify, mean and to refer to things Ricoeur thus, retorts:

How does an autonomous system of signs, postulated without speaking subject, enter into operations evolve towards new states, or lend itself to wage and history? Can a system exist anywhere bit in the act of speech? Is it anything other than a cross-section of a living operation? Is language anything more than a system that is potential but never completely actual, burdened by latent changes, apt for a subjective and inter-subjective history?²¹

^{19.} David Crystal, *Linguistics* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971), 104

^{20.} Crystal, *Linguistics*, 104

^{21.} Paul Ricoeur, “Structure and Hermeneutics”, *The Conflict of Interpretations, Essays in Hermeneutics*, 31

That is to say that it is the subject that takes up these instrumental signs and enbuilds them with signification and symbolic values to mean, to refer, and to signify things. While every sign relation is not language, there is never a language that is unconstituted by it. A phenomenology of language is not about the descriptive content of the linguistic science. It is rather about the inter-subjective intentional speech-acts actually used in such pervasive manner to attain meaningful communicative functions about us and the world that we are in.

Moreover, structuralism distinguishes between *synchrony*, the science of the simultaneous states of the system and *diachrony*, a science of changes or evolution. In doing this, Saussure subordinated the latter to the former, and presents synchronic linguistics as a “science of states in their systematic aspects.” The implication here, among others, is that the proponents of structural linguistics carefully avoided the historical, cultural and sociological issues of human relations and existentiality-evolution, perspectivity and contextuality, change and normativity, determinism and change, etc all that really define human subjectivity and gives it meaning.

Again, in linguistics it is question of “choice of syntax over semantics, “and subordination of the system of states (synchrony) to that of change (diachrony). In linguistics, the phonemes, morphemes, and lexemes relate to each other on differential and opposite values and as absolute terms. For instance, phonemes is concerned with the arbitrary relation of sound and conceptual meaning; morphemes, with syllables sub-linguistic units of words, and words of a language. Each of these operate at different levels that integrates into the higher form. In all none of each is used to mean, refer and signify things. Thus, the meaning, referential, and signifying values of proposition transcend their limit values. But by this segmentation structural linguistics misconstrues the phenomenon of speech, *parole*. As an ontological function, the articulation of speech acts goes beyond linguistic categorization. Each speech-act transcends linguistic elements all of which are taken as communicative signs

whenever one talks, writes, or speaks about things.²² By using the sentence, the speaker says something about extra linguistic realities to be construed as true or false. As has been noted already, Saussure did not conceive of the possibility of unifying the multi-faceted dimensions- the historical, psychological, sociological, etc. These aspects of the *parole* are involved in the production of meaningful communication utterances. The object is usually characterized in one or more of the diverse ways of qualities or attributes. The disparate side to the *parole* is diachronic. It cuts across the psychological, sociological, cultural and historical. These present too multiple elements that make the possibility of their unified into object of linguistic science most difficulty. Hence, speech does not qualify as a formal object of the linguistic science. Thirdly, in presupposing that “in any state of the system there are no absolute terms but only relations of mutual dependence”²³ and for which linguistic science chose syntax over semantics, linguistic science cannot explain how language becomes re-creative events of speech in human communication. Thus, for this choice of semiotic and syntax over the semantics, linguistic science as far as the philosophy of language is concerned is sterile; it lacks critical reflection that would have blended explanatory validity in order to circumvent its limitation. This reflection is crucial in a philosophical analysis of language as discourse, and speech-acts as meaning-creating events. Thus, without speech it is difficult to regard the formal rules of internal signs relation requisite in structural linguistics as the language phenomenon. Fourth, structuralism treats the collection of signs as a “closed and autonomous system of internal dependencies.” This does not explain much about how language is taken up to *say* and *say about* things meaningfully. The linguistic act of speaking is a transcendent act. The sentence is not itself a sign of language, though it is constituted of linguistic signs. The sentence is a basic significant totality of meaning communicated in discourse. The sentence is an existential phenomenon. It is, in a way, diachronic in nature. The constituent parts of the sentence can be analyzed into the lower distinctive and constitutive linguistic units: phoneme, morpheme,

²². Ricoeur, “Structure and Hermeneutics”, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 31

²³. Ricoeur, “Structure and Hermeneutics”, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 40, 80-84

semanteme which are defined by their internal and opposing relations. At the same time these lower units integrate upwards to constitute the sentence, complexes of sentence and function in a manner in ever indeterminate and unlimited creation of meaning. Therefore, for Ricoeur, structural linguistics is characterized as virtual, latent or merely potential; it says nothing about the subject and us interlocutor, intentionality, and about the world. But discourse is already a movement from virtual or potency to an eventual, act of reference to a world and a subject. The two axioms require dialectical synthesis of the form from the objective consideration of structural linguistics and eventual character of speech-acts.

Dialectics of the Semiotic and Semantic

Our reflection on the philosophical implications of the conclusions in structural linguistics as laid down by Ferdinand De Saussure draws from criticism by the French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur. We always communicate and interact within the ontological frame of space and time. This is realized the very moment that human speech is treated as a phenomenological actuation of language which use is essentially communication. Ricoeur informs us that the task of “phenomenology of speech” is to show that the “past of language” (that is, articulated diachronic elements) lives in the currency of human speech (the synchrony). The 'past of language' refers to the diachronic elements on the side of a language community. Much of what is said, spoken or written about, how and why they are stated as such arise from the cultural, historical and epistemic norm of the community. Thus, speech- events represent discourse, that is, the *present* moments of language, the recreated moments in the use of language are actualized.

The process of articulation is dialectical of the semiotic and the semantic aspects in the description of language. It is a dialectics which understands “the *system* occurs as an act and the structure as an event.”²⁴ The synthesis culminates, according to Ricoeur, in producing “the act of

²⁴ Don Ihde, “Editor's Introduction”, Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 9

speech in the very midst of language.”²⁵ He adds that: “when I speak, the signifying intention is in me, only certain void to be filled by words: this intention must then become full by realizing” it.”²⁶ Dialectical process requires dialectical moments. First, Ricoeur reinforces the antimony of philosophical linguistics and philosophical semantics as thesis and antithesis, respectively. Secondly, he reconstitutes the antimony so as to “balance the axiom of the closure of the universe of signs” and to give a new insight into a new model of intelligibility by giving attention to the primary function of language which is *to say something*, and in *saying something*, *to say about one* reality or other. The moment in the reflection on philosophy of language represents the “systematic and the historical, the potential and the innovative, operations of segmentation and operations of distribution.”²⁷ He places the synchrony on the side of the subject, diachrony on the side of objective science in order to show that “a synchrony of speech envelops the diachrony of language.”²⁸ Speech, thus received from the *system* an “aspect of regularity” but the diachronic datum of our linguisticity “is the innovation which arises from speech” each time one speaks or writes. This ushers us into the synthetic sphere of the “openness” or “opening” of language.²⁹ This opening is unto the vast onto-phenomenological world of beings waiting to said about; thus, a transcendental act attained by making use of the finite unit of signs, or limited number of alphabets in the language.³⁰ Brush speech aside, then the structuralist system of signs relations “remains potential as long as it is not actualized, realized, operated by someone who, at the same time, addresses himself to another.”³¹

^{25.} Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 10

^{26.} Don Ihde, “Editor's Introduction”, Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 9, 10-11

^{27.} Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 85-86

^{28.} Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 32-33

^{29.} Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor, Multidisciplinary Studies in the Creation of Meaning in Language*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 80, 87

^{30.} Ricocur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 84, 89

^{31.} Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 248

In a Kantian manner the *form* of categorical intuition is requisite only for its linguistic science's structuralist "organization... without reference to a thinking subject." as such it remains a "finite order or the finitude of order."³² As reconstituted in a dialectical synthesis, the structural linguistics' account must take up afresh the signifying intentions of subjects, "make way for a general theory of meaning, and revise them through a historical act of interpretation which would itself be inscribed within a continuous tradition." This dialectics is attainable, Ricoeur averred, because "the mind comprehends the mind, not only by the analogy of structure", but by recovering of the selves in being and continuing individual discourses which is animated in a living language.

Discourse as the Functioning of Language

In social parlance, *discourse* refers to a thematic field of verbal and written communication exchange. In this sense it would be referring to generic fields of human communications as well as the repertoire, in the relevant fields, of topics, rules of utterance formation, etc which define and organized "the *sayable*, the *narratable* and the verisimilar and ensure the division of (discursive) labour" of any language within a given society.³³ Speaking is the act by which language "moves beyond itself as signs toward its reference and toward what it encounters." By it, the speaker "overcomes the closure of the universe of Signs."³⁴ Oral discourse is realized or actualized in the present moment of speech", in a single instance of discourse whenever a subject takes up the linguistic tools or the system of sign which a language puts at his or her disposal to say, to say about something, and to *say* to somebody."³⁵ Ricoeur rhetorically asked "what is one doing, in effect, when one speaks?" The *illocutionary* act is to use a locution with a certain force. It is "an act

^{32.} Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 88

^{33.} "Discourse" *Anthro Base Dictionary of Anthropology*, A searchable Database of Anthropological Texts, URI: <http://www.anthrobase.com/Dic/eng/def/discourse.htm>

^{34.} "Discourse", *Litterature & Socologie, Sactocritique, Discourse Socialization*. URL <http://Sociocritique.mcgill.ca/theorie/discourse.htm>

^{35.} Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 85-86

performed in saying something.”³⁶ The *illocutionary* force implies *what* a subject does in saying. The one who speaks does several things at several levels such as making a statement, issuing a command, expressing a wish, making a request, expressing regret, asking and answer question, etc. According to Ricoeur, “it is language, as used and in action, which can take circumstances into account and have particular application.” The *locutionary* act also allows the speaker to anchor psychological elements in language belief, desire feelings, to mental act. The sentence *depicts* three propositional attitudes of man.³⁷ These are to assert, interrogate and command. These “reflect the three fundamental linguistic behaviour of man. In discourse, the sentence is used to effect the following communicative functions.

Discourse is as acts as structure is potency. The speech event is a present event, a transitory and a vanishing act that contrasts with the structural system which is simply potential. Here, semiotics is opposed to semantics; it is the system of signs against the system of the usage. The former is structure, institution, constraint and regulatory, the latter is operational and about exchange. The system of signs is anonymous, potential and synchronic, and closed. Discourse is act, intentional, eventual, allocution, choice or freedoms, historical. It is referential in character: referring to a world of extra-linguistic realities and predicating some values to it.³⁸

Ricoeur complements the theoretical axis of structural linguistics with semantic imports elicited from select linguistic theories within French tradition as a way to recovering a philosophy of language vis-a-vis structural linguistics. Gillaume's “Theory of Morphological System” reiterates that the article, parts of speech nouns, verbs, adverts, and adjective are categories of discourse. These according to Ricoeur “mark the endeavour of language to apprehend reality under its spatial and

^{36.} Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 80, 248

^{37.} Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, 81-82, 84, 87f

^{38.} Ricoeur, “Structure and Hermeneutics”, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 38-40, 52

temporal aspects.”³⁹ Its importance lies in showing that the taxonomic laws of formalism, as about science of elements and regulation (structural linguistics) convert to science of usage and operations (discourse as meaning creation). Conversely stated Ricoeur, notes “syntax enters discourse as act and in act.”⁴⁰ Émile Benveniste in *Problems in General Linguistics* showed that the structure of language is discourse (*discours*), since “there is nothing in language that was not first in speech (*Nihil est in lingua quod non prius fuerit in oratione*).”⁴¹ Ricoeur agrees with him and sums up that the *sentence* is: (i) the basic unit (specific form) of speech or discourse; (ii) not a sign but is constituted of series of signs (words); and (iii) unlike phonemes (“minimal sound unit) and morphemes (minimal units of grammar) the sentence itself is neither distributed nor integrated at other higher level.”⁴² The reality of language as used for communication reveals the constitutive elements: (i) subjectivity, for someone speaks or writes, (ii) intentionality, for someone had the intention in saying or writing *something*, (iii) reference, for someone says *something about something*, and (iv) inter-subjectivity, for someone says or writes something and another hears and reads and understands it.⁴³ Moreover, Chomsky's Generative Grammar elucidates that speech-acts converts from structure to event. The *performance* of a speaker in multiple generations of sentences from internalized finite structure of grammatical rules attested to creativity in language and this gives discourse the eventual characteristics.⁴⁴ Further still Ricoeur draws from Peter Strawson's *instance* of discourse to show that the generic and conceptual value of the sign function in the universal; the sign is used as vehicle to *say*.⁴⁵ The

^{39.} Ricoeur, “Structure and Hermeneutics”, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 80

^{40.} Ricoeur, “Structure and Hermeneutics”, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 80

^{41.} Ricoeur, “Structure, Word and Event” *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 90

^{42.} Emile Benveniste, *Wikipedia*, The Free Encyclopedia, URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title%C3%89mile_Benveniste&oldid=459523472, Retrieved, June, 2009

^{43.} Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 83-88

^{44.} Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 76-78

^{45.} Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 82-83

sense and reference distinction is a pervasive character of discourse. It “marks the fundamental difference between semantics and semiotics.” Ricoeur explained:

Only at the level of the sentence, taken as a whole, can what is said be distinguished from that of which one speaks. This difference is implied already in the simple equational definition, A-B, where A and B have different meanings. But if one says that the one equals the other, one says and the same time that they refer to the same thing.⁴⁶

Conclusion

In the phenomenon of the sentence, language passes outside itself, reference is the mark of the self-transcendence of language in the double direction in the transcendence power of language to *say* and to *say about the world*. Reference is dialectical instance of discourse: In Ricoeur's words, “to the extent that discourse refers to a situation, to an experience, to the extra-linguistics, it also refers to its own speaker by means of procedures that belong essentially to discourse and not to language.”⁴⁷

Philosophical explanations of the phenomenology of human speech posed both epistemological and methodological challenges for modern structural linguists. Language was treated formally in a manner amenable for its descriptive science. While the merit of their account is desirable for an objective study of language, it left whole subjective aspects for which language is required in the subjects. Since language is principally used as a vehicle of communication in saying/hearing and writing and reading, the basic unit of which is the sentence, language is discourse. The phenomenological task which Paul Ricoeur accomplished re-conceptualized language by finding an instrument “of thought that is capable of mastering the phenomenon of language” as an activity. This instrument would neither be the *structure* nor the event but one which “reflects the incessant conversion of structure into the event in discourse.” Only an intelligibility of a dialectical force between

⁴⁶. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 83,88

⁴⁷. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 107

structural linguistics and linguistics of discourse achieved it.

Ricoeur's allusion to linguistic and philosophical discourses on language in French and English traditions attested to the richer discourses he brought into the readings on the subject matter in question. Ricoeur's approach carried reflection onto existential phenomenology in order to consolidate the gains in science and reflective philosophy in modern semiotics and semantics. If the reflection were scientific, then its conclusion "would have to be limited to the science of human language." However, if the reflection were "philosophical in the critical and methodological sense, then the conclusions and the procedures would be but one instance in a generalized empirical method of discovery tending in the direction of a more adequate cognitional theory and transcendental method. If the reflection were philosophical in the foundational hermeneutic sense, the speech and language would be recognized as constitutive of the self and as complementary to the self as the subject that knows just as the desire to say is complementary to the desire to know. Assuredly, Ricoeur's philosophy is germane for a critical cognitional theory and desired for social transformation since ontological acts of saying, meaning and doing are interrelated and geared towards the world out there. It also means that we pay special attention to our language as it beams on reality and communicates us, taking into consideration cultural diffusion. By critical reflection the subject is freed from all forms of subjectivism and abstract forms of thinking. Thus, language is the house of being and ontological instrument in the hands of man to communicate things and to unravel the mysteries of human existence by which to express oneself of perceptions and understanding of the world attempt to proffer solutions its problems. Language is 'an opening' and 'letting in' of reality. If rightly studied, one understands its twists and communicative functions.

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