Critical Theory of Linguistics and Language

Colección Lingüística

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Critical Theory of Linguistics and Language
A Humanistic, Historical and Comparative Approach to Linguistic Ideologies

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For Rafael, Beatriz, Sara, Dalia, Ella, Bea and Pablo
Marichu, Manolo, Josef and Gertrud Simon, *in memoriam*

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Preliminary remarks

This book has been written throughout quite distant phases. Although I have revised the whole text in order to avoid repetitions as much as possible, some questions reappear in different parts and moments. This book is as historical as language and speakers themselves. You will notice it.

I have written this text according to the tradition of comprising under the masculine gender in grammar both male and female beings. I am myself a woman decidedly engaged in the defense of women rights in society and in science. But as a linguist I know that it is a general property of languages (at least of those I know or I have heard of) to use one term of semantic oppositions whatsoever either as the contrary of its antonym or as a superior category comprising both terms (technically as an *archi-lexeme*). This purely linguistic fact should not be opposed to because of feministic claims. Linguistic economy is not sexist. Only its sexist misuse is to be avoided.

Acknowledgements

My first acknowledgment goes to my two late teachers Eugenio Coseriu and Josef Simon, who guided my search for linguistic truth respectively from the linguistic and from the philosophical perspective. Both honored me with their friendship, and I would like to devote this book to their memory. Gertrud Simon also deserves a grateful mention for her friendship and help in so many things.

I would also like to thank my family: Rafael, my husband, with whom I have been all these years in a lively discussion about our respective professional fields, and to whom I owe my familiarity with social, political and legal issues, more or less directly connected with language. His patience was frequently challenged during the long years preparing this book, and his generosity made it simply possible. And I have to thank also our daughters Beatriz and Sara, who have filled my life with so many new dimensions of experience, emotion and knowledge, and who have inspired many of my linguistic and other observations.

Thanks also to my German colleagues and friends Tilman Borsche and Werner Stegmaier for many inspiring conversations in seminaries and private encounters, as well to those from the other side of science: Miguel Merchán, former director of the *Instituto de Neurociencias de Castilla y León,* who efficiently guided my readings about neural sciences, and the psychiatrist Vicente Molina, who added most valuable information from his working field.

The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation generously supported two longer research stays in Germany for bibliographical work and discussions with German colleagues.

Finally, I want to thank my colleague and friend Araceli López Serena for offering me to publish this book in the University of Sevilla Press she directs, as well as Cristina Ordóñez for having corrected my poor English.

Introduction

1.

This "Critical Theory of Linguistics" (from now on CTL) is neither a new "model of language" nor a new specific methodology for doing linguistics. It is a *reflection about the epistemological conditions under which linguistic work takes place*, and about the consequences of such conditions both for the *ontological validity of the results* of single linguistic work (i.e.: how good they are in matching and/or explaining what actually happens while speaking) and for the *ethic legitimacy* of its theoretical approaches and working methods (i.e., how *responsible* they are).

CTL thus moves in the domain of the "conditions of the possibility of linguistic knowledge". This explicitly Kantian formulation qualifies its subject as a mainly philosophical issue, but in the field of language studies the *underlying philosophy* is no discipline exterior to empirical work, but its *real, factual basis* and the *fundament of its coherence, legitimacy and relevance. It represents the "transcendental-logical framework" of the research,* to say it in a famous formulation of Jürgen Habermas. This book is the result of a long and sustained theoretical scrutiny of the *presuppositions and conditions* of linguistic work throughout history, and thus it is *both a philosophical and a linguistic treatise*. Distinguishing philosophy from linguistics surely makes sense in most contexts, but it does not reflect any ontological opposition. In the field where I am moving one has to keep both linguistic and philosophical.

CTL is no "new linguistics", but the continuation and renewal of the efforts of several single thinkers, throughout history, to introduce into grammatical or linguistic work the critical insights made possible by the most advanced ideas, past and present, about language, knowledge and science. In my opinion, within *Western linguistic tradition* the most decisive advances in this sense, and the most inspiring support for my own criticism, are those of Wilhelm von Humboldt, Hermann Paul and Eugenio Coseriu. CTL primarily attempts to update their achievements assisted by today's most suitable scientific, cultural, and philosophical tools. It formulates *updated criteria for qualifying valid linguistic research,* past and ongoing,

depending on its accordance to the critical level made possible by theoretical re-flections about language and its study until now.

Surprisingly, the most relevant advances in recent times concerning our sub-ject come less from linguistics itself than from natural sciences, from evolutionary biology and psychology and especially from neural sciences, which are becoming increasingly relevant for the self-reflection of science and linguistics. This issue will be broadly addressed in this paper.

Now, besides the empirical research in this latter field, some of its representa-tives also have developed interesting philosophical positions over the last decades, although they would almost deny that they are doing philosophy. Rather, they operate as designers of explanatory models about science itself. This is the case, for instance, of Von Glasersfeld's *radical constructivism*, or Maturana's and Varela's works about cognition and "*autopoiesis*". CTL's working field is to a certain extent the same as that of such designs, and it shares some of their premises and proposi-tions. However, it rejects their one-sided scientism as well as their widespread con-tempt for "philosophy" and "philosophers" and attributes it largely to ignorance of the achievements of critical philosophy and to a refusal to take into account the lat-ter's decisive contributions to the theoretical frame of sciences throughout history.

2.

At present, truly relevant philosophical and cultural novelties for CTL's work are quite scarce. A significant exception is the philosophical work on language theory by the late German scholar *Josef Simon*. I have commented on its implications for linguistics in several former publications.

In *linguistics* the last century has shown, above all, a proliferation of theoreti-cal models and single research objects, not always sustained by a sufficient meth-odological and theoretical criticism. Although much valuable work has been done in all fields of linguistic research in the last one and a half century, which has signifi-cantly contributed to enlarge and to improve our knowledge about languages and about language in general, we are all witnesses of true masses of irrelevant and na-ive studies, supported by simplifying ideologies or pure and simple fashion, which have caused considerable confusion in the linguistic scenario.

Since recent developments in linguistics and cultural sciences frequently lack the desirable historical and critical education and consciousness, a determined re-turn to older critical insights seems now advisable in order to *prevent falling back into already identified confusions in linguistic work*. This book is more interested in recovering the critical contributions of older thinkers, not always taken into

account, than in discussing the countless single proposals of many modern linguistic schools still relying on scarcely criticized traditional presuppositions and prejudices.

3.

CTL draws its ontological and ethical judgements from the point of view of "*humanism*", in the precise historical sense of that spiritual movement, mainly – but not only - developed in the Western tradition, which aims *to improve "humanity" as free rationality,* i.e., as the *responsible use of reason by each individual*.

This implies a critical attitude towards all those conditions and influences which prevent individuals from *thinking and acting according to their own responsibility and in a non-contradictory or non-arbitrary manner*. On the one hand, humanism works towards *individual freedom and coherence*, which according to Kant are the roots of *human dignity*[1], and on the other hand, it works against uncontrolled power and domination, manipulation, ignorance and avoidable damage and suffering[2]. With no doubt, language is one of the main determinations of the human. Therefore, its study is always involved, consciously or not, in the history of human efforts either to improve the human condition or to turn it back to obscurantism, underdevelopment and inhumanity. Linguistics is not immune to regressive temptations, and linguists within the academic world are not always safe from undue pressure, from authoritarian hierarchies and power relations, and from institutional or personal limitations of their "liberty of thought".

This is, so to speak, the purely "negative", critical function of humanism within human sciences. But again, consciously or not, whenever we face humanistic studies, we start from some *positive ideas about what a "human being" should actually be like*. And here we meet a remarkable historical "phase lag".

Current ways of imagining ourselves (for instance as the "subjects" of linguistic utterances or of linguistic research, or of knowledge in general) still rely, on a large extent, on *old metaphysics of subjectivity*, which also dominate social sciences like sociology or even psychology. The "subject of knowledge" is generally understood

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1. I. Kant, *Logik,* Vorwort.
2. In professional linguistic bibliography you will hardly find any mention of the kind of suffering grammar has provoked to countless generations of children and young people, forced to learn traditional grammatical categories and analyses which remained largely alien to their lives, interests and practical goals and hardly contributed to improve their expressive abilities. Eminent exceptions are the passionate arguments of Jakob Grimm and Fritz Mauthner against this habit of "torturing" the young minds with irrational demands lacking nearly any real scientific legitimation and with so scarce fruit.

as the absolute opposite of its "objects", and the latter as independent from the former. And in the case of language studies this is a strongly distorting view. We will analyze this problem in depth.

Parallel to this prejudice, often *exaggerated expectations related to biology* arise as a source for a better understanding of the "subject".

These attitudes have consolidated in what more or less appropriately has been labelled "idealism" and "materialism". Both should have been overcome since long with the aid of the advances of critical philosophy, but the kind of education scientists and humanists are mostly subjected to has to a large extent conditioned their ignorance.

Some old widespread, *pre-critical* approaches to the *relation between the subject, its objects and its own inner knowing machinery* are thus still present at the background of most human sciences, while a new kind of biological relativism tends to dominate the scene concerning the models of human cognition. Recent scientific research about the working of the human brain and nervous system throws useful and even indispensable results to correct many current, spontaneously biased representations about what we know and how we know it. But a conscious confrontation with the *history of critical philosophy* is also needed in order to correct too immediate projections of biology on the epistemology and to shape an *updated humanistic image of the human*.

When I refer to "critical philosophy" I mean the kind of self-reflection of philosophy which follows the path of Kant's three critics (of pure reason, of practical reason and of the judgement). Before Kant there were of course critical approaches to the diverse subject matters commonly comprised under the heading "philosophy", and Kant himself stresses his debt to them, especially to Hume. But he was aware that his own criticism sets a new basis for philosophy after him. Shortly after his "Critiques", Hegel gave a new and even more radical impulse to critical thinking with his dialectic philosophy, which offered a true *deconstruction of the whole of former metaphysics and logic*. In order to develop an updated critical theory of linguistics and language I consider it necessary to start from the arrival point of these two thinkers. It has not been easy to apply their extremely abstract reasoning to the much more concrete field of language study, but I believe this is at least a first step in this direction.

This is the reason why CTL's reflection does not start from the arrival point of most recent linguistics. Rather it is a *provisional last step* within a long *tradition of critical and sceptic thinking about language and grammar*, going back to the first attempts to understand human language since both the classical Greek culture and the early Indian grammarians. Since the middle of the 20th century this kind of criticism can easily be integrated into what certain German social scientists have called

"Ideologiekritik", ideological critique. Its goal is to uncover the many self-delusions triggered by the overall tendency of human (and not only human) beings to organize themselves in *stable and reliable systems of categories*, to retrace the own perceptions back to shared thinking and feeling structures ("ideologies"), and to reject whatever could put at risk such *stabilizations of the conscience*. This is the origin of most consecrated traditions, from religion and family roles to politics and science.

But throughout history single individuals have dared to put into question this kind of common certainties. These are the *sceptics.* In Europe a long and fruitful sceptic tradition counteracts with active reflection the presuppositions and implications of traditional ways of understanding the human world and human language and thinking. *Linguistic scepticism* has arisen at diverse phases of European culture with strong arguments against the naive belief in traditional grammatical categories and linguistic theories. But it has systematically been ignored by linguistics. This book decidedly and gratefully takes into account the contributions of the sceptic authors to the progress in critical insight into language, from the Greek and Roman sceptics like Pyrrho and Sextus Empiricus, over Francisco Sánchez "el escéptico", Michel de Montaigne and many others, till the radical contributions of Nietzsche, Mauthner, Simon (who himself would not have liked to be labelled a sceptic) and Antonio Machado in the specific field of linguistic reflection.

4.

CTL is always and necessarily an *individual* effort to *judge linguistic studies critically and historically*, and consequently *the "competence" to do it is also individual*. This is why I will begin presenting my own competence, as the subject and author of this work. This presentation is meant to allow an informed assessment of the theses of the book, which in no moment will hide its real condition of being the result of an individual reflection.

After graduating in Classical Philology at the University of Salamanca, I devoted my doctorate to a study of the history of case theories, done in the seventies at the Universities of Salamanca and Tübingen. This acquainted me both with the history of linguistic thought and practice in Europe since its very beginning and with European philosophy of language.

I also engaged in learning a variety of old and modern languages, mainly during my research stays in Tübingen, Bonn and Berlin, but also auto-didactically in Salamanca. I became a professor for Indo-European Linguistics in Salamanca, and since then I have cultivated nearly all variants of linguistic work: synchronic and diachronic, theoretical and applied, idiomatic and comparative. I have translated

into Spanish several thousands of pages mostly of German philosophy, but also from and into other languages and about other matters. I also have done occasionally simultaneous translation. Besides my activity as a professor for Indo-European linguistics I have worked on the philosophy of language and of science, Sanskrit philology and linguistics, theory of translation, comparative literature and cultural science, aesthetics and the relations between language and music. I have tried to keep myself updated on the philosophical advances about epistemology of linguistics, sociology, psychology and anthropology. And more recently, I have been concerned with neural sciences, with the aid of colleagues of the *Instituto de Neurociencias de Castilla y León.* These activities provide my own background for the kind of meta-linguistic approach I am proposing here. N.b.: It is important to clarify that "meta-linguistic" does not mean here "beyond language", but "beyond linguistics".

5.

As for the historical roots of CTL, firstly, it applies to linguistics *Humboldt's holistic approach* to language. Secondly, it revises the *epistemological, logical, ontological and ethical fundamentals of "valid linguistic work"*, starting from the achievements of the *critical philosophy* in Western tradition, above all Hume, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Mauthner, Simon, as well as from the insights provided by the *comparative* experience between the *European and Indian traditions of grammar and philosophy of language*. And thirdly, it takes into account *the critical progress within psychology and brain research, as well as within social and political theories*.

My selection of historical references in the *philosophy of language* might seem quite "personal". But, as a matter of fact, so are all selections of masters and spiritual authorities. It is true that most scholars move in this field within a certain, more or less widespread "canon", above all concerning the philosophy of the 20th century, comprising not only Wittgenstein, Husserl and Heidegger, but also the most famous figures of the so called "analytic philosophy of language". Nearly all of them are absent from this book. Yet the fact that I don't follow the main stream in the academic literature does not make my approach more "personal" or arbitrary than that of others. It simply reflects the position which has resulted from *my criticism on them*, developed through many published and unpublished studies throughout my life[3]. Instead of continuing the most recent opinion streams within academic philosophy of language, I have tried to *build a bridge between contemporary*

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3. I have included in the bibliographical references a selection of those publications of mine where I have developed in detail these criticisms.

linguistic work and the critical philosophy of language and linguistics made *possible* by Kant and Hegel and their followers.

6.

CTL intends to *uncover the metaphysical and pseudoscientific elements* contained in current "axioms" of Western grammatical and linguistic traditions, i.e., in the current "Western *linguistic or grammatical ideologies*". By "metaphysical" I mean, in accordance with Josef Simon, the *belief in the real existence of what our words refer to*. This is no "real definition", but a contrastive statement aiming to point directly to the *linguistic* aspect of our human way of constituting our "Lebensform", to say it in Husserl's terms, in contrast to dominant traditions of believing immediately in the ontological reality of our categories.

CTL consequently tries to apply to the *language of linguistics* what the most intelligent minds in philosophy, linguistics and psychology have highlighted about the true nature of "language" within the critical tradition. It thus commits itself *to a level of critical awareness about language which is not lower than it has become historically possible.*

According to CTL, and as already stated, linguistic work has to be *simultaneously "disciplinary" and "philosophical"*, because at the same time it has to question linguistic reality from its own theoretical approaches, and those approaches from the linguists' real experience. Thus, it has to work consciously within the "*hermeneutical circle*". But unlike most dominant currents within hermeneutics, starting with Gadamer himself, this does not imply any *inhibition of the judgement* about the *validity* of what takes place therein. Each scholar judging concrete theories has to work within his own *horizon*, and the only way of transcending its limits, which of course cannot be directly perceived, is to confront oneself with as many *alternative perspectives* as possible, thus bringing into conscience a certain *profile* of one's own position in contrast to others.

This also allows to assess theoretical positions as being more or less "progressive" o "regressive". CTL, as a humanistic approach, works with *values*. Its language includes not only the distinction between "true and false", but also, and intermingled with it, the distinction between "better and worse". Of course, none of these distinctions should be considered as independent of space, time and language, i.e., of human *history*.

CTL knows that it has to take into account the most recent results of "proper science" regarding relevant elements and features of the "linguistic" in experimental psychology and neural sciences (as far as non-specialists are able to understand

their language). Fortunately, at present specialists in this field are largely committed to the divulgation of their advances, and they provide really valuable information to interested people. Unhappily, their works often show some dependence on unconscious metaphysics and obsolete assumptions about human knowledge (as possibly different from human "cognition"). CTL takes thus a cautious critical attitude towards it.

7.

A main purpose of CTL is to work simultaneously in the realms of *empirical science, textual "hermeneutics" and philosophy*, but *avoiding any confusion* between these epistemological levels and perspectives. CTL works at the same time as linguistics and as meta-linguistics, but without confusing them.

CTL considers that the speculative elements which *are always involved* in linguistic theories have to fulfil the requisites of *valid philosophy*. Philosophy is "valid" when it addresses "conceptual buildings" of the past and of the present, wherever they may appear (in human sciences, in law and justice, in politics, in religions, in scientific divulgation, in aesthetics), and exerts towards them a *criticism taking into account the whole of critical progress in human history.* "Valid philosophy" is thus the opposite of "philosophical ideologies", and it proves to be an indispensable component of the personal competence for CTL.

In order to judge the "validity" of a philosophical approach, one has to bear in mind, firstly, the very fact that outside formal and natural sciences (i.e., in the field of culture), *words only "make sense" historically.* If a linguist wants to support his theoretical attitude on valid philosophy, he has to approach philosophical texts as historical and cultural products of individuals, and to try to grasp their relation to their historical and cultural context, in order to understand their semantics in the medium where it only becomes determined and intelligible. Shared words alone are not enough, even if one *feels* to understand them.

And secondly, this fact applies both to the vocabulary of past philosophies and to the *vocabulary of oneself here and now*. You cannot be aware of the real content, presuppositions and implications of your own words if you do not have some historical and critical overview of your own intellectual and social context and of your time.

Thus, CTL is consciously and decidedly bound to *historicism*. All judgements involved in CTL have to be understood as historical. Nevertheless, this does not imply any lessening of their objective value. CTL simply is aware of *the historical and thus changing nature of "objectivity"* itself.

8.

The way I have developed CTL tries to continue the work of the two theoreticians of language who in my opinion have done the most decisive work regarding self-consciousness in approaching language *as an object* of reflection and research in the 20th century: the linguist Eugenio Coseriu and the philosopher Josef Simon[4]. Unfortunately I have known about the impressive work of Fritz Mauthner too late as to fully introduce his criticism into this book. But the informed reader will notice that many of my formulations are strongly in accordance with his theses. Actually, I find it surprising that this lucid and even brilliant critic has been so ignored even by the two masters I refer to here.

Eugenio Coseriu's linguistic work is the most impressive example of how the *individuality* of the linguist, his experience with languages and literatures, his familiarity with philosophy, his broad and lucid criticism of the diverse theoretical approaches to language within present and past linguistics, his personal intelligence and the coherence of his purposes and goals are the real keys of successful and relevant linguistic research. Coseriu remains a paradigm both of personal competence, acquired through a nearly unlimited learning process (and a nearly miraculous memory), and of linguistic self-consciousness. His analytic and systematic genius resembling the Aristotelian one, his best achievements are therefore found in the *categorization* of many fields of research. But he did not understand them as "models" of linguistic reality, but as *tools for understanding*.

Josef Simon's books and articles on the philosophy of language since *Das Problem der Sprache bei Hegel* (1957), and above all his "*Philosophy of the Sign*" (Berlin 1989), which constitutes the most radical critical philosophy of language after Humboldt, are the main sources for the theoretical positions which characterize CTL.

Both thinkers taught at the University of Tübingen in the seventies, and I became their student. Coseriu greatly admired Simon, but he never tried to connect their approaches[5]. Simon develops a radical criticism of the usual analytical understanding of language, which is based on the metaphysical certainty that the latter can be handled in the same way as every other "object" of observation and analysis. Simon's criticism represents a severe argument against the *phenomenological*

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4. Of course, I am fully aware that this selection is "subjective". I could have also included here philosophers such as the second Wittgenstein, Bruno Liebrucks and many others, not to mention linguists who over the two last centuries have contributed to a truly better understanding of language. Taking Coseriu and Simon as the two most significant sources of inspiration for CTL is both an individual decision of mine and a first characterization of the approach to linguistic criticism I am proposing in this book.

5. I have devoted an article to the personal and intellectual relation between both (A. Agud 2003).

support of analytic linguistics, and this concerns most current linguistics as well as Coseriu's much more self-conscious approach to it.

Trying to conciliate the apparently opposite approaches of these outstanding scholars to the study of language would be the kind of bridge between philosophy and linguistics which could redeem the latter from two justified reproaches: that of ignoring its own epistemological status and that of naively building conceptual constructions without due self-criticism. An updated linguistics has to face explicitly the sceptic argument and justify its own scientific claims from a new and *more complex historical and philosophical conscience*[6]. This undertaking is one of my main goals with this "Critical Theory of Linguistics". It requires going deep into the relations between Humboldt's experience and sensibility for language and Hegel's dialectic logic.

9.

The present approach shares with the "Critical Linguistics" of Fowler a.o. the interest in introducing into linguistic theory a critical consciousness of the elements of language which may condition knowledge and theoretical attitudes. But, unlike them, it does not focus mainly on the ideological elements of alien discourses (of the "object language"), but on the discourse of linguistics itself. This is the reason why it is a critical theory *of linguistics*.

Such a theory addresses *the "language of linguistics" as part of the cultural Western history*. It is thus a *cultural study*. But it does not presuppose any definite concept of culture. Rather it tries to shape a *contemporary responsible notion of culture*, among other things, through explicit criticism on modern "cultural studies". "Culture" is not considered here as the system of beliefs and habits of any community whatsoever, but as the *progressive overcoming of inherited beliefs and habits within them*, in the sense of *improved humanity*. Thus "culture" is bound to an evaluation of the degree of humanity developed by a community, as the contrary of inhumanity. Inhuman, cruel and despotic forms of personal or common behavior are considered here as cultural regressions. Within linguistics a quite common form of cultural regression happens whenever a linguistic theory tries to ignore or to deny the individuality of speaking, or whenever a certain perspective on language is seen as the only valid one.

CTL speaks a *Western language*. It is theory and criticism "from inside", and it denies the possibility of assuming any position "outside" language when

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6. A. Agud, "Coseriu y la filosofía".

speaking about it. But the insights developed here are also largely the result of comparative linguistic and cultural work on the European and the Indian traditions, which has enabled me to approach the Western linguistic ideologies also from the point of view of an alternative tradition. This is the only kind of "exteriority" a linguist may reach.

10.

Let me now explain the general plan of this book. As it is based on the starting conviction that *words and utterances only make sense in factual speech in each case*, a systematic, unhistorical presentation of an own theoretical position would contradict this starting point. Nonetheless the effort of building a systematic presentation was needed in order to *create in each case suitable semantic profiles of the ideas*, that is, in order to reach some clearness and distinctiveness of the own proposals through the detailed discussion of *alternative* approaches.

All of what is said here is historical and makes sense in its historical and cultural context. Outside it, many utterances will surely seem unacceptable or even hardly intelligible. But this is how language works, both as a research object and as the tool of thinking about it. *No absolute semantic value can be aimed here*. At most one can, and has to try, to attain some agreement and recognition from equally historically sensitive and critical readers.

The first part formulates some crucial problems with the epistemology of linguistics in general.

The second part is an effort to present the main features of what I have decided to call "Critical Theory of Linguistics" in the most systematic possible manner. The system is not very conventional, but it includes traditional headings like epistemology, ethics, logic and ontology.

Parts III-VIII deal with specific aspects and problems concerning linguistics which I have identified and experienced throughout my intellectual biography. There is no "system" in here, but a concatenation of subjects which I have successively acknowledged as important for an updated theoretical reflection about language and its study.

The role of history in the meaning of theoretical utterances is developed in Part III. Chapter 3.3. presents a quite unconventional overview of the historical and ideological context of modern linguistics, and it draws some kind of a "negative picture" of this history, since it is mainly concerned with the currents of theoretical thinking which were *not* incorporated into linguistics. I wanted to stress the ignorance or indifference of language theoreticians towards spiritual movements

which played an important role in recent Western cultural history, but were hardly taken into account by modern linguistics. This fact contributed to a striking lack of discussions about those subject matters and conditioned a certain intellectual isolation of modern linguistics within our culture.

The new insights developed within neural sciences on the working of the brain and the nervous system, and their consequences for language understanding, have got a lengthy treatment in Part IV.

Part V introduces into the CTL the *aesthetic* perspective as a necessary correction to the usual neglect of the *materiality* of human knowledge and language in linguistics, even in the recent research of the "embodiment" of language.

Part VI is concerned with the modern research of the role of *emotions* in language and knowledge and with the kind of epistemic confusions I have found in this emotion research.

Part VII suggests a possibility of examining the "character" of the national tongues as an own "linguistic style".

And part VIII tries to confront the positiveness of language with its *negations*, with the absence of language, the role of the unsaid, the negativity of meaning, the unconscious and the non-verbalized.

I have to admit a personal inclination towards negative judgements, based on the evidence that positive notions only get an intelligible profile as long as they are contrasted with their opposites and become thus "concrete negations". Despite this real and objective reason for stressing negation and critique, I am afraid that it could have conditioned an insufficient appraisal of many excellent contributions to language understanding within modern linguistics, something I regret and for which I would like to apologize.

11.

The formulations in this work are mostly written in the same prose style which is the brand mark of "scientific prose". They hardly could avoid the smell of metaphysics always linked to this style, dominated by impersonal sentences and by the "non-person" (the third singular or plural) as the subject of statements, which thus are meant to *refer objectively to reality*. This usual grammar of the academic prose makes such statements *seem* independent of the one who makes them. The writer, his personality, his motivations and even his semantics thus fade away behind this presumed objective, impersonal reference, and this makes his discourse seem to be an immediate expression of something true: "black on white". It is extremely difficult to avoid this structural connotation of the scientific prose. "We are

forced to speak the language of metaphysics because we have no other", wrote Josef Simon in his "Philosophy of the Sign"[7].

As it will be shown later, this fact is rooted in the general tendency of human beings to stabilize their environment and themselves by fixing in the "substantive modality" ideas and categorizations of reality. Then we behave within the latter relying on our "names" and "nouns" for its presumed parts. Yet our own language makes some strategies available to escape this powerful though unconscious conditioning of our thinking.

A first strategy is to re-introduce the first person into the statements, thus retracing them back to the subject formulating them. This strategy compensates the metaphysical habit of taking written utterances as subject-independent and stresses their subjective root, i.e., the very fact that they are always *signals of an individual* who tries both to shape his own ideas and to make himself understandable and acceptable to his addressees. It thus relativizes at a purely formal, grammatical level the metaphysical opposition between subject and object, something undesirable in natural sciences but absolutely necessary in the human, hermeneutical ones.

A second strategy consists in "re-verbalizing" the nominal or nominalized designations, in turning back to the perception of reality as a flow, and of its researcher as a historical, ever changing, individual. The "verbal modality" relocates the content of the own statements in time and refers them to the individual making them, also on a purely grammatical level. For instance, in this work you will usually meet the word "speaking" instead of "language". A strong argument against the prevalence of the nominal modality in approaching language study is found in Fritz Mauthners *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*[8].

I have mostly resorted to these strategies in order to counteract metaphysical connotations in my writing. This book is conceived as a *personal contribution to the reflection of its readers concerning language and speaking*. But this is also the true condition of the usual writings of most linguists and philosophers, merely hidden behind ordinary grammar. *Nobody has a privileged cognitive access to reality itself.* We only transcend the circle of our individual subjectivity as long as we remain conscious of the many individual factors conditioning our thinking and speaking, and this consciousness can only become developed through *intercourse and discussion* with *other subjects* and with a deep historical and comparative education. It is individual consciousness, yet the single individuality of each linguist becomes enriched through the lively discussions with others, through contrasting the own horizon of comprehension with that of others. In any case, I think it is important to express this individuality of the own contents through an appropriate grammar.

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7. Josef Simon, *Philosophie des Zeichens* p. 5.
8. F. Mauthner 1901 p. 16.

12.

This book might sound quite abstract. Although, in certain cases, I have included concrete examples to make theoretical, abstract statements easier to understand, I have mostly remained within a speculative level. I surely could have done more in order to provide more concrete information. However, I consider it was not so necessary, as it would have increased the amount of text significantly. I have been mainly interested in *examining the theoretical coherence of alien proposals and in developing a consistent own reasoning.* This is more the "philosophical style" than the linguistic habit. Other publications of mine which are more abundantly illustrated with concrete examples are referenced in the bibliography.

As I have formulated within the text, CTL is no real invention of mine, since it merely signalizes a real quality of linguistic work wherever it is done with due awareness of the influence of historical traditions, the individual's biography and institutional habits of "speaking about speaking" on the linguist's own working. This presentation of CTL is *my personal attempt to develop the most complete possible overview of the factors and elements of such an awareness at this historical phase of Western linguistics.* It is of course conditioned by my experiences in life, by my masters and colleagues, by my past efforts and writings, by my readings and by my lack of them… exactly like every other work in human sciences. Only I believe that, in order to avoid the usual delusions suggested both by the scientific prose and by language itself in its ordinary working, it was important to signalize explicitly the personal component of every effort of going beyond these delusions and to approach language the only really possible way: from inside, from beyond the separation of subject and object, from the language's factuality, historicity and dependence on the individuality of whoever begins to speak.

Chapter 1
On the Epistemology of Linguistics

1. The constitution of the object of "linguistic science"

1.1. Science as a "well-made language"

"Language" *is not the name for anything definable or determinable,* but just a *word* of the common vocabulary of some historical languages, and thus in itself semantically undetermined: it is no part of any "strictly specified language".

According to the current theory of science, the object of a true "science of language" ought to be language as a given phenomenon, and just as it is given, without any previous conceptual restriction. Linguistic science should be a "description" of that object, based only on empirical evidence, consisting in experimental analyses, and structured according to mathematical logics. It also ought to make predictions possible.

These requisites of scientific research are coupled with restrictions of the language of any science. Science needs an own reliable language and gets it through such restrictions. But since the object of linguistics has to be *language without any previous restriction,* linguistics as a "scientific language" is *unable to embrace* such an object.

Language is to some extent of the same nature as science itself: they both formulate knowledge (whatever "knowledge" may mean). But it is "larger" than science. Sciences are simply "well-made languages", in Condillac's famous formulation. Their consistency depends on both *semantic and syntactic restrictions,* undertaken as means of avoiding the semantic openness and indeterminacy, flexibility, ambiguity and "self-reference" of natural language. Linguistics *as a science* thus ought to avoid in itself something which is essential to the language it studies. *There is an epistemological incompatibility between the language of science and the language which ought to be the object of a science.*

1.2. Restrictive decisions on the "metaphysical" level

This epistemological conflict affects the constitution of the object of linguistics as well as any purpose of building a "science of language". This conflict has been faced with diverse conceptual restrictions of the object throughout the history of linguistics. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, this object no longer had to be "language" in general, but rather some "well determined part or portion" of it, namely its supposed internal and shared "system". The latter is usually conceived as a structure of properties of a singular tongue or as a set of algorithms for its production, which in its turn is supposed to map the processes taking place within the physiological structures of the "mind" or the "brain".

The selection of certain parts or properties of "language", and the exclusion of the rest, in order to obtain a *suitable object for a science* of language, is the result of a number of decisions which cannot be paralleled with any analytical method of current sciences in order to isolate observable and measurable objects whatsoever. Empirical and experimental sciences define their partial objects through methods which are also scientific, not "pre-scientific" nor "metaphysical". If a physicist has to work on some aspect of matter or energy, he is forced to determine this "aspect" through valid procedures and techniques of detection and measurement. He cannot decide by himself, previously to any empirical research, to attribute a "relevant inner structure" and "other irrelevant properties" to the observable facts or things; he is no longer allowed to discard any real property of its research field only because he has previously decided that it is unimportant. Some remarkable scientific discoveries began when aspects or elements formerly discarded as irrelevant were taken into account.

Often linguists, aiming to retain only what *they* consider to be substantial or essential, propose to discard for instance "actual speech", "individual variants", "semantics", "cognitive contents", or the "history of a language" from their concept of "proper language". In doing so, they approach language from purely metaphysical distinctions like "substance and accident" or "essence and appearance". Their decision is not supported by any empirical or experimental evidence: "linguistics of the system", "linguistics of pragmatics" or "linguistics of discourse" are merely the result of *alternative pre-scientific decisions*.

Common assumptions among linguists, such as the idea that when speaking we "use" or "apply" some "virtual structures or algorithms" which exist out there, irrespective of whether they are used or applied, are pre-scientific *ideologies*. They are usually taken as a starting point in order to build a "model". But the following task of actually building this model cannot be fulfilled as a scientific sequence of observations, measurements and formulations of results. It has to be a sequence

of further pre-scientific intuitions, for instance, that language *really consists of* "sentences", "utterances", "texts", "discourses", "chains of words", or "abstract connective structures" secondarily filled with words, lexemes, semantemes or phonic units which map semantic ones, etc.

1.3. "Conceptual metaphors" in linguistics

The models of language built by linguists over the 19th and 20th centuries, in order to make empirical scientific approaches possible, are all made from words of the common vocabulary: terms like "nouns", "verbs", "sounds", "sentences", "subjects", "predicates", "meanings", "governments", "dependencies", "structures", "texts", "discourses", etc. Such words are now commonly seen as part of a technical field, that of "grammar" or "linguistics". However, all these words are metaphors, adopted in the course of history to make plausible certain representations or categorizations of the reality of language in each historical moment.

Let us look briefly, for instance, at one of them. A quite well established "grammatical category" like "noun" (the modern heir of the Greek ὄνομα) remains just a metaphor within current linguistic theory. A grammatical "noun" is not really a "name", which was the meaning of ὄνομα and its cognates through the Indo-European languages attesting this form. The use of a word to identify or indicate a "thing or fact" is logically and practically, thus really, not the same thing as to call me *Ana* or to call the homeland of Iranians "*Airyana Vaeja*". Nor is it the naming of any underlying mental thing, be it an ontological "sub-stance" or "essence" or "a concept". We usually use nouns (substantives) to identify things or facts *vaguely*, with the subsequent effect that these things or facts identified by our nouns are classified through them under "categories" ("a chair", "a person"). Orientation in life largely depends on such more or less unconscious categorizations. This function of nouns has nothing to do with that of calling persons by their names, although we usually believe to be simply "calling things by their names". The term "noun" in linguistics is thus a "metaphor" that leads to the error of identifying functions which are diverse: naming something with a word turns the utterance from *meaning* something singular and concrete (which is the purpose) into *actually stating* something general. Calling a person by his proper name does not subsume this person under any concept and it is thus an entirely different "speech act".

1.4. Meaning

Now, what kind of *fact* is really "to designate, identify, or indicate, a thing through a word", or "through a word designating in its turn a 'concept' of that thing", in "real life" as well as in science?

Despite the efforts of a wide range of semantic theories within linguistics, none of them could succeed in developing any truly reliable approach to the "meaning relation" between the words and "their designated objects". Because if linguistics attempts to be "scientific", it has to move within a field *in which this relation is already in force*, and its successful development has to be *presupposed* when asking and answering any question whatsoever, including the question about the "meaning of meaning".

The *factual* relation between human language and "real world", "facts" or "objects", whatever this relation may be like, is previous to the constitution of any scientific object, including the linguistic ones. Reflecting on this relation from inside a science would be like reflecting on the "concept of the human" or "consciousness" from inside any science (actually it is the same reflection). Such a reflection belongs to what Kant called "the previous metaphysical fundamentals of science"[9], and it is not scientific but philosophical, as it will be explained below.

"Semantic theories" over the 19th and 20th centuries thus prove to be efforts to tackle *a philosophical problem with un-philosophical tools*. The "meaning relation", whatever it may be, is not part of "empirical reality". This term is *a historical "verbalization" within a certain metaphysical habit of speaking about speaking*, that of the Western cultural tradition. Sciences have to maintain a "metaphysical" dimension in the sense of "*believing in the reality of the meanings of their words*"[10], as long as they play in the frame of a certain paradigm, but a critical theory of linguistics cannot allow itself to do so.

Although language was not "designed" to "speak about itself", through language mankind has proved to become able to speak about its own speaking, and also to verbalize feelings, perceptions and ideas concerning its own speaking condition. In different moments and contexts different people have become aware of singular aspects or moments of their own speaking and have given them "names", in the Indo-European context ordinarily through grammatical "nouns" or "substantives" applied more or less metaphorically. "*Grammar*" itself goes back to the Old Greek verb γραφεῖν, which originally meant "to scratch". The old nominalization*-*graph-man* > γραμμα *"scratching"* was built to designate "letters", and the τέχνη

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9. I. Kant, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft,* 1786.
10. J. Simon, in private conversations.

γραμματική was the "skill with letters", which, with increasing disciplinary development, evolved into the idea of the rules governing what is regular (i.e., "rule governed") in speaking.

The constant use of metaphors as "names" of *supposed* "linguistic things or facts", and their further linguistic shaping through derivation suffixes and the like, have contributed to conceal their metaphorical nature and to endow them with a "scientific" appearance. But they do not become *scientific* concepts only because grammarians or linguists *believe or feel* they are such.

A word or formula stands for a scientific concept, if and only if it is definable in terms of a given scientific language, i.e., if empirical and inter-subjectively verified evidence supports the assumption that it is part of a conceptual building which maps reality, all of whose pieces and relations are in turn *well defined within that same science*. Most modern scientific concepts actually no longer have any common linguistic "name". Instead, they are the contents of formulas and equations which are understood by every scientist in the same way. This is not the result of inter-subjective explanations or consensuses about what everyone "means", but it is assumed as a matter of fact ("presupposed"), because in scientific work everyone uses them "pragmatically" in the same form or at least in compatible forms and situations.

In linguistics, however, you have to explain every word you use as a term of your theory, i.e., of *your individual vocabulary*, because you cannot expect others to understand them as you do. This is a "matter of fact", and it qualifies linguistics as something different from "science". Different people do understand "linguistic" words in different ways, and "noun" does not mean the same when used in a traditional Western grammar, in a generative grammar, in Tesnière's structural syntax or in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.

In linguistics, like "in real life", one and the same word does not remain one and the same piece of the speech of different speakers. This fact is not noticed in untroubled ordinary speech, but whenever language becomes a problem (related to communication, understanding, thinking, cooperation, etc...), it becomes evident that the use of common words in no way guarantees identity of meaning, reference or expressive purpose. And language becomes an actual problem very often in practical life. Some harsh wars in human history have been raised merely by different understandings of the same words.

The identity of the "meaning" of the terms designating "objects" is an absolute previous requisite for a discipline to be considered a science. This is why sciences increasingly avoid language in the usual sense of the word. Their propositions and utterances are mostly artificial and "strictly specified" formulas or formal models.

1.5. The role of philosophy

Unlike sciences, "philosophy" does not claim to map any part or aspect of "reality". It is only concerned with "thinking itself" and it does not focus on *describing* more or less feasible features of "human beings", not even of "human thinking" (or "cognition"). It consists of a *subjective self-reflection of human thinking on its own possibilities, chances and limits*.

Of course, this is not a timeless definition of "philosophy", a term that has referred to very diverse intellectual efforts and achievements along Western history, and which is also applied to analogous achievements in some oriental cultures. It is my own "contrastive characterization" of contemporary "philosophy" as an academic "discipline", in contrast to other possible and even current understandings of the term. It stresses the fact that philosophy is neither science nor any kind of superior perspective on the subject matters of science.

Philosophy – let me propose a formula to make clear *what I mean* when labelling something as "philosophical" – is *critical discourse about other discourses, in a language which forbids itself restrictions of any kind.* It is thus a *verbal reflection on alien or own verbalizations, both scientific and "colloquial", which are based on conscious or unconscious linguistic restrictions.* In sciences such restrictions are undertaken in order to guarantee precise and unequivocal reference to objects in (their) reality. In colloquial speech they are the result of acting (and speaking) according to *current cultural patterns.*

Unlike sciences, *philosophy refuses "definitions" as a tool for making concepts clear.* Understanding, if any, is in philosophy *the result of a diffuse "communication" among people agreeing not to restrict their vocabulary to any science or culture whatsoever.* This is the only way to *become aware of current scientific and cultural limitations* in each case and to overcome them through reflection on their presuppositions and implications. And of course, such a reflection *may fail.* It may fall back into unconscious restrictions. Only the utmost attention, a wide historical education and a good capability of insight can prevent such failure, and only to a certain extent. As J. Simon says, the degree of success of critical reflection "has to show itself" in communication and discussion over time.

Philosophy is criticism of established cultures and sciences *with reference to the "whole" of human life and consciousness*, *as far as* that "whole" may be guessed *individually* in each case. But the "whole" is only a *negative concept*. It is not the name of any ultimate or most general object. It is only a way of pointing to the "limit" or "boundary" of every conscious or unconscious restriction of reflection in each case, whether individual, cultural or scientific. Philosophy thus refuses to attribute an absolute truth-value to any restricted (disciplinary or colloquial) discourse. It

makes them all "relative to other things", and it allows people to go in each case beyond the scope of each single perspective of reality and of ourselves.

Philosophy in this almost critical sense always works, "in each case", as a concrete effort to answer contemporary questions. It does not develop conceptual constructions beyond spatial and historical circumstances: it no longer does so. It only concerns itself with problems which *arise because of more or less suddenly noticed limitations of consciousness*.

Philosophical discourse does not substitute the limited scopes of disciplinary or colloquial discourses by a "better knowledge of something". Philosophy, in the sense I understand it here, is not directly concerned with positive contents of knowledge. Academic philosophers are actually often concerned with these contents, but their professional competence does not guarantee they are right, and in wide domains of contemporary literature they have become quite discredited. The critical discourse of philosophy is only able to indicate the "limits" of current discourses, as they are perceived by singular thinkers, and it *opens the scope for further or wider horizons of comprehension.*

The role of philosophy regarding sciences, if any, would be *to signalize the particularity of their perspectives on reality*. But as the latter are obvious, "philosophy of science" is just an optional entertainment. Sciences do not really need philosophy to become "good" or "adequate", and scientists do not need it to become better scientists. But, in fact, theoretical insight (in the broadest sense of the word) allows scientists to achieve a more lucid and realistic perspective about their own work. A good example of this is Erich Kandel's scientific and divulgation work in the domain of neural sciences.

Unlike proper sciences, the so called "human sciences" *certainly need philosophy*, but not in order to become "better sciences". They need it to *remain consequently "non-scientific"*. Philosophical reflection prevents "human sciences" from confusing their relation with their "objects" with that of "proper sciences". It does so through the criticism of the particular object constitution in academic activities such as historiography, philology, linguistics, sociology, psychology, communication "sciences", cultural "sciences", etc.

Philosophical reflection works in a field that is previous to that constitution and asks for the latter's *legitimacy*. Its commitment to refuse any restriction allows philosophy to question the relationship between particular object constitutions and "the (negative) whole" of human reality, which is the "goal" human sciences focus on. *This goal is no longer an object at all. It is the criterion according to which critical humanists may improve human "sciences" and thus humanity itself.*

Human "scientists" may do so, but they often do not, because they lack the required philosophical education. They thus become worse humanists. But they may

remain valid scientists, as long as they do proper science "within" human sciences (statistics, phonetic laws, dating, locating, etc.), which is not the same as doing such *human* sciences, which are always *interpretation of texts*.

2. Real language and the object of linguistics: language and grammar

2.1. The meaning of *"linguistic"* and *"language"*

The usual procedure for obtaining a plausible object for a linguistic science has been to discard the full complexity attributed to language in general and to *construct* structured "linguistic objects", such as "*la langue*" or "the linguistic competence", in order to analyze them in isolation (*in vitro* or *in silico*). Commonly these objects are not tested with existent texts but with "examples" designed for that purpose (and, in fact, curiously alien to real life; s. Agud 1988). This has seemed legitimate to most linguists. In the last decades the feeling of the limited productivity of researching such "objects" has led many a linguist to devote himself to realms supposedly "closer to life": pragmatic linguistics, "applied" linguistics, discourse analysis, language teaching for foreigners, etc.

Yet nothing can be properly termed "linguistic" *if you cannot prove it to be a true part of "language" in both an unrestricted and a well identifiable sense*. For example: the sounds of language are supposed to be partly a merely physical, acoustic phenomenon, and partly "linguistic", but how could a real, ontological difference between both considerations be explained in a scientific way? When experimental psychologists put single linguistic sounds on a screen in front of experiment subjects and expect the latter to react in one or the other way, can they be sure to be dealing with something "linguistic"?

In order to determine validly if something is or is not "linguistic", we ought to have a reliable concept of *what language is*. But, as I have stated above, "language" is just a *word*, a historical product of some languages, absent in other languages as well as in other phases of the languages which have it now. The word "language" was not created to identify an object of a science. It arose within a cultural and idiomatic tradition as most words arise: as a *signal for orientation within a certain context*.

It thus cannot be presupposed that it is the name of a definable concept, a scientific concept or a portion of reality. It cannot even be assumed to be the "name" of something. It is part of the speech of a certain culture, as are God, freedom, bliss, democracy, yes, good bye, etc. *Nothing allows us to assign "objective reality" (which is the realm of scientific objects) to things, facts or realities corresponding to each of our*

words[11]. When Hindus speak about "*samsāra*", we assume that they are confused because *samsāra* does not exist. But for them it is us who are confused because we ignore *samsāra*.

2.2. The "real grammar"

A long tradition of studying grammar has yielded the *belief* that grammar *is the real structure of a real thing called "language"*.

Such a tradition is the habit of speaking in a certain way. A long tradition of speaking about speaking among us has yielded the idea of an object which is no longer called "speaking", but "language"[12]. This is part of a general tendency of our Indo-European languages, which leads us to name with a "noun" all we believe in, be it God, love, knowledge or language. "Language" is a historically conditioned point of arrival of a certain way of speaking about speaking within a certain culture.

And if there can be no empirical evidence at all about the ontological reality of the semantic content of any traditional word of common language, *neither "language" nor parts of it can be assigned the property of real existence*. "Sentences", "prepositions", "grammars" and "discourses" cannot claim to be more real and objective things than "language", "linguistic competence", "pure reason" or "mind".

2.3. The ontology of "speaking" and its effect on the language of linguistics

"Human beings" (also a word of the Western tradition, in English no longer a single word like Latin *homo* or German *Mensch*) do "speak". But does the verb "to speak" properly designate what we do while "speaking"? This word evokes already a highly mediated cultural interpretation of what really happens when people "speak".

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11. Fritz Mauthner has broadly and convincingly developed this insight in his "Beiträge zur Kritik der Sprache".

12. Again Fritz Mauthner writes very lucidly: "Sprachvermögen" oder "die Gabe der Sprache" wird definitiv überflüssig, wenn klar erkannt wird, daß der Sprachgebrauch, d. h. hier die Ausübung der Sprachtätigkeit, sich erst das Sprachwerkzeug ausgebildet hat. Man wird dann den Begriff "Sprachvermögen" ebenso absurd finden, als etwa ein besonderes "Gehvermögen" oder ein besonderes "Atmungsvermögen". ... Die Ähnlichkeit zwischen Gehen u. s. w. und Sprechen würde heller werden, wenn wir schon hier mit klarer Einsicht das Abstraktum "Sprache" immer durch "Sprechen" ersetzen dürften. ... Die zweckmäßigen Bewegungen, welche wir unter dem Namen Sprache zusammenfassen, oder besser unter dem Verbum "Sprechen", (jedes Verbum ein Ordnungsbegriff unter dem menschlichen Gesichtspunkte eines Zwecks), machen den allgemeinen Weg von der unbewußten Bewegung durch das bewußte Wollen zum Unbewußten zurück. *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache,* (1921), p. 17.

Would it be better designated if we said that "human beings interchange information through acoustic signals"? Hardly: we call "to speak" activities which are not properly described by this latter sentence nor by other variants. Does this mean that we do not know what "to speak" really means? Perhaps. We know, of course, what *we refer to* when uttering this verb, but we could not determine unequivocally the ontological reality of what we imagine as its referent. How could one, for instance, determine cogently if "to write" is *ontologically* the same as "to speak", or the contrary of it, or a particular shape of it?

But the problem is even deeper: what exactly would mean "to know what a word means"? What exactly does "to know" mean? What exactly does "to mean" mean?

In logical terms such "self-referring" questions are vicious circles which must be avoided. But outside formal logics they are relevant questions, *pointing to the largely unknown real biological processes underlying* what we assume to be as clear as the verbs "to speak", "to mean", "to know". And at present these questions are no longer the exclusive concern of linguistics and philosophy, but also, or even mostly, of experimental psychology and neural sciences. Yet, this fact cannot guarantee that these questions will be properly answered by them, among other reasons because these sciences do not ask the same questions about reality as (most) linguists do. It only shows that linguistics is far from having the appropriate tools to address these questions, which are nonetheless crucial for its own self-understanding.

The fact that we speak (more or less) successfully does not prove that our ideas about speech and language are true, realistic or appropriate. When we "speak", whatever this may mean, we behave in a highly complex manner (it is actually the most complex kind of behavior known of any organism) we only control consciously to a certain extent (whatever "to control consciously" may mean in its turn). Speech involves indeed nearly the whole human organism, comprising neural control over articulation muscles, bodily gestures and postures, facial expressions, gaze and an indeterminable amount of fine chemical processes involving neurotransmitters, hormones and other organic substances, all variables depending on individuals, situations, emotions, etc. *We cannot validly determine for everybody in every circumstance what "speaking" really consists in.* And all of us have experienced situations in which one "speaks" and others think that this is no true speaking.

The same applies to other cultural words like "knowledge", "consciousness", "mind", "body", "soul", "culture", etc. *They work in speech just because they are not validly and definitely determinable.* Speech is an activity which does not rely on "words endowed with certain meanings", but on sequences of expressive actions not attached to unequivocal interpretations or to identifiable parts of reality. They are

uttered *as* means of reliable *orientation*[13], in reality and among other people. And "speech about speech" shares this property. Therefore, speech about speech cannot be a science.

No proposition referring to something labelled as "linguistic" can thus claim any ontological support regardless of the language it is uttered in, the individual uttering it and its individual and historical circumstances.

No single term of linguistics is able to prove its "objectivity" in an *ontological* sense. A linguist uses words of one or the other linguistic or grammatical tradition as he uses other words of his language: *believing* that in this precise moment and context this is the best means of formulating his idea or belief in order to be understood by his addressees. This will work as long as the others share his context, historical conditions and general ideas about language, or as long as they suggest through their answers or reactions that they "understand" (and what exactly means "to understand"?). Otherwise, his words will not be *experienced as intelligible.*

It is not reality which makes words intelligible: it is only their more or less shared use. If a Hindu tells you that "*śabda* (more or less "word" in the sense of "linguistic sound") is *bráhman*", you will not understand him even if you look up the word "*bráhman*" in the dictionary (assuming you already understand "word"). You will only understand him if you are familiar with the tradition of speaking about speaking and about "the Self" in India. And even then, it may happen that you still do not understand this proposition because you cannot imagine yourself understanding it, i.e., seeing things in such a way that "*bráhman*" makes sense for you in that context, or in any context whatsoever.

3. Some pragmatic questions about contemporary linguistic theories

Once the *ontological validity* of linguistic concepts is discarded, what kind of real-life problems are best addressed through "linguistic theories", so that the latter can exhibit at least some *practical legitimacy*?

There are some problems of that kind: the right or not to use a denomination like "McChinese", quarrels about public expressions which are or are not an insult, etc. But these are all problems whose solution requires such an elementary analysis that it would not justify so much linguistic research funding at the cost of taxpayers.

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13. The idea of "orientation" as the most fruitful approach to meaning is largely taken from my colleague's Werner Stegmaier's impressive work *Philosophie der Orientierung*, W. De Gruyter, Berlin 2008.

Is the acquisition of a good language competence favored by using linguistic theories in school education?

Hardly. Children hardly improve their expressive competence by analyzing sentences. They often fail to do it correctly although they would have produced correct sentences by themselves, the same sentences they fail to analyze in exams. The great German grammarian Jakob Grimm was decidedly against grammar in school[14]. He argued that the only efficient way of improving children´s linguistic competence is to give them good texts to read, make them write their own texts and correct them so that they understand what is wrong or defective, and why. In order to perform this work, the teacher does not need to be a linguist, but a cultivated and good reader and speaker.

Traditionally people learned foreign languages mainly through grammar, but at present the methods of teaching foreign languages make a restricted use of it, which has proved to be at least partly more efficient. And the grammar they use is also a very elementary and traditional one.

Are linguistic theories necessary to understand better extant texts, i.e., for philology? No. If the interpreter knows well the language of a text, no linguistic theory will improve his understanding. If the interpreter does not know the language well enough (for instance because written testimonies are too scarce, or because of defective personal competence), no linguistic theory will help. Good grammars and dictionaries are then often very useful, but mostly those which are composed not according to any definite linguistic theory, but in order to help in such situations: the so called "philological grammars".

What are then linguistic theories good for?

The more formal linguistic theories are, the more useful they become for "artificial language", i.e., for the many uses of algorithms producing linguistic outputs of artificial devices. Formal linguistic theories are not able to tell anything about "real language". They are designed to produce "language" (or rather something similar) mechanically, and they fulfil this goal surprisingly well. Their efficiency has increased astonishingly.

The great error of Chomskian linguistics was to confuse its object with "language". Only this explains such a surrealistic publication as Katz's *Philosophy of language*. Fortunately, most formal linguists have already abandoned any speculative temptation and have remained the kind of technicians they need to be in order to work successfully. But recent successful authors like Steven Pinker have fallen again into the confusion of formal models with linguistic reality[15].

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14. Jakob Grimm, *Deutsche Grammatik*, Göttingen 1822.

15. I have devoted a lengthy study to his theories, which I hope to put onto the web as soon as I succeed in building my homepage.

On the contrary, the more specifically "human" the object of a linguistic theory is, the less formal the theory itself will be. When linguistic considerations are adduced for the understanding of concrete texts, the philologist may and must choose the "linguistic language" he judges more akin to the sort of linguistic problems he finds in his working field, or even invent the expressions he believes to make "better sense" concerning such problems. The same happens with other goals of "applied linguistics" such as translation, education, learning of foreign languages, therapy of dyslexia, etc.

The important question is *if there is some spiritual space for linguistic theories aiming to "explain" or to "describe language" for its own sake.*

Here the answer of CTL is no. CTL's work shows that whenever someone tries to build a systematic theory about language "in and for itself" (German "*an und für sich*"), he falls into the epistemological contradictions mentioned above and only produces a "*linguistic ideology*"[16], i.e., a certain particular idea of language, mostly based on cultural prejudices. This was the case of the diverse "structuralisms" of Western linguistics over the 19th and 20th centuries. Their fundamental axiom of the "arbitrariness of the sign" is the consequence of the *artificiality and arbitrariness of such theories*. But, as Josef Simon states in his *Philosophy of the Sign*: "language is not arbitrary because it is not arbitrary to understand or not to understand"[17].

Surprisingly, the only kind of linguistic work outside formal linguistics which has proved to be *both scientific and useful* is actually the purely empirical "historical and comparative linguistics", a kind of work increasingly decaying in Western universities because politicians no longer understand what it is good for. It searches for possibly relevant textual facts to draw the history of a "linguistic family". This kind of linguistics does not fix any previous axioms about what "linguistic" and "non-linguistic" are, about what language is or is not, or about what its parts are. It works on texts and tries to establish both regularities and irregularities, thus studying empirically the kind of inner structure achieved *in each text of each author and language at all possible levels* (phonological, morphological, syntactic or semantic), as well as the *degree of regularity of historical changes in particular languages*. It uses eclectically the vocabulary of diverse linguistic schools or its own words, seeking in each case what seems to be the most fruitful formulation and communication of both its findings and its interpretations of them. And it actually helps reconstruct the history of vocabularies and texts, which in its turn helps to understand texts formerly not understandable. It also helps to judge the history of the expressive tools of singular tongues (the nominal or the verbal system, the means of subordination,

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16. For the critical concept of "ideology" s. H. Barth, *Wahrheit und Ideologie* (1945), Suhrkamp, Frankfurt. A. M. 1974, also *Truth and Ideology*, Berkeley 1976.

17. J. Simon, *Philosophie des Zeichens*, De Gruyter, Berlin 1989, p. 49.

the morphological tools of derivation...) in terms of "progress" or "regression", as Humboldt claimed.

Much linguistic work from the beginning of the 20th century on actually works according to these methodological ideas, even outside historical linguistics, and does not try to retrace to, or to integrate linguistic phenomena into, any more or less formalized "linguistic theory". Texts are observed and described according to the linguist's knowledge interest, and the theoretical framework remains often open and only loosely identified. This allows the individual linguist to formulate his observations and explanations in an eclectic language, using linguistic words the way he judges more appropriate to make himself intelligible in his context. The reader can thus relate what he reads to the individual author, to his biography and experiences, and he can judge about the validity of such linguistic work not by reference to any model of legitimation, but by reference to his own personality and experience. I would like to mention, as an example, Gerhard Helbig's and Joachim Buscha's very successful *Deutsche Grammatik: Ein Handbuch für den Ausländerunterricht*, largely relying on the ideas of Lucien Tesnière but not really depending on them.

CTL knows that in research one finds what one seeks, and that the purpose of the research shapes research itself and conditions its methods and results. It places at the core of its interest *the study of the leading purpose of every linguistic theory*, even of those which deny following any determinate purpose and claim to study language merely to know more about it.

4. Speaking about language is not speaking a meta-language

The current trust in the objectivity of the linguist's words about language has led to the qualification of linguistic theory as a "meta-language".

The word "meta-language" does not belong to the common language. It was invented in the context of logical positivism and it is bound to names such as Carnap, Tarsky or Bertrand Russell[18]. The latter uses it precisely in order to avoid what makes common, ordinary or natural language different from any formal "language": the logical paradoxes of "self-reference". Its invention was a tool of formal logics and applies to "strictly specified languages"[19]. Only the cultural

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18. B. Russell, "Introduction" to the first edition of the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* of Wittgenstein (1922).

19. A. Tarsky, "The Semantic conception of truth", in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 4 (1944).

connotations of its etymology have favored its spreading into disciplines using ordinary language.

Linguistic science cannot claim to be any "meta-language" of its "object language" as, according to its definition within logics, a meta-language has to be "essentially richer" than its object language, and in the case of the science of language the object is a language essentially richer than any formalized language. And as already noticed, since linguistic theory ought to be a self-restrained discourse about unrestricted speaking, it will never be able to embrace its supposed object.

The problem with language is that speakers have to speak about their speaking, and consequently thinkers have to think about their thinking, without leaving that same speech and the conditions of their consciousness. As Otto Neurath wrote: "Wie Schiffer sind wir, die ihr Schiff auf offener See umbauen müssen, ohne es jemals in einem Dock zerlegen und aus besten Bestandteilen neu errichten zu können"[20]. The "transcendental" refuge of "meta-language" is allowed in logics, not "in real life". Former thinkers thought that logics is a real part of real language, even its "essence" (Nietzsche makes cruel jokes about this prejudice), but in our culture it has long been noticed that both the idea of "logics" and that of "language" are sub-products of language itself, or rather representations of speaking people as such. Logic is now conceived as a formal science which constructs its own objects, like mathematics. It can no longer be understood as the true essence of common language. Real language is not like that. Its "logic", if there is any, is not a "mathematical" one. We shall return to this point.

5. How do we speak about "real language"? Legitimacy vs. objectivity

Since in the course of history European thinkers eventually discovered that human understanding "dictates its rules to nature" (Kant)[21] and not conversely, we can no longer speak about our own linguistic inventions (our verbal "theories of reality") as if they mirrored real parts of some external reality independent from our understanding of it. If we want to speak about "language", we must be aware that there is no real "thing meant" behind this word, but only a Western habit of "speaking about speaking" in order to keep some orientation.

"Language" is a secondary nominal derivation of a Latin metaphor, *lingua* "tongue", thought of as the conjectured ontological and invariable support of the highly variable process called *loqui* "to speak". It was coined in the late Middle

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20. Otto Neurath: "Protokollsätze". In: *Erkenntnis*. Band 3, 1932-33, p. 206.
21. I. Kant, *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können*, Riga 1783, par. 36.

Ages in South France, in provençal ("*lengatge"*), in the context of the poetics of the *troubadours*, and soon spread over the other countries as the new translation of the classical Latin word *sermo,* originally "conversation", later "manner of speaking" (of the vulgar people, of the educated, etc.), whence already in Cicero "tongue" (*latinus sermo*: "Latin language"). But it was not this Roman word *sermo* which was adopted since the Late Middle Ages to designate the abstract constant correlate of the empirical flow of speech, probably because it did not sound intellectual enough. It was eroded by use. In Spanish for instance, it became the name of the homily of priests in churches ("*sermón*"). "Language" thus owes its origin to the metaphysical necessity of a new word "fine" enough to be the name of a new "technical" abstraction.

In India a very strong grammatical tradition which developed over many centuries is still in use within Sanskrit studies. Its "discovery" in the 19th century in Europe decisively reoriented Western historical grammar. But Sanskrit lacks any good correlate of our word "language". Diverse words are used in different contexts and historical phases to point more or less to what we mean with "language" (*vacana, vāc, ukta, ukti, bhāṣā*…), none of which responds to the same need or is consequently a semantic equivalent of it.

Words and language "happen" in history, as the case of the word "language" shows. The real happenings of language, and thus also of linguistic discourses, are historical "facts", which as such can only be perceived in the framework of a certain "interpretation horizon" in each case, their interpretation being in its turn equally historical and factual.

While speaking about language we are not speaking about a determined "something". Linguistics usually believes to speak about the "referent" of this word, but actually we speak about what we *imagine, more or less consciously*, to be in each case the ontological correlate of our own use of this word. This use has changed throughout history since its first happening as an answer to a certain cultural need.

When our "speaking about speaking" takes the form of a (critical or approving) judgement about some "linguistic theory", *we cannot compare the latter with any "reality"*. We cannot check its "objectivity" because we cannot compare it with any empirical reality unequivocally designated by the word "language". We have to refute, in each case and with critical arguments, any historical determination of "what language is" *as a valid starting point* of any theory about it *claiming ontological validity*. This mostly does not affect what is diffusely presupposed to be "language" in concrete linguistic work, but it becomes critical as soon as such work is thought of as trying to demonstrate the truth of its starting axioms.

At most we can compare the diverse defining axioms about language reality, underlying the diverse theoretical models proposed until now, with *our own*

hermeneutical experience, which may suggest to us that the one or the other are too one-sided. Only *our* experience in historical and epistemological criticism allows us to compare them with our own historical conclusions about "what language is not".

Not being language a possible "object" of any science whatsoever, the sense and the fruitfulness of linguistic work cannot rely on any "reflecting" linguistic reality in the "mirror" of any theory. But linguistic work has proved to "*make sense*" in some or in many situations. What kind of sense?

Here we have to change the perspective. Now we are confronted with the aspects of *"validity" and "legitimacy"* as alternatives to the more usual "objectivity". When judging the *sense* of linguistic theories, we have to check their *"rationality" as a means for a certain goal in each case*, as well as the possible rationality of the goal itself in terms of "human" values. We have thus to judge linguistic work testing:

— its coherence with the concrete purpose of the linguist's use of his words in each case in order to build his theory;
— its utility as an attempt of orientation in a certain historical and concrete situation; and
— the productivity of its orientation horizon in the larger context of working for a better concept of the "human", which is avowedly the general goal of all "human sciences".

Our question is neither "what is language?" (this would be the *metaphysical* approach), nor "how do we use the word "language?" (which is the approach of *analytic philosophy*). Our question refers to the *purpose* for which people have invented and used this word in each case, circumstance, historical period or national, social and cultural context, and concerns whether *a certain understanding of "language" was or is a good solution for problems arising in those "contexts".* Our question is thus "*pragmatic*". It addresses the practical validity of disciplinary discourses of linguistics.

6. How to constitute and to recognize a "valid linguistic discourse"

We "have" the word "language" only *as part of discourses in which speakers have used it*, ourselves included. There is no "language in itself". For ontological reasons we cannot build a positive "theory" of language in the scientific sense of "theory", and for logical reasons we cannot construct any "meta-language" to it. Is linguistics then impossible and radically false?

Not necessarily. We still may speak about language in a sound and useful manner, but in order to do so *we have to start from the best historical results of reflections about the possibilities of this and other words* as valid means for *theoretical orientation*. We have to incorporate into our discourse the knowledge of the origin and achievements of the word "language", and other words usually associated with it in linguistic discourses within Western thinking. In order to do so, we have to decide what is deemed *acceptable* or not in each case. There are lots of possible goals of speaking about speaking. But *if I speak about "language", I have to assume an individual responsibility for my selection of my goal, tools (words and logic) and utterances.*

For this reason, I have to know and judge *history*. In a sense I actually do it every time I utter some expression and thus exclude others, but the knowledge of the history of common vocabulary and the judgements about the validity of concepts and conceptions mostly run unconsciously. They are usually a matter of "attitudes". Mostly the linguist trusts his school or his masters. And in the case of language this is not allowed. *Language only has real existence as "actual speaking" of individuals who "make sense" with it,* and *the language of the linguist shares this condition.* Each linguist has to make plausible face to his readers or addressees, in each case, that his speech here and now "makes sense". And he has to assume consciously the responsibility of his own way of trying to "make sense".

Most analytical philosophers assume that the only objective approach to ideas is the analysis of the actual use of the words "meaning" them. Unlike them, CTL allows neither to perform such analysis as mere "introspection" of supposed "competent native speakers"[22], nor to do it as random phenomenology of contemporary "discourses".

Its only valid base for making inferences about the "nature" of language is *the critical philology of specifically qualified texts throughout history*. Therefore, this base is neither "ordinary use" nor "formal construction", but *objective history of relevant and intelligent discourses about what we commonly assume to be the realm of language*, or rather the realm of those facts or data we *feel* justified to consider "linguistic". Such a feeling, like any other feeling, is individual.

"Objectivity", in the usual sense of the scientific paradigm, has thus to be replaced, in the case of linguistics, by the question of the *legitimacy of individual linguistic discourses.*

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22. Imagining language as the result of the competence of some "average speaker" is the same operation as in economics the idea of a "representative economic agent", whose artificiality has been clearly pointed out by Thomas Piketty in *Le capital dans le XXI*[e] *siècle,* Editions du Seuil, Paris 2013.