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Interdisciplinary Dimensions of Communication Science

Text Linguistics in the Context of the Communication Sciences

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Abstract: This paper tries to analyse the conditions of emerging of text linguistics, taking into consideration the roots of the preoccupations in its domain, originated in the framework of the communication studies. Thus, the change of the perspective on communication, from the mechanistic transmission to interactivity and the exchange of the meanings, led to the pragmatic orientation of the linguistic researches, not just to the message itself, but also to the elements of the communicative act and to the context where the exchange of the meanings takes place. As a result, text linguistics defines the text as communicational occurrence, involving both the members of the communication and the conditions of the production and the reception of the message, unlike conventional linguistics which studies the text *in abstracto*, just the message itself, ignoring the world that the text refers to, or the users of the message, the transmitter and the receiver.

Keywords: models of communication; theories of communication; text; textuality; semiotics

The approaches developed in the studies relating to the act of communication involve a gradual transition from simplistic understanding of it, focused on the complete determination of the elements involved, to some more complex theories which tend to emphasize the interaction between these elements of communication. Inside of this change of accent takes place also a movement of the center of interest from the "sending messages" to "exchange of meanings". The placement in the center of preoccupations of the relationship between transmitter, receiver and message determined the interdisciplinary study of communication in which semiotics occupies a significant position. Text linguistics is one of the effect-subjects of the change forementioned. The transition from the analytical approach of the text, that is specific to conventional linguistics, after which the text is reducible to its component parts, to the semiotic perspective in which the text is seen not only as a product, but also as a process, including the act of producing by the transmitter and that of reception by the receiver, is placed on the same direction traced by the models and theories of communication.

John Fiske appreciates that there are two major schools in the study of communication, one that understands communication as a process of transmitting messages and other that defines it from a semiotic perspective and takes into account the production and exchange of meanings. (Fiske, 1990, p. 2) While the "process" school focuses on some topics like how the transmitter and the receiver encodes, respectively decodes, the way in which the transmitter uses the channel of communication, or problems concerning the efficiency and accuracy of communication, the "semiotic" school considers

primarily the way in which the messages interacts with the transmitter and the receiver in the context of production and reception of the meanings. As such the two approaches are radically different in defining what the message constitutes. (Fiske, 1990, p. 3) The process school focuses on the transmitter and its intention to send a message, whether declared or undeclared, voluntary or involuntary. The aim of the transmitter is that, through the transmitted message, to produce changes in the behaviour or in the attitude of the receiver. The content of the message isn't essential, and in the case of failing to accomplish the aim, the justification is searched mainly to the elements of communication. On the contrary, the semiotic school emphasizes the role of receiver in determining the meaning, the relationship between the message and the receiver being essential in ensuring the success of the communication act. The cultural difference, for example, between the transmitter and the receiver can be a major obstacle to have a successful communication. This time, the emphasis is on how the message is understood, interpreted by the receiver, which involves, in the process of determining the meaning, his entire cultural experience, his own scale of values.

The model of communication developed by Shannon and Weaver in 1949 is considered by Fiske as the most eloquent application of the process school. On the same line of interpretation, however, are placed also other models, as Gerbner's (1956), which takes into account also the receptive aspect of the message, Lasswell's (1948), who develops a linear model for mass communication, Newcomb's triangular model (1953), whose elements are the transmitter, the receiver and a part of their social environment, Westley and MacLean's model (1957), which extend Newcomb's one to mass communication, and, finally, Jakobson's linguistic model (1960), which focusing on the meaning and the internal structure of the message, acts as a bridge between the two perspective on the communication, the process and the semiotic school. As for the models of the semiotic approach, these include three elements (Fiske, 1990, p. 41): 1) the sign; 2) what the sign refers to; 3) the users of the sign. Peirce's, Ogden & Richards's and Saussure's models are considered representative by Fiske. Peirce's triad, sign-object-interpretant, is close to Ogden & Richards's triad, symbol-referent-reference, but both are different from Saussure's pair, signifier-signified, which are components of the sign.

Fiske's distinction between the process and semiotic school is restored, this time in a evolutionary way, by Jean Lohisse by the antagonism between the mechanistic (analytical) and organicist (globalist) views. (Lohisse, 2002, pp. 20-22) Among the mechanistic's are included: 1) the mathematical theory of information, that has enabled the formulation of the communication model developed by Shannon and Weaver; 2) Saussure's structural linguistics, which by focusing only on the relationship between signifier and signified within the language (langue), ignores the concrete speech (parole), the members of communication and the referent, what the sign refers to; 3) the behaviorism, for which the transmitter-receiver relationship takes the form of reaction at the appearance of a stimulus; 4) the functionalist theories on mass communication, centred on the study of the effects of mass media on the receivers. The common principles to all these mechanistic views are (Lohisse, 2002, pp. 27-28): the linearity (the theories take into consideration processes which take place linear, between two points), the sequentiality (there are a sequence of successive operations), the atomicity (the constituent elements are strictly separated, without intertwine each other), referentiality (the study of the objects and ideas is made in a theoretical, abstract form, as independent signs, apart from the subjects of the communication act). Unlike these analytical approaches on communication, the organicist theories involve new notions such as system, context of communication or speech act. Organicist theories on communication are: 1) the theory of systems, which enriches the mathematical model of communication with the notion of feedback; 2) the interactionist theories from psychology, among

there is the Palo Alto school; 3) the anthropological studies on communication, such as symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology and ethnography of communication; 4) the pragmatic orientations of linguistics, by some authors such as Peirce, Benveniste or Austin, who is no longer limited to the abstract study of the language, but aims to describe the concrete uses of it. Like the mechanistic theories, the organicist ones share some principles (Lohisse, 2002, pp. 101-102): the circularity and the complexity (the idea of transmission is replaced by the one of contact, and the complexity excludes the mechanistic determinism), the interactivity (the elements of communication act each other), the totality, including the contextuality (communication becomes a continuously unity, in which the meanings are interpreted as well by taking into consideration the context of the message), the relationality (the signs doesn't represent, as in the case of analytical theories, but express relationships, being not *in abstracto*, but in things, objects, persons, which express and are expressed).

Among pragmatic orientations of linguistics lies also the emerging of text linguistics, a discipline that aims to go beyond the limits of conventional linguistics and to explain the text in communicative context, taking into account not just the text as product (the message itself, *in abstracto*), but also the text as process, involving the conditions of the production (of the transmitter), the conditions of the reception (of the receiver) and the context where the message is produced, transmitted and received. Under these circumstances text linguistics doesn't limit only to the study of the message, as conventional linguistics did, but extends its research on all elements of the communication process.

Text linguistics has the text as the unit of investigation, unlike conventional linguistics which investigates the sentence. Two reasons support the existence of text linguistics: 1) people communicate by means of texts, not of isolated sentences; 2) there are linguistic cases that can't be well explained by conventional linguistics. (Lundquist, 1980, p. 1) Thus, there is elements in some sentences that can't be interpreted just on the basis of information within those sentences. So is the case of interphrastic anaphora. Furthermore, there is another difficulty of the conventional linguistics in the case of the complex texts, where the interpretation of all text can't be reduced to the successive interpretations of its sentences.

A interesting legitimation of the text as a distinct category of linguistics is made by Eugen Coseriu, within a new interpretation of the language, which will develop later into the framework of a new paradigm of linguistics, integral linguistics. Thus, understanding language as activity (*energeia*), Coseriu identifies three levels of the language, corresponding to its three hypostases: universal level, because it is a universal human activity; historical level, because it manifests within a historical community, within a historical determined language; individual level, because it comes to be real through individual human being. Text or discourse is the outcome of the individual level, which leads to the getting of the ontologic status by the text, and to the legitimation of text linguistics as autonomous discipline within the language sciences. (Coşeriu, 1997, pp. 6-8) Coseriu attaches a content to every level of the language: designation for universal level, sense for historical level, and meaning for individual level. As a result, the aim of text linguistics is the confirmation and the justification of the meaning, coming close to hermeneutics. According to the same author, the meaning is not just within the text, but also out of it. Therefore text linguistics must to extend its object beyond the linguistic sphere, including the extralinguistic space.

Text linguistics has two main view about text, one, internal, where text is a string composed of sentences, the other, external, where the text is a unit above the sentence, including its conditions of production and reception. The interpretation that defines the text as a string composed of sentences, what are reducible to syntagms, morphemes and phonemes, is analytic. In conformity with this internal view, the text is nothing but a extension of a coherent syntactic units. The way that leads to

this perspective on text is the structuralist study of linguistics. The beginnings of modern linguistics is connected with descriptive or structuralist methods, which analyse the language by means of the systems of minimal units, phonemes in phonology, morphemes in morphology, lexemes in lexical semantics, sentences in syntax. These distinct systems of the language would exhaustively explain it. (Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981, pp. 20-23) So the structuralist view imposes a new level of analysis, above sentence, the textuality. But the same structuralist view doesn't succeed in organizing the all complexity of the texts, for a complete classification. In consequence, the language model of transformational grammar was considered an appropriate instrument for ordering the open and complex system of the texts. Thus the infinite sentences of a language are derived from a small number of elementary models and a finite set of rules which help us to produce more complex models. This conception leads to an analytical perspective on text, which isn't more a distinct unit above sentence, but a string composed of well-formed sentences. For instance, Katz and Fodor have tried to prove in "The structure of semantic theory" (1963) that text may be understood as one super-long sentence.

The other interpretation understands the text as a global sign, from a semiotic standpoint, proposing a multi-perspective approach of the text as autonomous unit, above the sentence. Lita Lundquist proposes a semiotic view based on John Searle's model. (Lundquist, 1980, pp. 13-15) She defines the text by means of three fundamental acts: referential act (about what is said), predication act (what is said) and illocutionary act (the communication of something to someone with any intention). This tripartition of the text implies three levels of inquiry of textuality, corresponding to every described act: thematic, semantic and pragmatic. In the same semiotic way, Heinrich Plett describes text starting from the model of Charles Morris, (Plett, 1983, pp. 49-50) who in *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* decomposes the process of semiosis in three dimensions: syntactics (which analyses the relations between the signs), semantics (which analyses the relations between the signs and the objects they refer to) and pragmatics (which analyses the relations between the signs and their interpretants). As a result the textuality must be analysed from a triple perspective, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic. A linguistico-semiotics approach is proposed by Carmen Vlad in *The text iceberg*, (Vlad, 2000, pp. 25-29) starting from Coseriu's definition of text linguistics as linguistics of the meaning, and from Peirce's semiotic theory. The author establishes the equivalences with Peirce's model of semiosis which contains the sign (or representamen), the object that the sign stands for, and the interpreter who determines the meaning of the sign. In the case of text linguistics, the text is the sign, the world is the object, that is divided in dynamic object, situated out of the sign, and immediate object, situated into the sign, and the interpreter is any thought (or intellectual image) produced by a text in relation with the objects of the world.

Beyond these two perspectives on the text, there is a definition of it through the opposition with discourse. For conventional linguistics the text is the outcome, the material product of the communication act, written or spoken, while the discourse appears as a communicative assembly that implies the orientation to a goal. The discourse becomes a praxiologic notion, which describes a social activity, having motivation, purpose and execution, while the text would be a linguistic notion, emerging as the result of the discursive action. (Vlad, 2000, pp. 11-13) Once text linguistics is built, the text tends to include also the dynamic side, both the constitution act and the product as such. Hence the text is interpreted taking into account the communicative situation where it comes off. A major influence in emerging of this view about text had the Prague Linguistic Circle, which brought a new perspective in the study of the language, replacing Saussure's structuralist principle, that the language is a abstract system of the related elements and linguistics is the intrinsic study of it, with the

functional principle, that the language is a system of elements coming off in a communicative context and always following a goal. (Beaugrande, 1992, pp.2-26 and 55-86) Going beyond the linguistic framework in the study of the text led to the nondistinction between text and discourse. However this identification of text with discourse doesn't lead to make equivalent text linguistics with discourse analysis. A distinction of these is made by a theoretician of text linguistics, Jean-Michel Adam. (Adam, 2008, pp. 46-70) Text linguistics doesn't cover all area of discourse analysis, but it is a subarea of that. While text linguistics has as aim defining the textuality, determining the elements of the continuity (operations of relation) and discontinuity (operations of segmentation), and moreover, the study of the production and the reception of the message, discourse analysis emphasises the interaction, the inter-discourse process and the study of the socio-discursive formations.

The incorporation of text linguistics in the framework of the studies of communication leads to go beyond the phrastic linguistics, focused on the abstract study of the text, by the development of a new linguistics, whose its object is text, but, this time, this isn't more studied into *langue*, but into *parole*, taking into account both members of the communication process, the transmitter and the receiver, and referent, the things of the physical world that text refers to. At the same time, the message isn't seen more as a atom, apart from the other elements of the communication, but is related both with the purpose of the transmitter and with the receiver's read of meanings, actions where are implicated both linguistic and extralinguistic space. An example that outlines clearly the domain of text linguistics is the description of the seven standards of textuality by Beaugrande and Dressler in *Introduction to Text Linguistics* (1981), where are implicated both the three dimensions of semiotics (syntactics, semantics, pragmatics), and all elements of communication process. Thus, cohesion and coherence are focused on the message, intentionality, on the transmitter, acceptability, on the receiver, situationality, on the context of the communication, and informativity and intertextuality are centred on the interdependence of the transmitter, the receiver and the message in the production and the reception of the meanings. On the other hand, besides cohesion and coherence, which show the syntactic, respectively semantic dimensions, all the other standards belong to pragmatics.

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