

### **Abstract**

The subject of this essay is the dialectic between word and thought. Between the word and the thought there is therefore no priority of one over the other, but mutual presupposition and a perpetual overlapping: it is at this level that the link between word and thought is actually affected by creativity. Between thought and word there has always implicitly been an original complicity that makes it impossible to separate the two dimensions, thought and expression. Therefore language appears as an inner dimension that is incarnated in expression giving shape to the unrepresentable; it is not merely a sum of positive elements added to each other, but a series of diachronic relations; the linguistic sign cannot be seen as having one definite, univocal meaning, but it is in the gaps and in the opposition between signs that all language becomes meaningful. Language is a constant work-in-progress, which cannot be schematised and viewed in static form. It is an equilibrium in incessant movement between signs and signs, living and dynamic, and is continually being renewed. It is about what is said: talking does not finish in what is said, but in what is said the talking is captured and held. As far as language is concerned, if it is the relation between signs that gives each sign meaning, then meaning arises from their overlapping as well as from the gaps between words; meaning lies in the verbal chain since it stands against other signs; its sense is an integral part of language; words always operate on a background of words, and it is never anything but a fold in the vast fabric of speaking. In the light of contemporary philosophical thinking, language is to be seen as a set of margins between signs and meanings, in a process of continual revelation, in a transformation of contents that generate other contents. The assumption is that in language there is something problematic, the coexistence of the logical level with the pragmatic one, in a continuous movement that cannot be stopped in signs. In this sense, it is right to call it the *unsayable*, the *ungraspable*. Language lives precisely *due to* and *on* this constant *aspiration* to say the unsayable, to take into oneself the ungraspable.

Le présent essai a pour thème la dialectique entre parole et pensée. Aucune priorité de l'une sur l'autre, mais une présupposition réciproque et une perpétuelle invasion: c'est à ce niveau que la créativité traverse le lien qui les unit. Entre parole et pensée existe, depuis toujours, une complicité originelle rendant impossible la séparation entre pensée et expression. Les arguments s'intéressent au parler, c'est-à-dire au fait de s'exprimer; le langage est considéré comme activité propre à l'homme; l'expression, mise en acte par l'homme, consiste à donner forme et présence au réel et à l'irréel. Le langage est thématiqué comme une intériorité qui s'incarne dans l'expression, donnant forme au non représentable qui, loin d'être une simple somme d'éléments positifs ajoutés les uns aux autres, consiste dans une série de rapports diacritiques, le signe linguistique ne peut être pensé comme ayant un signifié défini et univoque, mais se trouve plutôt dans ces écarts et ces oppositions entre les signes que le langage rend significatifs. La réflexion philosophique contemporaine propose le langage comme un ensemble d'écarts entre signes et significations, dans un processus de révélations continuelles, dans une transformation des contenus qui produisent d'autres contenus. On part du principe que le langage contient quelque chose de problématique, la coexistence du niveau logique et de celui pragmatique, dans un mouvement continu qui ne peut s'arrêter aux signes: dans ce sens, il s'agit, à proprement parler, de l'indicible, l'ineffable. C'est justement par et de cette constante aspiration dire l'indicible, à assimiler en soi l'ineffable, que vit le langage.

La tematica del presente saggio è la dialettica tra parola e pensiero. Non c'è priorità dell'uno sull'altra, ma reciproca presupposizione e perpetuo sconfinamento: è a questo livello che il nesso parola/pensiero è effettivamente attraversato dalla creatività. Tra pensiero e parola è da sempre implicita una complicità originaria che rende impossibile una separazione delle due dimensioni, quella del pensiero e quella dell'espressione. Si argomenta intorno al parlare che è un esprimere, il linguaggio è considerato come un'attività dell'uomo, l'esprimere attuato dall'uomo consiste nel dare presenza e figura al reale e all'irreale. Il linguaggio è tematizzato come una interiorità che si presenta nell'espressione dando forma all'irrapresentabile, esso non è una semplice somma di elementi positivi che si aggiungono l'uno all'altro, ma una serie di rapporti diacritici, il segno linguistico non può essere pensato come avente un significato definito e univoco, ma è piuttosto negli scarti e nella opposizioni tra i segni che il linguaggio tutto si fa significante. La riflessione filosofica contemporanea propone il linguaggio come insieme di *scarti* tra segni e significazioni, in un processo di svelamento continuo, in una trasformazione di contenuti che generano altri contenuti. L'assunto è che nel linguaggio vi è qualcosa di problematico, la coesistenza del livello logico con quello pragmatico, in un continuo movimento, che non può essere fermato nei segni, e in tal senso, è propriamente *l'indicibile*, *l'inafferrabile*. Il linguaggio vive proprio *per* e *di* questa costante *aspirazione* a dire quell'indicibile, a portare dentro di sé quell'inafferrabile.

What does speaking mean? General opinion will certainly respond that speaking is the activity of the organs of speech and hearing. Speaking means phonetically expressing and communicating the impulses of the human soul. These are guided by thoughts. Using this definition of language, three things are taken for granted as being true: firstly, speaking is expressing. The idea of language as expression is the most common one. It presupposes an inner state that is being expressed. Viewing language as expression means seeing it in its external guise, precisely in the act that explains expression as stemming from an inner state. Secondly, language is considered an activity of man. Therefore we cannot say "language speaks", since this would equate to stating that it is language that gives man being. Seen in this light, man would be a premise of language. Lastly, the expressing done by man consists of giving the real and the unreal a presence and an image (M. Heidegger, tr. it. 1993: 29).

We talk in our sleep and when we are awake, we are always talking, even «when we don't utter a word, but simply listen or read, even when we are not listening or reading, but engaged in a task or relaxing in idleness. We talk because talking is part of us» (Ivi, 27).

Speaking means expressing and communicating the impulses of the human soul, which are guided by thoughts.

The word that expresses thought is already an initial intrinsic deformation of that thought, which in its unexpressed purity, would be nothing. What is expressed does not exist either, outside what expresses it, but expressing is still different from what is expressed, and cannot be confused with it.

Between the word and the thought there is therefore no priority of one over the other, but mutual presupposition and a perpetual overlapping: it is at this level that the link between word and thought is actually affected by creativity. Between thought and word there has always implicitly been an original complicity that makes it impossible to separate the two dimensions, thought and expression: «thought and word anticipate each other, they constantly replace each other. Every thought comes from the word and returns to it, every word is born in thoughts and finishes there. Among men, and in each of them there is an incredible flourishing of words, of which thoughts are the framework» (M. Merleau-Ponty, tr. it. 1967: 40).

If the word presupposed the thought, if speaking meant first of all accessing the object through an intention of knowledge or a representation, one would not understand why thought seeks expression as its goal, because the most familiar object seems indefinite until we find a name for it, because even the thinking subject is in a sort of ignorance of his own thoughts until he has formulated them for himself or written or said them, as is shown by the example of many writers who start a book without knowing exactly what they are going to narrate. A thought that was content to live for itself beyond the difficulties of words and communication, would fall into unconsciousness as soon as it appeared, so it would not exist even for itself (M. Merleau-Ponty, tr. it. 1965: 247-248).

On the basis of this definition of language three things are considered certain: speaking is expressing, language is regarded as an activity of man, and man's expressing consists of giving presence and form to the real and the unreal.

Therefore language appears as an inner dimension that is incarnated in expression giving shape to the unrepresentable; it is not merely a sum of positive elements added to each other, but a series of diachronic relations; the linguistic sign cannot be seen as having one definite, univocal meaning, but it is in the gaps and in the opposition between signs that all language becomes meaningful.

Language is a constant work-in-progress, which cannot be schematised and viewed in static form. It is an equilibrium in incessant movement between signs and signs, living and dynamic, and is continually being renewed. It is about what is said: talking does not finish in what is said, but in what is said the talking is captured and held.

*L'idée existe au-delà de lui comme la petite phrase au-delà de son exécution ou "apparition" [...] Voir = réversibilité du voyant et du visible, penser = réversibilité de la Parole opérante et du [x] nommable<sup>1</sup>.*

As far as language is concerned, if it is the relation between signs that gives each sign meaning, then meaning arises from their overlapping as well as from the gaps between words; meaning lies in the verbal chain since it stands against other signs; its sense is an integral part of language; words always operate on a background of words, and it is never anything but a fold in the vast fabric of speaking.

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To understand language we cannot look up some internal lexicon that will give us, for the words and the forms, the pure thoughts they should correspond to: all we need is to give ourselves to its life, to its movement of differentiation and articulation, to its eloquent gesticulation. There is therefore opacity in language: it is never interrupted to leave space for pure meaning, it is never limited unless it be by another language and its meaning is always set in words. Like a charade, it can only be understood by the interaction of signs, each of which, taken in isolation, is either unclear or banal: only together do they make sense (M. Merleau-Ponty, tr. it. 1967: 66-67).

The opacity of language enables us to have a language that is really able to communicate: what makes language opaque and clouds its transparency, is not a limitation of language but is in fact what makes it alive and inexhaustible.

«Idée d'une expression jamais achevée»<sup>2</sup>.

Meaning is, in a way, coextensive to language in its entirety; it is not distinguished from language but is there, totally immersed in it. At this level, there occurs something similar to what happens in painting, where rather than being *expressed* by the picture, the meaning impregnates the picture.

Language does not express a meaning, but it is actually the meaning that permeates and impregnates language, and the original dimension is a kind of huge fabric from which, like endless folds, can emerge the multiplicity of direct speech.

Construing the communicative universe therefore means giving voice to the tensile lines that shape language from within, pushing the limits of language without completely breaking the structural constraints, to try in vain to create a kind of foreign language within one's own language.

Language does not subside into a static state, being constantly pushed beyond its limits by the inner forces that give life to it. Beneath the conceptual meaning of words there is an existential meaning.

Meaning is a dynamic object created intersubjectively and having a phenomenological dimension that is involved in every encounter. This is in contrast to the classical cognitive approaches that see meaning as an intrinsic property of certain language forms. Language evolves on the basis of the transformations of the natural and social context in which they happen to live. These modifications are perceived and expressed in language, which is not a reality complete unto itself, a sort of absolute subject of forms of life and of tradition, but something closely connected to the context in which it is determined and which, thanks to its typical symbolic elaboration, it helps to determine.

We need to add another interpretative category to the threesided communication situation analysed by Davidson, Peirce and Wittgenstein. This is the category of common feeling. In the constitution of language as process, we can identify the space of common feeling, which is the space where one is with others in the world. But while this theoretical orientation adds to the debate the important idea of the constitution of the language process and of its situated-ness in communicative relations, the context of analysing the language process must be broadened and not restricted to the subjectivity of sender and receiver, since if language were locked between these two, the process itself would be objectivised and limited to the relational exchange.

In the light of contemporary philosophical thinking, language is to be seen as a set of margins between signs and meanings, in a process of continual revelation, in a transformation of contents that generate other contents. The assumption is that in language there is something problematic, the coexistence of the logical level with the pragmatic one, in a continuous

movement that cannot be stopped in signs. In this sense, it is right to call it the *unsayable*, the *ungraspable*. Language lives precisely *due to* and *on* this constant *aspiration* to say the unsayable, to take into oneself the ungraspable.

But if we move one step at a time, in language there is on the one hand its logical form and on the other hand the construction of a set of relations between the language expressions and the entities that help to make up the semantic contents of utterances. And it is in this second phase that semantics takes up what was bequeathed by ontology. In the concrete determinations inherent to the discourse, we see the inadequacy of a vision of the phenomenon of language seen as a mere system, and the need to go beyond the structuralist approach in a perspective that can account for the capacity, typical of discourse, to transcend the system in order to refer to the world.

The semantic approach therefore finds confirmation on the level of reflection where by interpreting the symbols encountered in existence, the self-interpreting subject will no longer be the Husserlian and Cartesian *cogito*, but in the words of Ricoeur, an existent being that discovers (P. RICOEUR, tr. it. 1977: 14-16). And this is the phenomenological dimension in which language is placed. In this phenomenological perspective we find a field of signification that is prior to any objectivity; meaning is found to originate in the phenomenological dimension of the intersubjective space.

This opens the way to going beyond idealism, beyond the subject locked in his system of signification, in order to affirm the *worldliness of man* as a living being, the boundaries of whose intentionality are the whole world.

And it is precisely because using a phenomenological approach in our reasoning makes us reflect on the world and on our way of being with others, that it is useful to reflect on the world that is being referred to, in which every "thing" is not locked in on itself but is part of a context which brings many relations together into a single figure.

At the centre is the concept of *relation*, no longer in the sense of a closed circle, but seen as a movement that stays inexorably open and cannot be completed.

### *The relation between activity and passivity*

This is the relation between activity and passivity based on which there is a rethinking of the ontology of the Whole as *hollow fullness*, a

plurality made up of finite sharing/dividing. This brings into question the clear separation between the perceiving subject and the perceived object, between the subject's activity and at the same time its passivity.

And this is the complex path leading straight back to the investigation of the world's inner relational modalities, in order to discover their interweaving with the sensitive substratum, the sediment of the world, and thus reveal the latter as a "system of equivalences" which is "already there", prior to any explicit ideation. In other words this investigation concerns identities that are no longer the finished product, namely the clearly defined integral forms of a relation between elements that are *already given* and are confined within the borders of a pre-established, separate individuality, but identities that arise *due to* and *out of* the relation with all others. To paraphrase Merleau-Ponty, "each *is* what others see *of it*".

Moreover, meaning is not only experience of the world, but experience with others. This leads us to recognise the fact that every being is for the others that surround it and look at it and that its existence means communicating with others, *being-with*. This *being-with* explains why, rather than being a synthetically organised objective grouping, or a multiplicity of objects beside each other, the world is in fact a system of concordances and of inherent concordances, i.e. a network of relational exchanges all referring to each other.

The ontological inclination of this argument leads to the following analogy: just as the body also sees itself and in so doing becomes *light* revealing to the visible what is within it and achieving the segregation of the internal and external, so the word, supported by language's many ideal relations, is a certain region of the universe of meanings "it is both the organ and resonator of all the others and, due to this, is coextensive to the thinkable. The word is a total part of the significations like the flesh of the visible, as it is in relation to Being through a being, and lastly, as it is narcissistic, eroticised, endowed with a natural magic that lures other significations into its net in the same way as the body feels the world by feeling itself" (M. Merleau-Ponty, tr. it. 1964: 141).

Therefore, although it is seen as a dynamic object, what is investigated is no longer the word, but the *region* of the word. The word expands into the invisible and with it the body's belonging to being and the bodily relevance of every being are extended to semantic operations.

So in this new ontology, the linguistic process is interwoven with the interlocutor's process of consciousness. But how does language express this movement? How can the *really existing* be brought into language?

Language represents the subject's *taking* a stance in the world of its meanings and in itself holds an inner dimension, but this is not a closed and self-conscious thought.

Language tries to express the drives of the real through allusions and interweavings, multiplying the relational threads of meaning. For example for the speaking subject and for those listening to him, the making of sounds brings about a certain structuring of experience, a certain modulation of existence. The system of sounds and definite words is decentered in the discourse, breaks down and is reorganised according to a pattern that is revealed to the speaker and the listener at the very moment the communication is underway.

This is the *journey towards language*, in which every change taking place in the language's essential words determines at the same time, the change in the way things and the world reveal themselves to man<sup>3</sup>.

Corresponding to the system of words, of signs forming the visible side of language, there is the invisible side, the hidden framework. Language lives of the impossibility of saying what one would like to say, it revolves around a *deep cavity* without which language itself would not exist, and having retrieved the pragmatic nature of meaning, it becomes language *in action*. And this is shown even more clearly in the *figurative sense* accompanying language: a frown, a gulp, a sigh,...give meaning to the language outside of ourselves, and transcend its rigid patterns of words. This is *visual sound*, conveyed from the sender to the receiver, in which the word becomes: "the echo of the bare figure resounding in the open depths" (J.L. NANCY, tr. it. 2004: 8). The word region, as an echo, is not confined to a single "sound" that resonates in the depths of the individual, not closed but open to receiving and recreating.

If we follow these arguments we come upon perspectives to make us reflect, leading to the redefining of the process of construing meaning through the lens of phenomenology: the symbol cannot be interpreted or reduced to a mere sign, but rather it must be acknowledged that its interpretation is unending. It is a point in the construction and development of the hermeneutical circle. Language is not exclusively an operation of the intelligence, or an exclusive motor phenomenon; it is wholly motor and wholly intelligence; it holds a very broad, complex meaning and is not reduced to the operations and systems of signification.

To paraphrase Heidegger: everything is language, insofar as it is the *abode of Being, the essence of Being*; however our relation with language is uncertain, obscure, almost impossible to express; in various ways, speaking arises from the "unspoken", whether this be something not yet expressed or



something that must remain unexpressed in that it is a *reality that eludes words*.

Following these thoughts we can see the interconnection between the spoken and something that eludes words: not only something that has not yet come to words, but perhaps will never be able to reach them.

### *The communicative dimension*

The conceptual level of language, composed of figures, purely ideal-conventional signs, therefore falls in a *communicative* dimension in a *network of shared actions*, which involves all the subjects participating in the conversation, and *expresses* their reciprocal *acting*, their relating to each other and *moving-towards-each-other*. In this communicative dimension meaning is always a *process*. It is the *co-feeling* situation among the subjects, in which understanding is achieved.

The communicative approach has contributed to the development of the concept of language and communication. The communicative relation is an exchange not only of contents but also of semantic, grammatical or pragmatic categories or of language functions. This complex perspective takes on a relational power, in that it presupposes and suggests the relation, creating space for reflection and for the interlocutors' co-responsibility within the *place* where it is carried out.

Communication is achieved in a sliding of meanings between the interlocutors, in filigree there emerges the importance of the pragmatic side of language: to have real understanding one needs to immerse oneself in the concrete use of language, in the meaningful slipping that the interlocutors impose on terms.

Consequently the origins of meaning are not to be found in a cognitive system, or in a socially isolated subject, but in an intersubjective space. We might add that the process is continuous; it is the revelation and plurality of sense, and the unsayable in the relating of experiences.

Getting down to the substance of the question, there is the attempt to give meaning back to *the depth of existence*. The critical reflection that opens up tries to bring meaning down from the pedestal of individual creation to involve it in the tormented adventure of existence, in communicative intersubjectivity influenced by the context, as internalised social resources. And it is precisely by bringing into play this type of problems that the need arises to rethink the *chiasm* between context and language in a *new way*. And this is the path outlined as an alternative to the classical cognitive

approaches that conceive of meaning as the intrinsic property of certain language forms.

In the light of the analysis made so far, in this system of relations, in this *relational key* – or in a system of relations in which we ourselves are held, insofar as we are made up of them - in this pre-objective\_framework (M. Merleau-Ponty, 1969: 268), meaning turns out to be not a mere construct, though formed in the phenomenological experience, but in constant transformation. The hermeneutics of the symbol is opened up, keeping phenomenology engaged in dialogue with the philosophy of thought generated by the Cartesian *cogito*. In other words, reflection and interpretation are two complementary moments in a hermeneutical journey that integrates *cogito* with the awareness that man's concrete situation is not just that of being the centre of his existence, but also of being in the world of others.

These are the philosophical implications of the conception of situated meaning.

The words, the vowels, the phonemes from an analysis that considers not just the meaning of words as concepts and terms, but also the *emotional sense* as *ways of singing the world* «and they are destined to represent objects not because of an objective resemblance, as was believed by the naïve theory of onomatopoeia, but because they bring out and, properly speaking, they express *the emotional essence* [...]. The preponderance of vowels in one language, of consonants in another, the systems of construction and syntax should not be arbitrary conventions to express the same thought, but more ways for the human body to celebrate the world and, ultimately, to experience it» (M. Merleau-Ponty 1967: 258-259).

This is a communicative dimension in which signs are already themselves the meaning, and the latter is entirely absorbed in the concrete gestural-expression situated in the sender-receiver relationship: «la parole porte toute idée et devient elle-même une idée»<sup>4</sup>. It is not the complete achievement of language that one must seek, it is not towards the determination of the weight of words, but the thought of these “fields of thought”, as places where communication is «faire renaître dans l'esprit d'autrui moyennant signes extérieurs une conception qui était dans celui de l'auteur. Deux sujets pensants et des signes»<sup>5</sup>.

The way sign systems work conveys a particular relationship with reality.

The relationship of signs finds an objective *underpinning* in the social relations between individuals and the world around them. Generally speaking, casting light on the laws of language means comparing the

structural conditions of expression with the settings where it develops, with the reasons and rules of its genesis, with the multiple settings in which experience gains meaning. Once it has been verified that this deep need of semiotics matches and melds with Husserl's legitimate demand to investigate "the way the life world acts as an underpinning", we have the solution to the riddle which says for man "there is constantly a pre-scientific world" which is pre-linguistic and pre-meaning. It is then easy to realise that this attempt at a radical foundation exhausts itself in the blind alleys of an idealistic approach, which entrusts absolute subjectivity with the extreme task of construing the meaning of the world. One achieves however an effective explanatory capacity when semiotic observation, which holds that the basis of generalisation and idealisation finds its roots in the typical relations that objectively take place in social life showing the articulation of language and real action. This calls into play, in other words, the real configuration of the actual work of language, making up *language acts*. Basically one can talk about producing sense only when one takes man's production into concrete consideration; man starts to make sense of reality, he places between himself and reality the intelligible-significant realm, when he triggers the dialectics of his own production. The significant, like the intelligible, entails a coming to awareness which gives expression to the significations passively preconstituted in the real work carried out in the life world.

In the perspective of this argument, the communicative dimension needs to start from relations and dialogue to be able to construct the interlocutory space that leads to mutual understanding and possible agreement.

### *Communication in the class context*

The constant presence of the relation between a communicative way of acting and the context can be seen when observing communication at school.

The initial assumption is that interaction in teaching-learning is «a construction of a shared space within which an agreement can be negotiated as the outcome of the participants' capacity to dialogue and relate» (D. Coppola, 2008).

In this space of interlocutory co-responsibility, communication is not just competence and language event, but it is the construction of a shared meaning and *communicative action* (J. Habermas, tr. it. 1997).

The dialogic perspective tends to give depth to things, to make them more complex. It presupposes and suggests exchange through relating. Placing dialogue at the basis of the teaching/learning process means creating, within lessons, spaces for reflection and interlocutory co-responsibility. In this context communicative competence is required in every kind of language event, in order to consider the teaching/learning process an «active construction of theoretical-practical knowledge (knowing and knowing how to), of tools, values and ways of being, all the outcome of the negotiation of meanings and a reflection of the ways of being and complex dynamics that are not only personal but also socio-cultural» (D. Coppola, 2008: 36).

The teacher's communicative style is also reflected in the choice of linguistic-cultural models. This choice should be oriented towards a pluri-normative didactics; in other words it should pay attention to linguistic-cultural diversification and to the development of the ability to use the language in different contexts.

In short, «all behaviour is communication and all communication influences behaviour» (P.Watzlawick, J. Helmick Beavin, Don D. Jackson, 1971).

Overall, the conversational network is characterised by a way of acting in which the actors are systematically led to:

- identify the shared aims to be achieved,
- understand and justify the various actions performed,
- understand and influence the communicative strategies in a cooperative direction,
- assimilate the most common kinds of discourse that act as constraints on the speaker's subsequent choice,
- negotiate and re-negotiate purposes and aims in view of the communicative exchange,
- coordinate the reciprocal actions to maintain the stability of the system of interactions,
- produce a change in the initial situation by changing entrenched interpretative patterns,
- elaborate new shared meanings.

The teacher asks how the communicative actions expressed can be applied to school education. There is no doubt that promoting this communicative attitude must become an aim for the teacher to pursue systematically and coherently in his/her role in charge of the managing the class group. In the communicative perspective put forward here, this management becomes essentially a real task of animating the class, where the style adopted by the teacher in relating to students or to the group is essential if certain aims are to be achieved.

The school as an institution visibly and practically takes cognitive socialisation as its primary aim.

The life of the class involves a series of decisions. The teacher's intervention, which has the task of leading the group to achieve its objectives, can be placed on the level of action or of behaviour to be promoted. For instance, the subject or the group is told what it must and can do: here 'can' and 'must' are functions of a hierarchically higher position, the communication network is usually one-way and is limited to situations where precise information or instructions are given, decision-making is reserved for the leader, in virtue of the expertise that characterises him/her concerning the aim to be achieved. It therefore becomes very likely that the communication network is expressed through the participants' passivity, adaptation or opposition to this behaviour.

Communication in class is connected to asymmetric interaction, and often adopts the pedagogic aim of reducing this asymmetry. Research has shown that the teacher's communicative style can affect the pupils' behaviour and their school results, which makes us think about the passage from a strictly asymmetrical interaction framework to a less rigid communicative style in which the teacher takes the role of moderator rather than director, or where there are the features of an educational relationship centred on dialogue and on processes of co-construction of knowledge (R. Titone, 1988; C. Pontecorvo (a cura di), 2005; F. Orletti, 2005). The capacity to establish relations, to interact with the class group, to consciously and effectively communicate one's needs, are not only all elements at the basis of a good educational relationship, but also a competence that the educational relationship must be able to promote so that it is acquired, since it constitutes the premise for the pupils' successful participation in the training and educational contexts they will encounter in the future. The class-group is the basic structure through which the school organisation pursues the institutional objectives of the "systematic, planned acquisition of knowledge, but also constitutes the domain in which individual needs are displayed, differing from institutional ones (for instance the need to have friendships, to gain prestige or to give vent to aggressiveness)» (R. Carli e A. Mosca, 1980: 69). The latter aspect, defined as a sub-institutional level, is a profound feature of the process of socialisation and is often considered by teachers to be the area where problems are manifested in relations between teaching staff and students. On the other hand the teacher cannot always correctly understand the quantity and quality of the interpersonal relations that are set up within a class. In the gap between the perception of the teacher and the real social status of the pupils, we can identify one of the factors that has a negative effect on the construction of adequate, gratifying teacher-pupil

relations. So the failure to recognise needs and the inadequate expression of needs emerging at this level can lead to a difficult, dysfunctional integration of the class-group, and consequently have a negative effect on the primary learning process.

There is a vast literature that underlines the fact that the quality of the educational relationship is the indispensable seedbed for the acquisition of capacities and competences in the various areas of knowledge. This is a widely held belief among teachers, but these same teachers are not always placed in a position to gain the tools for monitoring, managing, verifying, and developing the quality of the educational relationship. While teachers on the one hand are able to perceive, often in advance, situations of uneasiness amongst pupils and with pupils, they often do not have the professional know-how to deal successfully with problems and critical aspects. Scholars seem almost totally in agreement in assigning the role of “discourse management” to teachers at all levels of schooling from nursery to secondary school, and also in underlining the essentially phonological nature of much academic teaching, not only in lectures, but also in seminar work. In the observation of a *typical* school lesson, what emerges are rigidly asymmetrical, predictable exchanges and pre-established situations, with stereotyped roles (A. Cilberti, R. Pugliese, L. Anderson, 2006).

On the other hand it must be pointed out that interest in relating and in the communication of the class group is not usually part of the teacher's training and at any rate it is too ambitious an aim to be dealt with without an adequate documentation on these dynamics. The problem is that, more and more often, teachers today find themselves facing modes of communicating and relating that are incompatible with the structure that teachers try to give their teaching practice; there is a significant mismatch between the expected behaviours and the actual behaviours, which express apathy, disinterest, closure and at times an attitude of defiance, of intolerance, lack of respect even inside the classroom. Now, when in a strictly structured social context like that of the class we see a progressive deterioration of the relational fabric, when communication becomes ineffective, when there is the systematic defiance and criticism of the delicate relationship between the teacher's authority and the pupil's freedom, the overall balance of the fundamental teaching-learning relationship tips inevitably towards the negative side. All this is generally associated with a situation of great stress for the teachers, who find it hard to see a way out, in professional and personal terms, in their teaching practice. The pupil's distress is therefore accompanied by that of the teacher, whose function appears, not only to the teacher but also to society, to have been suddenly stripped of its usefulness and meaning<sup>6</sup>.

We see that when the behaviour of the class group or of single pupils differs significantly from what can be called with some precision the acceptability threshold, and becomes repetitive and structured, it is the symptom of an uneasiness in the pupil/teacher relationship which must be dealt with using methods appropriate to the difficulty of the task.

Essentially, we need to rely on the resources typical of the teacher's role which until now has always been played out on a mainly (if not exclusively) disciplinary plane and which today must also rely on the field of the educational relationship. The cognitive and social aspects of learning are closely tied to the various forms of communication and cooperation existing in every class between teachers and students.

Each class is a specific community, in which, while relating, the individuals construct their own linguistic and communicative tools; though they share the same language, the use to which it is put depends largely on the rules they share for producing and interpreting every communicative event. For this reason each class is the unit of analysis in which one expresses oneself and communication is studied. The role of language cannot be seen simply as a way of exchanging information: since communication actualises a particular situation whose structure is created in the time and space shared with the other interlocutors, this time/space structure is the underpinning of intersubjectivity, which in the decentralisation of viewpoints, enables a communicative universe to be constructed.

Individual differences are fundamental to the processes of co-constructing knowledge but in a discussion, if they are not commented on and emphasised, they may not be noticed by the pupils. This essential task is the teacher's responsibility. Listening to and getting to know the pupils' way of reasoning is fundamental for coping with it.

In interacting with the pupils, the teacher must offer them behavioural models on how to elaborate knowledge and how to be receptive and critical of others' ideas. The strategy of *mirroring* underpins the repetition/reformulation of questions, already expressed by some members of the group, in whom the teacher sees the potential to reopen the discussion.

The activity of mediation typical of teaching makes the child's cognitive action explicit and conscious, giving the child access to conscience and control, which will be mastered little by little. The teacher's role therefore consists of planning and coordinating the activities, encouraging exchanges, discussion, making the class into "a learning community" that can be open to the outside world.

## *Textual hermeneutics*

The main support for this idea is to be found in Ricoeur's philosophy, which holds that the symbol in written texts and speech acts *gives one something to think about* (P. Ricoeur, 1969), since it connects the subject not only to his/her own unconscious, but ontologically to the relational universe.

Every communicative exchange comes about in a frame, which, while indicating the specific rules, also allows for a constant control on the progress of the conversation, since the frames can be recognised and repeated over time, and some of them may even become actual rituals, or lead to actual "constants", that is, to routines. In the specific school context, the latter are found in all kinds of classes - for instance, communication during the oral test, the giving of instructions – others are specific to the single class and make up a major part of the culture shared by teachers and pupils, regulated by the classroom contract.

Discourse frames, the short sequences made up of «a single type of adjacent pairs ("Do you understand?/I understand")», are used systematically during the conversation. They serve to fill in over-long pauses, to gain time to think, to manage one's participation without interrupting the thematic coherence of the conversation [...]. *Discourse routines* are in fact called the main organisers of teaching activity, since they direct the development and reduce margins of ambiguity; they are also shared by participants and socially acquired» (P. Selleri, 2004: 64-65).

In this picture, speech acts and behaviours have a *performative* value «by the very fact that they are used, they establish the framework of meaning underlying them as the given reality. In proposing certain teaching contents, in the act of presenting it in a certain way, the teacher is declaring what it is useful to transmit/learn, what is secondary and what needs to be explained; the teacher essentially attributes the status of event of importance to certain facts, and rejects others; in so doing he/she defines the area of semiotic reference orienting the process of interpretation (that is, of identifying as relevant, of selecting, of categorising) which qualifies the pupil's fruition of the message, and therefore the domain of signification within which he/she is to work» (C. Venuleo, S. Salvatore, R. Grassi, P. Mossi, 2008: 226).

Language acts are considered actions, as is shown by the theoretical work present in the examination of the philosophy of language from Wittgenstein to Habermas. Speech belongs to practical and technical actions, and is characterised by a communicative purpose. This first



characterisation (speaking equals acting, language equals a technique) justifies and specifies what the action must consist of from the pragmatic point of view. Though not wholly, this idea largely shares the viewpoint of Austin: using the terminology he introduced, we can call specific language acts *locutions* and call language acts locutive acts. All locutive acts have the effect of leading the agents taking part in them to irreversible compromise.

The analysis of the concepts brings out the character of the “network” of concepts – like intention, motive, agent – called upon by action, showing that each of them draws the diversity of its significations from its uses in definite contexts and that the different contexts in turn relate them to each other, so one should speak as much about intersignification as about signification. The analysis of propositions consists of thinking about the logical form of the utterances concerning action.

We have three different senses or dimensions of the use of an utterance, or in general the use of language.

Locutionary act: approximately equivalent to making a certain utterance with a certain meaning and reference, which still equates to the “meaning” in the traditional sense.

Illocutionary act such as informing, ordering, warning, making a commitment to do something, etc., that is, utterances that have a certain force (conventional).

Perlocutionary act: what we obtain or manage to do by saying something, like convincing, persuading, detaining, and even surprising and deceiving.

All three of these kinds of actions are subject, clearly simply as actions, to the usual difficulties and reservations about the attempt as opposed to success, to being intentional rather than not being so, and so on.

In other words the locutionary act has *meaning*, the illocutionary act has a certain *force* in saying something, the perlocutionary act is the *obtaining* of certain *effects* by saying something.

The analysis of the speech act (authors like Austin<sup>7</sup>, Strawson and Searle<sup>8</sup> provide the theory of “speech acts”) addresses the propositional structure, and at this level the analysis does not merely examine the reference and the meaning, but “saying which is itself doing”, that is, the illocutionary act.

The unit of discourse is the utterance, which has a meaning, or an intent, and the intent is what the speaker wants to say. The sign has the function of signifying, but only discourse has the function of communicating.

In other words, every discourse is performed as an event, but understood as meaning. This is possible insofar as language is the place where logic rises above psychology, and the place where logic shrinks before

the postulation of a reality that makes up the ontological implication of the discourse.

The typical feature of discourse is to depict its speaker through the indicators of subjectivity. It therefore becomes possible to state that this very self-referential character of discourse admits the speaker's intention along with the force of the discourse in the field of communicability.

The intentional element comes into play when we move from what language does to what the speaker does.

Austin too stresses the speaker's self-reference. In the last lessons of *How to do things with words*, he comments that constative utterances also have a performative effect.

«The performative is not so clearly distinguished from the constative – the first successful or unsuccessful, the second true or false [...]. When undertaking the task of finding a list of explicit performative verbs, it seemed that it would not always be so easy to distinguish performative from constative utterances, and so it seems useful to go back to the basic principles – to consider, starting from the bottom, in how many ways by saying something one *is* doing something, or *in* saying something one is doing something, and also *with* saying something one is doing something. And we started to distinguish a whole meaning group of “doing something” which are all included when we say, as is obvious, that saying something is in its full normal sense, doing something – which includes making certain sounds, uttering certain words in a particular construction, and uttering them with a certain “meaning” in the favoured philosophical sense of these words, namely with a certain sense and a certain reference. The name I give the act of “saying something” in this full normal sense is a locutionary act, and the study of the utterances in this area and from this point of view, I call the study of locutions, or of full speech units» (J. Austin, 1955: 52).

In constation, I make a commitment in a different way from a promise, like that of belief: “I believe in what I say”. With a constative utterance, we make an abstraction from the illocutionary aspects of the language act, and we concentrate on the locutionary ones .

With a performative utterance, we pay the greatest attention to the illocutionary force of the utterance, and we make an abstraction of the dimension corresponding to facts.

In general the locutionary act, like the illocutionary act, is just an abstraction: every authentic speech act is both one and the other (J. Austin, 1955: 52).

It can therefore be seen that the act of locution allows the fixing in language of elements considered to be psychological: belief, desire, feeling and in general a corresponding *mental act*. This comment is important for the

reference to the speaker. The idea of the speaker's intention is thus reintroduced.

It is the role of desire and belief to articulate the various meanings of "intention to". On this line Ricoeur arrives at a third sense of intention. I cannot promise without intending to produce in the other person the recognition that my utterance has the meaning of subjecting me to an obligation to do what I say<sup>9</sup>.

The content of the communication therefore depends on the speakers' intentions so when a speaker makes a certain utterance, he does so with the intention of having a certain effect on the listeners through their recognition of his intention. This discourse, in the area of linguistic communication, re-establishes the connection between meaning and intention. It results in the equivalence between "meaning" and "intending".

As Ricoeur argued, underlying every 'saying' there is a "*essere-da-dire*" and this is entitled to be brought into language. Language is intentionally open to being because, at the constitutive level, it is a "way of being in being". That is not to say that there is identity between language and being. Language distinguishes itself from being, since it presupposes it; in other words, there is a non linguistic basis (the non semantic) that precedes language and in which language itself is rooted.

Precisely insofar as it presupposes the ontological dimension, language can refer to the human experience in general. Or rather, it can be configured and modelled on the latter so as to reproduce it, since there is *structural identity* between the two levels. Language and the ontological plane conform in the sense that they are based on language and that on this basis there is a circular relation between experience and language.

Phenomenology shows that it is being itself that gives the foundation and structure to language utterances, which incorporate this structure, and it is precisely because there is structural identity that language can refer to experience. This does not mean separating the central theme of phenomenology – all consciousness is consciousness of – from the method of phenomenology, that is, from the fact that it is an eidetic science describing experience. Experience is structured, has a sense and is therefore sayable, because it is intentional and it is always possible to explain the sense of an experience through the objectivity at which it aims.

Phenomenology operates at the level of experience while linguistic analysis operates at the level of utterances. The former establishes the level of constitution, the latter the level of expression. But the two methodologies converge insofar as the work of phenomenology is based on linguistic analysis and from the latter we can discover the former.

The object perceived is already a sense unit presumed liable to be annulled during the further appearances of the object. Therefore there is meaning before language. *Lebenswelt* is the experience that precedes language. It is reached through an operation carried out *in* and *on* language in the form of retracing via questioning which enables language in its entirety to find its foundation in what is outside language.

Language contains the reference to something different from the self.

Phenomenology shows that it is being itself that underlies and structures language utterances, which incorporate this structure, and it is precisely because there is structural identity that language can refer to experience.

The language of action “construes meaning” not in a situation of observation, but precisely insofar as it informs action in the transaction process that develops between two agents. For this reason the interplay of question and answer in which the concepts of intuition and reflection take on meaning, is not where protocols are expressed. But analysing ordinary language reveals that languages “construe meaning”, even without constataion and without entailing verification

There is, therefore, “sense”, not only in constataion, but also in all illocutionary acts, just as there is illocution in a constataion. Giving an order or making a promise is to say something about something, but to say it in the imperative or in the future indicative etc.

Ricoeur argues that the crux of meaning lies in “taking the other person into account”. The relation between wills<sup>10</sup>, in conflict or in collaboration, is important for any strategy. Action is always in fact a way of behaving in relation to another person, of regulating one’s own game against the other’s game.

At this level language works by *family resemblances*, *overlapping*, and *digressions*. This is the “wisdom of language”.

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<sup>1</sup> «The idea exists beyond language, just as the little phrase exists beyond its execution or "apparition" [...] See = reversibility of the seer and of the visible, think = *reversibility of the word in use and [x] nameable*», ID., *Manuscrits*, Vol. VII, f. 203[r], in D. DE LEO, *La relazione percettiva. La musica. Merleau-Ponty e la musica*, Mimesis, Milano 2009, p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> «The idea of an expression never achieved», ID., *Manuscrits*, Vol. III, p. 210; in D. DE LEO, *La relazione percettiva. La musica. Merleau-Ponty e la musica*, cit., p. 106. As Merleau-Ponty underlines, Saussure taught us that if taken in isolation, signs mean nothing, in that rather than expressing a meaning, each of them indicates a gap in meaning between the self and the other person: «language is made up of differences and not of terms; or rather, in language the terms are generated by the differences that appear between them», ID., *Il linguaggio indiretto e le voci del silenzio*, in ID., *Segni*, cit., pp. 64-115, p. 63. Mauro Carbone makes a highly relevant parallel in his book *La carne e la voce*, between Merleau-Ponty's idea of flesh and Saussure's idea of language. The starting point of this analysis is the misunderstanding which, in my opinion, underlies the critiques of Nancy, Deleuze and Derrida and which can be summed up in two points. Firstly, the view of the flesh as a way of updating that of the subject safeguarding its traits of ownership and unity. In other words, the first misunderstanding lies in seeing the idea of the flesh as a way of making the body the last hiding place for subjectivity. The second misunderstanding lies in the interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's idea of reversibility of meaning as an accomplished reversibility with no gaps, such that there is a closure into oneself leading to a sort of confusion which in the end would annul any difference. However, the model I believe Merleau-Ponty uses when he describes the idea of the flesh is that of the language he finds in Saussure's linguistics, which holds that language functions as the interaction between different signs that can give rise to meaning thanks to their mutual difference. It is therefore on this conception of the differences that, as such, produce identity, that Merleau-Ponty's concept of the flesh is based, along with – obviously – his characterisation of reversibility. It is following the moral curve that the discourse adopts, according to Merleau-Ponty's arguments against the conceptions of language that emerge in both empiricism and intellectualism, that Levin's thought is articulated: «for our purposes here there is no need for a detailed repetition of Merleau-Ponty's arguments against this philosophy of language. For us what will be important is his phenomenologically generated topology of embodied experience. Specifically, we will be concerned with the possibility of relating the articulation of this topology to a process of self-reflection – a process that essentially involves a memory supported by the body, a "Proustian" memory – where the correspondence intrinsic to the syntony between our bodily experience and language is retrieved and raised to the level of a moral responsibility», M. CARBONE, D. M. LEVIN, *La carne e la voce. In dialogo tra estetica ed etica*, Mimesis, Milano 2003, p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> «I walk towards language – the expression sounds as if language were a long way from us, in some place, where in order to reach we would need to start walking. But is it really necessary to reach language? According to an ancient tradition, we ourselves are beings that are able to speak and therefore already possess language. Man would not be man if he were not granted the power to speak, to say. Right from the beginning we are therefore in language and with language. Walking towards language is not necessary. Moreover, it is impossible, if it is true that we are already where it would

lead us. But are we there? We are in language so as to express its real *being*, so as to think it as language, in the act. Listening to what is peculiar or typical of it, are we able to perceive it? We already abide, without our own cooperation, in the proximity of language», M. HEIDEGGER, *Unterwegs zur sprache*, Pfullingen, Neske 1959, p. 189.

<sup>4</sup> «The word carries the whole idea and becomes itself an idea», ID., *Manuscripts*, vol. VII , *Le Visible et l'invisible Notes de préparation* , f. 203, in D. DE LEO, *La relazione percettiva. La musica. Merleau-Ponty e la musica*, cit., p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> «Using external signs to bring to life in others' spirits a conception that is *in* the author. Two thinking subjects and some signs», ID., *Manuscripts*, vol. III *La Prose du monde. Notes de préparation*, f. 210, in Ibidem.

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. for further detail S. SALVATORE, M. SCOTTO DI CARLO, *L'intervento psicologico per la scuola. Modelli, metodi, strumenti*, Ed. Carlo Amore, Roma 2005, pp. 89 e ss.

<sup>7</sup> «For too long the philosophers have assumed that the task of an "assertion" can only be to "describe" a certain state of things, or to "expound some fact", which must be done in a true way or a false one. Scholars of grammar have actually pointed out regularly that not all "sentences" are (used to make) assertions: traditionally, as well as assertions (of the grammarians), there are also questions and exclamations, and utterances expressing orders or desires or connections. [...] Not all true or false assertions are descriptions », J. AUSTIN, *How to Do things with Words*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 1962, pp. 7-8.

<sup>8</sup> Prompted by Austin's analysis, Searle developed the notion of language act in a formulation that is close to Frege's model, distinguishing not between locutionary and illocutionary act, but between illocutionary force and propositional content. Cfr. J. SEARLE, *Expression and Meaning*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1979.

<sup>9</sup> «To say "I will do" can be to promise, or to express an intention, or foresee my future. E so on. [...]. So when we say "I will do" we can clarify that we are making a prediction by adding the adverbs "undoubtedly" or "probably", that we are expressing an intention by adding the adverbs "certainly" or "decidedly", or that we are promising by adding the adverbial phrase "without fail", or by saying "I'll do my best"», J. AUSTIN, *How to Do things with Words*, cit., p. 59.

<sup>10</sup> The real puzzle of volition lies in the overlapping of intention and the onset of action. So voluntary intention is analysed in three steps: "wanting to", "starting to do", and lastly "doing". In this perspective what comes into play is not only the dichotomy between passivity and activity: the notion of action is not just distinguished from passivity, in that activity itself has two opposites, not only movement as an event, but also the subject's passivity. In analysing the cause, one discovers a sense which cannot be linked either to a constant antecedent or to an active power, but is the passive counterpart of power. Assigning a desire as the motive does not mean attributing a reason. But knowing an intention means knowing the reasons, and things no longer proceed in this way when the sphere of passivity is taken into consideration. Factors of "disposition" are then introduced, which cannot be reduced to the "reasons for". The ultimate difficulty of the theory of action therefore lies in the relation between "disposition for" and "power to". An act is what can be carried out or done, begun, taken up again, carried on, interrupted. The act is the 'I can' of 'I think'. So the "fact" is no longer simply the observable, but the completed work, brought to light by language.