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ARTICLES

Languages, Language, and Linguists: The Study of the Diversity of Languages According to Saussure and Benveniste / *As línguas, a língua e os linguistas: o estudo da diversidade das línguas em Saussure e Benveniste*

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ABSTRACT
With this article, we aim to address aspects related to the treatment of languages in the theoretical postulations of two linguists: Ferdinand de Saussure and Émile Benveniste. To do so, we examine selected works by these authors, seeking to discuss—based on evidence—the role they grant to languages in their formulations. The analyses allow us to demonstrate the protagonism of the diversity of languages as one of the points where the two linguists meet, even though there are differences in their approaches.
KEYWORDS: Ferdinand de Saussure; Émile Benveniste; Languages; Language

RESUMO
Neste artigo, objetivamos abordar aspectos ligados ao tratamento das línguas na elaboração teórica de dois linguistas: Ferdinand de Saussure e Émile Benveniste. Para isso, examinamos obras selecionadas dos autores, buscando, a partir de evidências, discutir o papel que eles concedem às línguas em suas teorizações. As análises permitem apontar para o protagonismo da diversidade das línguas como um dos pontos de encontro entre os dois linguistas, ainda que existam diferenças no modo de abordagem de cada um deles.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Ferdinand de Saussure; Émile Benveniste; Línguas; Língua

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Introduction

In an article titled "Da diversidade das línguas à língua: Notas de leitura do *Curso de linguística geral*" [From the diversity of languages to language: Notes from reading Course in General Linguistics], Magali Lopes Endruweit and Valdir do Nascimento Flores analyze the theoretical value of the discussion on the diversity of languages for Ferdinand de Saussure's reflection. They exclusively consider the propositions in *Course in General Linguistics* (CGL) as their *corpus.*[1]

In order to do so, the authors identify three instances in which "Saussure resorts to the diversity of languages [...] to present his point of view on *the* language [*langue*]" (Endruweit; Flores, 2015, p. 103; emphasis in original).[2] They are: i) the limits of metalanguage, revealed by the terminological difficulty caused by the terms "language [*langue*]," "speech" and "language [*langage*]" (included in the chapter of *CGL* devoted to "The Object of Linguistics"); ii) the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, demonstrated, by Saussure, via examples of different signifiers for the same signified in different languages (specifically *b-ö-f* and *o-k-s* to name the "ox" in France and Germany),[3] which proves that "each language demarcates what is knowable in a different way" (Endruweit; Flores, 2015, p. 107);[4] and iii) the idea of value, a mechanism exemplified by the differences in the value of the "same" expression (*mouton* and *sheep*; *louer*, let (a house), *mieten* and *vermieten*, etc.) in different languages. With these examples, the authors demonstrate that the irreducibility between languages is a primordial characteristic for

[1] Briefly, the authors justify considering *CGL* as the exclusive *corpus* for their paper for two reasons: i) the need to resume reading *CGL* in undergraduate courses; ii) the fact that "*CGL* symbolically occupies a unique position in the history of linguistic ideas besides being an important source of Saussure's thought in the academic world" (Endruweit; Flores, 2015, p. 93; in Portuguese: "o *CLG* ocupa, simbolicamente, uma posição singular na história das ideias linguísticas além de ser uma fonte importante do pensamento saussuriano no mundo acadêmico.").

[2] In Portuguese: "Saussure recorre à diversidade das línguas [...] para apresentar seu ponto de vista sobre a língua."

[3] We do not ignore the fact that the example *b-ö-f*/*o-k-s*/"ox" gave rise to countless—controversial—debates and was even questioned by Émile Benveniste (1971, pp. 43-48) in the article The Nature of the Linguistic Sign [in BENVENISTE, Émile. *Problems in General Linguistics*. Translated by Mary Elizabeth Meek. Miami: University of Miami Press, 1971]; however, we will not delve into the issue, which transcends the scope of this article. For an excellent account of the discussion, see Flores (2017).

[4] In Portuguese: "cada língua recorta o cognoscível de uma maneira distinta."

Saussure, since "the understanding of what the language [*langue*] is as an object of Saussure's linguistics depends on it" (Endruweit; Flores, 2015, p. 111).[5]

The researchers indicate that their proposal is "an initial analysis of the collected material" (Endruweit; Flores, 2015, p. 91)[6] Thus, herein, the steps the authors took inspire us and we use their primary observations on Saussure's work as the starting point for our paper. This study aims to address aspects related to the diversity of languages in Saussure, where we draw near Endruweit and Flores (2015), and in Émile Benveniste, where we distance ourselves from the research that inspired this publication. Beyond Manichaean discourses of affiliation and/or rupture between Benveniste and Saussure, acting in accordance with Normand (2009), we consider that both linguists encounter each other in multiple aspects: in this study, we will address the one that deals with the involvement of languages in their linguistic thought. Despite the apparent triviality of approaching the involvement of languages in their oeuvres—in theory, it is obvious that every linguist is interested in languages—we believe that this type of study has not been adequately explored, both with regard to the formulations of each author, but mainly with regard to the correspondences that may arise from their relationship. This is what we seek to accomplish, albeit initially, with this study.

The path to address the correspondences between Saussure and Benveniste from the angle of languages in this paper is organized into three parts. In the first section, titled "We have to work with languages: Saussure and the diversity of languages," we take the observations made by Endruweit and Flores (2015) on the diversity of languages in Saussure as a starting point and expand on them based on selected texts. In the following section — "Benveniste, a linguist of languages"— we outline considerations from the same point of view — the theoretical and methodological value of the diversity of languages[7]— examining the work of another linguist, Émile Benveniste. Finally, in the

[5] In Portuguese: "depende o entendimento do que vem a ser a língua como objeto da linguística saussuriana."
[6] In Portuguese: "uma análise inicial do material coletado."
[7] In this article, the expression "diversity of languages" is understood in the same terms established by Saussure (1959, pp. 192-193) in *CGL*: "Beside diversity within related groups, then, there is absolute diversity—differences between languages that have no recognizable or demonstrable kinship. […] As we have just noted, countless languages and families of languages are not related." [in SAUSSURE, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. Translated by Wade Baskin. New York: Philosophical Library, 1959]. Thus, we assume that a multiplicity of languages are and were spoken around the world and that they differ from one another to a lesser or greater degree.

third and final section of the article — "Saussure, Benveniste, and languages: similarities and dissimilarities"— we are guided by the idea of talking about the relationship between Saussure and Benveniste in terms of encounters (Normand, 2009). We propose that the diversity of languages represents points of intersection in many aspects, while pointing out positions in which the constructs of the linguists are different.

1 "We Have to Work with Languages": Saussure and the Diversity of Languages

No one disagrees with the assertion that Saussure was a linguist who was devoted to multiple languages. The Swiss linguist belonged to a French family and defended his dissertation on the genitive absolute in Sanskrit in Germany; as a result of his time and the work of his time, throughout his professional life he dedicated himself to researching and teaching Indo-European languages such as Greek, Latin, High German, Sanskrit, Lithuanian and others (Arrivé, 2010). The close relation between his academic training—based mainly on research into comparative grammar of Indo-European languages from the 19th century—and the formulations that "gave him the title of founder of linguistics," according to Eliane Silveira (2007, p. 47),[8] is equally unquestionable. None of these statements, however, is sufficient to establish to what extent the study of languages may contribute to the development of his general linguistics. It is therefore necessary to observe how Saussure established this relation within his formulations.

To begin the discussion around the value of the diversity of languages in Saussure's theoretical framework, we generally begin with the section where the topic is most evident in *CGL*, titled "Geographical Linguistics." It is organized into four chapters ("Concerning the Diversity of Languages," "Complications of Geographical Diversity," "Causes of Geographical Diversity," and "Spread of Linguistic Waves").

Even though the discussion surrounding the authorship of *CGL* is not relevant to the debate that we propose herein, it is worth noting a specific issue regarding the position of these chapters. The location of the texts devoted to the diversity of languages does not coincide with either the quantity or the order attributed by Saussure in his courses at the

[8] In Portuguese: "lhe renderam o título de fundador da linguística."

University of Geneva[9] — as we know, the order was established by his colleagues Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, based mainly on the classes of the third and final course. Tullio de Mauro states, in his annotated version of *CGL*, that, when considering the path taken by the linguist during the courses, the first pages should be dedicated to languages, bearing in mind that Saussure's reasoning began with the plurality of linguistic forms to arrive at generalizations about languages. Thus, "the reader and the student would be made aware of a general dimension of linguistic phenomena, and the discourse would move from 'languages' to the 'language [*langue*]'" (De Mauro, 2005, p. 474).[10] Correspondingly, Endruweit and Flores (2015, p. 100)[11] consider that while the Genevan linguist follows "a direction that goes from awareness of the contingent, historically accidental nature of the organization of languages to the analysis of universalizing aspects, common to all languages," the book that results from the courses, "due to the editorial organization it received, subverts this order: it begins with the universalizing notion and arrives at the contingency of languages." This leads to some consequences when thinking about Saussure's general linguistics, such as the wrong understanding that his linguistics begins with abstract aspects, with theorization, and only then reaches concrete aspects.

Overall, the fourth part of *CGL* is dedicated to dealing mainly with diversity from a perspective of time and space—related to what Saussure calls "external linguistics." He begins with the following statement:

> The most striking thing about the study of languages is their diversity—linguistic differences that appear when we pass from one country to another or even from one region to another. Divergences in time often escape the observer, but divergences in space immediately force themselves upon him […]. Indeed, these comparisons are what makes a nation aware of its idiom (Saussure, 1959, p. 191).[12]

[9] Here we are speaking of the three courses on general linguistics courses taught by Saussure at the University of Geneva between 1906 and 1911. The book *Course in General Linguistics* was established mainly based on notes taken during these courses.

[10] In French: "le lecteur et l'étudiant auraient ensuite été conduits à prendre conscience d'une dimension générale des phénomènes linguistiques, et le discours serait passé des 'langues' à la 'langue'."

[11] In Portuguese: "uma direção que vai da conscientização da natureza contingencial e historicamente acidental da organização das línguas à análise de aspectos universalizantes, comuns a todas as línguas"; "devido à organização editorial que recebeu, subverte essa ordem: ele parte da noção universalizante e chega à contingência das línguas."

[12] SAUSSURE, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. Translated by Wade Baskin. New York: Philosophical Library, 1959.

Subsequently, Saussure asserts that "geographical diversity was, then, the first observation made in Linguistics. It determined the initial form of scientific research in language" (Saussure, 1959, p. 191).[13] By noticing the constitutive difference between languages, according to the linguist, "one instinctively looks for similarities. This is a natural tendency of speakers. Peasants like to compare their patois with the one spoken in a neighboring village. People who speak several languages notice their common traits" (Saussure, 1959, p. 192).[14] Based on the scientific treatment of such similarities, connections between languages that are regarded as related are established, that is, an attempt to reconstruct a common origin for them is made. This is the method to compare languages at different levels (phonetic, morphological, semantic, syntactic, etc.). Besides recognizing the speaker's knowledge in relation to the diversity of languages, the chapter explores the difference between linguistic diversity in kinship (languages in the same family) and absolute diversity (languages in distant families that are not related to each other). In both cases, albeit with different objectives, the methods of comparative grammar seem to be satisfactory.

In the chapter "Complications of Geographical Diversity," Saussure addresses the linguistic complexities generated by geographical diversity, when the "ideal form" of diversity — one single language for one nation and one territory — is not fulfilled. To this end, Saussure evokes countless situations of diglossia and multilingualism, such as contacts between languages, the intervening institutional and political factors, the relationship between the literary language[15] and the so-called non-standard dialects. It also deals with the linguistic consequences of the displacement of populations to other spaces.

In the third chapter, Saussure discusses the causes of the geographical diversity of languages and establishes a clearer connection between time and space in a linguistic mass with a common origin, regarding time as the essential cause of diversity in space. The linguist continues the discussion and assesses that "geographical diversity should be

[13] For reference, see footnote 12.
[14] For reference, see footnote 12.
[15] The literary language is not necessarily the language of literature: "By literary language I mean not only the language of literature but also, in a more general sense, any kind of cultivated language, official or otherwise, that serves the whole community" (Saussure, 1959, p. 195; for reference, see footnote 12).

called temporal diversity" (Saussure, 1959, p. 198).[16] For him, the geographical distance between previously close languages, in itself, does not create differences: "Volume is measured, not by one surface, but by adding a third dimension, depth; similarly, geographical differentiation is pictured completely only when projected in time" (Saussure, 1959, p. 198).[17]

Finally, the fourth and final chapter of the section dedicated to geographical linguistics addresses the spread of linguistic waves,[18] understood as the spread of linguistic facts, and the consequences of questioning the existence of the dialect category. In this chapter, Saussure introduces the theoretical terms "provincialism" and "intercourse," in order to describe the opposing and complementary forces that work simultaneously in a linguistic community, whether to maintain the stability of the language ("provincialism") or to agitate it ("intercourse"). The linguist discriminates two forms of intercourse: the first tries to prevent "dialectal splintering by wiping out an innovation whenever and wherever it springs up" (Saussure, 1959, p. 206);[19] the second favors the unity of the language "by adopting and spreading an innovation" (Saussure, 1959, p. 206).[20] This second form of intercourse is called a "linguistic wave"— a concept that appears in the title of the chapter — to "designate the geographical boundaries of a dialectal fact" (Saussure, 1959, p. 206).[21] With the consequences of the distinction between intercourse and provincialism, the linguist realizes that, when it comes to the same territory, provincialism "is nothing more than the force of intercourse peculiar to each region" (Saussure, 1959, p. 208),[22] which is why he considers that both aspects can be reduced to a single principle: intercourse. With regard to the distinction of linguistic facts in separate territories, Saussure (1959, p. 209)[23] is interested in knowing "whether separation plays a role in the history of languages and whether its effects differ from those that appear where there is continuity." The solution also lies in the theory of waves, given

[16] For reference, see footnote 12.
[17] For reference, see footnote 12.
[18] The theory of the spread of waves was introduced by German linguist Johannes Schmidt (1843-1901), who, in his work *Die Verwandtschaftsverhältinisse der Indogermanischen Sprachen*, published its principles by observing linguistic innovations based on gradual, constant spread in space.
[19] For reference, see footnote 12.
[20] For reference, see footnote 12.
[21] For reference, see footnote 12.
[22] For reference, see footnote 12.
[23] For reference, see footnote 12.

that it "reveals the causes of differentiation and the conditions that determine the kinship of languages" (Saussure, 1959, p. 210).[24]

Based on the content of the four chapters included in the section "Geographical Linguistics" in *CGL*, it is possible to observe certain recurrences and similarities between them. Here we are referring not only to the constant presence of two elements that are directly related—languages and the speaker—but also to the way Saussure leads the discussion regarding the variety of languages (which translates into variety in space and time): the linguist establishes an indispensable relation between particular/specific and universal/theoretical aspects.

On the subject of the languages, it is immediately possible to see that they are massively present. As an example, with a quick count limited to the chapters of the fourth section of *CGL*, we tallied around 56 different languages, distributed in greater or lesser frequency according to thematic need. Most belong to the Indo-European family, but there are mentions to languages from the Semitic, Bantu, and Ural-Altaic families. Even though the number of languages featured in a small number of pages is impressive, this item of data in itself does not tell us much about the relevance of languages in Saussure's theoretical formulations.

In general, languages are used due to their explanatory and didactic function, which enables the establishment principles and theoretical foundations regarding the object language [*langue*], based on empirical linguistic facts. This is what happens, for example, when Saussure (1959, p. 193)[25] addresses one of the consequences of linguistic diversity: the fact that there are "several languages that coexist in the same territory" with no confusion between each other. To demonstrate the assertion, the linguist mentions countless cases in which this occurs; without being exhaustive, we only highlight a few examples.

> Throughout the centuries nations have intermingled and still kept their idioms distinct. To realize this fact we need only glance at a map of modern Europe: Ireland, with Celtic and English; many of the Irish speak both languages. In Brittany, French and Breton. In the Basque region, French and Spanish as well as Basque. In Finland, Swedish and Finnish have coexisted for a rather long time, and Russian has been

[24] For reference, see footnote 12.
[25] For reference, see footnote 12.

> added more recently. In Courland and Livonia, Lettish, German and Russian are spoken; German, which was brought in by colonists under the auspices of the Hanseatic League during the Middle Ages, belongs to a special segment of the population; Russian subsequently entered by conquest (Saussure, 1959, p. 194).[26]

By following Saussure's reasoning, we see that it is only possible to speak of the coexistence of several languages at the same point (theoretical construction) based on the observation of the existence of different territories in which there is diglossia (empirical observation). In other words, the theoretical formulation takes shape and is established because it finds an empirical basis that support it in the languages. More than addressing the coexistence of several languages in the same space, Saussure demonstrates and proves that this occurs in many territories, to the point of deducing the generality of the phenomenon by stating that, in ancient times, "unilingual countries […] were the exception" (Saussure, 1959, p. 195).[27]

Saussure also explains how his formulation takes shape in languages when he emphasizes the diversity arising from the action of time in a continuous territory where the same language is spoken. By putting the preponderance of space with regard to changes into perspective, the linguist adds the need for the time variable and presents us with a definition that condenses the relationship between particular and general. He affirms that "*change itself* (leaving out the special direction it takes and its particular manifestations)—in short, the instability of language—stems from time along" (Saussure, 1959, pp. 198-199; emphasis in original).[28] Two propositions are put forward to deal with the case in which a stable population speaks a language in a given territory: i) even under these conditions "the language will no longer be the same after a certain length of time;" ii) "evolution will not be uniform throughout the territory but will vary from zone to zone" (Saussure, 1959, p. 199).[29] The linguist demonstrates the phenomenon with changes in Latin in different areas of the same territory: "*c* and *g* changed before *a* to *tš*, *dž*, then *š*, *ž* (cf. *cantum* → *chant* 'song', *virga* → *verge* 'rod') throughout northern France except in

[26] For reference, see footnote 12.
[27] For reference, see footnote 12.
[28] For reference, see footnote 12.
[29] For reference, see footnote 12.

Picardy and part of Normandy, where *c* and *g* remained intact" (Saussure, 1959, p. 200; emphasis in original).[30]

In turn, the speaker is called upon in Saussure's formulations when it comes to referring to the experience that ordinary speakers have with their own language(s). Before advancing, it is necessary to establish what we are referring to when we talk about the speaker in this discussion: here we are not referring to the speaker as an individual person, but to the representative of a given community. In his remarks about synchrony and diachrony and their relation with speech, Saussure himself authorizes the idea that the speaker be understood from the perspective of the collective: for him, "not all innovations of speaking have the same success, and so long as they remain individual, they may be ignored, for we are studying language; they do not enter into our field of observation until the community of speakers has adopted them" (Saussure, 1959, p. 98).[31] In other words, the figure of the speaker, in this case, performs a metonymic function to refer to the social mass of speakers, the group. There is no doubt that man's relationship with language is an experience that is both social and individual; however, the speaker, in this section, is more closely related to the social than to the individual. Saussure's recognition that there are no languages without speakers nor speakers without language(s), without resorting to a uniquely individual experience as a consequence, is ultimately crucial. This characterization of the speaker as a collective is demonstrated when we observe other uses of the term by the linguist. Most of the time, the "speaker" is mentioned through a word in its plural form. There are copious examples—we will point to three of them.

When dealing with the awareness of one's own language through comparison and differentiation from other languages, Saussure (1959, p. 192; emphasis added)[32] states that "having noticed that two idioms differ, one instinctively looks for similarities" and regards this as "a natural tendency of *speakers*. *Peasants* like to compare their patois with the one spoken in a neighboring village. *People* who speak several languages notice their common traits." When he addresses the imposition of literary language on local languages, the linguist assesses that this happens frequently and presents the reader with an example of what occurred in Greek: "It has been the same will all nations that have

[30] For reference, see footnote 12.
[31] For reference, see footnote 12.
[32] For reference, see footnote 12.

reached a certain stage of civilization. *The Greeks* had their *koine,*[33] derived from Attic and Ionian, along with coexisting local dialects" (Saussure, 1959, p. 196; emphasis added).[34]

The speaker is also called upon to demonstrate the role of time as the main cause of geographical diversity. Saussure does this when he explains and demonstrates the changes in the form (*a*) in a given language with the formulaic assumption of the transportation of that given language from one point to another in a delimited territory, thus forming three possible distinctions for *a* in two states of a language (*a* source S $\rightarrow \frac{b}{a}$, $\frac{a}{c}$; *a* settlement S' $\rightarrow \frac{a}{c}$, $\frac{b}{c}$). When projecting the possible causes of differences in his simulation, he argues that, contrary to what may appear at first glance, time is the preponderant factor in relation to space.

> By itself, space cannot influence language. On the day following their arrival at S' *the colonists* from S spoke exactly the same language as on the preceding day. It is easy to forget about the factor of time because it is less concrete than space, but it is actually the cause of linguistic differentiation. Geographical diversity should be called temporal diversity (Saussure, 1959, p. 198; emphasis added).[35]

Two aspects should be highlighted in this excerpt. The first is the mention of the speaker even when it comes to creating theoretical or hypothetical conditions for changes in the same language; such is the impossibility of disjunction, at the empirical level, between language and speaker. The second concerns the constant movement of resorting to empirics (albeit in abstract terms) to advance theoretical constructs. In this case, Saussure begins with a demonstration of possible changes in the same form (*a*) in two states of a language with two delimited territories (S and S') to outline his proposition that "geographical diversity should be called temporal diversity" (Saussure, 1959, p. 198).[36] This will be the basis for the following principle: "*change itself* (leaving out the special direction it takes and its particular manifestations)—in short, the instability of language—stems from time along," which means that "unless the comparative linguist

[33] Common, supraregional, Hellenic language.
[34] For reference, see footnote 12.
[35] For reference, see footnote 12.
[36] For reference, see footnote 12.

thoroughly assimilates this principle, he is likely to delude himself" (Saussure, 1959, pp. 198-199; emphasis in original).[37]

Having scrutinized the chapters of the fourth part of *CGL*, it is important to reiterate that the fact that we look in more detail into the part devoted to geographical linguistics to deal with the diversity of languages—since the presence of languages is more evident there—should not give rise to a mistaken perception that the reflection about this issue is confined to this part—rather the opposite. Since, in a way, Saussure's research on languages makes up the substrate of his linguistic propositions, it would not be unreasonable to state that the role and importance of languages in Saussure's work are constant and essential. Saussure's linguistics is a general linguistics in that it "moves from the empirical generalization of accrued results to the theoretical generality of the principles" (Flores, 2022, p. 74).[38] With different functions, the indispensability of languages is perceived since the introduction of *CGL*, when he establishes the foundations and principles of general linguistics (subject matter, scope, object, etc.), and accompanies him incessantly as a confirmation of the empirical manifestation of his science.

The subject matter of his linguistics are "all manifestations of human speech, whether that of savages or civilized nations, [...] in each period the linguist must consider not only correct speech and flowery language, but all forms of expression as well" (Saussure, 1959, p. 6),[39] and part of its scope is "to describe and trace the history of all observable languages" (Saussure, 1959, p. 6).[40] Even though the theoretical object of linguistics is language — understood here as "the social product deposited in the brain of each individual" (Saussure, 1959, p. 23)[41] —"we have to work with languages. The linguist is obliged to acquaint himself with the greatest possible number of languages in order to determine what is universal in them by observing and comparing them" (Saussure, 1959, p. 23).[42] It should be noted that it is only through any and all manifestations of human language that it may encompass that it is possible to make language into a formalizable object of linguistics. Thus, it is a formalization (theory) that

[37] For reference, see footnote 12.
[38] In Portuguese: "se desloca da generalização empírica dos resultados acumulados para a generalidade teórica dos princípios"
[39] For reference, see footnote 12.
[40] For reference, see footnote 12.
[41] For reference, see footnote 12.
[42] For reference, see footnote 12.

cannot abstain from observation (empirics). There are even moments when the boundary between theoretical and empirical aspects become more blurred, as when Saussure states, when dealing with the general principle of immutability and mutability of the linguistic sign, that "the only real object of linguistics is the normal, regular life of an existing idiom" (Saussure, 1959, p. 72).[43] Therefore, if the object of the line language is initially language as a social product of the community of speakers, here we see a kind of similarity between the formalized object and the concrete data, since "the normal, regular life of an existing idiom" may be interpreted as a synonym for a given language.

In fact, there is a two-way relationship between languages and language [*langue*] in Saussure: the questions he raises about language simultaneously involve theoretical and methodological issues, considering that they refer to the conditions for the analysis of languages themselves and result from and/or lead to demonstrations. From a methodological perspective, languages, always particular (empirical), are the tangible representation of language (generalization/theorization of languages); it is not possible to establish linguistics other than with languages. We can only come to this realization because we, as humans, have the faculty (capacity) of language, of being speakers (Barboza, 2023). From a theoretical perspective, the study, observation, comparison and description of specific languages provided linguists with the possibility of generalizing about them and pointing out universal principles about language.

2 Benveniste, a Linguist of Languages

Émile Benveniste is known in the field as "a linguist of *languages*"—an epithet given to him by none other than Roland Barthes (1989, p. 165; emphasis in original)[44] and repeated by several other scholars, who also highlight that Benveniste uses many languages in his analyses. As Flores (2013, p. 73) states:

> One could say, without no risk of being untruthful, that Benveniste is a linguist of languages—since he knew many and uses them to validate his theoretical point of view—but he is also a linguist of the language

[43] For reference, see footnote 12.
[44] BARTHES, Roland. Why I Love Benveniste. *In*: BARTHES, Roland. *The Rustle of Language*. Translated by Richard Howard. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989. pp. 162-167.

> system [*langue*] and of language in general [*langage*]. There are texts by Benveniste in which more than 15 languages are mentioned.[45]

In this regard, both Georges Redard (2014) and Tzvetan Todorov (2014) provide lists of languages and language families that are relevant to Benveniste, including German, Armenian, Baltic, Celtic, Slavic, Spanish, French, Germanic, Greek, Hittite, Indian, English, Italian, Iranian, Latin, Sanskrit, Sogdian, and Tocharian. From a personal standpoint, we know that the linguist grew up in a multilingual environment—in his childhood, there was "a multiplicity of languages around him: Russian, Turkish, Arabic, the Hebrew taught by his mother, and... French" (Fenoglio, 2016, p. 337)[46] — and that "at sixteen, Émile Benveniste had already established the list of languages he should learn (a dozen!) and at the age at which one normally faces serious difficulty with the Latin version, he is passionate about comparative grammar" (Redard, 2014, p. 206).[47]

However, akin to Saussure, the attribution of the epithet "linguist of languages" and the mention that Benveniste knows and uses many languages are not sufficient to establish the role that languages, in their diversity, play in the linguist's formulations. Thus, it is also necessary to observe how Benveniste uses languages to reflect on the language system [*langue*] and language [*langage*].

When taking Benveniste's use of languages into account, it is first important to note that due to the nature and diversity of the material he published—composed, according to Moïnfar (1992, p. 22),[48] of "18 books, 300 articles and one a similar number of reviews full of reflection and often as rich as his articles"—there is not a single moment in his oeuvre that is devoted to thinking exclusively about the diversity of languages or to analyzing linguistic data. On the contrary, it is possible to see that knowledge about and originating from languages is spread throughout his theoretical production.

[45] In Portuguese: "Poder-se-ia dizer, sem medo de faltar com a verdade, que Benveniste é um linguista das línguas – já que era conhecedor de muitas e a elas recorre para validar seu ponto de vista teórico –, mas também o é da língua e da linguagem. Há textos de Benveniste nos quais são citadas mais de 15 línguas."
[46] In French: "une multiplicité de langues autour d'eux : le russe, le turc, l'arabe, l'hébreu enseigné par la mère, et... le français."
[47] In Portuguese: "aos dezesseis anos, Émile Benveniste já estabeleceu a lista de línguas que deve aprender (uma dúzia!) e na idade em que normalmente se tem muita dificuldade com a versão em latim, é apaixonado por gramática comparada."
[48] In French: "dix-huit livres, près de trois cents articles, et autant de comptes rendus pleins de réflexion et souvent aussi riches que ses articles."

On the one hand, there are, naturally, for thematic reasons, a large number of languages cited in his books about comparative grammar, such as *Noms d'agent et noms d'action en indo-européen*, *Origines de la formation des noms en indo-européen,* and *Dictionary of Indo-European Concepts and Society*, as well as in articles that examine linguistic structures, such as those in the third and fourth parts of *Problems in General Linguistics,* titled Structures and Analyzes and Syntactic Functions. On the other hand, however, it is also clear that languages spread unrestrictedly throughout the linguist's work. A recent inventory, whose *corpus* consisted of 11 books by Benveniste,[49] listed 470 different languages mentioned by the linguist – they are not mentioned only in the Introduction to the Third Part of *Noms d'agent et noms d'action en indo-européen* and in the articles Animal Communication and Human Language (reprinted in *Problems in General Linguistics*) and Les Indo-Européens et le peuplement de l'Europe (published in *Langues, cultures, religions*) (Hoff, 2023).

Besides this massive presence of languages in Benveniste's texts, they also include regular reflections on the importance of languages for linguistics. In the Preface to the first volume of *Problems in General Linguistics*, Benveniste ponders on the difficulties that are inherent to linguistics, stating that it is necessary to take into account

> that language is indeed a difficult subject and that the analysis of linguistic data is achieved by arduous paths. Like the other sciences, linguistics advances in direct proportion to the *complexity* which it recognizes in things; the stages of its development are the stages of this awareness. Moreover, one must bear in mind the truth that reflection on language is fruitful only if it deals first of all with real languages. The study of those empirical, historical organisms which actual languages are remains the only possible access to the understanding of the general mechanisms and functioning of language (Benveniste, 1971, p. vii; emphasis in original).[50]

[49] They are: *Origines de la formation des noms en indo-européen* (1935), *Textes sogdiens* (1940), *Vessantara Jātaka* (1946), *Noms d'agent et noms d'action en indo-européen* (1948), *Études sur la langue ossète* (1959), *Hittite et indo-européen* (1962), *Problèmes de linguistique générale, 1* (1966), *Titres et noms propres en iranien ancien* (1966), *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes, 1* and 2 (1969), *Problèmes de linguistique générale, 2* (1974), and *Langues, cultures, religions* (2015).

[50] BENVENISTE, Émile. *Problems in General Linguistics*. Translated by Mary Elizabeth Meek. Miami: University of Miami Press, 1971.

A similar concern is registered in A Look at the Development of Linguistics, when Benveniste (1971, p. 17)[51] argues that there are two objects for linguistics: "it is the science of language and the science of languages." According to the author, it is necessary to distinguish the two of them, since "language, the human faculty, the universal and immutable characteristic of man, is something distinct from particular languages, always individual and variable, in which it is realized," that is, "the infinitely diverse problems of particular languages have in common that, when stated to a certain degree of generality, they always have a bearing on language in general" (Benveniste, 1971, pp. 17-18).[52] As they are a means of access to language, languages must be a priority amidst the concerns of linguists: "It is with languages that the linguist deals, and linguistics is primarily the theory of languages" (Benveniste, 1971, p. 17).[53]

In another reflection with an epistemological nature, in an interview with Guy Dumur, when mentioning the relationship between linguistics and grammar and philology, Benveniste states:

> Everything that concerns language is the subject matter of linguistics. Some of the disciplines you mention—philology in particular—only deal with the content of texts, their transmission through time, etc. Linguistics deals with the phenomenon that constitutes language and, naturally, without neglecting the part of language that becomes writing. Philologists do not have the same concerns as the linguist, even though they provide the latter with indispensable help, particularly when it comes to interpreting texts in extinct languages, as *the linguist needs to know as many languages as possible to define language*. This is one of the directions linguistics is involved with (Benveniste, 2006, pp. 29-30; emphasis added).[54]

It is possible to interpret the phrase "as many languages as possible" literally for at least two reasons. The first refers to the number of languages listed in 11 of his books.

[51] For reference, see footnote 50.
[52] For reference, see footnote 50.
[53] For reference, see footnote 50.
[54] In Portuguese: "Tudo o que diz respeito à linguagem é objeto da linguística. Algumas das disciplinas das quais o senhor fala, a filologia em particular, só se ocupa do teor dos textos, de sua transmissão através dos tempos, etc. A linguística se ocupa do fenômeno que constitui a linguagem e, naturalmente, sem negligenciar a parte da linguagem que se transforma em escrita. As preocupações dos filólogos não são as do linguista, ainda que deem a este uma ajuda indispensável, em particular quando se trata de interpretar textos de línguas desaparecidas, porque *o linguista tem necessidade de conhecer o maior número possível de línguas para definir a linguagem*. Esta é uma das direções nas quais se engaja a linguística."

The second concerns a premise that underlies Benveniste's reflection on languages: the fact that "linguistics granted equal importance to all types of languages, written or not, and it had to adapt its methods to them," since it aimed "to know what a language consisted of and how it functioned" (Benveniste, 1971, p. 19).[55] In other words, "great importance must be attached to this ever-broadening experience of the linguistic diversity of the world," since "all types of languages have acquired equal rights to represent language in general" (Benveniste, 1971, p. 5).[56]

Thus, when thinking about the role of languages in Benveniste's reflection, it is important to understand that they must be considered in their diversity, as there are indications of the legitimacy and interest of contemplating a large number of different languages, expanding the boundaries of linguistics. This happens because, according to Benveniste, languages are related to the property of symbolizing: "each language, each culture employs a specific apparatus of symbols by which each society identifies itself. The diversity of languages, the diversity of cultures, their changes reveal the conventional nature of the symbolism that articulates them" (Benveniste, 2006, p. 30).[57] Thus, each language articulates unique symbolisms—therefore, it is only possible to apprehend language by analyzing the greatest possible diversity of languages.

In this regard, it is important to note that Benveniste often emphasizes the uniqueness of specific linguistic systems, noting that it is necessary to consider languages on their own, without attributing universal values to their features. In the article The Nominal Sentence, he explains that the conception that opposes the notions of verb and noun and associates them with a process and an object, respectively, is "unacceptable for a linguist," since "an opposition between 'process' and 'object' cannot have a universal validity, a fixed criterion, or even a clear meaning in linguistics," as these notions "do not reproduce objective characteristics of reality but result from an expression of reality which is itself linguistic, and this expression can only have a limited validity [...] they are categories that have been formed in certain languages and projected onto nature"

[55] For reference, see footnote 50.
[56] For reference, see footnote 50.
[57] In Portuguese: "cada língua, cada cultura emprega um aparato específico de símbolos pelo qual cada sociedade se identifica. A diversidade das línguas, a diversidade das culturas, as suas mudanças mostram a natureza convencional do simbolismo que as articula."

(Benveniste, 1971, p. 132).[58] According to Benveniste (1971, p. 132),[59] thinking in that way implies thinking based on "the classification of [one's] native language," transposing these categories "into universals"—which goes against the recommendation of knowing and taking into account the greatest number of languages.

The fact that languages are always specific is highlighted on several occasions and is especially emphasized in "Remarks on the Function of Language in Freudian Theory":

> each language is specific and shapes the world in its own way. The distinctions each language brings forth must be explained by the particular logic that supports them and not be submitted straight off to a universal evaluation. In this regard, ancient or archaic languages are neither more nor less strange than those we speak; they only have that strangeness which we attribute to unfamiliar objects. Their categories, oriented differently from ours, are nonetheless consistent (Benveniste, 1971, p. 71).[60]

Thus, it is clear that the linguist always needs to try to understand the language in its own logic, considering the language under study by itself, without adopting models that refer to other systems or patterns that are considered universal in the analysis. Only after this, it is possible to compare it to other languages. This method is outlined by Benveniste at various times and is specifically detailed in "The Relative Clause, a Problem of General Syntax." Benveniste begins the text by stating that he seeks "a method of comparison dealing with a certain type of clause found in languages of different families" — the relative clause, which usually consists of a subordinate clause attached to an antecedent term (Benveniste, 1971, p. 181).[61] However, the task does not consist of "comparing the formal expressions of such clauses throughout various languages, which would be senseless," since "it is precisely in the different arrangement of the parts of the clause and in the relationship, different each time, between the syntactic function and the formal elements that express it that the difference between linguistic types is manifested," which means that "such a comparison would fail" (Benveniste, 1971, p. 181).[62] Thus, from the outset, we can see the emphasis given to the need to consider the specific

[58] For reference, see footnote 50.
[59] For reference, see footnote 50.
[60] For reference, see footnote 50.
[61] For reference, see footnote 50.
[62] For reference, see footnote 50.

organization of each language, which is emphasized subsequently: "Our method is completely different," according to Benveniste (1971, p. 181);[63] it must consider the different languages "separately, each for itself and in its own functioning," which reveals "a formal structure ordered by a certain function that is not always visible" and that must be unveiled. This can be done by noting that "the relative clause often has, in a given linguistic system, the same formal marks as another syntagm of a denomination so entirely different that no one would think they could be related" (Benveniste, 1971, p. 181).[64] This formal analogy makes it possible to understand the function of the relative clause. Thus, the analysis has a well-defined objective: "It is an *internal* relationship which we propose to bring to light first" (Benveniste, 1971, p. 181: emphasis in original).[65]

The adoption of this method gives rise to the possibility of expanding the analysis: "if in addition we succeed in showing that this same identical relationship exists within languages of different types, the possibility of a model for syntactic comparison between heterogeneous languages will be established" (Benveniste, 1971, p. 181).[66] Therefore, it is clear that while linguistics implies a study of languages on their own, seeking to understand structures, it should not ignore the possibility of establishing correspondences and distinctions between systems, thereby determining the functions of the elements, formulating theories about the language system and language in general.

It is interesting to note that this method, used to analyze a syntactic structure, does not differ from the path taken by Benveniste in his works on Indo-European comparative grammar, which becomes especially clear when considering the two publications arising from his doctoral dissertation. In both, there is a concern with unveiling the underlying features of the elements under analysis.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that, in the preface to the first work, originally published in 1935 and titled *Origines de la formation des noms en indo-européen*, Benveniste (1973, p. 2)[67] states that, to reflect on the formation of names and

[63] For reference, see footnote 50.
[64] For reference, see footnote 50.
[65] For reference, see footnote 50.
[66] For reference, see footnote 50.
[67] In French: "Nous avons visé avant tout à définir des structures, des alternances, l'appareil formel. Il importera d'envisager plus tard les fonctions des éléments en jeu et les tendances qui les gouvernent."

of the Indo-European root, he intends "above all to define the structures, the fluctuations, the formal apparatus," choosing to consider "the functions of the elements at play and the tendencies that govern them" later. However, he begins the first chapter, which addresses the oscillation between r/n in Indo-European inflection, by noting that, although the existence of this form is well attested, there is a gap in research: "We describe it, we discover its traces here and there: we do not explain it" (Benveniste, 1973, p. 4),[68] whereas

> explaining means recognizing both the distinctive function of each of the elements present, the reasons why these elements are grouped together or oppose each other and the ways in which the oscillation is established. A method is included in this definition. So many attempts have failed because the problem was installed in a fictitious framework. We wanted to appreciate the survivals according to regular types, that is, *to submit the archaisms to the norm of later periods*. On the contrary, it is necessary, by rejecting the consecrated schemes, *first to describe, as broadly and as completely as possible, a state of things which will have to be understood by itself; to characterize each morpheme in the various functions we may recognize in it and in relation to its system*; then, only then, consider the modalities of oscillation in detail (Benveniste, 1973, p. 4; emphasis added).[69]

Thus, Benveniste emphasizes that it is only when considering the forms individually, within their respective systems, that it is possible to explain them. First, one need to understand the functioning of the elements themselves.

It is only after that is done that it is possible to go further, defining the functions of the elements. This happens, according to Benveniste himself, very belatedly. Due to complications arising from the Second World War, the second volume originating from his doctoral thesis was only published in 1948, with a title — *Noms d'agent et noms d'action en indo-européen* — that already denotes the change in position. Benveniste

[68] In French: "On la décrit, on en signale çà et là les vestiges: on ne l'explique pas."
[69] In French: "En pareille matière, expliquer signifie reconnaître à la fois la fonction distinctive de chacun des éléments en présence, les raisons pour lesquelles ces éléments se groupent ou s'opposent et les voies par où l'alternance s'établit. Dans cette définition est inscrite une méthode. Si tant d'essais ont échoué, c'est parce qu'on a installé le problème dans un cadre factice. On a voulu apprécier des survivances en fonction des types réguliers, c'est-à-dire soumettre des archaïsmes à la norme des époques postérieures. Il faut au contraire, rejetant les schèmes consacrés, décrire d'abord aussi largement et complètement que possible un état de choses qu'il s'agira de comprendre pour lui-même ; caractériser chaque morphème dans les diverses fonctions où il peut se reconnaître et par rapport au système où il joue ; puis, alors seulement, considérer en détail les modalités de l'alternance."

(1948, p. 5)[70] states, at the beginning of the preface, that "the issue, this time, is no longer restoring the forms, but interpreting the functions." This is done by analyzing extensive data about countless languages, comparing forms and structures and seeking to establish correspondences and to highlight differences. In this book, Benveniste studies "some well-represented forms that have already been described several times," as well as classes of derivatives that depend on them, considered separately—when one examines them "successively, these great categories in their function, one tries to detect the system of oppositions that validates them" (Benveniste, 1948, p. 5).[71]

Besides this methodological shift and extension, the linguistic amplitude of the work also draws attention. Despite the title openly declaring affiliation to the Indo-European branch, Benveniste calls on other language families in *Noms d'agent et noms d'action en indo-européen.* In chapter 11, he states that, to establish the function of ordinals, one must consider them "as a specific category of numbering," whose "sense in Indo-European will be clarified by analyzing corresponding forms of other linguistic families" (Benveniste, 1948, p. 144).[72] Benveniste (1948, p. 144)[73] thinks it is a "tortuous" path, but it is "the only path that leads to a satisfactory definition of the function of Indo-European ordinals, because it allows us to identify facts of employment that would otherwise divert our attention." Thus, examples in languages such as ancient Egyptian, Tibetan, Yukaghir, Tagalog, and Kalispel enable to "see whether the similarities are in line with or limited to some uses of a particular language or, on the contrary, if they indicate a constant expression which can be referred to the common Indo-European state" (Benveniste, 1948, p. 155).[74]

[70] In French: "il ne s'agit plus cette fois de restituer des formes, mais d'interpréter des fonctions"
[71] In French: "nous avons étudié quelques formations bien représentées et déjà plusieurs fois décrites: [...]. Examinant successivement ces grandes catégories dans leur fonction, nous essayons de déceler le système d'oppositions par lequel elles valent."
[72] In French: "Il y a intérêt, pour l'interpréter, à considérer les ordinaux comme une catégorie spécifique de la numération. Et, de cette catégorie, le sens en indo-européen s'éclairera par l'analyse des formations parallèles d'autres familles de langues."
[73] In French: "Cette voie détournée est en fait la seule qui conduise à une définition satisfaisante de la fonction des ordinaux indo-européens, parce qu'elle fait discerner des faits d'emploi qui autrement échappent à l'attention."
[74] In French: "voir si les concordances signalées sont de rencontre, ou limitées à quelques emplois d'une langue particulière, ou au contraire si elles manifestent une expression constante et qu'on ait le droit de reporter à l'état indo-européen commun."

Consequently, for Benveniste (1948, p. 155),[75] "only a broad verification can legitimize a general conclusion." This statement points to the relevance of the diversity of languages in Benveniste's analysis. A broad investigation of languages leads to generalization. Languages, therefore, play an essential role in Benveniste's theory. They are an instrument to formulate theories, or, in other words, they function as an operator within the theory, if we take the term "operator" according to the definition provided by Dany-Robert Dufour (2000, p. 34), who understands it as "the device that contains a decision process"[76] in a given way of thinking. The operator is associated with the adverb "then," in a formula "if x, then y": "*Then*, such a decision will be made" (Dufour, 2000, p. 34, emphasis in original).[77] From this point of view, it is possible to appreciate that, for Benveniste, the languages under analysis operate to reach decisions, since it is possible to apply the formula "if language x has this structure/functions in this way/signifies in this way, then…," which enables the devising of theories about languages themselves, the language system and language in general.

Even though this can be seen, as we mentioned previously, throughout the author's work, it is possible to highlight one text in particular as an example: "Le langage et l'expérience humaine" [Language and the human experience, published in the second volume of *Problems in General Linguistics* and not translated into English]. Among the issues Benveniste addresses therein is time, which is regarded as the linguistic form that reveals the richest subjective experience, albeit the most difficult to explore. Among other aspects, Benveniste questions how languages are able to express time:

> A widespread confusion is that certain languages ignore time, because, since they are non-inflectional languages, they seem to have no verbs. We think that only the verb allows time to be expressed. There is a lot of confusion about this that must be denounced: the category of the verb can be perceived even in non-inflectional languages, *and the expression of time is compatible with all types of linguistic structures*. The paradigmatic organization specific to the temporal forms of certain languages, notably Indo-European languages, does not have the exclusive right nor the exclusive privilege to express time (Benveniste, 2006, p. 70; emphasis added).[78]

[75] In French: "Seule une vérification étendue pourra légitimer une conclusion générale."
[76] In Portuguese: "o dispositivo que contém um processo de decisão."
[77] In Portuguese: "*Então*, tal decisão será tomada."
[78] In Portuguese: "Uma confusão muito difundida é a de crer que certas línguas ignoram o tempo, pelo fato de que, não fazendo parte da família das línguas flexionais, elas parecem não ter verbo. Subentende-se que

Furthermore, there is another confusion related to languages. It "consists of thinking that the temporal system of a given language reproduces the nature of 'objective' time, so strong is the propensity to see the transfer of reality into language" (Benveniste, 2006, p. 70).[79] According to Benveniste (2006, p. 70),[80] in fact, "languages provide nothing but different constructions of reality, and it is perhaps precisely in the way in which they elaborate a complex temporal system that they differ the most." Therefore, one must question "at what level of linguistic expression can we find the notion of time that necessarily informs all languages and, and, subsequently, how this notion is characterized" (Benveniste, 2006, p. 70).[81]

Benveniste understands that there are several possible conceptions of the notion of time, including linguistic time, characterized by "the fact that it is organically linked to the exercise of speech, the fact that it is defined and organized as a function of discourse," which implies that in language there is only "a single temporal expression, the present"—which determines the temporal references of the past and future (Benveniste, 2006, pp. 74-76).[82]

Based on this observation, the linguist begins to analyze the way in which different languages organize past and future verbal forms. For Benveniste (2006, p. 76),[83] it is important to note that, on the one hand, "in languages of the most varied types, the past form is never missing, and that it is very often double or even triple." On the other hand, "many languages do not have a specific future form. The present is often used with an

somente o verbo permite exprimir o tempo. Há nisto muita confusão que se deve denunciar: a categoria do verbo pode ser reconhecida mesmo nas línguas não flexionais, e a expressão do tempo é compatível com todos os tipos de estruturas linguísticas. A organização paradigmática própria às formas temporais de certas línguas, notadamente das línguas indo-europeias, não tem o direito nem o privilégio exclusivo de exprimir o tempo."

[79] In Portuguese: "consiste em pensar que o sistema temporal de uma língua reproduz a natureza do tempo 'objetivo', tão forte é a propensão a ver na língua o decalque da realidade."

[80] In Portuguese: "as línguas não nos oferecem de fato senão construções diversas do real, e é talvez justamente no modo pelo qual elas elaboram um sistema temporal complexo que elas são mais divergentes."

[81] In Portuguese: "a que nível de expressão linguística podemos encontrar a noção de tempo que informa necessariamente todas as línguas e, em seguida, como se caracteriza esta noção."

[82] In Portuguese: "fato de estar organicamente ligado ao exercício da fala, o fato de se definir e de se organizar como função do discurso"; "uma única expressão temporal, o presente."

[83] In Portuguese: "nas línguas dos mais variados tipos, nunca falta a forma do passado, e que muito frequentemente ela é dupla ou mesmo tripla."

adverb or particle that indicates a future moment" (Benveniste, 2006, p. 76).[84] This standpoint is supported by examples of languages, such as Chinook, which has "three past tense forms, distinguished by their prefixes: *ni-* indicates the indefinite past; *ga-*, the most remote past of myths; *na-*, the very recent past, yesterday," which means that "according to the circumstance 'he went' will be *niyuya* (*ni* prefix + *y* 'he' + *uya* 'go') or *gayuya* (*ga* prefix + *y* + *uya*) or *nayuya* (*na* + *y* + *uya*)," and only one form of the future, "characterized by a redundant morpheme *a* that is, at the same time, prefixed and suffixed, unlike the past prefixes. Thus we say *ačimluda*, 'he will give it to you,' decomposable into *a*-future + *č* 'he' + *i* 'it' + *m* 'you' + *l* 'to' + *ud* 'give' + *a* future" (Benveniste, 2006, pp. 76-77, emphasis in original)[85] According to Benveniste (2006, p. 77),[86] "this contrast between the forms of the past and of the future is instructive for its very generality in the world of languages" and reveals the dissymmetry of the experience of retrospective temporality—which refers to multiple past distances—and prospective temporality—which is only a prediction of experience. Thus, Benveniste uses data from languages, establishing correlations, which allows him to determine general properties of languages—in this case, related to the different ways of organizing the experience of time.

It is important to investigate another aspect highlighted by the linguist in "Le langage et l'expérience humaine" [Language and the Human Experience]. Besides pointing to generalizations observed in multiple languages, Benveniste also states, throughout the text, that there are properties that are observed in all languages, and are, therefore, universal:

> We thus arrive at this realization—surprising at first sight, but profoundly in accordance with the *real nature of language*—that the only time inherent to language is the axial present of discourse, and that this present is implicit. It determines two other temporal references; these are necessarily made explicit in a signifier and in return make the

[84] In Portuguese: "muitas línguas não têm forma específica de futuro. Serve-se [*sic*] frequentemente do presente com algum advérbio ou partícula que indica um momento futuro."
[85] In Portuguese: "três formas de passado, que se distinguem por seus prefixos: *ni-* indica o passado indefinido; *ga-*, o passado mais remoto dos mitos; *na-*, o passado bem recente, ontem"; "'foi' será dito segundo a circunstância *niyuya* (*ni* prefixo + *y* 'ele' + *uya* 'ir') ou *gayuya* (prefixo *ga* + *y* + *uya*) ou *nayuya* (*na* + *y* + *uya*)"; "caracterizada por um morfema redundante *a* que é, ao mesmo tempo, prefixado e sufixado, diferentemente dos prefixos do pretérito. Assim se diz *ačimluda*, 'ele dá-lo-á a ti', decomponível em *a*-futuro + *č* 'ele'+ *i* 'lo' + *m* 'ti' + *l* 'á' + *ud* 'dar' + *a* futuro."
[86] In Portuguese: "este contraste entre as formas do passado e as do futuro é instrutivo por sua própria generalidade no mundo das línguas."

> present look like a line of separation between what is no longer present and what will be present. These two references do not relate to time, but to perspectives about time, projected backwards and forwards from the present. This seems to be the fundamental experience of time, to which *all languages bear witness in their own way*. It informs the concrete temporal systems and notably the formal organization of different verbal systems (Benveniste, 2006, p. 76; emphasis added).[87]

Consequently, we can see that it is through the observation of languages that Benveniste arrives at broader propositions. Analyzes of linguistic data, establishing affinities and differences between systems, allow the linguist to reflect on the organization of languages, the properties that are shared by different languages, the different ways of signifying, and, finally, the universal human property of language. Therefore, languages are instruments for formulating theories about languages themselves, the language system and language in general. As Benveniste himself (1971, pp. 17-18)[88] asserts, "the infinitely problems of particular languages have in common that, when stated to a certain degree of generality, they always have a bearing on language in general."

3 Saussure, Benveniste, and Languages: Similarities and Dissimilarities

What was presented and discussed regarding Saussure, Benveniste, and the diversity of languages in the previous sections makes it possible to show similarities in their perspectives. The most immediate correspondence concerns their personal and academic training: both were, at some point in their lives, in multilingual contexts. Furthermore, the two linguists began their research journey in the comparative tradition, from which they have never strayed, regardless of the paths their theoretical propositions took.

[87] In Portuguese: "Chega-se assim a esta constatação — surpreendente à primeira vista, mas profundamente de acordo com a natureza real da linguagem — de que o único tempo inerente à língua é o presente axial do discurso, e que este presente é implícito. Ele determina duas outras referências temporais; estas são necessariamente explicitadas em um significante e em retorno fazem aparecer o presente como uma linha de separação entre o que não é mais presente e o que vai sê-lo. Estas duas referências não se relacionam ao tempo, mas as [*sic*] visões sobre o tempo, projetadas para trás e para frente a partir do ponto presente. Esta parece ser a experiência fundamental do tempo, de que todas as línguas dão testemunho a sua maneira. Ela informa os sistemas temporais concretos e notadamente a organização formal dos diferentes sistemas verbais."

[88] For reference, see footnote 50.

In addition to the similarities related to academic training, there is also a theoretical-methodological perspective, a recommendation that arises from their practices: the need to know as many languages as possible for the study of linguistics. For both linguists, a presumption of the equality of languages derives from this point of view—for Saussure (1959, p. 6),[89] the subject of linguistics is "all manifestations of human speech, […] all forms of expression;" for Benveniste (1971, p. 19),[90] linguistics should be interested in "all types of languages," since any language can represent language equally. Thus, what Claudia Mejía-Quijano (2013, p. 18),[91] proclaims about Saussure also applies to Benveniste: "due to their nature, there are no languages that are perfect or better than others, for any activity. Consequently, the language of a given community cannot be taken into account to establish any hierarchy between peoples."

This is not merely a methodological postulate, but rather an empirical concretization, that is, the work of the two linguists reflects this fundamental principle. In both cases, it is possible to observe the massive presence of languages in their formulations—the aforementioned inventories provide evidence of this. Moreover, for both Saussure and Benveniste, this massive presence of languages is not accidental: both use languages as a basis to arrive at theories about the language system and/or language in general and, consequently, are unable to imagine a linguistics that disregards languages. For both linguists, there is no possible formalization of language without observing linguistic reality.

These similarities should not, however, be understood as full equivalence and/or absolute proximity. There are not only similarities between these two linguists: by looking into details, it is possible to see their different stances regarding some aspects. The very nature of their formulations is one of them. Even though Saussure felt an ethical obligation to "show the linguist *what he does*"—a task that would be accomplished "without enthusiasm nor passion" (Saussure, 1894 *apud* Benveniste, 1964, p. 95; emphasis in original)[92] — his drive to shed light on the foundations of linguistics was

[89] For reference, see footnote 12.
[90] For reference, see footnote 50.
[91] In French: "de par leur nature il n'y a pas de langues parfaites ou meilleures que d'autres, pour aucune activité. Et par conséquent, la langue d'une communauté ne peut pas être prise en compte pour établir une quelconque hiérarchie entre les peuples."
[92] In French: "l'immensité du travail qu'il faudrait pour montrer au linguiste *ce qu'il fait*" ; "sans enthousiasme ni passion."

only accomplished by third parties. He was neither directly responsible for his most famous work, *CGL*, which ended up giving him the title of father of modern linguistics, nor do we find a significant number of publications by him; with the exception of his dissertation and scattered articles, there are nothing, but handwritten notes written by Saussure. Precisely due to the nature of the material to which we have access, we see a certain didactic bias in Saussure's theorizing, including in relation to the diversity of languages, which, as seen in section 2 of this article, has its own chapter in *CGL*. Benveniste's production, in turn, as Moïnfar (1992) attests, is extensive and also geared towards different areas of knowledge besides linguistics. Besides, this pedagogical concern is not as present in his oeuvre, and reflections on the relevance of the diversity of languages are spread throughout it and are less a proposition of principles and more linguistic analyzes of facts—this is what the analyzed data allows us to perceive.

An important point of divergence between the linguists concerns the focus given to the speaker in the scope of the texts we cited herein. While, as we have previously shown, Saussure invokes the relationship that the speaker (metonymically representing a collectivity) has with the language(s) they speak to list characters that are universal to all languages (thus, to language [*langue*]), in Benveniste's reflection on languages the speaker is revealed stealthily, when the linguist proposes universal properties, observed in all languages, related to discourse, to speech. Therefore, since he refers to speaking languages, even though the speaker is not explicitly cited, they are essential, since there are no languages without speakers.

Their stances also differ in another aspect: the direction given to the results derived from the observations of languages. If, for Saussure, the analyzes of languages have value insofar as they lead to the possibility of proposing what "is universal in them" (Saussure, 1959, p. 23),[93] in Benveniste, we observe a different positioning. The linguist often mentions that considering that the specificities of a given language are common to all languages is a mistake. For him, "the distinctions each language brings forth must be explained by the particular logic that supports them and not be submitted straight off to a universal evaluation" (Benveniste, 1971, p. 71).[94] In other words, Saussure relies on the

[93] For reference, see footnote 12.
[94] For reference, see footnote 50.

diversity of languages towards proposing general principles about language [*langue*]; Benveniste, in turn, expresses a reservation, noting that it is always necessary to take each language as a unique system and not as a general norm for all others, even though he thinks it is possible to make general propositions resulting from the observation of languages.

In between similarities and dissimilarities, it is clear that there is a certain connection between Saussure and Benveniste in all the aspects highlighted in this section. One can speak, as Normand (2009, p. 198)[95] proposes, in Saussure-Benveniste, of "encounters," encounters that are presences, since both "were an obligation and still are an obligation today for anyone interested in language. More than revealing, each of them led others to sense that something essential was at stake there, in what remains nonconsensually named: language, discourse, communication…" and "they woke us up from our dogmatic sleep, raising issues that, despite their attempts and all those that followed, are not resolved." Perhaps the diversity of languages is one of those issues that is not fully named and not entirely resolved, which still deserve to be further explored. It is evident, when considering both Saussure's and Benveniste's thoughts, that linguistics can only reach its object, be it the language system [*langue*] and/or language in general [*langage*], through languages, the only materiality, the only observable aspect that is available to all linguists.

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[95] In Portuguese: "se impuseram e se impõem ainda hoje para quem se interessa por linguagem. Cada um deles, mais do que revelar, levou os outros a pressentir que algo essencial estava em jogo ali, naquilo que continua sem ser consensualmente nomeado: língua, discurso, comunicação…"; "nos despertaram do sono dogmático, levantando questões que, não obstante suas tentativas e todas aquelas posteriores, não estão encerradas."

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Statement Author's Contribution

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Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.

Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana*. Revista de Estudos do Discurso [*Bakhtiniana*. Journal of Discourse Studies] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

Review I

The article begins with the distinction between language [*langue*] and languages to investigate how languages are taken into account within the theoretical framework of Ferdinand de Saussure and Émile Benveniste. The authors propose a detailed discussion, featuring, with regard to *CGL*, a section that often—if not always—goes unnoticed by interpreters and linguistics scholars. Notwithstanding, with regard to Benveniste, extensive bibliography is used, along with relevant comments from scholars of Benveniste's theory. Therefore, I believe that the article is suitable for publication by *Bakhtiniana* and provides valuable contributions to those who study the theories of both linguists. I only have one proofreading suggestion: despite being very well written, I found some problems with pronoun placement in the text. APPROVED

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Review II

The article proposes an important and necessary discussion for language studies, emphasizing that the requirements of a scientific article were observed: adequacy of the title to the proposal, clarity, linguistic correctness, stating the objectives and proposing, during discussions of the ideas of one and the other, the importance and need to expand studies on the diversity of languages. Overall, such requirements demonstrate consistent, constant knowledge of both theories. Returning to what the author states, Saussure and Benveniste provoke in language scholars: the awakening "from our dogmatic sleep, raising issues that, despite their attempts and all those that followed, are not resolved." APPROVED

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