

Contributions of Ferdinand de Saussure, Mikhail Bakhtin and Émile Benveniste to Language Acquisition Studies in Brazil / *Contribuições de Ferdinand de Saussure, Mikhail Bakhtin e Émile Benveniste aos estudos de aquisição da linguagem no Brasil*

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to reflect upon the presence of the *language acquisition* theme in the works of Ferdinand de Saussure, Mikhail Bakhtin and Émile Benveniste, in order to, based on such reflection, describe how this presence gave rise to work perspectives around the theme in research panorama in Brazil. Three major perspectives for studying language acquisition in the country are highlighted: based on Saussurean assumptions, there are the social interactionist studies; in the Bakhtinian perspective, the dialogic-discursive approach; from the Benveniste perspective, the enunciative acquisitional perspective. The reflection presents a summary table with the configuration of each perspective derived from its affiliation with the authors in question.

KEYWORDS: Language acquisition; Social interactionist perspective; Dialogical-discursive perspective; Enunciative acquisitional perspective

RESUMO

Este artigo tem por objetivo refletir sobre a presença do tema aquisição da linguagem nos trabalhos de Ferdinand de Saussure, Mikhail Bakhtin e Émile Benveniste, para, a partir de tal reflexão, descrever como essa presença deu origem a perspectivas de trabalho em torno do tema no panorama de pesquisa do Brasil. Focalizam-se três grandes perspectivas de estudo de aquisição da linguagem no país: a partir de pressupostos saussureanos, têm-se os estudos sociointeracionistas; na vertente bakhtiniana, tem-se a abordagem dialógico-discursiva; na esteira benvenistiana, encontra-se a perspectiva aquisicional enunciativa. A reflexão apresenta um quadro

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resumitivo com a configuração de cada perspectiva derivada da sua filiação aos autores em questão.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Aquisição da Linguagem; Perspectiva Sociointeracionista; Perspectiva Dialógico-discursiva; Perspectiva Aquisicional Enunciativa

Introduction

We find in Ferdinand de Saussure, Mikhail Bakhtin and Émile Benveniste explicit references to the language of the child. These references motivate us to reflect upon the presence, to some extent, of the *language acquisition* theme in the works of these authors, in order to, based on such reflection, describe how this presence gave rise to work perspectives regarding this theme in the Brazilian research panorama. Undoubtedly, these are authors with extensive recognized work; however, we do not propose, to go through all these productions; on the contrary, we situate our study in specific works by each author, as follows. Saussure appears in our reflection with the *Course in General Linguistics* (2013),¹ more specifically, with the chapter “Object of Linguistics”; in relation to Bakhtin’s studies, we searched, mainly in the text “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity” from the work *Art and Answerability* (1990)² and in Vološinov’s contributions in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1973),³ the foundations for our discussion;⁴ Benveniste, in turn, appears in our reflection with concepts and principles presented in texts of the work *Problems in General Linguistics* (1971),⁵ with emphasis on “A Look at the Development of Linguistics,” “Subjectivity in Language” and in the text “Structuralism and Linguistics,” from the work *Problemas de linguística geral II*

¹ SAUSSURE, Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics*. Edited and annotated by Roy Harris. London and New York: Bloombury, 2013.

² BAKHTIN, Mikhail. Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity (ca. 1920-1933). *Art and Answerability*. Edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Translation notes by Vadim Liapunov. Supplement translated by Kenneth Brostrom. Austin: Texas University Press, 1990, pp. 4-256.

³ VOLOŠINOV, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Trad. Ladislav Matejka and R. Titunik. Translator’s Preface. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973.

⁴ We also rely on the ideas proposed in Vološinov’s aforementioned work because we understand that a large part of Bakhtin’s principles are consolidated in the confluence of the works of what is conventionally called *Bakhtin Circle*.

⁵ BENVENISTE, Émile. *Problems of General Linguistics*. Translated by Mary Elizabeth Meek, Miami: University of Miami Press, 1971.

[Problems in General Linguistics II] (1989).⁶ We justify these theoretical approaches due to the fact that we found, in the cited texts, explicit references to the language of the child, an issue that, for none of the authors, was configured as a central theme of research, but whose presence determined perspectives for future works.

Therefore, this article has been organized as follows: we revisited the thoughts of the three authors in focus to then situate the possibilities of thinking about the child's language, focusing on the perspectives of studies on language acquisition developed in Brazil and their affiliation to each of the thoughts discussed. Finally, we present a summary table with the main contributions to the theme derived from the work of each author and situated in each of the perspectives developed in the country.

1 Saussure, the Problem of Origins and the Language of the Child

We begin this section by giving voice to the *Course in General Linguistics*,⁷ more specifically, to the reference made by Ferdinand de Saussure to the study of children's language:

[...] At any given time, it is an institution in the present and a product of the past. At first sight, it looks very easy to distinguish between the system and its history, between what it is and what it was. In reality, the connexion between the two is so close that it is hard to separate them. Would matters be simplified if one considered the ontogenesis of linguistic phenomena, beginning with a study of children's language, for example? No. It is quite illusory to believe that where language is concerned the problem of origins is any different from the problem of permanent conditions. There is no way out of the circle. (Saussure, 2013, p. 51).⁸

By presenting this statement in a text dedicated to the subject matter of *Linguistics*, which gives the title to the chapter in focus, one has the impression that, for the linguist,

⁶ There is no equivalence in English for this edition.

⁷ See footnote 1.

⁸ SAUSSURE, Ferdinand. Chapter 3. The Object of Study. In: SAUSSURE, Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics*. Edited and annotated by Roy Harris. London and New York: Bloombury, 2013, pp. 50-60.

in the language sphere, the study of children's language, the origins, will not be able to point out issues which differ from the permanent conditions of language. Certainly the mere presence of this idea does not allow us to see, in Saussure, the investigation of the theme of the child's language or acquisition; however, as we have already stated, the conception of the linguistic phenomenon and its relationship with the theme of *origins* opens up possibilities for such a study to be carried out. This possibility was assumed in the 1970s, but with greater impacts in the 1980s, by Claudia De Lemos, an author who considered the relationship proposed by the master between the language of origins, the language manifested by children, and the permanent conditions of language.⁹ Based on this idea, the author (1995) defends an approach to the acquisition phenomenon that is explicitly opposed to the developmentalist notion assumed by most of the acquisition theories known until then. De Lemos does this convinced of the idea that Linguistics offers an academic space in which the question about how the child acquires language makes sense, although she recognizes the resistance that the child's empirical data may reveal in the face of linguistic theories. Her approach, already called "interactionist," is currently known in Brazil as "social interactionist."

According to the author (2002), the conception of the nature of language as a system, as conceived by Saussure, makes it impossible to submit it to an ordered series of partial apprehensions, as presented by the developmentalist perspectives. Thus, as a result of Saussure's structuralist project, the author's search for "something to say about the language"¹⁰ in the child's speech was configured, first, by a rereading of Saussure. In this rereading, the theory of value stands out, according to which the concept of system is seen as a system of relations and not of units governed by pure difference. Choosing dialogue as the unit of analysis, the author turned to the functioning of language revealed by "errors" as products of relations between intersecting chains, producing substitutions in the child's speech with others. Using this perspective, the author found in Roman Jakobson's studies, especially in the author's reflection on metaphor and metonymy (1956), presented in the essay "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic

⁹ An important record of the history of the work inaugurated by De Lemos can be seen in Castro (2011).

¹⁰ In Portuguese: "algo a dizer da língua."

Disturbances,”¹¹ the possibility of a better understanding of the child’s speech phenomena:

To the extent that they maintained what, in Saussure, has the status of minimal properties and, at the same time, pointed to an effect beyond these properties, such processes would make it possible to apprehend, in my view and as Jakobson wanted, the language in its initial state in the child’s speech, as well as the movement that would produce the change (De Lemos, 2002, p. 52).^{12 13}

That said, it is important to note that De Lemos’ proposal is not seen as complete in the universe of Linguistics. The author, throughout her studies, especially from 1992 onwards, seeks to understand what subject is manifested in the acquisition. Thus, based on concepts such as *autonomy* and *alterity of language*, De Lemos (2000) works with the notion of “capture” of subjectivation processes: she conceives the child as captured by a linguistic-discursive functioning, which allows him or her to have meaning. In this functioning, phenomena, based on Lacanian psychoanalysis, gain relevance, and the author deals with them from the notion of “listening,” as she understands that the metaphorical and metonymic processes perceived in the children’s manifestations are associated with a subject and the emergence of this subject in the signifying chain.

Following her studies, the author (cf. De Lemos, 2000) argues that the changes in the trajectory of the child from non-speaker to subject-speaker are changes in position with regard to the speech of the other, to the language and, consequently, in relation to his or her own speech. It is important to highlight that this change is seen as a change of position in a structure, since, according to De Lemos (2002), there is no overcoming of any of the three positions, but a chain that is revealed, in the first position, by the

¹¹ JACKOBSON, Roman. Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances. In: JACKOBSON, Roman; HARRIS, Morris. *Fundamentals of Language*. The Hague: Mouton & Co., Printers, 1956, pp. 55-82.

¹² We highlight important work by Figueira (2015) on the theme of analogy in children’s speech from the Saussurian conception of language. Although we do not return to this discussion in this article, we recognize her affiliation with Saussure, as well as her contribution to studies in language acquisition.

¹³ In original: “Na medida em que mantinham o que, em Saussure, tem o estatuto de propriedades mínimas e, ao mesmo tempo, apontavam para um efeito para além dessas propriedades, tais processos permitiriam apreender, a meu ver e como queria Jakobson, linguagem em seu estado nascente na fala da criança, assim como o movimento que produziria a mudança.”

dominance of the other's speech; while, in the second position, there is dominance of the functioning of the language; and, in the third position, the dominance of the subject's relationship with his or her own speech is highlighted.

In the constitution of her studies, the author (2002) also considers it essential to explain the way in which the three operations are articulated at different moments in the chronology of the child's trajectory. To this end, her investigations always seek to explain the changes in position based on the effect of the functioning of the language, which she seeks to do, not by describing his or her utterances, but by metaphorical and metonymic processes. These processes, therefore, command the relationship of the child's utterances with the utterance of the other in the first position, the relations between utterances in the second position, and the relations between speech and listening in the third position. The speaking child, thus, is divided between the one who speaks and the one who hears his or her own speech, which allows him or her to resume, reformulate and recognize the differences between his or her speech and the speech of the other, as well as between the subjective instance that speaks and the subjective instance that hears from another place.

Finally, social interactionism, as a way of seeing the acquisition of language, makes use of a conception of language based on the radical alterity of language in relation to the organism and on the consideration of what, in the child's speech, points to a subject that, when constituted in language, is divided by it. Such a view makes use of the Saussurean idea of the synchronic functioning of language and, as we have sought to explain, represents important opposition to the notion of development in the works of language acquisition. It is based on this Saussurean conception that we understand, with Irani Maldonado (2015, p. 4764), where "the child enters the language captured by linguistic functioning, producing utterances that, submitted to adult interpretation, cut out entities or events in the world."¹⁴

We note that the repercussion of Claudia De Lemos' work has generated new research, of undeniable recognition, as can be seen in the vast production and influence

¹⁴ In Original: "a criança entra na linguagem capturada pelo funcionamento linguístico, produzindo enunciados que, submetidos à interpretação do adulto, recortam entidades ou eventos do mundo."

of the research group on Language Acquisition from the Institute of Linguistic Studies of the University of Campinas - Unicamp.

2 Bakhtin, Dialogism and the Language of the Child

We dedicate this section to the contributions of the language philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin, who, like the other researchers studied here, did not focus specifically on the study of child's language; however, his reflections made it possible to approach the theme under different facets, of which the dialogic-discursive approach stands out. Our reflections begin with one of the most controversial works of the Bakhtin Circle, currently attributed to¹⁵ Valentin Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1973),¹⁶ in which a critique of the Saussurean approach is presented: “in the so-called Geneva school of Ferdinand de Saussure. Its representatives, particularly Charles Bally, are among the most prominent linguists of modern times. The ideas of this second trend all have been endowed with amazing clarity and precision by Ferdinand de Saussure” (Vološinov, 1973, p. 58).¹⁷ Although this dialogue between Saussure and the Bakhtin Circle is not the object of our study, it leads us to realize that there is, in the Circle's discussions, an effort to read Saussure's work in order to establish a critique and lay the foundations for a linguistic study that distanced itself from what was called “abstract objectivism” by the authors.

However, what interests us most in the cited work is a small passage in which Vološinov refers to the difference between “sign” and “signal.” According to the author:

¹⁵ The first Brazilian translation of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language - Fundamental Problems of the Sociological Method* was based mainly on the French edition of the work and, at that point, attributed to Mikhail Bakhtin, due to the consultations made by the translators at the time. However, the authorship of the work has always been a controversial and discussed issue, since other editions in several countries attributed the same text to Volóchinov. In the most recent edition of the work in Brazil (2018), Sheila Grillo and Ekaterina Vólkova Américo translate the text directly from the Russian edition and, after extensive research, attribute the authorship to Valentin Volóchinov, reaching a consensus with several other editions of the work around the world.

¹⁶ See footnote 3.

¹⁷ See footnote 3.

A signal that we have not quite become used to or a form in a language that we do not know very well. No, the task of understanding does not basically amount to recognizing the form used, but rather to understanding it in a particular, concrete context, to understanding its meaning in a particular utterance, i.e., it amounts to understanding its novelty and not to recognizing its identity (Vološinov, 1973, p. 68).¹⁸

Despite seeking to distance himself from Saussure, Vološinov (1973)¹⁹ uses the notion of “sign” to affirm that, even in the learning phases, which, in many cases, we associate with the acquisition of a language, there is no pure “signal,” but there is a meaning of the sign always guided by the context. The criticism presented focuses on the defense that “systematic thought about language is incompatible with living historical understanding of language” (Vološinov, 1973, p. 78).²⁰ Thus, language is seen beyond the system, in the dialogical relationship between subjects.

It is precisely in the dialogical exchange that many of the reflections in the essay “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity,” in *Art and Answerability* (Bakhtin, 1990)²¹ are concentrated. In this text, we find the main considerations of Mikhail Bakhtin himself regarding the relationship between the child and language. A relationship that, as we will see, centers on the fundamental dialogical interaction that gives shape to the self and the other:

In fact, as soon as a human being begins to experience himself from within, he at once meets with acts of recognition and love that come to him from outside—from his mother, from others who are close to him. The child receives all initial determinations of himself and of his body from his mother’s lips and from the lips of those who are close to him. It is from their lips, in the emotional-volitional tones of their love, that the child hears and begins to acknowledge his own *proper name* and the names of all the features pertaining to his body and to his inner states and experiences. The words of a loving human being are the first and the most authoritative words about him; they are the words that for the first time determine his personality *from outside*, the words that come to meet his indistinct inner sensation of himself, giving it a form and a

¹⁸ See footnote 3.

¹⁹ See footnote 3.

²⁰ See footnote 3.

²¹ See footnote 2.

name in which, for the first time, he finds himself and becomes aware of himself as a *something* (Bakhtin, 1990, pp. 49-50).²²

The dialogical relationship between the child and the people who love him or her, especially the mother, gives shape to the first discursive manifestations of the child who “begins to see himself for the first time as if through his mother’s eyes, and begins to speak about himself in his mother’s emotional-volitional tones—he caresses himself, as it were, with his first uttered self-expression” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 50).²³ In other words, it is from the dialogical relationship with the other that discourse is born. Thus, the dialogic-discursive strand of language acquisition focuses on the various Bakhtinian works that will define the concepts of “dialogical relationship” and “dialogism” to find a methodology for studying the child’s language. It was Frédéric François, in France, who first observed that Bakhtinian theory could offer subsidies for a new look at language acquisition. According to François (2004, p. 25), the child “who learns to speak does not go from language (as a kind of linguistic toolbox) to speech (as a set of uses of language in context), but from the discourses of others to his own discourses.”²⁴

When talking about the language of the child, François (2004) relies not only on the studies of the Bakhtin Circle, but also establishes a dialogue between the theoretical conceptions of the Circle scholars with the Vygotskian theory, already well known by researchers in the field of education. With texts that focus on psychology related to language acquisition to works that deal with the construction of narratives by children, François is a reference when it comes to the dialogic-discursive perspective, followed by Anne Salazar Orvig, a researcher who continued the acquisition studies of this approach in France. It is with this configuration that the dialogic-discursive perspective of language acquisition arrives in Brazil at the hands of Alessandra Del Ré, a researcher who developed studies in France with Frédéric François himself, as well as with Anne Salazar

²² See footnote 2.

²³ See footnote 2.

²⁴ In original: “[...] qui apprend à parler ne va pas de la langue (comme sorte de boîte à outils linguistiques) à la parole (comme ensemble d’usages de la langue en contexte), mais des discours des autres aux discours de soi” (François, 2004, p. 25).

Orvig, among others. Del Ré currently leads important research groups in Brazil on language acquisition.

According to Hilário (2023), with the coordination of Del Ré, the Language Acquisition Study Group and the Language Acquisition Study Center²⁵ have, since 2008, developed studies in the dialogic-discursive aspect in Brazil. This research has given rise to several reference texts in the area of Language Acquisition and has guided many current studies. Thus, the acquisitionist perspectives of Vygotsky and Bruner, mainly considering the interactional issue, are revisited in an approximation with what the researchers of the Bakhtin Circle propose. Thus, we have the dialogical conception of language (Hilário, 2012). It is Alessandra Jacqueline Vieira (2012, p. 119) who states: “Although Bakhtin did not speak specifically about the language of the child, the phenomenon of dialogism can be found since the emergence of speech.”²⁶ It is, therefore, through this dialogical relationship that the child is inserted into the ideology of his or her social world, a central issue in the studies proposed in this approach.

The first book by the NALíngua group, under the title *Na língua do outro: estudos interdisciplinares em aquisição de linguagens* [In the Other’s Parole: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Acquisition of Languages] (Del Ré and Romero, 2012), brings several texts by scholars of language acquisition that observe specific aspects of the child’s language, combining the dialogic-discursive aspect with several authors and theories. However, it is in the work *A linguagem da criança: um olhar bakhtiniano* [Child’s Language: A Bakhtinian Perspective], by Alessandra Del Ré, Luciane de Paula and Marina Célia Mendonça (2014), that the dialogic-discursive perspective of the study of language acquisition is defined. According to the authors (2014, p. 17), by resorting to Bakhtin’s theoretical notions, the intention is not to apply a theory, “but to glimpse, from certain conceptions, possible dialogical understandings about the phenomenon that occurs in the

²⁵ The names of the two groups in Portuguese are *Grupo de Estudos em Aquisição da Linguagem* – also known by its acronym: GEALin, and *Núcleo de Estudos em Aquisição da Linguagem* – also known as NALíngua.

²⁶ In original: “Apesar de Bakhtin não ter falado especificamente da linguagem da criança, o fenômeno do dialogismo pode ser encontrado desde a emergência da fala.”

process of children's speech acquisition."²⁷ Therefore, to assume the dialogic-discursive perspective, according to the authors, means to understand the word as "an ideological sign put into use by a certain subject (in this case, the child), in a certain space-time (the chronotopic situation of enunciation), with social-historical-cultural values and voice" (Del Ré, Paula, Mendonça 2014, p. 19).²⁸ This conception is specifically based on the reflections pointed out in the aforementioned work by Volóchinov (2018) and considers the self-other relationship as a basis, the foundation of Bakhtin's dialogical relations.

The dialogic-discursive perspective, as defined by the authors and adopted by the GEALin and NALíngua groups, conceives language as a "*living organism*, full of ideological meanings and historically and socially constituted" (Del Ré, Paula, Mendonça, 2014, p. 23).²⁹ According to this conception, all subjects, including the child, are understood as social subjects and in relationship. Thus, it is considered that the child's discourse is motivated, understood, interpreted and valued by the other, in the instance of dialogue, and this other person, commonly, the mother and/or father, who are the closest to him or her in the period of language acquisition. Besides, the child becomes part of the world of language through the experience of discourse genres, since the child "acquires utterances that are part of a *scenario* involving family conversations, birthday parties, the beach, etc., which means that there is a whole linguistic universe that accompanies these situations" (Del Ré, Paula, Mendonça, 2014, p. 26).³⁰ According to Del Ré, Hilário and Vieira (2021, p. 24) this other "(initially the father or mother) is what positions the child as a discursive subject"³¹ and it is the self-other relationship "(child-interlocutor)" that

²⁷ In original: "[...] mas vislumbrar, a partir de determinadas concepções, possíveis compreensões dialógicas acerca do fenômeno ocorrido no processo de aquisição da fala das crianças."

²⁸ In original: "[...] signo ideológico colocado em uso por um determinado sujeito (no caso, aqui, a criança), num determinado espaço-tempo (a situação cronotópica da enunciação), com valores e voz sócio-histórico-cultural."

²⁹ In original: "[...] *organismo vivo*, repleto de significações ideológicas e constituído histórica e socialmente."

³⁰ In original: "[...] adquire enunciados que fazem parte de um *cenário*: o das conversas em família, das festas de aniversário, da praia etc., o que significa que existe todo um universo linguístico que acompanha essas situações."

³¹ In original: "[...] (inicialmente o pai ou a mãe) é que posiciona a criança como um sujeito discursivo."

“creates a discursive space where culture is put into circulation in words, gestures, interactions, updating their meanings.”³²

From this perspective, the concepts of *subjectivity*, *singularity* and *identity* are very relevant. While *subjectivity* and *identity* are specifically related to Bakhtin’s conceptions involving the constitution of the subject, singularity is reflected in the unrepeatability of the enunciative act. Thus, when studying the children’s utterances, the unrepeatability and discursive singularity must be considered. There are, therefore, no “repetitions,” in the strict sense of the term, since, with each new enunciative act, the language itself is updated in a new event.

In this sense, we consider that the dialogic-discursive perspective of the study of children’s language is complex and comprises a wide network of concepts and reflections that are beyond the linguistic system, seeking to understand the social-historical position of the subjects who enunciate it. The contribution of Bakhtin and the work of the Bakhtin Circle is, therefore, valuable in the configuration of this perspective, represented, in Brazil, by the research groups already mentioned.

3 Benveniste, the Faculty of Symbolizing and the Language of the Child

In this section, we turn our gaze to certain principles proposed by Émile Benveniste and which, as already seen in relation to Saussure and Bakhtin, are ideas that allow us to illuminate the discussion regarding the theme *language acquisition*. As with the two other authors, Benveniste, throughout his many works on language and language, did not present a theory focused on acquisition; however, in his work we recognize the existence of concepts and principles that enable researchers to make displacements³³ to present a study perspective of language acquisition. In the author’s interview with Pierre

³² In original: “[...] cria um espaço discursivo onde a cultura é colocada em circulação nas palavras, nos gestos, nas interações, atualizando seus significados.”

³³ The notion of “displacement” is a subject of reflection by Knack (2020). According to the author (2020, p. 148), “Displacement, formulated from what the reader understands, involves not the application of theoretical notions to the description of a phenomenon, but the production of new theoretical and/or methodological knowledge to explain a phenomenon.”

Daix, collected in 1968 and published in *Problemas de linguística geral II* [Problems in General Linguistics II] in a chapter entitled “Estruturalismo e linguística” [Structuralism and Linguistics], Émile Benveniste (1989), when discussing what meaning is, states that language is a collective consensus and, to explain how this consensus occurs, resorts to the child’s language:

The child is born into a linguistic community, he learns his language, a process that seems instinctive, as natural as the physical growth of beings or plants, but what he learns, in fact, is not the exercise of a “natural” faculty, it is the world of man. The appropriation of language by man is the appropriation of language according to the dataset that we consider it translates, the appropriation of language by all the intellectual achievements that the handling of language allows (Benveniste, 1989, pp. 20-21).³⁴

By presenting this reasoning, the author allows us to think about the birth of the child in culture, instead of thinking about this birth in nature, because the child learns “the rudiments of a culture necessarily from the language” (Benveniste, 1989, p. 23).³⁵ It is based on this idea that Benveniste (1989, p. 24) understands the child’s experience in language as the acquisition of “a world that language gives him and on which he learns to act.”³⁶

Going through Benveniste’s work, we highlight the *symbolic aspect of language* concept, present in other texts by the author, but deepened in “A Look at the Development of Linguistics.” In the text in question, the author presents language as “a special symbolic system” (1971a, p. 25),³⁷ organized on two planes. The first of these planes is physical, involving the mediation between the vocal and auditory systems; the second concerns the immaterial structure and communication of meanings. The linguistic symbol is presented,

³⁴ In Portuguese: “A criança nasce em uma comunidade linguística, ela aprende a sua língua, processo que parece instintivo, tão natural quanto o crescimento físico dos seres ou dos vegetais, mas o que ela aprende, na verdade, não é o exercício de uma faculdade “natural”, é o mundo do homem. A apropriação da linguagem pelo homem é a apropriação da linguagem pelo conjunto de dados que se considera que ela traduz, a apropriação da língua por todas as conquistas intelectuais que o manejo da língua permite.”

³⁵ In Portuguese: “necessariamente com a língua os rudimentos de uma cultura.”

³⁶ In Portuguese: “necessariamente com a língua os rudimentos de uma cultura.”

³⁷ BENVENISTE, Émile. A Look at the Development of Linguistics. In: BENVENISTE, Émile. *Problems in General Linguistics*. Translated by Mary Elizabeth Meek. Miami: University of Miami Press, 1971a, pp. 17-28.

in this way, as mediatizing, since it is in the symbolism of language that the inner experience of one subject becomes accessible to another. As the author states (1971a), the relations between man and the world and the relations among men are established by symbolic capacity; and thus society is established. In presenting this reasoning, the author (1971a, p. 23)³⁸ states:

Society is only possible except through language; nor the individual. The awakening of consciousness in the child always coincides with the learning of language, which gradually introduces him as an individual into society.

In the same text, further on, another reference to the child is highlighted: “The child is born and develops in the society of men. It is adult human beings, his parents, who inculcate in him the use of words” (Benveniste, 1971a, p. 26).³⁹ By stating that the child lives in the society of men and that it is the adults of this society who inculcate the use of the word in him or her, Benveniste (1971a, p. 26)⁴⁰ highlights the role of the symbol in this experience, the ability to symbolize, to “represent what is real by a ‘sign’ and to understand the ‘sign’ as representing what is real, to establish, therefore, a relation of ‘signification’ between something and something different.” It is this ability that enables the child to refer to something concrete or not in his speech. Also in this text, the author points out that, by learning his or her name and the name of the things around him or her, the child experiences his or her social environment through language. Thus, the child, in the relationship with the *other* in his or her life, learns his or her mother tongue and, in the acquisition of the language, establishes symbolic relations with the *other*, which are instituted by the function of language, which is to symbolize.

Benveniste (1971b, p. 223),⁴¹ in the text “Subjectivity in language,” considers language and the subjects that mobilize it as elements of the structure of enunciation: “Language is possible only because each speaker sets himself as a subject, referring to

³⁸ See footnote 37.

³⁹ See footnote 37.

⁴⁰ See footnote 37.

⁴¹ BENVENISTE, Émile. Subjectivity in Language [1958]. In: BENVENISTE, Émile. *Problems in General Linguistics*. Translated by Mary Elizabeth Meek. Miami: University of Miami Press, 1971b, pp. 223 -230.

himself as *I* in his discourse.” This is because, for the author “a man talking is what we find in the world, a man talking to another man” (Benveniste, 1971b, p. 224).⁴² It is in this relationship between *I* and *you* that intersubjectivity is established.

In this regard, in order to institute what is conventionally called an enunciative acquisitive perspective, Carmem Luci da Costa Silva (2009) proposes a theoretical-methodological device that seeks to explain the act of language acquisition. It is the trinitarian device (*I-you/he*)-*HE*, which involves the child (*I*), the other of his life (*you*), the language (*he*) and the culture (*HE*). The enunciative acquisition perspective, based on relations derived from this device, sees the subject of language acquisition as constituted enunciatively by three intersubjective instances: the cultural one, the allocution or dialogical one and the linguistic-enunciative one. To explain the establishment of the child in the language, the author (2009) proposes three operations. The first operation is the *filling of an enunciative place*, which involves changing the child’s position from being summoned by the other (*I-thou* conjunction) to summoning the other (*I/thou* disjunction). The second proposed operation is that of *reference*, which, in the exercise of discourse, allows signs, as conceptual and generic entities, to be used as words for particular notions always; this operation involves the passage experienced by the child from a shown reference (anchored in the enunciation situation) to a reference constituted in the discourse (anchored in the discourse itself). As a third operation, we have the *enunciative inscription of the child in the language-discourse*, for whose realization the forms of person, space and time contribute in the establishment of more complex enunciative relations, involving the resumption of past events, the projection of future events, and, mainly, the simulation of only imagined events.

The enunciative acquisitive perspective conducted by the researcher has derived several works on different themes, such as the vocal aspect (cf. Diedrich, 2015), listening (cf. Silva and Oliveira, 2021), the narrative (cf. Diedrich, Golembieski and Boldori, 2023), among others. It should also be noted that, recently, Giovane Fernandes Oliveira (2022) proposes, in his doctoral thesis, supervised by Carmem Luci da Costa Silva, a look

⁴² See footnote 41.

at the acquisition of the child’s writing, also based on Benvenistian principles. However, in this case, this proposal is somewhat different from the enunciative acquisition perspective, since, according to Silva and Oliveira (2023), it is a semiological-enunciative perspective of the acquisition of writing, which we will not address in this article, but which can also be understood as a possibility of looking at the acquisition of language as proposed by Benveniste, mainly in the notes organized in *Últimas aulas no Collège de France (1968 e 1969)* [Last Classes at Collège de France] (Benveniste, 2014).

In the face of all these productions, there is no doubt, therefore, the power of the theme “language acquisition” in Benvenistian work and of the possibilities of investigating the child’s language based on this author’s thoughts.

Final Remarks

As we reach the final remarks of this article, we recall our objective pursued throughout the investigation, which was to reflect on the presence of the *language acquisition* theme in the works of Ferdinand de Saussure, Mikhail Bakhtin and Émile Benveniste, in order to, based on such reflection, describe how this presence gave rise to perspectives of work around the theme in the Brazilian research panorama.

Therefore, we organize our final considerations by presenting a summary table of the main ideas that confirm the presence of this theme, even if only as an illustration or as secondary comments, in the works of the three authors. Furthermore, we consider how these ideas proved to be powerful for the configuration of current perspectives for the study of the theme in Brazil.

Authors and works	Main concepts related to the topic of <i>language acquisition</i>	Derived Study Perspective	Main ideas assumed in the proposed study perspective
Ferdinand de Saussure on “Object of Linguistics,” from	Language is conceived as a system of relations in its synchronic	Social interactionism	Recognition of the impossibility of subjecting language to an orderly series of

<p>the <i>Course in General Linguistics</i></p>	<p>functioning.</p>		<p>partial apprehensions, opposing developmentalist perspectives.</p> <p>Conception of the child as captured by a linguistic-discursive functioning, which allows him to have meaning.</p> <p>Understanding that changes in the child's trajectory from non-speaker to subject-speaker are changes in position as part of a structure.</p>
<p>Mikhail Bakhtin in "The Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," from <i>Art and Answerability</i>; Valentin Volóchinov in <i>Marxism and the Philosophy of Language</i></p>	<p>Language is conceived beyond the system, in the dialogical relationship between subjects.</p>	<p>Dialogic-discursive</p>	<p>Recognition that the child becomes part of the world of language through the experience of discourse genres.</p> <p>Conception of the child as a social subject, in his dialogical relationship with the other.</p> <p>Understanding that the child's trajectory in language goes from the speech of the other to his own speech.</p>
<p>Émile Benveniste in "A Look at the Development of Linguistics" and in "Subjectivity in Language," from <i>Problems in General Linguistics</i>; in</p>	<p>Language is conceived as an updated system in discourse: language-discourse, with emphasis on the symbolic power of language.</p>	<p>Enunciative acquisition</p>	<p>Recognition of language as an intersubjective instance, since its forms exist through adjustments of meaning produced in the syntagmatization of the <i>I</i> and <i>you</i> discourse.</p>

<p>“Structuralism and Linguistics,” from <i>Problems in General Linguistics II</i></p>			<p>Conception of the child as a subject that is established in the language, since, at the same time, that it constitutes the language with the other, it is constituted by the language structure.</p> <p>Understanding of the child’s trajectory in language based on enunciative relations, since the child recognizes himself as speaker and the other as allocutor in the dialogue. At the same time, he conceives language as a possibility of updating discourse, converting meaning into words.</p>
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Table 1 - Summary table of the perspectives presented. *Source:* Prepared by the authors (2024).

Finally, we consider it important to note that Ferdinand de Saussure, Mikhail Bakhtin and Émile Benveniste, each in their own time and in their own way, planted investigative seeds in their works, which germinated throughout the history written by researchers of Language Acquisition. In this history, fruitful research allows us to look at the child’s relationship with language from the recognition of discourse and dialogue as fundamental elements in the study of language acquisition. Our thoughts definitely do not exhaust the theme, since, we believe, many other perspectives open up with each revisiting of the texts by these great researchers.

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Statement of Author's Contribution

The authors contributed in equal proportion to the idealization, conception and final writing of the article. All of them helped in defining the writing project and objectives of the work. The author Marlete Sandra Diedrich was mainly concerned with the theoretical reflection and bibliographic review about the considerations of Ferdinand de Saussure and his contribution to the studies established by the social interactionist perspective of acquisition. Marina de Oliveira dedicated herself, in a more significant way, to theoretical considerations and to the explanation of the relations between Mikhail Bakhtin and the Circle and the acquisition of language. Also, Gabriela Golembieski formulated the initial reflection on Émile Benveniste's considerations and the proposition of the enunciative acquisition approach in Brazil. The three authors contributed to the final text presented, carefully read and revised the manuscript text and its adequacy to the publication standards. Finally, the authors read and approved the final version of the article in Portuguese and English.

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 1

The text presents a relevant theme for language studies: the contributions of Saussure, Bakhtin, and Benveniste to the topic of language acquisition, and more specifically, child language. The author reflects on these contributions based on the texts of these authors and other researchers associated with the problem of the relationship between language

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and acquisition. At the end of the article, a summary table of these contributions/reflections is presented. Despite the complexity of the problem and the fact that the proposed reflection is elaborated on small excerpts and passages from the works of these pioneering authors, the publication of the article is justified by the problem raised and the inferences drawn from these theoretical foundations. In structural terms, the article presents the objectives clearly, a good and didactic division into sections, each dedicated to one of the three authors, and the final considerations resume equally clearly the initial objectives and the implications drawn from each author commented on. The style is more essayistic than a report resulting from research, as there is no empirical development or production of new data. ACCEPTED.

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Review II

This is a very well-written and clear text, with language fully compatible with a scientific article, with all parts well organized and articulated. With a focus on the works of Ferdinand de Saussure, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Émile Benveniste, the article aims to show how each of the authors contributed to the construction of the perspectives of language acquisition studies that we have today in Brazil, namely, socio-interactionist studies, the dialogic-discursive approach, and the enunciative acquisition perspective, respectively. At the end, a table is presented summarizing the main contributions of each author within each of the three perspectives. The reflection brought by the article is totally original and of great relevance for linguistic studies in general, insofar as it shows how each of these three great authors contributed, even if they did not have this focus, to thinking about child language in the studies developed in Brazil. It brings a great contribution, as well, to the area of language acquisition, and to a linguistic-discursive look attributed to the area, by proposing these theoretical reflections that had not been made before. And, finally, the article, by shining a spotlight on the studies developed in Brazil, shows the pungency and importance of the studies of the country itself. That said, I believe it would be interesting for the article to show these aforementioned contributions in the conclusion of the work. ACCEPTED

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