REMARKS ON A RECENT PUBLICATION RELATING TO STEREOTYPY

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Abstract
This work aims to discuss the results of a study recently published in France: Étude(s) de cognition politique written by Fred Hailon (2017). The working hypothesis is that the discourse "socially institutes" the subject, as well as the subject "socially institutes" the discourse. This problematic subject-discourse nexus therefore seems to activate a phenomenon of multiple sense, rich in cross-implications, because the discourse also establishes, in turn, "social sense". This would mean (if we correctly interpret it) that there is a fundamental semantics of the discourse that dynamically intervenes in the collective production of social concepts, schemes, categorizations.

Keywords: *cognition, discourse, categorization, semantics, stereotypy.*

Abstrakt
Cieľom tejto štúdie je diskutovať o výsledkoch nedávno zverejnenej štúdie vo Francúzsku: Étude(s) de cognition politique [Štúdia(-ie) o politickej kognícii], ktorej autorom je Fred Hailon (2017). Vychádzame z hypotézy, že diskurz „sociálne utvára" subjekt, rovnako ako subjekt „sociálne utvára" diskurz. Zdá sa, že toto problematické prepojenie subjekt-diskurz teda aktivuje fenomén viacnásobného významu, bohatý na križujúce sa dôsledky, pretože diskurz zase naopak konštituuje „spoločenský význam". To by znamenalo (ak to správne interpretujeme), že existuje základná sémantika diskurzu, ktorá dynamicky zasahuje do kolektívnej tvorby spoločenských konceptov, schém, kategorizácií.

Kľúčové slová: *kognícia, diskusia, kategorizácia, sémantika, stereotyp.*

Introduction

The French book *Étude(s) de cognition politique* written by Fred Hailon (2017) has, as its theme, the construction of the identity of human groups through language, discourse and the transmission of messages communicated via the media channels. This interesting study gives us the opportunity to make some observations, which we wish to bring to the readers' attention.

If cognition is the key word of the title, that is the topic of the text, language constitutes its empirical basis and therefore the whole work has great interest also for linguists. Fred Hailon's methodological reference points are offered by Alice Krieg-Planque, Julien Longhi and Georges-Elia Sarfati's research concerning the discourse analysis, whereas his epistemological presuppositions are found in the thought of Hannah Arendt ([1951] 1979) on the dynamics of formation of totalitarianism, in Michel Foucault's epistemological analyzes on the social categorization of differences (Foucault, [1971] 1972), in the sociological investigations of Pierre Bourdieu (1991), especially on the mechanisms of symbolic production of power.

The discourse establishes the subject socially as well as the subject socially establishes the discourse. This relationship discourse-subject therefore seems to be two-way and reciprocal. The discourse establishes also, in turn, the social sense. This means that there is a fundamental semantics of the discourse that intervenes in the creation of social concepts, topological schemes and categorizations. The pragmatic context, which consists here, above all, of the media and the themes of political confrontation, produces the frameworks for understanding events (Hailon, 2017, p. 13). The concept of self-creation of society through discourse, reaffirmed by Hailon's remarks, seems strongly Foucaultian.

The cognitive conditions of discourse are the topic of the first chapter, entitled *Cognition au cœur du politique* (cognition at the heart of politics). Hailon clearly identifies two levels of analysis: knowledge (the need to know and understand) and signification (the process of producing meaning). The anchoring of the discourse to its empirical counter-test, Hailon says, may be faulty. In this case, it can produce a separate logic and belief schemes that are not rooted in reality. We are then in the presence of the "doxa": the way in which the mind integrates the stimuli coming from reality, adapting them to categorical schemes strongly influenced by language. Similar to (but not completely) to what Edgard Morin (1994, p. 211) says, we find that cognitive patterns are in language, just as language is in cognitive patterns. In other words, mental patterns (stereotypes and perceptive categorizations) are included in our mind, which generates also language, which produces mental patterns and their discursive manifestations. In this way, language influences mental patterns and, at the same time, receives a kind of generative influence from them.

Relationship discourse-"doxa"

The hegemonic action of a subject of enunciation requires then that we speak of power relationships in the socio-cultural context, as Hailon must do, when he refers his analysis to Louis Althusser ([1970] 1976, p. 29 – 30) and to the Gramscian concept of "hegemony" (Hailon, 2017, p. 25). This hegemonic action exercises its function through the iteration of its messages and the social generalization of the "doxa", which turns into a more articulate and rigid cognitive structure. This structure, in turn, transforms the discourse that comes from the common linguistic sense into ideology, or in an "ideological norm", as Georges-Elia Sarfati suggests (1996). Hailon does not mention here the Saussurian categories of "langue" (social level of institutionalized discourse) and "parole" (individual level of discourse establishing structures), although its description of the socio-discursive dynamics seems to get close to them.

Indeed, political discourse determines − socially and ideologically − pre-established cognitive scenarios, and, we can stress, vice versa.

Hailon therefore poses as the center of his observation the conceptual pair of discourse-ideology, while a linguist would have opted for the conceptual pair of lexeme-text. This approach would have been interesting and fruitful also in the discussion of the Authier-Revuz model (Hailon, 2017, p. 31 – 34), in which the concepts of "amalgam" and "heterogeneization" clearly correspond to the organization of semantic levels through the semantic scale, which attributes to words more or less broad and general values, according to a mechanism of contextual and circumstantial selection. The "amalgam" allows to make cutouts of the semantic field that can, in turn, overlap, for propaganda purposes, different notional fields such as "immigration" and "insecurity" or categorizations as "immigrants" and "criminals".

The processes of cognitive fixation create a problematic distance between the subject and the reality, but also between the subject and its identity. A cognitive scheme transformed into an ideological construct establishes the limits within which the subject can exercise his mastery over the meaning of things. A more rigidly ideologized cognitive subject does not have the same freedom as a different cognitive subject, because it exercises its action within the limits of its "ideological ego". Hailon speaks in this case of a "re-identified ego" (Hailon, 2017, p. 32), which reminds us of the fundamental, famous observation by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1922, p. 74, 5.62): *"That the world is my world, shows itself in the fact that the limits of the language (the language which only I understand) mean the limits of my world."*

Stereotypy of otherness

The stereotypy of otherness – "transdisciplinary object", according to Hailon (2017, p. 43-46) – is the topic of the second chapter, beginning with a brief summary of the related notions and terminology: *clichés*, *idées reçues*, *formes figées de l'expression* (*langue de bois*), *formes figées de la pensée* (*lieux communs*). As Hailon correctly recalls, the use of the word

stereotype, in English, within the meaning of "preconceived and oversimplified notion of characteristics typical of a person or group" (see *Online Etymology Dictionary* in https://www.etymonline.com/word/stereotype) is recorded from 1922 thanks to the semantic creation of the American publicist Walter Lippman ([1922] 1998). With these semantic properties, the word was used later in other languages according to morphologically similar forms, as in French *stéréotype* (within the meaning of "idée, opinion toute faite, acceptée sans réflexion et répétée sans avoir été soumise à un examen critique, par une personne ou un groupe, et qui détermine, à un degré plus ou moins élevé, ses manières de penser, de sentir et d'agir". See *Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé* in http://stella.atilf.fr).

The approach proposed by Hailon suggests that the stereotype is a "social product", whose origin is predominantly cultural. However, we must not conceal that studies on perception have long shown that the bases of the phenomenon lie in the neurophysiological mechanisms of response to stimuli. In other terms, in nature. This has allowed us to see that the tendency to hypergeneralization in the processes of categorizing social stimuli is not a phenomenon of individuals, nor of narrow ideological groups, but of the human community as a whole. On this issue, we believe that a clarification is important, for an optimal synergy between the different scientific disciplines involved in the study of this phenomenon and for an optimization of the commitments that the various institutions must provide, first of all cultural and educational institutions. So, the conceptual nature-culture couple can offer the reader interesting exploration paths on the same theme and, from this point of view, the cultural consequences of perception provide, in our opinion, one of the best contexts for an even more fruitful development of this research.

The cultural perspective adopted by Hailon (2017, p. 53) emphasizes the importance of collective memory and interdiscursive and intertextual phenomena. The transmission and socialization of stereotypes acts over time according mainly in linguistic ways. The modalities are interpersonal, metadiscursive (the commentary), metalinguistic (the commentary on the enunciative qualities of the speech of others).

Common sense and political discourse

Even if the author does not resort to the Freudian concept of "reality texting", definable as function and capacity of distinguishing the internal world of thoughts and feelings from the external world, it is clear that the questioning of cognition ("acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses", according to the *Oxford Dictionary* in https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/cognition) alludes to it. Suffice it to say that the transcoding of the toponym *Poitiers* (Hailon, 2017, p. 49 – 56) from the common sense to the political discourse, as Hailon clarifies, is systematically based on an incorrect denotation of the word since, in reality, on the basis of a "déjà dit", extremist speeches confuse the place of the famous "Battle of Poitiers" fought in 732 between the Franks and the Saracens which, historically speaking, actually took place in Vieux-Poitiers, tens of kilometers away, with the city of Poitiers, where the battle never took place. In this case, the mythologizing needs of the identity-giving discourse prevail over rational discourse and cognition of reality. In the speech of the occupants of the Poitiers mosque (20 october 2012), Poitiers was not Poitiers, it was the last bulwark of civilization, entrusted with a mission of salvation: to bar the way to the Muslim advance, to defend Christianity and Western civilization in the name of the legacy of Charles Martel (Hailon, 2017, p. 59 – 64).

The third chapter is devoted to the semantics of numerical linguistic expressions in journalistic language. In it, the exemplification of the generative relationships that link language to common sense and the common sense to ideological phenomena appears with great clarity. Words and utterances, in short, texts and textual semantics, are the material that provides meaning to representations of the social world.

Use of numbers in idiomatic expressions is symptomatic of a widespread trend in political language. The number seems to adhere to reality, at least to its countable part, to anchor the discourse to the ground, to fix it definitively to common sense. More generally, the number reproduces an ideology of measurability. In this regard, Hailon (2017, p. 76) examines the example of the expression "tolérance zéro", of which he reconstructs the history, which dates back to the eighties, in New York. The concept is taken up in France by Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy. Jean-Marie Le Pen also adopts the American concept of "zero tolerance" since the late nineties. From then, he has been constantly talking about "tolérance zéro". When immigration seems to be a key topic of French politics, particularly since 2007, "tolérance zéro" of Nicolas Sarkozy will change in "immigration zéro" of Marine Le Pen (Hailon, 2017, p. 83).

The number zero represents the sign of a closure without exceptions, of a sacrosanct intolerance towards anomalies, of whatever type they are. Moreover, the number zero adds to the meaning of the negative morpheme "no", which otherwise means, the strength of certainty that comes from algebra. Zero constitutes a hyperbole by default. The number zero indicates not only a minimum value of tolerance, but above all, through the unsaid, a maximum value of repressive and punitive attitude.

Foreign language and citizenship

The fourth chapter selects a distant object of observation, the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, in comparison to the "neighbor" of Poitiers. The analysis of political discourses in this profoundly different socio-cultural context makes it possible to verify differences and regularities in the way of culturally organizing the perception of society (Hailon, 2017, p. 92).

The corpus analyzed consists of journalistic texts taken from the local media, Francophones and Spanish speakers, in various technological supports. The ethnic composition of the population of Hispaniola, which has a component of immigrants of Haitian origin, was the object of a sentence (n. 168-13) adopted on 29 November 2013 by the Constitutional Court of the Dominican Republic. The effect of this controversial measure, judged by many as xenophobic, was to deprive thousands of residents of the Dominican Republic of Haitian origin of the possibility to live where they had long been. Indeed, the law required the regularization of "irregular residents", to whom however, it seems, was sometimes denied regularization due to the "French consonance" of their surname (Hailon, 2017, p. 98 – 99). In this case, the foreign language (here the French language, attributed to the quality of a foreign citizen) indicated a condition of irreducible extraneousness, and its resonance was, in itself, proof of a status of expatriate.

In this context, the tendency towards homogenization of plurilingualism becomes, as Hailon observes, a political topos, and the onomastic formations become the ground in which power expresses its reordering action on the basis of obvious symbolic needs.

On the other hand, in different contexts, phenomena of demonization of Islam go through discriminatory attitudes directed towards alleged Arabic surnames. As the author writes, it is easy to find similarities with cases of discrimination associated with the Arabic language in the United States.

Fred Hailon (2017, p. 99) quickly cites the terribly significant case of a New York citizen, Mohammad Salman Hamdani, a Pakistani American scientist, victim of the 11 September massacre, later cited by name in the Patriot Act as an example of Muslim-American valor, but initially suspected of involvement in the attacks. On this aspect, we find it interesting to report the words of the *New York Times* of March 9, 2003 (http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/09): *"After Mr. Hamdani, 23, disappeared on Sept. 11, ugly rumors circulated: he was a Muslim and worked in a lab; he might have been connected to a terrorist group. Months later the truth came out. Mr. Hamdani's remains had been found near the north tower, and he had gone there to help people he did not know."*

As Hailon notes, the racism of the name has real and painful repercussions. The French socio-cultural context, the author must note, also let us see many cases in which names and surnames that present foreign consonances, especially of Maghreb origin (Mohamed, Toufik), condemn those who lead them to be perceived as "foreigners forever", witnesses of irreversible cultural strangeness (Hailon, 2017, p. 99 – 100). For the person who has to present a project, to convince someone and be credible, it is necessary to get rid of the "cliché of the Arab". The consequence is that many French of foreign origin resort to practices of Frenchization of their name, both informally and (sometimes) in a legal way.

Representations of identity

The fifth and last chapter of the book focuses on the problem of representations of identity in relation to space. Historically, the process of establishing national states is accompanied by the formation of a community sentiment which is embodied in the construct of national identity. Part of this process is the recovery and symbolic organization of a reinterpreted or reinvented past (Hailon, 2017, p. 115). This trend seems to be general, as Christian Coulon (1994) points out, even if it is then declined according to culturally oriented assumptions. In particular, two different models prevail in Europe, as Hailon recalls, one definable in terms of "civic nation" (France), the other definable in terms of "ethnic nation" (Germany). The current political debate on nationality, which is based on the two principles of *jus soli* (Latin: 'right of the soil', more commonly *birthright citizenship*) and *jus sanguinis* (Latin: '*right* of *blood*', by which citizenship is determined by having one or both parents who are citizens of the state) is clearly rooted in this differentiated and double cultural substrate, the first of which makes the identity descend from a social contract, the second of which derives the identity from belonging to a community whose homogeneity is presumed.

This part of the book seems particularly broad. The political theme of the migratory phenomenon is reconstructed in diachrony, starting from the nineteenth century, when, in France, the phenomena of stigmatization hit Italian (and then Polish) immigrants, up to the seventies and eighties of the twentieth century, when the same phenomenon has hit the migrants of Maghreb origin, in particular Algerians (Hailon, 2017, p. 121). However, the eighties see above all the development of ideological forms openly hostile to the prospects of integration concerning citizens of foreign origin. In a nutshell, we have witnessed the transition from "Italophobia" (in French *italophobie*, 'prejudice against Italians') to "Maghrebophobia" (in French *maghrébophobie*, 'prejudice against North Africans').

Conclusion

Thus we arrive to the present day. The migratory emergency and the alarm for increasingly inconsiderate terrorist attacks generate growing feelings of threat and fear. This situation weakens the traditional argument of the élites (immigration is a resource) and reinforces the arguments that tend to overlap the semantics of insecurity with the semantics of immigration. Social perceptions determine the themes of public discourse on the basis of a precise action carried out by the media, which are not only a mirror of events, but also generators of a fundamental semantics of social discourse (Hailon, 2017, p. 125 – 127). The analysis of the speeches of the French electoral campaigns highlights an insistent reference of the media to the "crisis of the suburbs" (Hailon, 2017, p. 146). The riots in France (2005 and 2007) seem to change the previous pragmatic and socio-cultural context. The opinion expressed by various members of the political world in the speeches of the 2017 election campaign tends to place the issues of immigration and security in one context.

This drift ends up influencing the lexical designations of the places occupied by immigrants, the poor or refugees: the previous euphemistic linguistic practices, which spoke of the peripheries as "sensitive places" (*lieux sensibles*, *cités sensibles*, *banlieues sensibles*, *zones urbaines sensibles*, etc.) (Hailon, 2017, p. 145 – 151) are now increasingly being designated

with stigmatizing and pejorative expressions as *jungle*, *zone de non-droit* ('lawless zone'), *no-go zones*, *quasi-ghetto* (to which the noun *ghettoïsation* is linked), etc. The semantics of ethnic belonging are here confused with the semantics of social belonging, and both these semantics merge, in turn, with the semantics of national belonging and, again, with the semantics of religious belonging.

The picture that can be obtained from this analysis, really very significant, is that the set of these lines of demarcation (territorial, urbanistic, social, of identity) are associated with categorical divisions of a cognitive type. They determine semantic fields on the basis of specific linguistic practices. The combination of these factors produces cognitive grids that establish common sense, which in turn defines and implements what Hailon believes to be able to call "political sense".

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