



Saussure-Benveniste: a reflection on method from semiological principles

Saussure-Benveniste: uma reflexão de método a partir dos princípios semiológicos

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ABSTRACT: This article aims to discuss the semiological principles in the line of thought of Ferdinand de Saussure and Émile Benveniste, to understand how these principles are founded, as well as are interrelated in the reflection of each of these linguists. The starting point of the text is to think about how, from the analysis of such principles, one can observe the construction of a working method that characterizes Saussurian and Benvenistian linguistics. In addition, the reflection presented here helps us understand how these linguists explained the phenomenon of language, considering the different points of view used by each of them during their analysis.

KEYWORDS: Ferdinand de Saussure. Émile Benveniste. Semiological principles. Method.

RESUMO: O presente artigo tem por objetivo discutir acerca dos princípios semiológicos no pensamento de Ferdinand de Saussure e de Émile Benveniste, a fim de compreender de que forma esses princípios se erigem, bem como se inter-relacionam na reflexão de cada um desses linguistas. O ponto de chegada do texto é pensar em como, a partir da análise de tais princípios, pode-se observar a construção de um método de trabalho que caracteriza a linguística saussuriana e a linguística benvenistiana. Ademais, a reflexão aqui empreendida auxilia na compreensão acerca de como os linguistas explicaram o fenômeno da língua, considerando os diferentes pontos de vista, segundo os quais a analisaram.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Ferdinand de Saussure. Émile Benveniste. Princípios semiológicos. Método.

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1 Introduction

In his article *The Semiology of Language* (1969), Émile Benveniste revisits Saussurean semiology to explore the relations between the language and other semiological systems. The guiding question of his investigation concerns the position of language among sign systems. As Puech (1997) points out, revisiting this Saussurean approach does not aim to repeat or correct Saussure, but rather to reconstruct the principles upon which the Genevan linguist built his semiology. Here, the reconstruction implies a strategy of looking back in order to move forward, it is a matter of continuity rather an attempt of overcoming him¹.

In *Saussure After Half a Century* (1963), it becomes clear that Benveniste recognized the importance of making this move starting from Saussurean semiology. In fact, what is described in the following passage is exactly what Benveniste would propose in his 1969 text:

Now, we see this principle spreading beyond linguistic disciplines and penetrating the human sciences, which are becoming aware of their own semiotics. Language does not dissolve into society, rather, society starts recognizing itself as a "language". [...] These innovative investigations suggest that the natural character of language, being composed of signs, might be common to the entirety of social phenomena constituting culture. [...] The day the science of culture takes shape, it will likely be founded upon the primordial character, elaborating its own dualities based on the model Saussure provided for language, without necessarily being bound by it. (BENVENISTE, 1976 [1963], p. 47)

It is precisely from the principle of language as an interpretant that Benveniste arrives at what he calls second-generation semiology, which will be achieved through

¹In Meschonnic (2008), the language theorist identifies a notional shift (*déplacement*), driven by Benveniste's use of new concepts. However, the framework as a whole would remain aligned with Saussure, while standing in opposition to structuralism.

intralinguistic analysis, that paves the way for the significance of discourse, as well as through translinguistic analysis of texts, which will involve a metasemantics built upon the semantics of enunciation, thereby implying a culturology².

In questioning the position of language among the various sign systems, Benveniste finds it necessary to compare with other systems of the same order, focusing on non-linguistic semiological systems. This approach is genuinely Saussurean in its inspirations, since in the *Course in General Linguistics* (CGL), we find the assertion that

[I]f one wishes to discover the true nature of language, it is necessary to first consider what it has in common with all other systems of the same order; and linguistic factors that initially appear crucial (for example, the functioning of the vocal apparatus) must be considered of secondary importance if they serve only to distinguish language from other systems. Hence, not only will the linguistic problem be clarified, but we believe that by considering rites, customs, etc., as signs, these facts will be seen in a new light, and the need will be felt to group them under Semiology and explain them through the laws of science. (SAUSSURE, 2006, p. 25)

It is worth noting that Saussure suggests we will find this nature by tracing the common aspects between language and other semiological systems. For Saussure, therefore, analyzing what semiological systems share leads to an understanding of what is distinct and essential about language, that is, understanding the aspects that make language a unique system among semiological facts (SAUSSURE, 2006, p. 24). This way of analysis is also present in *The Semiology of Language*, and it is this approach that enables the development of the principles leading Benveniste to conclude that the semiotic and semantic domains exist.

²Regarding this point, we follow Chloé Laplantine's interpretation: "This metasemantics (the semantics of a semantics) < which will be constructed upon the semantics of enunciation >, is, to me, simultaneously the discovery of specific semantics, such as Baudelaire's semantics (that is, <Baudelaire's language>), which implies a culturology [...]" (cf. LAPLANTINE, 2008, p. 158, *our translation*).

This article aims to present the interpretation that, following Saussure, Benveniste also bases his theoretical development in *The Semiology of Language* on semiological principles, which in both frameworks, function as explanatory hypothesis that ultimately pave the way to the discursive sphere. To this end, we will first outline the semiological principles in the work of each author, demonstrating how these principles interconnect and operate within their respective theories. At the end of the essay, we will relate the theories, seeking to present reflections that introduce the hypothesis that there is a procedural approximation regarding the principles in other authors papers as well, thus such approximation lies in the method used by both linguists while developing their theories.

2 Theoretical Assumptions

2.1 The semiological principles in Saussure's work

In Saussurean thought, semiology is a prospective science that has a fundamental role in establishing linguistics as an autonomous science. Given that the need to establish this autonomy was of great importance in the 19th century, the most influential interpretations involved debates on whether linguistics should be part of psychology or sociology. Benveniste rightly notes that Saussure distances himself from choosing between these terms by stating that linguistics would not be part of either of these sciences, but rather of a science that did not yet exist: semiology. (BENVENISTE, 1989 [1969] pp. 47-48). Thus, linguistics would no longer need to position itself between the natural or historical sciences, and would establish itself as a unique scientific branch that studies social signs.

This prospective science is defined by Saussure as "a science that studies the life of signs within society" (SAUSSURE, 2006, p. 24). Linguistics would then be a part of semiology, a particular system belonging to it. The Genevan linguist also states that semiology will show what constitutes signs and what laws govern them, meaning that

it is a broader science than linguistics, encompassing it without being limited to it. Similarly, semiological principles govern language, but cannot be said to be specific to it, since they also operate in other semiological systems.

When discussing semiological principles, Saussure gives a privileged position to the principle of arbitrariness. Precisely because this principle is the one that most characterizes language, and because language is the most complete and widespread system of expression, Saussure asserts that language must be considered the master-pattern of semiology. It also seems that the centrality of arbitrariness stems from the fact that the other principles are generated from it. To illustrate this viewpoint, let us consider the following passages, both found in the chapter where Saussure investigates the mutability and immutability of the sign:

Ultimately, the two facts are interdependent: the sign is capable of changing because it continues. What predominates in all this change is the persistence of the old material; infidelity to the past is only relative. This is why the principle of change is based on the principle of continuity. [...] A language is radically incapable of defending itself against the factors that shift, from minute to minute, the relationship between the signified and the signifier. This is one of the consequences of the arbitrariness of the sign. (SAUSSURE, 2006, p. 87-90, *highlighted by us*)

Based on this passage, Saussure explains the functioning of the principles of continuity and change of the sign. They are considered principles of general semiology because they operate not only in language but also in writing systems, sign languages for the deaf, etc. Such principles are closely related; in fact, this connection is so tight that it can be said that Saussure defines them together: "the sign is capable of changing because it continues" (SAUSSURE, 2006, p. 89). Furthermore, at the end of the passage, it becomes quite evident that the factor of change—and, consequently, of the continuity of the sign—is a consequence of arbitrariness.

Also closely connected to the arbitrariness of the sign is the semiological principle of differentiation, related to the notion of value. Saussure defines it by stating: "In language, as in any semiological system, what distinguishes a sign is everything that constitutes it. Difference is what makes character, just as it makes value and unit" (SAUSSURE, 2006, pp. 140-141, grifo nosso). In the same chapter, he also states that "[a]rbitrary and differential are two correlative qualities" (SAUSSURE, 2006, p. 137, emphasis added).

Regarding the principle of differentiation, it is important to note that, in the *Course in General Linguistics* (CLG), it is stated that "language thus presents this strange and surprising character of not offering entities perceptible at first sight, without one being able to doubt, however, that they exist and that it is their interplay that constitutes it" (SAUSSURE, 2006, p. 124); he then concludes: "this is undoubtedly a feature that distinguishes it from all other semiological institutions" (SAUSSURE, 2006, p. 124). Based on this passage, one could contest whether the principle of differentiation is related to semiological principles, as we have posited here.

However, in the *Writings in General Linguistics* (ELG), Saussure uses this principle to explain the color of a flag in a maritime signal system:

"All that represents, for the soul, the maritime signal of a red or blue flag proceeds not from what it is, nor from what has been decided to associate with it, but exclusively from these two things: (1) from its difference in relation to the other signs displayed at the same moment, and (2) from its difference in relation to the other signs that could have been hoisted in its place and in the place of the signs accompanying it." (SAUSSURE, 2002, page 52)

Still in the *Writings in General Linguistics*, the "DIFFERENCES between signs" and the "DIFFERENCES in signification" are treated as the "[f]undamental principle of semiology, or of 'language' considered properly as language and not as the result of preceding states" (SAUSSURE, 2002, page 65)

These principles, which appear to be intimately connected, are present even when Ferdinand de Saussure addresses diachronic linguistics. When discussing the phenomenon of analogy, for example, the linguist defines it as a principle underlying linguistic creation and states that it is, in fact, identical to the principle governing the mechanism of language, according to which the broader units of language, composed of smaller units, maintain reciprocal solidarity among themselves (SAUSSURE, 2006, page 148). Evidently, this solidarity is a consequence of the principle of differentiation, which concerns linguistic value.

Thus, starting from the principle of arbitrariness, we encounter integrated and increasingly specific principles in explaining the functioning of the linguistic system. We see that, taking this semiological sphere into consideration, not only synchronic but also diachronic phenomena are explained. Based on the relationship established among these principles, we may ask why such a connection occurs, since merely pointing out that they are all semiological does not explain the reason for the implication among them.

To understand this point, let us recall the well-known Saussurean statement that answers the question *Unde exoriar?*³: “Far from saying that the object precedes the point of view, we would say that it is the point of view that creates the object; moreover, nothing tells us in advance that one of these ways of considering the fact in question is prior or superior to the others” (SAUSSURE, 2006, page 15). As is well known, this passage means that our view of reality is always shaped by a point of view, which determines what is understood as a linguistic fact. In other words, there is no possibility of a neutral perspective on linguistic phenomena; there is no examination of data “in themselves.”

³ As Normand (2011) notes, the question *Unde exoriar?* – “Where to begin?”, is explicitly formulated in the Writings in General Linguistics (cf. SAUSSURE, 2002, page 240-241).

Let us now analyze a note from the Writings in General Linguistics that corroborates and further expands the understanding of the previous quotation:

“Now, what is primordial and inherent to the nature of language is the fact that, from whatever angle one attempts to approach it – whether justified or not – one will never discover therein individuals, that is, beings (or entities) determined in themselves upon which a generalization may subsequently be made. There is, BEFORE ALL ELSE, generalization and nothing beyond it; and since generalization presupposes a point of view serving as a criterion, the first and most irreducible entities with which the linguist can concern himself are already the product of a latent operation of the mind.” (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 26)

More than denying the possibility of analyzing linguistic facts in a neutral manner, this passage denies that generalizations can be made from such a purported attempt at neutral analysis ⁴and, furthermore, categorically states (in capital letters), that prior to anything else, there is generalization.

What does this mean? To what type of generalization is Saussure referring? Or rather, from what type of generality does Saussure begin in order to analyze language? We understand this to refer to the generality of principles. On this point, Claudine states:

“If the linguistics proposed here is general, it is nothing more than a synthesis of results: [In Saussure] it is not a question of generalization in the form of laws and tendencies of comparative grammar and historical linguistics [...]. The perspective is reversed: the proposed generality is that of principles, and this is why the Course in General Linguistics is an epistemology in which the necessity of hypotheses is clearly established. One no longer starts from language as something self-evident; rather, one enunciates the a priori principles that make it possible to define language and, consequently, to describe it.” (NORMAND, 2000, p. 466)

⁴According to Médina, linguists such as Antoine Meillet, for example, expressed the belief that facts should be analyzed “in themselves,” just as was done in chemistry and physics (cf. MÉDINA, 1978).

We understand that such principles are intimately connected, in the sense that they lead to one another, because they are not mere generalizations derived from descriptions of languages. Principles explain the functioning of language and of other semiological systems precisely insofar as they are systems. To say that these principles are interconnected implies that we cannot view them as conflicting or, even less, contradictory⁵.

Let us now see how Benveniste relates the principles outlined in *The Semiology of Language*⁶.

2.2 The semiological principles in Benveniste's work

Unlike Saussure, Benveniste does not start from the principle of arbitrariness in *The Semiology of Language*. Although he recognizes the significance of this principle in Saussure's theory⁷, since it is responsible for establishing the link between language and semiology, Benveniste asks: "What principle should be introduced that can order

⁵ Treating semiological principles as a priori hypotheses could lead to the criticism that, for Ferdinand de Saussure, language would constitute an abstraction, as indeed argued by Antoine Meillet. However, it is important to recall the Genevan scholar's statement in the First Conference at the University of Geneva: "To wish to study language without taking the trouble to study its diverse manifestations is an absolutely chimerical undertaking; on the other hand, to wish to study languages while forgetting that they are primarily governed by certain principles summarized in the idea of language is a task even more devoid of serious meaning or valid scientific foundation" (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 128–129, emphasis added). The position defended here, then, does not disregard that the establishment of language as an object is only possible through the study of specific languages, but rather that analyses of such a kind stem from principles that guide the linguist's perspective and that enable the description of language from that perspective.

⁶ It is important to note that this presentation of Benveniste's semiological principles does not intend to exhaust the arguments developed in the chapter "*Semiology of Language*". It is an excerpt aiming, above all else, to clarify how these principles are connected and interrelated.

⁷ When I mention that Benveniste considers the significance of this principle in Saussure's thought, I mean that he understands its theoretical place within the linguist's thoughts. In *The Semiology of Language*, Benveniste himself states: "What links linguistics to Semiology is this principle, placed at the heart of linguistics, that the sign is arbitrary." (BENVENISTE, 1989 [1969], p. 50). This does not entail that he does not regard this concept critically, as is evident in his paper *The Nature of the Linguistic Sign*. It should be noted, however, that Benveniste's critique concerns the arbitrary nature of the relationship between signifier and signified, not specifically the one between language and reality.

relations and define sets?" He replies, promptly: "The common characteristic of all systems and the criterion for their connection to Semiology is their property of signifying, or SIGNIFICANCE, and their composition into units of significance, or SIGNS." (BENVENISTE, 1989 [1969], p. 52)

This principle is not mentioned by Saussure; nonetheless, it is clearly a corollary of Saussure's semiological theory, seeing that semiology encompasses precisely the systems of signs – social ones –, that convey meaning. Therefore, the semiological systems will be analyzed in relation to one another primarily through this principle, as articulated by Benveniste.

Moreover, as Neumann (2020) points out, there is an affinity between the notion of value, derived from Saussurean linguistics, and the notion of significance in Benveniste's work. In *The Semiology of Language*, Benveniste makes use, for the first time in his work, of the concept of *significance*, which is always linked to the concept of *system*. In this work, the linguist discusses in particular the relationship between the different systems of meaning. There is a point in the chapter in which Benveniste even uses the term *value* instead of *significance*, stating that "the *value* of a sign is defined solely within the system of which it is part" (BENVENISTE, 1989, p. 54, *italics added*), regarding the infeasibility of trans-systemic signs.

It's worth noting that this principle, while serving as a starting point, is also put to the test, since Benveniste, in a footnote, states that the problem that arises when analyzing non-linguistic systems is that of "inter-semiotic validity of the notion of sign", that is, the inquiry that seeks to understand if all semiotic systems are permeated by the notion of sign⁸. (BENVENISTE, 1989 [1969], p. 59)

⁸ At this point in the text, according to Meschonnic (2008), Benveniste distinguishes between the *sign* and the *unit*. Thus, in *The Semiology of Language*, every sign is a unit, although not every unit is a sign. It is this separation that enables Meschonnic to conceive of the work of art as a signifying unit.

Benveniste explains that the relationship between semiotic systems is governed by two principles: the principle of non-redundancy and the principle of non-transistemicity of language. These principles, we must say, are restrictive in the sense that they establish possible limits of interaction between semiological systems.

The principle of non-redundancy postulates that there are no synonymous signs in two systems with different bases. Thus, Benveniste explains that we can not say the same thing through music and through language; we could, however, say the same thing through speech and through writing, since, in that case, there is a common basis. The reason there is no synonymy between systems with different bases is that these systems are not interchangeable, given that the a different basis implies a distinct nature.

From the principle of non-redundancy, derives the principle of non-transistemicity, which completes it. The premise of this principle is that two distinct systems can share a sign without their being synonymous with one another. Benveniste gives the following example: “The red of the binary traffic signal system shares nothing in common with the red from tricolor flag, nor does the white of that flag with the Chinese white of mourning” (BENVENISTE, 1989 [1969], p. 54) It is therefore a mistake to equate materiality with synonymy; in this sense, the signs are seen here as “common” solely for the material aspect, a relationship that is incidental — a relationship that, I must say, is incidental. In the relevant aspect, which is related to its operation, there is no synonymy⁹.

Benveniste establishes the limits of the relationships between semiological systems through the principles listed above. However, this does not mean that the sign

⁹ This secondary aspect of the materiality of the sign is explored extensively in Saussurean thought. Saussure, when discussing the functioning of the language system using the metaphor of a game of chess, illustrates why the the material aspect of language is secondary. In a game of chess, if we were to lose a knight and a pawn, for instance, we could very well use two checkers to replace them; as long as the pieces retained their value and remained in the same positions they were in when they disappeared, the substitution would make no difference to the continuity of the game (cf. SAUSSURE, 2006).

system are closed, that they are all grouped together within semiology without establishing relationships among them. It means, however, that the possible relationships will be limited by restrictive principles and, of course, not able to conflict with them.

From this perspective, the linguist understands that there are three possible types of relationships within the multiple systems: generative, homological and interpretive relationships.

The generative relationship establishes that a system can generate another, provided they share mutual characteristics; thus, usual language generates logical-mathematical language, for example. This principle is closely related to the principle of non-redundancy, which states the opposite - in other words, the non-convertibility between systems with different bases. Thus, it is deduced that when we speak of creation, we are also speaking of convertibility.

As for the relationship of homology, Benveniste defines it as a unifying principle between two semiotic domains, one being a relationship that is established - unlike the previous one, which is discovered based on parameters that may be rational, intuitive, conceptual, poetic, or of other natures. Here, the relationship does not need to occur in systems with the same base; however, the linguist points out that nothing predetermines the validity of these relationships, nor the extent to which they may extend. This means that, just because we can freely establish relationships between different semiotic systems, it does not follow that they will be valid, since there may be inconsistencies that invalidate the homology. Thus, homology serves as a criterion for analyzing the type of relationship that can be validly established between systems with both identical and different bases.

In fact, when it comes to music, the linguist examines various analogies that prove to be invalid, leading him to conclude that the units of language are sounds, but that these units are not signs. Through homologies, we arrive at a distinguishing

principle: "Systems based on units are divided into systems with significant units and systems with non-significant units. Language falls into the first category; music, into the second." (BENVENISTE, 1989 [1969], p. 59)

As for the visual arts, however, it is not even clear at first whether we can speak of the existence of distinct categories. In any case, Benveniste asserts that the artist creates his own semiotics and establishes the opposition of values that he himself renders meaningful within his own order. Thus, the artist does not work with a repertoire of existing symbols. Each work, then, would be unique. Here we have the semantic aspect, since we can speak of meaning even without being able to speak of units, that is, even without the semiotic domain.

The analysis of music and the visual arts is essential because the first principle identified by Benveniste to guide his research is the principle of the sign, which states that (1) all systems of signs possess the condition of signification and that (2) they are constituted by signifying units. Thus, it is clear that this principle needs to be rethought, as it must also account for systems that do not use units to convey meaning. The principle of language, as we shall soon see, will not be rejected, but will be subsumed under another, broader principle.

Finally, let us turn to the principle to which Benveniste assigns a central role: the interpretant relationship. The relationship of interpretance will be the one that allows us to answer the question regarding the place of language among semiological systems, the guiding question of the chapter under analysis. Benveniste argues that this is the fundamental relationship between semiological systems, as it classifies them into articulating systems and articulated systems. Language occupies a unique place among semiotic systems because it is the only articulatory system:

One can thus introduce and justify the principle that language is the interpretant of all semiological systems. No other system possesses a "language" within which it can be categorized and interpreted according to its own semiotic distinctions, whereas language can, in

principle, categorize and interpret everything, including itself.
(BENVENISTE, 1989 [1969], p. 62)

In fact, Benveniste introduces the interpretant relationship even before analyzing music and the visual arts, stating that it is a “general principle of hierarchy, suitable for inclusion in the classification of semiotic systems and which will serve to construct a semiotic theory” (BENVENISTE, 1989 [1969], p. 55). The principle of hierarchy, because it places language in a privileged position relative to other semiological systems; for while language can interpret itself and other systems, those systems cannot interpret one another or interpret language.

In discussing the principle of interpretance, Benveniste once again concludes that the principle of the sign is insufficient to account for the totality of linguistic phenomena and cannot, therefore, be the sole principle. Therefore, he proposes a principle that encompasses and expands upon it: “it [language] is endowed with a DOUBLE SIGNIFICANCE [...] Language combines two distinct modes of signification, which we call the SEMIOTIC mode, on the one hand, and the SEMANTIC mode, on the other” (BENVENISTE, 1989 [1969], p. 67). The principle of the sign is thus confined to the semiotic sphere, with the inclusion of the semantic domain. Thus, language is the only system that combines these two modes of meaning; the others possess either the semiotic or the semantic. In Benveniste’s semiological analysis, language is no longer viewed as a system of signs but rather as language-discourse.

In the development of Benveniste’s semiology, we observe a feature that had gone unnoticed in Saussure’s: as principles are developed, they allow for reflection on and adjustment of the very principles established prior to them. This is because, as we mentioned, principles are hypotheses that aim to answer fundamental questions and that guide and enable the development of a theory. They do not, therefore, need to be universal or applicable to all cases.

2.3 Methodological considerations

In both Saussure and Benveniste, we can see how the semiological principles are dependent on each other. What distinguishes the semiological principles of one from the other, however, is that, in Saussure's case, these are principles that seek to explain the internal workings of the language system, whereas the semiological principles explored by Benveniste are principles that explain the relationship between systems.¹⁰ In any case, just as Saussure's semiological principles lead to an understanding of the relationship between semiological systems, Benveniste's principles lead to an understanding of how language functions.

We have seen that, in Benveniste's case, these principles led to the emergence of a field distinct from semiotics: semantics. As the linguist points out, this domain "should be recognized as distinct." "He will need a new set of concepts and definitions" (BENVENISTE, 1989 [1969], p. 67). Thus, it seems tempting to assert that semiological principles are principles for accessing the semantic domain, but that they have no influence whatsoever on the principles of that sphere. Although we believe that we cannot say that Benvenistian semiological principles act directly on the semantic sphere in terms of how that domain functions, it seems unlikely that we could say that the principle of interpretance does not act directly on the discursive domain, understood as the actualization of language.¹¹

Laplantine (2008) states that Benveniste developed a project in culturology over the course of his career. According to the researcher, culturology seeks to understand

¹⁰One can thus see the importance of semiological principles in clarifying the relationships between distinct systems. In his article "Language Structure and Social Structure," Benveniste cites the principles of homology, interpretance, and non-redundancy to support his argument that there is no isomorphism between the two structures. In "Semiology of Language", when discussing the principle of interpretance, he states that it naturally applies as well to subsystems within society (cf. BENVENISTE, 1989 [1968; 1969]).

¹¹ In Meschonnic (2008), in addition to the principle of interpretance, the language theorist revisits the principle of homology to conceptualize the work of art.

how language organizes the world in increasingly unique ways. This project would, in the author's words, stem from the principle of a semiology of language, in which language is the interpretant of society" (LAPLANTINE, 2008, p. 222)¹².

It is through the principle of the interpretant nature of language that, in Benveniste, one understands the relationship established between language and society, between language and culture; language is thus the interpretant of society and the interpretant of culture.

Furthermore, it seems reasonable to ask whether, in the semantic sphere, we can speak of principles that operate in a manner similar to those found in the semiotic domain. By "mode of operation," we mean principles such as hypotheses that, connected, explain how this domain works, always seen together.

The interpretation presented by Dessons (2006) seems to support this idea, in the sense that Benveniste's entire body of work can ultimately be understood through what Meschonnic (2009 [1982]) refers to as a "historical anthropology of language." This interpretation is based on the principle of subjectivity in language and regards reflection on language as a reflection on the subject. Thus, the entire constellation of terms and concepts in Benveniste—such as intersubjectivity, communication, sentence, discourse, enunciation, meaning, and time—are understood as inseparable from the principle of subjectivity.

It is also important to note that we can consider principles, in both Saussure and Benveniste, within spheres of their thought that are sometimes viewed as independent of those just analyzed Claudine Normand, in her article *Benveniste : linguistique saussurienne et signification*, explains that, in terms of how these principles function, Benveniste remains faithful to Saussure:

¹² In the original: "principe d'une *sémiologie de la langue*, où la langue est l'interprétant de la société".

Benveniste proposes undertaking this task of elucidating and applying Saussure's principles in concrete analysis. This fidelity is clearly visible in his statements about theory that permeate his many developments. [...] Such statements explain Saussure in terms that the then rampant positivism forbade; as such, Benveniste clearly says much more than Meillet ever did - who was still a direct disciple - that the linguistic endeavor requires suppositions about observable data, and if we wish to attain relevant generalizations, "It is necessary to start by seeing beyond the material form and make it such that the field of linguistics does not fit in the descriptions of linguistic forms" (NORMAND, 1992, p. 55-56, *emphasis added, author's translation*)

Normand, in this context, is not referring to any of the author's semiological principles. The author mentions the *Mémoire sur le système primitive des voyelles dans les langues indo-européennes*, positing that Benveniste followed Saussure's method.

Be it about works on the field of indo-european comparative linguistics or the many analyses shown in *Problèmes de linguistique générale* under the name of "Structures and analyses" and "Syntactic functions", the rhetoric is always the same, in that it establishes the method to be followed: the necessity to hypothesize about what remains not directly seen. (NORMAND, 1992, p. 55-56, *author's translation*)

Thus, Normand observes, in both linguists, principles such as hypotheses, suppositions - as stated previously - that seek to explain linguistic phenomena. This statement clashes with one made by Saussure in *General Linguistics* about the procedures of linguistics:

Linguistics actually proceeds through induction and intuition, and it has to proceed in this way so as to arrive at fruitful results. Once it has been discerned, the hypothesis, the construct, will always be taken as the starting point so as to ascribe impartially to each language whatever this hypothesis leads to in its case. Without doubt the exposition thus gains clarity. The satisfying whole which results from the facts that are explained by the acceptance of the hypothesis is relied on as its proof. (SAUSSURE, 2002, p. 87)

Emanuele Fadda also notices, in many of Saussure's works, a methodology that starts from explanatory hypothesis about the workings of linguistic phenomena. Furthermore, Fadda states that "there are some cases where Saussure truly builds a stair of abductions, with hypotheses that build upon hypotheses" (FADDA, 2004, p. 122). Such hypotheses, building upon each other, are exactly what one notices when analyzing semiological principles.

It is relevant to notice that this like-mindedness in the outlook of linguistic realities shows two thinkers adopting a more open method of investigation, which somewhat diverges from a positivist linguistic methodology¹³. If Normand states that Saussure's vision on principles explains a linguist in a manner which positivism forbade it, the author, when referring to positivism in other occasions, posit that it is a "movement of which Benveniste, heir to Saussure and semiology, remains removed from" (NORMAND, 1996, p. 7, *author's translation*).

4 Final considerations

Com base nas reflexões apresentadas, compreendemos que analisar a semiologia saussuriana, bem como a benvenistiana, em termos de princípios semiológicos, longe de tratar-se de uma mera questão de nomenclatura, trata-se de uma questão epistemológica, que tange tanto à forma de apreensão desses princípios quanto ao modo de se olhar para os fatos linguísticos. Se essa é uma questão epistemológica, há abertura para pensar também, como mostramos, se/como os princípios empregados nas análises empíricas de Saussure e de Benveniste se

¹³ Normand, in her *La généralité des principes*, states that, among some linguists, there was a great fear of relapsing into philosophical speculations removed from the realm of facts. Still, the generalization accepted through a positivist perspective is the one that would formulate laws strictly derived from induction. Saussure's proposal, concerning the generalization of principles in order to explain observed linguistic facts, was, as such, criticized by these linguists, since it would represent a departure from positivist procedures (cf. NORMAND, 2000).

relacionariam metodologicamente ao modo de funcionamento dos princípios semiológicos e em que medida haveria relação entre eles.

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