

Developments and Extensions

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Sign, Discourse and the Construction of Meaning: An Inquiry into Jean-Blaise Grize’s Semiotic Analysis

Abstract: This paper investigates a few key elements from Jean-Blaise Grize’s semiotic developments. For the Swiss author, it is necessary to understand not only the functioning of reasoning (formal and informal) or the argumentative structures that we use in everyday life. In order to get a better image of the latter, we have to dive into the depths of semiotics and try to figure out the life of signs. This leads to a certain peculiarity within Grize’s work, as long as his considerations concerning natural logic, reasoning or discursive schematisations are by far clearer than the semiotic elements which would constitute their basis. Nevertheless, the fact that he opted for an explicative schema that encapsulates a lot of semiotic elements proves that Jean-Blaise Grize had a nuanced view of the matter. In his *Logic naturelle et communications* (1996), Grize offers an explanation of meaning through an inspired construction of a theoretical hybrid (Saussure and Peirce are brought together in spite of the common view according to which those two traditions are hardly compatible). Far from being a naïve standpoint (as Grize joked about his own view, in a playful self-referential sequence), this hybrid incorporates enough concepts in order to be not only a mature structure, but also a useful one (signifier, signified, reference, meaning, object of the sign, denotation, designation). Understanding these concepts and the relations that are established among them allows us to grasp two forms of discursive representations, namely models and discursive schematisations. The problem of meaning is innovatively tackled by a two-way approach. On the one hand, we have to keep in mind that in front of us we find several sources of difficulties (lexical, semantic and syntactic). On the other hand, we must pay attention to the process of semiosis that involves a creative form of activity from both speaker and receiver. Moreover, this activity (comprising receiving, understanding and interpreting the signs) is presented by Grize against the background of Michel Meyer’s problematology. One important result of this theoretical network developed by Grize is the fact that the classical model of

communication created by Shannon and Weaver seems inappropriate a tool for the description of the real communication sequences. Finally, my paper states a few objections that can be made to Grize's project.

Keywords: meaning, sign, symbolic function, discursive schematisation, reference, semiotics

1. Introduction

One of the constant theoretical preoccupations that have been present throughout the work of Jean-Blaise Grize is the nature and function of meaning. This made Grize discuss a lot of matters from the field of semiotics, on the one hand, and make this kind of semiotic analysis a key ingredient of his natural logic developments, on the other hand. Moreover, for a logician so keen to understand and bolster the systems of logic that are very close to human reasoning, the task of connecting the elements of calculus with their social counterparts (social representations, group dynamics, collective emotions or communication) seemed a necessary one. As he argued (1996, 29), we have to always remember the fact that nothing constitutes a sign in itself, but only in relation with other objects. We need to have a certain activity (an activity that may involve thinking and creativity) that is labelled now as *semiosis*. The process of semiosis has the fundamental role of linking the objects together, and thus of establishing a network of relationships between them, and this further leads to meaning. Let us not forget – I must add – the fact that the process of semiosis also implies the presence of an *interpreter*, an entity that has the capacity of (partially) decoding the above network of relationships. And, of course, at this point it doesn't really matter if this entity is mechanical or biological. All that matters is the fact that that entity should have (or should be) a device of calculus, capable to produce valuable outputs.

An object does not acquire the status of being a sign until it enters the realm of the symbolic (or semiotic) function. Here, Grize gives full credit to Piaget, and thinks that the semiotic function is the source of any representation. Moreover, this function is seen like a point of intersection between the subject and the world. In this vein, we can say that it is a constitutive ingredient of human life. Grize briefly tackles the problem of computers (1996, 30-31), claiming that computers are machines that have an extraordinary capacity of combining signals, but those signals are

actually signs only for us. This position will be discussed in the section of objections. We have to remember, Grize notes, not only the signs and their symbolic function, but also their context of presence and their physical support. It is not the same thing, the Swiss author says, to see a slogan in a newspaper or to see it painted on the walls of a faculty. This is enough to produce a difference in terms of perlocutionary effect.

A sign is never alone, Grize says. On the one hand, a sign always speaks about its own possible absence, and is usually a part of a system, on the other hand. When we mention systems of signs (organized by rules, that is), we, in fact, make reference to codes. And here we have a new point of intersection, this time between codes and social groups, the codes being one of the most powerful tools to create and maintain strong relationships between the members of a community.

2. Basic assumptions

For Grize, any discourse must be interpreted as a change, a form of dialogue and it encompasses an argumentative dimension (1985, 359). A second important assumption is the fact that every discourse produces a schematisation, namely a “(discursive) representation that, because of its semiotic nature, has in the same time meaning and reference – and that in spite of the objections formulated by U. Eco” (Grize 1985, 359).

When trying to understand a sequence of signs, the receiver, Grize says, uses the general logical and discursive operations, but also some forms of informal reasoning. If we assert that a meaning does not just “belong” to a sentence or a text and it involves a certain semiotic activity from the part of the receiver, than we have to ask the question whether such an activity is, in fact, a reconstruction (a form of decoding that tries to stay close enough to the presumed intentions of the speaker) or a new construction (Grize 1985, 360). What holds strong, Grize believes, is the fact that generally a text is not just a “random configuration of signs” (1985, 360), and this, I have to add, for two reasons. First, the sender encapsulates his or her communication intention within the message and for that he or she makes use of certain signs (in ways that are infinitely more complicated than we thought, and we have to thank Wittgenstein for making us see that). Second, the sender usually uses standard signals, traditional forms of communication that should be, in principle, easily recognizable by the receiver. This implies the fact that the signs are arranged according to certain rules (syntactic, semantic and pragmatic). In a common situation of communication, the sender wishes that the receiver

should be able to reconstruct, as Grize puts it, a schematisation that is “more or less isomorphic to the one that he or she offered” (1985, 360).

This presupposition leads to the fact that the classical model of communication described by Shannon and Weaver is not a tool intricate enough to show this process of construction and reconstruction of schematisations. Grize (1996, 58-60) thinks that this model is actually based on four hypotheses. First, there is a certain form of independence between the elaboration of an idea and its coding into message within the model put together by Shannon and Weaver. Even though this makes sense, things are always more complicated in the reality of communication. It's not as if every time we communicate we choose carefully the words that would express best our thoughts: sometimes, what we speak constitutes the whole content of communication, and there is simply no deeper level that is “translated” into words. The second hypothesis concerns the fact that according to the Shannon-Weaver model, the deformations of meaning and the misunderstandings are a direct result of the noise that occurs on that special communication interaction or represent a consequence of channel imperfection. Evidently, the intricate mechanisms of interpretation (and their cultural background) bring about serious trouble when it comes to meaning and understanding. Sometimes, trying to make sense of the speaker's intention, the interlocutor makes a radical reconstruction of meaning. The third hypothesis, Grize says, creates an unnecessary symmetry between the process of decoding and the process of coding. Decoding a message seems to entail, within the Shannon-Weaver model, that we use the same operations like in the case of coding, but only in reverse. This works in a handful of cases, when the process of communication as a whole is mechanized enough: puzzles, a standard exercise, a riddle or a technical message. Otherwise, the simple (1) “We need to change some things around here” can become the starting point for a saga. As Grize (1996, 60) shows, “the real partners in communication are not machines made from the same mould. They are individuals with their own personal life, with their own history, individuals who are situated in social contexts always a little different one from the other. The symmetry postulated by this hypothesis is actually never made real”. Moreover (and this is the fourth hypothesis according to Grize), the model entails the unacceptable equivalence between sense and meaning. This may work, again, in technical transmissions, but is not at all evident in normal conditions. The Shannon-Weaver model, Grize says, has the lone merit of underlining the

importance of information. But in a situation of interlocution, information covers just one of the functions of communication.

The re-production of reality by language (thus coined by Benveniste) is, obviously, a process that includes several stages. For Grize (1985, 361), these stages could be summarized as follows: *receiving*, *understanding* and *interpreting*. The inclusion of interpretation in this process is a fine strategic option, because it explains the fact that the receiver of a message can make his or her own version of reconstruction: this means that sometimes the latter could be less isomorphic than expected, which translates in a difficulty to convey the same meaning or reference as the one intended by the sender. Moreover, in the phase of understanding, the receiver must decode the sequence of signs that he or she receives. First, as receivers, we have to recognize the patterns of signs so as to make a decision about their origin (Do they belong to the daily natural language or not? If not, where should we look?). As we know it, the task of surveying the natural language in search for clues is not always a simple one, given that the problem is linked to identifying sub-codes: not all the people involved in a communication situation acknowledge the presence of the elements that indicate, say, a technical sub-code (the one used in ecology, engineering or law enforcement).

When we explain the concept of meaning, we have to keep in mind the fact that we have an intricate job to do. We must get rid of the illusion that meaning can be explained separately, without the use of other concepts such as information, processing, interpretation or function (see Eco 2005, 170-171, for example). In the same direction, meaning allocation is not everything that we do when we communicate. As it has been shown by philosophers that are working in the field of teleological semantics, the social dimension of meaning must not be set apart from the biological realm. Staying close to Frege's pivotal remarks made in "On Sense and Nominatum", Grize adopts his point of view concerning meaning and reference. In spite of the theoretical profit brought by Frege's analysis (see also Dummett 1978), his position also leads to technical difficulties. But, as Grize notes, "this type of difficulties wasn't a direct concern for Frege. He worked as a mathematician and he was preoccupied by founding arithmetic, successfully by the way, on the basis of logic. But certain mathematical entities have their own existence while others don't, for example if 'the largest natural number' has no denotation; 'the smallest natural number' has one, which is ensured by a theory of existence". Some authors solve the problem of denotation by

simply choosing to elude it, as does Eco when he says (Grize 1996, 36) that we should eliminate the problem of denotation from our entire semiotic research. Eco asserts that instead of looking for such an evasive object, we should concentrate our efforts in clarifying the cultural units that correspond to the lexemes in the natural language. In such a view, the signs are strongly connected to culture (or, in Grize's terms, to our cultural pre-constructs), but this leads to the fact that our intuition of common sense is left aside. This is precisely the reason for which an approach based on the tenets of natural logic has to embrace denotation, reference and designation. The test for fidelity to natural logic passes through the gate of common sense. The stake of natural logic is, fundamentally, to create the link between the structures of logic (with a special interest in the functioning of inference) and the structures of common sense (and the way the latter is expressed through natural language).

The philosophers who tackled language roughly fall into two non-exclusive categories, namely philosophers who proved a strong affinity to the abstract, mathematical aspect of language and philosophers who were more preoccupied to clarify the use of common language. I coined these two directions (Grădinaru 2011, 14) *philosophy of ideal language* and *philosophy of common language*. Of course, beyond the obvious different approaches, these two directions are complementary. This has been shown in the seminal work of David Lewis (1996), entitled "Languages and Language". There, Lewis also searched for answers concerning the relationship between those two aspects of language use. For him, the first step of such an explanation would consist in showing that there is a connection between a language and a community that speaks that language. The second step involves a set of conventions that function for that community. When we question the nature of the conventions, we might find different possibilities. Lewis himself opts for *sincerity* and *trust*. The convention of sincerity asserts that people in that community are inclined to speak the truth or, in other terms, never to utter sentences that are not true in that particular language. The convention of trust states that people try to be sincere when they communicate. In the ideal case, there is coordination between the sincere speaker and the trustful listener: each one conforms to the conventions hoping that his or her peers would do the same thing (Lewis 1996, 541). Such regularities within a linguistic community help perpetrate sound forms of communication.

The concept of discursive schematisation may be seen as such a bridge. Its applications are to be found in logic, rhetoric, theory of

argumentation, but also in several fields of communication (for a detailed analysis, see Sălăvăstru 2006, 180-207. In fact, Grize (1996, 46) talks about two forms of discursive representations, namely *models* and *discursive schematisations*. In order to understand their functioning, Grize argues, we have to look first at three types of language games (in the sense given by Wittgenstein). The first type corresponds to the daily use of language, and it is characterized by the fact that its terms are only partially clarified. This omnipresence of vagueness is to be found in nouns (“liberal”), sentences (“This revolution is nothing but a coup.”) or even syncategorematic terms (“They came *and* they protested.”). The vagueness is not necessarily a negative trait: sometimes we need it to reach our goals. Without it, a metaphor could not be created in the first place, and it is easy to speak about the importance of metaphors in human communication. The second type of game is related to the technical and scientific use of language, and has as main trait the fact that while it doesn’t step too far away from the daily use, nevertheless it tries to clarify all the terms that are utilized. Grize says that if in the former case we could talk about (imprecise) notions, in the latter we have concepts. Metaphors and other tropes do not totally disappear from this language game, even though they might not be encountered very often. The third type of language game obeys to extremely rigorous rules. The definition of the terms is precise; the rules of inference and the forms of demonstration are also clearly stated. There is a pretence of universal meaning, as in the case of “[$(p \rightarrow q) \ \& \ p$] $\rightarrow q$ ”. This type of language games is strictly controlled by syntactic and semantic rules (which are usually discussed separately). Needless to say, only logic and mathematics fit this description. On the other hand, understanding such a language requires familiarization with the alphabet, the rules, the axioms and the primitives. The process of interpretation is guided by these elements, and it is usually quite a safe enterprise, with little space for creativity.

A discursive schematisation aims to represent something for someone, namely what the speaker believes or imagines about a certain fragment of reality (see Grize 1987, Apothéloz and Grize 1987, Grize 1990). Thus, a discursive schematisation is directly linked with a certain situation, and this situation includes two dimensions:

“One is that of interlocution, with its partners, with the relations that exist between them and the conditions of communication; the other is related to the subject in question, to the cultural units that constitute the reference, reference that may reveal both the realm of imagination and fiction and

the conceptualisation based on the testimony of our senses. It is significant to notice that, for instance, if the objects corresponding to the signs from *Alice in Wonderland* constitute a world that is totally unreal, they nevertheless send to references that are perfectly known: rabbit, hatter, dormouse, duchess and queen". (Grize 1996, 50)

A schematisation is always descriptive in nature, Grize argues, and this holds both for the cases when it describes something real and the cases when it describes something fictitious (as it is the case above). For that to happen, its author has to choose the relevant aspects of the reference. In accomplishing the operation of selection, this person may include both aspects that are subjectively relevant and themes that correspond to the expectations of the envisaged public. However, a discursive schematisation is not a pure rendition of a real sequence, as long as it involves the activity of the speaker: a discursive schematisation is neither a picture nor a map. But a trustful speaker, on the other hand, does not just mix words in his or her schematisation in order to confuse the interlocutor. The goal is to make the other person understand the matter. Two consequences are important here, Grize claims. One is the fact that there will always be a certain amount of vagueness in a discursive schematisation, at least from the fact that the receiver of a message has to make an interpretation of her own. The vagaries of meaning and reference find a good place to stay, but, again, this is not necessarily a loss. Both the activity of the speaker and that of the listener open a field of multiple meanings, and this is precisely the condition of the progress in thinking (Grize 1996, 51). The second one is the fact that a discursive schematisation does not contain final clauses, being an open element. If we are to compare a discursive schematisation and a demonstration, Grize argues, we can make an abstract of the first but not of the second (we would simply "amputate" the demonstration, Grize says). This leads to the fact that within the network of social sciences we can only find general laws that are susceptible to exceptions. In the hard sciences, we aim for universal laws, and there the concept of model is at work. A model contains a number of hypotheses and constraints, leaving a very small space of interpretation for the receiver of the message. The subjective nature of the discursive schematisations is compensated by the insistence on objectivity that is typical for models. A model, moreover, is not based on empirical observations, but consists of theoretical frames that are made to explain empirical data.

3. The process of interpretation

Concerning the concept of interpretation, Grize finds useful ideas in Michel Meyer's approach, one that is based on the dialectic relationship between questions and answers. According to Grize (1985, 365), "the problematology [...] has the advantage of explaining how is it possible to give meaning to a text without fully understanding it. Many times we need just a few elements in order to imagine a question to which it would answer. This is the case for many pupils and for the problems (the questions are, nevertheless, explicit) that they are subjected to, this is the case every time your partner tells you 'You didn't understand me'". This perspective gives credit to the activity of both speaker and listener, namely to the activity of construction of meaning and to the activity of reconstruction of meaning. Moreover, it can easily explain why a text may be interpreted in different ways: each interpretation is developed starting with a different question. Evidently, a text can answer to more than one question.

When he talks about understanding a message, Grize thinks that a lot is going on, from the required minimal knowledge of the code to the material conditions that underlie this process. Grize also uses the distinction between meaning and sense, believing that the former is somehow "historically determined" (1985, 362), while the latter is much more close to the text and to the interpreter himself. Understanding a message, Grize argues, is mostly a "meaning" problem, more than a "sense" problem. The Swiss author also underlines three major sources of misunderstanding. First, we should take into account the lexical difficulties. Although the dictionaries help us by offering a nucleus of meaning for a word or for an expression, when a message contains too many unknown words (and this happens when the sequence of communication belongs to a technical code – for instance, utterances in mathematics or physics), we may be able to understand that message only if we connect to whole array of knowledge that is brought about in that particular discipline. Second, we have to be aware of the semantic difficulties that are connected to either the possibility of a context that is not clear enough or to the possibility of the existence of more than one context. Finally, we have the syntactic difficulties that require no other explanations at this point.

One essential feature that links the linguistic system to the social world is the concept of cultural pre-constructs. In fact, any discourse takes place only by submerging the signs into the deep waters of the cultural

pre-constructs. In this discursive situation, we always start by using signs that already have a certain nucleus of meaning, and this nucleus is cultural in nature. When we assert (2) “The freedom of speech has low scores in that country”, we make reference to a complex network of cultural presuppositions that are perceived as true for a certain community of speakers in a definite “position” in the space-time continuum: any talk about freedom of speech in the court of a tyrant in Greek or Roman antiquity would have been an act of courage. So, the signs that we use in order to give life to our discourse carry not only the nucleus of meaning, but also the luggage of cultural practices. As Grize (1990, 30) put it, “the cultural pre-constructs [...] allow what Longacre coined the *expectancy chains*. They are also the base for the *topoi* of Anscombe and Ducrot. There is, by the way, just one step between the expectancy chains and the prejudices of class.”

Such an expectancy chain, I must add, is also isomorphic with the image put together by Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical investigations*. The presence of the cultural pre-constructs in any discourse sends us, in the same time, to the question of power and influence. Briefly citing both Pierre Bourdieu and Kerbrat-Orecchioni, Grize is inclined to side with the latter. We have to acknowledge, with Bourdieu, the fact that many times the authority enters the discursive space from outside, namely from the position of the speaker. But I think Grize is right when he evaluates Bourdieu’s standpoint as somewhat too radical – indeed, this is the way things happen many times (especially in political communication), but not always. Rather, as Kerbrat-Orecchioni argues, there is a more intricate relationship between different discursive practices and their conditions of performance (conditions that may be of social, economic, political, cultural or military nature): if someone says a prayer, we might join her just because we suddenly have the feeling of togetherness, of communion, of meaningful solidarity. There are moments when the *ethos* and the power of the speaker prove decisive, but also moments when the speech itself is the ultimate force.

In his *Logique et langage*, Grize summarises some of the main points concerning the problem of meaning, and thus he cites Greimas for whom the meaning is given only by the activity of the interpreter. The meaning is not *in* a painting, a poem or a sentence, is not to be found in grammar or semantics, but is produced by the interpreter. So, in our communication activities, we give meanings rather than we recognize meanings. This is also a little too radical, in my view. It is clear that the interpreter, through all the semiotic activities, plays a central part in the

clarification of meaning. But to place meanings only at the level of the interpreter would be a tactical mistake, since anyone who chooses to do that has to face Twin-Earth counterexamples of the type Hilary Putnam created. Later, in his *Logique naturelle et communications*, Grize seemed to revise this point and make a different option. Instead of going for the simplicity present in Greimas's work, he now offers a more complex schema, in which we find not only the relationship between a signifier and a signified, but also the object of the sign and its reference. Moreover, designation is defined as being the relationship between the signifier and the reference, while denotation constitutes the relationship established between the signifier and the object that corresponds to the sign. To replicate an example from Grize, the expression " $\sqrt{9}$ " denotes ± 3 , but it designates the number 3. The term *connection* seems to be a terminological innovation done by Jean-Blaise Grize, and it stands for the relationship between the object of the sign and the reference. Another point of innovation worth mentioning is the fact that in this book Grize assumes the practice of "intellectual borrowing" from both Peirce and Saussure, which may seem to many people an act of sacrilege. As a matter of fact, Grize (1996, 40) says that he borrowed "totally free, which means that I have the intention of paying them homage while betraying them, and this, morally, is highly condemnable". What is missing from this schema is the concept of connotation. Grize is surely aware of its importance, but chooses not to introduce it, in spite of the fact that connotation stands for the ever present secondary meanings in a discourse (see Carpov 1987, 100-104).

For Grize (1985, 93), a systematic study of the construction of meaning has to be based on the understanding of the general frame of communication. Three notions seem central for this approach, namely the situation of interlocution, the place of the interlocutors and the cultural pre-constructs. In terms of discourse, Grize follows Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni in distinguishing four types of competence that are mandatory in the process of understanding. The first one is the linguistic competence, the second one is the encyclopaedic competence, the third one is the competence in logic and the last one is the rhetoric-pragmatic competence. The encyclopaedic competence is strongly linked to the knowledge of culture. This entails the fact that a proper understanding of discourse requires knowledge of reference. If we have the assertion (3) "This book is nothing but a blend of cheap avanguardism and metaphysical nonsense", than understanding it will require certain background information about, for example, avanguardism and metaphysics.

4. Discourse and persuasion

Grize also discusses the problem of communication from the standpoint of five postulates. First, there comes the postulate of dialogism. Along the lines developed by Bakhtin, the Swiss author is interested in developing a framework that describes better what happens within the process of discursive communication. In fact, he is ambitious enough to offer an alternative to the Shannon-Weaver model (Grize 1996, 68). The new schema underlines the importance of the activity done by the two interlocutors, and also the centrality of the concept of discursive schematisation: A constructs his or her version of a certain subject, while B reconstructs it, both using for that goal their corresponding cultural pre-constructs. In the same direction as Bakhtin, Grize seems to believe that almost all the forms of language-in-use (a sentence, the discourse of a politician, even a monologue), regardless of their apparent traits, are semantically and stylistically dialogic.

The second postulate discusses the situation of interlocution. When we communicate, we find ourselves in a situation that has at least two fundamental dimensions. One of them is related to the spatial and temporal features: a speech is performed at a certain moment in time, in a place that has been already chosen, with a certain public that hears it. The use of deictic signs, Grize thinks, proves this strong connection between the content of the discursive activity and the context of performance. On the other hand, any discourse is produced within a social and historical framework that shapes its size, scope or inner constraints. This social dimension of change is seen when we analyse the power relationships. Without exaggerating their role (Grize does not think that a discourse is fully determined by the exterior social conditions), these relationships have their influence on *what* is said and *how* is said.

The third element is the presence of social representations. Grize is not interested in drawing subtle distinctions among different types, but he wants to tell us that at least three levels are fundamental when it comes to the representation that the speaker (A) has about the listener (B). First, A has to be aware of the cognitive capacities of B, and also of the knowledge that B has on the subject that A speaks about. For example, teachers forget to start in a simple manner when they approach a new theme, thus creating serious difficulties for their students. Second, A has to know the level of linguistic competence that B has. This is a key element when it comes to understanding the utterances of A. If A has a

false representation about B, his or her discourse will not be adapted to the level of B. Third, A needs a representation of B's values and ideological sensibilities (and B needs the same thing).

The fourth postulate tackles the concept of cultural pre-constructs (CPC). For Grize, any utterance entails a large volume of background knowledge, even if we are not always conscious of that. The pieces of knowledge create a large number of combinations; they are also transformed by their presence in the discourse. As Grize put it:

“The CPCs provide the mandatory frame within which the discourse has to be inserted and this is done by the double Piagetian mechanism of assimilation and accommodation. The orator has to assimilate the content already present and accommodate it to what he or she has to say. And this doesn't work only for the meanings of words. The places, rightfully coined commonplaces, are indispensable tools for backing the inferences, even the most elementary which allow understanding. I cannot infer about someone, about whom somebody tells me that he marched with a rose in his hand, that he participated to a meeting of the Socialist Party only if I know this had happened in France – and not in Portugal – and that the rose is more than a flower, a symbol – about which some people hope that it will live more than one morning!” (1996, 66)

Communication is possible only when the partners share a minimum of CPCs. The CPCs transform a verbal product in a social product, and the language-in-use opens the field of a systematic research of the social groups. Even if the developments in natural logic must be aware of the CPCs, it is the role of sociology to study them and the respective social communities in a detailed fashion.

Finally, a discourse is a device that creates meaning and for that it creates objects of thinking (Grize 1996, 67). They may take the form of reference, denotation, designation or what have you. The construction of objects by the speaker is followed by a reconstruction of the listener, but what is really essential is the common adaptation of schematisations in order to produce meaning and understanding. Much more than a simple transfer of knowledge from A to B and back, communication is a process of common creation, of common construction of objects. The goals of A and B guide this activity and make the signs get out of their natural indeterminacy.

In his article “La construction du sens (II)” (1985, 366), Jean-Blaise Grize makes some interesting remarks concerning the problem of persuasion. Instead of presenting again the well-known theories about

persuasion, Grize prefers to look for an application of Meyer's problematology. From the semiotic point of view, he says, we can study the attitudes of the persons involved (let us keep the 'A' and 'B' notations) by examining the situations of questioning. For Grize, there are four possible combinations- if by Q_A we understand the question to which the author of a text answers and Q_B translates the question to which the reader thinks the text answers -, namely $Q_A = Q_B$ (agreement or disagreement) and $Q_A \neq Q_B$ (fake agreement or contestation). When B interprets a text in the same manner as its author and accepts his view (A and B think that the text answers the same question), we witness the agreement between A and B. But B also has the possibility of accepting A's question, but refusing A's interpretation, therefore we have disagreement. When A and B think that the text answers to different questions, there is the possibility that B accepts A's interpretation, thus creating a pure form of misunderstanding, and also the possibility that B does not accept A's interpretation, and that means that B is contesting A's case. Persuasion seems to be present (even if Grize does not feel the need to explain matters further) in situations one (agreement) and three (misunderstanding). In fact, the latter represents a sour victory for the orator, as far as his public accepts A's views without understanding them.

Later (1996, 73-77), Jean-Blaise Grize revised his opinions, and preferred to discuss about *receiving*, *acceptance* and *compliance*. In order to accept the discursive schematisation of a speaker, first the listener has to perceive it and to reconstruct it according to his or her own CPCs. Then, B examines A's discursive schematisation and verifies if it contains contradictions or not, if it corresponds to the general picture of the world that B has, and if A's assertions are possibly true. It is mandatory for A, then, to eliminate any source of errors from the discourse. If B does not accept A's schematisation or identifies debatable points, than B can create his or her own counter-discourse. It is evident that B will not comply with A's demands or influence. The old problem of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* reclaims its centrality within the field of rhetoric again, as long as A's victory can be a consequence of his authority, of his arguments or of his emotional knowledge and force. Compliance is the last step, and Grize underlines the fact that acceptance is not enough in terms of the role that rhetoric has to play. On the other hand, everything is on B's shoulders, and A's persuasive intentions are accomplished if the activities of B lean towards that direction. Grize thinks that many times – but not every time, I have to say – the activity of B is one of inferential nature. In my view, this revision brought Grize's theory closer to the modern view of the

matter, one that cannot leave aside psychological and sociological models.

5. Objections

Objection 1

I think that Eco has a point when he doubts that any discourse, simply by being semiotic in nature, automatically leads to meaning and reference. It seems safer to assert that every discourse is rather the possibility, the promise of meaning and reference, than a totally developed semantic system. When one person initiates a sequence of signs, there is the presupposition that that person tries to tell us something, to communicate something. This presupposition works in the vast majority of cases, but obviously not in all the cases. Errors, playful or blocking intentions, contextual frames stop us from reaching the points envisaged by that person. It would be interesting for scholars to deliver a more detailed analysis of our constant “illusion of meaning”. Wittgenstein, Hume or Kripke did a good job in clarifying the “contribution” of language to our twisted understanding of things, while researchers in psychology or psycho-therapy showed the psychological roots of our continuous longing for meaning. It seems that we need to believe in meaning and in the fact that our life and our actions have a meaning. When it comes to discourse, things are even more acute, as long as words and their related nonverbal aspects constitute devices specially “designed” for communication and understanding. But the illusion of meaning may, at times, penetrate the discourse and create a subsequent illusion, the illusion of meaningful discourse. Decades of propaganda tragically proved that our expectancy chains of cultural pre-constructs are a serious liability in our system of symbolic defence. We are vulnerable to discourse, and a constant meditation about meaning may be our most trusted instrument of critique.

Objection 2

Even if there is a certain semiotic tension in every text, I doubt that this tension is always one that takes the dual form question-answer. This happens if we do not extend the concept of question enough to be an equivalent for discourse, in which case everything goes. Moreover, there are numerous cases in which the activity of searching for the meaning of a text takes the form of trying to find the question to which that particular text answers. Such a scenario has the theoretical advantage of the credit

given to the reader: after all, without the activity of the reader, we wouldn't be able to have a complete situation of communication. On the other hand, there is also the fact that different readers could grasp different questions that belong to a text, and thus we have an explanation of the multitude of interpretations that arise when reading a text. Grize is careful to note that not any interpretation would do, and that the concepts of *co-text* and *context* make sure that there is a limit to the way we construct our interpretations (we might say that Grize anticipates what Eco would present about the limits of interpretations and about the concept of text use). For instance, a sentence like (4) "Please, bring me the book from the right shelf!" is, as Grize (1985, 365) put it, "univoquely determined" if there is just one book on the shelf indicated by the speaker. There are no problems in identifying its meaning or its reference, and it seems totally unfruitful to try and complicate things theoretically in a case when understanding comes natural between the two persons who are inside this situation of communication.

But, sometimes a text includes only bits of information that are nothing else but the speaker's own world. It is as if the text would provide only answers to the speaker's questions, and nothing more. In such a case, the meanings – interpreted like that – constitute a mystery for the reader, as long as he or she is not familiar with the speaker's world. Moreover, many texts just do not have this question-answer aspect, and I say that in spite of the fact that I am conscious of the constant presence of the cognitive elements within almost any text. We can find many examples in prose or poetry in which there are no evident or implicit questions to be identified. In poetry, as we know it, we have works that defy our intention of understanding them, the poet ironically testing our prejudice (or should I say cultural pre-construct) according to which any text encapsulates a meaning. In the same vein, let us not forget the works that are built around the aural force of the signifier, nothing purely "semantic" being at stake there.

Objection 3

At various occasions, Grize insists on the double activity that is done by the speaker and the receiver in the process of understanding. Underlining the presence of the two intentions is mandatory, and Grize does just that (1990, 92): "in order to have meaning, it is necessary to postulate a double activity, that of the speaker on the one hand and that of the receiver, according to the general schema adopted in this book. The speaker advances some signs with the intention of making sense and the

receiver *gives* them meaning". So, we are dealing with not just one, but two creative acts. But any structure of signs, especially words, has its own say in the construction of meaning – and this is the relevance of the cultural pre-constructs. Speaking in Eco's terms, when we analyse a discourse, we have those two intentions present (that of the author and that of the reader), but also a third one, namely that of the text itself. In the case of literature or art, *intentio operis* cannot be forgotten, because these genres do not put into play a simple dialogue between the writer/author and the reader/spectator. The confrontation between the (visible/hidden) intention of the author and *intentio lectoris* is accomplished by the intermediate nature of the work itself, be it a text or a painting or a theatre show.

Objection 4

I doubt that only the human being is a semiotic entity, as it appears in *Logique naturelle et communications*. It is true that humans have developed an intricate network of signs, and that brought the capacity of experimentation and simulation. No other being on Earth can claim such a thing. But by doing this, it does not mean that we create some form of separation from the biological realm as Boris Cyrulnik asserts (Grize 1996, 30). I would rather cheer for the teleological semantics programme, according to which humans have developed exquisite performances, but this does not take us out of the picture of the biological realm as we know it at this moment. I do not claim that biology and its related fields have already said everything that is important: surprises may arise at any time. Papineau, Dretske (1981) or Dennett (see Grădinaru 2011, 351-352) help us integrate what we know about language and discourse in the general picture about our world that we developed scientifically.

Objection 5

The problem of computers is a tough one. On the one hand, it seems almost crazy to assert that computers "understand" something. On the other hand, we have witnessed the fact that they nevertheless play chess better than we do. This may either change our own conception of meaning or simply say that playing chess is not a matter of handling meanings. The latter is weird and plainly false in the case of two human players competing against each other. If the expressions "6 + 1" and "7" are not only mathematical elements, but also forms of communication that we try to make sense of, then the same holds true in the case of chess. A legal move in a game represents an expression created in a logical space.

So, it rather seems that there's more to the handling of signals than we thought, and the thinking machine does a pretty job when it competes with the biological being that thinks. The fact that a computer is not, as Grize said, an entity capable of using the symbolic function is not an obstacle here.

6. Conclusions

This study concentrated on some characteristics of Jean-Blaise Grize's work on semiotics. The Swiss writer succeeded in developing a creative reading of the tradition, all its major themes being discussed. Moreover, as new ideas emerged in this field, Grize carefully and critically examined them and introduced the most promising results in his own philosophy. This produced substantial theoretical hybrids, with solid capacities of explanatory power. The concept of discursive schematisation, without any doubt a useful theoretical innovation, has been interpreted in this paper as being a solution for filling the gap between the logical and mathematical view on language and the common sense perspective. The stake of natural logic is a noble one, but it has to overcome many difficulties in order to reach its goals. An overview of Grize's analyses shows that his project constantly found valuable inputs from the field of semiotics, on the one hand, and that Grize tried to permanently improve his explanatory schemas, on the other hand. In his papers and books, Grize proved to be a courageous researcher, ready to use results coming from disciplines such as sociology, psychology, genetic epistemology, mathematics, rhetoric or theories of communication. This effort is highly laudable when we think that it was done by someone who was a renowned specialist in logic, used to work with formal languages. To integrate such data, any writer would require encyclopaedic knowledge and imagination. This was, actually, the case with a fine intellectual like Jean-Blaise Grize.

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