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The Approach of Antoine Culioli to the Theory of the Utterer

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Introduction

General linguistics is addressed on the standpoint of two different approaches. The first involves the concept of “langue” and is investigated by theories such as structuralism and generative grammar while the second is known with reference to “parole” which is the subject of study of uttering act theories. These theories are in turn twofold: a pragmatic approach and a grammatical approach. The approach of Culioli refers to the grammatical aspect relying on the utterer as the center of language production.

The objective of this paper is to overview the theory of Culioli known as the uttering act theory so as to shed light on its specificities going from its early development up to its recent evolution. We therefore suggest to overview the early developments of the Theory of the Utterer with reference to both Gustave Guillaume and Emile Benveniste as pioneers of the concerned theory before addressing the model of Culioli.

I. Some Forerunners

The development of linguistics science has gone through a series of disruptions since the early 60s. Under the epistemological pressure of philosophers, linguists, and other scientists, the practice of linguistic analyses was faced with sharp modifications as for the behavior of the scientific object and the descriptive and/or explanatory approach. A great number of linguists have ever since oriented their analyses in the bosom of the metalinguistic operations, prior to the surface concatenation. In order to do so, linguists have to consider the dynamism of the object and that of the uttering act. Those works had inspired Antoine Culioli in the foundation of his *Linguistique des opérations énonciatives (LOE)*.

Among the forerunners of that trend are Wilhelm Gustav Freiherr von Humboldt, Gustave Guillaume, Roman Jakobson and Emile Benveniste. In this part, we shall briefly present the precursors whose works have been driven by the concept of operations, with the utterer as the kernel phenomenon in the linguistic analysis process.



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I.1. Gustave Guillaume

In spite of the belated recognition of the greatness of his works¹, Gustave Guillaume remains a keystone in the constitution of the type of linguistics based on the activity of the utterer or the reality of the language practice. We shall present Gustave Guillaume in three steps:

I.1.1. Guillaume, the Epistemologist

Gustave Guillaume undertook to found a linguistic method based on an analytically rigorous and demanding spirit. For Guillaume, scientific research consists in setting a powerful analytical scheme to track down the invisible hidden above the visible. The quality of the explanations will depend on the quality of the comprehension and then on the quality of observation. Observation, according to Guillaume must be analytical and not deceptively direct: “On explique selon qu’on a su comprendre; on comprend selon qu’on a su observer.”²

For Guillaume, the scientist must move away from the data of the first observation and operate abstractly.

I.1.2. Guillaume and the Linguistic Mechanics

The theory of Gustave Guillaume relies on the assumption that language is *energeia* and not *ergon*. He does not totally keep the dyadic presentation of Ferdinand de Saussure:

LANGUE / PAROLE

Here follows his presentation:

LANGUAGE / DISCOURSE

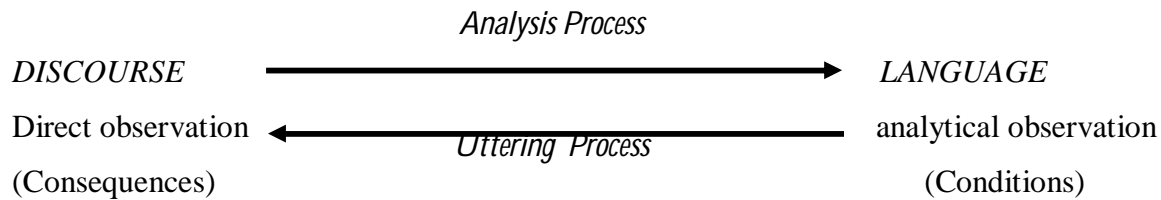
Guillaume preaches for a scientific attitude that consists in discovering the marvelous theory inherent to the system of systems (*language*). Since *language* is not directly observable, the linguist should analyze discourse (the manifestations, the consequences) in order to grasp the language (the system of conditions):

¹Gustave Guillaume was allowed to lecture his *psychomechanics of language* in 1938, supported by Joseph Vendryès, Emile Benveniste and, posthumously, by Antoine Meillet. Gustave Guillaume died in 1960.

²See Gustave Guillaume, *Langage et science du langage*, 1960.



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The linguist has to have a theorizing behavior when working out the linguistic phenomena. He has to set a tool, a model, which will enable him/her to comprehend the process of construction of the system and reveal the extraordinary order (its intimate theory) lying below the apparently chaotic phenomena we experience. The purpose is to understand the types of relations between the different elements of the system. The linguist has to dismantle the system and unveil the systematic structure, the organization of language. He/she will then be able to state the structuring rigor of that system.

In order to have a handle on the intimate structure of language, Gustave Guillaume suggests that the linguist posit the dialectics language / mind.³ For Guillaume, language is constructed in the mind of the speaker (psychosystematics or intuitional mechanics or tempus primum) on which a system of sign lie (psychosemiology or tempus secundum). Language is mentally built up before being a physically-based reality. The psychomechanic movement is then divided into two parts. In its constructed state, a language is thus a combinatory relation between a psychosystematics and a psychosemiology (psychosemiotics).

Such a scientific attitude, according to Gustave Guillaume, shall lead the linguist to figure out the remarkable inner natural clearness of language.

The systematicity of the theory of Gustave Guillaume lies in the discovery of the binary organization of the system of systems. A microsystem made of before / after is the foundation for an extended part of his analyses:

Immanence vs. transcendence
Virtualization vs. actualization

³Cf. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz "Language is the Mirror of the Mind".



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Past	vs. after-past
Condition	vs. consequence
Cause	vs. effect
Language	vs. Discourse

In the linguistic analysis, Gustave Guillaume made two major discoveries: the kinetics of the article and the chronogenesis of the verbal-temporal system. These phenomena are explained by a simple binary fact.

As for the article, the system is tension 1 vs. tension 2:



The article, in language represents a whole process. But in discourse, it is a moment of this process from U1 to U2.

The tension 1 represents the functioning of the operator **a** and the tension 2, the functioning of the operator **the**.

We shall provide a deeper explanation of this kinetic system in another presentation.

Guillaume discovered the chronogenetic system in trying to understand the following utterance:

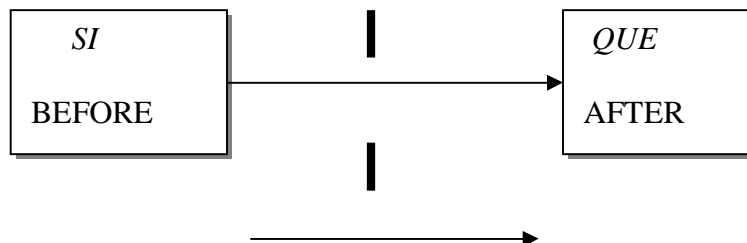
« SI vous le faites et QU'IL s'ensuive un malheur, on vous en tiendra rigueur ».

(If you do it, and a misfortune does occur, you will be held accountable for that.)

He tried to understand the reason why there occurs a subjunctive form after “que” and why there is an indicative form after “si”.

Guillaume discovered that there is a dynamic movement from the virtual to the present (current).

SI is a tracer of the virtualization of a current element whereas **QUE** marks the actualization of a virtual element:





SUBJUNCTIVE

INDICATIVE

The theory of Guillaume does not only assert the dynamic aspect of language but also gives the reasons to say so. Science does not live out of truth but out of proofs, Antoine Meillet used to say. Guillaume has given the proofs that language *is* a systematic and active set. Each unit in the system holds a given position and *does* function in a way fundamentally different and opposed to the others.

I.1.3. Guillaume, a Forerunner of the Theory of Operations

The theory of Gustave Guillaume is governed by the fact of accounting for the system by the scientist while remaining inside or within the boundaries of language. Moreover, language is not a phenomenon that one can directly experience. The linguist should start by the analyses of its manifestations called discourse. From discourse, the scientist is then able to conjure up the system and express its regularities and even its irregularities.

The linguistics of operations was founded on the assumption that the principle of immanence can impede the way of understanding language and its functioning processes. The reality of language is the instance of discourse, communication, verbal interaction, performance or parole. Since language is an abstract set, one can only come between reach of its manifestations. A direct contact is then not possible. Hence, a sound scientific theory that is liable to turn to the materialization of the system, the production into context and, through a powerful analytical movement which is susceptible to sort out the internal theory of language.

This little passage is sufficient to prove that Gustave Guillaume is among the noted forerunners of the linguistics of operations. For Guillaume, the concept of discourse is central in the construction of language. Thus said, he takes into account the activities of the utterer, his/her mental activities. These activities are fundamental in describing and explaining the structuring processes occurring within language. This theory then does deserve the name of uttered-centered linguistics.



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Gustave Guillaume has paved the way to a sound linguistics theory which will deserve its position in the sphere of the demanding community of *science*.

Another important step in the development of uttered-centered linguistics is shown through the works of Emile Benveniste.

I.2. Emile Benveniste

I.2.1. Benveniste's Perception to the Uttering Act Theory

The approach of Benveniste was influenced by Saussure's view of the study of linguistics. In fact, in *Cours de linguistique générale*,⁴ Saussure distinguishes between *langue* and *parole* and suggests to consider *langue* instead of *parole* for homogeneity and generalization matters. Benveniste in turn will be interested in the couple *langue* and *parole* and keep the latter as the basis of any linguistic study. Yet he did not reject *langue*.

Another significant step in Benveniste's study is the concept of communication, which helps him address the issue of sign and semantics.

I.2.2. Benveniste's Theory of Enunciation

Communication is of key significance in Benveniste's analysis. In *Problèmes de linguistique générale*⁵, he states communication as the factor which better illustrates the utterer with reference to intersubjectivity. There starts his famous quotation: «l'énonciation est cette mise en fonctionnement de la langue par un acte individuel d'utilisation⁶ ».

Thus stated, the utterer becomes the most significant variable to take into account in the production of the utterance. Language becomes therefore very dynamic since considering the utterer amounts to envisaging language as an activity.

The study of communication involves two main elements that are sign and semantics.

⁴ Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, 1916.

⁵ Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale I*, Paris, Gallimard 1966 (2nd edition)

⁶ Benveniste, op cit



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I.2.2.1- The Linguistic Sign and Semantics

According to Benveniste, the sign both involves the signifier and the signified so that he views “langue” as made of two entities: semiotics is the level where the sign is perceived whereas semantics is identified as the universe of the utterer, and so, that of discourse.

As language is meant for communicating, meaning becomes very important. Meaning is not in fact taken for granted; it results from the action, or better, the activity of the utterer who activates language through the use of “parole”.

I.2.2.2. The Utterer

Benveniste states the utterer as “I” facing “you,” the co-utterer. The use of “I” evidences subjectivity as related to time and space. “I” is qualified as “ego,” the space as “hic” and time as “nunc.” The time of events is related to “parole” and is ordered with regard to discourse. Benveniste views the present as the best representation of time through which the utterer endorses his utterances.

As a brief summary, it can be noted that Benveniste is known as being the first to explicitly refer to the term uttering act when addressing the issue of communication. In this field, there are two main distinctions to put forward: entities with full and permanent states should be differentiated from those stemming from the utterer whose existence is made possible because of the factor of inter-subjectivity. The main feature of uttering act is the actualization of the discursive relation to the linguistic partner represented as follow:

⇒ Subject ⇒ langue ⇒ discourse ⇒ meaning.

Considering the abovementioned facts, Benveniste’s view helps understand the approach of Antoine Culioli.

II. The Theoretical Scheme of Antoine Culioli

II.1. The Theoretical Foundations



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Based on the works of Benveniste, Guillaume and Jakobson, Culioli takes to set up a powerful linguistic model in theorizing the linguistic operations.

For Antoine Culioli, the linguistic analysis shall be oriented towards “le langage appréhendé à travers les langues naturelles”. The purpose is to succeed in theorizing language and not a given system of language. To reach this objective, the linguist must see to found a systematic and rigorous method of analysis and reconstruct the object of the linguistic science. He/she has to establish a theory to approach the observed phenomena (a theory of observation). In the reconstruction of the object of analysis, Antoine Culioli goes in line with Gustave Guillaume and Emile Benveniste to set up a linguistics of discourse. Such a way of picturing the linguistic analysis contradicts the conceptions of de Saussure and Chomsky. In Culioli’s theory, the utterer is the center of the analysis. He posits that language is a set of activity or operations intrinsically linked to an utterer. The analysis shall then consider the process of production. This process of production is composed of the different steps the utterer sets in motion during the uttering act. Culioli suggests that this uttering act be the siege of analyses.

According to him, the construction of utterances relies on various operations that are activated by the utterer. Culioli believes in the concepts of surface and deep structure too, but views them with reference to structuring operations. In fact, the production of utterances involves three complementary levels we suggest to analyse.

The operations in the uttering act are the following:

II.1.1 The Lexis Schema

The first level takes into account a set of three notional entities called notions. Culioli defines the notion as a bundle of physical and cultural properties. The notions are both grammatical and lexical. They are not constructed nor contextualized. The uttering act starts with a primitive relation and a lexis schema written $\langle \xi_0, \xi_1, \pi \rangle$, where ξ_0, ξ_1 are variables for arguments and π , a variable for operators of predication. ξ_0 , refers to the first argument, ξ_1 , the second argument and π the variable for operators of predication. It refers to the binding operator that builds up the predication. It is also the binding operator that builds up the predicative mode.

II.1.2 A Lexis



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After the lexis schema, comes the lexis. At this level, there is an instantiation of a schema by terms which have in turn been constructed from notions. A lexis is noted λ (lambda). This second level is called the assignment level. It consists in assigning lexical units to void places according to the primitive relations inherent to physical and cultural properties. The lexis is said to be pre-assertive. It is a dictum, a lekton or a set of paraphrases (a paraphrastic family), a set of propositions. It is not an utterance since it is neither asserted nor unasserted.

$\lambda = \langle \text{player, goal, score} \rangle$

II.1.3 Assertion

The third level is the assertive level where the utterer endorses his utterance. This is the place where all possible operations are made in line with the produced utterance, in concrete situations of communication. At this stage, an utterer endorses the lexis (λ). He/she locates the lexis within a situation of utterance (Sit):

$$\lambda \in \text{Sit} (S, T)$$

All the utterances do display this unique axiom.

$\langle \text{player, goal, score} \rangle \in \text{Sit}_0 (S_0, T_0) \rightarrow \text{The player scores the goal! ...}$

The utterer is the key notion in the theory of Culioli in that he/she is the one who will take the lexis into charge and make it effective. He will apply some operations of modulation and modality according to the parameters of the situation of utterance. It is then a utopia when trying to explain the linguistic phenomena regardless of the utterer. The utterer is the one who organizes the linguistic event.

II.2. The Scheme of Antoine Culioli

Antoine Culioli has organized a research team around the enunciative operations. The objective of this team – made of philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, linguists, mathematicians... – is to account for the enunciative phenomena and present an accurate image of language in general (language universals). After these explanations, the scientist will have to formalize the regularities (and irregularities) of language and come to a mathematical programming in setting



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up a scheme of algorithms to account for the linguistic phenomena observable in all natural languages.

In this attitude to formalization, the scientist has to fathom the operations lying behind the surface structure – formalizing the surface is paraphrasing – and found a formal enunciative system. The purpose of such a formal system is to reduce the amount of subjectivity in the scientific explanations and assure the transportability and malleability of the theory.

The formalizing project of Culioli is – definitely – a complex project. This is why Culioli's team is made of researchers whose various disciplines are to help grasp the entire dynamism of the object. The linguistic phenomenon being always new – as a quantum – a probabilistic theory seems to be much more suitable to express the results. This probabilistic characteristic is the basis of many critics against the formalizing project of the linguistic facts. Unfortunately, for Culioli, this is the only way to prove the scientific aspect of the science of language. Formalization makes the theory much more systematic, much more efficient and much more rigorous.

The formalization project demands a co-operation among different fields, between the mathematician and the linguist for instance. However, the tools are not automatically to come from the field of mathematics (algebra, geometry, topology...). The items offered by the mathematician have to be corroborated as far as the behaviors of the linguistic phenomena are concerned and adapted or rejected. The linguist can find some metaoperators that are suitable to account for the facts studied.

If the behavior of the quantum has been formalized through a probabilistic function of the wave, the enunciative operations can also be formalized.

Antoine Culioli has proposed a set of metaoperators to systematize the linguistic phenomena.

One of the most important items is the metaoperator of location or locating operator: $\underline{\epsilon}$

The concept of location is fundamental to the theory of Culioli insofar as, for him, uttering consists in constructing a set of locating parameters. A term is said to be located when it has been specified, situated or determined. In the theory of operations (or theory of the lexis), a unit



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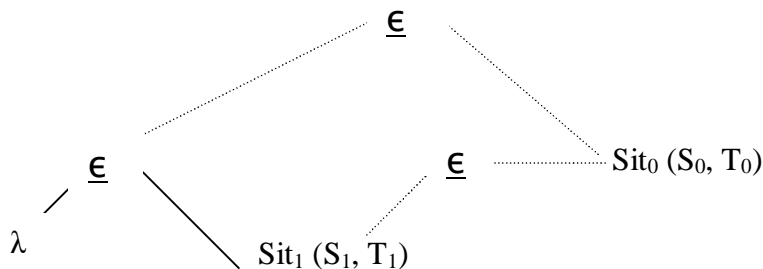
acquires a specific value by means of a system of location.⁷ This operation of location is a binary operation between a locator and a located element:

$$X \underline{\epsilon} Y \text{ (X is located relative to Y)}$$

The complexity of this system of location depends on the spatiotemporal data of the utterer or the way she or he views the relations:

$$(((X_3 \underline{\epsilon} Y_3) \underline{\epsilon} (X_2 \underline{\epsilon} Y_2)) \underline{\epsilon} (X_1 \underline{\epsilon} Y_1)) \underline{\epsilon} (X_0 \underline{\epsilon} Y_0) \dots$$

In the uttering act process, the system of location can be represented as follows:



For Culioli, there is an utterance when a lexis λ is located within a situation of utterance or enunciative situation. This location is formalized by the metaoperator *epsilon* $\underline{\epsilon}$. Epsilon is a complex operator encompassing:

- = (identification);
- ω (disconnection);
- \neq (differentiation);
- * (fiction).

⁷ See J. Bouscaren et al., *Introduction to a Linguistic Grammar of English : an Uttered-centered Approach*, 1992, p.150



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We shall give some details below.

The term location refers to specific concepts: a located term is one which has been specific or determined. The basic idea is that linguistic objects only acquire a determined value by means of a system of location. In the theory of Culioli, the relation of location is always binary.

To construct a binary relation, we use a unary operator $\underline{\in}$ (epsilon): $\langle x \underline{\in} y \rangle$ reads “x is located relative to Y”. $\underline{\in}$ can have several values:

1) Identification ($=$)

$X = Y$ reads “X is identifiable with Y” but not identical.

2) Differentiation (\neq)

$X \neq Y$ reads “X is not identifiable with Y” or “X is located relative to Y” and is consequently different from Y.

3) Disconnection (ω)

$X \omega Y$ reads “X is neither identifiable with Y, nor different from Y”. This means that the location is not carried out relative to Y.

4) Fiction ($*$) which is a mixed value of the first three operators ($=, \neq, \omega$).

- either \neq or $=$
- neither \neq nor $=$ (i.e. ω)
- can be both \neq and $=$.

To illustrate these categorizations, we shall take the case of pronouns:

- With “I” we have $S = S$ (S : utterer and S: grammatical subject)
- With “you” $\Rightarrow S \neq S$
- He/she $\Rightarrow S \omega S$
- we $\Rightarrow S = S$
- they $\Rightarrow S \omega S$
- One $\Rightarrow S * S$



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These forms put forward the utterer's view of the situation according to the operation carried out by him.

Conclusion

The project of Antoine Culioli is to set up a type of linguistics that should be called *science*. This project of Culioli, as presented above, is based on three main assumptions: first, the object should be the operations lying beyond the surface forms; second, the objective should be *language* and not a specific language system; and finally, the linguist should theorize and set up a formalized model to ensure objectivity and theoretical efficiency.

Moreover, Culioli advocates for a fruitful co-operation between neighboring fields for the marvelous phenomena of language to be accurately thought through and formalized.

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