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Benveniste.
L'enunciazione, la soggettività, il tempo
e il confronto con altri autori

a cura di Giovanni Manetti e Irène Fenoglio

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3. Schedario/Recensioni

Benveniste and the issue
of linguistic temporality
Time of enunciation and its relationship
to Bergson and Husserl's ideas of time

Giovanni Manetti*

Abstract: The problem of time and its representation through language is addressed on several occasions in Benveniste's writings on general linguistics, ranging from 1956 to 1970. Time lies at the center of the issue of enunciation and, in its form of "present tense", is inextricably linked to the position and perspective of the speaking subject. It is precisely in reference to the different aggregations of temporal forms that Benveniste also proposes the famous dichotomy between "history" and "discourse". But Benveniste's perspective expands beyond linguistic reflection, also taking into consideration the philosophical conception of time. In this context, it is possible to find a reference to the contemporary theories of Bergson and Husserl.

Keywords: Enunciation; time; Bergson; Husserl; Pos.

0. *Introduction*

According to Benveniste, the issue of the forms of existence of time and of its representation through language lies at the heart of the problem of enunciation, which the French linguist addressed in a series of texts published between 1946 and 1970. In particular, the issue of time is addressed in the articles "La nature des pronoms" (1956), "De la subjectivité dans le langage" (1958), "Le langage et l'expérience humaine" (1965) and "L'appareil formel de l'énonciation" (1970). However, it is especially in the essay "Le langage et l'expérience humaine" that Benveniste examines the general features which make the linguistic expression of the category of time (along with that of person) a fundamental means of grasping the subjective experience of speakers situated within language (Benveniste, 1965/1974: 69)[1].

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*   Università di Siena. giovanni.manetti@unisi.it
1   Generally, I will be following the convention whereby the first date refers to the

A first general reflection advaced by Benveniste is that the term "time" refers to a range of very different representations (as we shall soon see in greater detail). These representations bring out a profound difference between the linguistic conceptualisation of time and the philosophical conceptualisation, as well as the psychological and common-sense ones. Secondly, Benveniste corrects two widespread yet erroneous ideas. The first is the opinion that only inflected languages, which have the explicit category of the verb, can express time. Benveniste emphasises that the expression of time is compatible with every kind of linguistic structure, including that of languages that do not seem to have any verbs. The second erroneous idea is that linguistic forms of temporal representation create a conceptual system which mirrors "objective" or real time (besides, Saussure – a constant source of inspiration for Benveniste – had already noted that this is a common opinion with regard to language in general). On the contrary, linguistic time is structured not in relation to anything external to language, but according to the dimension of subjectivity and the activity of enunciation. Indeed, languages offer representations that are different from reality, and it is precisely in the development of specific temporal systems that they most diverge from one another (Benveniste, 1965/1974: 69-70).

1. *Three notions of time: (i) physical time*

In line with his plan to distinguish between the conceptualisations of time provided by "reflection" (no doubt to be understood as "philosophical reflection") and that provided by language (ivi, 85), in the essay "Le langage et l'expérience humaine" Benveniste first presents two different notions of time: (i) "physical time" and (ii) "chronic time". To these he will add a third notion, (iii) "linguistic time", which is found to be completely different from the first two.

The notion of "physical time" is illustrated as follows:

publication of the essay and the second date to its reprint in a volume. The page number is that of the volume.

Le *temps physique* du monde est un continu uniforme, infini, linéaire, seg-
mentable à volonté. Il a pour corrélat dans l'homme une durée infiniment
variable que chaque individu mesure au gré de ses émotions et au rythme de
sa vie intérieure. C'est une opposition bien connue et sans doute n'est-il pas
nécessaire de s'y arrêter ici (1965/1974: 70).

First of all, it must be noted that in this passage Benveniste
draws a preliminary distinction, within the notion of "physical
time", between a conception of time as an "objective" physical en-
tity and a conception of time as a psychological and "subjective"
entity[2] that is somehow correlated to the former, yet stands in con-
trast to it. According to the "objective" dimension, time is seen as
an entity which transcends the individual and constitutes a uni-
form and infinite continuum that flows in only one direction and
contains no internal articulations, even though it can be divided
freely ("segmentable à volonté")[3]. The "subjective" dimension cor-
responds to what Benveniste describes as "durée", noting that it is
the "corrélat psychique" of physical time. This duration is defined
as being infinitely variable in relation to the variety of individuals,
each of whom measures it "au gré de ses émotions et au rythme de
sa vie intérieure".

Benveniste states that this initial contrast between time as an
"objective" physical entity and time as a "subjective" and "psycho-
logical" entity is "bien connue". However, he does not provide any
precise reference with regard to the origins of this notion. Never-
theless, certain linguistic clues allow us to hypothesise a theoreti-
cal frame of reference. In particular, the fact that the notion of
"subjective time" is defined as a "durée" measurable according to
the rhythm of an individual's "vie intérieure" evidently points to
the conception of time put forward by Bergson, especially in his
1889 *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*[4]. Here the

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[2]   The fact that it is possible to speak of a contrast between an "objective" concep-
tion of "physical time" and a "subjective" one is confirmed by a later passage on "chronic
time". See Benveniste (1965/1974: 71): "Or le temps chronique, comme le temps phy-
sique, comporte une double version, objective et subjective".

[3]   I should note in passing – and will return to this point later – that this last observa-
tion establishes a relation with an aspect of the second main subdivision of the notion of
time.

[4]   See also by Bergson *Durée et simultanéité. (A propos de la théorie d'Einstein)*
(1923).

philosopher draws a distinction between "spatialised time", which is measurable and external, and "qualitative time", which is also defined as "inner duration", and whose functioning is illustrated by subjective consciousness. This contrast is clearly laid out in the following passage:

> Quand je suis des yeux, sur le cadran d'une horloge, le mouvement de l'aiguille qui correspond aux oscillations du pendule, je ne mesure pas de la durée, comme on paraît le croire; je me borne a compter des simultanéités, ce qui est bien différent. En dehors de moi, dans l'espace, il n'y a jamais qu'une position unique de l'aiguille et du pendule, car des positions passées il ne reste rien. Au-dedans de moi, un processus d'organisation ou de pénétration mutuelle des faits de conscience se poursuit, qui constitue la durée vraie (Bergson, 2018: 80).

Bergson draws a contrast between two notions of time: on the one hand, time conceived according to the parameter of quantity, as something external to the subject and as a succession of unique and isolated moments in space; on the other hand, time conceived according to the parameter of quality, as something internal to the subject – as something "within consciousness" – that takes the form of "pénétration mutuelle des faits de conscience". The idea of physical time, envisaged through the metaphor of a continuous line (clearly adopted by Benveniste: "Le *temps physique* du monde est un continu uniforme, infini, linéaire"), is expressed in the following passage:

> Mais familiarisés avec cette dernière idée [de l'espace], obsédés même par elle, nous l'introduisons à notre insu dans notre représentation de la succession pure: nous juxtaposons nos états de conscience de manière à les percevoir simultanément, non plus l'un dans l'autre, mais l'un a côté de l'autre; bref, nous projetons le temps dans l'espace, nous exprimons la durée en étendue, et la succession prend pour nous la forme d'une ligne continue ou d'une chaîne dont les parties se touchent sans se pénétrer (Bergson, 2018: 75).

It is quite possible, therefore, that Benveniste drew upon the Bergsonian notion of "spatialised time" to describe the features of physical time in its "objective" dimension, and that what he had in mind when describing its "subjective counterpart" was the notion of "duration" which Bergson attributes to the qualitative time of inner life.

2.1. *Chronic time*

If we move on now to examine the second conception of time presented by Benveniste, we find that Bergson is not his only implicit point of reference. This second notion, which is also referred to as "chronic time", is defined as follows:

> Du temps physique et de son corrélat psychique, la durée intérieure, nous distinguerons avec grand soin le *temps chronique* qui est le temps des événements, qui englobe aussi notre propre vie en tant que suite d'événements. Dans notre vue du monde, autant que dans notre existence personnelle, il n'y a qu'un temps, celui-là (Benveniste, 1965/1974: 70).

With respect to the notion of "chronic time" a crucial role is played by the social dimension, insofar as "notre vie a […..] des repères que nous situons exactement dans une échelle reconnue de tous, et auxquels nous rattachons notre passé immédiat ou lointain" (*ibidem*, 70). In this regard, Benveniste notes that, like physical time, chronic time has a double dimension: objective and subjective (ivi, 71). In its objective dimension, chronic time emerges as the succession within which both personal and social life events are situated. All cultures seem to share the same effort to lend order to these events through the development of instruments such as clocks and calendars that make it possible to calculate and divide time on the basis of recurrent natural phenomena (a "day" is the interval between the appearance and disappearance of the sun on the horizon; a "month" corresponds to the interval between two conjunctions of the sun with the moon; a "year" corresponds to the time required for a complete revolution of the sun). Such instruments are so important that their existence is a prerequisite for any form of human social living. Here we might see an implicit reference to one of the features that Benveniste assigns to physical time, namely its being conceived as a continuous line "segmentable à volonté". The segmentation of physical time, which varies from culture to culture, produces chronic time, which is to say its socialised version, which is manageable by human beings. It is this segmentation that produces calendars, which are actually external to both physical time and lived time:

> Le calendrier est extérieur au temps. Il ne s'écoule pas avec lui. […]. Or, comme un jour est identique à un autre jour, rien ne dit de tel jour du calendrier,

pris en lui même, s'il est passé, présent ou futur. Il ne peut être rangé sous l'une de ces trois catégories que pour celui qui *vit* le temps. […]. Le temps chronique fixé dans un calendrier est étranger au temps vécu et ne peut coïncider avec lui ; du fait même qu'il est objective, il propose des mesures et des divisions uniformes où se logent les événements, mais celles-ci ne coïncident pas avec les catégories propres à l'expérience humaine du temps (Benveniste, 1965/1974: 73).

As Benveniste notes again, calendars, regardless of their cultural variability, are subject to three essential conditions. The first is the so-called "stative" condition, whereby calendars originate from an axial moment that constitutes point zero of the reckoning: a fundamental moment that is believed to have marked a new beginning (e.g. the birth of Christ or Buddha, the Hegira, the founding of Rome). The second is the so-called "directional" condition, whereby events are seen to fall before or after the axial point. The third is the "mensurative" condition, whereby events are arranged according to a division that makes it possible to measure their distance from the axial moment through a fixed set of units of measurement (e.g. years, months, days).

2.2. *Chronic time, spatialised time, and number*

Benveniste makes two interesting general points with regard to chronic time. The first is that for man (we might say "ordinary man") time has no other dimension but this ("Dans notre vue du monde, autant que dans notre existence personnelle, il n'y a qu'un temps, celui-là", Benveniste, 1965/1974: 70). It is only within this dimension that we can establish some points of reference within a shared scale that enable social living.

Benveniste's second observation is that chronic time is, strictly speaking, "non-temporal", as it entails time determinations that in no way participate of the nature of time itself. In this regard, Benveniste notes a similarity between the notion of chronic time and that of number:

Intemporel, ce temps mesuré par le calendrier l'est en vertu de sa fixité même. Les jours, les mois, les années sont des quantités fixes, que des observations immémoriales ont déduites du jeu des forces cosmiques, mais ces quantités sont des dénominations du temps qui ne participent en rien à la nature du temps et sont par elles-mêmes vides de toute temporalité. Compte tenu de leur spécificité lexicale, on les assimilera aux nombres, qui ne possèdent aucune

propriété des matières qu'ils dénombrent. Le calendrier est extérieur au temps. Il ne s'écoule pas avec lui (Benveniste, 1965/1974: 72-73).

The parallel which Benveniste draws between the calendar and numbers is a very interesting one: it clearly shows how unrelated the time measured by calendars is to physical time (and, as we shall see, to linguistic time too) – just as numbers possess none of the properties of the objects to which they are applied. This assimilation of chronic time to number cannot be a matter of chance, since Bergson proposes a similar assimilation for spatialised time:

Il est vrai que nous comptons les moments successifs de la durée, et que, par ses rapports avec le nombre, le temps nous apparaît d'abord comme une grandeur mesurable, tout à fait analogue à l'espace (Bergson, 2018: 78).

Bergson underlines that we perceive time as a measurable magnitude – a feature that Benveniste attributes precisely to chronic time – and that this corresponds to time conceived as space. On the contrary, time conceived as duration presents no analogy with the notion of number or that of spatial succession:

Je dis par exemple qu'une minute vient de s'écouler, et j'entends par là qu'un pendule, battant la seconde, a exécuté soixante oscillations tout d'un coup. […]. Si, d'autre part, je veux me représenter ces soixante oscillations successivement, mais sans rien changer à leur mode de production dans l'espace, je devrai penser à chaque oscillation en excluant le souvenir de la précédente, car l'espace n'en a conservé aucune trace […]. Ou je l'apercevrai l'une dans l'autre, se pénétrant et s'organisant entre elles comme les notes d'une mélodie, de manière à former ce que nous appellerons une multiplicité indistincte ou qualitative, sans aucune ressemblance avec le nombre: j'obtiendrai ainsi l'image de la durée pure (Bergson, 2018: 78).

However, it must be noted that the comparison between spatialised time and number in the two authors rests on two different assumptions: Bergson bases the analogy on the "countability" of the moments of spatialised time; Benveniste, on the complete heterogeneity of both numbers and time with respect to the objects to which they refer.

2.3. *Lived time and the observer's time*

If we pause to consider Benveniste's previous observation that chronic time includes an objective dimension and a subjective one

(Benveniste, 1965/1974: 71), we find that the latter dimension is not explicitly discussed in any section of his work. However, it is possible to formulate a hypothesis as to what Benveniste means by "the subjective dimension of chronic time" on the basis of the final passage of this section of the text:

> Le temps chronique fixé dans un calendrier est étranger au temps vécu et ne peut coïncider avec lui; du fait même qu'il est objectif, il propose des mesures et des divisions uniformes où se logent les événements, mais celles-ci ne coïncident pas avec les catégories propres à l'expérience humaine du temps (Benveniste, 1965/1974: 73).

While the objective dimension of chronic time is to be identified with the presence – across all cultures – of calendars that are used to measure time in a fixed and necessarily rigid way, while remaining unrelated to it, the subjective dimension can only be traced back to the "experience of time", an experience made by a subject. What clearly emerges here is the contrast between two antithetical notions: that of "lived time", which is experienced by a subject directly in his or her own life, and the notion of the time objectively "observed" by someone who does not experience it, but analyses it from the outside:

> L'observateur qu'est chacun de nous peut promener son regard sur les événements accomplis, les parcourir dans deux directions, du passé vers le présent ou du présent vers le passé. Notre propre vie fait partie de ces événements que notre vision descend ou remonte. En ce sens le temps chronique, figé dans l'histoire, admet une considération bidirectionnelle, tandis que notre vie vécue s'écoule (c'est l'image reçue) dans un seul sens (Benveniste, 1965/1974: 70).

> Notre temps vécu, s'écoule sans fin et sans retour, c'est l'expérience commune. Nous ne retrouvons jamais notre enfance, ni hier si proche, ni l'instant enfui à l'instant (*ibidem*).

In this contrast it is possible to detect a rather explicit – if undeclared – reference to the paradigm of Phenomenology. In an important text by Edmund Husserl on the philosophical notion of time we find the first reference to "lived time", understood as the immanent temporality of original consciousness and as the very flux of consciousness, by contrast to the notion of "perceived time". The first part of Husserl's text, *Zur Phänomenologie des Inneren Zeitbewusstsein: 1893 -1917*, features his 1905 lectures, while

the second part consists of integrative texts written between 1893 and 1917. It may further be noted that the dychotomy laid out in Husserl's writings shows certain affinities with Bergson's idea of time: Husserl only read Bergson's texts in 1911, but when he did, he immediately noticed the affinities between his own conception and that developed by the French philosopher[5].

Furthermore, Benveniste's dychotomy between the "time perceived by the observer" and "lived time" can be viewed in relation to a similar dichotomy proposed by the Dutch philosopher Hemdrick Josephus Pos, a pupil and follower of Husserl's whom Benveniste personally met at events and lectures held in the Pragues school. In his 1939 essay "Phénomenologie et linguistique", Pos draws a preliminary distinction between the perspective of the speaking subject, the vehicle of the original consciousness (and hence the subject of lived time), and the perspective of the scientific subject (also referred to as the "observer")[6]:

Ce qui distingue ce témoignage subjectif et vécu de l'observation scientifique, c'est l'attitude active d'où il dérive : le sujet linguistique, tout en se rendant compte de sa fonction, n'est pas scindé. Il énonce sa réalité vécue, sans l'observer en spectateur. Aussi, rien ne se perd dans ce qui est énoncé de cette réalité (Pos, 1939: 357).

Moving on to outline the notion of time in greater detail, Pos shows how the scientific observer conceives time as a succession derived via acquisition, whereas the speaking subject, who lives time, is foreign to any notion of previous or future acquisition with respect to the immanence of the presence:

Pour la conscience originaire qui vit dans le présent, le passé reste invisible. D'où nouvel antagonisme entre le savoir et la conscience linguistique, exclusion mutuelle des deux sphères. Plaçons nous dans le temps de l'activité parlante : le sujet dispose de l'instrument du langage. A cette disposition une acquisition doit avoir précédé. Réduire l'exercice de la disposition à l'acquisition, est l'affaire de l'observateur ; utiliser ce qui a été acquis sans rappel conscient de l'acquisition, c'est ce que caractérise l'exercice de la parole. […] Le sujet parlant dispose du langage comme dans une dimension qui a été soustraite au temps et où toute trace d'acquisition antérieure ou postérieure a été effacé (Pos, 1939: 360).

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[5]   See Ponzio (2012: 20).
[6]   On Pos' distinction between "speaking subject" and "observer", see Marina De Palo (2012b: 88 ff).

Conversely, an evident degree of affinity is to be found not just between Pos' phenomenological perspective and Benveniste's[7], but also – which brings us full circle – between Pos' perspective and Bergson's. According to Pos, the speaking subject, as the vehicle of the original consciousness, exclusively lives in the present: all traces both of his previous state and of his subsequent one have been "erased". Likewise, for Bergson pure duration corresponds to a situation whereby our ego lets itself live (note the emphasis on the very notion of "life"), without establishing any separation between the present state and previous ones:

> La durée pure est la forme que prend la succession de nos états de conscience quand notre moi se laisse vivre, quand il s'abstient d'établir une séparation entre l'état présent et les états antérieurs (Bergson, 2018: 74-75).

It is the observer who acquires the other dimensions of time via reflection. In this respect, Pos' notion of the observer's time coincides with Bergson's idea of succession and of spatialised time.

3. *Linguistic time*

Turning to consider the third notion of "time", Benveniste first of all stresses its irreducibility to the other two notions. For it is one thing to situate an event in chronic time, quite another to situate it in language. Linguistic time constitutes both a way of organising the human experience of time and a perspective on non-linguistic time. Its defining feature is the fact that it depends on the exercising of speech, which is to say of "discourse"[8]. In other words, linguistic time depends on and finds its centre in the present of the instance of enunciation. It is enunciation that engenders the present as the coincidence between an event and the speech act that indicates it (usually through a verbal form). In turn, the present engenders the idea of time:

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[7]   It may be noted that, despite the striking similarities between Benveniste's and Pos' conceptions of time, in Benveniste's essay no bibliographical references to the Dutch philosopher's work are provided. However, this is in keeping with the writing style of Benveniste, who tends to provide few or no references to other authors.

[8]   On the importance of the notion of "discourse" for Benveniste in general, see Gérard Dessons (2006).

Ce temps [linguistic time] a son centre – un centre générateur et axial ensemble – dans le *présent* de l'instance de parole. Chaque fois qu'un locuteur emploie la forme grammaticale de 'présent' (ou son équivalent), il situe l'événement comme contemporain de l'instance du discours qui le mentionne. Il est évident que ce présent en tant qu'il est fonction du discours ne peut être localisé dans une division particulière du temps chronique, parce que il les admet toutes et n'en appelle aucune. Le locuteur situe comme 'présent' tout ce qu'il implique tel en vertu de la forme linguistique qu'il emploie. Ce présent est réinventé chaque fois qu'un homme parle, parce que c'est, à la lettre, un moment neuf, non encore vécu (Benveniste, 1965/1974: 73-74).

Note here the linguistic variation between two expressions that essentially carry the same meaning: "instance de parole" and "instance de discours". When newly addressing and further elucidating the topic of the centrality of the present as the source of time in his 1970 essay "L'appareil formel de l'énonciation", Benveniste will adopt a third expression, "énonciation", which will become predominant:

On pourrait croire que la temporalité est un cadre inné de la pensée. Elle est produite en réalité dans et par l'énonciation: de l'énonciation procède l'instauration de la catégorie du présent et de la catégorie du présent naît la catégorie du temps. Le présent est proprement la source du temps. Il est cette présence au monde que l'acte d'énonciation rend seul possible, car, qu'on veuille bien y réfléchir, l'homme ne dispose d'aucun autre moyen de vivre le "maintenant" et de le faire actuel que de le réaliser par l'insertion du discours dans le monde (Benveniste, 1970/1974: 83).

Once again, in these passages we can detect a phenomenological overtone in the expression "présence au monde" and in the double reference to the dimension of "lived experience" ("vivre le 'maintenant'", "moment neuf, non encore vécu"). The use of the linguistic form of the present emerges as the way in which the human experience of time manifests itself. One peculiarity that Benveniste emphasises, and which is worth noting, is the fact that the present in itself cannot be situated in any moment of chronic time, as it admits of all of them, without referring to any particular moment. In a previous essay ("De la subjectivité dans le langage", 1958), this had led Benveniste to argue that the linguistic present does not correspond to any objective external reality, but is rather self-referential (Benveniste, 1958/1966: 91). We shall return to this passage later on.

The fact that the present, in itself, does not indicate any particular moment in physical time – and hence in chronic time –

accounts for one of its specific features, namely its constant shift-ing forward in physical time, while always remaining present. Moreover, the present constitutes the line of demarcation between another two dimensions it engenders, which are not dependent on the act of enunciation (but rather on the present itself): on the one hand, the moment in which the event is no longer concurrent with discourse, has left the present, and can only be recalled in one's memory; on the other hand, the moment in which the event is not yet present and only appears as a perspective.

Beneviste's conclusion is that the present is the only tense inher-ent in language, marked as it is by the coincidence between the event and the discourse, and that it is by nature implicit: it is only the other tenses that need to be made explicit. The other verbal tenses appear to be capable of indicating points in time only by "starting from the present", in such a way as to situate these points back or forward in time. This image corresponds to the view we all have of time as something that we are approaching or which is approaching us:

> On arrive ainsi à cette constatation – surprenante à première vue, mais pro-fondément accordée à la nature réelle du langage – que le seul temps inhérent à la langue est le présent axial du discours, et que ce présent est implicite. Il détermine deux autres références temporelles; celles-ci sont nécessairement explicitées dans un signifiant et en retour font apparaître le présent comme une ligne de séparation entre ce qui n'est plus présent et ce qui va l'être. Ces deux références ne reportent pas au temps, mais à des vues sur le temps, projetées en arrière et en avant à partir du point présent (Benveniste, 1965/1974: 74-75)[9].

Language needs to order the various moments in time by refer-ring to an axis which always coincides with the instance of enun-ciation. To this general picture Benveniste adds a few more specific points. First of all, he notes that all languages, each in its own way, follow the general pattern just outlined, while at the same time dis-playing an odd unbalance between past tense forms and future ones. All languages have a way of expressing the past, though this varies

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[9]   The idea that verbal tenses other than the present do not actually indicate specific moments in physical-chronic time is incontrovertibly confirmed by the fact that in the first rough draft of Benveniste's article (*Brouillon* B1) "vues" is underlined – and hence emphasised – in the passage corresponding to the one quoted above: "Ceux qui sont linguistiquement explicités ne ~~sont pas des temps~~ <reflètent pas des états propres du temps>, mais des vues sur ces états, projetés <en arrière et en avant> à partir du présent implicite" (B1, p. 25, f° 527, quoted by Fenoglio, 2009a: 89).

considerably; many even have two or three. On the contrary, many languages have no way of expressing the future: to do so, they combine the present with an adverb or particle indicating a moment yet to come. This fact is correlated with the idea that temporality is closely associated with the expression of experience (a key theme of Benveniste's 1965 essay, as suggested by its very title). The latter, in turn, is connected to the various degrees of distance from the present. Conversely, the future only finds place in the dimension of experience as the anticipation of experience (Benveniste, 1965/1974: 75).

A second important point made by Benveniste concerns the relation between subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Indeed, every act of enunciation is both individual and unique at each new reiteration. This ought to suggest that linguistic temporality is inevitably subjective. Yet the paradoxical thing – as Benveniste notes – is that, as far as communication is concerned, the temporality which is typical of a subject and structures his or her discourse is also shared by the interlocutor as his or her own. Temporality, therefore, operates as an intersubjectivity factor:

> La temporalité qui est mienne quand elle ordonne mon discours est d'emblée acceptée comme sienne par mon interlocuteur. Mon 'aujourd'hui' se convertit en son 'aujourd'hui', quoiqu'il ne l'ait pas lui même instauré dans son propre discours, et mon 'hier' en son 'hier'. Réciproquement, quand il parlera en réponse, je convertirai, devenu récepteur, sa temporalité en la mienne (Benveniste, 1965/1974: 76).

A third important point made by Benveniste regards the limited possibility of indicating succession within the three articulations of time. In other words, as the temporal system centres on the present, as far as vocabulary is concerned we find the presence of terms that are removed from "today" only by two degrees: "yesterday" and "the day before yesterday" for the past, and "tomorrow" and "after-tomorrow" for the future. Moreover, from a lexical point of view, these second-degree expressions are not independent, but rest on the first-degree ones. So all we have are three primary expressions: "today", "yesterday", and "tomorrow". When the speaker must go beyond the distance of two days, he or she will resort to expressions typical of chronic time, such as "eight days ago" or "in five days' time", which still indicate a subjective distance (Benveniste, 1965/1974: 78).

4. *The formal apparatus of temporal distinctions*

As is widely known, the idea that enunciation may be framed within a "formal apparatus" is explicitly suggested by the title of Benveniste's last article (1970/1974: 79). The expression in question indicates the range of forms by which enunciation is realised through the act of a speaker who uses the language featuring those forms. However, scholars have not paid sufficient attention to the fact that, according to Benveniste, even linguistic temporality (which – as we have seen – itself refers to the enunciative dimension) has a specific "formal apparatus", which is to say a range of forms by which it structures itself. Some evidence can be adduced in support of this claim.

First of all, in a handwritten note from the rough draft of the essay "Le langage et l'expérience humaine" – quoted by Irène Fenoglio but not printed in full in the published version of the text – the expression "appareil formel" is used with reference to temporality:

De toutes les formes d'expérience inhérentes au langage et que l'analyse d ≠ les langues révèlent <reflètent> toutes, aucune n'est aussi riche que le temps; aucune n'est aussi difficile à reconnaitre et à décrire. C'est celle qui semble d'accès immédiatement à l'analyse, et celle qui se dérobe le plus malignement à l'appréhension. On la croit directement saisissable et <éludant toute saisie directe> elle se cache dans un appareil formel qui la dissimule plutôt qu'il ne la démontre" ("Le langage et l'expérience humaine", B1, p. 13, f° 515; quoted by Fenoglio, 2009a: 94).

Secondly, it may be noted that a similar expression ("appareil linguistique") had already been used with reference to temporality in the 1958 essay "De la subjectivitè du langage": "En dernière analyse la temporalité humaine avec tout son appareil linguistique dévoile la subjectivité inhérente à l'exercice même du langage" (Benveniste, 1958/1966: 263).

Thirdly, and finally, the expression "appareil formel du discours" occurs in the 1959 essay "Les relations de temps dans le verbe français", devoted to the topic of linguistic time (Benveniste, 1959/1966: 239). In this essay Benveniste highlights the fact that, by contrast to what happens in traditional grammar, where all verbal forms are ascribed to a single paradigm, it is necessary to identify two distinct and complementary temporal systems, reflecting two different ways in which speakers structure the experience of

time: (i): the system of *history*, and (ii) that of *discourse*. This is a well-known essay, but it is worth dwelling on it in order to highlight certain details. We will start by considering the plan that Benveniste outlines at the beginning of the text:

> Les paradigmes des grammaires donnent à croire que toutes les formes verbales tirées d'un même thème appartiennent à la même conjugaison, en vertu de la seule morphologie. Mais on se propose de montrer ici que l'organisation des temps relève de principes moins évidents et plus complexes. Les temps d'un verbe français ne s'emploient pas comme les membres d'un système unique, ils se distribuent en *deux systèmes* distincts et complémentaires. Chacun d'eux ne comprend qu'une partie des temps du verbe; tous les deux sont en usage concurrent et demeurent disponibles pour chaque locuteur. Ces deux systèmes manifestent deux plans d'énonciation différents, que nous distinguerons comme celui de l'*histoire* et celui du *discours* (Benveniste, 1959/1966: 238).

The crucial thing to be noted in relation to this passage is that in 1959 Benveniste was explicitly speaking of "deux plans d'énonciation", which is to say – as he clarifies later on in the essay (ivi, 245) – "l'énonciation historique" and "l'énonciation du discours". This fact is not only highly significant from a theoretical perspective, but also surprising to some extent, because in later works Benveniste fully identifies the notion of "énonciation" with that of "discours" – as in his 1970 essay, where "l'appareil formel de l'énonciation" is de facto only the formal apparatus of "discourse". This limits the heuristic potential shown in 1959 by the identification of two distinct levels of enunciation. In the 1959 study we find both a definition of the two types of enunciation and an outline of their respective formal apparatuses, each of which consists of a series of forms that make that kind of enunciation possible. The essay has a very clear, almost schematic structure. Benveniste sets out from the definition of "historical enunciation" ("énonciation historique", 1959/1966: 242 e 245):

> Il s'agit de la présentation des faits survenus à un certain moment du temps, sans aucune intervention du locuteur dans le récit. Pour qu'ils puissent être enregistrés comme s'étant produits, ces faits doivent appartenir au passé. Sans doute vaudrait-il mieux dire: dès lors qu'ils sont enregistrés et énoncés dans une expression temporelle historique, ils se trouvent caractérisés comme passés (Benveniste, 1959/1974: 66).

Once he has defined "historical enunciation", Benveniste moves on to indicate its formal markers:

L'intention historique constitue bien une des grandes fonctions de la langue: elle y imprime sa temporalité spécifique, dont nous devons maintenant signaler les marques formelles. Le plan historique de l'énonciation se reconnaît à ce qu'il impose une délimitation particulaire aux deux catégories verbales du temps et de la personne prises ensemble. Nous définirons le récit historique comme le mode d'énonciation qui exclut toute forme linguistique 'autobiographique'. L'historien ne dira jamais *je* ni *tu*, ni *ici*, ni *maintenant*, parce qu'il n'empruntera jamais l'appareil formel du discours, qui consiste d'abord dans la relation de personne *je* : *tu*. On ne constatera donc dans le récit historique strictement poursuivi que des formes de '3e personne' (Benveniste, 1959/1966: 239).

As previously noted, in this passage we find the expression "appareil formel du discours", with the additional remark that *history* will never adopt this kind of formal apparatus. The fact that this expression is used to talk about the possibility of indicating a formal apparatus for one of the two kinds of enunciation, namely discursive enunciation, suggests that it is possible to speak of a formal apparatus also in relation to historical enunciation. Benveniste de facto lists a series of forms that constitute the apparatus by which the dimension of *history* is realised: as regards the category of person, the apparatus entails the exclusive use of the non-personal form (third person); as regards the category of verb, the apparatus includes the use of the aorist, imperfect, pluperfect and prospective.

Consistent with the plan he has set himself, Benveniste first presents some textual examples of "historical enunciation" and then moves on to give a definition of "discursive enunciation" ("énonciation de discours", 1959/1966: 245): or "discourse" in general. I will quote a crucial passage, in which discourse is compared with historical enunciation:

Il faut entendre discours dans sa plus large extension: toute énonciation supposant un locuteur et un auditeur, et chez le premier l'intention d'influencer l'autre en quelque manière. […] La distinction que nous faisons entre récit historique et discours ne coïncide donc nullement avec celle entre langue écrite et langue parlée. L'énonciation historique est réservée aujourd'hui à la langue écrite. Mais le discours est écrit autant que parlé. Dans la pratique on passe de l'un a l'autre instantanément (Benveniste, 1959/1966: 242).

The definition of discursive enunciation too is followed by an outline of its formal apparatus in which Benveniste presents first the forms belonging to the category of person and then those pertaining to the category of verb:

Le discours emploie librement toutes les formes personnelles du verbe, aus-
si bien *je/tu* que *il*. Explicite ou non, la relation de personne est présente par-
tout. De ce fait, la 3ᵉ personne, n'a pas la même valeur que dans le récit histo-
rique. Dans celui-ci, le narrateur n'intervenant pas, la 3ᵉ personne ne s'oppose
à aucune autre, elle est au vrai une absence de personne. Mais dans le discours
un locuteur oppose une non-personne *il* à une personne *je/tu*. De même le
registre des temps verbaux est bien plus large dans le discours: en fait tous les
temps sont possibles, sauf un, l'aoriste, banni aujourd'hui de ce plan d'énon-
ciation alors qu'il est la forme typique de l'histoire. Il faut surtout souligner les
trois temps fondamentaux du discours: présent, futur et parfait, tous les trois
exclus du récit historique (sauf le plus-que-parfait). Commun aux deux plans
est l'imparfait (Benveniste, 1959/1966: 242-243).

The two formal apparatuses of "discourse" and "history" may
be schematically illustrated through the use of the two following
diagrams, which I have already presented, in a slightly different
form, in a previous work of mine (Manetti, 2008: 40):
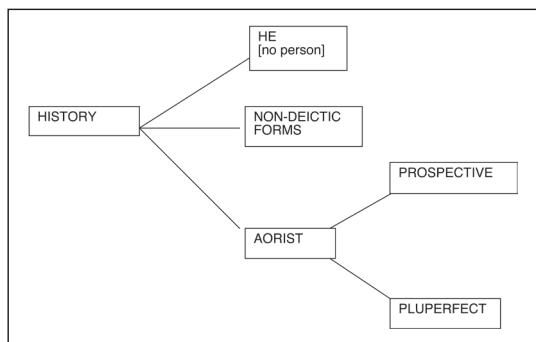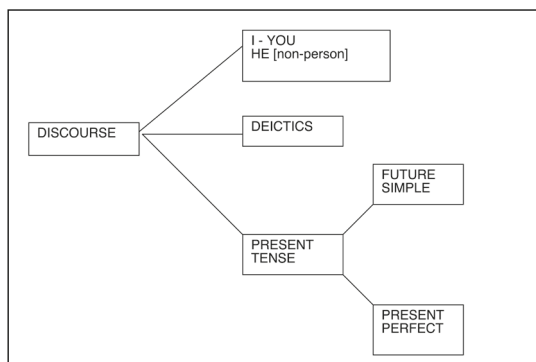
5. *The linguistic present and the physical present*

All things considered, discursive enunciation would appear to centre on the "present". Benveniste's fundamental idea is that the present is what constitutes the dividing line between the other forms of temporality, both with respect to what is no longer present (past) and with respect to what no yet is (future). However, since the present has a shifting reference, these forms anchor themselves to the present in order to identify the exact moment in which the reported event is situated. In the 1958 essay "De la subjectivité dans le langage", when speaking of the "present", Benveniste makes a highly interesting observation:

> Mais toujours la ligne de partage est une référence au 'présent'. Or ce 'présent' à son tour n'a comme référence temporelle qu'une donnée linguistique: la coïncidence de l'événement décrit avec l'instance de discours qui le décrit. Le repère temporel du présent ne peut être qu'intérieur au discours. Le *Dictionnaire générale* définit le 'présent' comme 'le temps du verbe qui exprime le temps où l'on est'. Mais prenons-y garde, il n'y a pas d'autre critère ni d'autre expression pour indiquer 'le temps où l'on est' que de le prendre comme 'le temps où l'on *parle'*. C'est là le moment éternellement 'présent', quoique ne se rapportant jamais aux mêmes événements d'une chronologie 'objective', parce qu'il est déterminé pour chaque locuteur par chacune des instances de discours qui s'y rapporte (Benveniste, 1958/1966: 262-263).

Benveniste ends with a rather perplexing claim:

> Le temps linguistique est *sui-referentiel*. En dernière analyse la temporalité humaine avec tout son appareil linguistique dévoile la subjectivité inhérente à l'exercice même du langage (Benveniste, 1958/1966: 263).

This statement of Benveniste's regarding the "sui-referential" character of the "present" is worth examining more closely. If taken literally, the expression suggests that the verbal form of the "present" has (or identifies) itself as the referent, or that – more broadly – it identifies a referent within language itself. I believe that what led Benveniste to reach this conclusion was the topic of the essay, namely the dimension of the subjectivity of language itself. With regard to present time, Benveniste still speaks of the "coïncidence de l'événement décrit avec l'instance de discours qui le décrit". But it must be borne in mind that the event is situated within physical time and that therefore the verbal form of the

present identifies, more in particular, a coincidence between the moment in which the act of speaking takes place and that in which the event described by the verbal form occurs.

One explanation as to why Benveniste assigns a sui-referential character to the "present" is suggested, perhaps, by certain considerations – more philosophical than linguistic in nature – made in the 1970 essay:

> Le présent formel ne fait qu'expliciter le présent inhérent à l'énonciation, qui se renouvelle avec chaque production de discours, et à partir de ce présent continu, coextensif à notre présence propre, s'imprime dans la conscience le sentiment d'une continuité que nous appelons 'temps'; continuité et temporalité s'engendrent dans le présent incessant de l'énonciation qui est le présent de l'être même, et se délimitant, par référence interne, entre ce qui va devenir présent et ce qui vient de ne l'être plus (Benveniste, 1970/1974: 83-84).

This passage, with strong phenomenological overtones, clarifies the meaning that Benveniste probably assigned to the expression "sui-referential". Given Benveniste's habit of taking up again concepts already illustrated in previous essays, often in order to better define their meaning, it is hardly a coincidence that in the passage quoted above we find the expression "par référence interne", which would appear to be a paraphrase of the expression "sui-réferentiel". In the same passage we also find an interesting distinction between "le présent formel", which I believe may be taken to refer to the verbal form of the present, and "le présent inhérent à l'énonciation", which a little later on in the text is identified with "le présent de l'être même". According to this "philosophical" claim, sui-referentiality ranges from the formal present to the ontological and eternal present of enunciation, which coincides with that of being itself.

From a more strictly linguistic and semiotic standpoint, it may be possible to view things in a different light, without overlooking Benveniste's formulations. It may be noted that the formal present identifies the referential moment in which the event described is to be situated with that particular moment in physical time (and hence in chronic time too) that is co-extensive with the moment in which a given speaker uses a "present" form. If we picture, on the one hand, the succession of instants of physical time as a line – a succession which, in chronic time, becomes a sequence of socialised and conventional measures: seconds, minutes, hours,

days, etc. – and, on the other hand and by analogy, the succession of moments in which enunciation can occur as another line, parallel to the first, we can construct the following diagram:

Relationship between the time of enunciation and physical time in Discourse
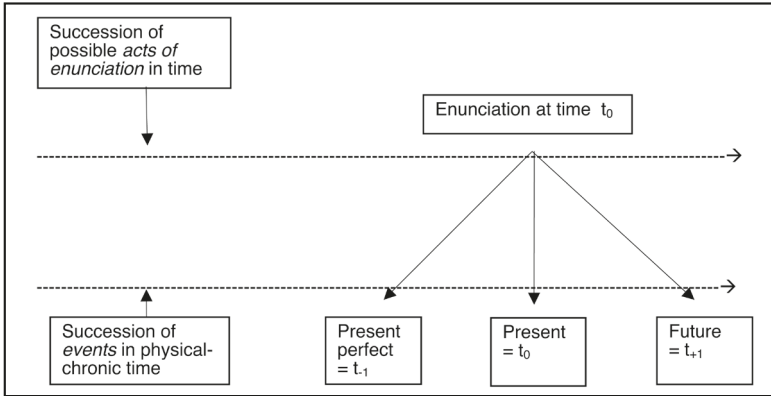

This diagram illustrates the situation which emerges with "discursive enunciation" or "discourse": the "present" is identified as that moment (t_0) in physical time in which the moment of utterance coincides with the event that is being reported in speech. It may further be noted that Benveniste assigns a particular role to the present perfect, since the utterance of the corresponding verbal form coincides with a moment in physical time that is closely connected to the present of the enunciation:

> Le parfait établit un lien vivant entre l'événement passé et le présent, où son évocation trouve place. C'est le temps de celui qui relate les faits en témoin, participant ; c'est donc aussi le temps que choisira quiconque veut faire retentir jusqu'à nous l'événement rapporté et le rattacher à notre présent (Benveniste, 1959/1966: 244).

If we move on to consider historical enunciation, we find that temporal relations are structured differently compared to the moment of discursive enunciation (that is, the moment in which the text of the enunciation is realised). First of all, whereas in "discourse" it is always possible to identify the temporal moment to which one is referring based on its relation to the moment of enun-

ciation, this is never possible within "history". The axial time of "history" is the aorist, which – as the very etymology of the word suggests – indicates an indefinite or undefinable time[10]. As Benveniste emphasises, the only way to assign it a particular moment in physical-chronic time is to combine it with a date. There are two tenses which refer to this axial time represented by the aorist: (i) the pluperfect, which indicates a previous moment in time; (ii) the prospective, which indicates a subsequent moment in time, which nonetheless never reaches the present of the enunciation (it is realised through expressions such as "later on that event would occur", "that event was to happen"). This situation may be illustrated by the following diagram:

Relationship between the time of enunciation and physical time in History
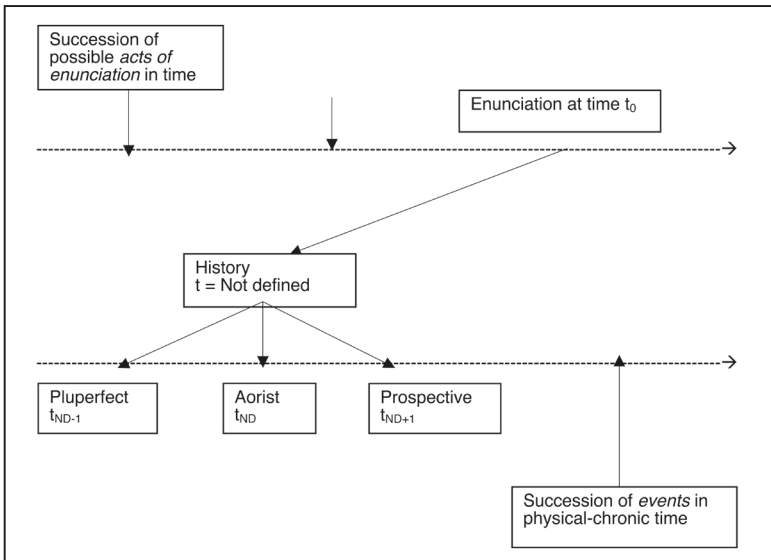
In History, the time of reference is that of the vent and not that of the enunciation.

<hr>

[10]   The two possibilities are expressed in Greek by the verbal adjective in *-tos*, which in English coincides both with the past participle and with the adjectival form in *-able*.

6. *The adverbial forms of temporality*

To conclude, I would like to draw attention to the fact that Benveniste's reflection on time in relation to enunciation also concerns adverbial forms expressing temporal notions. In the 1956 essay "La nature des pronoms", Benveniste highlights the fact that language employs two series of temporal adverbs, which differ depending on whether they have the instance of enunciation as their reference or not. This is a particularly significant fact in the light of the general rule that language admits of no duplicate forms unless they serve different functions:

L'essentiel est donc la relation entre l'indicateur (de personne, de temps, de lieu, d'objet montré, etc.) et la *présente instance de discours*. Car, dès qu'on ne vise plus, par l'expression même, cette relation de l'indicateur à l'instance unique qui la manifeste, la langue recourt à une série de termes distincts qui correspondent un à un aux premiers [*aujourd'hui, hier, demain, dans trois jours,* etc.] et qui se réfèrent, non plus à l'instance de discours, mais aux objets 'réels', aux temps et lieux 'historiques'. D'où les corrélations telles que *je : il - ici : là - maintenant : alors - aujourd'hui : le jour même - hier : la veille - demain : le lendemain - la semaine prochaine : la semaine suivante - il y a trois jours : trois jours avant* etc. La langue même dévoile la différence profonde entre ces deux plans (Benveniste, 1956/1966: 253-254).

The two series of adverbial expressions differ, therefore, in that they refer to two different levels of enunciation. The first series refers to what the 1956 essay describes as "la *présente instance de discours*"; the second series instead refers to what the passage just quoted defines as "temps et lieux 'historiques'" – namely, the level of historical enunciation, as the 1959 essay calls it.

The distribution of adverbial and periphrastic temporal forms is summed up in the following table, where such forms are classified, on the one hand, according to whether they refer to the moment of discursive enunciation or that of historical enunciation and, on the other hand, according to the three directions of contemporaneity, anteriority and posterity:

	Reference to the determinate time of discursive enunciation	Reference to the indeterminate time of history (or of the event)
Contemporaneity	now today	then the same day
Anteriority	yesterday eight days ago	the previous day eight days earlier
Posteriority	tomorrow in three months' time	the following day three months later

It is noteworthy that the topic of the double series of temporal expressions was taken up again in the 1965 essay "Le langage et l'expérience humaine", albeit from a slightly different perspective:

Quand, pour des raisons pragmatiques, le locuteur doit porter sa visée temporelle au-delà des limites énoncées par 'hier' et 'demain', le discours sort de son plan propre et utilise la gradation du temps chronique, et d'abord la numération des unités: 'il y a huit jours'; 'dans trois mois'. Néanmoins 'il y a …' et 'dans…' restent les indices de la distanciation subjective; ils ne pourraient passer dans une relation historique sans conversion: 'il y a (huit jours)' devient '(huit jours) auparavant', et 'dans (trois mois)' devient '(trois mois) après; plus tard', comme 'aujourd'hui' doit devenir 'ce jour-là'. Ces opérateurs effectuent le transfert du temps linguistique au temps chronique (Benveniste, 1965/1974: 78).

In this passage the distinction between temporal expressions is associated with that between two categories that may be regarded as analogous to those identified in the 1956 article and to the two levels of discourse and history discussed in the 1959 article. What emerges here is an opposition between linguistic time, which is essentially regarded as that of the "present", and hence of discourse and subjectivity, and chronic time, which is also understood as the time of "historical relation".

7. *Conclusions*

Benveniste's theory on the way in which time is represented by and through language (to use a circumlocution dear to the French linguist: "dans et par") finds its most complete and detailed expression in the 1965 essay "Le langage et l'expérience humaine". However, various aspects of this theory had already been outlined

in another essay published nine years earlier, "La nature des pro-nomes" (1956). In this text, Benveniste had highlighted the fact that the linguistic expression of time is always to be set in relation to the "instance du discours":

> Le caractère systématique du langage fait que l'appropriation signalée par ces indicateurs [personal pronouns and ostension indicators] se propage dans l'instance de discours à tous les éléments susceptibles de s'y 'accorder' formel-lement; avant tout, par des procédés variables selon le type d'idiome, au verbe. On doit insister sur ce point: la 'forme verbale' est solidaire de l'instance de discours en ce qu'elle est toujours et nécessairement actualisée par l'acte de discours et en dépendance de cet acte (Benveniste, 1956/1966: 255).

In the same essay, Benveniste distinguished for the first time between two series of temporal expressions, based on whether the reference was to the "instance de discours" or "temps et lieux 'historiques'" (Benveniste, 1956/1966: 253-254). As we have seen, this distinction is to be viewed in relation to the contrast that Ben-veniste draws in the essay published three years later, "Les rela-tions de temps dans le verbe français" (1959), between the two "levels of enunciation" (ivi, 243): discursive enunciation and his-torical enunciation, which are essentially defined on the basis of temporal distinctions.

The 1956 essay affirmed the importance of the category of the "present", although the reference was a rather generic one ("L'essentiel est donc la relation entre l'indicateur (de personne, de temps, de lieu, d'objet montré, etc.) et la *présente* instance de discours", ivi, 253). However, the fact that the expression "présen-te" was put in italics shows what importance Benveniste attached to this notion. Indeed, enunciation is realised in an eternal present, mirrored by the temporal forms of the verbal present.

The main novelties of the 1965 essay, "Le langage et l'expérience humaine", concern various different aspects. First of all, in this essay the notion of linguistic time is constructed and developed against the background of, and in opposition to, the other two no-tions of time, which might be defined, respectively, as the philo-sophical and the anthropological: physical time and chronic time.

Secondly, in the 1965 essay, the dimension of the "present" ac-quires crucial importance, to the point of becoming the very source of the category of time. The linguistic present is marked by the tem-

poral coincidence (within physical time) between the act of enunciation and the occurrence that is being reported. From this there follow several consequences that Benveniste illustrates in detail.

Thirdly, in the 1965 essay a clear affinity emerges between Benveniste's conception and the one ascribable to the "phenomenological" paradigm, according to which "lived time" is a fundamental dimension of the speaking subject, such as to define man's very experience of temporality. This conception is set in contrast to the abstract one formulated by the scientific "observer", a notion which brings Benveniste's conception close to that of the phenomenologist Pos (1939).

All these topics are addressed again, in concentrated form, in the 1970 essay "L'appareil formel de l'énonciation" (29 lines, pp. 83-84 in the Gallimard edition), without really introducing anything new. Benveniste confirms that the verbal form of the present identifies a moment co-extensive with that of enunciation. He further confirms the relation between the three categories of 'enunciation', 'the present', and 'time': "De l'énonciation procède l'instauration de la catégorie du présent, et de la catégorie du présent naît la catégorie du temps" (Benveniste, 1970/1974: 83). Finally, he asserts, once more, the importance of the dimension of "lived experience":

Le présent est proprement la source du temps. Il est cette présence au monde que l'acte d'énonciation rend seul possible, car, qu'on veuille bien y réfléchir, l'homme ne dispose d'aucun autre moyen de vivre le 'maintenant' et de le faire actuel que de le réaliser par l'insertion du discours dans le monde (Benveniste, 1970/1974 : 83).

We may conclude, therefore, that Benveniste's theory of time – developed in the years between 1956 and 1970 – was consistently maintained and progressively enriched up to the 1965 essay, within a framework of clear and in-depth research on the topic. The words that Roland Barthes (1966) dedicated to the great French linguist are convenient in this regard:

Les livres de savoir, de recherche, ont aussi leur "style". Celui-ci est d'une très grand classe. Il y a une très grand beauté, une expérience de l'intellect qui donne à l'oeuvre de certains savants cette sorte de *clarté inépuisable*, dont sont aussi faites les grandes oeuvres littéraires. Tout est clair dans le livre de Benveniste, tout peut y être reconnu immédiatement pour vrai; et cependant aussi, tout en lui ne fait que commencer.

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