Hi everyone,

I just happen to read this old thread.

It is my impression when I was doing my PhD and tried to get around the notion of language and more into the notion of speaking (or communication if you will) that De Saussure actually was inspired in many ways by Hegel's theory of systems when producing his categories of langage/langue/parole. Furthermore, it seems than Hegel anticipated many Saussurian ideas on the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, its relationship with concepts, and writing systems in general.

As you can clearly see when translating Vygotsky's Thought and language/Thinking and speaking we struggle with Saussurian terminology to convey what that "language" is.

There are many passages of the Cours that match Hegel's Encyclopedia.

I could not address all these issues in my thesis and I opted for deploying the notion of discourse instead of speech. In that way I got rid of the notion of language as system comprising all utterances (much or less as all commodities form the market). However, I did not solve the underlying issue of how abbreviation works in discourse (or language).

There are also many ontological problems with Vygotsky's notion of interiorization and inner speech if we get rid of a Saussurean understanding of language as system or what linguists call a segregationist view of language (language as a reified object that only makes sense within an objectified system).

Best,

Arturo
This study addresses the question: How do the structural conditions of university organisation modulate subject position, social relations and discourse and therefore shape individual consciousness and activity? The response is informed by an empirical pedagogical problem located at the tertiary level in Japan: What makes acquirers attain higher levels of language mastery in foreign language (Spanish) settings informed by communicative language teaching? The attempted answer is framed within cultural-historical activity theory, the cultural theory of Holland et al. (2001), and Basil Bernstein’s code theory. These theories have been combined using Marxian-Hegelian notions of culture and subject, which allow language development and mastery to be treated as the acquisition by an individual of a cultural tool (semiotic mediation) subject to both individual agency and historical forces. The organisational and pedagogical contexts of three institutions engaged in Spanish language education have been analysed using motive-action/educational task as the unit of analysis that situates the observation in between micro and macro levels of analysis, in combination with the methodologies for ascertaining subject position provided by Bernstein’s code theory and the cultural theory of Holland et al. This procedure made it possible to determine acquirers’ coding orientations (orientations to meaning) and to establish comparisons between organisation and learning settings. The findings indicate that acquirers who have a formal trajectory of language learning and who are able to recognise grammar instructional discourse – i.e., who possess a representational gaze – attain better levels of language mastery (active realisation) than those with informal trajectories (e.g. learning languages overseas in a conversational fashion without following a formal programme) and who do not recognise grammar instructional discourse. Evidence is provided to indicate that there is no way to avoid representational-function programmes. The bottom-up move within Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development is suggested as a feasible intervention without a drastic reshaping of the programmes.

Less
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Writing in a foreign language as a science of writing or grammatology

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The present paper explores the issue of writing in a foreign language as a pedagogic process that may produce a radical subjective transformation. Drawing on Bernstein’s notions of the pedagogic device and discursive gap, the paper explores the epistemic make-up of language and the way it has been normalised by academic and educational institutions as a reified notion that discourages an understanding of it as the very formation of subjects, social contexts and pedagogic identities. Based on a principle of complementarity, the study proposes the deployment of pedagogies that draw on both Derrida’s science of writing or grammatology, and the dialectical approach of Vygotsky, in which writing is viewed as a representation of oral speech, capable of objectivising semiosis. The author draws on his experience as a language instructor in Japan, carrying the baggage of his self-imposed exile, to contextualise those pedagogies in relation to the positions subjects take (resistance, avoidance, commitment) and opportunities for subjective emancipation. In the end, the author suggests that Derrida’s anti-epistemologic approach offers new ways of addressing the issue of subjective domination and emancipation.

Keywords: deconstruction; discursive gap; foreign language; grammatology; immanent critique; pedagogic device

Introduction

Written speech is the algebra of speech. (Vygotsky 1987, 203)

…the destruction of discourse is not simply an erasing neutralisation. It multiplies words, precipitates them one against the other, engulfs them too, in an endless and baseless substitution whose only rule is the sovereign affirmation of the play outside meaning. Not a reserve or a withdrawal, not the infinite murmur of a blank speech erasing the traces of classical discourse, but a kind of potlatch of signs that burns, consumes and wastes words in the gay affirmation of death: a sacrifice and a challenge. (Derrida 2001, 347)

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The aim of the present paper is to explore the issue of writing in a foreign language or producing written discourse in a foreign language as a pedagogic process that may further a radical transformation of all subjects involved in the pedagogic relation, whether they are learners or instructors. I argue that pedagogies of writing have a better chance of producing deep subjective transformations if educators approach the subject as both a science of writing, in Derrida’s terms, i.e. as a deconstruction of knowledge and science, and in a more traditional linguistic sense, i.e. as a representation of oral speech.

I will analyse this process in terms of both language’s epistemic make-up and the complexities posed by its instruction and learning. I will focus my analysis on the teaching of Written Spanish, drawing mainly on my experience as a language instructor of Spanish Writing for the past four years at the tertiary level in Japan. The argumentations I give are interested and biased, as they are based on my lifelong experience as a native speaker of Spanish, born and raised in Chile but of Spanish extraction, and learner of foreign languages. My English – the language in which I am writing the present article – is my third spoken language after French but it is unquestionably the language in which I conduct my (written) critical reflective practice. Learning English had for me an immense emancipatory effect. It was the language of my self-induced political and social exile in which I forged a new identity that kept me relatively distant from the atrocities of the Chilean dictatorship of the 1970s and 1980s. Eventually, English became the language through which I started to articulate more comprehensive critiques of the knowledge systems that I had come to know through Spanish and French. Thus, for me, language teaching has always been a serious business; I believe it has tremendous implications for the learner as the main vehicle to author him- or herself not only in times of political crisis, but of personal crisis as well. Therefore, for me writing has an emancipatory potential under certain pedagogic circumstances that I highlight below.

The paper is structured as follows. In the opening sections, I set out my position regarding the pedagogies of writing in relation to Derrida’s notion of a science of writing or grammatology. Having that goal in mind I draw on different theoretical systems, especially on dialectical traditions (Hegel, Marx and Vygotsky) and on Bernstein’s sociology of pedagogy. These systems coincide in certain aspects but also present divergent views and are subject to epistemic and theoretical contradictions. In my discussion of writing and subject transformation, I will defy several notions that place language and the pedagogies of foreign language, especially writing pedagogies, on safe ground and normalise their tenets, making them appear as unquestionable or unproblematic practices. Finally, I will give an account of the underpinnings of the pedagogies of writing in a foreign language according to the (contradictory) deconstructing principles already seen. I will
describe a selection of practices that do not pretend to constitute an empirical body of work, as in a traditional research paper, but are rather an illustration of the underpinnings so that the reader can see them in action, so to speak, especially in light of the tremendous (social and linguistic) distance between Spanish and Japanese.

Writing as a representation of speech and writing as death

In order to situate ourselves with regard to writing and its pedagogies, let us start with a general analysis of the status that language is given and the particular role writing plays in foreign language study programmes.

I argue that writing classes are, in general, underrated in the pedagogical systems that deal with foreign language instruction. In fact, the very notion of language takes us back to the structuralist notion of a semiotic system devised by Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics*, which not only inaugurated the modern linguistic vision of language as a system of signs that represent ideas, but gave writing the status of a mere representation of speech (Saussure 1959, 23). Saussure was not the first theoretician to treat writing as a representation of speech but he was one of the most influential forgers of the myth, as drawn on in the field of foreign language pedagogies.

The Japanese pedagogical system is not exempt from this problem. Writing does not occupy the place of a foundation course, along with grammar, translation and conversation courses. The positioning of writing as one of the last courses in the curriculum tells a tale in which its mastery is seen as disconnected from the rudiments of grammar, and as a logical step that follows the mastery of oral speech. The fact that writing is a highly reflexive activity, which in itself constitutes a grammar, is widely overlooked, helping to reproduce the idea, in Japan and elsewhere, that writing is a mere representation of oral speech.

Derrida’s notion of *science of writing* or *grammatology* runs against this conception. For Derrida, writing is not a mere representation of speech but the means on which any science is based, that is, the foundation of knowledge. As Derrida points out:

...writing is not only an auxiliary means in the service of science – but first ... the condition of the possibility of ideal objects and therefore of scientific objectivity. Before being its object, writing is the condition of the *epistémè*. (Derrida 1997, 27)

Grammatology is a practical assault, first, on *logocentrism*, that is, on the belief that phonetic writing, and particularly alphabetic writing, is superior to other forms of written representation, and, second, on the systematic repression of writing practised by metaphysics, ‘from the pre-Socratics to
Heidegger’, which has ‘always assigned the origin of truth in general to the logos’ (Derrida 1997, 3), particularly the logos contained in oral, full speech.

We will return to Derrida’s grammatology after we introduce the theories behind the current dominant conception of language and writing and its links with the dialectical tradition and Hegel’s standpoint, which for Derrida, as we will see, occupies an ambivalent position.

**The interested prevalence of Saussurean structuralism**

Let us go back to the normative notion of language and how this contributes to the shaping and normalisation of pedagogic practices. The dominating idea, reflected in the name given to the main field of research into foreign language teaching and learning, Second Language Acquisition (SLA), is that learners acquire language and, therefore, using a foreign language amounts to an exercise in translating a communicative intention, without necessarily changing the communicating subjects. Let me give an example. If some speakers of Japanese successfully translate the words kekkon (marriage), kazoku (family) or ikka (clan or household) into Spanish and use them in an utterance without paying attention to what the terms connote in Spanish society, they are operating with a principle in which they assume the equivalence of the social and communicative contexts in Japan and Spain. They may be shocked and some disgusted by the fact that in Spain same-sex marriages are now commonplace and same-sex partners can legally adopt children; that women do not change their last names when they get married and do not become members of the husband’s household, as is normally the case in Japan, and so on. In other words, simple terms like family or husband are part of a network of social relations that support dissimilar living conditions and rationales for organising society.

How did this conception of language get normalised? First, as I have already mentioned, we can trace the modern conception of language to Saussure’s structuralist paradigm, which later influenced and set constraints on the cognitive-computational tradition, especially generative linguistics, one of the most influential theories of language of the last century. This paradigm helped to keep at bay competing notions of language, such as those of the dialectical tradition, which viewed it in its social dimension. Second, as we are going to see later, the structuralist paradigm was (and still is) subservient to the role that language pedagogies play in the educational system.

Let us see first how the SLA field still operates mainly under a Saussurean paradigm. In the *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure (1959) establishes what at prima facie seems to be a doctrinal Hegelian distinction between langue (universal), langage (particular) and parole (individual) (language–human speech–utterance). For Saussure, language is a passive,
receptive, collective and homogeneous system that comprises all manifestations of human speech. He stresses the point that human speech cannot be studied because it lacks unity. It is an imperfect and incomplete manifestation (9). Utterance, moreover, is the individual act, the actuality that establishes language (13). After setting up what I believe are Hegelian links, Saussure chooses the universal, language as the object of linguistics, that is, the most stable part of the triad (non-temporal being): the passive collection of the conventions adopted by society that enable individuals to exercise the faculty of speech. A science of language, argues Saussure, can only be built upon the exclusion of the other elements (15). But whilst Hegel (1975) in *Doctrine of the Notion* cannot conceive of the Notion, the universal, without instantiation in particular individuals (temporal process), for Hegelian dialectics is based upon the non-identity at any given time of the universal, the particular and the individual, Saussure in contrast leaves human speech (particular) and utterance (individual) out of language, effectively decapitating Hegel’s dialectic. This amounts to leaving human institutions such as the school, the corporation, the church, the union or the family, and the speech acts produced by actual individuals that are grouped under those institutions, with their own needs and motives, out of the equation. As a unit of analysis, Saussure’s option implies that researchers and educators working with that notion of language will leave out by default the social milieu which shapes and is shaped by language, and the psychological dimension of communication. The attempts to incorporate that milieu and language’s psychological dimension will always be perceived as extraneous, artificial, accessory or forced under such a paradigm. Thus, when Saussure postulates langue as the object of linguistics he is consciously opting for the study of an abstract (and arbitrary) system. Most foreign language pedagogies deployed in the SLA field do not recognise that the social context, including its institutions, is itself constructed through language. As Johnson points out, the social setting of the dominant SLA pedagogies is described *a priori* as a stable context in which meanings are fixed non-negotiable entities (Johnson 2004, 85–99).

**Discursive gap**

The historical formation of the linguistic field is not the only circumstance that has helped in normalising a reified notion of language. The Saussurean paradigm also plays a subservient role to the particular works of what Bernstein (2000) calls the pedagogic device, through which actual discourse (in this instance, realisations of language) is transformed into an imaginary (pedagogical) discourse. Instructors and students alike seem to operate with a conception of (their own and the target) language as a principle-based generator of mathematic propositions and with the notion of mental semantic normativity, that is, meanings as stable entities that people store
somewhere in their minds. The pedagogic device operates with internal rules that control or regulate the pedagogic communication that the device makes possible. In our case, the device is constraining the potential of language to produce subjective change by appropriating sciences and pedagogies of language ancillary to the idea of a non-evolutionary subject.

But what exactly is the pedagogic device? Bernstein views pedagogy as operating on a transformation principle (pedagogic discourse) through which the what, roughly translated as the academic content, and the how, that is, ‘the theory of instruction’ (Bernstein 2000, 34), are continuously recontextualised and evaluated to reinforce its aims. Put more blatantly, pedagogic institutions choose and appropriate actual discourses from several production fields, package them as imaginary school subjects, transmit them as imaginary discourses and evaluate the transmission’s performance. Distributive rules (based on social class differentials), though, will allow a few subjects to produce actual discourse and access the actual field of production.

By distributive rules, Bernstein (2000) understands the distinction of two classes of knowledge, the ‘thinkable class and the unthinkable class … one class of knowledge that is esoteric and one that is mundane’ (29). These two classes of knowledge have different forms of abstraction that relate ‘the material world and the immaterial world’ (29), which are regulated by the division of labour and the particular relation between meanings and their material base. Therefore, if the ongoing accumulation of instances of language constitutes the material base (unrepresentable in its totality), different modes of abstraction provide us with alternative theories of language, which will serve the interests of different social groups. In other words, Bernstein is referring to the regulation of power relations between social groups by means of distributing different forms of knowledge and creating, therefore, consciousness differentials, whether we understand these differentials as orientations to meaning or pedagogic identities.

The meanings which are not directly linked to a material base create a potential discursive gap. Put in a rather brutal way, there is knowledge to be taught, which ensures the reproduction of institutions and social relations, and there is knowledge to be produced, which has the potential to reshape institutions and social relations. For Bernstein,

this potential gap or space … is the site for the unthinkable, the site of the impossible, and this site can clearly be both beneficial and dangerous at the same time … [it] is the meeting point of order and disorder, of coherence and incoherence. It is the crucial site of the yet to be thought. (Bernstein 2000, 30)

In our case, the structuralist and cognitivist notions of language are ancillary to pedagogies through which discourse, the social context and the social relations, are not interpellated and consequently no radical transformation of
the (individual) subject is sought. Foreign language instruction, therefore, becomes a safe, non-evolutionary pedagogic subject. If language is a static object, its instruction does not presuppose the transformation of the student/instructor as subjects, as socially positioned individuals. Consequently, there is a strong call against the evolution of the subject, an interpellation for a non-evolutionary subjectivation, or for his or her controlled evolution under the subject’s own terms (i.e. an interpellation for consensual subjectivation), which amounts to a certain commoditisation of foreign language education. Students may only engage in the instructional process up to a certain point without compromising their own values or world views, or those of the society that is enabling this process. Neither the student nor the instructor has to take up a radical position regarding language in order to close the gap between pedagogic discourse and the discourse produced in the actual field of production (i.e. language use): the instructor can be happy abandoning the student in the fantasy island of the classroom where an imaginary foreign language is spoken; and the student can be happy about learning an imaginary foreign language. Language then starts working as a commodity, an accessory that is acquired in the market.

The Bernsteinian approach not only allows us to understand the implications of the adoption of a broadly Saussurian paradigm within foreign language pedagogies, its fundamental stance is that discourse, understood here as socially situated language, is not external to the field of power, but constitutive of it. However, even though this makes clear that the subject is configured and transformed through discourse, Bernstein’s sociology lacks insight into the exact process of formation and transformation of the subject. This is why Bernstein’s sociology has been supplemented with the dialectical tradition (Daniels 2001; Escandon 2012) in an attempt to give an account of intrasubjective processes.

Subject transformation and the ideal of emancipation

Let us analyse now the dialectical tradition, as an alternative to the structur-alist-based cognitivist approach, and see what analytical tools it has to offer that can incorporate both the social and psychological fabrics of language. What are this tradition’s main tenets? First, it works with a socio-genetic framework of analysis and explanatory principle whereby the development of the subject through higher psychological functions and the emergence of consciousness are the outcome of social activity, especially language (see Leont’ev 1981, 56). In this framework, the development of higher psychological functions such as voluntary attention, logical memory and generalisation appear twice, first on the interpsychological level, and later on, on the intrapsychological level (Vygotsky 1978, 56). These functions are developed in order to accurately reproduce the features of the world of things, as Vygotsky indicates, whereas linguistic means target the
communication of ideas in order to organise societal activity, including one’s own behaviour. Vygotsky depicted development as if happening in a zone, i.e. the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which may be interpreted as an analytical metaphor that helps to represent ‘the fusion of the individual and the social setting’ (see Robbins 2003, 34). Development is therefore a function of language’s socio-communicative and representational functions, or, put in terms of the ZPD, the dialectical relationship between the zone’s upper (scientific/theoretical concepts) and lower reaches (spontaneous/everyday concepts).

However, the main concern of the dialectical tradition is the issue of human development and freedom. Social relations develop human beings so that they can become full participants in society. The aim is to have the individual appropriating the means to free him- or herself from arbitrary social conditions by generating new social relations (see Chaiklin 2012). So, for Vygotsky, developing a foreign language allows a breaking away from the cognitive dominance of the native language, contributing therefore to the emancipation of the individual:

…[the native] speech system stands between the newly learned language and the world of things …This process of concept formation requires entirely different acts of thought, acts of thought which are associated with free movement in the concept system, with the generalization of previously developed generalizations, and with a more conscious and voluntary mode of operating on these concepts. (Vygotsky 1987, 180–181)

The speech trap of the dialectical tradition

Teaching a modern foreign language usually aims first at the mastery of that language’s socio-communicative functions, yet instruction is highly reflective and demands, according to Vygotsky, processes similar to those required in the mastery of scientific concepts and written speech in the native language. Thus, Vygotsky (1987, 179) sees similarities in terms of the psychological processes required in mastering (1) writing in the native language, (2) scientific concepts in the native language, and (3) a foreign language.

However, the basic tenets of the dialectical tradition are problematic, if we try to assimilate them to Derrida’s grammatology. First, the differentiation between higher functions and linguistic means may work in terms of describing intended objects of activity – higher psychological functions are developed in order to reproduce accurately the features of phenomena, whereas linguistic means target the communication of ideas to organise societal activity – but is ontologically compromised. This is because both the world of things and the subject are primarily constituted through language and, therefore, there is no way to determine where one ends and the other begins. In fact, higher psychological functions belong to a system
that is already predetermined and normalised and carries with it a moral stance given by the linguistic means used to regulate social relationships. Developmental targets predate development. Suppose that an instructor is teaching the linguistic means linked with the pragmatics of Spanish spontaneity in certain conversational contexts, yet, whether instruction deals with the grammatical or pragmatic aspects of the linguistic means, the instructor’s demand for spontaneity is paradoxical. The linguistic and social excess that constitutes spontaneity for subjects of Spanish cannot be captured by the representational function.

The second problem we face is that in the dialectical tradition, development depends ultimately upon the internalisation of speech. In the process of internalisation, speech is abbreviated. This not only applies to the development of a foreign language but also to the development of the scientific concepts in the native language. Writing occupies a conflictual role that is a product of what Jones (2009) calls the segregationist linguistics adopted by Vygotsky. For Jones, Vygotsky’s model assumes a mythical, reified and de-personalised notion of linguistic activity in which ‘an anonymous language system, predicated on the assumption of social conformity, is taken to be the precondition for any communicative act’ (168). In other words, linguistic activity (whether external or internal) is an instantiation of an external depersonalised code. Drawing on Wertsch’s interpretation of Vygotsky’s notion of development as predicated on the ‘principle of decontextualization of mediational means’ (Wertsch 1985, 33), Jones points out that written language is the ultimate decontextualised universal model to which external speech and, eventually, other shorter, condensed forms are compared. Decontextualisation is the process ‘whereby the meaning of signs become less and less dependent on the unique spatiotemporal context in which they are used’ (Wertsch 1985, 33). Thus speech, whether external, private or internal, is an instantiation of a universal that is contained in full written form. Abbreviation operates as a semantic and syntactic condensation of full written forms.

For Vygotsky, the aim of instruction is to rise from context-bound forms of functioning, such as those linked to the use of spontaneous concepts, whether they have an extra-linguistic or linguistic context, to decontextualised forms, such as those linked to the use of scientific concepts. For him, spontaneous concepts refer to an extra-linguistic or linguistic context, and are therefore context-tied and transitory, whereas scientific concepts refer to a network of conceptual relations and are therefore stable. For instance, if we take the word ‘wall’, it refers to an extra-linguistic context in which there is a wall, or to a linguistic context in which there is an imaginary wall, a wall that is no longer present or something resembling a wall or containing its properties. However, if we take the word ‘circumference’, we are no longer dealing with a linguistic or extra-linguistic referent but with a network of concepts such as ‘centre’, ‘diameter’ and ‘radius’, and a whole network of notions contained in
Euclidean geometry. Now, the exact shape of the wall, its colour, the material it is made of, and so on, may change, but this is not the case with the word ‘circumference’, which only admits the predicate size.

As Wertsch (1985) points out, in ‘developing his account of the factors that contribute to predicativity, Vygotsky argued that the end points of a continuum that extends from minimal to maximal predicativity are represented by written language and inner speech, respectively’ (123). The paradox is that the abbreviated forms are located in the opposite reach, in the realm of what Vygotsky called personal ‘sense’ and written language is located in the realm of objective ‘meaning’ (109), and yet, abbreviated forms enable the subject to produce operations of decontextualisation and generalisation.

How can we interpret these similar and yet conflicting views on language? On the one hand, we encounter similarities. Derrida’s position vindicates, as a first step toward the deconstruction of Saussurean linguistics, the supremacy of the *script* against the metaphysical dominance of the oral. By the same token, speech, within the dialectical tradition, is an instantiation of writing, an idea that reverses Saussurean linguistics, which views writing as a mere representation of speech. On the other hand, the approaches could not be more different. Because of its systemic nature, the dialectical tradition holds that writing is the universal, de-contextualised, complete, perfect form, in opposition to the particular, context-tied, abbreviated, incomplete and imperfect forms of social and inner speech. In contrast, for Derrida, writing can be characterised as a process of incompleteness, for it is subject to the processes of differing (spatial displacement) and deferring (time displacement), which Derrida formulated in the neologism *differance* (see Derrida 1982, 3–27, my emphasis). In writing there is a necessary (structural) effacement of the addressee and the context, and the effacement of meaning, for the meaning of a text is always in connection to the (endless and incomplete) system of texts (as a citation is only valuable because it is citing something else). This amounts to an ontological negativity that, although described by Hegel (1977) in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, was nonetheless left out for the sake of attaining true knowledge (see Derrida 2001, 317–350).

The positions overlap if we recognise Vygotsky’s view of language and psychological method are eminently historicist. Even if Vygotsky, as Jones points out, operates with a reified notion of language that implies the individual is overdetermined by the social structure, he introduces an intermediate position, that of the instantiation, wherein the social and personal dimensions of the subject dialectically meet. For Vygotsky, signs are relational processes that bridge personal sense and social meanings. Put in dialectical terms: concepts, objectivised mainly in signs, obey at once the logic of social or historical forces and individual consciousness or psyche. However, Derrida’s approach to historicism is that of making evident the
absurdity of the apparent completeness of meaning making, its humourless 
travestissement. If the historicism of Hegel (and Vygotsky) is one of 
presence, a belief in totality or repression of losses, Derrida’s historicist 
method (i.e. writing) is one that goes beyond presence and absence by 
virtue of the displacing and dislocation of différance. Addressing 
Rousseau’s suggestion that writing is the destruction of presence (e.g. 
whatever we write will potentially outlive us), Derrida points out:

Rousseau knew that death is not the simple outside of life. Death by writing 
also inaugurates life. ‘I can certainly say that I never began to live, until I 
looked upon myself as a dead man’ (Confessions, Book 6 [p. 236] … Death 
is the movement of difference to the extent that the movement is necessarily 
finite. This means that difference makes the opposition of presence and 
absence possible. (Derrida 1997, 143)

**From restricted to general economy**

Derrida’s (2001, 327) view of writing, then, radically interpellates the 
dialectical tradition’s treatment of true knowledge as systemic, i.e., ‘the 
unity of process and system’. Let us have a look at the dialectical method. 
A word, or an utterance, under such a system, is interpreted as dependent 
on the sum-total of meanings given by the totality of utterances that 
configure the abstract space of linguistic meanings. Every new utterance is 
different from itself when it enters the system, because its introduction alters 
the sum totality of meaning of all utterances. Derrida’s basic assumption is 
that the systemic totalities of structuralism, and by extension Hegelian 
metaphysics, are forms of totalitarianism, for they ignore that the systemic 
totality does not account for the meaning losses registered at the ontological 
foundation of the system. Derrida is referring to what Bataille called 
restricted economies, that is, the notion that all objects of a system and their 
relations are always meaningful, or that all expenditures are productive. In 
contrast, Bataille and Derrida work with a general economy model, that is, 
a system which acknowledges that non-productive expenditures always 
productive expenditure; in actuality, it knows nothing of purely 
non-productive expenditure either’.

For Derrida, writing (and even speech), under such a Hegelian 
metaphysical framework, presents meaning losses that are unaccounted for. 
These losses are produced by the excesses that Bataille spoke of in his 
account of general economy (Bataille 1985, 1991), the excesses or 
expenditures of ‘destruction, suppression, death and sacrifice’ (Derrida 
2001, 327), and by all phenomena that are not mediated, uncontrollable 
experiences such as nausea, pain, sickness, anguish, delusion, which are 
 beyond or exceed language and therefore lie at the limit of knowledge.
There is a basic destruction underlying knowing something through meaning-making activity. Derrida views Hegel’s ontological foundation on the sovereignty stance of the master–slave relation as an example of general economy, which acknowledges that meanings are lost. Simply put, the operation can be characterised as follows: those who are prepared to die, to risk their lives, accede to lordship, to freedom, recognition, and to knowledge, sovereignty. In order to know you have to jump into the vacuum, face death, dissolve your existence:

The lord is the man who has had the strength to endure the anguish of death and to maintain the work of death. Such, according to Bataille, is the center of Hegelianism. The ‘principal text’ would be the one, in the Preface to the Phenomenology, which places knowledge ‘at the height of death’. (Derrida 2001, 321)

Yet, this general economy principle of sovereignty, which in Vygotsky has its equivalent in the catharsis, that is, the resolution of a personal conflict and the revelation of a higher, more general human truth, the condition of real learning, is eventually rendered as restricted economy in the Hegelian metaphysics deployed by Vygotsky. It is as if the work of art ended up conveying a moral.

What is in conclusion the problem with Hegelian metaphysics? As Derrida points out:

The blind spot of Hegelianism, around which can be organized the representation of meaning, is the point at which destruction, suppression, death and sacrifice constitute so irreversible an expenditure, so radical a negativity – here we would have to say an expenditure and a negativity without reserve – that they can no longer be determined as negativity in a process or a system. In discourse (the unity of process and system), negativity is always the underside and accomplice of positivity. Negativity cannot be spoken of, nor has it ever been except in this fabric of meaning. Now, the sovereign operation, the point of nonreserve, is neither positive nor negative. It cannot be inscribed in discourse, except by crossing out predicates or by practicing a contradictory superimpression that then exceeds the logic of philosophy. (Derrida 2001, 327)

This amounts to saying that in the dialectical tradition there is neither a theory, nor an account, of the unconscious, or the immediate, i.e. all phenomena that are not mediated by verbalisations are substituted, as a form of testimonial act, by a chain of cross-referenced signifiers. An instance of this can be seen when Vygotsky, drawing on John B. Watson, seems to correlate the unconscious with the lack of verbalisations of the earliest childhood (Vygotsky 1997, 121). This condition of the unmediated is summarised by Derrida (2001, 167) in a brief quote from Bataille (1954, 29): ‘Silence is a word which is not a word, and breath an object which is
not an object’. The word silence can never represent silence. The sign and
sign systems betray the no-meaning nature of certain phenomena. Vygotsky
(1997) suggests in contrast that the unconscious does not exist unless is
mediated through a psychophysiological process (119), which in dialectical
psychology is dominated by ‘the system of reversible reflexes’ (77), i.e.
words, utterances.

Therefore, Derrida’s method is to keep the old name of writing for a
new concept that alludes to that which is not susceptible to
conceptualisation. The core characteristics of writing are:

(1) the break with the horizon of communication as the communication of
consciousness or presences, and as the linguistic or romantic transport of
meaning;
(2) the subtraction of all writing from the semantic horizon or the
hermeneutic horizon which, at least as a horizon of meaning, lets itself
be punctured by writing;
(3) the necessity of, in a way, separating the concept of polysemy from the
concept I have elsewhere named dissemination, which is also the concept
of writing;
(4) the disqualification or the limit of the concept of the ‘real’ or ‘linguistic’
context, whose theoretical determination or empirical saturation are,
strictly speaking, rendered impossible or insufficient by writing. (Derrida
1982, 316)

What do these nuclear characteristics entail? First, that writing is an attitude,
a sovereign stance that is well beyond some utilitarian aim of attaining
knowledge or knowing the truth. Second, that writing involves a
decomposition of the metaphysics of presence, and particularly of speech.
Third, that writing is a new philosophical method that operates to produce a
clash between opposite metaphysical categories, which constitutes the locus
of difierance. In the case of writing in a foreign language, we face first and
foremost the opposition of two different or dissimilar meaning systems or
what I would call allelosemia. And fourth, the rejection or suppression of
normalised ideas of linguistic context, especially the conventional ideas
of national contexts. Writing is the context.

The principle of complementarity
Overall, by discarding the inexplicable, the Hegelian position recycles
sovereignty, negativity, into a system governed by presence, the presence
that is at the foundations of metaphysics, of repression of the non-verbal
and immediate that Derrida (1997) unveils in Of Grammatology. Bataille, in
Erotism, encapsulates the dialectical tradition’s stance: ‘...in Hegel’s mind
the immediate is bad’ (Bataille 1986, 255). This also amounts to a form of
simulacrum or repetitive representations of sacrifice: it tames the negativity
of the sacrifice, true sovereignty, for the sake of attaining knowledge, and
of sustaining a moral order (see Bataille 1993). More precisely, Derrida points out that

The necessity of logical continuity is the decision or interpretative milieu of all Hegelian interpretations. In interpreting negativity as labor, in betting for discourse, meaning, history, etc., Hegel has bet against play, against chance. He has blinded himself to the possibility of his own bet, to the fact that the conscientious suspension of play (for example, the passage through the certitude of oneself and through lordship as the independence of self-consciousness) was itself a phase of play; and to the fact that play includes the work of meaning or the meaning of work, and includes them not in terms of knowledge, but in terms of inscription: meaning is a function of play, is inscribed in a certain place in the configuration of a meaningless play. (Derrida 2001, 329)

Here we have reached an epistemological dead end stemming from ontological differentials. On the one hand, we have the dialectical tradition with no account of meaning losses, the negative outcome of sovereign activity. In effect, the dialectical tradition reduces true sovereignty to lordship, transforming it into knowledge, providing order to the world, producing a moral stance that is based on reason. Thus, Vygotsky’s attempts to use the deconstructing power of the alphabetic script as a means to inquire into sign systems, becoming a form of scientific inquiry, are condemned to be apprehended again by the systemic structure of the dialectical method, by the positive of presence, and of speech. What is for Derrida, on the other hand, the killer sovereign act? It is writing. Writing is the method of dismantling the metaphysics of presence, the negation of negativity, of death, a method of destructing the moral order of philosophy, the door that opens the way to chaos and to what Bernstein, as already seen, qualifies as the unthinkable, that place where knowledge shows its weaknesses. And yet, even if, from a philosophical point of view we are persuaded to adopt Derrida’s deconstruction and the anti-epistemology of a general economy, as Plotnitsky (1994) does in Complementarity, we seem, within the domain of pedagogies, unable to get rid of restricted economies, at least until the learner has mastered metaphysics or tasted its limitations. The problem we face is that deconstruction is not a gratuitous task. Deconstruction has often been misinterpreted as a game, as a baseless and unmerited stance, akin to a brief irrational diversion. However, Derrida’s approach requires disclosing discursive gaps. That can only be accomplished by way of mastering classic knowledge and sustaining a lengthy praxis. As Plotnitsky asserts, the ‘dislocation created by a general economy is never a simple or uncritical dismissal of classical theories, but is instead their rigorous suspension’ (11). So we are in pedagogic activity one step behind incorporating the genuine principle of complementarity proposed by Plotnitsky. We need reason and philosophy in order to set up moral orientations, reproduce the social order and help subjects to take
control over their lives, to help them to emancipate themselves within a given world, but also, if we have any chance of changing the social order, of overcoming the discursive gap, we need to act on deconstructing speech and truth, we need to take a sovereign stance.

I believe writing, especially writing in a foreign language, can provide a complementary move between these two reaches until learners are ready to embark on Derrida’s anti-epistemological method by themselves and adopt a genuinely complementary stance.

Pedagogies of writing in a foreign language
I am proposing to operate with a principle of preliminary complementarity in which writing produces, on the one hand, a move toward objectivised semiosis or reason, that is, a Vygotskian move that interpellates phenomena and their analytical constructs, and on the other hand, a move toward destructive construction or poiesis. This is an epistemically compromised and contradictory position in which no integration is possible. In other words, all we have left is to work by complementing both moves until the classical theories are superseded by a general economy. In regards to pedagogies, this means that tasks will be given to produce independently one of these moves. Thus, there will be writing tasks aiming mainly at exploring the world of things and the categories deployed to give shape to that reality, or to analyse it; and there will be writing tasks aiming mainly at producing a sovereign stance. In the case of the latter, since this stance is precisely about a confrontation with non-meaning, it is impossible to control, interpret (and even evaluate) the product of these tasks, and therefore I will try to situate the texts within the pedagogical context but I will refrain from interpreting them. We will see now examples of both.

Reason and the intensification of language’s representational function
Under the ‘classical concept of writing’ Derrida (1982) believes that a ‘written sign … is not exhausted in the present of its inscription’ (317) and, furthermore, ‘carries with it a force of breaking with its context, that is, the set of presences which organize the moment of its inscription’ (317). For Derrida, this ‘force of breaking is not an accidental predicate, but the very structure of the written’ (317). In fact, I argue, by focusing on writing instead of speaking in a foreign language, this intrinsic characteristic of writing helps to substantiate the fissures and cracks of pedagogic discourse, intensifying language’s representational function. Let us see how this may operate in a language class.

An example of how the pedagogic device operates as a recontextualisation apparatus in foreign language pedagogies in Japan is given by Hashimoto’s (2000) research on the Japanese politics of internationalisation through
education. Hashimoto concludes that the Japanese government’s discourse of promoting globalisation through the teaching of English is ‘in reality only a different form of promotion of Japaneseness’ (49). The teaching of foreign languages may produce the opposite to its apparent intended effect as students, far from adopting a new foreign identity, reassert their own Japanese identity no matter how alien to the local context the pedagogies being deployed may appear to be (e.g. pedagogies associated with the communicative approach or task-based instruction). What Hashimoto refers to is the fact that in conversation classes, students do not seem able to engage in discussing topics or issues because they do not seem to have anything to say. Reasserting their Japaneseness, in opposition to the identity of the speaker of the foreign language, may be a strategy to fill up a missing content (40–41). Students may be urged to state ‘We the Japanese…’ in circumstances where in the past they did not explicitly assume that identity, for the customary is implicit. Now, this sounds like the normal outcome of having students redefining their own assumptions and in fact reveals a form of subject development that is welcome but dangerous, if the process is left unfinished. This intermediary stage ignores or neglects reason and therefore is only equivalent to the move from a natural religion to a positivist one, that is, what was customary morality (e.g. the way of the Japanese, the way of the Spaniards, the way of the English), and therefore implicit, is now explicit and backed up by the authority deriving from the right to cultural determination. Yet, excluding reason from the rights that correspond to each and every one of the faculties of the human spirit is, as Hegel (1978, 141) points out, a system that abhors human beings, for it may condone injustice. What Hegel is saying is that in order to avoid the problem we have to set as a benchmark the ideal of absolute reason, that is, a systemic analysis of the constructs of reality is required in order to avoid arbitrariness. Well, writing is one way to avoid leaving subjects in the limbo of cultural relativism.

In my writing class, if students are given an essay to write about almost any topic, their first attempt reflects the development of an explicit national point of view, as Hashimoto pointed out. Thus, if the task is the analysis of the widespread use by the Japanese of the surgical mask in everyday life, the assumed point of view is that of ‘We the Japanese’, even if ‘Japanese’ are referred to in the third grammatical person, that is, ‘They, the Japanese’. Most students argue that Japanese wear surgical masks in the public transport system, the school, the office, the street, etc., ‘to prevent virus from spreading and to avoid getting hay fever’, and ‘many women use them too to hide their faces when they have not applied make-up’. This process may include setting an in-group/out-group distinction such as ‘I believe foreigners do not have that idea’ (notice the word ‘foreigners’ helps to reassert the point of view of the Japanese). Yet, very few students are ready to question the widespread uses of the surgical mask by Japanese society at large. It is only when they are asked to re-read what they have written and
apply a *scientific point of view* that challenges the beliefs of the Japanese and their social practices that they start backing away from their in-group position. In the second draft, they start moving toward a more critical review of the use of the surgical mask. Some conclude: ‘Japanese are always afraid of getting and making other people sick. However, their use of the surgical mask works more like a talisman against diseases than a real way of protecting themselves’. Others write that ‘by wearing surgical masks in everyday situations people are signalling that they may not be able to perform well and therefore request some kind of respect for their personal space, especially in places in which there is a lack of personal space such as crowded trains’. The final review of the topic will comprise the transfer of the analytical apparatus to the analysis of societies other than the Japanese. Many conclude that no matter how developed a society may seem, they always create rituals which are at odds with mainstream science. In summary, they have moved away from the in-group/out-group binary logic. The adoption of the point of view of the cultural anthropologist or sociologist helps students develop this position and in my class I teach a few methods drawn from these disciplines, including participant observation, and we spend time analysing sociological reports on customary societal behaviour. Eventually, the argumentative requirements imposed by the essay as a genre will be recognised first and foremost as analytical tools that can be directed to analyse the constitution of the foreign identity, but that is better done through the introduction of scientific conceptual systems (see Vygotsky 1987; Hedegaard 2002).

I would suggest further that writing not only demands attention to the representational function of the foreign language and consequently a clear reflexive-intensive teaching and learning approach, but that this explicit reflexivity extends to those socio-communicative aspects of the foreign language such as the position of *speakers* or the context. In writing it is easier to track down a change in the grammatical voice that may signal the social positioning of the addressee. An essay that begins with an aseptic ‘people wear surgical masks…’ may later turn into ‘we believe that wearing surgical masks…’ The attention of the student can be easily brought to these aspects by virtue of the written sign. In certain written genres of what we could call objective writing such as the essay, the journalistic report or the thesis, the authorial voice tends to assume the position of a more knowledgeable subject, even if the discourse is exploratory. This may be at odds with the assumed communication apprehension of Japanese students and may operate as a call to overcome the barrier of status-related behaviour, which seems to be dominant in conversational contexts involving Japanese and non-Japanese speakers (see Lucas 1984; Kowner 2002).

The problem is how to help students move away from their existing subject and assume a social position they have never experienced, even if it is through a sort of play or pretence. Can students situate themselves in an
unknown social context that is explicitly transmitted, internalise and appropriate it, and make it their own?

The displacing power of writing in a foreign language comes precisely from its relative avoidance of the untamed socio-communicative dimension of the conversation class, which writing restricts to an imaginary author–reader relation.

Writing as poiesis

The idea behind tasks involving poiesis is to facilitate students in the adoption of a sovereign stance. Drawing on Fernández’s (2012) pedagogies of microtexts, I have developed a few tasks, each one lasting at least three or four 90-minute sessions, in which intermediate students explore the structural limitations of script and representation in general, without a particular utilitarian aim in mind. The main activity is the writing of microtexts. The only requisite is that the text length cannot exceed 140 characters, the length of social networking microblogging messages known as tweets.

These texts may well fall under the aims Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais advanced in their literature workshop Oulipo (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle) in Paris in 1960. They believed that artistic invention and playfulness was linked to the imposition of rules or structural constraints (see Lescure 2003; Lapprand 1998). The microtext task compels the author to draw on other stable or widely known discursive forms such as locutions, short poems, and prosaic verse or prose such as aphorisms, citations or advertising.

The writing of microtexts, especially of poems, is something with strong connections to Japanese poetry. Students quickly make the task their own and start writing short texts. For instance, about love, they write:

1. ‘...And they lived happily ever after. The End.’ Love, like in all tales, is only found in books.
2. I want a handsome boy. Japanese boys are cowards.
3. Love is what you find after the morning has broken.
4. If the husband does not give enough money, the wife divorces him.

Some of them (microtexts 1, 2 and 4) could also be considered anti-poems, the kind of poetry proposed by Nicanor Parra, using humour, everyday language, and sometimes mathematical and algebraic signs to break away from the seriousness and conventions of classic forms (see Grossman 1975; Parra 2004). Thus, whilst there are some examples of what could be considered classic or romantic poems (microtext 3), most of the students’ productions go against the conventions of traditional poetry.
Other microtexts reinterpret human experiences with objects that are found in everyday life, such as these two texts about vending machines:

(1) It is so sad when the cover does not completely open and my hand cannot reach the drink.
(2) She is waiting by the corner in order to make money. I go toward her to kill my thirst.

Some microtexts are incipient *calligrams*, that is, poems in which the script is arranged so as to create a visual image. The calligram is a kind of poetic art cultivated by Guillaume Apollinaire, Stéphane Mallarmé and Vicente Huidobro, among others. Because of their visual nature, reading them aloud would be a reductionist rendition, and most of the time an impossible task. An example of this is microtext 7, a representation of university life:

(1) For students, the week goes by like this: MONDAAAAAY, TUESDAAAAAY, WEDNESDAAAAAY, THURSDAAAAAY, FRIDAAAAAY, saturday and sunday.

It uses both visual (i.e. use of upper and lower case) and phonetic representations (i.e. extending the sound *a* in words referring to weekdays) in order to produce a hierarchical distinction between weekdays and weekend days.

In summary, there are many connections between Derrida’s grammatology and the *Oulipo* (see Tufail 1999), calligrams, anti-poetry and other writing devices that are worth exploring (see Derrida and Attridge 1992). In order to achieve sovereignty in a pedagogic context, I would like to stress the necessity of setting up structural constraints or rules, to liberate writing from any utilitarian aim. It may be the product of my own bias, but my experience tells me that many students for the first time feel empowered to embark on a personal discovery journey rather than following someone else’s steps. The sovereign stance creates an anti-pedagogising field. Sovereignty cannot be taught.

**Conclusion**

Where do we stand in regards to language, or its sociological rendition ‘discourse’, writing and subjective transformation? Well, it seems that writing in a foreign language may be central to any serious endeavour of transforming the subjects involved in the pedagogical process of learning a foreign language. Whether we choose Derrida’s deconstructionist approach or the immanent critique method of the dialectical tradition – or even the complementary approach whereby we adopt both approaches at once – writing is at the base of both objectivised semiosis and poeisis. The question I find hard to answer is: who are we as educators to engage in this
transformative process, taking into account that deconstruction operates as a
form of radical liberation that brings human beings back to a standstill, an
aesthetic and epistemic standstill where the modern ideals of ‘progress’ and
‘truth’ are cancelled? And, who are we as educators to assume a
hierarchically higher position, to stand above learners, dominate them with
the promise that, after they pay their dues, they will be able to make
choices or change the world we have planned for them because we, at this
particular time, know better?

Learners’ resistances seem paradoxically blissful; they may bring back
some form of equilibrium into the asymmetric instructor–student
relationship. Are the students who resist learning a foreign language afraid
of reconfiguring their social relations? Are they afraid of dissolving their
essential national selves or identities that seem more feasible, given the
structural constraints and affordances regulated by social class, by the
discursive gap, by the administration of the unthinkable? Are they afraid of
losing themselves in the chaos of the unthinkable? Or is it fair to say that
their resistance is part of a more subtle standpoint aimed at dissolving the
(fake) sovereign stance imposed by their – usually boring – masters?

Alternatively, are the students who are committed to learning a foreign
language invested in losing themselves, as I was when I started learning
English and took refuge from my own Chilean identity? What are
committed language learners taking refuge from?

In summary, the more-knowledgeable–less-knowledgeable relation in
Vygotsky’s ZPD, for all it is worth in accounting for subjective
transformations, does not seem able to capture the subtleties of domination
and emancipation within the pedagogic relation. If we stand by Derrida,
pedagogies that rely on the metaphysics of presence are just another set of
fantasies or collective delusion, another form of taming the true sovereign
stance that only emerges in the act of writing, which is beyond presence or
negativity, but is still fundamentally an analytical process.

Note
1. Cited texts in Spanish have been produced by students who took my writing
course in 2012. The texts were published at the end of that year under the
condition that individual authors could not be identified. The English translation
is mine.

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Consciousness differentials, social regulation and discursive forms: Twitter as a battlefield of moral stances

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Abstract

Twitter constitutes an arena in which moral stances and appeals for action, including discourse, fight for recognition. Bernstein's theory of codes was used to construct categories for the classification of tweets favoured by followers of a Mexican poet. Data analysis shows the conformation of two groups of users: on the one hand, those 'insiders' who can appreciate a critical discourse and who can free themselves from structural length limits (only 140 characters per message) and appreciate fragmented forms of distributed cognition syntagmatically joined; and, on the other, 'outsiders' who do not appreciate those forms of critical discourse and prefer self-contained messages such as aphorisms with unitary forms of distributed cognition, which ultimately depend upon the agglomerating pull of everyday language. Even if Twitter does not impose structural limitations to prevent the development of horizontal social relationships, the findings show that boundaries and cleavages are created by discourse itself. Unitary forms of distributed cognition, associated with 'outsiders' deal with knowledge beyond theoretical reach; whereas fragmented forms, associated with insiders, deal with a complex mix between theoretical generalisation and practical reasoning.

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1. Introduction

His concern for the way the mind fluctuates between heights and depths of feeling and thought, his interest in tracing these movements, and his belief in the place of aphoristic expression in finding or creating a 'balance between them'—these are the important developments for [Wallace] Stevens during this 1898–1912 period when he wrote very little poetry. (Coyle, 1976, p. 207)

If we want to understand how pedagogic processes shape consciousness differentially, I do not see how this can be done without some means of analysing the forms of communication which bring this about. (Bernstein, 2000, p. 4)

The purpose of the present paper is to explore the links between consciousness, discursive forms, discursive context, subject position and forms of social regulation on Twitter, the online social networking and microblogging service that allows its users to read text-based messages of up to 140 characters known as tweets. I am interested in Twitter for two fundamental reasons. First, Twitter has been designed or has the potential to sustain horizontal social relations. In this regard, it is a discursive platform with very limited forms of organisational regulation embedded in its technological structure. Unlike other internet resources, Twitter lacks participants' access and message distribution controls. Thus, whilst a mailing list might have an owner who controls members'

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access and postings that might be moderated. Twitter has none of those mechanisms of control in place. In other words, Twitter represents an ideal discursive platform that could be associated with notions such as access equality and freedom of speech and information. Second, in Twitter discourse is presented in written form and therefore it has the potential to develop forms of reflection similar to scientific knowledge. Yet the platform does not support distributing the lengthy forms of written speech which characterise the kind of abstraction and generality typical of the sciences (see, for instance, Derrida, 1997 and Muller’s discussion of common sense–uncommon sense cline [2007]). It is as if the creators of Twitter designed the platform to block its scientific potential and focus it on forms of exchange that resemble oral speech, yet scientific-based discourse is smuggled in Twitter in different ways.

The questions I am asking deal with how subjects understand and position themselves toward different forms of discourse and social regulation afforded by the platform. A mixed research method design was used for a case study that examines the discursive production of a Mexican poet located in Mexico City. The poet, together with other users of Twitter, explores the poetic possibilities of the platform and uses it to air his social criticism. On the one hand, Bernstein’s (2000) theory of codes was deployed in order to categorise forms of discourse belonging to the Mexican poet. On the other hand, those discursive forms were tested to check for correspondence between discursive forms, social regulation and their appreciation by groups of followers according to their relationship with the poet. Finally, the findings are discussed especially for the implications they may have on understanding new forms of distributed cognition and determining the limitations and affordances of public debate in social networks.

2. Literature review: Twitter as a battlefield of moral stances

In the present paper, I am extending Bernstein’s notion of pedagogic discourse to a realm that may not be considered obviously pedagogic, as is the case with the spontaneous social activity mediated by Twitter. I argue, however, that this notion can be deployed to analyse any kind of discourse whether pedagogic or not. In my view discourse is intrinsically pedagogic because in its (a) quest for public recognition, being subject to the logic of social positioning, must (b) assert, by proposition or opposition, certain ideas about the social order and (c) draw on certain mechanisms which essentially amount to operations of recontextualising discourse itself.

In a nutshell, whether pedagogic or not, discourse is speech subject to the logic of and enabling the distribution of forms of activity related to social projects which advance an ideal social order through discursive means. The access to discursive means, especially of discursive means in the fields of production of complex discursive traditions (e.g., a scientific field), is normally regulated by educational institutions—that is what we call pedagogy—, however there is always pedagogic activity involved in the appropriation of any discursive form, even in contexts that are not considered pedagogic. Thus, learning the talk of a company, association or club implies certain pedagogic development.

Let me begin with the two functions of (pedagogic) discourse: recontextualisation and segmentation. For Bernstein, pedagogic discourse is basically a recontextualising principle of social order:

I will define pedagogic discourse as a rule which embeds two discourses; a discourse of skills of various kinds and their relations to each other, and a discourse of social order. Pedagogic discourse embeds rules which create skills of one kind or another and rules regulating their relationship to each other, and rules which create social order .... Often people in schools and in classrooms make a distinction between what they call the transmission of skills and the transmission of values. These are always kept apart as if there were a conspiracy to disguise the fact that there is only one discourse.

([Bernstein, 2000, p. 31–32])

Thus, whether one deploys a series of theoretical concepts to build a case or not—that is, to clothe an opinion in the gown of science—those theoretical concepts are a function of human projects or certain views about what long-term goals society should set and how it should be organised in order to attain them. Intermediate organisations such as institutions—and in our case a single individual—appropriate the discourses that are being created in actual fields of production—or distributed through educational institutions—and recontextualise them, which amounts to what Bernstein (2000) refers to as a discursive gap (p. 29). However, the kind of discourse deployed corresponds to forms of realisation of knowledge that are vertical, which is to say they take the form of a coherent, explicit and systematically principled structure, hierarchically organised as in the sciences, or ... the form of a series of specialised languages with specialised modes of interrogation and specialised criteria for the production and circulation of texts as in the social sciences and humanities.

([Bernstein, 2000, p. 157])

The segmentation function, in contrast, is the kind of pedagogic process whose outcome is an informal or spontaneous learning experience. Its outcome may be defined as spontaneous but subject, for instance, to historical trajectories and traditions that play a role in reproducing mores and customs. Bernstein calls it segmentation because ‘the pedagogy is exhausted in the context of its enactment, or is repeated until the particular competence is acquired’ (2000, p. 159); thus, there is no connection between one context and another. The problems of everyday life are specific and are solved most of the time not by resorting to scientific knowledge but by learning through experience, imitating what other individuals do or listening to the voice of experience. This amounts to a form of discursive horizontalism.

Because Twitter lacks structural forms of hierarchisation of pedagogic relations, it may be considered to be the ultimate battlefield of moral stances and of discursive forms. In Twitter subjects not only take position but also compete for recognition through discursive practices, drawing on scientific and nonscientific discourses alike. However, the apparent horizontality of Twitter is not an end to the conscious differentials of subjects, for they are a function of the subjects’ access to or appreciation of different forms of discourse.
How can this be so? Unlike other theories of cultural reproduction (e.g., Bourdieu's sociological approach), Bernstein views discourse as reproducing in its own inner logic the external power relations that shape it. This suggests that the power field does not shape discursive practices from without but the structure of those discursive practices gives rise to the power field. Thus, for Bernstein, symbolic systems are at the same time realisations and regulators of the structure of social relationships. In other words, different forms of discourse carry within themselves and generate social differentials.

I will now introduce Bernstein's views on how discourse structures consciousness, a subject that falls under his more general *theory of codes*, and I will try to give a comprehensive definition of discourse.

### 2.1. Discourse, social class and consciousness differentials

*Codes, or speech systems,* as Bernstein (1971) calls them in their earliest formulation, 'create for their speakers different orders of relevance and relation that amount to consciousness differentials. The experience of the speakers may then be transformed by what is made significant or relevant by different speech systems' (p. 112).

Bernstein holds that the degree of complexity of the social division of labour manifests in the coding orientation: that is, in the orientation to meanings:

> The simpler the social division of labour, and the more specific and local the relation between an agent and its material base, the more direct the relation between meanings and a specific material base, and the greater the probability of a restricted coding orientation. The more complex the social division of labour, the less specific and local the relation between an agent and its material base, the more indirect the relation between meanings and a specific material base, and the greater the probability of an elaborated coding orientation.

[(Bernstein, 1990, p. 20)]

This implies that elaborated and restricted codes have different values in terms of predicting semantic (lexical) and syntactic selections:

> In the case of an elaborated code, the speaker will select from a relatively extensive range of alternatives and the probability of predicting the organizing elements is considerably reduced. In the case of a restricted code the number of these alternatives is often severely limited and the probability of predicting the elements is greatly increased.

[(Bernstein, 1971, p. 98)]

Thus, we see that in an elaborated coding orientation the discourse, if it is going to be understood by the listener, is self-explanatory, as it draws from different sources, contexts or traditions. As Bernstein (1971) asserts, 'meanings will have to be expanded and raised to the level of verbal explicitness' (p. 101). In contrast, in the restricted coding orientation, because speaker and listener both share the base or context, the discourse does not need to be self-explanatory. Questions and explanations that make use of everyday or spontaneous concepts represent succinct forms of discourse, as 'meanings are likely to be concrete, descriptive or narrative rather than analytical or abstract' (Bernstein, 1971, p. 100).

Overall, this implies that subjects who possess a determined coding orientation have more or less chances of understanding, appreciating and producing different forms of discourse. This amounts to a consciousness differential that Bernstein (2000) sees as regulated by social class (p. 89). Social classes regulate the access to the sacred or the ideal, to use Durkheim's terms (Durkheim, 1915, p. 440). In sum, different forms of socialisation, shaped by class structure, orient the individual toward different forms of (speech) codes, which in turn control access to relatively context-tied or context-independent meanings, structuring the individual's experience as well. Thus, we may widen our notion of discourse. For Bernstein, *discourse* is socially situated speech, and therefore it works as both a sociolinguistic and a psychological notion.

These forms of discourse are in turn correlated (in unknown ways) with particular forms of knowledge and different strategies for the circulation of discourse (which Bernstein calls *distribution rules*), social relations and forms of acquisition. In a few words, *discourse* in the theory of codes must be viewed as a relational category that groups the following determinants: *speech, distribution, knowledge structure and pedagogic code*.

We have seen so far that vertical discourse carries within itself views of the social order, and horizontal discourse does the same, although in forms restricted by the nature of its segmentation. The learning of vertical forms of discourse (such as physics, mathematics, literature and almost any subject that is explicitly taught) is enabled by horizontal discourse. As Bernstein points out, instruction is a function of social regulation (2000, p. 32): he sees in the acquisition of horizontal discourse 'the major cultural relay' (p. 158). Instruction in vertical discourse is, nonetheless, in its purest and most idealistic form predicated on establishing certain social hierarchies based on knowledge differentials, as it is impossible for learners to figure out by themselves the whole conceptual network without help from someone who is familiar with it. Vertical discourse is, after all, the result of uncommon sense.

The knowledge structure, which is ancillary to the overarching project of a science or theoretical system, for an underlying and unifying concept plays a role in determining the instruments or methods of transmission, but there is no direct correlation, first and foremost because instruction is not only a recontextualisation process but *recontextualisation is a necessary process* in which control is passed from a more knowledgeable to a less knowledgeable person, which amounts to a pedagogic code. I argue that the knowledge structure can only be analysed with regard to (a) the project a particular science or theoretical system accomplishes and (b) the pedagogic realisations needed to teach it and learn it. However, the structure in itself is a worthless reification.
Finally, discourse is subject to the logic of its distribution, as it is the major enabler of human projects. Bernstein highlights the particularities of the circulation of different forms of knowledge and discourse. He introduces the notions of repertoire and reservoir. The former refers to the ‘set of strategies and their analogic potential possessed by any one individual’, whilst the latter refers to the ‘total of sets and its potential of the community as a whole’ ([Bernstein, 2000, p. 158]). The relative isolation of members explains the different dynamics of the circulation of strategies:

the greater the reduction of isolation and exclusion then the greater the social potential for the circulation of strategies, or procedures and their exchange… Now any restriction to circulation and exchange reduces effectiveness. Any restriction specialises, classifies and privatises knowledge.

One may then argue that the nature of horizontal discourse, of being common to everyone, implies strategies for what Bernstein calls ‘maximising encounters with persons and habitats’ (2000, p. 157). The distribution rules for hierarchical discourse, however, are based on the principle of distributing different knowledge to different groups or individuals. Thus, for Bernstein, pedagogic discourse cannot be analysed without bringing in the logic of its distribution and the modality of its transmission (e.g., its pedagogic code), for the form of transmission is linked to the discourse’s capacity for integration or exclusion.

3. The empirical study: a Mexican poet in Twitter

The major participant in the present study is a Mexican poet based in Mexico City. He would like to be identified by his Twitter username @cruzarzabal. The ‘at’ sign (@) is used in Twitter to designate users’ identities. I contacted him in June 2011 in order to carry out the study, although, as a Twitter user myself, I had come across his postings a few months before. Even though I invited a dozen users I had met online to participate in the study, @cruzarzabal was the only one who was keen to answer my questions and get involved. It is hard to assess why I got such a low response ratio from potential participants because nobody turned down my request in an explicit way, justifying their lack of interest. They just ignored my proposal.

From the beginning there were a number of problems with narrowing down the scope of the study, for Twitter does not present fixed boundaries. Users follow other users’ postings but this does not mean that they do it reciprocally. Thus, it is extremely hard to locate what constitutes a group or not. In fact, @cruzarzabal is not keen on the use of the term group in Twitter to designate clusters of users who more or less follow their own discursive production. In this regard, a group is defined here in a non-essentialist way. As @cruzarzabal points out,

what I believe is that I have created networks of interests and affection with users who follow each other and make comments. Sometimes, it might be thought that I belong to such and such circle of friends because we play the same word games and have common references (many of them only understandable to those who follow the majority of common users), but I do not feel part of a community because I seldom follow all the users who take part in these dynamics.

Eventually, I ended up limiting the scope of the study to provide an account of how users responded to @cruzarzabal’s discursive production. This was done through a rather unusual way for a social research study since the information from users was already made public through the Web. This may be contested with ethical principles regulating consensual usage of information, but as Wilkinson and Thelwall (2011) conclude regarding the research of personal information on the public Web, ‘the default position is almost the reverse of that for traditional social science research: the text authors should not be asked for consent nor informed of the participation of their texts’ (p. 387). Nevertheless, as Wilkinson and Thelwall also point out, ‘steps should be taken to ensure that text authors are anonymous in academic publications, even when their texts and identities are already public’ (p. 387). In our case, however, the textual information from users amounted to a mere ‘like’, which made it very difficult to trace back to their source. Furthermore, in order to protect their identity, users’ usernames other than @cruzarzabal have been kept anonymous in the present publication.

Our poet usually meets online with other users at 9:00 PM to start exploring Twitter’s capabilities as a poetry-writing platform:

I have common concerns with many users who know each other. The main one is literature, as in reading and practicing it. This makes me share a series of topics with these users such as commentary on books, word games, and so forth. However, I have tweets that the most part of this group would not understand (through which I make a critique of the practices of certain literature groups in Mexico that not everyone knows). I also share with them a writing style: caring about orthography, eliminating replies, avoiding hashtags, and so on.

Before I start analysing @cruzarzabal’s discursive production, I would like to describe briefly what makes Twitter a platform worthy of study and how it works. Unlike mailing lists, bulletin boards or blogs, there is no group owner, founder, editor or writer in Twitter with special permissions or privileges. Structurally, hierarchical relations are not supported by the communication platform but are established through the users’ interaction alone, especially if notions such as prestige, authoritatives or fame are brought in from the outside. In other words, Twitter, as a communication platform, is set by default to sustain horizontal relations and no one has more permissions or privileges than anyone else.
Users may read the messages posted by almost everyone who is out there writing through a Twitter account (with the exception of a few protected accounts to which access can be gained only through permission from the owners) just by subscribing to their message streams (i.e., ‘following’ a particular user). Thus, unlike other social network platforms such as Facebook, where friendship is requested to access a user’s personal information, the messages posted by any particular user in Twitter are out there in the public domain and anyone can read them. It is, therefore, a more open and potentially volatile way to access people’s messages and usually brief profiles. If someone dislikes a particular stream of messages, he or she only needs to unfollow its author for that whole stream to disappear from his or her time line (TL); that is, from the record of messages that are listed on one’s account home screen as the posted messages of the users one follows.

Twitter also presents the following features: (a) messages have a length limit of 140 characters; (b) a reply can be made to the sender without the reply reaching the replier’s followers (unless followers track the more private conversation through a ‘follow the conversation’ option); (c) messages can be favourited (fav’ed) by clicking a star or (d) re-sent to the re-sender’s followers through a feature called retweet (RT); and (e) direct one-on-one messages (DM) can be sent only if the users follow one another. Users are (f) notified by Twitter, if they so choose, through an e-mail when someone starts following them but they are not notified when someone unfollows them. The same notification features are now established when users’ messages are fav’ed or retweeted.

3.1. Everyday language, poetry and critical thought

Although Twitter prompts all users to say something about themselves or their current state through the prompt ‘What’s happening?’, users who share common interests with @cruzarzabal rarely reply to that question and prefer to explore Twitter’s poetic potential instead. They may start with a few words and soon elaborate complete verses:

1] Un puente nunca está en medio, un puente es, en realidad, el inicio de una historia.[A bridge is never in the middle; a bridge is in reality the beginning of a story.](@cruzarzabal, June 8, 2011, 2:31 UTC)

2] Quemar las naves para hacer puentes con el humo.[Burn the ships to build bridges with the smoke.]([@cruzarzabal, 2011, June 5–9, 2:25 UTC])

The fact that, unlike the tweets that may answer Twitter’s prompt ‘What’s happening?’, tweets 1 and 2 above do not have primarily the practical (e.g., referential and emotive) function that characterises ‘everyday prosaic language’ but a poetic one [Jakobson, 1971, p. 558], does not make them part of a specialised language, for the level of specialisation of a given text is determined by its degree of closeness to or remoteness from common sense [Martin, 1992]. Common sense implies the existence of a common (tacit) context. In other words, tweets 1 and 2 and tweets such as ‘I don’t have any food left in the fridge’ or ‘I have a hangover’ all share a high degree of closeness to common sense, and share a tacit common context, even if the first two have a primarily poetic function and the last two a practical or prosaic one. Unlike semiotics, poetics is based on the actual fabric of language and therefore is the minimum common denominator of any discursive practice. Poetics is a special form of metalanguage, for it is referred to itself but cannot escape language’s everyday universal substratum, which represents its final judgement measure. Thus, the substratum of poetics is language, and language itself is the commonest of realities. As Jakobson (1985) points out, the ‘poetic function is not the sole function of verbal art but only its dominant, determining function, whereas in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent’ (p. 116). These two kinds of tweets will therefore be merged into one category called poetic-prosaic tweets.

This is not the case, however, with critical thought. Besides poetry, @cruzarzabal and the users that share his interests engage quite often in criticism such as in the following series of tweets:

3] Según un comerciante de arte que vende máscaras de luchadores en París, éstas son objetos contraculturales, no de masas. No entendió nada.[According to an art dealer who sells wrestlers’ masks in Paris, these are countercultural, not objects of mass culture. He did not understand anything.]([@cruzarzabal, 2011, June 5–9, 14:29 UTC])

4] La lucha libre es un fenómeno de masas populares, negarle ese carácter es desconocerlo, es normalizar su complejidad haciéndolo panfleto.[Pro wrestling is a phenomenon of the popular masses. To deny that characteristic is to show ignorance; it is to normalise its complexity and turn it into a pamphlet.]([@cruzarzabal, 2011, 14:31 UTC])

5] Es continuar la idea de que ser ‘tercermundista’ es una condición moral y política natural, es el buen salvaje posmoderno y rentable.[It is to perpetuate the idea that being a ‘third-world person’ is a natural moral and political condition; it is the postmodern and profitable good savage.]([@cruzarzabal, 2011, 14:35 UTC])

Critical thought constitutes a form of discourse detached from common sense because such a discourse can only be understood if the conceptual system that informs it—that is, its theoretical framework—is shared and its intent is understood, regardless of the level...
of agreement one may have with its propositional content and intent. Furthermore, following Bernstein’s theory of codes, elaborated discourse, with its syntactic unpredictability, demands that texts be self-explanatory and, therefore, they tend to be lengthy. The context is less stable and implicit and needs to be clarified as well. Restricted discourse, on the contrary, occurs in a system in which speakers tacitly share a common repertoire of meanings. Context is less variable and, therefore, texts are shorter. In conclusion, we may assert that a continuum exists from common sense to uncommon sense, accompanied by a similar continuum that moves from shorter to longer textual extension.

Thus, it is not a surprise that tweets expressing critical thought refer to systems of thought that cannot be directly inferred from common sense. In the case of tweets 3, 4 and 5 above, they all refer to notions that are part of subjects such as cultural studies (mass culture and countercultural) or political thought (good savage and natural order). Verbs and expressions seem extracted from a cultural studies textbook or paper: ‘normalise its complexity’, ‘turn it into a pamphlet’, and ‘deny that characteristic’. The syntactic structure of the discourse resembles the work of a scholar. Furthermore, even if tweet 4 is self-contained, tweets 4 and 5 can only be understood fully in connection with tweet 3, so they constitute a series. Yet tweets 4 and 5 do modify tweet 3, forming, eventually, a network of interrelated texts—a true syntagma. We will call tweets 4 and 5 distributed-critical-thought tweets. In general, we may say that the discursive requirements of an elaborated discourse drastically challenge the tweet’s length limit, requiring a full set or a series of tweets. This kind of tweets demands more attention from readers than independent-critical-thought tweets, that is, tweets that address the same theoretical concerns but are expressed in a unitary, non fragmented way.

These distinctions are important because they impose boundaries between users, for certain users will not be able to become true co-subjects and share common forms of discourse if they cannot access a common repertoire of meanings and objects (Leont’ev, 1992).

3.2. The expanded and expanded-distributed-critical-thought tweets

There are two more levels of decontextualisation. The first level corresponds to what I will call the expanded tweet and refers to tweets that refer either to other tweets or to internet sites through a hyperlink. There is no reason to make true sense of such a tweet but by following the link and reading what you find there:

[6]hace seis meses de este tuit que me gusta particularmente: http://t.co/ji7TvwG.[six months have passed since this tweet that I particularly like: http://t.co/ji7TvwG.]

[(@cruzarzabal, 2011, 4:33 UTC)]

In this case, the link refers to another tweet by @cruzarzabal:

[7]mi abuela acostumbra guardarlo todo. En sus cajones, la memoria de las cosas; en sus arrugas, la memoria de sus amantes. Memoriosos pliegues.[my grandmother has the custom of keeping everything. In her drawers, the memory of things; in her wrinkles, the memory of her lovers. Folds of remembrance.][@cruzarzabal, November 20, 2011, 2:26 UTC]

The second level of decontextualisation already referred to above is represented by a tweet that mixes an independent- or distributed-critical tweet with an expanded one. In this case there may be a mix of a critical thought worded succinctly and a referral to an external reference that supplements the view.


In this particular instance @cruzarzabal seems to oppose outsourcing, which is the subject of the magazine article to which tweet 8 links. This kind of tweet will be called expanded-distributed. Another characteristic is that these kinds of tweets may be posted sporadically, building up a topic that is spread over time. In fact, these tweets may subsume the content or intent of other tweets. Users who closely follow @cruzarzabal may anticipate the content referred to by the link if they recognise the tweet as a true part of a time-spanned topic. The expanded-distributed tweet requires from its reader a complete follow-up, usually forming part of a very long and scattered series. The tweet thread is almost completely disembedded from the system of tweets. It summarises deeply rooted personal convictions. Users who agree with the basic tenets of an expanded-distributed-critical-thought tweet may tend to agree with the particular contents of the whole series. I believe that this kind of tweet is relevant in establishing boundaries (i.e., drawing a line between those who disagree with the moral values of capitalism and everyone else). In fact, this may be a tacit way to introduce powerful intra-subjective and inter-subjective limits and have users assume long-lasting positions, establishing, for instance, alliances amongst them.

To sum up, the tweet (either distributed or self-contained) that makes a critical point but uses a link to an article to back its ethical stance—that is, an expanded-critical-thought tweet—requires from its reader a complete follow-up, as it forms part of a very long and usually scattered series of tweets. The expanded and distributed tweet thread is almost completely disembedded, which is to say that its denotative function is played down in favour of a connotative function that is no longer in the message itself but somewhere else. By calling the tweet thread disembedded, I am referring to the fact that the substratum and the actual communicative potential of the message are no longer in the message itself. The power of connotation lies in the sharing of uncommon sense contexts. In conclusion, disembeddedness is the outcome of (a) formal determinations given by the affordances and constraints of the technological platform (i.e., character limits and hypertextuality), and (b) content determinations given by the degree of context independence of the
messages (i.e., the mix of everyday and scientific concepts in relation to the presumed context of the readership, and hypertextuality as well).

3.3. Explicit social regulation

There seems to be yet another form of establishing boundaries and that is through tweets that directly qualify a particular user or a certain collective of users in a certain way. These tweets will be called regulatory tweets. They may touch users’ common and more lasting traits or, more punctually, the way they act or have acted.

[9] Para alguien de muy cortas miras como @edmundocc es peor sufrir el tráfico que la violencia y la descomposición social. Pacato. [For someone very shortsighted such as @edmundocc, it is worse to suffer traffic than violence and social decomposition. Prudish. | @cruzarzabal, June 4, 2011, 18:52 UTC]

The regulatory tweet usually includes a declaration of principles that qualifies past performance and therefore refers to a prior tweet or to a network of tweets. In other words, it summarises and qualifies one or a series of interventions. This kind of tweet has a polarising effect, as it requests users to take sides. Users who share that point of view may feel encouraged either to favourite (fav) or RT the tweet, and the decision to fav or RT such tweets is an important one, for it may involve participating in a form of online quarrel.

Both critical-thought and regulatory tweets have regulatory functions and may play an important role in setting ‘us-and-them’ type of boundaries. The former are indirect and implicit; the latter, direct and explicit. They act as a declaration of principles and may try to regulate past or present activity or set a moral boundary that boosts collective cohesion. In conclusion, these two kinds of tweets have a historical dimension as a recontextualisation of a prior tweet or a complete network of tweets.

The next tweet quoted below is an example of a regulatory tweet that touches the problem we introduced earlier concerning the intersection of the practical and poetic functions of language. For @cruzarzabal there is a big difference between those who tweet with poetic ends and those who simply relate what is happening to them.

[10] En tuiter hay gente que hace ficción y gente [sic] que cuenta su vida. Los primeros se divierten, los segundos no entienden. [In Twitter there are people who make fiction and people who tell about their life. The former amuse themselves, the latter do not understand. | @cruzarzabal, November 25, 2010, 19:05 UTC]

3.4. Direct and indirect social regulation: the case of plagiarism

According to @cruzarzabal, discussion of plagiarism is an example of different ways or styles to establish boundaries: ‘it is common to learn about people who steal someone else’s tweets. It has happened to me. There are people who bluntly denounce it and there are people who play it down and in fact consider denouncing plagiarism an imposture. I dislike plagiarists, it bothers me that something like that happens to me but I would never bully someone for committing plagiarism’ (@cruzarzabal, 2011; Bernstein, 1973). For this reason, @cruzarzabal refrained from posting tweets regulating someone else’s behaviour but published tweets that dealt with it in a more indirect way. In the following example, his tweet takes the form of an aphorism that refers to plagiarism in general terms as a phenomenon inside and outside Twitter.

[11] El plagio es el talento de los sin talento. [Plagiarism is the talent of those with no talent.| @cruzarzabal, June 4, 2011, 18:09 UTC]

Plagiarism has been a sort of trending topic amongst users, especially amongst those who hold some poetry-writing pretensions. Many well-thought-out tweets have been plagiarised. The discovery sets in motion a whole chain of RTs and sometimes very crude, blatant, ad hominem recriminations. In other words, it is not difficult to detect plagiarism since the tweets that are being plagiarised are usually relevant and very well-written ones. Thus, the number of favs and RTs starts to grow exponentially, like a snowball. Some tweets return to the original author like a boomerang but with a different signature or with no signature at all. Yet the position taken up by users varies tremendously, since the internet is viewed as a sort of Far West in which there are no law enforcement agencies, except the soft power exerted by public condemnation. Some users tend to subscribe to some kind of lax attitude in terms of enforcing copyrights because they hold some idea of community outside the influence of the markets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Categories of the discursive forms of tweets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aphorisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetic-prosaic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent critical thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributed critical thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulatory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is interesting here is that aphorisms do not involve direct personal attacks on the conduct of someone in particular but they are able to convey the division of what is good or ill through a general thought that, unlike the critical-thought tweet which requires the mastery of a particular discipline, is expressed in everyday, common language. Paradoxically, as Morson (2004) points out, an aphorism can also be classified as a form of quotation: that is, a short, memorable expression that must be quotable (p. 248). In other words, the power of an aphoristic expression lies precisely in the ease with which it can be distributed, which jeopardises its authentication.

It is not my goal to make here a thorough review of the aphoristic form, but I believe aphorisms are an interesting genre of expression for the following reasons: they are (a) an ancient poetic and nonpoetic form for expressing scientific truths or experiences that, as Stevens (1966) asserts, (b) help anchor thought, and may work as (c) a pivot between feelings and thought or between experience and abstraction. For points (b) and (c) above, see Coyle’s (1976) commentary on the role of aphorism in Wallace Stevens’s poetry. More importantly, though, aphorisms, as Morson (2003) points out, (d) ‘share a sense that what it is most valuable to grasp lies beyond our reach’ (p. 421) and therefore introduce some form of mystical knowledge that somehow breakdowns theoretical reason. Compare plagiarism is the talent of those with no talent with see the good side of getting things wrong or Pascal’s (1958) the heart has its reasons, which reason knows nothing of (p. 78). Eventually, Morson concludes that aphorism share the expression of the paradox of method, that is, the methods we deploy to find truth prevent us from seeing it (p. 425).

Finally, Table 1 summarises the tweet categories seen so far with their operational definitions, whilst Fig. 1 summarises the categories of tweets in terms of their coding orientation (from restricted to elaborated) and their form of regulative discourse (from explicit to implicit).

So far, we have seen that disembeddedness is a function of both a context-dependent–context-independent axis and a self-contained–distributed axis: the axis that goes from textual to hypertextual (see Fig. 2). Formal mechanisms available to differ,
distribute or spread discourse (e.g., hypertext in the internet or cross-referencing in a book) bring about cognitive decontextualisation, as they break with stable or foreseeable narrative lines. They produce a cognitive effect. This kind of decontextualisation amounts to a syntagma (e.g., hyperlinked messages). Thus, we have so far two kinds of decontextualisations: (a) discursive decontextualisation and (b) hypertextual decontextualisation. A combination of both amounts to a powerful disembedding process.

Tweets were selected by accessing Favstar.com, a search engine that shows tweets from any user that have been fav’ed at least once by his or her readers. Thus, the search engine shows by default only tweets that have a following. I further narrowed down the selection of tweets to a period of time of one or two months so that I could also build a list of recognisable followers to give to @cruzarzabal. I coded 23 of the @cruzarzabal tweets using the categories listed in Table 1 above. A second appraiser coded them as well. The intercoder reliability was 92%. The 8% on which there was no agreement was evenly distributed between the appraisers. The whole list is contained in Appendix 1.

The whole list of 50 followers represented by their avatars was given to @cruzarzabal on a PowerPoint slide for him to classify them. The criterion of classification was left open. Thus, @cruzarzabal was free to group his followers in the way he saw fit. Initially, the poet classified the followers in four groups, described here in his words. Group 1 contained followers with ‘common readings, interests in literature (or creative wit). I have developed a friendship and working collaboration with them even though I do not personally know them’ (@cruzarzabal, 2011). Group 2 contained followers with the ‘same common characteristics as 1, but the difference is that I personally know them, which in a sense deepens our friendship relationship’ (@cruzarzabal, 2011). Group 3 contained followers that the poet followed because ‘I personally know them, even though their tweets are not particularly interesting’ (@cruzarzabal, 2011). Group 4 comprised followers that ‘I neither follow nor know. I have not been interested in following them or I have unfollowed them’ (@cruzarzabal, 2011). Eventually, groups 1 and 2 were merged into one, forming the group of insiders, and groups 3 and 4 were also merged into one, forming the group of outsiders. To summarise, insiders are those followers who share the poet’s interests in literature, and who share common readings and interests, whilst outsiders do not.

### 4. Statistical methodology

The aim of the statistical analysis was to test the hypothesis that correlative relationships existed amongst two nominal categories of user groups and the frequencies with which they fav’ed the six nominal categories of tweets by @cruzarzabal. Empirically observed...
correlation (covariation or association) is an essential but not a sufficient condition for implying causality (Pearl, 2009). Any underlying causes and effects were ex post facto, and could not be experimentally manipulated by the researcher.

The conceptual and operational definitions of the nominal variables used in the statistical analysis are outlined in Table 2. The categorical data analysis assumed that (a) each category was mutually exclusive, so there was no possibility of overlaps between the categories; and (b) no other categories of users or tweets existed outside those listed in Table 1.

### 4.1. Chi-Square significance test

The null hypothesis for the Chi-Square significance test was that the frequencies in the columns of the contingency table (user groups) were significantly associated with the frequencies in the rows (tweet categories) (see Table 4). The rule decided on was to reject the null hypothesis if \( p < 0.05 \) for the Pearson’s Chi-Squared statistic \( \chi^2 \), computed as follows (where \( O = \) observed frequency, and \( E = \) expected frequency):

\[
\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}.
\]

The expected frequencies for each cell of the contingency table were given by:

\[
E = \frac{\text{row sum} \times \text{column sum}}{\text{grand total}}.
\]

The rejection of the null hypothesis of the Chi-Square test at \( p < 0.05 \) did not axiomatically imply that there was a strong correlation between the user groups and the six tweet categories. The Chi-Square statistic could only be interpreted to infer that the frequency distributions deviated from those expected by random chance, with a 5% probability of making a Type I error (i.e., falsely rejecting the null hypothesis when, in fact, it should not be rejected). The results of a Chi-Square test are very sensitive to sample size. If more than 50% of the cells in a contingency table contain expected frequencies \( < 5 \), then the results may be invalid. Conversely, if the frequencies in each cell of the table are large \( (> 30) \), then the Chi-Square test may provide statistically significant results, even if...

### Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tweet categories</th>
<th>Inertia</th>
<th>User groups</th>
<th>Inertia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aphorisms</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>INSIDERS</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributed critical thought</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>OUTSIDERS</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanded</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent critical thought</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetic-prosaic</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulatory</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
there is no meaningful association between the variables (Agresti, 2007). Consequently, Cramer’s V coefficient was computed to measure the strength of the correlation between the user groups and the tweet categories.

4.2. Cramer’s V

Cramer’s V coefficient is a popular measure of the strength of the correlation between two nominal variables, generating a value between 0 and +1. The stronger the correlation, the more Cramer’s V tends toward +1. The conventional interpretation applied in this study was that V < 0.1 indicated little, if any, correlation; V = .1 to .3 indicated weak correlation; V = .3 to .5 indicated moderately strong correlation; and V > 0.5 indicated strong correlation (Agresti, 2007). Cramer’s V was computed as the square root of the \( \chi^2 \) statistic divided by the sample size (N) multiplied by the smallest dimension in the contingency table (k = the number of rows or columns, depending on which was the smallest) minus 1:

\[
\text{Cramer’s } V = \sqrt{\frac{\chi^2}{N(k-1)}}
\]

The advantage of Cramer’s V is that it factors out the sample size, so that, unlike \( \chi^2 \), it does not automatically increase in magnitude when N is large; however, because \( \chi^2 \) values tend to increase with respect to an increasing number of cells in a contingency table, the greater the difference between the number of rows and columns, the more likely that Cramer’s V tends toward 1.0 without strong evidence of a meaningful correlation. Another limitation of Cramer’s V is that it neither provides any information about which categories are strongly correlated or which are weakly correlated, nor indicates whether the correlation is positive or negative. Correspondence analysis was therefore conducted to provide a better understanding of the relationships between the categories in the contingency table (Table 4).

4.3. Correspondence analysis

Correspondence analysis is commonly used in social science to explore relationships and latent patterns amongst categorical variables collected by surveys (Greenacre, 2007; Greenacre & Blasius, 1994). This method assumed that the variables in the contingency table (Table 3) were significantly associated using the conventional Chi-Square significance test. Correspondence analysis facilitated the extraction of the underlying relationships between the different user group and tweet categories in the tradition of exploratory data analysis, without testing null hypotheses or prescribing a level of statistical significance. A window was opened on the data to visualise categorical relationships in a simplified graphical representation. The high-dimensional information in the cross-tabulation was broken down into two lower dimensions so that each category represented 8.2%.

The two-way contingency table (Table 3) classified the frequencies of the 98 favs posted by the insiders and outsiders into the six prescribed categories. The insiders provided 61 favs, representing 62.3% of the total. The outsiders provided 37 favs, representing 37.7% of the total. Aphorisms and poetic-prosaic tweets were the most frequent, representing 58.2%, followed by independent-critical-thought tweets, representing 33.6%. Expanded and regulatory tweets were the least frequent, representing 8.2%.

A statistically significant association was found between the two user groups and the six tweet categories in the contingency table, indicated by Pearson’s \( \chi^2 \) \( ((N = 98) = 19.476, p = .001) \). The correlation between the frequencies in the columns and rows was moderately strong, as indicated by Cramer’s V = .449.

Each point on the correspondence map (Fig. 3) represented one of the categories in the contingency table. The tweets most closely correlated with the insiders were poetic-prosaic and critical-thought tweets (both self-contained and chain) located in the bottom right-hand quadrant. The tweets most closely correlated with the outsiders were expanded tweets and aphorisms, located in the bottom left-hand quadrant. Regulatory tweets did not correspond closely to either of the user groups; however, there were only three tweets for this category, providing very limited information for the correspondence analysis. Consequently, this point may be erroneous.

Dimensions 1 and 2 explained 100% of the inertia, and therefore a two dimensional solution to the correspondence analysis was satisfactory. Nearly all the inertia (98.95%) was explained by Component 1, which horizontally partitioned the outsiders and insiders into left (negative) and right (positive) quadrants of the correspondence map. Very little inertia (1.05%) was explained by Component...
2, serving to separate the six tweet categories across the vertical axis of the map. Consequently, it is concluded that the differences between the insiders and outsiders explained most of the variance extracted from the contingency table, whereas the variance between tweet categories contributed relatively little. Insiders contributed over half (59.8%) of the inertia (Table 4), implying that they explained more of the variance than the outsiders. Aphorisms, associated with outsiders, and distributed-critical-thought tweets, associated with insiders, contributed nearly two thirds (64.3%) of the inertia. This implied that aphorisms and distributed-critical-thought tweets contributed substantially more than the other categories toward the partitioning of the insiders and outsiders. In comparison, expanded and independent-critical-thought tweets contributed only 31.3%, whilst poetic-prosaic and regulatory tweets contributed only 4.4% to the inertia, implying that they had a relatively small influence.

6. Discussion

The results of the statistical analysis suggest that the categories of insiders and outsiders worked well in explaining the underlying factor behind the appreciation of certain forms of discourse. This suggests in turn that insiders shared with the poet a similar repertoire of concepts, which in this case were related to the conceptual system that configures critical theory—a system that is not learned spontaneously but requires some form of instruction (e.g., reading a book or taking lessons), and similar affects and points of view. Thus, even if Twitter has the potential to sustain horizontal relations, one may say that discourse itself is the source of boundaries, or is a tool to create them as users may appeal to others to socially position themselves by fav’ing a tweet or not.

The first question is why outsiders did not appreciate @cruzarzabal’s critical theory discourse but appreciated his production of aphorisms instead. Part of the answer may lie in the fact that indirect means of social regulation tend to work better than direct ones. Presumably, users, whether insiders or outsiders, do not like to outwardly express their agreement when a matter of practical reason is discussed and an ad hominem argument is given, as is the case with regulatory tweets.

Aphorisms are powerful because they are indirect, self-contained and do not deploy theoretical concepts, which raises their chances to be distributed. They seem to address issues of practical knowledge in a complex way, appealing to universal but often contradictory determinations. The wisdom expressed in aphorisms reveals truths beyond human’s reach or the very limitations of theoretical knowledge.

Users appear to be more willing to show their colours when the opinion is expressed as an abstract principle that addresses the complexities of practical life. Explicit forms of regulation do not seem to be appreciated either by insiders or outsiders, perhaps because they imply taking sides and advancing judgements when one may not have access to all the specifics of the situation. They may create unnecessary social polarisation.

The second question is why insiders appreciated distributed-critical-thought tweets such as the series that touched the case of a Parisian merchandise dealer confounding Mexican mass culture and counterculture, whilst outsiders did not. The answer may also lie on the fact that distributed-critical-thought tweets are forms of indirect social regulation, which are preferred to direct ones. However, unlike aphorisms, they demand an understanding of a particular theoretical conceptual system and a complex follow up. In our case, because insiders share a common repertoire of theories with @cruzarzabal, they look set to be able to follow up the disembedded discursive form of distributed-critical-thought tweets. They represent a rather peculiar mix of theoretical and practical reasoning. In fact, they seem to sum up the precise merge of theoretical (general) formulations with the specifics of (concrete) situations. In order to weave these two lines, a dialogue or dialectical relation must be produced before synthesis can be reached, which can only be developed by segmenting the discourse and presenting it in a series of tweets. The mere synthesis of complex determinants beyond human reach expressed by the aphorism is no longer adequate.

7. Conclusion

Even though Twitter does not impose structural limitations to the development of horizontal social relations, the findings of the study show that discourse itself has the power to establish social boundaries and cleavages. The fact that the division between insiders, users who share common references and affects with the poet, and outsiders, users who do not share them, explains divergent appreciation of discursive forms reveals strong classifications or boundaries even in the absence of external manifestations of power, authority or prestige, widely believed to be the most prominent sources of social segmentation.

The data shows that users are more reluctant to favour discursive genres that express a direct form of social regulation, especially ad hominem arguments, and prefer indirect forms, such as aphorisms and distributed-critical-thought tweets. The former, associated with outsiders, represent complex discursive forms that test the ability of theoretical systems to tackle the specificities of practical reasoning. Furthermore, these forms are unitary, self-contained and context-dependent. They do not require a demanding fragmentary follow-up, which increases their chances to be widely appropriated and spread (and even plagiarised). In contrast, the latter, associated with insiders, represent the merge of theoretical generalisation and practical reason. Their enactment requires the development of a series of fragments in which a dialectical relationship between a context-independent abstraction and a context-dependent concrete is built up. Their recognition is subject to a demanding follow-up of syntagmatically joined fragments or hypertext.
### Table 1

Tweets by @cruzarzabal coded by discursive form category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Original tweet</th>
<th>English translation</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>June 6, 2011, 2:02 UTC</td>
<td>Mi calle es calle empedrada de buenas intenciones, con una cruz en la esquina es también un viraje, un subir un poco más, una agitación.</td>
<td>My street is a street paved with good intentions; with a cross on the corner [it] is also a turn; climbing a bit more, a revolt.</td>
<td>Poetic-prosaic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>June 5, 2011, 18:19 UTC</td>
<td>Él me lo contó apenas el jueves, yo no recordaba, pero le creí. Hoy, entre el polvo y los ácaros, apareció la confirmación, la respuesta.</td>
<td>He told me on Thursday at the earliest; I didn't remember it, but I believed him. Tomás, amongst the dust and the mites, the confirmation emerged—the response.</td>
<td>Poetic-prosaic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>June 5, 2011, 6:29 UTC</td>
<td>Es emocionante recibir literatura por correo. Especialmente si es S/N: NewWorldPoetics, la maravillosa revista de Bernstein y Espina.</td>
<td>It is moving to receive literature by postal mail, especially if it is No Number: NewWorldPoetics, the wonderful journal of Bernstein and Espina.</td>
<td>Poetic-prosaic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>June 5, 2011, 5:20 UTC</td>
<td>Yo no miento,iento.</td>
<td>I do not lie; I tempt.</td>
<td>Regulatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14)</td>
<td>June 4, 2011, 18:09 UTC</td>
<td>El plagio es el talento de los sin talento.</td>
<td>Plagiarism is the talent of those with no talent.</td>
<td>Aphorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(21)</td>
<td>Circa July 2011</td>
<td>En estos días, la Verdad es tan evasiva que las buenas conciencias la confunden frecuentemente con la sinceridad.</td>
<td>Nowadays, Truth is so evasive that those of good conscience often confound it with sincerity.</td>
<td>Aphorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(22)</td>
<td>July 11, 2011, 10:03 UTC</td>
<td>‘No confíes en nadie que tenga más de 17 años’.</td>
<td>‘Do not trust anyone who is older than 17’.</td>
<td>Aphorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>June 3, 2011, 23:47 UTC</td>
<td>El gran @jorgeaguilar presenta al maestro Max Rojas.</td>
<td>The great @jorgeaguilar presents master Max Rojas.</td>
<td>Expanded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18)</td>
<td>June 3, 2011, 21:43 UTC</td>
<td>Los poetas mac, @viajerovertical e @intigs en Taxco. <a href="http://twitpic.com/56luf0">http://twitpic.com/56luf0</a></td>
<td>Mac poets @viajerovertical and @intigs in [the city of] Taxco.</td>
<td>Regulatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>June 5, 2011, 4:33 UTC</td>
<td>Hace seis meses de este tuit que me gusta particularmente: <a href="http://t.co/j7Tvwc">http://t.co/j7Tvwc</a>.</td>
<td>Six months have passed since this tweet that I particularly like: <a href="http://t.co/j7Tvwc">http://t.co/j7Tvwc</a>.</td>
<td>Regulatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>June 4, 2011, 18:52 UTC</td>
<td>Para alguien de muy cortas miras como @edmundocc es peor sufrir el tráfico que la violencia y la descomposición social. Pacato.</td>
<td>For someone very shortsighted such as @edmundocc, it is worse to suffer traffic than violence and social decomposition. Prudish.</td>
<td>Regulatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20)</td>
<td>Circa July 2011</td>
<td>Que alguien le diga a @pocopelo22 que la URSS emergió de regreso a la Ciudad.</td>
<td>Someone tell @pocopelo22 that the Soviet Union also had a national football team and played in world cup championships.</td>
<td>Distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(23)</td>
<td>Circa July 2011</td>
<td>Para el embajador @jorge_guajardo, en los empleados de un gobierno no cabe la reflexión; para la nómina, sólo la genuflexión.</td>
<td>For Ambassador @jorge_guajardo, government staff are not supposed to reflect; for the pay cheque, only genuflections.</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>June 6, 2011, 2:05 UTC</td>
<td>Eso, señores, es el principio de asociación del Universo, una ley casi newtoniana.</td>
<td>That, gentlemen, is the principle of association of the Universe, almost a Newtonian law.</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>June 5, 2011, 3:58 UTC</td>
<td>Me andan leyendo el TL y me hacen cosquillas.</td>
<td>[People] are reading my time line and they are tickling me.</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(13)</td>
<td>June 4, 2011, 18:10 UTC</td>
<td>Un camión lleno de poetas dormidos. No, no es una metáfora crítica, es que vamos de regreso a la Ciudad.</td>
<td>A bus full of sleeping poets. No, it isn’t a critical metaphor but we are going back to the City.</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>June 3, 2011, 15:06 UTC</td>
<td>Los críticos de narrativa nos dicen que esta es una era postpoética. La poesía americana lleva 30 años en ello, sin descubrir el hilo negro.</td>
<td>Narrative critics tell us that this is a post-poetic age. American poetry has been at it for 30 years without inventing the wheel.</td>
<td>Distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>June 5, 2011, 14:35 UTC</td>
<td>Para el embajador @jorge_guajardo, en los empleados de un gobierno no cabe la reflexión; para la nómina, sólo la genuflexión.</td>
<td>For Ambassador @jorge_guajardo, government staff are not supposed to reflect; for the pay cheque, only genuflections.</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>June 5, 2011, 14:33 UTC</td>
<td>O peor, es normalizar su recepción para otorgarle un valor simbólico que no necesariamente tiene para aumentar su valor de cambio.</td>
<td>Or worse, it is normalising its reception in order to grant it a symbolic value that it does not necessarily have to increase its exchange value.</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>June 5, 2011, 14:31 UTC</td>
<td>La lucha libre es un fenómeno de masas populares, negar ese carácter es desconocerlo, es normalizar su complejidad haciéndolo panfleto.</td>
<td>Pro wrestling is a phenomenon of the popular masses. To deny that characteristic is to show ignorance; it is to normalise its complexity and turn it into a pamphlet.</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>June 5, 2011, 14:29 UTC</td>
<td>Según un comerciante de arte que vende máscaras de luchadores en París, éstas son objetos contraculturales, no de masas. No entendió nada.</td>
<td>According to an art dealer who sells wrestlers’ masks in Paris, these are countercultural, but not objects of mass culture. He did not understand anything.</td>
<td>Distributed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References

@cruzarzabal (2011, June 5–9). [Personal communication via an e-mail interview with @cruzarzabal]
Arturo--

It's Roy Harris who divides linguists into "segregationists" and "integrationists" like himself (which is why the terminology seems rather biased in favor of his 'integrationism'). I think the distinction is a quite specious one: Harris simply insists on the incommensurability of communicative acts, and therefore refuses to talk about linguistic science at all.

Certainly, Harris has very harsh things to say about both Saussure (who he translated into English and commentated in a separate volume) and Peirce (who he considers a myopic print-fetishist). Harris is a very entertaining read, but has remarkably little to say by way of positive programme.

Isn't it interesting that people who do not rise to the level of theory (because integrationism really precludes all forms of analysis of language as an abstract code) also refuse to descend to the level of practice?

David Kellogg
Sangmyung University

I am not a fan of Saussure myself, Arturo, partly because he established such a very un-Hegelian dichotomy with his Signifier and Signified. Such a view is fundamentally incompatible with Hegel's approach. However, you are correct that as early as 1817 Hegel supported the thesis of the arbitrariness of the sign, and he regarded sign-systems which included remnants of representation as underdeveloped, kind of 'second-rate'.

Apart from that, what Hegel has to say about speech is mainly in the Subjective Spirit, as I am sure you know, but it is a pity that Hegel never developed his ideas about communication in general and speech and writing in particular into any kind of finished theory.

Andy

While we have the attention of some linguists .... Indigenous Australians have a way of using certain specific words, for example, country, culture, language, community, which in English we usually use with a personal pronoun, as in "I can speak your language," or article, "is this the country you come from?" as if they were countable nouns, but which Indigenous Australians use without an article or personal pronoun, as in "I went to country" or "when I speak language ....," much like the word "home" which can be used without the "my" or "your."

This usage conveys a meaning which is generally understood, but is used only in relation to the Indigenous people. I understand it. But I find it hard to put into words what is actually being done when words are used like this. I use words like "science" or "religion" in the same way, I guess. What does it mean linguistically??

Andy

I think it means that Australians are leading the way into a future without articles. Actually, very few languages use an article system; as you know, Russian does not, and neither does Chinese, Korean, Tibetan or Turkish.

As you point out, English doesn't always use articles either. When we embed singular nouns in prepositional phrases, the use of the article tends to depend on the meaning. Compare "in the morning" with "at night", or "at weekend" with "over the the weekend", "down town" with "down the street", etc. The usual analysis is that "at night" functions mostly as an adverb ("nightwise") while "in the morning" is a
minor verb (i.e. a verb with no subject but an object). "I go home", "I speak language" and "I spent two weeks in hospital/jail/church" can be analyzed in much the same way.

I find it useful to think of articles as part of a whole range of prenominal modifiers that go from deictic to defining. So for example when my student writes "My mom had to have an urgent C-section surgical operation" the "an" part is maximally orienting but minimally defining (it just means I am orienting towards it as an instance of something but it doesn't say what it's an instance of), the "urgent" part is somewhat less orienting and more defining, the "C-section" part is classifying, and therefore more defining still, until we come to the part that is maximally defining and minimally orienting, "operation". Not only nominal groups but verbal groups obey this rule ("had to have", where "had" is tensed because it is orienting and locates the speaker in time but "to have" is untensed and simply defines the nature of the process). Whole clauses can also be seen this way ("My mom" is the deictic part of the clause and "operation" is the defining part).

Not all languages do this, because not all languages need to. So for example Russian doesn't require this kind of rigid order. Because of those pesky cases, so hard for Russian students to master, it is always clear who does what to whom by what means, and the order simply doesn't matter. Same is true in Latin. This is why I think you miss the point a little when you speak of "a perizhivanie" vs. "perizhivanie". That's not how you think in Russian.

Mmm, but this is not a speech style applied across the board (like a distinctive accent, or never using the accusative case). It is used only for certain words, so the structural principle of difference applies. These specific words are given an elevated meaning by marking them with the different usage, and kind of take on the meaning of a principle, rather than a thing or place, etc these

As to perezhivanie, of course, it is not an issue for Russian speakers speaking Russian. The problem comes up when a Russian uses a Russian word in an English sentence and how an English speaker hears that,

Andy

This conversation is also making me think of a recently emerging option at least in English vernacular (I don't know if this is showing up in other languages): dropping the preposition "of" before an abstract noun in order to emphasize the authoritative power of the concept itself in the absence of any specific manifestation. (i.e. "...because science" or "because reasons"). This is a bit different of course because it is a deliberate grammatical modification to an existing form that calls attention to itself as such.

Best,
Elizabeth

Andy,

Not sure if this gets at what you're describing but Whorf deals quite extensively with the tendency of English to make processes into things. His classic piece on this addresses the way that English (speakers) can turn processes like lightning or waves or even time itself into countable nouns and how this might affect the way that we understand the world around us (esp. time). Really fascinating stuff and not unrelated to Vygotsky's idea of semiotic mediation (as an old paper by John Lucy pointed out a long time ago).
I wish I knew more about the aboriginal Australian languages and could point more toward the kinds of things that you are talking about but I'm no linguist and most of what I know are restricted to the differences in directional terms as compared to English - cardinal vs. relative (and I happened to be teaching this two days ago - or should I say "two nights have passed since I taught this").

Cheers,
greg

I think Elizabeth's message was to the point. Thanks Elizabeth,

Greg, it is not about Aboriginal languages. It is an innovation which indigenous people have introduced into English and is limited to a small range of concepts and which, as Elizabeth says,"emphasise the authoritative power of the concept itself."

Andy

Thanks Andy and David for your insights.

As you say, Andy, the dichotomy signifier-signified is not very Hegelian to say the least. In my opinion, just by reading the Cours, I can tell Saussure started with some kind of Hegelian approach but, because he did not capture the real dimension of dialectics, ended up producing shell-like categories, shortcuts of Hegelian theory. The same applies to Durkheim and the rest of structuralists.

David, I did not know who the actual source of the segregationist/integrationist categories was. I had a laugh with your comment on Harris placing himself among the integrationists.

Anyway, I think there is some research opportunity here about making more precise observations of what constitutes speech or communication in our tradition. 'Word meaning" for instance, should not be rendered as 'utterance meaning' in English? What is 'word'? Or its use it's just fine as word allows us to establish a relation between more objective and less objective forms of communication. In that case 'word' serves the purpose of keeping intact the process dimension of meaning making.

I am more familiar with Bakhtin and Akhutina views on theories of communication and their discussion on Saussure, yet I abandoned such subtleties a decade ago, so it was nice to be reminded of how the scheletons of modern linguistics still play a big part in our own imaginary.


Best
Arturo

Arturo, I think Vygotsky and Bakhtin have two distinct units of analysis here, and both give us a specific insight which the other does not.

"Word" in the sense Vygotsky is using it in Chapter 1 of T&S is inclusive of any phrase or word which is the sign for a concept. "Utterance" for Bakhtin is a turn in dialogue, i.e., a move in a language game (to use Wittgenstein's term for the same entity). The utterance does not tell us anything about the concepts
being evoked. "Word meaning" does not tell us how it figures in a language game, and therefore does not tell us about the relations of subordination or solidarity, etc., being produced.

That's how I see it, anyway.

Andy

Thanks for that conceptual jewel, mate.

Let me bring here Akhutina to further show their complementariness:

The minimal holistic unit of conversation is the utterance. An utterance, unlike a sentence, is complete in itself. The utterance always carries within it the marks and features of who is speaking to whom, for what reason and in what situation; it is polyphonic. An utterance develops from a motivation, "a volitional objective" and progresses through inner speech to external speech. The prime mover of the semantic progression (from the inner word that is comprehensible to me alone to the external speech that he, the listener, will understand) is the comparison of my subjective, evanescent sense, which I attribute to the given word, and its objective (constant for both me and my listener) meaning. Thus, the major building material for speech production is the living two-voice word. But polyphony is a feature of the utterance as expressed in the word; the word carrying personal sense is an abbreviation of the utterance. Thus, the utterance and the word, as a compressed version of the utterance, are the units of speech acts, communication, and consciousness.

Best

Arturo

I would have appreciated a definition of some kind of what the writer actually means by "utterance." In absence of that "the word, as a compressed version of the utterance" is nonsense, or at least a step backwards because it obliterates a concept. Otherwise, I wouldn't mind saying that the two are together the micro- and macro-units of dialogue (or something having that meaning). The same as Leontyev has two units of activity: action and activity, and Marx has two units of political economy: commodity and capital. To theorise a complex process you always need two units.

The rest of what you have cited reminds me of what Constantin Stanislavskii said about the units of an actor's performance:

Andy