

Praxis and enunciation: Greimas, heir of Saussure

Jacques Fontanille

Semiotics Research Centre (CeReS), University of Limoges
Limoges, France
e-mail: jacques.fontanille@unilim.fr

Abstract. Enunciative praxis was defined as comprising all the operations that produce, through assuming the system of narrative deep structures, semiotic configurations sufficiently stabilized to be available for other uses. The practice of enunciation implies an operations chain, organized in collective time, and a capacity for creation and renewal in meaning figures production, under the constraint of cultural conditions.

This conception of enunciation is not an invention of Greimassian semiotics in general. It is present already in Saussure, when he describes signs praxis and life of languages. The founding moment of his reasoning is the substitution of substance by action: the sign is not an abstraction obtained by discretization of the substance, the sign is a “class of executions”, a praxeological class.

The Greimassian enunciative praxis can be defined as all acts by which discourses are convoked, selected, handled and invented by each particular enunciation. This conception strengthens the relationship with Saussure’s speaking mass, since the praxis in question belongs to no one, and it is not even assignable to a precise linguistic community.

Finally, we may propose to analyse enunciation praxis as a sequence of *reflection* and *exploration*, which mediates between primary experience and the semiotic object.

Keywords: enunciation; experience exploration; manifestation; praxis; reflexivity; sign duality; sign transmission

Introduction

Enunciative praxis was defined thirty years ago (Greimas, Fontanille 1991: 86–89; Bertrand 1993; Fontanille, Zilberberg 1998: 127–150) as comprising all the operations that produce, through assuming the system of narrative deep structures, semiotic configurations sufficiently stabilized to be available for other uses, but, for the same reason, taken in a constant alteration movement of all semiotic forms. The canonical narrative schema is one of these forms which we know to be characteristic of European cultures; passions and their syntagmatic expansions are other such forms which are also

marked by their cultural background. The practice of enunciation implies an operations chain, organized in collective time, and a capacity for creation and renewal in meaning figures production, under the constraint of cultural conditions.

So, enunciative praxis has pushed the boundaries of textuality: each particular enunciation is put into perspective in the temporal depth of concomitant, anterior, and even posterior enunciations. Stereotypes as well as innovations, retrospective as well as prospective enunciations, all these movements of enunciative praxis distend the textual temporality, and involve it in a temporal pattern that belongs to another plane of immanence: that of practices.

But this conception of enunciation is neither an invention of Greimas nor of semiotics in general: it is already strongly affirmed by Saussure who does not propose a theory of enunciation, since according to him praxis belongs to signs and languages life.

Saussure: sign is relentless action and transformation

An active and unstable dual unit

The Saussurean sign is dual: a “psychic entity with two faces” that “unites not a thing and a name, but a concept and an acoustic image” (CLG 98–99); or it is a “combination of two also intangible but absolutely different elements” (CLG 190), a “constant duality”, the “junction of two areas”, the “coupling of heterogeneous objects” (ELG, 17–20)¹. This duality is the source of the sign’s instability, because signs are not at all complete and forever given, and it is necessary, for any further executions in speech, to assemble their two faces into one unit again.

Yet Saussure continues to claim, recurrently and even stubbornly, that this unity is indivisible; however, it is indivisible only in thought: we cannot linguistically think about the sign otherwise than as a unit. Against this methodological and considered interrelatedness, Saussure does not fail to oppose the real instability in the social and cultural reality of the same unit of the sign. The simple reason is that, in social reality, assembling the two faces of the sign is a concrete action to which Saussure refers most often as an “execution” of the language system, which takes the form of a collective process: “Language does not provide a substance in any of its manifestations, but only combined or isolated actions of physiological, physical, mental strengths”² (ELG, 197).

It is a surprising affirmation for all those who have read Saussure only through Hjelmslev’s prism, or through the structuralist Vulgate: here, there is no substance to give a form, but only countless actions. The “actions” in question are the result

¹ All translations of citations in this paper are mine, J. F.

² “Le langage n’offre sous aucune de ses manifestations une substance mais seulement des actions combinées ou isolées de forces physiologiques, physiques, mentales.”

of associations between forces and, thus, praxis is the explanation for a dynamic of forms. Sign or language, the duality is both formal and inseparable, on the one side (the one of thinking of the sign), and active and moving; on the other side (the social and concrete one), and this is where its duality is properly “relentless” and opposed to any “absolute rest”.

The alternative between *substance* and *action* disappears in Hjelmslev: behind the linguistic form, there is no more than substance, and the action is referred to the process. Substance is logically located “before” the form, which is the system (the immanence), which then gives rise to the process (the manifestation). Logically, Greimas and Courtés recall this in their *Dictionary* (Greimas, Courtés 1979: 220): manifestation presupposes system.

We specifically have to examine this relation of the language with the social as well as time through praxis. We may be tempted to think that language is involved in the social and time, and that, in short, praxis is external (in a social and temporal reality) to language itself. But Saussure says otherwise:

[...] This is why at any time, contrary to appearances, any semiotic phenomenon does not leave outside itself the element of social community: social community and its laws are one of its internal and not external elements, that is our point of view. (ELG 289–290)³

Language in all its forms is eminently practical, and therefore the social is in the language, and not outside.

It is the same with time. Not only has time to do with the execution of the sign: the sign as a unit is itself carrying a temporal tension generated by the coexistence within it of linearity and instantaneity. Time has not only to do with the formation of the sign as a bifacial unit, it is never out of the sign.

Praxis transmission

Still, language and signs, even in case of this constant praxis, appear both relatively stable, yet caught in an uncontrollable change. Stability is the work of the linguistic convention: once forms are constituted, praxis stabilizes them thanks to convention. But why, once the convention is established, does it not keep up imperturbably? If the answer to this question is essentially based on the principle of arbitrariness, it mobilizes also all the problems of transmission.

³ “C’est pourquoi à aucun moment, contrairement à l’apparence, le phénomène sémiologique quel qu’il soit ne laisse hors de lui-même l’élément de la collectivité sociale: la collectivité sociale et ses lois est un de ses éléments internes et non externes, tel est notre point de vue.”

Although it is present in the *CLG*, transmission has not the same status as in Saussure's writings. It is in the *ELG* that we can see that if social convention can be considered as a factor of conservation, stability and resistance to innovation, it also supports the sign's alteration, due to the displacement of the relationship between the signifier and the signified: this paradox can be resolved if we consider signs' and languages' circulation and transmission in time.

And again, far from being an external property, transmission is a praxis which is inherent to the constitution of the sign; it is neither a movement caused by an external force nor an independent structural property, but an ongoing process located in the sign and with respect to its dual constitution.

This will be the capital reaction of the study of language in the theory of signs, this will be the forever new horizon it opens [...], that has taught and revealed to it a whole new side of the sign, namely that it begins to be truly known only when we see that it is not only a transmissible thing, but of his nature to be transmitted, alterable. But for those who want to make the theory of language, it is the hundredfold complication. (*ELG*, 220)⁴

The transmission in question is very specific, as it relates to relationships, negotiations and differences. In this, the transmission is inextricably linked to the conventional character of the sign, and endows it with a perpetual "second life":

What is special about the conventional sign is that the disciplines that might have to deal with it have not suspected that this sign was transmissible, and thus has a second life, about which we can say that these disciplines (as well as the public in general) have no kind of notion. (*ELG*, 229).⁵

The identity of the sign is nothing but social agglomeration of its performances: a differential, social, praxeological, plural and interactive identity. The sign is neither a naturally given entity nor created to be recovered and spread (or degraded). It is a unit that continues only because of the diversity of the acts that constitute it, producing

⁴ "Ce sera la réaction capitale de l'étude du langage sur la théorie des signes, ce sera l'horizon à jamais nouveau qu'elle aura ouvert [...], que de lui avoir appris et révélé tout un côté nouveau du signe, à savoir que celui-ci ne commence à être réellement connu que quand on a vu qu'il est une chose non seulement transmissible, mais 1° de sa nature destiné à être transmis, 2° modifiable. Seulement pour celui qui veut faire la théorie du langage, c'est la complication centuplée."

⁵ "Ce qu'il y a de particulier dans le signe conventionnel, c'est que les disciplines qui pouvaient avoir à s'en occuper ne se sont pas doutées que ce signe était transmissible, et par là doté d'une seconde vie, dont on peut bien dire que ces disciplines (de même que le public en général) n'ont aucune espèce de notion."

variants series which are the only mode of existence where we can observe and grasp it, through its multiple executions.

The founding moment of this reasoning is the substitution of substance by action: the sign is not an abstraction obtained by discretization of the substance, the sign is a “class of executions”, a praxeological class. And like any practice, that “praxis course” has neither relevant origin nor end: in theory, we can stop it, but by nature, and by definition, it can only “continue”. We can see the point of divergence between what became structural linguistics (especially via Hjelmslev), reflecting the transition from substance to form, then from immanent form to manifestation, and what it might have become if it had taken into account the other version, the one of practical action within the sign and the system.

The result, according to Saussure himself, is that “the original contract is confused with what happens in the language every day”, which means that the origin of the “original contract” dissolves in all the moments in course of the long practice. It is precisely this fundamental aspect that is concerned with the transmission of the sign: in addition to its social quality, the convention that constitutes it, far from being reifying and congealing, it is a kind of “social permanency in circulation” under which signs are indefinitely reconstructed and experienced as identical because they appear congruent with or different from other ones.

In this perspective, convention and sign circulation do not succeed, they overlap, and in this transmission is suspended and invalidates the distinction between, on the one hand, the dual structure of the sign, and on the other hand, communication: signs only emerge and are realized in interaction. Therefore, transmission is not an event which would be external to signs, or an accessory or added attribute: it is the result of “signs’ life in social life”, for which circulation, recovery and dissemination are inseparable from the dual constitution, once it is accepted that this dual constitution implies a practical dynamic. This is also related to the fact that the sign has some reality and is transmitted only as value, and the value cannot be conceived independently of exchange, interaction and time.

It is also in its transmission that the sign is realized as a unit still undergoing change, and as a factor in redistributing the values of other signs. And it is in its nature, Saussure writes, to be “destined to transmission”, that is to say, made for transmission and transmitted to be made:

[...] See immediately the entire insignificance of a point of view starting from the relationship of an idea and a sign out of time, out of the transmission, which alone teaches us (experimentally) that what is the sign. (*ELG*, 231)⁶

⁶ “*Constatons tout de suite l'entière insignifiance d'un point de vue qui part de la relation d'une idée et d'un signe hors du temps, hors de la transmission, qui seule nous enseigne (expérimentalement) ce que vaut le signe.*”

In brief: instability and displacement of value, sociality and temporality of exchange.

The property of the sign *to merge in its instability, temporality and alterity, as an internal and active base of its own alteration* makes the process of transmission analysable both in the synchronic and the diachronic perspectives. The well-known interest of Saussure in the issue of time is therefore not just about its historical dimension. More specifically, the issue of transmission shows that Saussure's synchrony is not out of time, contrary to what the structuralist Vulgate would try to convince us in.

Synchrony is a methodological point of view on language; it is also a transposition of the feeling, but only a feeling, about the system's stability that speaking subjects have at some point, allowing them to believe that mutual understanding is possible. Diachrony is another point of view on language and signs, but a point of view that does not have the time privilege. So, if there is, according to Saussure, a very permanent feature of language facts, it is that of the process of their interactive and temporalized (re) structuring: we may seize it in synchrony to build relationships, classes and paradigms from the series of practical executions, and we may also seize it in diachrony to build transformations and reconfigurations rules. Yet in both cases, the object is the same, and only the point of view is changing.

We have to insist that the conception of the transmission practice is incompatible with the one of the sign as a communication tool, because it makes change and praxis-internal operations in the system, and is not a phenomenon that could be applied from the outside: successive transmissions inevitably produce movements in the relationship between the signifier and the signified, movements which have no external basis and which are, in themselves, ultimately a perpetual (re)establishment of the convention:

But we did not say, as I recognize, why they [the signs] *shall* be altered. And it is easy for me to indicate the reason for this abstaining. Early on, I indicated that there were distinct alteration factors, but *ones so mixed in their effect* that it is not wise to try at once separate them. I said that the 'total fact' could only and surely be translated by the phrase '*moving of the total relationship*' between signifier and signified, the alteration would be either in the signifier, or in the signified. So we take alteration without separating its causes or its forms, because there is some danger in wanting to do so without further precaution. (ELG, 329–330)⁷

⁷ "Mais nous n'avons pas dit, je le reconnais, pourquoi ils [les signes] doivent s'altérer. Et il m'est facile d'indiquer la raison de cette abstention. Dès l'abord, j'ai indiqué qu'il y avait des facteurs d'altération distincts, mais tellement mélangés dans leur effet qu'il n'est pas prudent de vouloir à l'instant même les séparer. J'ai dit que le fait total ne pouvait se traduire avec sûreté que par le mot de déplacement du rapport total entre signifiant et signifié, soit que l'altération soit dans le signifiant, soit qu'elle soit dans le signifié. Donc nous prenons l'altération sans séparer ses causes ni ses formes, parce qu'il y a quelque danger à vouloir le faire sans autre forme de procès."

For Saussure, the sign is therefore a dynamic entity, “alive”, so refractory to immobility or closing, which forbids giving a positive view of its unit. The sign itself is ceaseless activity, a still tensive entity, based on a set of non-concordances: arbitrary relationship between concepts and acoustic images; no-coincidence between this first duality and the duality signified/signifier; a temporal tension between the signifier, the signified, and sign; plurality and diversity of executions within its identity. The sign is, by definition and constitution, dependent on these non-concordances and it continues them during its transmission and transformation in time.

The dynamics of the sign is neither a reflection of a different external dynamic, nor determined by it, but it involves constant interaction between semiotic, psychological and social systems.

There is no example of absolute immobility. What is absolute is the principle of language movement in time. A movement which is done in various ways and, depending on the case, more or less rapidly, but fatally. (ELG, 311)

[...] a socio-historical phenomenon which causes the vortex of signs in the vertical column and then precludes making it neither a *fixed* phenomenon nor a *conventional* language, since it is the incessant result of social action, imposed beyond any choice.⁸ (ELG, 102)

Greimas and enunciation in act: Manifestation, semiosis, praxis

Generation and manifestation

With Hjelmslev being inserted between Saussure and Greimas, we may expect some purification of the practical dimension. And indeed, following Greimas, semiotic practice (generally defined as operations that produce semiosis) remained long (maybe always) more or less distinct from the enunciation issue. For the latter, without expanding on an already known position, just remember that enunciation is mainly described as a “creative schizie” (Greimas, Courtés 1979: 79; entry ‘Disengagement’), the shifting out that projects in discourse the categories of person, time and space from deictic elements characteristic of enunciation. This is not a *praxis*, but only a

⁸ “Il n’y a pas d’exemple d’immobilité absolue. Ce qui est absolu, c’est le principe du mouvement de la langue dans le temps. Mouvement qui se fait de façon diverse et plus ou moins rapide selon les cas, mais fatalement.”

“[...] phénomène socio-historique qui entraîne le tourbillon des signes dans la colonne verticale et défend alors d’en faire ni un phénomène fixe ni un langage conventionnel, puisqu’il est le résultat incessant de l’action sociale, imposé hors de tout choix.”

single formal operation, a split in isotopy within categories defining this instance of enunciation.

As for the former issue, the practice of semiosis production, Greimas' theory is a little more explicit, especially about 'manifestation', this concept of Greimas being closest to those we may mobilize to describe semiosis. The manifestation is due to an *interruption of the generative path*. Let us examine more specifically the entry 'Manifestation' in Greimas and Courtés *Dictionary*:

The different levels of depth that can be distinguished are the articulations of the immanent structure of each of the two planes of language (expression and content), taken separately, and mark out their generative path; the manifestation is, however, an incidence, an interruption and a deviation, which requires any instance of this path to build up as a plane of signs. [...] In analysing the deep structures and wanting to take account of them by any system of representation, the linguist stops, fixates, at one point, the generative path, and then manifests the monoplane immanent structures, using a series of biplane signs (or of interpretable symbols). Similarly, the distinction between the abstract and the figurative discourses can be established, given the interruption of generative path, followed by manifestation, at two different times of the production process. (Greimas, Courtés 1979: 220)⁹

This is not an aleatory incident that would affect the generative path of content or expression, but the very principle of manifestation, which always affects the two planes: the *interruption of the generative process*. This interruption does not belong to immanence and system: it would even be an absurd assumption, since for Greimas, the "system" refers to virtual deep structures, and these structures are themselves an important part of the generative path. So it is not clear at all, in Greimas' theory, how the interruption of the generative path could be part of the generative path itself. We do not find in Greimas any solution as strongly integrated as in Saussure: neither *praxis* nor time of praxis and social seems to belong to the immanent system.

⁹ "Les différents niveaux de profondeur que l'on peut distinguer sont des articulations de la structure immanente de chacun des deux plans du langage (expression et contenu) pris séparément, et jalonnent leur parcours génératif ; la manifestation est, au contraire, une incidence, une interruption et une déviation, qui oblige une instance quelconque de ce parcours à se constituer en un plan des signes. [...] Lorsqu'il analyse les structures profondes et veut en rendre compte à l'aide d'un système de représentation quelconque, le linguiste arrête, fixe, à un moment donné, le parcours génératif, et manifeste alors les structures immanentes monoplane à l'aide d'un enchaînement de signes biplanes (ou de symboles interprétables). De même, la distinction entre le discours abstrait et le discours figuratif peut être établie, compte tenu de l'interruption, suivie de manifestation, du parcours génératif à deux moments distincts du processus de production."

The status of that operation, the interruption of the generative path, is not specified here, and will be so only in an incidental and marginal note to the entry ‘Enunciation’ in the *Dictionary*:

Finally, we must add one last point regarding downstream enunciation: as an act, it has the effect of producing *semiosis* or, to be more precise, this continuous set of semiotic acts called manifestation. The signifying act meets here the constraints of the expression substance, making it obligatory to implement textualization procedures.¹⁰ (Greimas, Courtés 1979: 127)

The theoretical combination is very explicit, but has been little noticed and still less exploited by Greimas’ successors: (1) the act of enunciation (creative *schizie*) that leads to manifestation; (2) the semiosis, after manifestation; (3) the specification of semiosis toward expression through the textualization process.

Regarding manifestation, we can also note that it can be operated by the analyst himself, who also may interrupt the generative path to feed his analysis with categories he may extract and textualize in his discourse of analysis. In this case, the operation of the generation interruption is part of a voluntary act. But we can also observe in Greimas’ and Courtés’ presentation that producing a description discourse (by the analyst) does not proceed differently from any other (e.g., figurative) kind of discourse. What the analyst does, such as textualizing directly actantial structures, or the narrative programs, bypassing their figurative presentation (actors, times, spaces), any other enunciation can do it as well, with other substances and forms of expression.

The interruption of the generation in preparation for manifestation is therefore the act by which the production of all discourses is possible. This interruption is one of the actions that are imputable to the analyst, or to another enunciation actor, and other instances, involuntary and not conscious, may also operate. As concerns the two planes of language, expression and content, we have to suppose two concomitant (or not concomitant) interruptions, in the same (or different) generative phase, about the two generative paths. The only mention of any coordination between two interruption operations, on the two planes of language, which is not explicitly envisaged by Greimas, yet would open a direct dialogue with Saussure’s conception, is that we have just described, and on the expected complexity of a praxis.

Greimas’ and Courtés’ reasoning here is still typically the same as that of Saussure: the expression plane and the content plane may be analysed separately, as is the case for the abstract and formal signifiers and signified in Saussure, but they reach manifestation

¹⁰ “Il faut enfin ajouter une dernière remarque concernant l’aval de l’énonciation : en tant qu’acte, celle-ci a pour effet de produire la semiosis ou, pour être plus précis, cette suite continue d’actes sémiotiques qu’on appelle la manifestation. L’acte de signifier retrouve ici les contraintes de la substance de l’expression, obligeant à mettre en place des procédures de textualisation.”

only thanks to the assembly of the two planes of language, thanks to semiosis that gives them a new mode of existence, “on the plane of signs”. This new mode of existence is the realized mode, just as, in Saussure, the ‘reality’ of signs constituted by the assembly of the signifier and the signified. Both studied and separately taken planes are immanent, and once assembled, semiosis “realizes” them.

Manifestation is not only an incidental interruption of immanent generation, it also involves a realizing semiosis. An interruption and then a realization of semiosis: the manifestation is doubly an output from immanence. The question that keeps surfacing concerns the status of this “reality”: is it internal to language?

Enunciative praxis

There is another proximity with Saussure: as in the latter, the collective and massive “effectuations” of the immanent system (i.e., for semiotics: the deep narrative structures), and the constituting operations of semiosis (the assembly of the signifier and the signified in Saussure, and those of the expression and the content planes in Greimas), constantly move the two planes relative to each other: the possibilities of generative process interruptions leading to semiosis are then only a part of a larger set of operations, to be named “enunciative praxis”¹¹ later¹². We may now measure the whole extent of this potential set of operations:

- (1) at each level of the generative path, an interruption is possible;
- (2) the number of levels where interruptions are possible is not permanently fixed;
- (3) the model predicts possible distortions between what comes from the generative path (immanent being) and what is actually expressed (manifested appearance);
- (4) nothing in the structures of both generative paths (expression and content) neither motivates, nor compels, nor prefigures, before their assembling and realizing in semiosis, the nature and properties of what will be assembled.¹³

Now, we can make the assumption that praxis, following Greimas, originates in this double generation interruption: if we assume that the immanent structures are stable, if not permanent, these interruptions, leading to manifestation and semiosis, are at the origin of the formation of more or less complex configurations, which in turn

¹¹ We find a first mention, and in Greimas, Fontanille 1991: 86–89.

¹² Significantly, in the first volume of *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire de la théorie du langage* (1979), there are no entries ‘praxis’ or ‘enunciative praxis’. It appears only in the second volume (Paris, Hachette 1986), always under the direction of Greimas and Courtés, but in a collective writing.

¹³ The only constraint in this case is that the two planes must be both ‘isomorphic’ (they must have compatible and joinable forms) and ‘allotopic’ (they must use different isotopies).

are stabilized. This stabilization does not occur in the virtual deep structures system, but in a kind of cultural “encyclopedia”, where these semiotic configurations remain available to other enunciations, and/or may facilitate the automation of subsequent generative interruption operations. Greimas does not include Umberto Eco’s concept of ‘encyclopedia’, but he must nevertheless imagine a specific space, belonging to the semiotic universe, yet not merging with the systemic virtualities: this space, in which cultural consistencies and distinctions are all made and unmade, is that of semiotic “primitives” (Greimas, Fontanille 1991: 86–89).

Enunciative praxis can be defined as all acts by which discourses are convoked, selected, handled and invented by each particular enunciation, and, it should be added, from the point of view of the community that assumes and integrates these individual productions. For, indeed, enunciative praxis is also characterized, above all, by its contribution to the inflections and reconfigurations of cultural primitives. In *Semiotics of Passions* Greimas and Fontanille (1991: 88) specify in particular:

Enunciative praxis is this return that, between the discursive level and other levels, makes it possible to constitute cultures semiotically. [...] The ‘primitives’ thus obtained appear as taxonomies that, under the configurations convoked in discourses, function there in a way as connotations, distinct from denotations resulting from convoking of the universals. In this sense, the enunciative praxis conciliates a generative path and a genetic process, and associates in discourse the products of a timeless articulation of meaning and those of history.¹⁴

Finally, we can notice that in Greimas, this draft praxis is explicitly attributed to an enunciation actor only in the case of the production of description discourse and meta-linguistic semiosis, and in other cases, praxis seems to operate by itself. However, if there are one or more operations, there is necessarily an instance operator, that is to say an actant, but it remains a potential actant. Then we can speak of the “impersonal” of enunciation, but this “impersonal” seems to have its origin in the impossibility of imputing the generative interruption and the manifestation to anyone.

The subsequent emergence of the concept of enunciative praxis strengthens the relationship with Saussure’s ‘speaking mass’, since the praxis in question belongs to no one, and, as regards the general discourses, and even beyond all the possible semiotic

¹⁴ “La praxis énonciative est cet aller-retour qui, entre le niveau discursif et les autres niveaux, permet de constituer sémiotiquement des cultures. [...] les ‘primitifs’ ainsi obtenus se présentent comme des taxinomies qui, sous-jacentes aux configurations convoquées dans les discours, y fonctionnent en quelque sorte comme des connotations, distinctes des dénnotations qui résultent de la convocation des universaux. En ce sens, la praxis énonciative concilie un parcours génératif et un processus génétique et associe dans le discours les produits d’une articulation atemporelle de la signification et ceux de l’histoire.”

objects, it is not even assignable to a linguistic community. At most we may assume today that forms of living and semiotic forms of social existence and, more broadly, semiospheres, could provide some frameworks to identify what, from the point of view of general semiotics, would play the same role as of Saussure's speaking mass.

Outlook: enunciation as a practice sequence

A field maneuvers

Today, any particular enunciation is supposed to participate in a wider field of enunciation maneuvers, more general and collective. In this respect, it is immediately considered at least as "re-enunciation" of prior or contemporaneous enunciations. To move forward on this issue, we might now specify what is a practical enunciation, or rather, a practice of enunciation. Indeed, since enunciation is considered as re-enunciation, and even more so if it is treated as "polyphonic", it cannot be limited to the "act of language individual appropriation" even if this act becomes more complex as a double interruption of the generative path of expression and content. Individual enunciation is only a local phase in a global and collective process, and it always results in confirmation or denial, adjustment or turning, assumption or rejection of an encyclopedia of semiotic primitives that has no individual nature.

Therefore, enunciation should be examined on another plane of immanence than textuality. In a strictly textual conception, enunciation is just the act of individual language appropriation, in that it produces a particular text from the linguistic and semiotic systems. But we cannot base a collective, polyphonic, multidimensional and evolving enunciation on the only plane of immanence of textuality: it is necessarily procedural and practical, and that is why Greimas chose the name 'enunciative *praxis*'.

At this stage of reflection, we have the following elements:

(1) any enunciation presupposes, explores and manifests one or several previous, subsequent or concomitant experiences;

(2) these experiences may be somatic, textual practices, or other ones: media, scientific, etc.;

(3) therefore they may have been explicitly taken over by other enunciations whose acts and authors are identifiable (in which case there is, strictly speaking, enunciation and re-enunciation), but they may also be only stored, shared or transmitted within an individual or collective experience, without previous identifiable enunciation; in all cases, these experiences have resulted in textual, practical or existential semiosis;

(4) the experience in question is accessible to a reflexive exploration, and malleable enough to be transposed into another semiosis.

All of these conditions constitute enunciation as a specific practice, *a practice of semiosis production from experience*. We may then try to provide a canonical sequence of enunciation practice.

The enunciative practice sequence

In his latest book about modes of existence, Bruno Latour (2012) proposes to consider that meaning happens in the world of existence thanks to *instauration*, an operation which is minimally defined by intensification and extension of presence, without having to suppose first any subject actant to which we would impute an enunciation. Instauration is only attributable to a dynamic state of things, a diffuse and emerging instance.

Practices specifically happen to meaning because they pursue their course despite obstacles and resistance (extensively) and because they can only do that owing to an engagement force that maintains this practical course (intensively). And again, this extensive and intensive instauration may only be attributed to a diffuse, multifaceted, and moving instance. Therefore, *instauration is the primary and elementary form of practical enunciation*. There is enunciation because the meaning emerges from the dynamics of a course of action, and from the activity of an instance which is itself becoming instaured.

Something is instaured, but from what? By transformation or conversion of what else? If the instauration is not a magical operation that arouses the meaning *ex nihilo*, it is supposed to transform something the meaning of which is not yet accessible, into another thing that is a meaningful whole. What, then, would the significant and instaured manifestation be the transformation of? Our answer is: it is *the transformation of experience*. Human experience in search of its meaning becomes a semiotic practice, since it is itself accessible to experience: this *elementary reflexivity* is the starting point and the minimum requirement for meaning questioning. It is precisely in this reflexive experience that intensity and extension are perceived and understood, both being necessary in order that there would be “instauration”.

The enunciation-instauration of practical meaning *transforms experience into meaningful manifestation*: what remains to be done now is to describe this enunciative mediation. It should be noted immediately that the practice of enunciation cannot be a social or individual practice like any other: not only does it produce meaning, which is not the case of other practices, but also it enunciates it, and it produces a semiosis in its proper form.

The first experience articulation will be a reflection, in this specific enunciation-instauration, *practising gives the feeling of practising*. On either side of the predicate

“gives the feeling”, the first “practising” is affecting, and the second is affected. The elementary reflection in the course of practice is an affect. In other words, this *elementary reflexive affect* emerges in two simultaneous or successive phases: practising, and feeling practising. Something *takes* form in action, and the affect reflexively *retakes* it. At the heart of the experience we can thus see the two “taking” and “retaking”. From this point of view, any enunciative practice has, as we have seen, a capacity of stabilizing or destabilizing forms, or, in short, some procedures to ensure the recognition of phases and moments of practical courses. Reflection forms and deforms patterns and models. Taking and retaking forms are the two basic moments of the reflective phase of enunciation considered as practice.

The second articulation is the answer to the first affect: the reflexive affect is a request for meaning, which is answered by *an exploration of this affect*, which results in a semiosis, producing a semiotic object. This semiosis may adopt a wide variety of expression planes, alternatively or successively: enunciative exploration is then completed with one or more transpositions in different expressions; e.g. the experience can be for olfactory, or emotional, and its exploration can lead to textual or visual semiosis.

Exploration schematizes and transposes experience. To do this, it must first, and simultaneously, extract and explore the properties of this experience and convert them into proper internal dependencies in a semiotic object. Moreover, it intensifies, expands and specifies the practical affect: it asks the experience feeling to extract patterns and properties from it, to elicit some answers and to utilize those answers by transposing them from one substance of expression to another.

This process is particularly evident, for example, when it comes to visualizing “invisible” properties of a body or any physical system: scientific imaging demonstrates in this respect a remarkable technical inventiveness to respond to all cases of invisibility and inaccessibility: interactions between materials and energy arouse the physical system to get answers (signals of various technical types), which are themselves subject to substantial transpositions, that makes them access to visual semiosis. The products of these sophisticated explorations are supported by schematization, spatialization, and temporalization, up to the final visualization.

The exploration of the experience by enunciation practice includes at least:

- (1) *interaction and excitation* of the objects of experience, so as to extract exploitable properties (information, signals, sensitive or physical qualities);
- (2) *transposition* of these properties and products of the primary interaction-excitation in the corresponding properties of a semiotic field (computer transduction, projection on a support, plastic organization, etc.);

- (3) *semiotic manifestation* (assembling contents and expressions), which results in the production of a semiotic object on its own support and following its own organization and interpretation rules.

Thus the double sequence of *reflection* and *exploration* mediates between primary experience and semiotic object.

References

- Bertrand, Denis 1993. L'impersonnel de l'énonciation. *Protée* 21(1): 25–32.
CLG = Saussure 1986.
ELG = Saussure 2002.
Fontanille, Jacques 2008. *Pratiques sémiotiques*. Paris: PUF.
Fontanille, Jacques; Zilberberg, Claude 1998. Praxis énonciative. In: Fontanille, Jacques; Zilberberg, Claude, *Tension et signification*. Hayen: Mardaga, 127–150.
Greimas, Algirdas Julien; Courtés, Joseph 1993[1979]. *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*. Paris: Hachette.
Greimas, Algirdas Julien; Fontanille, Jacques 1991. *Sémiotique des passions: Des états de choses aux états d'âme*. Paris: Seuil.
Hjelmslev, Louis 1968. *Prolégomènes à une théorie du langage*. Paris: Minit.
Latour, Bruno 2012. *Enquête sur les modes d'existence: Une anthropologie des Modernes*, Paris: La Découverte.
Saussure, Ferdinand de 1986[1916]. *Cours de Linguistique Générale*. Paris: Payot.
– 2002. *Ecrits de linguistique générale*. Paris: Gallimard.

Практика и высказывание: Греймас как наследник Соссюра

Практика высказывания определяется как совокупность всех операций, которые, основываясь на системе нарративных глубинных структур, производят достаточно стабильные семиотические конфигурации, пригодные для использования. Практика высказывания подразумевает коллективную, организованную в коллективном времени операционную цепь, а также способность к созданию и возобновлению фигур значения с учетом прилагаемых культурой ограничений.

Такая концепция высказывания не является изобретением Греймаса. Она появляется уже у Соссюра, когда он описывает практику знаков и жизнь языков. Основопологающим моментом его рассуждений является замена субстанции действием: знак не является дистиллированной из субстанции абстракцией; знак – это «класс действий», практика.

Греймасовскую практику высказывания можно определить как совокупность действий, посредством которых каждое конкретное высказывание собирает, отбирает, обрабатывает и изобретает дискурсы. Эта концепция усиливает связь с «говорящей массой» Соссюра, так как рассматриваемая практика никому не принадлежит и ее нельзя приписывать к конкретному лингвистическому сообществу.

В конце статьи автор предлагает проанализировать практику высказывания как последовательность рефлексии и исследования, которая выступает посредником между первичным опытом и семиотическим объектом.

Praxis ja enontsiatsioon: Saussure'i pärija Greimas

Enontsiatiivset praktikat on defineeritud koosnevana kõigist operatsioonidest, mis narratiivsete süvastruktuuride süsteemist lähtuvalt loovad piisavalt stabiilseid semiootilisi konfiguratsioone. Enontsiatsioonipraktika osutab kollektiivses ajas organiseeritud operatsiooniahelale ning loomis- ja uuenevõimele tähendusfiguuride tekitamisel kultuuripiiranguid arvestades.

Sellist enontsiatsioonikontseptsiooni ei leiutatud otseselt Greimase semiootikas. See esineb juba Saussure'il, kus see kirjeldab märgipraksist ja keelte elu. Tema arutelu algõukeks on substantsi asendamine tegevusega: märk ei ole substantsist eristatud abstraktsioon, märk on "soorituste klass", prakseoloogiline klass.

Greimaslikku enontsiatiivset praktikat saab defineerida kui kõiki tegusid, mille kaudu iga konkreetne enontsiatsioon diskursusi koondab, valib, käsitleb ja loob. See kontseptsioon tugevdab seost Saussure'i 'kõneleva massiga', sest kõnealune praxis ei kuulu kellelegi ja seda ei saa isegi omistada mingile konkreetsele keelekogukonnale.

Teeme ettepaneku analüüsida enontsiatsioonipraktikat refleksiooni ja uurimise jadana, mis vahendab primaarset kogemust ja semiootilist objekti.