The Hermeneutic Lens: Ricoeur's Contribution to Discourse Analysis

La Hermenéutica de Ricoeur en el Análisis del Discurso

Contribuições da Hermenêutica Ricoueriana na Análise do Discurso

Paulo Marcelo Ferrarese Pegino
Universidade Estadual de Londrina
Brasil
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0532-7008
paulo.pegino@uel.br

Abstract

Discourse Analysis became mainstream in Organizational Studies. While some easily recognize discourse as one of the most expressive contemporary organizational phenomena, others consider its onto-epistemological and theoretical-methodological aspects to lack consistency: discourse is conceptually fragile and means virtually anything; it is epistemologically fragile as a pure reflector of reality or its universal constructor; builds false perceptions that is a simplistic way to access and understand reality objectively. In this paper, we confront these claims by proposing Ricoeur's hermeneutics as an onto-epistemological alternative. We develop a comprehensive view of hermeneutics showing its strong connections with discourse and demonstrate how, in Ricoeur's hermeneutics, the most elementary concepts are intimately connected to the philosophical aspects of the discourse. Finally, we explain how Ricoeur's hermeneutics may be an epistemology for Discourse Analysis.

Keywords: Ricoeur's hermeneutics; discourse analysis; ontology; epistemology; organizational studies.

Resumen

El análisis del discurso se volvió común en los estudios organizacionales. Mientras algunos reconocen fácilmente el discurso como uno de los fenómenos organizacionales

contemporáneos más expresivos, otros consideran que sus aspectos onto-epistemológicos y teórico-metodológicos carecen de consistencia: el discurso es conceptualmente frágil y significa prácticamente cualquier cosa; es epistemológicamente frágil como puro reflector de la realidad o su constructor universal; construye percepciones falsas de que es una forma simplista de acceder y comprender la realidad de manera puramente objetiva. En este artículo confrontamos estas afirmaciones proponiendo la hermenéutica de Ricoeur como una alternativa onto-epistemológica. Desarrollamos una visión integral de la hermenéutica que muestra sus fuertes conexiones con el discurso y demostramos cómo, en la hermenéutica de Ricoeur, los conceptos más elementales están íntimamente conectados con los aspectos filosóficos del discurso. Finalmente, explicamos cómo la hermenéutica de Ricoeur puede ser una epistemología para el análisis del discurso.

Palabras clave: hermenéutica de Ricoeur; análisis del discurso; ontología; epistemología; estudios organizacionales.

Resumo

A análise do discurso é um campo consolidado nos estudos organizacionais. Enquanto alguns reconhecem facilmente o discurso como um dos mais expressivos fenômenos organizacionais contemporâneos, outros consideram que os seus aspectos onto-epistemológicos e teórico-metodológicos carecem de consistência: o discurso é visto como conceitualmente frágil, podendo significar virtualmente qualquer coisa que o pesquisador queira lhe atribuir; é epistemologicamente frágil, sendo assumido como puro refletor de uma realidade ou como seu construtor universal; constrói falsas percepções de que é uma forma simplista de se acessar e de se compreender a realidade de forma puramente objetiva. Neste artigo, confrontamos essas afirmações propondo a hermenêutica ricoeuriana como alternativa onto-epistemológica para a análise do discurso. Desenvolvemos uma visão ampla da hermenêutica a partir de seus aspectos filosóficos fundamentais que mostra suas fortes conexões com o discurso, e demonstramos como, na hermenêutica de Ricoeur, os conceitos mais elementares estão intimamente ligados aos aspectos filosóficos subjacentes do discurso enquanto objeto de estudo. Por fim, explicamos como a hermenêutica ricoeuriana pode ser uma epistemologia para a análise do discurso.

Palavras-chave: hermenêutica ricoeuriana, análise do discurso, ontologia, epistemologia, estudos organizacionais.

1) Introduction

This paper presents Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics as an epistemological alternative for discourse analysis (DA) in Organizational Studies (OS). Researchers have identified discourse as a mean of access to subjective and complex organizational phenomena (Vaara, Tienari & Koveshnikov, 2019; Halsall, 2009; Reynolds & Yuthas, 2008); as a mediating element of the relations between organization and society (Nayak & Becket, 2008) even in the public sector (Höglund & Svärdsten, 2018); as a stigmatizing element of both exclusion and inclusion in organizations (Segercrantz, Tuori & Niemistö, 2021; Bendl, 2008); as a mediating element of organizational

practices, including the methods of control and power relations in its most diverse forms and manifestations (Vaara & Whittle, 2022; Josefsson & Blomberg, 2020; Hardy & Thomas, 2014; Marshak & Grant, 2008); as a resource in the process of constructing or legitimating strategies, identities, and subjectivities in the organizational environment (Segercrantz, Tuori & Niemistö, 2021; Smith, Valsecchi, Mueller & Gabe, 2008, Driver, 2007, Musson & Duberley, 2007, Berger & Knights, 2006; Al, 2004); or as a mythical organizational narrative (Ogbor, 2000). Also, discourse can be accessed through documents (Michaud, 2017) and used as a tool to identify and solve problems in the managerial process (Oppong, 2017).

The examples cited above do not exhaust the use of DA in the OS. On the contrary, the field has grown year on year since 1989 (Leitch & Palmer, 2010), reaching a remarkable number of 4400 articles only in the top 8 international business journals between 2000 and 2010 (Hardy & Grant, 2012). Hence, it is not surprising that DA became mainstream in OS (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011), mainly due to the "linguistic turn" that affected the whole field of social sciences (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000a) and philosophy (Rudolph, 2006; Surkis, 2012) since the mid-twentieth century.

While some easily recognize discourse as one of the most expressive contemporary organizational phenomena (and empirically available, which in theory would facilitate its access) (Hardy & Grant, 2012), others consider its onto-epistemological and theoretical-methodological aspects miss consistency: discourse, as it has been treated, (i) is conceptually fragile and, based on the empirical evidence of its use in organizational studies, means virtually anything (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000a); (ii) is epistemologically fragile as polarises the question between a false duality of discourse as a pure reflector of reality and discourse as a universal constructor of organizational reality (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011); (iii) it leads to a false perception that discourse is a simplistic way to access and objectively understand reality (Faria, 2015), dismissing non-discoursive elements (Putnan, 2015).

Although authors such as Hardy and Grant (2012), Hardy and Thomas (2015), and Orlikowski and Scott (2015) point out exceptions to the above critiques, both the concept and its analysis indeed elicit (or should elicit) more profound reflections on the appropriate theoretical-methodological (and onto-epistemological) treatment for DA. In this paper, by presenting Ricoeur's hermeneutics, I confront these claims

that DA is conceptually, epistemologically, and ontologically fragile. Thus, I propose hermeneutics as an epistemological alternative for DA in OS.

Identifying the concept of discourse in Ricoeur's hermeneutics requires the construction of a long path that runs from the most primary conceptual aspects, such as phrase and word, to the more complex reflections on philosophical questions and their positive developments in terms of scientific knowledge.

Throughout this journey, however, it is possible to identify the same hermeneutical unity of thought centered on the concept of discourse. This unity of thought leads the hermeneutics of the phrase to the dialectical pair of semantics and semiotics; reconstructs the concept of discourse from its negation in Saussurian structuralism; rescues him, again, now to inscribe it in the dialectical pair of event and signification; uses it to surpass the Heideggerian hermeneutic circle and the irreconcilable situation between understanding and explanation; and, finally, launches it as the mediating element of a hermeneutic that transits between the dialectical pair of ontology and epistemology.

With this path on the horizon, I discuss in a specific way: (i) the relations between the hermeneutics and the discourse; (ii) the disappearance and rescue of discourse from Saussurean structuralism, and how this has impacted important concepts in discourse theory; (iii) the universal primacy of the sentence as the unit of discourse analysis from the propositional content and the onto-epistemological possibilities of hermeneutics in its relation to the concepts of linguistics; (iv) and, finally, the questions raised about the onto-epistemological impacts of discourse in hermeneutics and discourse theory.

2) Ricoeur's hermeneutics and discourse

Almost half a century has passed since Paul Ricoeur wrote *Le conflit des interprétations* (Editions du Seuil, 1969) and proposed a hermeneutic reflection on the classical Dilthey's opposition in which explanation and understanding were unanswerable singularities from the philosophical point of view. At the same time, Ricoeur intended to solve a similar anthropological reading of Heidegger that opposed the objective and the existential (Ricoeur, 2004 [1974]). At that point, Ricoeur had already observed that those oppositions constituted, in fact, false dilemmas that implied that the "sciences of thought" abdicate the possibility of explaining the world in favor of idealistic systems preoccupied almost exclusively

with the ontological problem. Reflecting on the limits that this dualism had imposed on philosophy, Ricoeur (2004, p. 392) wrote: "Doubtless it is necessary today to award less importance to *Verstehen* ('understanding'), which is too exclusively centered on an existential decision, and to consider the problem of language and interpretation in all its breadth."

After that, Ricoeur began a philosophical task of replacing those false dilemmas with a hermeneutic theory of interpretation, which would not be based on the dualism of *Verstehen* and *Erklären* but rather on dialectic relations between both. Shortly afterward, in 1981, a robust definition appeared for the first time in English: "hermeneutics is the theory of the operations of understanding in their relation to the interpretation of texts" (Ricoeur, 2016 [1981], p.53). Although simple, this definition led to three critical onto-epistemological implications for DA: hermeneutic is (i) the epistemology that allows the "interpretation of texts"; it is (ii) the ontology of the "operations of understanding"; but (iii) on condition that both these philosophical dimensions are mutually involved. In addition, it had a conceptual impact that set it apart from a significant part of the DA perspectives commonly found in the field, from the so-called Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to the postmodernists. Common to all these perspectives, "text" refers to the unit of discourse analysis. It is the starting point that institutionalizes practices (as in postmodernist works) or provides an understanding of the organizational context (as in the CDA's work).

For Ricoeur, however, the text is the symbolic universe itself, only accessed and modified by the understanding-and-interpretation pair throughout the multiple forms of discourse. Hence it is neither the starting point (since it does not institutionalize the discourse) nor the arrival point (since it is not discovered by discourse), but the dialectical movement between both and, therefore, at the same time, starting and arrival point for the DA. The text, in Ricoeur (2016), is a world to be explained and understood, whose basic mediation is given by discourse. Besides, the text has no immediate connection with writing, nor is the unit of DA as in the perspectives mentioned above. However, it exists with discourse, both in its oral and written form.

In the contemporary DA debate in OS, the concept of text assumes slight variation: in Grant et al. (2004), for example, text appears as the manifestation of discourse, and discourse - tautologically - is a set of interrelated texts (Marshak & Grant, 2008;

Phillips & Hardy, 2002); it takes only the form of written language (Van Dijk, 2001), written and oral language in Fairclough's first forays into the field of discourse (Fairclough, 1992) or a "multimodal" form (Leitch & Palmer, 2010), which would include sounds, artifacts, symbols, Etc. (Hardy & Grant, 2012; Fairclough, 2003); yet text and discourse can be treated as synonyms (Hardy, 2004; Fairhurst, 2004).

In his later works, however, Fairclough provides a more robust definition of text, defining it as "linguistic/semiotic elements of social events, analytically isolable parts of the social process" (Fairclough, 2003, p.916). What Fairclough calls text approaches what Ricoeur would call a discourse. The discourse, for Ricoeur (2016): (i) is the actual use (and consequent updating) of a virtual linguistic system, crossed by the dialectic of event and meaning, and divided into two units of analysis, the phrase (which refers to semantics) and the sign (which refers to semiotics); (ii) necessarily provokes management of the contexts, that is, "an activity of discernment that is exercised in the concrete exchange of messages between interlocutors, and that is modeled in the interplay of question and answer" (Ricoeur, 2016, p.4); (iii) and has specific characteristics depending on its form, oral or written. It, therefore, bears the semantic and semiotic elements to which Fairclough refers but raises a myriad of additional explanations for its proper understanding.

3) Discourse as semantics

For Ricoeur (1976), the fundamental problem of discourse revolves around the distinction between semantics and semiotics. This distinction represents the progress the author has achieved, influenced by the work of Émile Benveniste (Ricoeur, 2003 [1975]), towards Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistic systems. Saussure, in his *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, published initially (and posthumously) in 1916, creates a distinction between a system of codes (*langue*) under which the speaker constructs the message (*parole*), translated in the English version as language and speaking. Alvesson and Kärreman (2000b) pointed to a "linguistic turn" in social sciences between the 1980s and 1990s. We should notice, however, the tremendous impact of Saussure's work on social sciences from, at least, the publication of *Structural Anthropology* by Claude Lévi-Strauss years before, in 1958.

By *langue*, Saussure (2011 [1916]) comprises a collective, synchronous (and, therefore, a-historical), anonymous and neutral linguistic system. By *parole*, the

individual, intentional and diachronic use of this system. This abstract distinction between the code and the discursive message entailed the disappearance of discourse as a scientific object in language studies, provoking a similar effect on the social sciences (Ricoeur, 1976). Now understood as a system, language was finally able to meet the scientific criteria of a scientificity still tributary to positivism. In Saussure's perspective, linguistics was restricted to the diachronic exercise of criticism dealing with the limitations imposed by the available documents. Besides, without access to "[...] an infinite number of photographs, taken at different times" in the course of History, these diachronic linguists "[...] are constantly aware of wide gaps in their documentation" (Saussure, 2011, p.212). On the other hand, the synchronic language was accessible in the anonymous totality of a given community, existing potentially "[...] in each brain, or, more specifically, in the brains of a group of individuals", however incomplete in any single individual, was surely finite in the totality of the collectivity (Saussure, 2011, p.14).

The *parole*, the discursive element of Saussurean linguistics, is the individual access to the *langue* system. It manifests in a given individual when they intend to express something through a psychophysical mechanism. Although the act of speech accomplishes the language code, it is a minor phenomenon "[...] accessory and more or less accidental" (Saussure, 2011, p.14) since it is evanescent, occasional, and conditioned to a finite momentum (Ricoeur, 1976; 2003). Speech is nothing more than the researcher's empirical access to the individual's inventory of the language. To a greater or lesser degree, each speaker of a particular community unintentionally registers a specific linguistic system, accessing it and materializing it in the act of speech. Since it is impossible to verify all these individual speech acts, linguistics should concentrate its efforts on the social phenomenon of language. The discourse, moreover, should have less scientific attention in favor of the system, which is somewhat predictable, controllable, and reducible in its constituent parts. The first linguistic turn in social sciences was not the discovery of discourse, as Alvesson and Kärreman (2000b) believe, but precisely the obliteration of this phenomenon: "the science of language is possible only if the other elements are excluded" (Saussure, 2011, p.15).

In Levi-Strauss's *Structural Anthropology* (2008 [1963]), for example, the structural model of analysis splits the ethnographic work, which consists of empirical data collection and classification, from the ethnological work, which consists of

constructed models from the data raised. It seems clear that discourse plays a significant role from an ethnographic angle. Nevertheless, a given society's narrative about itself and the external world has scientific value to the extent that it enables the construction of a sufficiently broad and complex structural model to explain how social phenomena work. In this context, the model does not represent reality but must encompass the codes that regulate this society. Discourse, thereby, is more a source than an object per se. From it (and, of course, supplementary data), ethnology can reach kinship rules, taboos, myths, rituals, and other complex structures that would be fragmented across multiple individual interpretations.

Ricoeur (1976, 2004) admits Saussure achieved scientific advances in the study of languages. What Saussurean linguistics ignores, however, is that a broader linguistic phenomenon requires a qualitative change in the type of discipline used: the code belongs to semiotics, while the phrase belongs to semantics. The phrase, as resulting *parole* from the *langue* system's access, is not a longer word nor more complex but a new entity that cannot be reduced in its constituent parts. The phrase, thus, is an entirely new event and implies specific theoretical-methodological and onto-epistemological contours.

In Saussure's *langue*, the phrase is a *parole* problem. Hence, it does not evoke linguistic concerns. It is a heterogeneous entity in a set whose main characteristics are the enormous possibility of variants and the little similarity between its parts when comparatively analyzed. Thus, any effort to bring together the typical characters of phrases should face the fact that the only common elements in their constitutions are words, leading linguistics back to *langue* and its unit of analysis, the sign (Saussure, 2011). Semiotics is, therefore dissociative and analytical as it understands the language from its constituent parts. Semantics, on the other hand, is integrative and refers to the concept of meaning since it has in its sentence its unit of analysis (Ricoeur, 1976). In DA, the concepts of semiotics and semantics are a minor concern. These are absent concepts, for example, in Zanoni and Janssens (2015), Bommel and Spicer (2011), Thompson and Harley (2012), Curtis (2014), Iedema, Degeling, Braithwaite and White (2003), Werner and Cornelissen (2008), Holt and Mueller (2011), Golant and Sillince (2007), Mengis and Eppler (2008), Vaara, Tienari and Laurila (2006), Hardy and Grant (2012), Alvesson and Kärreman (2000a, 2000b, 2011), among many others. In practice, DA has treated such concepts as merely elements which form discourse: while written and oral texts are

its semantic components, other symbolic artifacts, such as pictures, images, and sounds, are its semiotic elements. It is a taxonomic way of dealing with terms and, therefore, emptied in their abstract forms. In Fairclough (2003), semiotics is a complex set of non-textual elements. Semantics, on the other hand, is a linguistic subject concerned with studying meaning in language (in opposition to grammar, which deals with its formal aspects, and pragmatics which seeks the meaning of "[...] actual texts in actual social contexts") (Fairclough, 2003, p. 222). For Ricoeur, however, semantics demands context since discourse always happens as an event and is understood and interpreted as meaning.

4) Semantics, semiotics, and discourse

In Hermeneutics, the possibility of rescuing the discourse of the structuralist eclipse emerges from this duality between semiotics and semantics. Ricoeur (1976) understood that discourse's transitory and evanescent character might mean its epistemological weakness before the *langue*. However, a phrase is followed by another phenomenon corresponding to its temporal nature, *the meaning*. In this dialectic of event and meaning, discourse positions itself as a particular object: it is not merely evanescent since it can be identified and re-identified to the point that it can be said in other words or even in other languages. The linguistic element that allows it is the *propositional content*, a "said as such" that preserves the discourse from its transience (Ricoeur, 1976, p.21).

This propositional content consists of a singular identification (a subject) and a prediction (an action attributed to the subject). The predicative function leads the phrase to mediate a relationship between a speaker and the world: it is always the subject who says, intentionally, something. Furthermore, it also uses a system of signs that do not have actual existence but are only realized in one own speech (Ricoeur, 2000). In the speech, a singular action happens at a particular time, with a particular intention and intensity. It must be borne in mind, however, that the sentence's subject is logically proposed: in OS assumes the form of "the company," "the strategy," etc.

The phrase, unit of analysis of discourse, has a *singular identification* (a subject who speaks) and a *predicative identification,* that is, the adjectives ("great, good") and nominalized qualifications ("greatness, kindness"), the classes of belonging ("minerals, animals"), relations ("X is on the Y side"), and actions ("Brutus kills

Caesar") (Ricoeur, 2000). If the singular identification refers to the subject logically proposed, the predicative identification has a universality attribute since it can be applied to different subjects (Ricoeur, 2000).

Nevertheless, if the phrase carries universal qualities (predicates) to specific subjects, it can still reveals: (i) the act of speech or the intention of the subject (in semantic and non-psychologizing terms); the illocutionary act, which is to do something in saying; and the perlocutionary act, which is to produce effects in saying. Moreover, since discourse is always addressed to someone, it eventually promotes an interlocutionary act (an interlocution) (Ricoeur, 2000).

These phrase's features give the discourse a complex dialectical character: discourse happens, but it does not disappear temporarily given the meaning it produces in interlocution; this meaning, however, is not purely subjective since what has been said has a propositional content that allows the interlocutor to identify and re-identify it. Moreover, what has been said because it can be identified acquires semantic independence from the speaker. Hence, the discourse is self-referential from the semantic point of view, and "the event is someone talking" (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 24).

This semantic independence means that neither on the side of the locution nor the side of interlocution do discourse's psychological meanings matter. Significations and re-significations do not alter a discourse's identity, that is, its propositional content (the "said as such"). It suffers from different interpretations from the socio-historical context to which it belongs or to which it could have been hypothetically transported. However, its propositional content gives it an epistemological character of universality. 'What is said' is part of the intentionality of an ideal author. The 'what is said' event, the act of discourse, updates the system of language codes but also provokes a signification. The discourse is then understood as meaning. Meaning is a propositional content's function and, dialectically, the author's intention: "the meaning of the enunciation points to the meaning of the speaker thanks to the self-reference of the discourse to itself as an event" (Ricoeur, 1976, p.25). 'Meaning' gives scientific objectivity to the discourse. Thanks to propositional content (and, of course, to its connectors), it is possible to dedicate oneself to discourse in a non-psychologizing and purely semantic way. The saying carries a semantic intention independent of a psychological intention.

Relying on a detailed description of the phrase's semantic function, Ricoeur did not plan the design of an instrumental method for DA. On the contrary, on this ground, the author inscribed hermeneutics in the onto-epistemological clash between philosophy and science. In this sense, the semantic independence and the intentionality of the propositional content do not respond, at the instrumental methodological level, to how to identify the various constitutive acts of communication, such as illocutionary and perlocutionary acts or the polysemy of words and signs. Polysemy can be understood as the phenomenon of the existence of several meanings for the same name (Ricoeur, 2000).

Signs, the unit of semiotics, usually carry polysemy and can impair the context's management and hinder the interlocutor's interpretation. Polysemy also intermediates the dialectical relation between semantics and semiotics. For example, a company's strategy is a company's strategy. However, the polysemic character of words can lead the sign from its first and literal sense to a second and figurative sense.

Henceforward, the signs can be (i) technicians when they refer to what they mean and (ii) symbolic when they are opaque and leads to a second meaning, usually reached by analogy through the idea of an "as if" (Ricoeur, 2004). Thus, "the weight of decision making," for example, can be understood as "the decision as a weight.". Managing opaque signs in a given context always starts from medium points, "[...] from the fullness of language and of meaning already there" (Ricoeur, 2004, pp. 287-288).

What will be interpreted in the sign is what has already been said, and, in a way, everything has already been saying about the sign. The language has already been realized in the sign. Unlike the phrase, where the event must occur to exist an interpretation, in the sign, its meaning is already being charged even before the event.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of dialogue is precisely the intention of having the polysemy, the signs, and the acts recognized. The intention to become frightening by saying may or may not be perceived by the interlocutor. However, this signifying game between speaker and interlocutor marks the most fundamental characteristic of language: the dialectic between explanation and understanding.

5) Explanation and understanding

It is no exaggeration to say that the discourse allowed Ricoeur to reconcile the so-called sciences of the spirit with the explanation of the world. The dialectic between event and meaning, which has rescued the discourse from the twilight caused by the structuralist movement, has given hermeneutics, at the same time, the basis for a dialectical relationship between understanding (ontology) and explanation (epistemology).

As commented, the linguistic turn in the social sciences followed the rhythm dictated by Saussurian linguistics. However, for Ricoeur, while structuralism relegated discourse to the background, it provided the social sciences with advances in epistemological terms. In "Hermeneutics and Structuralism" - originally published in 1969 in his book "*Le conflit des interpretations*" - Ricoeur transpires this point of view: "Structuralism is part of science, and I do not at present see any more rigorous or more fruitful approach than the structuralist method at the level of comprehension which is it is own" (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 30).

Concomitantly, philosophy was also struck by its linguistic turn in the mid-twentieth century. The effect was that language was partly seen (i) as the redemption of philosophical problems: "Metaphysical disputes, it was thought, could be reduced to problems about the meanings of words" (Rudolph, 2006, p. 64); and partly (ii) as a hermeneutical shift from Heidegger's works and his perception of the philosophy's bankruptcy (Rudolph, 2006). Therefore, it is no coincidence that in the publication of *Le conflit*, Ricoeur stood against what he called the false dichotomy of the sciences of the spirit: the dissenting opposition between *Erklären* (explanation) and *Verstehen* (understanding). Alternatively, according to Heidegger's existentialist version, the opposition between "objective and existential" (Ricoeur, 1969, p. 396).

On the one hand, language allowed the social sciences' epistemological strengthening and, on the other, the regionalization of philosophy by positioning its internal debates almost exclusively on ontological questions. In Heidegger (1996), the impossibility of explanation culminated in a hermeneutic circle as an exclusively ontological problem in which the subject-object dichotomy (characteristic of epistemological postulates) did not exist. In Heidegger's circle, "[...] the subject itself enters into the knowledge of the object; and, in turn, the former is determined, in its most subjective, by the hold which the object has upon it, even before the subject comes to know the object" (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 17).

For Heidegger (1996), the circle is part of the essential pre-structure of the subject (subject = *Dasein*). It means that it precedes all the descriptive or classifying forms that surround the human world, subsuming any attempt to explain reality to the existential aspects of the *Dasein*. Death or consciousness are existential questions before biological, psychological, or theological questions. Even the examination of language is later than *Dasein* since "the existential-ontological foundation of language is discourse," and discourse is as existentially to the being as comprehension itself (Heidegger, 1996 [1953], p. 161). Discourse is a condition, moreover, to articulate this comprehensibility.

The circle, therefore, expresses the irreconcilable relation between understanding (ontology) and explanation (epistemology) since it gives the subjects a sense of belonging (Gadamer, 1975 [1960]) or ontological density (Ricoeur, 2016) but prevents them from explicating the world. The discourse, previously discarded by structuralism, was now buried by ontology. For Ricoeur (2016), the overcoming of the circle goes through the re-foundation of the dilemma proposed by Gadamer in Truth and Method (*Wahrheit und Methode*, initially published in 1960).

For Gadamer (2004, p. 295), the role of hermeneutics should be that of staying in the middle (*Zwischen*) between the tension that the "traditionary text's strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition." Consequently, the solution to the circle would be to operate consciously at the pole of alienation. Gadamer understood the circle as a possibility to build the historicity of understanding, not just the pre-structure of Heidegger's understanding. History operates on ontology as subjects are preceded by traditions constructed or under construction before their arrival. To stand at the pole of alienation means becoming aware of tradition's ontological operation to such an extent that any objectification of history seems impossible. Thus, either the subjects establish a relation of belonging to their world, which is a relation of truth to what composes their reality, or they operate an alienating distance, a conscious philosophical act in which they abdicate from any positive science over reality.

This opposition between distanciation and belonging from Gadamer's hermeneutics necessarily leads to a dilemma: "either we adopt the methodological attitude and lose the ontological density of the reality we study, or we adopt the attitude of truth and must then renounce the objectivity of the human sciences" (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 131). For Ricoeur, however, this dilemma is inaccurate: belonging

to a tradition necessarily limits its distanciation. Suppose there is a tradition operating in the understanding of tradition itself, as it concludes the ontological historicity of Gadamer (2004); in that case, there is no possible option in favor of the pole of strangeness. It means the impossibility of escaping from the ontological density.

Ricoeur's solution (2016) is to deny the remaining pole, that is, to deny distanciation and assume belonging and its historicity. The space to place hermeneutics then becomes the dialectic relationship between belonging and distance, with the text as "[...] the paradigm of distanciation in communication" (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 131). The dialectic between distanciation and belonging marks the dialectic between explanation and understanding. Belonging is the Heideggerian characteristic of *Dasein*: one belongs ontologically to a given historical time and a particular social context. Distanciation is the redemption of hermeneutics with epistemology: the discourse potentially objectifiable from its propositional content allows access to the (world of) text. The text is the fundamental mediation of *Dasein* with the world, and language is the fundamental mediation of *Dasein* with the text. In this way, every activity of interpretation reveals an understanding of the world, taken in an ontological sense from a particular subject. In a correspondingly dialectical way, every activity of interpretation allows objective explanations of a particular object, taken in an epistemological sense. Working between these philosophical poles, a socio-historical dynamic involving subjects and objects, limits the hermeneutic activity of interpretation.

6) Conclusions

Saussure's structuralism inaugurated a linguistic turn in the social sciences: it replaced history by the system, narrative by intelligible arrangements, and, equally radically, discourse by *langue*. It was followed by a non-linguistic path in discourse analysis, carried out by logicians and epistemologists, in a direct approach to the phenomenon without paying tribute, however, to the linguistic advances in the field (Ricoeur, 2000). Discourse as an existential operative mechanism or as a mediator of historicity in Heidegger and Gadamer, respectively, provide evidence of the solid philosophical advance on the topic independently of the obscuring of discourse in linguistics.

Similarly, the advancement of DA in OS reflects this non-linguistic path. The "linguistic turn" proposed by Alvesson and Kärreman (2000b) is not, in the limit, the discovery of a new method but the discovery of a new object of potential interest to the field. The quantitative advancement of DA articles, conceptually fragile and poorly operationalized (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000a), seems to demonstrate that the greater interest of the field lies more in the object and less in its complex theoretical-methodological or adjacent onto-epistemological aspects. Few papers attempt to resolve these issues. In addition, the practical use of the theme seems to have an aprioristic justification that exempts the author from articulating the links between text and context and between method and theory.

Suppose the preterition of discourse by Structuralist linguists allowed the advance of ontological discussions in discourse in the human sciences. In that case, it seems that the transposition of the discourse of its (inter) disciplinary sites of origin to the OS did not move the field to proceed with similar rigor. Even papers that manifest better-defined meta-theoretical positions, such as the so-called Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the constructivist/institutionalist ones, need to deepen, even at the theoretical-conceptual level. These are not works without theoretical consistency: they are, moreover, works that are little concerned with articulating and advancing the concepts proper to DA. Fairclough (2003), for example, is an author commonly cited in CDA. He defines (and differentiates) the concepts of (i) text as a linguistic and semiotic element of social events from a multimodal perspective; (ii) language as the verbal aspects of the linguistic structure (words, sentences, Etc.); and (iii) discourse as an element of social life interconnected with other elements (texts with texts). However, it is rare to use and articulate these concepts within the field.

For Ricoeur, the isolated advancements in discourse semantics benefit from the progress made in semiotics of signs. The field could use this approximation between discourse theory and linguistics and operationalize its concepts, whether those of Fairclough's sociolinguistics or Ricoeur's hermeneutics.

DA could benefit from more explicit definitions of its most elementary concepts and should be able to respond to what is text, what is speech, what is narrative, what differentiates it, and what its impacts on the field; what are semantic and semiotic - beyond mere taxonomies - and what are the epistemological impacts of these concepts; and, above all, DA should propose more profound reflections on what

theoretical-methodological and onto-epistemological treatment is appropriate to the discourse particularities'. In this sense, Ricoeur's hermeneutics can claim a method to explain the world of organizations, even if its origins are the human sciences. However, the transpositions between this type of hermeneutics and the OS require care and can incur risks in its operationalization. However, claiming a method is the equivalent of claiming hermeneutics as an epistemology, defining criteria of criticism and truth, and its ontological limits.

Conflict of interest statement

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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