CHATEAUBRIAND ON THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE[1]

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Abstract: In the present paper, I raise some questions referring to Chateaubriand's discussion of the nature of language, its origin, its development and its functions in human live. These questions arise when his view is compared with the partly similar views defended by Gödel and Jørgensen, among others.

Keywords: Origin of language. Creation. Functions of language. Chateaubriand. Gödel. Jørgensen.

CHATEAUBRIAND SOBRE A NATUREZA DA LINGUAGEM

Resumo: No presente trabalho levanto algumas questões referentes à discussão de Chateaubriand sobre a natureza da linguagem, sua origem, seu desenvolvimento e suas funções na vida humana. Essas questões surgem quando seu ponto de vista é comparado aos pontos de vista parcialmente similares defendidos por Gödel e Jorgensen, entre outros.

Palavras chave: Origem da linguagem. Criação. Funções da linguagem. Chateaubriand. Gödel. Jørgensen.

In the initial chapter of Part II of his *Logical Forms*, which is entitled "Language, Meaning, and Reference" (Chateaubriand 2005, Chap. 13), Oswaldo Chateaubriand deals with the origin of (spoken and non-idealized) language, as well as with issues related to the ontology and epistemology of (spoken and written) language. In what follows, I wish to pose some questions that arise when his view is compared to some views defended by some other authors. In Section 1, I shall pose my questions concerning his conception of the origin of language. They refer, in the first place, to his notions of "invention" and "creation" and their relation to similar notions that have been used by Gödel, Tolkien, and Kenny. I shall also raise, in this section, some questions regarding Chateaubriand's view of the relationship between the origin of language, on the one hand, and the origin of logic and mathematics, on the other. Section 2 deals with Chateaubriand's view of the development of language and its functions in human life. I shall compare in this section some aspects of this view with Jørgensen's view.

1. CHATEAUBRIAND ON THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE

Chateaubriand begins his reflections on the origin of language with a negative thesis about the origin of language, which is established with the help of an argument of reciprocity. He argues that "[t]he idea that we invented language is an illusion", and that "it would be just as accurate to claim that language invented us" (p. 17). He underpins this negative claim with a citation from the work of Noam Chomsky, according to which we cannot properly say that we or our remote ancestors have "made" our language (cf. p. 45). One of my questions with regard to Chateaubriand's view of the origin of language, which I shall pose at the end of this section, is associated with his use of the verb "to invent" (and its cognates) and Chomsky's use of the verb "to make" (and its cognates) in this context.

Chateaubriand also proposes some positive theses about the origin of language. He claims, for instance, that "in their specificity English and other natural languages are partly human creations" (p. 17), and he elucidates this thesis by means of a commentary made by Roberto di Pietro according to which "our creative capacity is sufficiently great to enable us to change and re-form the systems which generate our sentences" (cf. p. 46). The question arises how this concept of "creation" or "partial creation" relates to the use of the verbs "to invent" and "to made" in Chateaubriand's discussion of the origin of language.

He moreover holds that language is an "essentially social biological phenomenon" (p. 19), where "social" is understood in a very strict sense that rules out, for example, that bees are social animals (p. 19).

In order to make my questions regarding the origin of language more precise, it is helpful to introduce some distinctions that have been made by Kurt Gödel, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien and Anthony Kenny, respectively. The distinction made by Gödel is the distinction between "free invention" or "free creation", on the one hand, and "construction" or "non-free creation", on the other. In a text on the nature of mathematics, he characterizes the former concepts as follows:

> [...] for the creator necessarily knows all properties of his creatures, because they can't have any others except those he has given to them. (Gödel 1995 [1951], p. 311)

> [...] ignorance as to the objects we created, it is true, might still occur, but only through lack of a clear realization as to what we really have created [...]. Therefore it would have to disappear (at least in principle, although perhaps not in practice) as soon as we attain perfect clearness. (Gödel [1951] 1995, p. 314)

The notion of "construction" or "non-free creation", in contrast, is characterized by him as follows:

> [...] the constructor need not necessarily know *every* property of
> what he constructs. For example, we build machines and still cannot
> predict their behaviour in every detail. [...] we don't create the
> machines out of nothing, but build them out of some given material.
> [...] this material or basis of our constructions would be something
> objective and would force some realistic viewpoint upon us even if
> certain other ingredients [...] were our own creation. (Gödel [1951]
> 1995, p. 312)

Gödel favors a conception of mathematics according to which
mathematics is not a human "free creation" in the sense specified
above (Gödel [1951] 1995, p. 322); the brand of conceptual realism he
defends is a Platonic realism, not an Aristotelian one (Gödel [1951]
1995, pp. 321-322).

The distinction made by Tolkien that is needed for my
purposes is the distinction between a "primary world" and several
"secondary worlds", which is made by him in the context of his
theorizing on fairy tales. Whereas "secondary worlds" are the result
of human sub-creation, the "primary world" is the result of divine
creation. He writes:

> Probably every writer making a secondary world, a fantasy, every
> sub-creator, wishes in some measure to be a real maker, or hopes
> that he is drawing on reality: hopes that the peculiar quality of this
> secondary world (if not all the details) are derived from Reality, or
> are flowing into it. If he indeed achieves a quality that can fairly be
> described by the dictionary definition: 'inner consistency of reality',
> it is difficult to conceive how this can be, if the work does not in
> some way partake of reality. (Tolkien *apud* Lopes 2006, pp. 132-134)

Anthony Kenny also distinguishes between various concepts
of creation. In his comment on Plato's concept of creation in
Timaeus and its reception on western thinking (2004), he
distinguishes between no less than seven concepts of creation, of
which two are the most important ones: the Greek concept of
creation in the sense of a process that starts from pre-existent matter

and involves the use of an eternal paradigm (Kenny 2004, p. 81), and the scholastic concept of creation in the sense of a creation *ex-nihilo* in which the creator is free from any paradigms (cf. Kenny 2004, p. 87).

Given these distinctions, my first question regarding Chateaubriand's conception of the origin of language can be formulated in a more precise way as follows: Is it correct to characterize the concepts of invention and creation employed in his *Logical Forms* by means of the following comparative scheme?

Gödel	Tolkien	Kenny	Chateaubriand
Free creation (Free invention)	Creation	Creation in the scholastic sense	Invention (Manufacture)
Construction (Non-free creation)	Sub-creation	Creation in the greek sense	Creation

In order to formulate my second and my third question, it is necessary to briefly recall an important feature of Chateaubriand's overall logical system. According to this system, there are *logical* properties, i.e., properties "living" in a Platonic world that accumulate in his *sui generis* hierarchy (cf. Sautter 2004). It therefore seems that, in Chateaubriand's view, logic is a "construction" in Gödel's sense. Given the peculiar kind of logicism sustained by Chateaubriand, this seems to favor a conception of mathematics, similar to the Gödelean one, according to which mathematics is a "construction". Is language partly a free creation in Gödel's sense? (If it is partly a free creation in Gödel's sense, it follows that there is a significant difference between language, on the one hand, and logic and mathematics, on the other.) My second and my third questions are: Are there in Chateaubriand's hierarchy specifically linguistic properties? And what is the *status* of the so called "linguistic universals", if, in fact, they are admitted by Chateaubriand?

2. DEVELOPMENT AND FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE

Chateaubriand claims that the development of language is synchronic with the development of "cognitive capacities fundamental for language in our non-human ancestors" (2005, p. 17). In contrast to Chomsky, who assumes that there is "a substantial difference in the underlying biological structure" between human animals and non-human animals, despite the partial sharing of several components and functions of language, Chateaubriand finds it improbable that there is "an evolutionary discontinuity with respect to communication between animals and us" (2005, p. 18). Concerning this issue, to which I shall return later when I describe Jørgensen's theory of language, my question reads: Is it possible, if only in an imprecise manner, to draw a line between non-human animals that have a language in the strict sense adopted by Chateaubriand, and non-human animals that do not have such a language? And, with regard the same topic: Is it possible to draw a line, at least in an imprecise manner, between the stages of the development of a human *person* in which she has such a language and those stages in which she does not, supposing that there is a stage in which a human *person* does not have a language?[2] This question, to which I shall also return later when I describe Jørgensen's theory of language, is intimately connected with the peculiar type of arguments used by Chateaubriand from page 20 onwards to sustain his views on language: like Jean Piaget, he uses

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[2] Here, of course, we are running the risk of giving slippery slope arguments because we are dealing with rather delicate issues about vague concepts, concepts which may be vague for epistemological or for ontological reasons. It would, moreover, be interesting to know whether Chateaubriand accepts the ontological vagueness of concepts (properties, in his terminology). Gödel, for example, rejects it.

examples referring to his son's development of language to corroborate his theses about language.

Although Chateaubriand recognizes the importance of the pragmatic aspects in the study of language (2005, pp. 47-48, footnote 11), he is primarily interested in the semantic and the syntactic aspects. My own interests with regard to the pragmatic aspects concern the directive use of language and its relationship to the informative one. In a classical text about the relationship between imperatives and logic, Jørgen Jørgensen (1938) proposes a theory about the origin and development of language that is, in my view, akin to the theory defended by Chateaubriand, in various respects. My final question to Chateaubriand refers to the relationship between the directive use of language and the informative one. To explain this question, I shall briefly recapitulate Jørgensen's theory.

According to Jørgensen, we must distinguish between four stages of the development of language. The first two stages are of a "pre-linguistic character" and the last two of a "genuine linguistic nature" (cf. Jørgensen 1938, p. 294). At the first stage, sounds or gestures "may function as signals", although they are neither produced with the intention to have this function nor are understood in this way. Examples of this are the bee-languages, which are not to be considered as "genuine languages", according to Jørgensen. At the second stage, the sounds and gestures are not produced with the intention to have meaning, but are understood as indicating either the "mental state" of the speaker or the causes of this state. An example of this is when the mother interprets the cries of her young child as expressions that indicate hunger or other kinds of displeasure. At the third stage, the sounds and gestures are conversely produced with the intention to have meaning, but they are not understood in this way. This happens, for instance, when humans talk to animals. At the fourth stage, finally, the sounds and gestures are produced with the intention to have meaning and are

also understood in this way, which is characteristic of the normal use of human language.

From the point of view of Jørgensen's theory, it is plausible to assume that there is a certain continuity between human communication and animal communication, because the stages it describes occur also in the development of the language faculty of human beings. This consequence agrees with Chateaubriand's thesis that "it would be very surprising if there were an evolutionary discontinuity with respect to communication between animals and us" (p. 18). Moreover, Chateaubriand also shares the view defended by Jørgensen that, in a strict sense of "language", the bee-languages are not languages at all. His reasons, however, appeal more to the absence of creativity in the process of language learning than to the fact that signs are produced or understood as being produced with the intention to have a meaning (cf. p. 19).

With regard to my purposes, the most interesting feature of Jørgensen's approach is that it subdivides the last stage of the development of language into two substages: an "ape stage", where the sounds "are only used and apprehended as indicating emotions or feelings", and a "human stage", where the sounds "are also used and understood as descriptions of objects or facts" (Jørgensen 1938, p. 294). It is precisely in the transition from the ape stage to the human stage, that is, the transition from the expressive use of language to the indicative one, that we encounter the proper locus of the directive use of language, according to Jørgensen. The imperatives, he holds, are simultaneously expressions of states of mind and descriptions of objects or facts. He distinguishes, accordingly, between two purposes that expressions may fulfill: an "informative" and an "imperative" purpose, which he considers to be the two main purposes of all human language (cf. Jørgensen 1938, pp. 294-295)

From a genetic point of view, the directive use of language precedes the indicative use, just as the expressive use precedes the directive one. According to Jørgensen, imperative sentences "have played a considerable part when language in its descriptive form originated", and "indicative sentences may possibly have developed from sentences of an imperative character" (Jørgensen 1938, pp. 293-294). But, from the logical point of view, there is a tendency to invert this relationship, at least with respect to the directive and indicative uses of language, with the exception of emotivist theories, which need not invert this relationship, of course.

Chateaubriand seems to sustain the same thesis that Jørgensen sustains about the relationship between directive and indicative uses of language, from a strict genetic point of view. He writes:

> And just as it seems impossible to define the complex concepts in terms of simple concepts, it is very hard, if not impossible, to define these imperatives in terms of simple declaratives. The attempts by logicians to characterize orders, wishes, questions, etc., in terms of declarative sentences always seem artificial and problematic. My tentative guess is that in a real sense imperatives are not derived previously learned declaratives. (Chateaubriand 2005, p. 22)

My final question to Chateaubriand is this: Does the relationship between directive and indicative uses of language that we encounter in the genetic dimension coincide with their relationship in the logical dimension? It is important to note that Jørgensen himself assigns to the imperatives a double function – to command and to inform. This had motivated him to propose an analysis of imperatives into two factors: the indicative factor and the imperative one (Jørgensen 1938, p. 291). This conception influenced Richard Hare's important later analysis of the imperatives that distinguishes frastic from neustic. But, there is an important difference between Hare and Jørgensen: whereas Jørgensen postulates the immanence of a indicative in each imperative, Hare

postulates only the immanence of a propositional content in each imperative. This difference has far-reaching consequences for the possibility and the format of a logic of imperatives. So my question to Chateaubriand can also be formulated in the following terms: Is a "logic" of imperatives possible, if "logic" is understood in the way that Chateaubriand understands this term? And, if so, to what extent does such a logic depend on the logic of indicatives?

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