

A Brief way on Philosophy of Language: from Plato to Port-Royal Grammar

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Abstract

This paper outline a brief philosophical way of the nature of human language, from Plato (427-347 BC) to Port-Royal grammar. Plato (427-347 BC) and Aristotle (384-322 BC) present the question of the correctness of the names. In the middle Ages, the nature of language spread over by several schools of thought very heterogeneous and appear the first grammars. In the 12th century, the speculative grammar presents a strictly scientific basis for language: deductive and universal. In the early modern, specifically with the Renaissance, modern thought arises and there is the resumption of the classical tradition and the expansion of the literature, arts, culture and a new philosophical and ethical conception. In the 17th century, the language studies focused on the modern languages of Europe. The publication of the Port-Royal grammar becomes the greatest exponent of Cartesian rationalism, reflecting the prescriptivism of traditional grammar.

Keywords: human language, philosophy, knowledge, correctness of names, philosophical grammars

1. Introduction

The philosophical reflection on language arises around of the question: does the language represents faithfully reality or deforms it? Graffi (2010, p. 24) argues that some older Greeks philosophers, such as pre-Socratics, already took care of this problem, which thought is transmitted in a very fragmented way and generally do not come from an only text, but as aphorisms on which you can still make conjectures. According to Heraclitus of Ephesus (544-484 BC), the entire substance of the world is in a ceaseless process of change, whereas there is a natural link between names and things. The author admits that language is in the nature of things and it flows with them, while the name is a natural part of what is named. Thus Graffi (2010, p. 24) takes the views that, in Heraclitus (544-484 BC), the language provides a direct access to reality”. However, Parmenides of Elea (530-460 BC) believes that whatever is, is; whatever is not, is not, and cannot come to be. Being or reality is eternal, unchangeable and uncreated. The language is equivalent of being and thinking, in which the being is the expression of thought. Graffi (2010, p. 24) argues that, in Parmenides (530-460 BC), “the one reality is that of being, intuited by mind, and language signs haven’t any title to represent them”. This philosophical debate began in the pre-Socratic Works, Parmenides and Heraclitus, including the texts that have survived, specially dedicated to language. The thought of Plato (427-347 BC) had influence on subsequent philosophical reflection, even to the modern and contemporary age. In the Western tradition, especially from the Cratylus, written in the fifth century BC, has been the birth of language as systematic study object and as a foundational work on the various issues that involve the relationship between philosophy and language. In the Cratylus, the problem addressed is whether the language is a means to teach the nature of things (*phýsei*), as Cratylus believed, or if it is adopted by convention by speakers (*nómo*), as considered the Sophists. Graffi (2010, p. 24) argues that “the first position may be followed by Heraclitus, the second by Parmenides, even if the terms *phýsei* and *nómo* probably not derived them”. According to Plato (427-347 BC), the language is not a product of the convention, but must simply be capable to discern the nature of things.

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From Aristotle (384-322 BC), the ontology appears in its relationship with the *logos* (discourse), because it means both reason and its articulation. In other words, it is the language and its meaning, the elucidation of the basic structure of reality. Considering the reciprocity of reality and language, the observation of the way we talk about the objects can provide some information about its own structure. It is the nature of *logos* reveal the being and, therefore, the ontology of Aristotle (384-322 BC) refers to reality as well as the language that describes it. In the Middle Ages, the philosophical reflection on language continues in several other schools that found quite eclectic doctrines. However, the stoic philosophical current achieved great projection in the study of grammar and language itself. The Stoicism, designed by Zenon of Citrum, a disciple of Aristotle, approximately 300 BC, extends until 180 AD with the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Zenon and Chrysippus (280-205 BC) represent the ancient phase, but there are few sources of knowledge in the stoic language. The main reconstruction source of stoic thought is found in the writings of the skeptical philosopher Sextus Empiricus (fl. during the 2nd and possibly the 3rd centuries AD) and the history work “on the lives of the philosophers” of Diogenes Laertius (fl. third century). Other reconstruction sources appear in the writings of Galen (129-199 AD), Plutarch (45-120 AD) and Marcus Tullius Cicero (107-43 BC). The Renaissance inaugurates the modern thought, emphasizing the man and the universe, strongly influenced by the principle of development of the natural sciences. This period is characterized by the resumption of the classical tradition, by flowering of literature and the arts, science, culture, and a new philosophical and ethical conception. In the seventeenth century, the linguistic studies are the center of the modern languages of Europe. This trend reached its apogee with the publication of the Port-Royal grammar of Lancelot (1615-1695) and Arnauld (1612-1694), in which “[...] the language is founded in reason. It is the image of thought and therefore the established analytical principles aren’t attached to a particular language, but they serve any language” (PETTER, 2002, p. 12).

The paper is organized as follows. In the section 2, we outline critical questioning of correctness of names, raised by Plato (427-347 BC) in *Cratylus* dialogue. In section 3, we present the nature of language to Aristotle (384-322 BC). In section 4, we draw a brief overview of linguistic studies and the emergence of the first grammars during the Middle Ages. In the section 5, we present the flowering of Renaissance thought with the resumption of classical antiquity and the scientific basis for language, culminating in the Cartesian rationalism of the Port-Royal grammar in the seventeenth century. Finally, in the section 6, we present the final considerations about the philosophical contributions inherited in Plato’s route to Port-Royal grammar and what were lost about human language over the centuries.

2. The Language in Plato: Convention or Nature of Things

Plato (427-347 BC) introduced the question about the correctness of names in his *Cratylus* dialogue. In this debate, Socrates examines two extremely opposing views. On the one hand, Hermogenes considers that the correctness of names (*orthotês onomatôn*) is purely a linguistic convention², suggesting that each individual has the freedom to use words the way he want, even if they differ from one person to another. Similarly, cities can name the same object with different names, from Greek to Greek and Greek to barbarians. On the other hand, Socrates argues that if one accepts the view of reality that is fixed in *onoma* (term, word, name, etc.) that everything has by its nature and it become able to impose its shape to letters and syllables, promptly accepted by Hermogenes, one cannot consider the correctness of names as a purely arbitrary choice. Similarly, *Cratylus* believes that some names have a suitability by nature to named entities while other names not, i.e., some names are part of the nature of the objects and they originate in eternal and immutable principles, external to the man himself. For example, Hermogenes is not the real name of Hermogenes, because in fact he is not the son of Hermes, the god of eloquence. Thus, Socrates and *Cratylus* consider that most of the names can be analyzed etymologically within a smaller set of primary names. Thus, the correctness of names would be in the natural resemblance existent between its sounds and its object, that is, language is the exact representation of objects. At the end, Socrates finds that it cannot establish a clear position in favor of Hermogenes, which argues that the names are the result of a convention, nor in favor of *Cratylus*, which considers that the names are established according to the nature of things. In the *Cratylus*, Socrates explores the correctness of the names claiming that the etymology or original form of a word contains a description of the named thing.

² In this sense, the correctness of the names is the result of a law (*nomos*) and a custom (*ethos*), arising out of an agreement or social contract between members of a community.

Kahn (2013, p. 70) argues that “[...] the discussion of language in the Cratylus is governed by this parallel between naming and describing, a parallel reinforced by the fact in Greek the term *onoma* means both name and word”. The correctness principle is that the name should reveal what the thing actually is (*déloun boion hekaston esti tōn ontōn*, 422d). Kahn (2013, p. 70) argues that “[...] the pursuit of “etymology” in the Cratylus is based on the assumption that names should be interpreted as disguised description – as ‘truthful (*etumoi*) logos’”. The author believes that “Plato establishes the notion classical of *etymology* as the searches for a name’s true meaning, its *etumos* logos” (KAHN, 2013, p. 78). However, the components of such descriptions are other, simpler names. The question then arises: what are the ultimate or primary names? If someone asks you about the terms or expressions (*remata*) from which a name is formed, and then about the ones from which the terms are formed, and keeps on asking this indefinitely, “the answerer should finally give up the answer?” (Crat. 421d–e). The right time to stop is when one reaches the primary names, which are like the elements (*stoicheia*) of other names and sayings (*logoi*), and which are no longer “composed of some other names” (Crat. 422a, b). Kahn (2013) argues that the mathematical notion of *stoicheia* plays a crucial role in Plato’s view. The author believes that “the most influential of uses of the term *stoicheion* will turn out to be its application to the first principles of the natural world, that is, the “elements” of ancient and modern physics”(KAHN, 2013, p. 79). In order to verify that the primary names are correctly assigned, as revelations or imitations (*mimemata*) of reality, Socrates keeps on saying that one must not only analyze words into their components, but also examine things into their own elements (*stoicheia*, 424d). Socrates then develops the suggestion of an ideal language in which the systematic arrangement of linguistic components would accurately reflect (by similarity, *homoioiōtēs*, 424d) the systematic structure of the world of things (*onta*). According to Kahn (2013), cosmologists developed the notion of physical elements as the enduring constituents of perishable compounds in the 5th century BC in order to answer to Parmenides attack (530-460 BC), who made a radical critique of the concept of transformation. Parmenides (530-460 BC) introduced the deductive argument: what is not does not exist. Thus, change is not possible, because the change requires do not be a thing and becoming something else. The Plato’s Cratylus combines the notion of physical elements with linguistic theory according to the function names and words in general to reveal the true nature or *ousia* of the things, by imitation or by similar things named.

Based on this principle of correctness, Plato (427-347 BC) briefly outlines the notion of an ideal language in which the analysis of the names should mirror and reveal the branched structure of reality. Plato (427-347 BC) leads to a vision of the primary names according to the interpretation of the letters “r” and “s” as natural signs to represent the constant flow, the flux doctrine. For example, in the Cratylus, some consonants, e.g. fricatives and vibrant, can be emitted continuously and indefinitely, sharing the idea of perpetual motion. In the end, Socrates concludes that it cannot provide a solid foundation for the study of language. Graffi (2010, p. 25) considers that the conditions to represent the language adequately are exposed in later dialogue of the Cratylus, that is, in the Sophist, which can be summarized as follows: “the correctness of the relationship between language and the reality may not be based on single words, but according to their connections, that is, based on speech”. The author argues that “Plato (Sophist 261c) says one of the characters of the dialogue (“the foreign”) that there are two types of << phonic elements that indicate the substance >>: the *onomata* (singular *onoma*) and *rhēmata* (singular *rhema*)” (GRAFFI, 2010, p. 25). The latter indicate actions while the first refer to those who exercise the action, translating then *onoma* as ‘name’ and *rhema* as ‘verb’. However, Graffi (2010) points out that Plato (427-347 BC) probably understood the first term as something related to what we know currently as ‘subject’ while the second term was understood as what we conceive with the modern name of ‘predicate’. Later, Plato (427-347 BC) considered that the speech (*logos*) born from the union of a name and a verb, for example, “Theaetetus sits” and “Teetelo flies”. However, it is clear that the two speeches differ: the first says things just as they are while the second speaks of different things of what one is. Thus, humans have the articulation skills of sit but do not have wings to fly. Graffi (2010, p. 25) considers that the truth or falsity of speech “is based on the relationship of own speech in reality: if we say that a certain thing has a property that really has it, the speech is true; otherwise, it does not possess it, the speech is false, “that is, the sayable, do not only naming it, is the true or false”.

3. Aristotle and Human Language

Aristotle (384-322 BC), as his predecessor Plato (427-347 BC), did not examine the language itself, but as an instrument through which one can formulate true or false speeches and infer its validation or not.

Graffi (2010, p. 26) argues that the study of language is “a necessary premise the definition the canons of proper thinking” and is not by chance that “[...] some of the most important linguistic reflections of Aristotle are treated in the logic (the *Organon* regarded) and, in particular, the work known by the Latin title *De interpretatione*”. In *De interpretatione*, the appointment is connected to a convention (*synthêkê*) which does not exist in animals. This convention is not for all kinds of voice (phone) which they convey meaning, e.g. expressions of pain and pleasure, but it is so for the word (logos), expressing the good and the bad, the just and the unjust, for example. Otfried (2003, p. 124) argues that, according to Aristotle (384-322 BC), up to third degree, the articulated speech (*diaklektos*) is not a feature present only in humans but also in certain birds that have this faculty. However, only humans have the highest degree, the logos. Its elements, words, differ from purely affective sounds by the fact that these sounds have meaning in nature. In addition, the elementary sounds (vowels, consonants) can be combined to produce complex sounds (syllables, words, sentences). According to the Plato’s *Politics* (I 2, 1253a14-19), the language is not just for cognition, but also for pragmatic, political, social and moral. In *De interpretatione*, Aristotle (384-322 BC) attempts to uncover the logical structure of propositions or statements and he opposes to theories of language developed by the Sophists and Plato, beginning to introduce your starting point semiotic. For the author, the linguistic expressions are as symbols (*symbola*), which are determined in four parts: writing, sound, accidents of the soul and objects. Distinguishing the logical proposition of a simple request, Aristotle (384-322 BC) refers to the different uses of language that are currently the pragmatic dimension or speech acts. In *Poetics*, the author uses the term *schemata tês lexêôs*, forms of expression or speech. Graffi (2010, p. 27) argues that, in Aristotle (384-322 BC), the term ‘*onoma*’ refers to “voice understood by convention, without indication of time and that it is not decomposable into parts endowed with meaning” while ‘*rhema*’ “ [...] means the time and is the sign of what is said about another thing”. The author compares the expressions and he points out that “both *onoma* as *rhema* may have *ptôseis* (singular *ptôsis*), which could be translated as ‘cases’, but should be understood as inflection”. Aristotle (384-322 BC) uses the term *ptôseis* to indicate the genitive ‘case’ and the dative ‘case’ as well as the ‘inflection’ past verbal and the future.

Graffi (2010, p. 27) argues that the common features between the two terms is that neither of them can be decomposable into morphemes, i.e., they cannot be analyzed into smaller pieces endowed with meaning. Thus, both terms oppose the speech, the logos, defined as “the voice sound endowed with meaning, any part which has meaningful in isolation, but as an expression and never as a statement”. The author also believes that both Aristotle (384-322 BC) and Plato (in *Sophist*) conceive the speech as a combination of *onoma* and *rhema* provided with meaning. However, if considered separately such expressions have the ability to assert the true or false. Aristotle (384-322 BC) makes clear distinctions between linguistic entities, words (*onomata*), and objects that are designated by the words (*pragmata*), berating the Sophists by disregard these distinctions. However, Aristotle (384-322 BC) is not sufficiently clear whether he is talking about the different meanings of a word or of different objects. He treats both terms as a proposition, subject and predicate, entirely analogous manner, not assigning semantic priority to the combination of the two terms, i.e., the proposition or sentence as it does Frege (1848-1925) and Russell (1872-1970) in modern logic. They establish the formal rigor for which the functional decomposition of the internal structure of sentences replaced the Aristotelian dichotomy of subject-predicate. In the works that are part of the *Organon* (organ), the logic is a tool, an introduction to the science and knowledge, based on the hypothetical syllogism. However, Aranha and Martins (1993, p. 97) affirm that “Aristotle himself did not use the word logic which only appeared later”. In fact, Aristotle (384-322 BC) named the logic as Analytical. Later, the Stoics and Alexander of Aphrodisias used the term logic. According to Aristotle (384-322 BC), the syllogism refers to “a discourse in which, certain things having been supposed, something different from the things supposed results of necessity because these things are so”. (Prior Analytics, A.1, 24b, 18-22). Lukasiewicz (1951, p. 01) presents a very old example, quoted by Sextus Empiricus (fl. during the 2nd and possibly the 3rd centuries AD), as a syllogism “peripatetic”:

- (a) All men are mortal,
Socrates is a man, therefore
Socrates is mortal.

The author believes that a syllogism peripatetic is not an Aristotelian syllogism, saying that, the first, the premiss “Socrates is a man” is a singular proposition, because its subject ‘Socrates’ is a singular term. However, Lukasiewicz (1951, p. 01) argues that “Aristotle does not introduce singular terms or premisses into his system”. He says that the following syllogism would be more Aristotelian:

- (b) All men are mortal,
All Greeks are men, therefore

All Greeks are mortal.

However, the author points out that it is not Aristotelian syllogism, because it is an inference in which you can draw the conclusion "All Greeks are mortal" from the two premiss accepted as true, "All men are mortal" and "All Greeks are men". Lukasiewicz (1951, p. 02) states that the term "logo" (*λόγος*) is a proper signal of an inference. The author argues that "no syllogism is formulated by Aristotle primarily as an inference, but they are all implications having the conjunction of the premisses as the antecedent and the conclusion as the consequent" (LUKASIEWICZ, 1951, p. 02). The author then presents what would be a true Aristotelian syllogism:

- (c) If all men are mortal
and all Greeks are men,
then all Greeks are mortal.

In the author's words, "this implication is but a modern example of an Aristotelian syllogism and does not exist in the works of Aristotle" (LUKASIEWICZ, 1951, p. 02). However, Lukasiewicz (1951) presents some passages in the Posterior Analytics of whom we can extract some examples of such syllogism as:

- (d) If all broad-leaved plants are deciduous
and all vines are broad-leaved plants,
then all vines are deciduous.

For Lukasiewicz (1951), such syllogisms are only examples of some logical forms and do not belong to logic, because the terms "man" and "vine" are not part of the logic. The author believes that "to get a syllogism with in the sphere of pure logic, we must remove the syllogism, what may be called its matter, preserving only its form" (LUKASIEWICZ, 1951, p. 02). Thus, Aristotle (384-322 BC) used the letters instead of concrete subjects and predicates. Lukasiewicz (1951, p. 02) argues that if we put the letter A instead of the term "deciduous", the letter B instead of "broad-leaved plants" and the letter C for "vine", we will have singular terms as Aristotle (384-322 BC) does, thus we get syllogistic form:

- (e) If all B is A
and all C is B,
then all C is A.

Lukasiewicz (1951, p. 03) considers that "this syllogism is one of the logical theorems invented by Aristotle, but even it differs in style from the genuine style of the genuine Aristotelian syllogism", because Aristotle (384-322 BC) always puts the predicate in the first place and the subject in the second. Thus, Aristotle (384-322 BC) always applied the expression "A is predicated of all B", which later called "Barbara":

- (f) If A is predicated all B
and B is predicated all C,
then A is predicated all C.

Aristotle (384-322 BC) considered that the terms involved for a premiss³ are subject and predicate, calling them terms. He defines the word 'term' (*ὄρος*) at the conclusion in which the premisses are resolved. Lukasiewicz (1951, p. 04) points out that "every premiss is either universal, particular or indefinite". The author considers that the terms "all" and "no", when added to the subject, are universal signs while "some" and "some not" or "not all" are the signs of particularity. The premisses without assigning of quantity, of universality or of particularity, are called indefinite, e.g. "pleasure is not good". However, a definition of the universal and the singular terms only appear in *De interpretatione*, where a term is defined as a universal if it is of such a nature as to be predicated of many subjects, e.g. 'man'. A term that does not have this property is called the singular, e.g. "Callias".

³ Every Aristotelian syllogism consists of the three propositions called premisses. A premiss is one or more of a declarative or negative judgment, together of something else that is the conclusion.

4. The language in the Middle Ages

The notion of a Middle Ages⁴ corresponds to the historical period beginning in 476 AD, when it was deposed the last Roman emperor of the West (Romulus Augustus) and the end of Hellenism (centuries IV-V), finishing on October 12, 1492, date wherein Christopher Columbus discovers America. In ten centuries, it is still possible distinguish: the High Middle Ages, beginning with the fall of the Roman Empire of the West and runs until the year 1000 AD; and the Low Middle Ages, between the centuries IX and XV. However, there is no historiographical unit designating the middle Ages. It is separated by splits between Late Antiquity and the “end of the Middle Ages” or “Early Modern period”. According to Graffi (2010, p. 41), “the late antiquity and all subsequent periods in Western history differ from the previous civilization by a fundamental element: the presence of Christianity”. The philosophical questions about language are widely debated in the Middle Ages, especially in relation to logic and grammar, revolving around of the analysis of the nature of linguistic signs and the theory of meaning. In the theory of meaning, the Stoics distinguished the following concepts: significant, meaning and real object. The significant corresponds to the vocal sound, regarded as something corporeal (*soma*). The real-world object is what remains outside, that is, the thing named, and it is also something corporeal (*soma*). The meaning (*lekton*) is thought (*ennoia*) expressed by vocal sounds and it is incorporeal (*asomatos*) because it is the product of intellectual activity, composed by the participation of reason. For Graffi (2010, p. 32), the stoic presents the following concepts: the object (*tynkhanon*) thought (*ennoia*) and voice (phone), which correspond to the three Aristotelian levels, adding the meaning (*semainomenon*) which, when it comes to the enunciation meaning, is called “expressible” (*lekton*, plural *lekta*). For example, Sextus Empiricus (fl. during the 2nd and possibly the 3rd centuries AD) claims that if one points to Dion, he says “Dion”. The significant and the real object pointed are corporeal; from the knowledge I have of the vocal sound that says the name “Dion” and of the real thing, which refers to the name of a person, the man Dion, it gives the relationship of meaning between the voice and the thing named. However, for a foreigner, the sound of a word that has meaning for me is just a meaningless sound for him.

The Stoics believed that every human being born with an empty soul, not having any prior knowledge, and only from experience, impressions, understood because of sensory perception, would be marked in his soul. Thus, every human being acquires knowledge throughout life. The soul records our impressions and duplicate records of the same impression lead us to the formation of concepts. Graffi (2010, p. 30) considers that “the Stoic conception of language seems to differ from that Aristotelian, because it is more oriented towards naturalistic conception (*physis*) of language”, differing from platonic naturalism, presented in Cratylus, based the general conception of man and his ability. In the stoicism, the human ability to develop concepts is innate, but the process of formulation of this capacity is a function of the first perceptual experiences, acquired from the outside world and his own conscience. According to the Stoics, the language is the product of man’s natural reason, being attached the anticipation, 'innate sense' (*prolepsis*), which gives him the idea of good and bad, just and unjust. They believed that the origin of words was linked to a faithful reflection of nature, founded on the 'innate sense', seeking the etymology or study of truth among the sounds that compose a particular word (significant) and the entity to which it refers (meaning). Graffi (2010, p. 30) states that, for the Stoics, origin of primary words was explained by means of onomatopoeia (similarity of sound and meaning, as 'Tilin Tilin' to indicate the sound of a bell) or synesthesia (fusion of meanings, produced by the words and their senses, e.g., the word 'lust', that would be associated the sensations of “sweet” and “suffering”). Graffi (2010, p. 33) points out that “the stoics distinguish statements that can be true or false from other types of statements, such as clauses, requests, etc., calling the first of axiomatic, [...] in this case, it should translate as judgment”.

The Stoics also made another important distinction between the various types of *lekta*, the expressible 'incomplete' and expressible 'complete'. The first are those made only by the predicate, called *katagorema* by the stoics, i.e., are verbs as 'to write', 'to run', 'to say'. In the second type, we have the proposition or judgment as a complete expressible, connecting the predicate to the subject (nominative case), e.g., 'Socrates writes', 'Socrates walks', 'Dion runs', etc. The Stoics also considered the distinction between the ontological status of 'truth' and 'true'. In this sense, Sextus Empiricus (fl. during the 2nd and possibly the 3rd centuries AD) states that: Between the true and the truth is no difference in substance, in conformation and value. In substance: the truth is corporeal; the true is, instead, incorporeal. This distinction explains thus: the true is a judgment, the judgment is expressible therefore incorporeal.

⁴According to Robinson (1984, p. 748), the first documented use of the term Middle Ages was “*media tempestas*”, from 1469.

On the other hand, the truth seems to be the science that says all true, but science is nothing but a way of being the main part of the reason, as the handle is considered a way of being of the hand, and the reason is the body, therefore, the truth is, in its gender, corporeal [...] ((REALE, G., 2006, p. 291). Graffi (2010, p. 33) argues that the stoics rated the predicate into three types: active (*ortha*, 'rectus'), passive (*hypia* 'supine') and neutral (*oudetera*, 'neither'). The first refers to predicates with oblique case; the second type refers to predicates with *hypo* preposition, which is the preposition 'for' in 'passive voice'; the third type refers to those predicates that do not fit in either two modes. The author considers that, later, with the Greek and Latin grammar, the notions of 'to act' and 'to start' are introduced to indicate different types of verbs. Graffi (2010, p. 34) points out that the stoics established the case category applied only to the names, assigning the use of the term 'case' as we know it currently. They opposed the *rectus* case to the oblique case, known as genitive, dative and accusative. The latter refers to a Latin mistranslation of the Greek term *aititiaké ptōsis*, meaning 'causative case', whose direct object is understood as a psychological agent action. The Stoics were also responsible for the distinction between verbal categories of tense and aspect. The first refers to the sequence of events in which the time distinction is carried out by lexically adverbs or by context, e.g., Burmese and Dyirbal (cf. COMRIE, 1990). The second, the verbal aspect, refers to different modes, in which the verb expresses a course of action, i.e., incomplete or complete: 'was writing' vs 'wrote'. Graffi (2010, p. 34) points out that the stoics distinguished four verbal tenses, combining the aspectual opposition of a complete or incomplete action with present and past time. Thus originated: (e.g. 'writes') the 'present incomplete', the 'complete present' (e.g. 'wrote'), the 'incomplete past' (e.g. 'was writing') and the 'complete past' (e.g. 'had written'). Later, this terminology was known respectively as 'present', 'perfect', 'imperfect' and 'more-than-perfect'.

4.1. The Origin of the First Grammars

In the 2nd century BC, are produced the first systematic Greek grammars, which are: Dionysus Thrax, Art of Grammar (relevant to the morphology) and the grammar of Apollonius Dyscolus (the early syntax studies). These grammars served as a model throughout antiquity. According to Graffi (2010, p. 32), the stoics preserved four classes of expressions listed by Aristotle: the name (*onoma*), the verb (*rhema*), the article (*arthron*) and the conjunction (*syndesmos*). The name was divided into two classes, the proper names (*idion*) and 'appellative' names (*prosegorikon*), wherein the first indicates a "proper quality" (e.g. "Socrates") and the second expresses a "common quality" (e.g. 'man' or 'horse'). In Donatus' and Priscian's grammars, where proposed eight discourse parts (name (*onoma*), pronoun (*antonymia*), verb (*rhema*), adverb (*epirrhema*), participle (*metochè*), conjunction (*syndesmos*), preposition (*prothesis*) and interjection (*interiectio*)). According to Priscian, the name (a substance that has quality) understand the words that are currently classified as an adjective. However, Priscian distinguishes between common names (*appellativum*) and proper name (*proprium*), but there is no clear distinction between names of things and quality names in terms of noun and adjective. Priscian (fourteenth century) also made an important distinction between transitive and intransitive constructions: the first occurs between verbs and the oblique cases; the second occurs between the verb and the nominative case. However, Graffi (2010, p. 39) points out that the classification of the verbs made by Priscian had been found in the stoics, following the terminology of verbs 'active', 'passive' and 'deponents'. According to Priscian (fourteenth century), the name and pronoun should be put before the verb. Graffi (2010, p. 40) describes it consolidated the foundations of the doctrine of "natural order" of words, according to which the subject must precede the verb and this must precede the complement of the object. In short, Priscian (fourteenth century) not written an *Ars*, but *Institutiones*: The Latin grammar is no longer strictly pedagogical and it gains an intention to doctrinal nature. The precepts accompanied by reflections that bring the grammar into the logical studies have the semantic aspect as the main distinguishing criterion of the parts of discourse.

4.2. Speculative grammar in the Middle Ages

In Late antiquity, Christianity affected the teaching of grammar, restricting it to the works on education and doctrinal nature. Lyons (1979, p. 14) points out that the Latin "not only was the language of the liturgy and Scripture, but also the universal language of diplomacy, erudition and culture". In this scenario, by the power of the Church, Latin was the language to be taught. Nef (1995, p. 73) argues that the medieval grammar inherits all the knowledge in the ancient trivium of the classical grammar: grammar, rhetoric and dialectic (logic). In the XII century, the speculative grammar arises in order to replace the descriptive and normative orientation of the Latin grammarians for a strictly scientific orientation for language: deductive and universal.

In this sense, the author points out that “this universal vision does not result, or translates a little bit, its great curiosity for human diversity of languages - the search is limited in order of importance to Latin, Greek, and more rarely to the Hebrew and the Arab” (NEF, 1995, p. 73). The universality then rests on the prevailing balance, on the one hand, between the metaphysical and ontological categories of thought and reality, on the other hand, among the mental categories of thought and language. The Aristotle's ideas pass to the speculative grammar. The author points out that, in *De interpretatione*: [...] The proper nature of *sumploké* prevented the truth was reduced to a series of isomorphism, because you cannot decide whether the combination is in things or in spirit. The medieval grammar makes this methodological reduction necessary for the foundation of grammar. [...] The revolution of isomorphism of linguistic structures, cognitive and ontological - speculative grammarians dare do it (NEF, F., 1995, p. 73). The speculative grammarians proposed the existence of a universal grammar, valid for all languages, depending on the ontological structure of the real world and of human reason. These speculative philosophers argued that all existing things have various modes of signifying and they have become known by the term “*Modistae*”. The *Modistae* explained the language formation process starting from of things (*res*). For the *Modistae*, all things have their own essence and they are known through the intellect, being associated with a phonetic sequence that acquires meaning (*dictio*). All properties and modes of being, once known, are assigned to the *dictio* as modes of meaning. According to *Modistae*, the words (the union of voice and meaning) are composed of a phonological element and two semantic levels: a level that covers the specific or vocabulary meanings (meaning *specialia*) and another level that refers to other more general meaning, called modes of signifying or meaning. Both levels are identified from two different acts of *impositiones*: the first imposition that produces the meaning (*dictio*), which it's called lexeme in modern linguistics; the second act of imposition is identified and attached to the modes of meaning, called morphemes in contemporary linguistics.

According to *Modistae*, the grammar deals with modes of meaning (*modi significandi*), regardless of their substance. Thus, they consider that the grammar reflects the structure of reality in the same way as the human mind perceive it. Then we have: (a) *modi essendi*, representing the mode of being of things; (b) *modi intellegendi*, corresponding to the understand mode; (c) and *modi significandi*, representing the parts of discourse. According to Nef (1995, p.74), in the 14th century, Thomas of Erfurt subdivides the understanding mode (*modi intellegendi*) in active and passive mode. The first mode corresponds to the property given by the intellect to the thing while the second refers to property received by the thing. However, it is of the same intellect: Is the same faculty of comprehension (*ratio intellegendi*), by which the intellect understands the property of the thing in an active manner, and by which the property of the thing is understood passively. Therefore, the properties are different, but the faculty (*ratio*) is the same, and therefore they differ materially and are the same thing formally (NEF, F., 1995, p. 74). Thomas of Erfurt also makes a distinction between the noun name (*nomen substantivum*) and adjective name (*nomen adiectivum*) to describe the names according to the *modus essenciale*, respectively, of syntactic independence (*per se stantis*) and of construction with a noun name (*adiacentis*). According to *Modistae*, the noun name and the adjective name do not express respectively substance and quality, but the possible forms of meaning. In fact, the distinction between noun name and the adjective name just occur several centuries later, after the final separation between both words.

Graffi (2010, p. 48) states that the *Modistae* distinguish three important syntactic notions: construction (*constructio*), congruence (*congruitas*) and completeness (*perfectio*). The construction consists of two terms, the “dependent” (*dependens*) and ‘terminal’ (*terminans*), e.g., a noun phrase as “white man”, the word ‘white’ is a dependent term while “man” is the terminal element. Similarly, the verb phrase “Socrates runs”, the dependent term is the predicate ‘runs’ while the subject ‘Socrates’ is the terminal term. In *Modistae* terminology, both formations are intransitive: the first example (‘white man’) is an intransitive construction of person (*intransitiva personarum*); the second example relates to the construction of an intransitive action (*intransitiva actuum*). Similarly, the transitive constructions are classified as an intransitive of person (e.g. ‘Socrates’s son’) and transitive action (‘I read a book’). The criteria used to distinguish if the sentence consists of two grammatical persons or by two non-coreference noun phrases is following: in intransitive constructions of person, there is only a change of referent (*transitio personarum*) no transfer action (*transitio actuum*). Each construction is congruent if certain accidental modes of the terminal term (species, gender, case and person) correspond to certain modes of the term dependent, i.e., the predicate must agree with the subject in number (singular or plural) in an intransitive construction of action while the adjective must maintain the same gender (masculine, feminine or neuter), number and case name in an intransitive construction person. The congruent constructions can be proper (e.g. ‘black mantle’) or improper (e.g. ‘categorical mantle’). The difference between both constructions is the fact that improper constructions are well formed from a syntactic point of view, respecting the relations of agreement, but not from a semantic point of view, the adjective ‘categorical’ applies to a value judgment that cannot be established for the previous term “mantle”.

Completeness (*perfectio*) is the ability of a construction to generate a complete concept in the listener's mind. This complete sense takes place when the meaning of a complete construction needs affirm or deny something (*quid*) about something (*alterum*) in the world, i.e., the constructions 'Socrates runs' or 'read a book' are complete because the first sentence maintains a completeness of sense and thinking while the second statement is complete of sense from the point of view of thinking, because the subject 'I' is not expressed.

5. The Renaissance and the Port-Royal grammar

Chronologically, Graffi (2010, p. 53) points out that the Renaissance is a phase of Western European culture that does not have a well-defined time limit. In Italy, the Renaissance originated with Humanism, which lasted throughout the fifteenth century, but, in other countries, the Renaissance began later, i.e., at the end of the fifteenth century or the early sixteenth century. The Renaissance was marked by great changes: the movement of religious reform, in which the Roman Church reacts with the Counter-Reformation and the courts of the Inquisition; the crisis of theocentric view of the world, occurring the rise of anthropocentric thinking and the rescue of art and ancient literature of the Greeks, resuming the classical tradition and neglecting the medieval Aristotelians of Scholastic Philosophy. Around the second half of the seventeenth century, the school of thought known as Port-Royal Grammar (originally *Grammaire générale et raisonnée contenant les fondemens de l'art de parler, expliqués d'une manière claire et naturelle*) assumes that language is the product of reason (Cartesian rationalism) and that the differences between human languages are just accidental, variations of a system general. The purpose of the General and Rational Grammar (*Grammaire Générale et raisonnée*) was to propose a set of principles common to all languages, developing an analysis of language on the basis of logical categories valid for all human languages. This philosophical rationalism system was integrated the logic, the grammar and the Jansenist ethics⁵. The Port-Royal grammarians tried to explain the linguistic facts, showing that language is the image of thought and it is based on reason. These grammarians built a linguistic scheme based on logic which included all forms of real language. The first part of the Port-Royal grammar analyzes and describes the sounds, syllables, vowels and consonants while the second part of the grammar distinguishes the types of words based on traditional criteria: nouns, pronouns, articles, prepositions, adverbs, verbs, participles, conjunctions and interjections. The Port-Royal grammar also pointed out the importance of syntax and phrase construction, which were considered marginal in the grammars. Graffi (2010, p. 63) considers that the major innovation of the Port-Royal grammar was the addition of the copula verb between the subject and the predicate in the propositions, forming the Subject-Copula-Predicate schema. The verb 'to be', with copula function, was placed between the parts of the discourse, beside the conjunction and interjection to express the form and the manner of our thoughts.

6. Last Words

This short paper has been written to provide a succinct and accessible introduction about the philosophy of language from Plato to Port-Royal grammar. We can conclude that Plato (427-347 BC) makes etymologies to argue about the correctness of words in the Cratylus. Later, some their proved to be erroneous. From Plato (427-347 BC), we inherited the arbitrariness of linguistic signs on said word concreteness (sound and rhythm). However, we lost the dynamics of sense that was dominated by the arbitrariness of meaning. The sense has to be earlier to the meaning, i.e., arbitrary. The semantic has not enabled us to look the sense. In the Sophist, Plato (427-347 BC) also showed that the words are not the same, i.e., they are not all the same type and only a combination of different words gives rise to the discourse true or false. Aristotle (384-322 BC) built a logical system that was influenced by Platonic philosophy. Plato (427-347 BC) believed that the object of true knowledge must be stable and capable of a precise definition, which is part of the universal and never particular. In Aristotle (384-322 BC), the class of beings or of the entities is universal, determining its reality and its peculiar form of existence. The author gives an embedded treatment in the broad way, i.e., there is an essentially ontological concern and it had repercussions in logic and theory of knowledge. From Aristotle (384-322 BC), we inherited the basic elements of the sentence, subject and predicate, as entities that also suited to an existing category in metaphysics or part of hers, the ontology (study or treaty be and reality), connecting language and metaphysics.

⁵The Jansenists are those supporters of the theological doctrine of Cornelius Jansen (1585-1638) who tried to reconcile human freedom and grace emanating from God. The Jansenism arose in reaction to the theologians of the Counter-Reformation (Luther and Calvin), which emphasized human responsibility instead of divine grace, falling into Christian heresy (Plagiarism).

In *Categories*, Aristotle (384-322 BC) examined the act of saying something about something and he analyzed how the simple terms (subject and predicate) combine to form assertive. Furthermore, he argues that the first substances such as, e.g., ‘this man’ and ‘this horse’ are subjects of predications. Aristotle (384-322 BC) still established the inflectional category of case. However, we lost the semantic priority (“semantic value”) in the combination of subject and predicate that it just appears in Frege (1848-1925) and Russell (1872-1970). They inaugurate the modern logic while Aristotle (384-322 BC) inserts the intelligible and the sensible as dualism in own experience, developing the relationship between subject and predicate that only occurs in *verbum/rhema* as a proposition. The stoic contribution stands out for its morphological criteria, distinguishing one word from another and including the adjectives in the class of names (*onoma* – of the Sanskrit - *naman*). In addition, the Latin grammatical tradition does not differ substantially from the Greek grammar, remaining the classification of parts of speech the same way, i.e., the adjective is still included in the class of names. At the end of antiquity, Donatus (fourteenth century) changed the mode of production of grammar manuals with the publication of *Ars Donati* along with *Institutiones grammaticae*, Priscian’s grammar (fourteenth century). They constituted the official texts to organize all education in the middle Ages.

The contribution of the *Modistae* was the union of the voice and meaning, i.e., the word composed of a phonological element and two semantic levels, creating what will have the names of lexeme and morpheme respectively in modern linguistics and contemporary. In addition, we inherited the relations of transitivity and regency, hitherto neglected by classical authors. However, we lost the idea that the world itself is indifferent to the mental processes, i.e., many modes of meaning are not expressed through language, having always a small number of modes of signifying that the modes to be understood. In the Renaissance, the General and Rational Grammar (*Grammaire Générale et Raisonnée*) establishes a new basis for teaching. According to Arnauld (1612-1694) and Lancelot (1615-1695), the grammar becomes a kind of received doctrine, i.e., the grammar is considered a prescriptive discipline. From Port-Royal Grammar, we inherited the prescriptivism which remains in traditional grammar current. However, we lost the logical correspondence between the different categories of words, i.e., the differences between the languages analyzed becomes surface variations.

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