The transformations of management discourse: sociology and discourse analysis.


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Abstract: Discourses in organizations have become increasingly important in the last decades. The publishing industry produces thousands of books on business and management each year, and some of them even become best-sellers. According to Boltanski and Chiappello, these texts are the main loci in which the new spirit of capitalism is inscribed. Whereas the post-World War discourses were focused on rationality, careers, assembly lines, hierarchies and territorialization, recent discourses have used different concepts: information, knowledge, networks, mobility and deterritorialization. This paper uses discourse analysis to examine several classic management books, and argues that changes in discourses are always referred to a socioeconomic context. A self-constructed discourse analysis methodology will then be proposed, which tries to cover three discursive levels: structural, semantic and pragmatic. This epistemological tool is inspired by, amongst others, Roland Barthes’ Mythologies and the works of Vladimir Propp, Paul Ricoeur, Mikhail Bakhtin and several CDA authors such as Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk. And with this, sociology and language establish a solid alliance, in a different approach to social phenomena.

Introduction.

My contribution to this *Language and society* panel is a reflection on what are called the “management discourses” - those discourses made about the enterprise and the organization of work, from the perspective of the companies. But the paper is especially a reflection on the way sociologists might use discourse analysis techniques in relation to certain issues. Thus I will start my paper by attempting to reflect upon the special relation sociology and discourse analysis have had during the last decades. I will focus on discourse and content analysis rather than other approaches to language, such as sociolinguistics. From that point of departure, I will analyse a concrete discourse in society - the managerial discourse. It will be argued that this highly polemical discourse has to be studied using a specific discourse analysis, as well as reflecting on the necessity of developing original methods to study concrete social situations. But firstly let us start by describing the links between sociology and discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis and sociology.

Sociology and discourse analysis have had a prosperous relationship during the last decades. Nevertheless, according to the linguist Teun A. van Dijk (1980), the sociological approach to language has usually relied on perspectives which are too close to etnomethodology, without ever trying to point beyond them. Thus in its traditional study of discourses, it has basically focused on the analysis of conversations from daily life, micro-social restrictions on discourses, acts of speech in social interaction, and the like. Corsaro (1985: 167-192), in his chapter in van Dijk’s *Handbook on Discourse Analysis*, enumerates several examples. Thus he points to works such as Harvey Sacks’ conversation analysis (1992), which is centered upon conversations, turns of speech, and interpretive procedures regarding discursive interactions, and is heavily influenced by Garfinkel’s etnomethodology. He also mentions the work of Erving Goffman, especially his *Presentation of the self in everyday life* (1971). Goffman analysed the way certain discursive processes arise in determined social situations such as casual encounters, as well as focusing on the rituals of those situations. Aaron Cicourel’s cognitive sociology (1982) would be another example of a sociological approach

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2 I would like to thank my friend Tim Appleton for his comments on this paper.
to discourses. Cicourel’s work is centered around the influence that social structure has on discourses. There are more examples, though: Labov and Fanshell have developed a comprehensive discourse analysis, using a methodology based on the “expansion” of the text beyond what is said. Gumperz (1971), on the other hand, has studied the way participants in a conversation guess intentions in others’ words, and how they establish inferences from what the others are saying. Speaker and listener have the ability to contextualise certain facts that might be placed outside the linguistic exchange.

Most of these approaches have focused basically on orality, with a much lesser emphasis on written language or texts. Nevertheless, there have been several works by sociologists on the content of texts. Classic examples were the analysis of the contents of the daily press, by authors like Lippmann or Lasswell; there has also been qualitative approaches to letters or books (we must recall the works of the Chicago School of sociologists, such as Thomas and Zaniecki, White or Baldwin). This interest in discourses, moreover, led to the development of a quantitative approach, in which words are codified using either manual or electronic techniques. Researchers such as Berelson, Lazarsfeld, Osgood or Krippendorff have given us fine examples of these practices, using analytic resources to obtain information from the discourses, such as semantic correlations. Their goal is to draw conclusions about verbal, symbolic and communicative data, such as elements of propaganda, stylistic effects, etc. (about all these issues, see Bardin, 1986; Krippendorff, 1990). We could argue that this is the dominant trend in the sociological approach to social discourses, and it is mainly considered a non-critical perspective. It has been criticized, however, because it does not give a deeper insight into the understanding of discourses. This because it is pitched at the level of the denotation, whereas it forgets to go lower – to the level of connotation (Alonso, 1998).

However, there are other ways of approaching the analysis of these texts, and from a critical perspective. One of the most important schools in this regard is the Critical Discourse Analysis proposed by authors such as Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak or Teun A. Van Dijk (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Van Dijk, 2003; Fairclough, 2003; Wodak and Meyer, 2003). Critical discourse analysis can be understood as a consideration of the dialectical relationships between discourse and other elements of social practice, a consideration that departs from a clear critical position. This means that it is an analysis that is aware of elements such as power and contextual relations, and which pays attention to media discourse as well as discourses related to racism or domination. The authors focus on different elements of discourses such as syntax, style, texture and the like. It is an analysis grounded on language studies and semiotics, but in its softer versions can be really flexible. In fact, Norman Fairclough has been working on the discourse of the new capitalism. He has even analysed a managerial text (with the sociologist Ève Chiappello): the best selling Rosabeth Moss Kanter’s Evolve! (Chiappello and Fairclough, 2002), focusing on its ninth chapter. Both authors look at it in terms of the three interconnected, but analytically separable, aspects of genre, style, and discourses.

Nonetheless, I will argue that CDA relies upon semiotics to a significant degree, and that even though it is a powerful tool, there are still further ways of improving the analysis of the text. CDA brings a rich methodology which can be used for several kinds of discourses, and which also brings a critical edge. However, we may find that certain objects of study - certain discourses, that is - give us more information about social facts behind them than we might usually expect. Thus it is sometimes necessary to build a specific methodology for concrete discourses. This means that the researcher must be aware that he has to use a precise methodology which requires the utilization of elements not present in the works of the great discourse analysis theorists.
The American sociologist Charles Wright Mills developed an interesting concept in his classic work *The Sociological Imagination*: the idea of *intellectual craftsmanship*. According to Mills, the sociologist ought to have the capacity to shift from one perspective to another, thereby becoming truly flexible in his approach to social phenomena. The researcher is supposed to be insightful and to display creative endeavor (Mills, 2000: 195-226). It is important to understand the implications of developing this craftmanship. It means that the sociologist must approach his object of study with care. Thus the social researcher must construct a methodology, using the elements he considers valid for concrete research. Thus he must use his sociological imagination. In this paper I will try to be committed to this sociological imagination, developing a methodology specifically in order to analyse a concrete discursive manifestation: managerial discourse.

**Discourse in organizations: managerial discourse.**

By managerial discourse I mean a type of discourse which reflects the new spirit of capitalism, in the form of a new management ideology. The *spirit of capitalism* is, according to Chiappello and Fairclough, the ideology that justifies people’s commitment to capitalism, and which renders this commitment attractive (Chiappello and Fairclough, 2002: 186). This management ideology is one example of what sociology might analyse: it can be found to be well-reflected in certain texts (although it is also reflected in other aspects of organizational life). I am talking about popular management books, easily to be found in every book shop and whose target are executives, managers and, occasionally, workers (usually white-collar workers). The publishing industry produces thousands of these books on business and management each year, and some of them even become best-sellers. We can think of authors like Peter Drucker (2001), Tom Peters (1992), Spencer Johnson (1998) or Rosabeth Moss Kanter (2001), who sell millions of these books giving advice as to how to run a successful company. According to Collins (2000), there are about 5,000 different books of this kind published every year, in the British market alone.

Management discourses have become increasingly important during the last decades and they are expanding further, introducing managerial culture into every social field. They seek to show the relevance of terms such as efficiency, effectiveness, improvement or competitiveness in a global economy. Nevertheless, these discourses are particularly strong in organizations, especially enterprises which are operating in the capitalist market. After early works such as the ones by Bendix (1974) or Anthony (1977), which are more focused on the concept of managerial ideology, there has been some research on these texts as well as upon the phenomenon of the management guru. More recent works are those from Abrahamsson (1991), Huczynski (1993), Clark And Salaman (1996, 1998), Micklethwait and Woolridge (1997), Collins (2000), Jackson (2001) and Clark and Finchman (2002).

These discourses are characterized by two aspects: on the one hand, they present certain central features, such as orientation to capital accumulation, private property, the commodification of all social activities, competition or wage-labour. These elements are always present. On the other hand, the management ideology shows itself in a particular incarnation, at a given period within a given region. Thus management ideology develops throughout time different ideas of what security is, what fairness is, and what is stimulating in being engaged with capitalism (Chiappello and Fairclough, 2002: 187-188). Whereas the post-World War discourses were focused on rationality, careers, assembly lines, hierarchies and territorialization, recent discourses have used different concepts: information, knowledge, networks, mobility and deterritorialization (Fernández Rodríguez, 2004).
Thus we have an interesting phenomenon, since we are interested in written texts. It seems that content analysis, just like the one used by Krippendorff (1990) fits perfectly with the start of our research. However, I will not follow his perspective, since I consider that a quantitative approach based on a codification of verbal facts does not give us enough information. They are restricted to the content and there is a lack of engagement with the social. Moreover, they also lack a critical edge, instead placing themselves in a position of neutrality (Alonzo, 1998).

On the other hand, certain discourses in society present specific characteristics which should oblige the researcher to find a more flexible methodology. Some of them can be organized in such a way that they can become a genre. Once we read a good number of the management books, it is easy to recognize that certain characteristics and features are repeated constantly. These books are about innovative ways of managing, the main characters are managers to the exclusion of other stakeholders, managing is presented as the central social activity. The books are also intended to be challenging or exciting, and the style of writing has a strong normative tone (Huczynski, 1993; Collins, 2000; Fernández Rodríguez, 2004). Thus we find very distinctive themes in this literature. Whilst there are variations, all of them have important regularities. We can say that there is a specific genre of managerial literature, or, as the semiologist Tzvetan Todorov (1991) would say, these texts have some specific principles which link them to a particular literary field. A genre permits the researcher to taxonomize the texts so that he can choose a corpus which can be analyzed. Whereas we can talk about a genre of detective novels, or a romantic genre, we can also speak about a managerial genre. One example is this managerial discourse that can be found in management texts. Thus we have identified a literary quality in these texts: they are basically a specific genre of discourse which, as such, can be analysed through the methodology of discourse analysis.

**A proposal: Three-level discourse analysis.**

Thus we have some discourses and we also have techniques for deciphering them. Going back to that idea of sociological imagination I quoted before, I will now develop a specific discourse analysis method adapted to managerial texts. My point of departure is the understanding of the “social” quality of these texts (as well as their literary quality, mentioned before). The “social quality” of the texts is something that is easily recognizable. Norman Fairclough shows it clearly in this graphic:
Texts cannot be separated from the social, according to Fairclough (1992: 73). If we establish a homology (in the Bourdiean sense), we find that the schema might also be adapted to the case of management literature. Thus we must understand managerial literature as part of wider managerial discourses, which are a manifestation of a social framework: the organization of labour. Our graphic, then, would be like this:

**Graphic: Literature, discourse, labour.**

In this graphic, then, we have the essential relation: managerial literature is part of a certain organization of labour in society, which means that it is very important to focus on the context, that is, the historical moment in which those discourses were articulated and the socioeconomic framework to which they refer. This means that a simple content analysis will not be useful since it is centered upon the inner relations in the text, whilst the outer ones are evaded. A sociological approach is needed.

Discourses have been also been studied from the perspective of other disciplines (philosophy, semiology, linguistics) and it is possible to find in the latter ideas for a different approach to certain discursive phenomena. One clear example of this is the distinction made by the philosopher of language Charles Morris, between different levels of discourse (1985). For Morris, the process by which something works as a sign is called semiosis. This particular process implies three dimensions\(^3\). The first dimension is the relation that the signs have among themselves, the sign relation, that Morris calls syntactic dimension, or syntax. This dimension covers the logical aspect of discourse, focusing on logical structures and the formation and transformation of signs. The second dimension is the relation between the signs and the objects they are representing, and it is called semantic dimension, or semantics. Here we must focus upon the symbolic elements in the text. The third dimension of semiosis is the relation between signs and interpreters, that is, the way interpreters perceive a sign as a proper sign. This is the pragmatic dimension, or pragmatics. Following Charles Wright Mills’ idea of intellectual craftsmanship (2000), my proposal is a self-constructed discourse analysis.

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\(^3\) Morris (1985) had spoken of a fourth element, the interpreter. In this case, the interpreter would be the researcher.
methodology, which tries to cover these three discursive levels: structural, semantic and pragmatic.

**Structural level of the discourse.** The theoretical inspiration at this level of discourse is the work of authors such as Vladimir Propp (1971) and Roland Barthes (in his structuralist phase). Propp’s analysis gives an idea of the way in which stories are combined, developing a scheme. Propp departs from an essential point: there is a two-fold quality of every tale - its amazing multiformity, and, at the same time, its striking uniformity. Repetitions seem to show a surprising similarity between folktales. Propp’s aim is to discover the basic laws which rule their structure, that is, the pattern that allegedly underlies the folkloristic text. By breaking down these folk tales into their smallest narrative units -narratemes-, he was able to arrive at a typology of narrative structures, which are organized around a combination of a limited number of functions and characters (Propp, 1971). Therefore, a narrative can be reduced to a pattern, and all narratives choose from a repertoire of events and present them in roughly the same order. While not all are present, he found that all the tales he analysed displayed the functions in an unvarying sequence.

This methodology fits very well with literature genres which are characterized by a certain uniformity. This is the case with detective novels, popular folktales, self-help books, horoscopes, etc. Regularities in these best-selling business books are quite notorious as well, so this structural methodology can give interesting results.

Barthes more or less follows Propp’s argument but also enriches it, from a theoretical perspective. He explains that his structural analysis in fact tends to “dechronologise” the continuity of the narrative, to “relogify” it, giving a structural description of the chronological illusion. According to Barthes, the logic of the narrative must account for the time sequence of the narrative (Barthes, 1975: 11). Barthes distinguishes three levels in the relevant discourse: the level of the functions, the level of the actions and the level of the narration. According to Barthes, these three levels are linked together according to a progressive method of integration: a function only has meaning when it is placed in the general action of an actant; and this action itself receives its ultimate signification from the fact that it is narrated, placed in a discourse which has its own code (Barthes, 1975: 5).

At the level of the function, Barthes argues that there are two main categories of units - Functions and Indications - and that distinction should make possible a certain classification of narratives. Some narratives are strongly functional (for example, folk tales) and some others are strongly indicational (for example, psychological “novels”); between these two extremes there exists a whole range of indeterminate examples depending on their historical background, society, genre (Barthes, 1975: 8). Function is nothing but a name which is expressing an action, and one understands that an action cannot be defined apart from its place in the course of the action. Functions in a text can be divided into nuclei (former functions) and catalyses (complementary functions which, in fact, expand the text). The level of the actions focuses on the characters (dramatis personae, actants), who perform an action. They form a necessary descriptive plan, outside which the smallest related “actions” cease to be intelligible. According to Barthes, it is impossible to have a narrative without “characters” or at least without “agents”; but on the other hand these very numerous “agents” cannot be

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1 Roland Barthes’ work has evolved through different stages. Barthes himself describes them (1980): a first period influenced by Marxism and literary works such as Brecht’s; a second period which is purely structuralist, influenced by Saussure, Propp, Greimas or Lévi-Strauss; and a last post-structuralist work in which Nietzsche, Lacan or Bataille remain as main influences.
described or classified in terms of “people” [persons], so we must speak of agents or characters. Finally, the level of narration is occupied by the signs of narrativity, the collection of features which reintegrate functions and actions into the narrative communication, articulated by the doer and receiver (Barthes, 1975: 15-21). Here Barthes includes the *topoi*, cultural stereotypes also known as commonplaces: spaces of discursivity which function as basic forms of argumentation, due to their extended use among the speakers of a community (Barthes, 1990; also van Dijk, 2003).

Once we have identified these elements in the text, we are able to combine them and categorise them. The aim is to classify elements and to understand the logic of their combination. The final goal of a structural analysis is to identify the Basic Plot of the text. From this Basic Plot, we can identify variations and typologies.

Structural analysis is very useful to identify the basic organization of a text. We also have to be aware of its limitations, such as what might be called pan-semiologism, or the reduction of all social reality to the sphere of the sign (Beltrán, 1991; Alonso, 1998), or the excessive formalization which tends to put both subject and history out of the analysis. In its most extreme versions, structuralism forgets that language, as Ricoeur defines it, is not a world in itself, but a mediation between minds and things (Ricoeur, 1973). But if we just use it as a framework for the structural level of our analysis, it is very interesting and it offers important results.

**Semantic level of the discourse.** Once we have discovered the structure of the discourse, it is important to transcend this dimension and put the text in a closer relation to the social. Semantics are essential because the sociologist must do something more than discovering and describing the structure and regularities of the discourse: he must understand it and make an interpretation of it. Each individual has its own interpretation of signs, but these interpretations are always mediated by social reality. Language, the most complex of the human communication systems, is imposed upon the individual by the social: it filters his perceptions, produces his thinking and constructs his knowledge about the world (Berger and Luckmann, 1997; Beltrán, 1991). So discourses are social phenomena (Fairclough, 1990: 23). Not all the symbols signify the same for every person: in semantics, we focus on those symbols whose meaning has not achieved a consensus amongst the members of society. The theoretical inspiration in this level of the discourse is the work of authors such as the previously-mentioned Paul Ricoeur and – again - Roland Barthes, in this case in his pre-structuralist period (with his most valuable sociological work: *Mythologies*).

Ullmann (1972) defines semantics as the science of the signified, which relates it to Symbols. Symbols can be defined in many ways, but we might conceive them as a classifying schema that societies use to order their universe. They break the closed codes of signs and create an openness to the social world. According to Ricoeur (1986), semantics are about the relation between the sign and the denoted thing (the relation between language and world): its purpose is to put into relation two aspects: the inner constitution of sense, and its interplay with the transcendental objective of reference. Thus semantics abandons the closed world of signs to reach what is beyond language, that is, the world.

Narrations include many symbolic elements. To decipher the text, it is necessary to identify them. Many of them are expressed through metaphors, which are speech figures in which the word which usually denotes a signified moves to a different meaning (there is a connotation of another sign, of something else). Once we have identified the metaphors, we should be able to re-read the texts as a re-description. We identify that words are polysemic, with several signifieds for different social subjects: as the semiologist Eliseo Verón (1987: 19-20)
explains, there are at least two possible readings, the one from the author and the one from the receiver. The work of the analyst (the hermeneut) should be the deciphering of what is apparent, trying to find out what is hidden behind the words.

This has an immediate connection with the concept of Myth. A myth could be defined as a collective representation that reflects certain social practices and functions, and takes the form of a narrative. These narratives have historical foundations, and commonly involve a foundational act in society or the beginning of a concrete social practice, such as a rule or a custom. Social myths have often been studied in structuralist approaches, which have focused on them from different perspectives (Lévi-Strauss, 1970; Greimas, 1973; Maranda y Kőngas-Maranda, 1971). Nevertheless, the version developed by Roland Barthes (1973) throughout his small masterpiece “Mythologies” is the most relevant for our approach. For Barthes, myths are not just common in “primitive” cultures. They are present everywhere in bourgeois culture, although they are not building great structural narratives, but merely a corpus of discourses. In Mythologies, Barthes describes myths in different aspects of French daily culture. There are mythologies in food (wine, steak and chips), commodities (toys, cars) or journal reports (the iconography which is present around actors and writers). For Barthes, daily life is perceived as a group of signs and symbols that, in spite of their apparent “naturalness”, are undoubtedly ideological. They are an inverted reflection, presenting what is social as simply natural. When these signs are structured in discourses, they are called myths. Therefore, their symbolic form is expressed through a narrative. They operate as intersubjective structures of signification, organised around a concrete Mythology. Myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal, which, as Barthes claims, is the exact process of bourgeois ideology (Barthes, 1973: 142). Each social sign has several signifieds associated with one signifier: there is a disagreement that avoids consensus in reaching the same signified. Nevertheless, this signified can be imposed by authority or power. It becomes the natural signified: the myth has been born in that moment. Thus myths must be deciphered during the analysis of these texts, trying to find out what is behind them. Therefore, even if Barthes claims himself to be a semiotician, in this work he is undoubtedly closer to semantics, and that is why he will be again a central reference in this level of the discourse.

Pragmatic level of the discourse. The pragmatic dimension is deeply intertwined with the semantic one, as symbols do not just refer to a certain relation between signifier and signified, but also to a relation between the sign and the interpreter, which is mediated by the social. In linguistics both dimensions are clearly separated (they have different inner rules), but in this proposal of discourse analysis it is better to have a simultaneous approach to both meaning and context. The theoretical inspiration at this level of the discourse is the work of authors such as Voloshinov, Bakhtin and the CDA authors (van Dijk, Fairclough). As the Russian philologist Valentin Voloshinov (1973: 10) argued, “signs can arise only on interindividual territory. [...] It is essential that the two individuals be organized socially, that they compose a group (a social unit); only then can the medium of signs take shape between them”. Therefore, he adds, the forms of signs are conditioned above all by the social organization of the participants involved and also by the immediate conditions of their interaction (Voloshinov, 1973: 21). These statements are very important. They are showing the way from the text to the social, and the relevance of sociology to research in these matters. Sociology must do an ideological analysis of discourse, because every sign has an ideological feature. According, once again, to Voloshinov, a “sign does not simply exist as a part of reality – it reflects and refracts another reality. Therefore, it may distort that reality or be true to it, or may perceive it from a special point of view, and so forth. Every sign is subject to the criteria of ideological evaluation” (1973: 10). Therefore, once we identify the signifiers, the
sociologist must take into account the social forces and struggles which are behind the discourses.

The most important concepts at this level are the enunciations, the intertextuality and the context. The enunciations are statements which express ideas and whose main property is to be destined to reach someone. Enunciations are always influenced by the social as they are full of dialogical shades (Bakhtin, 2003: 282-285). This concept is very important, because from the moment that we speak of enunciations, the actant from the structural analysis stops being a simple actor, and becomes a subject (Fernández Rodríguez, 2004). Thus the speaker can be considered an ideologist, and his words then become ideologems, points of view about the world from an ideological position, ways of access to the historical and socioeconomic system (Bakhtin, 1991: 150). We select, choosing relevant criteria, the most representative enunciations, and we apply our analysis to them. Intertextuality is another mode of openness to the social, in this case to other texts. It means that texts can be conceived as mosaics of other texts, references to other discourses, connected interdiscursiveness (Kristeva, 1978: 190). This references to other voices are very important since we can find in a text a condensation of voices, a dialogism, a polysemy (Alonso, 1998; Fernández Rodríguez, 2004). The last concept, and a crucial one, is the context. The context can be defined as the social field, a sequence of events, with a dynamic character (van Dijk, 1980: 273-274). According to the Spanish semiologist Jorge Lozano, the context is the bridge between discursive structures and social structures, and without it, the linguistic expressions would always be ambiguous (Lozano, 1993: 43). It covers the socioeconomic and historical framework, but, in a latent state, it also denotes a range of possible contexts (possible worlds). Sociology, with the addition of the study of the context, has the opportunity of surpassing its traditional approach to discourse (so close to ethnomethodology, with many micro-social restrictions). Therefore, it would be closer to a sociohermeneutical approach that can lead to the identification of the social origins of the discourses and helps to rediscover the active social actors who construct them.

In summary, this approach to discourse analysis must be understood as an attempt to develop a flexible tool to study managerial texts. Whilst the dominant textual analysis focuses on the codification and atomization of elements, this one offers flexibility and an openness to the social.

An example of a three-level discourse analysis applied to management narratives.

During the next few pages I will give two examples of managerial texts and the results that we can get from using this three-level discourse analysis. The idea is to contrast two discourses - one from the sixties (though referred to the thirties and forties) and one from the nineties. The first example is a text from the sixties written by Alfred Sloan, the famous president of General Motors. I have selected the following enunciations:

We have always taken great pains to keep foremen’s morale at the highest level. In 1934 foremen were placed on a salary basis, and in 1941 we adopted the rule that their salaries had to be at least 25 per cent higher than the earnings of the highest-paid group of employees under their supervision. In addition, our foremen, who constitute our first line of supervision, have been getting overtime allowances since the early days of World War II – though the Federal Wage and Hour Law does not require the payment of overtime to supervisors. But perhaps the most important reason for the high morale of our foremen is the solid support we have given them on matters of discipline and work standards. They know that they are considered members of management (Sloan, 1972: 459).
The responsibilities of the Personnel Staff are, obviously, very grave ones, especially as they relate to our dealings with unions. For in these dealings there is always the possibility of great damage to the corporation – and of severe suffering to its employees. On the one hand, we must, wherever possible, avoid big strikes, and small ones too. On the other hand, we must not succumb to unreasonable economic demands or surrender the basic responsibilities of management. Avoiding both of these hazards is no easy task. And yet we have, in the past decade and a half, been reasonably successful at doing so (Sloan, 1972: 460).

The second example comes from a book from the nineties. It is from the famous Hammer and Champy’s *Reengineering the corporation*. I have selected these enunciations:

When a process is reengineered, jobs evolve from narrow and task-oriented to multidimensional. People who once did as they were instructed now make choices and decisions on their own instead. Assembly-line work disappears. Functional departments lose their reasons for being. Managers stop acting like supervisors and behave more like coaches. Workers focus more on the customers’ needs and less on their bosses’. Attitudes and values change in response to new incentives. Practically every aspect of the organization is transformed, often beyond recognition (Hammer and Champy, 1993: 65).

Process teams, consisting of one person or many, don’t need bosses; they need coaches. Teams ask coaches for advice. Coaches help teams solve problems. Coaches are not in the action, but close enough to it so they can assist the team in its work. Traditional bosses design and allocate work. Teams do that for themselves. Traditional bosses have little to do in a reengineered environment. Managers have a switch from supervisory roles to acting as facilitators, as enablers, and as people whose jobs are the development of people and their skills so that those people will be able to perform value-adding processes themselves (Hammer and Champy, 1993: 77).

The texts are very different but at the same time there are certain common characteristics. Both texts describe the organization of labour, the way things should be. If we read the first text, is easy to recognize several themes in it: Sloan describes how General Motors supported their foremen and helped to keep their moral high, and the responsibilities of their Personnel Staff. The second text is also centered around the organization of work, but in a more impersonal way: they are trying to create a theory about business process reengineering. Both perspectives are committed to showing successful ways of managing a company. Nevertheless, there are huge differences in their recommendations.

At the structural level, we can find that both texts are structured through axes which are organizing the sense. These axes are binary oppositions between certain ideas. In Sloan’s case, there are three axes which are, more or less, structuring the text. The main idea in the first paragraph is very clear: proposals from the managers to keep their foremen enthusiastic about their job. They are considered members of the management board, and they are very grateful for that. We find here the first axis: there is a situation of cooperation, opposed to a situation of social conflict. The foremen are committed to the management, there is an alliance, a consent. On the second paragraph, we read about the dealings with the unions. We find here another axis: the one which opposes managers and trade unions. And the third axis is related to a certain implicit situation: in the enterprise it is possible to make agreements, to achieve fair deals, which means that there is a model of integration inside the company which is opposed to ideas of class struggle (which are read in the reference to strikes).

In Hammer and Champy’s texts, there are three axes organizing their discourse. The first one sees on one side the past, the old-fashioned (the classic assembly line work) and on the other the future, the new (business process reengineering). The second axis opposes supervisors to coaches, that is, it proposes a new way of understanding the figure of the manager. In the
third axis, the opposition has to do with the employees’ attitude: it can be either boss-oriented or customer-oriented. In the end, all three axes have to do with the dichotomy old-new which was mentioned above: supervisors and orientation towards ones boss are the past, coaches and customer orientation are the new.

Also at the structural level, it is easy to identify several actors and several functions. The actors in Sloan’s text are Alfred P. Sloan, the management board, the workers, the foremen and the trade unions. Alfred Sloan’s voice is behind the whole narration, it is his point of view. He is proud of what he has achieved. He presents himself, throughout the discourse, as someone reasonable. It is a monological discourse. The management board is presented as the bearer of rationality and initiative, while other actors appear as objects of managerial action (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992). Its functions are related to caring about their people: they pay very high wages (even more than the norm), raise the moral of their foremen, take care of the employees, try to avoid bad dealings with the trade unions that could damage them. They must do certain things (imperative mode) to maintain their responsibilities, to be responsible. The foremen are considered part of the management even if they are workers (they are merely front-line supervisors). This implies a division between workers, as the foremen are aligned with management: this means that some of the workers believe that their interests and the interests of management are equal (cooperation), whereas other workers are in the trade unions. Regarding the level of narration, we should point to the status of the narrator, in this case the voice of Sloan (in first person). He is essential as narrator, his is a monologue in which other voices remain silent. He exposes the alternatives and shows the way to follow. There are also several topoi or commonplaces in the text: the company pay more than the law requires; the enterprise cares about its people; the enterprise resolves problems since it is governed rationally.

In Hammer and Champy’s text, we identify several actors and several functions as well. The actors in their text are basically managers and workers, and it is very interesting to notice that the trade unions have disappeared from the discourse. The text is basically centered around functions. The management board is presented as the bearer of rationality and initiative, but in this case there are also explicit references to how the workers’ attitude must be. Management functions are related, in this case, to being coaches, enablers, facilitators, assistants, whereas they must not act like supervisors. The workers, on the other hand, are supposed to work in teams, to display initiative and perform value-added processes. It is a monological discourse again. In the level of discourse, the narrators are Hammer and Champy, but they are speaking in the third person, in more objectivist fashion. Again, they are describing, using a very prescriptive style, what has to be done. There are some topoi as well: the emphasis on action, on the radical break with the old, on freedom.

We mentioned before that one of the objectives of a structural analysis was to discover the pattern in the text, if one indeed exists. In both cases it would be something like this:
At the semantic level, it is easy to find certain mythologies in both texts. The most notable one is the mythology of cooperation, which appears in both texts. Managers and workers basically share the same interests, the same goals. The contradiction between Capital and Labour announced by Marx (1967) has ceased to exist. This also implies, in Sloan’s text, a mythology of control and consent, in which we find control (there is supervision/management is exercised through disciplinary processes) and consent (foremen feel they are part of management, workers in an implicit way co-operate with the bosses), and close to that another interesting mythology, the mythology of the worker who is against the trade unions. The managers are trying to create an opposition between the foremen, that is, the supervisors, and the ones who are supervised, the workers. Foremen are workers whose position is against trade unionism, as their interests are the same as the enterprise. Trade unions can also have unreasonable demands for the workers. In Hammer and Champy’s text, instead of a mythology of control and consent we find a mythology of the Customer: the source of power comes from outside the enterprise, from the customers, whose needs must be taken into account by the worker. This is associated with a very important mythology: the mythology of the free worker i.e. that there are no supervisors, the managers being simply coaches who help him, thus he is free to do what he wants. There is also a mythology of management styles: there are old ways of managing which take to failure, whereas there are new ways which lead to success.

Apart from mythologies, it is easy to find certain semantic elements that can lead us to discover symbolic elements in the text. For instance, the way the management functions are explained in Sloan’s text: the managers take great pains, their responsibilities are heavy, they support their people. The tasks are described as difficult, yet then they are successful doing them. Success arises from hazard. But also they are responsible, rational, they know what has to be done. In Hammer and Champy, it is easy to classify the different meanings of such things, as in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enterprise elements</th>
<th>Before reengineering</th>
<th>After reengineering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jobs</td>
<td>Narrow and task-oriented</td>
<td>Multidimensional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>Instructed</td>
<td>Make choices and decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>Supervisors</td>
<td>Coaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>Focus on bosses</td>
<td>Focus on customers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 In fact, he is free to do what the company wants. It is a case of a double bind discourse (Fernández Rodríguez, 2004).
Enterprise elements face a severe change after re-engineering arrives. Re-engineering is presented as liberation management, since individuals come to be treated like adults instead of children.

In both Sloan’s text, and that of Hammer and Champy, the style is very interesting. It is extremely prescriptive; we can only hear the management’s arguments, whereas the other social actors remain silent. It is a monological discourse, as we said before.

Finally, we face the pragmatic level of the discourse. We have selected these enunciations as an example and, in this case, there are no clear cases of intertextuality. However, there is a clear, if subtle, reference to the context, which is given by the absence of one of the actors (the trade unions) in the second text and the transition from supervisors to coaches. Sloan’s text is historically situated in the period which comes from the thirties to the sixties. It is the period of the assembly-line work inspired by taylorism and fordism, and rationality is a core part of that discourse. General Motors was also one the classic big corporations. This type of organization was praised in a period in which industrialism was at its height. It is a period in which social and class struggle were institutionalized through collective bargaining, so trade unions are an important social actor. However, in Hammer and Champy’s text we realize that there has been a huge shift. Now taylorism is out of the discourse: no more assembly work, say Hammer and Champy. Now we have to take care of our customers’ needs. Thus it is a discourse adapted to a service economy, a post-industrial society. Supervision is substituted by assistance, by coaching. There is a constant emphasis on freedom which makes us think instantly of individuals, not of social forces. Therefore we can read how the organization of labour (and society) has changed, and how the managerial discourse has adapted itself to those transformations. But the most interesting aspect is that, in the discourse, there are no references to history at all. Social facts are taken out of history, and social representations become mythical.

According to Boltanski and Chiappello (1999), the managerial discourse reflected in these texts is the main loci in which the new spirit of capitalism is inscribed. We read in them the organization of labour and the moral values which are supporting capitalism in its different phases. These discourses, according to the discourse analysis model that has been developed throughout these pages, are based on Mythologies. The function of Mythologies is to integrate the individual in a concrete symbolic order through an imposition of meanings. I myself have always been convinced of the power of this concept to explain crucial discourses in our society. For instance, most of the people work for organizations, social institutions where tapestries of myths have the function of creating bonds of solidarity between the members, in spite of the different social positions of each one of them. The easiest example is the case of management narratives, with all their fuss about leaders with vision, workers who achieve spectacular results and corporations that conquer huge markets. All these narratives and rethorics are based on myths, and the essence of these myths is that which appears natural but which in reality is a social construct. They offer a vision of the organization that puts some organizational aspects into the foreground whilst the rest of the social and historical situations and facts remain silent. Thus we may say that managerial discourses are authoritarian discourses which impose an ideological vision from the enterprise’s point of view.

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6 The transition from Fordism to Post-Fordism has been covered by authors such as Piore and Sabel (1984), Harvey (1989), Lash and Urry (1987, 1993), Ofie (1985), Castells (2000) or Alonso (1999, 2001).
Conclusion: a solid alliance between sociology and language.

In summary: in this paper I have tried to argue how sociology can be fully enriched by the utilisation of linguistics, but avoiding pure semiotics. I have developed a model of discourse analysis specifically designed to approach managerial discourses, whose influence is higher than ever. We are focusing on language, on a discourse, but behind the words we may be able to identify certain social situations and concrete social actors. Verbal communication, as Voloshinov suggests, *can never be understood and explained outside of this connection with a concrete situation* (Voloshinov, 1973: 95). From that point of departure, I have tried to show how discourse analysis can have access to sociologically interesting conclusions. And with this, sociology and language establish a solid alliance in a different approach to social phenomena.
References:


