Communication is the place of encounters and conflicts, where discourses and different points of view are constituted[1]

Interview with José Luiz Fiorin[2]

By Roseli Figaro[3]

With an extensive experience in Theory and Linguistics Analysis, José Luiz Fiorin contributes mainly on issues related to enunciation and is a careful observer of media discourses. Among other books, he published *The wiles of enunciation; In search of meaning: discourse studies; Introduction to the thought of Bakhtin; The 1964 regime: discourse and ideology; Text Lessons: reading and writing*. In 2010, he gave a conference in the Communication, Discourse Analysis and Language Activity Study Cycle, sponsored by the Graduate Program in Communication Sciences from ECA-USP, in partnership with the Masters Program in Communication and Consumption of ESPM and the Communication and Work Research Group of ECA-USP. In this exclusive interview with **MATRIZes**, Fiorin talks about science, the power of media and internet and their crossover point: the discourse, linguistic and social product of enunciation.

MATRIZes: The idea of text and discourse permeates our knowledge field. We talk about communicative texts and discourses of communication. Can you give us an overview about the differences between text and discourse?

Fiorin: Each theory that studies discourse and text differentiates between them. But if we were to take, in a simplified way, the characteristics that distinguishes them, passing by different theories, we could say that the discourse is the result of an enunciation, being the enunciation historical, which means that the discourse is integrally linguistic and historical. The discourse is a language arrangement that implies a historicity of the meaning. In this regard, the text is the manifestation of a discourse, through a expression plane. For example, in the novel *Vidas Secas[4]* understood as a discourse: insofar as its verbally expressed, this discourse is materialized by a text in the book, or visually in the movie directed by Nelson Pereira dos Santos. The discourse is a linguistic and social product of enunciation. It has a linguistic structure and a historicity, and expresses itself through texts.

MATRIZes: So we might think, in our knowledge field, in communicational texts as those linguistic expressions which are present in diverse media vehicles, and all such expressions as discourse.

Fiorin: Yes, because I have to untangle the discourse. In fact, when I say its social, the discourse is indeed a social position. Its´ quite clear that establishing the discourse is neither simple nor trivial. For example, I could utter that we have a left and a right discourse ... Nowadays it is very rude, but this is a dictatic example. As well as we can have a Catholic religious discourse of liberation and a Catholic religious discourse of salvation, and these elements become manifest in different doctrines.

MATRIZes: In your articles - especially one that I really like called "Language and Interdisciplinary" - you explain the limits and boundaries between language and other fields of knowledge. How is this connection between Communication and Language?

Fiorin: It's interesting, because in that article I try to show that disciplines were constituted by establishing boundaries between them, and from the meaning of prefixes *multi, multi, inter and trans*, I observe what is interdisciplinary and transdisciplinarity etc. Language is by nature transdisciplinary because I can investigate, for example, language transformation over time: Linguistics combined with History. There is, for me, one thing that you can not do, which is to distinguish language and communication. This is because communication is any relation mediated by language. Every connection is mediated by language, therefore, all human relations are relations of communication. And communication is, first of all, a *make believe*, rather than a *make know*, a content transmission, as supposed by the Information Theory, which examined the noise of the information transmission. Even when, as a teacher, I give a lecture, what I want is to get my students to accept what I'm saying. It bothers me that our academic institution has separated the communication field – in which the relation is mediated by different media like radio, TV etc. - from other forms of communication that are left aside as if they belonged to Language and Literature field. In my ideal University organization, Language and Communications institutions need to be together in a large language research institute and not separated as we are

nowadays. There is a boundary between what is communication and what is language, however I believe this is a artificial border, because of bureaucratic organization: the distribution of positions, distribution of scholarships, division of areas etc. But even regarding the subject, all communication process involves language and all language is present in a communicative relation. You see, I can never talk alone. Talking to myself has always been heavily sanctioned by our societies. Only fools talk alone. The division conceived is an artificial division. Most important problems passes over whatever acts of communication, for example, the effectiveness of persuasion. This search for efficiency exists in my conversation at a bar with a friend that asks me for a particular advice, or that I want to have something done, as well as in political speech, either mediated by television or a rally, or in a newspaper interview and so on.

MATRIZes: On this subject there is also another understanding that communication is always agreement, conciliation and reaching a deal, on behalf of the common sema. What do you think about this?

Fiorin: Only a sociology that denies the conflict that pervades History and denies the conflict between social classes can conceive communication as agreement. Communication is as much agreement as disagreement. Communication is conflict. Its´ true that its´ necessary to have a common ground on which you disagree, in order to communicate. If we are to discuss political views, for example, both must agree that politics is something important and deserves to be discussed as well as political positions in society. If someone says "no, this is crap", it disrupts the communication process. But communication can not be understood only as an agreement, because it's reductive. I would say that there are two broad views of society: one that is called the liberal view, the idea of social agreement in which is rested this idea of communication as conciliation. There is another vision of society based on the conflict between social classes. Perhaps we should think of communication as a consequence of these two views. There is a communication based on negotiation for a deal but there is also communication as conflict and it should be taken into account.

MATRIZes: There are also thinkers who believe that communication does not exist. Communication is incommunication due to the specificity of the subjects and on

behal of different interests that the code is not able to lead, in fact, to communication. What do you think about it?

Fiorin: Dominique Maingueneau[5] talks about mutual interincomprehension. However, one must understand what it is. The mutual interincomprehension occurs between discourses, that is, social positions or discursive formations. Its evident, for example, that if one goes to the United States there is right and left, as political positions – I will simplify the explanation for didactic purposes. If we have a major with an Arab surname in the United States who gave shots and killed a lot of people, the left would say he has mental problems. The right would say "no, he is a terrorist". That is, they read what one side said to be psychological problems as terrorism. Then, later, an individual took an airplane and threw it into a building of the US Revenue, claiming that the government invaded his privacy. Immediately, the right said he was defending individual freedom against state oppression, and the left said "he's a terrorist." This is a question of mutual interincomprehension: to read what is said by the other as opposed to my discourse. This is established between the social positions within the discourses. Within the discursive formations, however, there is a field of understanding. On the other hand, we could imagine the interincomprehension as total obscurity, but there is no such thing as complete opacity. Bakhtin explains how the social consciousness is constituted, that is, consists of social discourse plus the dialogical relationships between them. I can take a certain position, but I know the discourse of others. I may consider it wrong, but this allows a minimum of comparability between the social formations which allows a minimum of understanding. And we can not consider only the incomprehension, because that would be like adhering to a liberal communication theory. But we cant´ think we have a deaf dialogue as well: there should be a minimum of understanding to have negotiations of meanings. For example, I always joke that fortunately our pilots and flight controllers don´t believe in total misunderstanding. And when someone says "down to 10 thousand feet," they know exactly what it is and go down to 10,000 feet. There exists a common

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[5] Linguistics Professor at Paris XII University, his work runs upon Linguistics of Enunciation And Discourse Analysis.

ground and its´ clear that it´s not the general agreement that certain theories of communication would like, but there are agreements in flow areas within and between certain discursive formations.

MATRIZes: Different fields of knowledge, as Education, Communication and History, emphasize the appropriateness and necessity of interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinarity, pluridisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity. After all, what are you talking about? Is it something new?

Fiorin: Actually we are talking of nothingness. Indisciplinarity was the last to appear. As much libertarian the term indisciplinarity seems, its´ but a denial of discipline, which can result in the overall thinning of things. We should understand multidisciplinary and pluridisciplinarity as the same: many disciplines focusing on a given problem, for example, the energy issue. Geology investigates how to find out non-renewable energy sources, agronomy explains how to efficiently crop biomass that will produce energy, electrical engineering shows how to build transmission lines without losing energy, sociology or anthropology studies the impact of using particular form of energy in society. The disciplines boundaries are not diluted as the problem under study requires the viewpoint of different disciplines. This is multi and pluridisciplinarity. This means that multidisciplinarity is not something *a quo,* to use a Latin term. You can´t start looking for the multidisciplinary approach to solve a problem. No. There is a problem and the end point, the *ad quem*, requiring the perspective of certain disciplines to see everything. So I do not postulate a *prior* multidisciplinarity that dilutes disciplines.

Interdisciplinarity is more complicated because it relates to discipline´s transformations and concerns two aspects. First, when one discipline uses methods, techniques and concepts from another discipline. In this case, what has happened in Psychoanalysis is an example. When Lacan – not as a new practice, because Freud had already taken principles from linguistics to study Psychoanalysis – decides to desmedicalize the psychoanalytic study, he rests in Linguistics and from its concepts develops theories about represssion, transference, on the structuring of the unconscious as a language. This is interdisciplinary. The Structural Anthropology also did this, as Levi-Strauss studied the elementary structures of kinship using the methods of Phonology.

Next, when different areas are combined establishing new set of problems we have interdisciplinary. For example, in Geolinguistics, which is the study of the language distribution in space and its impact, we combine elements of Geography such as population distribution etc. with elements of Linguistics. This is interdisciplinary. Therefore, it does not emerge every day as people are willing to. Interdisciplinarity comes when new problems arise, at the time of scarce scientific paradigm shifts.

Transdisciplinarity is even more complex. It´s neither combination of areas nor transfer of concepts. *Trans* is to go beyond certain views, for example, if it´s denied the basic principle of science such as non-contradiction and established a science founded on analogy, it´s transdisciplinarity. Because it´s being conceived a poetic science. There is a sonnet by Camões that goes: " Love is fire that burns without being seen; Is a wound that hurts and does not feel; It is an unhappy contentment; It's pain without hurting...". Over eleven verses – two trios and the first quartet – the poem attempts to define love. And it begins "Love is fire that burns" – visible -, "without becoming visible" – invisible – a contradiction, which serves no purpose because science establishes that a definition can not contain within itself its contradiction. Camões ends the poem: "But how can its favor cause; Friendship in human hearts; If it is so contrary to itself?" That is, he's saying that love is love. Love is the first and the last word - "love." Love is love, to feel, to be lived, despite the contradiction. However, science does not admit contradiction. Literature and poetry do. I could create the oxymoron and the paradox. It seems to me that new trends in science deals with this exact perspective. Physicist Marcelo Gleiser indicates now that we have to create an imperfect science, where asymmetry is to be sought, instead of symmetry. Its transdisciplinary, because science had been searching the symmetry of things since the thirteenth century. When Kepler[6] establishes mechanics laws, he wants to show a universe so symmetrical, mathematically so perfect that could only be accepted because it sounded divine

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[6] Johannes Kleper, astrônomo e matemático, 1571-1630.

perfection and symmetry. Kepler understood how the universe worked, he was still a astronomer descended from an old view of science, ruled by the purpose of things and he looked for the divine perfection that resonated in the universe. Nowadays, there is talk of an imperfect science. So, transdisciplinarity is a very new trend. Transdisciplinarity is somewhat to keep in check certain basic science principles, creating new sets of problems with elements that were not admitted as scientific principles. That means that understanding the problems of inter, multi and transdisciplinary demands, even nowadays, a proper knowledge of the nineteenth century disciplines before pulling down their borders.

MATRIZes: Sometimes people use these terms much more like an elegant feature to flourish the speech than to say anything at all ....

Fiorin: And its curious that pluridisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity and now transdisciplinarity turn into positive concepts. All this because discipline is a negative concept and because after all we live in a time of alterity, decentralization disruption of boundaires and limits, but I had never noticed in University such great inability to cope with divergent thoughts as I see these days. For example, in Language Studies, it was promoted a discussion of whether to separate the field of Linguistics from Literature. Now, you see, how can we separate them? This means that we will extinguish the Bachelor in Language Studies as we know it, with two major components: one is the study of languages, chaired by a theoretical discipline of Linguistics, another is the study of Literature, chaired by a theoretical discipline of Literary Theory. Now it´s said that we can´t live together because of very different scientific traditions, but we have always been together. That means I can no longer coexist with the difference, exactly in an era when interdisciplinarity adds a positive value. We are witnessing a crash of interdisciplinary networks of relationships that still subsist within universities.

Another thing that bothers me: Brazilian law stablishes that people don´t need to get a graduation degree in the same area of the Bachelor´s degree. Interests change over life and people make their choices. But analyzing the public service announcement contests

- I will speak of Language degree - it´s required a degree in Literature. Sometimes it´s even determined the Bachelor´s degree, Master´s and PhD in Language. What is this for? One day I was told the following: "but if the person doesn´t has a degree in Language, then had never studied Latin and can´t teach Portuguese Historical Linguistics." Well, is this a contest on Portuguese Historical Linguistics? If it´s asked to teach theories of discourse, Latin is not needed. Well, what if the contest is for Portuguese Historical Linguistics? If I'm taking part in the jury, I am able to verify whether the candidate is competent to teach Portuguese Historical Linguistics, and I will certainly conclude that he is not capable. It depends on the decision of the jury. No need to restrict this tight and to hinder refreshment and interdisciplinarity. It´s shocking. We live in an era when interdisciplinarity has a positive value, but it´s the disciplinarity that takes place in the daily practices of our academic relations.

MATRIZes: For us from the Communication field it has been a combat against the perspective that intends to restrict the object and subject of study in Communication field to the means of communication and the media, rejecting anything that deviates. On the other hand, there are those who reduce the field of Communication to Semiotics. What do you think about this?

Fiorin: I have already answered the question on the ones who reduce Communication to the media when I stated that Communication field is wider. Now, on the reduction to semiotics, it´s import to say that there are three major semiotic traditions: an American, relied on Charles Sanders Peirce, which is not a semiotics for text analysis, but is more a semiotic to establish the linguistics foundations of science; and then two others more related to text analysis, one French and the other Soviet. Nowadays we can no longer speak in Soviet, because the USSR no longer exists, but the first one was found around the figure of Lotman and the other around Greimas. It´s curious that Greimas was also Lithuanian, from the same region. Actually, this semiotics arose in the former Soviet Union territory, although Greimas had been more involved in France. I consider all theories of discourse as important. Each one answers a different question, because as I like to repeat, science is not as religion that explains everything: where did we came from, why do we suffer, where are we going to. No. In science, every theory answers a question and I can not criticize a theory for not answering a question that emerged from

another theory. The three semiotics have important functions. Now, semiotics is a theory among many others, you can not take semiotics as "the" theory of communication. It can´t be dismissed as some do, but it can not be turned into "the" theory to explain the communication process. There are dozens of points of view to study Communications, since the old rhetoric, that still poses problems on the effectiveness of discourse a very important issue, to semiotics, discourse analysis, textual linguistics, critical theory of discourse, Bakhtin's theory, depending on what to address, French semiotics, Russian semiotics (in the USSR, right used the expression Russian semiotics and left used Soviet semiotics). These are language theories and they contribute to the study of communication. But neither is "the" science, otherwise we would have a religious and not a scientific view of science.

MATRIZes: To address the role and hegemony of the media in the global scenario, the sociologist Octavio Ianni created the metaphor of "electronic prince", a clear allusion to the Prince in Machiavelli and to the party in Gramsci. How do you understand the relationship between media and society, media and social relations that takes place nowadays? The problem about the power of media in society, after all.

Fiorin: Now you're asking me to discuss something in which I am not expert. Then I would like to make an exception that I will respond as a user and a afflicted with the media role. Perhaps as a privileged user, but plagued with the role of the media. The first idea we have to reject is a very dear idea to the mainstream media, the idea of neutrality, impartiality, objectivity and truth of what is conveyed by the media, ceasing to consider any idea of media iniquity or conspiracy. Because if there was conspiracy, it would be very easy to solve the problem. That is not the problem. It´s inherent to the language that when the enunciator utters, he designs his point of view, the position where he speaks from. Therefore, whatever is stated by the media, somehow reflects – I do not like that word, but let's say – , consists of and establishes the speech position. It *consists of*, because it´s put forward certain points of view from the speech position. But on the other hand, it is by interpreting these views that I can determine the position occupied by an organ in a discursive panorama of a society.

That said, now comes the other side. Many people would like to control the media, the so called social control. It is interesting that I recently heard two complaints that the

media was not reporting important news, one about Lula and the other about José Serra. Two to three months ago both complained that the media has not been reporting. At that time someone stated something interesting: that news were what people in power do not want to be reported. I will not argue this but I will consider Bakhtin ideas. Bakhtin´s utopia was the incompleteness of human being. The freedom space for the constitution of consciousness is given by the fact that there were too many discourse in opposition that took care of my conscience that I could never reach the truth, the final position. Regarding the media, I think this has to be the utopia: not having to control anything. To have more voices in this contradictory dialectic of the discursive universes. And people will find the space of freedom there. To believe that people are so easily manipulated is to discredit them and especially the intrinsic contradiction of the discursive universe. The discursive universe in not Ptolemaic, but galiliano, which is, it moves constantly and this motion has to guide media issues. It doesn´t have to control the media. Of course, even the most repugnant perspectives should be reported. Maybe there's a fine line and Bakhtin wasn´t blind to the fact that the circulation of discourse is liable to the order of power. He speaks in centrifugal and centripetal movements, ie, one that tends toward the centralization of enunciation.The power is attracted by a enunciative centralization. And the centripetal force expressed mainly through derision, laughs, joking with the severe discourse of power ocurred in all periods. Bakhtin studied one of these cases in the discourse of François Rabelais´s work, which ridicules all the scholastic philosophy´s discourses. Well, we can´t deny that there may be an impossibility. For example, nowadays we can no longer tolerate an apology for pedophilia, racism, hatred, crime and in fact we don´t tolerate it. Our criminal law prohibits these practices. But political, religious and economic views do. This plurality of voices has to become manifest through the only guarantee of human freedom, this eternal symposium announced by Bakhtin.

No enunciative centralization nor market, neither the party nor the church will contribute to human freedom. In a Bakhtinian idea, I believe that only contradiction and plurality of voices can provide a space for freedom.

MATRIZes: What is the role of the media on the political scene? Do you believe the Internet changes this link?

Fiorin: I don´t know if the Internet changes it. I am particularly impressed by the space of slander developed by the Internet. There is no possibility of control in the Internet and even countries that attempted to control it, such as China and Pakistan, noticed an impossibility. Of course it can be done for a share of the population, but experts can create a *blog* and other mechanisms. This is our first election in which the Internet plays a role. It performed a important role in Obama´s election, from the collection of donations to the dissemination of images. In Brazil, I have no idea of how it will be. I've heard a lot of people accusing the mainstream media of being against the government. And I believe that is not true. In fact, it was the mainstream media that led a absolutely unknown person, who had never played any election, who was a newcomer to the PT and had difficulty of being accepted by the party, to this level. In fact, it´s not the editorial that influences people's ideas, but the news and the exposure. Another day I saw something really odd: an interview with a uneducated person from the countryside of Pernambuco, who was asked about his vote and said: "I'll vote for Lula's wife." Then the interviewer said: "The Lula´s wife is not a candidate." The respondent called his wife and asked: "Didn´t you say that Lula's wife was a candidate?". The wife confirmed. The husband: "he's saying she's not" and the wife completed "Yes, she is, she is called Vilma." This demonstrates the press exposure regardless of many things. She is only supported by Lula. Another important thing to be said is that Lula has a great communication strategy. Brazilian news service presents fairly both candidates, instead of editorials. The press it is not neutral nor impartial because such ideal doesn´t exist, but it provides, more or less, the same area for both candidates.

MATRIZes: There is a current claim that the new media, especially from the Internet, have enabled major role of the users, opening dialogue channels with traditional media and the possibility of creation and participation through social networks. How do you analyze these possibilities, and how theories of discourse can meet this new demand, especially relating to the subject? That is, nowadays we have no means of communication with just one guideline, only in one direction, but we have the possibility of interaction.

Fiorin: To the theory of discourse, this is a challenge. In Linguistics, just one area studied texts produced in partnership, which was conversation analysis. The

conversational text is produced in partnership, there is a mutual collaboration. In other texts, for example, it is clear that there is collaboration when it´s written, but of an ideal receiver. If I want to speak to lay people, then I'll eliminate the jargon, I´ll write in such a way, I will explain and give more examples. For example if I write to a academic jury, it´s clear that I will not need to give an explanatory note on Marshall McLuhan. There is collaboration, but based on an ideal image of an audience. We face a challenge which requires studying new ways of textualization and new forms of discursivization, ie how the subject represents himself. For example, in a news *blog*, the subject is not a journalist. Whereas the journalist has the security of an institution, the blogger has none. But a warranty in necessary in order to create an effect of veracity. These are new challenges for theories of discourse. The Internet is creating new ways of representing the subject, of establishing guarantees for truthfulness of discourse, of colaborative textualization and, at the same time, one more important thing is that while we already had discourses which we call "syncretic" – those that appear with several languages at the same time as the film, which has verbal and nonverbal language such as sound, visual etc, we have never had this amount of syncretic texts. This requires explanations on how all different languages create a certain meaning. Even newspapers are much more illustrated. These are the challenges.

On the other hand, another serious question bothers me: even knowing that discourse is not neutral, impartial and true as journalists state, there are still some limits of media companies that prevent them from falling in total disbelief. You could not, for example, to accuse a government official of pedophilia based on weak evidences, because that would fall into a total disrepute. There should be limits, and there is no such thing in the Internet. How do I have a guaranteed limit? We see things that are being said about Dilma, or Serra or Marina, or anyone else Some are absurd and even slanderous. Each discourse builds a enunciative security and we do not know how the discourse of Internet is building its own. This is a challenge for us as scholars of Language. I do not know what role users will have, but I see great challenges.