

BOOK REVIEWS

Peter Ives and Rocco Lacorte, eds., *Gramsci, Language, and Translation*. Lexington Books, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto and Plymouth, 2010. xi + 326pp.

ISBN: 978-0739118603 (paperback), price: £20.85 (US\$33.90)

ISBN: 978-0739118597 (hardback), price: £47.45 (US\$77.16)

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Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was a prominent Italian Marxist philosopher and politician, co-founder of the Italian Communist Party, an influential thinker, and critic of contemporary society and culture. Joseph Francese mentions Gramsci's encyclopedic breadth and uncommon depth of thought, and stresses that:

His impact on social and political thought, critical theory and literary methodology is profound. (...) He is notable as a highly original thinker within the Marxist tradition, especially for his ideas concerning the role of civil society as lynchpin between the economic base and the ideological superstructure of societies. He is also renowned for his theorization of the importance of cultural hegemony as a non-coercive means of maintaining bourgeois dominance in capitalist societies (Francese 2009: 1).

Gramsci's studies on social theory and culture, collected in several volumes of *Letters from Prison*, and *Prison Notebooks* (the latter recently republished by Columbia University Press as a three volume set), include very important texts and comments on language, philosophy of language, translation and translatability. However, this aspect of the Italian philosopher's work is relatively less known, and many ideas remain yet to be discovered and reinterpreted. The reviewed volume brings together 16 essays (majority of which are translated from their earlier Italian versions) devoted to 'Gramsci, Language, and Translation'.¹ It is composed of a short introduction, three interconnected thematic parts, an index, and notes on the contributors.

¹ An earlier version of this review appeared in *Marx & Philosophy Review of Books* (<http://marxandphilosophy.org.uk/reviewofbooks/reviews/2011/324>), permission for publication of this material in *LPP* is gratefully acknowledged.

The editors of the volume, Peter Ives and Rocco Lacorte, observe in the introduction, “There is a fascinating silence concerning Antonio Gramsci’s writings on language and translation despite his wide ranging and profound influence, particularly in the fields and debates in which language features prominently such as poststructuralism and cultural studies” (p. 1). According to the Italian philosopher, language “is a totality of determined notions and concepts and not just of words grammatically devoid of content” (Gramsci 1971: 323) and as such constitutes (together with ‘common sense’, ‘good sense’, and ‘folklore’) Gramscian ‘spontaneous philosophy’. The essays collected in the volume concentrate on Gramsci’s writings on language and translation, seen as crucial to his social, political, and cultural theory; they attempt to shed light on the relation between his “linguistics and his Marxism” (p. 3), and to integrate his “political theory and his linguistic concerns” (p. 3). The editors also observe that it is necessary to understand the role of language in Gramsci’s approach in order to fruitfully compare him with such theorists as “Foucault, Habermas, Chomsky, Bakhtin, Bourdieu” (p. 6).

Part I, ‘Gramsci’s Linguistics and Gramsci’s Marxism’, brings six essays. Franco Lo Piparo, in a text originally published back in 1987, looks at the linguistic roots of Gramsci’s non-Marxism. The author’s main thesis is that Gramsci:

had fully developed his theory of intellectuals, civil society, etc., while he was professionally interested in language (...) The primitive matrix of his philosophy should not be searched for in Marx or in Lenin or in any other Marxist, but in the science of language (p. 21).

He further discusses Gramsci’s studies concerned with language development, the relation of language to written national languages, and several terminological issues crucial for Gramscian understanding of language.

Luigi Rosiello, who investigates linguistics and Marxism in the thought of the Italian philosopher, further elaborates upon Lo Piparo’s insights from a somewhat different angle. Rosiello also discusses the sociolinguistic aspect of Gramsci’s work, his conception of dialect, and the linguistic policies pursued by the dominant class. This chapter also includes a very interesting, though brief, comparison of Gramsci’s linguistic science and the work of Friedrich Engels.

Tullio De Mauro discusses Gramsci’s linguistic studies and achievements in a historical perspective, and he also offers an interesting comparison with de Saussure’s approach to language and linguistics, focusing on spoken language in Saussurean linguistics instead of the on the written form in Gramsci. He also comments, “the two directions diverge, even though both equally and clearly delineate the same objective picture of the linguistic universe” (p. 60).

Stefano Gensini follows with analyzing the political dimension of Gramsci's contribution to the linguistic question. He observes that "the linguistic dimension [...] permeates the *Notebooks* as a *political* question, namely, as one of the levels on which the possibility of transforming Italy into a socialist country is at stake" (p. 75). Utz Maas, in a text originally published in German, aims at proving that Gramsci's "linguistic-theoretic considerations can offer a point of departure for recommencing the discussion about a materialist theory of language" (p. 81). Maas's essay is one of the many places in the reviewed book stressing the topicality of Gramsci's thought for current philosophy of language. This point has not lost its relevance even though the paper was originally published back in 1988.

The first part of the book concludes with a short interview, conducted in Naples in 1997, with Edoardo Sanguineti, an Italian writer, poet, artist, translator, one time political activist, and founder of the avant-garde movement *Gruppo 63*. Sanguineti, referring to Gramsci's ideas, defines language as "an instrument for interexchange, communication and, at the same time, for creating identities" (p. 102). He also offers an interesting comment on comparing the complex construction of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* with Giacomo Leopardi's *Zibaldone*. It might be rewarding to further compare Gramsci's work in this context with Walter Benjamin's *Passages*.

Part II, 'Language, Translation, Politics and Culture', comprises five essays. Derek Boothman (who translated an anthology of Gramsci's writings into English) focuses on the issues of translation and translatability in connection with the renewal of the Marxist paradigm; he also closely examines the use of the relevant terms in the *Prison Notebooks*. Translatability can be seen as "the theoretical possibility and the practice of translating not only between different natural languages but also between different paradigms, or discourses" (p. 108). Boothman also compares Gramsci's ideas with the theory more recently put forward by Nida and Taber, and sees in the Italian theorist a forerunner of the cultural turn in translation studies.

Lucia Borghese follows with a comprehensive discussion of Gramsci as translator from German and as translation theorist. Through detailed text analyses she demonstrates that Gramsci's translations are consistent with the theoretical framework he developed. She also points at the need of more accurate editorial work on his manuscripts. Fabio Frosini concentrates on the issue of translatability, strongly linked to Marxism, philosophy, and politics. As observed by the author, according to the Italian philosopher, the radical form of translation, "that is, the one that makes possible all other translations, is the translation of philosophy into politics" (p. 171). This, admittedly utopian, and echoing the final thesis on Feuerbach ('The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it'), view of radical translation might be compared with ideas put forward, from a very different standpoint, in more recent times by W. V. O. Quine.

Maurizio Lichtner discusses translations and metaphors in Gramsci (and in Marx), also in connection with the translatability of languages, and historicity of languages (with the very term ‘translation’ being highly metaphorical itself). Lichtner shows the complexity of Gramsci’s views, his conscious effort to reread and reinterpret Marx, and stresses the important differentiation between solutions in theoretical terms and solutions in historical terms. In the last chapter in this section, Rocco Lacorte looks at translatability again, this time not only in connection with language, but also freedom. In this short essay, part of a larger project, Lacorte stresses that for Gramsci translatability “is conceived as necessary to activate what the previous knowledge and way of conceiving have neutralized – in other words, the idea that knowledge can have a revolutionary function” (p. 214).

Part III, ‘Politics, Theory and Method’, consists of five essays. Francisco Buey discusses the ties that exist between language and politics: language as a means of communication, the feasibility of constructing a common language, and the development of Gramsci’s own political thought. Anne Showstack Sassoon deals with Gramsci’s subversion of the language of politics also comments on some of the difficulties encountered in reading and interpreting his texts, claiming that: “consciously or unconsciously, he made a choice to write in note form and not a book. Consequently, he produced an archetypal open text that the reader must recreate each time she or he reads it” (p. 244). The next chapter is another essay by Tullio De Mauro, this time centered around the politics of Gramscian scholarship, and Gramsci’s contribution to current research in language studies. He also stresses the systematic nature of the *Notebooks*.

André Tosel looks at the lexicon of Gramsci’s ‘philosophy of praxis’, and shows the shift in interpretation throughout the Italian philosophers work, from a linguistic equivalent of ‘historical materialism’, to “an identity card of a program capable of elaborating Marxism in response to the challenges of the times” (p. 267). Tosel offers a careful philological and political reading of the *Notebooks*; he discusses ‘philosophy of praxis’ as a nomenclature and as a theoretical question and also as a methodology of history. This chapter demonstrates the intricacies involved in understanding (and translating) Gramsci’s terminology. As observed by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, the editors and translators of selections from Gramsci’s *Notebooks*:

(...) ‘philosophy of praxis’ is both a euphemism for Marxism and an autonomous term used by Gramsci to define what he saw to be a central characteristic of the philosophy of Marxism, the inseparable link it establishes between theory and practice, thought and action (Hoare and Nowell Smith, 1971: xiii).

The last essay of the collection, by Marcus E. Green and Peter Ives, is devoted to the concept of subalternity and Gramsci’s attention to language politics and his

concern with the function of popular common language. They also devote considerable attention to the notion of ‘common sense’, understood by Gramsci “as popular social thought or as the common beliefs and opinions held by ordinary people. In some ways, common sense can be understood as the mentality or psychology of the masses” (p. 293). In a recent article devoted to ‘common sense’ in Gramsci, Guido Liguori provides some comments on the negative side of this concept in Gramscian thought:

Common sense, (...), is the world view that a social stratum receives, for the most part passively. This passive receptivity stands in contrast to the active manner in which the intellectuals and the ruling group of that same society elaborate their world views. Insofar as it is passive, common sense is marked by belatedness and minimal development (Liguori 2009: 124).

The quotation from the *Notebooks*, that “language also means culture and philosophy (if only at the level of common sense)” (p. 294), adequately sums up Gramsci’s views on language and common sense.

The collected essays provide detailed introduction to the complex ideas of the Italian philosopher. They show the originality and independence of his thought, and enable seeing in Gramsci the forerunner of current trends in, among others, discourse analysis and translation theory. An accompanying volume, an anthology of Gramsci’s texts (or just appropriate fragments) dealing with language and translation, together with a glossary of Gramscian terminology, often highly idiosyncratic, should be an idea worth considering.

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Edda Weigand. *Language as Dialogue. From Rules to Principles of Probability*. Edited by Sebastian Feller, 2009. viii, 410 pp. Dialogue Studies 5. John Benjamins Publishing Company. Amsterdam/ Philadelphia.

ISBN: 978-9027210227 (hardback), price: £99.00 (US\$160.98)

Weigand, Edda. *Dialogue – The Mixed Game*. 2010. xii, 304 pp. Dialogue Studies 10. John Benjamins Publishing Company. Amsterdam/Philadelphia.

ISBN: 978-9027210272 (hardback), price: £95.00 (US\$154.48)

Weigand, Edda (ed.). *Dialogue and Rhetoric*. 2008. xiv, 316 pp. Dialogue Studies 2. John Benjamins Publishing Company. Amsterdam/Philadelphia.

ISBN: 978-9027210197 (hardback), price: £89.00 (US\$144.72)

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The three publications represent the “Dialogue Studies” series, which is edited by Edda Weigand, and so far embraces eleven volumes. The departure point of this interdisciplinary series is the classical conceptualisation of language as being inherently dialogically orientated and serving dialogic interaction. Regardless of their common denominator, namely research on dialogue, the volumes display diversified methodological approaches and focus on different types of discourse. Two of the books under review present the series editor’s scholarly work, whilst the third one is a collection of papers submitted by different authors.

Edited by Sebastian Feller, *Language as Dialogue* is comprised of a selection of Weigand’s essays, with the majority previously unpublished but only delivered as plenary lectures in the span of approximately two decades. The essays show the development of Weigand’s theorising, whose crowning achievement is the theory of the dialogic action game called the Mixed Game Model. Weigand’s work shows a transition from a theory of competence based on rules to that of competence-in-performance dependent on principles of probability.

The essays are divided into three sections (“Language as dialogue in a theory of communicative competence”, “At the crossroads: Opening up the theory

of competence”, and “Language as dialogue in a theory of communicative competence-in-performance”), each preceded by the book editor’s introduction. The chapters cover a wide range of topics in linguistics inclusive of: Speech Act theory, lexical semantics, utterance grammar, and emotions in dialogue, and address dialogue in the context of different discourse domains: the media, rhetoric, and business communication. In her discussions, Weigand deploys genuine data and expands on the workings of language use in different discourse domains and dialogic contexts.

Edda Weigand’s monograph, *Dialogue – The Mixed Game*, elaborates the model of the mixed game, which constitutes an all-encompassing theory of dialogue. Weigand argues in favour of the interdependence between, and thus inseparability of, human language and human interactive performance in general. This premise leads her to launching an integrative model of dialogic interaction, which lies at the heart of all social encounters and combines verbal, perceptual, and cognitive processes. The author thus propounds a complex and holistic communicative system used by humans in a variety of real-life ever-changing settings, which are embedded in the sociobiological matrix. The innovative model sheds new light on language use, subscribing to (broadly conceptualised) linguistic pragmatics but testifying to the interdependence between multifarious disciplines of the natural and social sciences and the humanities.

The author develops her proposal step by step, introducing new concepts and postulates and illustrating them with analyses of authentic games. She starts from the state-of-the-art picture of relevant research, which forms the backdrop for her integrative model contingent on Principles of Probability. Weigand also puts forward a classification of action games ranging from minimal action games (vs. Speech Act taxonomy) to complex action games (represented by institutional games and literary action games).

Having perused Weigand’s books, some readers, advocates of the “reductionist” models, may still be reluctant to reject the traditional approaches to communication in general (e.g. the Gricean model or Speech Act Theory) or chosen dialogic phenomena (turn-taking strategies or common ground). Such traditional proposals, which have garnered a lot of scholarly interest, may be narrower in scope but are much more detailed and deserve more careful attention than that given by Weigand in her multifaceted theory. However, no one will deny the intellectual merits of both the books or refute Weigand’s numerous important observations.

Finally, Edda Weigand’s edited volume focuses on dialogic rhetoric, which, as the editor claims in the introduction, integrates different voices in conformity with her notion of the mixed game. Part I of the volume is comprised of several rhetorical paradigms applied to real-life discourse types, whilst Part II conflates papers on rhetoric in the mixed game, showing how a number of elements interact

in chosen discourse types or discursive phenomena. The volume closes with a round table discussion held by the proponents of the different paradigms.

The chapters are diversified both topically and methodologically, altogether assuming a very broad perspective of rhetoric and dialogue, as well as notions that can be associated with the two. The essayistic chapters pertain to a variety of topics and offer proposals such as: ventriloquism as numerous agents participation in dialogue (François Cooren's paper), metadiscourse of arguments and critical events (Robert T. Craig's chapter), the role of arguments in political discourse (Wolfgang Teubert's contribution), or fallacies perceived as derailments of strategic manoeuvring (Frans H. van Eemeren and Peter Houtlosser's work). Papers constituting the second part of the book focus on case studies or address specific discursive phenomena such as: irony in dialogic interaction (Sebastian Feller's paper), the rhetoric of political visual images (Georges Roque's contribution), or construction of euthanasia in discourse (the chapter by Amelia Manuti and Rossella Rubino).

As is sometimes the case of edited volumes, the chapters manifest varied levels of expertise and insight, with the authors being either distinguished experts in the field or emergent researchers. Nonetheless, readers will be able to choose chapters of interest to them from among the whole gamut of topics, many of which are bound to inspire future research.