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Italian philosophy of language

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> A language doesn't have to be definitely poetic, but one that is definitely mathematical cannot help being ugly and lifeless. The best of all languages is the one that can be both poetic and mathematical, and contain indeed all the degrees that range between the two extremes (LEOPARDI, *Zibaldone*, 2013, p, 332).

Abstract   In this paper the distinctive characteristics of the Italian philosophy of language (IPL) are delineated. It is not only Italian philosophers who have constructed such a philosophical tradition. The Italian philosophy of language has a long history (a tradition which probably began with Dante); it is based on a very broad and comprehensive concept regarding the nature of human language. In respect to other traditions of philosophy of language (mainly Anglo-American analytic philosophy, hermeneutics and semiotics, and critical theory), the Italian tradition considers language to be *at the same time* a natural and a social phenomenon. From this point of view, the basic theoretical source of IPL is an 'anthropological stance'. But it is worth stressing that in the IPL, the conception of human biology includes ideas from anthropology, sociology, psychology (and perhaps psychoanalysis as well). Therefore when an IPL philosopher speaks of 'language' s/he refers to this broad and stratified field of phenomena. Exactly in this sense, IPL connects itself to the very peculiar Italian political and intellectual history. Following Wittgenstein, the IPL slogan could be this one: to study a language means to study a *form of life*, that is, at the same time a biological entity (a life) and a socio-historical one (a form).

Keywords: Italian philosophy, language and languages, biological stance, society, human body, immanence

1. A peculiar *Italian* tradition

Despite some important differences between them, for a long time the primary contemporary philosophical traditions – Anglo-American analytic philosophy, hermeneutics and critical theory – shared a common presupposition: the absolute centrality of language. All these traditions considered language as the most important

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philosophical category, both as an object of analysis and as a theoretical tool of analysis. In the Anglo-American analytic tradition, for example, a description of the human mind was impossible without taking into account language: in a certain sense mind and language were considered synonymous (DAVIDSON 1982; RORTY 1981; 1992; DUMMETT 2014). Hermeneutics tried to describe the whole of human experience through the linguistic notion of 'interpretation' (RICOEUR 1981; GADAMER 1989). In critical theory and deconstructionism, the main object of analysis is language and writing (DERRIDA 1974; CULLER 1982). What is less acknowledged is that a very similar presupposition was held by the first 'wave' of cognitive science: Jerry Fodor's *The Language of Thought*, for example, considered the human mind literally to be made of a peculiar language, what he called 'mentalese' (FODOR 1975). These ways of thinking of language have recently changed (MARTIN, HEIL 1999; FERRARIS 2012; GABRIEL 2014); actually it seems that the philosophical epoch in which language was the predominant notion it has been simply reverted to the previous situation, where it was only considered as a means of communication. Take the case of 'speculative realism' (MEILLASSOUX 2008), which purports that human thinking can access reality as it is, independently of any act of subjectivity. That is, an absolute – i.e., a reality absolutely separate from the subject – can be thought by the subject. The problem immediately arises of how to successfully put the role of language in brackets while categorizing reality. Such a consideration does not at all imply that language is the main or unique agent of human categorization; it simply stresses that to speak of 'reality' as if we could have access to it without any mediation, seems hardly possible. The problem is that if the 'linguistic turn' largely 'overestimated' the role of language in human experience, now the 'ontological turn' equally 'underestimates' its role.

In fact, according to ESPOSITO (2010), in respect to this 'dominant role' assigned to language, Italian philosophy always has considered language from a broader anthropological perspective. In the Italian philosophical tradition – which is influenced at least by Dante (LO PIPARO 1983), Machiavelli, Vico, Leopardi (GENSINI 1984), Manzoni, and Gramsci (LO PIPARO 1979, 2014) – language is not considered as a self-sufficient phenomenon[1]. Italian philosophers always have placed language into human empirical praxis and life. While in the previously mentioned

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[1] According to an anonymous referee «the literary more than philosophical training of many of its [IPL] elder scholars made them more keen on (and expert of) linguistics than on logic and ontology / metaphysics, therefore rather peripheral to the analytic vs. continental debates». This is true, but while the reviewer seems to see such a specific character of IPL tradition like a limit or a defect, on the contrary such a 'peripheral' and untopical character is what gives to IPL its contemporary attractiveness. IPL is returning central in contemporary philosophical debate *just because* the analytic vs. continental debate is no longer viable (one has not to forget that both traditions are different forms of the *same* 'linguistic turn', nowadays a completely unfashionable 'turn'). For example, according to IPL one cannot study ontology separately from language, or metaphysics separately from politics. In the previous quotation there is another aspect that is worth commenting; it seems that according to the reviewer a "literary more than philosophical training" is not that a background good to become what a philosopher of language should be. In fact, such statement seems more a prejudice than a description of what actually is the case. Take the exemplar case of ECO *Kant e l'ornitorinco* (1997). Eco's semiotic and literary background is elegantly and pertinently used to face the classical philosophy of language problem of 'reference'. As to this point, on the contrary a philosopher is akin to IPL tradition who does not rigidly separates philosophy from literature. More specifically, IPL tradition does not adheres to the modern prejudice in favor of logic and science in respect to literature and history.

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three philosophical traditions, language is a more basic category, that is, a theoretical category which explains the whole of the human experience, this is not the case in the Italian philosophical tradition. That means that the characteristic IPL tradition did not properly pass through the 'linguistic turn' (AGAMBEN 1982; ECO 1984; VECCHIO 1996; DE CAROLIS 1989; CIMATTI 2014); exactly for this historiographical reason the Italian tradition is free from any 'sense of guilt' with respect to nonlinguistic reality; therefore, it has no theoretical sin to be forgiven. From this point of view, any project involving the naturalization of language (e.g. LOCKE 2009) for IPL is not at all new or surprising. At the same time, any language naturalization project based on the idea that 'nature' is a synonymous with 'material reality' is considered by IPL to be extremely reductive (and fundamentally mistaken) (e. g. MILLIKAN 2004). A project to naturalize language literally means to attach linguistic meaning to some material (neurological) entity; the main problem with such a process is that the notion of causality is simply unfit to account for the richness and variety of language phenomena (CIMATTI 2004). Therefore, according to IPL one cannot describe language reality without taking into account its social and institutional reality.

As I have just explained, In this paper I will not simply concentrate on Italian philosophers of language (because there are many important Italian philosophers of language who do not recognize themselves in *this specific Italian tradition*, e. g. MARCONI 1997; VIOLI 1997; FABBRICHESI 2006[2]; LEONARDI 2007; PICARDI 2009; RAYNAUD 2010; SINI 2012; at the same time there have been not Italian philosophers who equally adhered to IPL; for example PRIETO 1976; DANESI 1993; TRABANT 2004). In this paper I will concentrate on the Italian philosophers of language who inscribe themselves in this ancient and still vital tradition. Therefore, from this point of view IPL is only partially analogous to such a tradition which has been recently defined as 'Italian theory' (GENTILI 2012), that is mainly concerned with political theory.

2. Anthropological stance

The basic idea of IPL is that language has to be considered from a broader socio-anthropological perspective. The first and most important consequence of this theoretical presupposition is that to study human language firstly means to study human biology because there would be no language if the human body did not have the physiological and neurological features it actually has (LIUZZA *et al*. 2010; FERRETTI 2012). But in order to delineate the specific characteristics of human language, it is also necessary to compare them with nonhuman animal languages (CIMATTI 2002; GENSINI, FUSCO 2009; BUCCHI, GENSINI 2014). That is, the first feature of the tradition we are delineating here is a 'biological stance' with respect to language. In the Anglo-American analytic tradition (as well as the other two traditions), this fundamental aspect of language has long been completely neglected; it is worth noticing that when this original defect was recognized, this tradition adopted a very narrow and impoverished view of what effectively constitutes *human* biology.

Take the exemplary case of cognitive scientist Steven Pinker's crude account of

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[2] However, FABBRICHESI (2012) seems quite sympathetic with many of IPL main tenets.

human language: «language is not a cultural artifact that we learn the way we learn to tell time or how the federal government works. Instead, it is a distinct piece of the biological makeup of our brains» (PINKER 1994: 18). What does it *really* mean to say that language is not a cultural artifact? Does it make any difference if someone is born in Italy or England? Pinker speaks of language without any other specification, but actual human beings do not speak *the* language, they speak Italian or English. Pinker places language in the brain, as if we do not articulate linguistic sounds with the lungs and the tongue (and the feet that sustain our body). But it is the whole body which makes use of language, a body which uses language in order to do something, an action that in turn depends on what society deems worth doing and thinking, and so on. According to IPL *all* these elements are pertinent and necessary in order to construe a comprehensive (and adequate) theory of human language[3]. On the contrary, Pinker's idea of language (and of biology of language) is extremely limited: speaking of a language instinct «conveys the idea that people know how to talk in more or less the sense that spiders know how to spin webs» (ibid). The problem here is not the zoological analogy (typically IPL involves discussions of language and different animal species: cf. CIMATTI 2002; LO PIPARO 2003; GAMBARARA 2006; DE MAURO, 2008); the problem is that such an analogy is simply mistaken. Spiders spin webs for specific and precise biological causes: their survival depends on such webs. This is not the case with human languages. Human beings use languages for a (probably infinite) variety of reasons. Here a brief list of language uses taken from WITTGENSTEIN's *Philosophical Investigations*:

> Consider the variety of language-games in the following examples, and in others:
> Giving orders, and acting on them
> Describing an object by its appearance, or by its measurements
> Constructing an object from a description (a drawing)
> Reporting an event a Speculating about the event
> Forming and testing a hypothesis
> Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams a Making up a story; and reading one Acting in a play
> Singing rounds
> Guessing riddles

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[3] According to an anonymous reviewer the present reconstruction of IPL tradition «seems to omit deliberately and shrewdly that the so-called 'anthropological' and 'bio political' stance at the beginning was tied up with a (no more fashionable) strong and active political commitment from a Marxist perspective». Such an historical statement is factually false. Contemporary philosophers who more or less directly participate to IPL, De Mauro, Lo Piparo, Cimatti and Agamben, for example, are never been Marxist philosophers or activists. A philosopher can be define Marxist if explicitly adheres to historical materialism and to the distinction between 'base' and 'superstructure'. IPL strong consideration for the socio-political aspect of language does not imply at all to adhere to such a doctrine; on the contrary, it is one of the main points of IPL that such a distinction does not apply to human form of life. There is an important IPL philosopher only, who can be defined Marxist, Paolo VIRNO. However, if one *actually* reads his own books on language (2003; 2005; 2010; 2013) it is apparent that the bibliographic references to Marx are few, and sometimes completely absent. In Italy a somewhat Marxist tradition in philosophy of language existed (cf. ROSSI-LANDI 1968; PONZIO 1970), however it had marginal contacts only with IPL tradition. A last note on the reviewer comment: that a philosophy is 'no more fashionable' is not that a sound argument against such a philosophy. Philosophy has to deal with truth, not with fashion.

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Cracking a joke; telling one
Solving a problem in applied arithmetic
Translating from one language into another –
Requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying
(WITTGENSTEIN 2009: I, § 23).

It is misleading to assert that each one of these language uses responds to some precise biological function. A biological approach to human language, as is the case with IPL, implies taking into account the idea that human biology has characteristics different from other species. If an alleged naturalistic study of human language requires that human linguistic behavior be considered the same as spider web behavior, then it is not naturalistic at all. On the contrary, the IPL biological stance implies a consideration of all human activities that are more or less explicitly connected to language. Perhaps this is IPL's main distinctive character: a separate entity—'language'—doesn't exist in isolation from the whole of human social and political life. Take the case of praying. This is a linguistic activity, obviously, but if one really wants to understand its anthropological value, one cannot consider prayer simply as a particular kind of *utterance*. A philosophical analysis of praying which limits itself only to the question of the truth or falsity of these kind of utterances is mean and meaningless (cf. ARISTOTLE *De Interpretatione:* 16^{b}33). To understand a prayer, or a joke, or an insult (PIAZZA 2012), one has to consider the function it assumes within the "language game" it is part of.

The IPL biological stance means that the object of analysis is never *language* on its own. IPL looks for the various and complicated ways human bodies interact with language and with themselves and nature. The anthropological thesis is that there is not a human being that is completely outside language (VIRNO, 2003). Such a thesis doesn't mean that language is the ultimate ground of human life; on the contrary, it asserts that language cannot exist without human bodies; it asserts that language is made of our flesh and blood. For a long time Anglo-American analytic philosophy concentrated on a single aspect of this broad field of biological activities: the connection between language and reality, that is, the question of truth or falsity of linguistic expressions (DEVITT, STERELNY 1999). In fact, Wittgenstein's list of examples clearly shows that only in a fraction of the 'language games' the question of truth (or falsity) poses itself; for the vast majority of the games — those implicated in the most important and significant human activities: religion, art, literature, ethics, play and so on — such a question cannot be posed, or at least has to be posed with the question of the success or failure of a linguistic move, a question which is much broader than the classical truth/falsity dichotomy (e. g. AUSTIN 1955; PIAZZA 2005;

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LO PIPARO 2007)[4]. Therefore, according to IPL, following its biological stance, the question of truth or falsity of language is not *the* unique question that philosophy of language has to tackle. More specifically, such a quiet IPL attitude in respect to the question of truth and falsity derives from a more general presupposition: it is never the case that language can stand in isolation from human reality and nature (PRODI 1977). That is, the concern about the relationships between language and reality can pose itself only if one believes that language is an isolated entity. But such a belief is exactly what characterizes classical Anglo-American analytic philosophy. The IPL biological stance always has avoided such an unnatural conception. Language is part of nature, in particular, of human nature, with the specification that human biology is inseparable from its social and material life.

More generally, a truly biological stance means to take into account the vary basic and apparent fact that human beings do not speak *the* language; on the contrary, human beings speak an enormous variety of *languages* (DE MAURO 1982; FORMIGARI 2007). This is what Darwin stressed, in the famous last lines of *The origin of species*, when he wrote of the life's 'endless forms'. According to IPL, a naturalistic account of human language implies the same Darwinian stance which means paying particular attention to different languages and language games, because a single abstract entity called 'language' doesn't exist in nature[5].

3. Language and society

«The mistake,» wrote De Mauro in one of the founding IPL books, «consists in affirming and believing that words and sentences mean something by themselves: on the contrary, the meaning—through words and sentences—stays in human

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[4] An anonymous referee observed that «the relevance of the truth-quest is taken into consideration only to underline its insufficiency, while at the end of the article the notion of 'use' seems to be introduced as a proposed alternative leading idea, without adequate explanation or justification». This is one of the major characters of IPL tradition, in particular in respect of analytical philosophy. While in the latter tradition the question of truth/falsity is *the* question about human language, according to IPL the possibility to assert the way things are 'in reality' is just *a* function of language, nor the principal neither the most used. According to IPL language makes part of a form of life, therefore language is more an action than a representational medium (cf. RORTY 1979). IPL does not share the widespread idea that philosophy is somewhat similar to science. The main consequence is that the exclusive privilege accorded to 'truth' by most contemporary philosophy is misleading. The vast majority of human phenomena – art, religion, literature, playing, poetry and son – have very few or nothing to do with truth or falsity; IPL tries to describes human life like it actually is, without any normative intention. As to the question of 'use', this is not an alternative to a truth-functional semantics. On the contrary, such a notion aims to stress how the value of a linguistic expression lies in the same linguistic act. The 'value' of a gesture lies in the way it *does* something; the same applies to language.

[5] An anonymous referee observed that the present paper disregards the «balance between the care about what is different and the care about what is the same throughout languages». In respect to human language IPL assumes the very same attitude Darwin assumed in respect to the concept of *species*: «I look at the term species as one arbitrarily given, for the sake of convenience, to a set of individuals closely resembling each other, and that it does not essentially differ from the term variety, which is given to less distinct and more fluctuating forms. The term variety, again, in comparison with mere individual differences, is also applied arbitrarily, for convenience' sake» (DARWIN 2009: 42). The IPL biological stance is neither centered on what make languages different between them, nor on the common core, it is presumed they share.

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beings» (DE MAURO 1965: 31-32). Language is not an autonomous entity; there is not semantics without human beings and all their interests, drives and needs. The main goal of this book is to criticize any theory of language which somewhat presupposes the separateness of language—or of a singular component of language, like syntax (CHOMSKY 1957)—from the rest of the human body and human practices. In respect to Noam Chomsky, for example, De Mauro's criticism is exactly (and solely) about the autonomous status of grammar in Chomsky's linguistic (and philosophical) theory. Chomsky recently has denominated this internal and innate component of language *I-Language*, in respect to the *E-Language*, the external one (CHOMSKY 2000).

The theoretical problem that such a language model implies is explicit in this passage from Steven Pinker: «knowing a language, then, is knowing how to translate mentalese into strings of words and vice versa» (PINKER 1994: 82). Pinker's model is simple and direct: first there is a string in mentalese (which corresponds to Chomsky *I-Language*); then such a string is translated into a string in *E-Language*, an auditory string that anyone can listen to; finally such a string is newly translated into the listener's mentalese (mentalese ↔ external language ↔ mentalese). It really seems very simple. But: what ensures the speaker's intention is understood by the listener? Take the case that a speaker says the sentence *p* to a listener. The scheme now is: mentalese_S (speaker) ↔ external language ↔ mentalese_L (listener). The problem now is apparent: there is no correspondence between what the speaker intended to say with what the listener actually understood. The problem is that mentalese_S ≠ mentalese_L. According to Pinker, linguistic meaning *de facto* is a private entity. Therefore, if the meaning of a linguistic sentence is private, then no one can understand it, simply because it is private (that is, it is not public). Some might say that according to Pinker the mentalese is innate: maybe it is, but innate does not mean equal (all living human beings have in their own skull a brain: but every brain is profoundly different from any other human brain: SPORNS *et. al.* 2005). On the contrary, mutual linguistic comprehension requires that speaker and listener speak the *same* language: a situation where any speaker speaks only his/her own language makes mutual linguistic comprehension impossible. This is by no means a novelty: one of the founders (nowadays almost completely forgotten) of analytic philosophy, Ludwig Wittgenstein, presented such a problem as the 'private language argument':

> Let's imagine the following case. I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation. To this end I associate it with the sign "S" and write this sign in a calendar for every day on which I have the sensation. —— I first want to observe that a definition of the sign cannot be formulated. But all the same, I can give one to myself as a kind of ostensive definition! How? Can I point to the sensation? Not in the ordinary sense. But I speak, or write the sign down, and at the same time I concentrate my attention on the sensation and so, as it were, point to it inwardly. But what is this ceremony for? For that is all it seems to be! A definition serves to lay down the meaning of a sign, doesn't it? Well, that is done precisely by concentrating my attention; for in this way I commit to memory the connection between the sign and the sensation. But "I commit it to memory" can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connection correctly in the future. But in the present case, I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem correct to me is correct. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'correct' (WITTGENSTEIN 2009: § 258).

The internal sign 'S' is a mentalese sign. Take the case that today I fixed the reference of such a sign. The day after I want to use such a sign again. How can I be sure that I'm correctly using the sign 'S'? How can avoid using it incorrectly? I cannot find help in a dictionary, because my own mentalese is a private language, therefore no dictionary can exist (if a dictionary could exist, the mentalese would be a normal public language). The main consequence of this paradoxical situation is that no one can understand a private language. Therefore no communication is possible using a private language. Language is public[6]. This is one of the major theses of IPL: «an idea of the faculty of language as a social praxis and of a language as both an instrument and a product of such a praxis» (DE MAURO 1965: 179).

It is important to note a terminological distinction which English lacks: in Italian (and in other Romance languages) there is an important difference between *linguaggio* and *lingua*, a distinction which is somewhat lost in English, because in both cases the word 'language' is used. *Linguaggio* is the biological component of language, the faculty of language; *lingue* are the various and changing languages spoken each one in a given community for a certain time span. There cannot be *linguaggio* without *lingue* and vice versa (FORMIGARI 2007; CARAPEZZA 2008). This is not a terminological point only: in this distinction one can find the peculiar IPL sensibility for the social and historical differences (DE MAURO 1963), frequently absent in Anglo-American analytic philosophy of language. At the same time this very distinction—which allows IPL to pay attention to both the biological socio-historical sides of language—marks the deep difference of IPL in respect to hermeneutics, which frequently neglected the natural, that is, the non-historical aspect of language. As an example of this double blindness, take the case of the famous 1971 debate between Chomsky and Foucault (DAVIDSON 1997; CHOMSKY, FOUCAULT 2006). In this debate Foucault stressed the historical side of language and human nature, completely neglecting the biological; on the other side, Chomsky exactly did the opposite, completely neglecting the social/historical side. Both Chomsky and Foucault missed an opportunity. Instead, in the IPL tradition both sides of language are taken into account (LO PIPARO 2003; MAZZEO 2003; LIUZZA *et al.* 2010; VIRNO 2013).

It is important to note that there is no contradiction between the IPL attention to the social dimension of language along with a similar attention to the biological

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[6] According to an anonymous referee «the interesting point against 'mentalese' or private language and against the connected disregard about the plurality of languages does not prevent [the present paper] from omitting the distinctions between the psychological and logical sides of meaning». This is really a major point. The key question is: does it *really* exist such a distinction? Is there a logical side and a psychological one *within* human animal? Is human organism divided into mind and body? According to IPL such a distinction does not hold. In fact, such an internal separation of human organism into two parts is required more by a theoretical prejudice than an empirical need. Take the case the embodied explanations of linguistic behavior (cf. BORGHI, CIMATTI 2010; LIUZZA *et al.* 2010; PULVERMÜLLER 2013): such explanations do not need any more to presuppose the very existence of such an internal duality between logic and psychology. On the contrary, the very need to individuate a 'logical side of meaning' seems to be a consequence of an unnatural way to conceive human language experience. In fact, a theory that does not dispose of the notion of language as a socio-political entity, it is unable to explain how mutual comprehension is possible. IPL mainly focus on the interrelationships between human biology and human bodies; a natural-historical language like Italian is properly the place where such a relation takes place.

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dimension. Here it is important to remember the peculiar Italian history: from Dante to Pasolini, one of the main political, literary and philosophical question has been the so-called *questione della lingua*, that is, the political problem of how to give Italian people one common language and one government. In such a question is mixed together history and geography, anthropology and religion, economics and politics. Such a tradition transmits to IPL an absolutely unique sensibility for the multiple aspects of language, which is still quite unusual in actual times. For this reason it is not uncommon in the IPL tradition to find scholars with a significant linguistic background, such as Tullio De Mauro, or to find philosophers who write technical linguistic works (for example, LO PIPARO 1984; GAMBARARA 1990; SIMONE 1995; PENNISI 1996; VECCHIO 2001).

From this point of view another effective distinction between IPL and in particular the recent Anglo-American philosophy of language that is always closer to cognitive sciences than it is to linguistics, is regarding what constitutes the 'new' scientific field of biolinguistics (JENKINS 2000; BOECKX, PIATTELLI-PALMARINI 2005). In effect in the cognitive tradition, biolinguistics means more and more biology (and frequently, *genetics*) of language. From this perspective, all the non-biological characteristics of language are increasingly neglected. This comes back to Chomsky's basic distinction between 'I-Language' and 'E-Language', where the 'essence' of language is the first one (HAUSER *et al*. 2002). Such an approach implies coming back to the idea of language as a separate entity (consequently, according to the Chomskyan School the origin of language is a mystery; cf. HAUSER *et al*. 2014). But if language and linguistic meaning returns to the brain from society and human practices Wittgenstein's 'private language argument' becomes meaninful again. This is a recurrent problem of any theory of language that postulates the priority of any presumed internal language—it is impossible to take into account the very possibility of mutual communication between human bodies (STEHR NIELSEN 2008).

The peculiar attitude of IPL towards the social dimension of language and biology clearly shows itself in the way it faces the very intricate and somewhat ambiguous notion of biopolitics (FOUCAULT 2010). Foucault's distrust of biology and naturalism lead to current interpretations that risk a dangerous biologization of politics and human life. The underlying idea is that politics and language have nothing to do with biology and nature. On the contrary, the relationship of human biology and language is at the very center of IPL (CIMATTI 2000; LO PIPARO 2003; VIRNO 2003); the roots of language lie in the rock of biology. The peculiarity of IPL is that such a biological stance includes anthropology and sociology. The basic idea is that a human being is 'naturally artificial' (AGAMBEN 2002; CIMATTI 2004; DE CAROLIS 2008; VIRNO 2013), that is, a human is an animal who needs to construe its own habitat, therefore, an animal whose survival is not guaranteed by its instincts (the peculiar human instincts are what Sigmund Freud called 'drives', that is, instincts impregnated with language; cf. PIAZZA 2004: CIMATTI 2012; MAZZEO 2012).

From this point of view IPL can at the same time sustain the naturalness and the artificiality of language. Starting from this awareness, recently some IPL philosophers tried to imagine a way to think of politics from a biolinguistic (in the larger sense just presented) point of view. The basic idea is that in human nature a balance exists between biology and culture, a balance that in recent times has been

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compromised, economically and ecologically (CIMATTI 2011), a compromised balance that in the future could represent a major risk to the whole humanity (PENNISI, FALZONE 2011; PENNISI 2014). What is worth emphasizing is that such 'political' applications of the IPL biological stance follow an ancient Italian literary and philosophical tradition of considering linguistic questions as political questions and vice versa[7]. According to IPL, a separation of philosophy of language from politics and anthropology is not only *de facto* impracticable, because there is no separation between the human being who speaks from the one who acts politically, but it is also theoretically wrong. This is probably the major difference among IPL and actual Anglo-American philosophies of language, which is based on quite rigid disciplinary separations between different aspects of the unitary field of language. From an IPL point of view, for example, considering pragmatics as a separate field of inquiry, as if a study of language were possible where pragmatics doesn't occupy a central position, is hardly conceivable.

4. *Langue* and form of life

Obviously IPL authors of reference are not only philosophers (in particular not only Italian philosophers), but also scientists (Darwin), linguists (Benveniste, Jakobson, Hjemslev), anthropologists (Durkheim, Mead, Lévy-Strauss, De Martino), psychologists and psychoanalysts (Vygotskij, Freud, Lacan). However, there are two figures of modern thought that occupy a special role in the IPL tradition (a third one is Aristotle; however his presence in IPL is less widespread; cf. LO PIPARO 2003): the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Saussure' *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916)[8] is based on a fundamental tripartition: *faculté de langage*, *langue* and *parole*. The faculty of language is the biological background which makes the acquisition of a particular language possible. In particular, this is a species-specific *Homo sapiens* neuroanatomical capacity (MINETT, WANG 2005). But such a biological foundation is not at all sufficient to account for language competence as a whole. Here is the basic difference in respect to Chomsky distinction between 'competence' and 'performance' (CHOMSKY 1965). Chomsky's competence is logically and theoretically independent from performance, that is, one 'knows' (pay attention to this verb: language is a matter of knowledge, not of actual 'use') the language even if s/he doesn't actually use it. Performance is simply language put in use: a car is always a car even if it remains in a garage. On the contrary, according to Saussure, the faculty of language alone is not language. In order to be a speaking body, a human being needs two other factors beyond the *faculté de langage*: a particular language (*langue*), such as Italian or English, and an actual act of speaking (*parole*). A language is a social and historical entity which is spoken in a particular space and in a particular time (therefore, the famous Saussurian distinction between synchrony and diachrony derives from the biological

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[7] Take the example of Dante's De Vulgari Eloquentia or Gramsci's Quaderno 29 (cf. *Note per una introduzione allo studio della grammatica*, in LO PIPARO, F. (2004), *Lingua, intellettuali ed egemonia in Gramsci*, Laterza, Roma- Bari, Ist ed. 1979).

[8] Cf. The Italian translation by Tullio DE MAURO (1967).

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distinction between an innate potentiality and the actual realization of such a potentiality; this is a situation very similar to what one can finds in biology: there is no such a thing as 'life', there is 'this' living being right now; PAGE 2010; MINELLI, BONATO 2012; CLELAND 2012).

A language is greater than the total sum of all its speakers: this means that a language is an 'institution', a special object that is in some sense autonomous and independent in respect to the human bodies which make use of it (a brief parenthesis: social ontology is born with Durkheim and Saussure). If a language didn't have an 'autonomous' existence, the communication would be impossible. In such a case every speaker would speaks her/his own language, that is, her/his own private language. As a consequence no one would understand each other. The connection between language and society is therefore intrinsic: a language is by necessity a social entity. The third element of this term is the actual act of speaking, what Saussure called *parole*. This is the actual human body, who uses the language into the real world for a specific purpose, in a determinate social and cultural context. These three elements constitute the whole of language: the biological component, the social component, and the bodily component. A description of language which excludes one of these three elements is not realistic or biologically adequate.

The interconnection between the biological, the social, and the bodily linguistic dimensions makes explicit the reason why IPL pays so much attention to the socio-biological fact of the diversity of languages. There is an important linguistic tradition (the reference tradition in Anglo-American analytic philosophy of language) that maintains that despite the apparent enormous diversity of languages, in fact they are basically the same (BAKER 2001). That is, diversity of languages is only mere appearance. In fact, there is 'one' language, deeply rooted in our brain; therefore, Italian, French and all other languages of the world (including all the extinct ones) do not properly exist. In fact Charles Darwin considered 'diversity' of life forms the most astonishing biological fact (from this point of view, one could consider the actual insistence to uniformity like residue of a religious perspective). But the point is even more relevant. According to IPL, the diversity of languages and cultures is the basic characteristic of *Homo sapiens* life (FITCH 2001; LO PIPARO 2010; SIDNELL, ENFIELD 2012), like the starting point of an effectively Darwinian biology is the diversity of life forms. Diversity of languages is not a problem to solve (as it seems the case with Chomsky's principles and parameters theory; CHOMSKY, LASNICK 1993), on the contrary, is a very fact of human life. This is not something from which a good scientific theory has to be freed, it is the unavoidable starting point of every plausible theory of human nature (LO PIPARO 1999).

Saussure's theory of sign is very famous, but very rarely correctly understood. According to Saussure a sign is a bifacial entity, as a coin or a sheet of paper; one side is called signifier (*signifiant*), the other side signification (*signifié*). What is crucially worth stressing is that *both* entities are *linguistic* entities. Such a specification should be uncontroversial for the signifier, on the contrary the signification is frequently considered a psychological entity (as if 'signification' were simply a synonymous of 'thought' or 'idea'). The common and trivial translation of Saussure *signifié* is 'meaning'. But meaning is a psychological entity, it is a thought. This is a simplistic translation because it would be completely uninteresting to

maintain that a sign connects a thought to an expression: this is the common sense conception of language. On the contrary, Saussure shows that a sign connects linguistic entities (for this reason he rejected his previous idea that a sign connects a *concept* and an *image acoustique*, because he wanted to avoid the risk of a psychological theory of language). A linguistic sign is made of language entities. That is, the signifier is not a meaning (a psychological and nonlinguistic entity). Such an unusual conception helps Saussure to explain the puzzling fact that different languages categorize the 'same' entity in different ways. An English 'child' occupies a semantic field that in Italian is articulated by a 'bambino' or a 'bambina': but the object remains the same[9]. Saussure observed not only that different languages use different signifiers for the 'same' object; what is much more important is that different languages categorize the world in different ways. What is an object in one language is an event in another; what is a unitary entity in one language is a composed one in another language. Languages are arbitrary; that means that every language contains a peculiar 'ontology' (that means that the way one thinks of ontology is influenced by the language s/he thinks in). Such a conception of language doesn't mean that when an English man watches a child he is '*seeing'* something different from what an Italian man is seeing when he is watching a 'bambino'; at the same time it is scientifically proven that speaking a certain language influences the automatic associations we use to categorize our experience (TAN *et al.* 2008; THIERRY *et al.* 2009; LUPYAN *et* al. 2010). Saussure's *arbitraire du language* is the main consequence of the difference he poses between *signifié* and concept, that is, between the plane of language and the plane of nonlinguistic thought. Language arbitrariness is very different from the trivial idea according to which the same object receives different names in different languages (this is the conventionality of language). Therefore, Saussure's idea is that language deeply influences the way human bodies think. From this point of view language is much more a cognitive device than a means of communication, it is thinking/acting more than mainly communication.

Ludwig Wittgenstein is the other main IPL reference. Nowadays, the effective reception of Wittgenstein's philosophy is somewhat puzzling (TRIPODI 2011). Even if he is still frequently quoted in places such as Usa and Great Britain's philosophy departments, it seems that Wittgenstein is no longer really considered as a philosopher who has something relevant to say about the problems our current philosophers discuss. The enormous body of Wittgenstein literature seems somewhat analogous to Shakespeare's or Tasso's literature; Wittgenstein seems to have become a philosopher that only historians of philosophy study. Take the previous mentioned case of 'mentalese' in cognitive science. From a Wittgenstein point of view, this is a perfect example of private language (MARCONI 1996); therefore, a theory of

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[9] An anonymous referee rightly observes that the 'entity' can appear the same to an external look only, for example to a Martian anthropologist. Different languages think differently to the world. Within a particular language what a sign means is inseparable from the peculiar way such a meaning is articulated. The referee also adds that according to Saussure linguistic signs «cannot stand for objects but only (if ever) for concepts». This is not properly the case, because according to Saussure each sign has a specific 'value' within the signs system of a language: that is, every sign is a 'move' inside the 'language game' (like in the famous chess example). Once again IPL stresses language as a form of action more than a representational medium.

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language and cognition based on such a theoretical mistake would be impossible. What saddens more is not that psychologists do not understand the seriousness of such a problem (remember Wittgenstein's definition of psychology: «experimental methods and *conceptual confusion*» WITTGENSTEIN 2009: XIV, § 371), but that a *philosopher* does not even realize it. That means that Wittgenstein is no more considered a philosopher to work with every day. This is a peculiarity of Anglo-American analytic philosophy, which is probably explicated by the spell of science that such a philosophy has been under.

On the contrary IPL has shown a strong relationship with Wittgenstein's thought from its very beginning (DE MAURO, 1965), a link which has grown over the years (LO PIPARO 2003; CIMATTI 2007; VIRNO 2010; MAZZEO 2013). Wittgenstein is the modern philosopher who more than any other tried to consider language as a 'natural' phenomenon. Wittgenstein doesn't speak of language in general, he always speaks of language in actual use, what he defined as a "language-game" in order "to emphasize the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (*Philosophical Investigations*, § 23). Even if Wittgenstein never explicitly dealt with politics (ROBINSON 2009), the close connection he poses between language and human life makes him quite near to Italian philosophical tradition (ESPOSITO 2010). The kind of implicit politics IPL finds in Wittgenstein is humble and natural; it is human life made of power relations and language-games, bodies and practices. What is worth stressing is that such a natural politics comes first before any explicit form of government. Therefore, what IPL finds in Wittgenstein is a conception which includes in *human nature* language and praxis, politics and bodies, life and history. This is the reason why IPL does not consider biopolitics as an innovation of the last century: human nature is intrinsically bio-political.

5. Body and immanence

In the last few years a new topic is assuming a growing importance in IPL (AGAMBEN 1982; ESPOSITO 2014)[10]. While at first the central IPL theme was the relationship between language and society (DE MAURO 1965), lately the problem has been how language directly affects and transforms the human body. The general IPL setting is unchanged, what is turned is the vantage point from which the relationship between language and body is taken into consideration (from this perspective it is worth remembering the peculiar attention the IPL tradition always has dedicated to the language of signs — e.g., the gesture language of deaf people: cf. RUSSO CARDONA, VOLTERRA 2007). The recent technological and scientific global transformations always make it more difficult for a single body to resist the power of

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[10] According to an anonymous referee, Agamben and Esposito «are not philosophers of language». Such a statement is true if, and *only if*, one accepts the extravagant idea (although widespread in Anglo-American philosophical tradition) that one can study language in isolation from the rest of all human social and political activities. On the contrary, the main theoretical point of IPL is *exactly* that such a separation is impossible and misleading; therefore, from IPL point of view they are philosophers of language *just because* they do not separate the analysis of language from the whole of human form of life. As to Agamben he explicitly asserts that «nei libri scritti e in quelli non scritti, io non ho voluto pensare ostinatamente che una sola cosa: che significa 'vi è linguaggio', che significa 'io parlo' ?» [In written and not written books, I stubbornly wanted to think but one thing: "what does it mean "there is language", what does it mean "I speak"?] (AGAMBEN 2001: X).

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economics and politics (ESPOSITO 2002; FOUCAULT 2010). What all these forms of power have in common is precisely language: from the total pervasiveness of communication in modern life and politics to the eminently linguistic character of financial capitalism (BRYAN, RAFFERTY 2006; HELLER 2010; SHANKAR, CAVANAUGH 2012), language is the primary impersonal agent a human body seeking freedom has to fight. This is not a paradigm change in IPL; it is more a switch in the focus of attention: from society to the actual living body (CIMATTI 2013; 2014). A similar movement of thought occurred in French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (such a similarity is not at all casual, since Lacan shares with IPL a structuralist origin), whose theory during the years passed from the predominance of what he called the 'Symbolic Order' – that is, language (LACAN 2002) – toward a final emphasis on the Real, that is the actual body (LACAN 2005; CIMATTI 2015).

The theoretical premise of such a final switch lies in Saussure's idea of language. A *langue* is made of negative relations between words; each word's semantic value is the total sum of the differences between it and all the other words in the *langue*. It is the power of negation and difference which literally holds together it:

> on ne se pénétrera jamais assez de l'essence purement negative, purement *différentielle*, de chacun des éléments du langage auxquels nous accordons précipitamment une existence: il n'y en a aucun, dans aucun ordre, qui possède cette existence supposée – quioque peut-être, je l'admets, nous soyons appelés à reconnaître que, sans cette fiction, l'esprit se trouverait littéralement incapable de maîtriser une pareille somme de differences, où il n'y nulle part à aucun moment un point de repère positif et ferme (SAUSSURE 2002: 64-65).

IPL conceives the *langue* quite differently; the *langue* is an institution which cannot exist if it is not connected to human lives and actual practices (DE MAURO 1965, 1982). But in our time it is apparent that the linguistic dimension is increasingly assuming an almost independent reality. Take the case of financial capitalism: an entity like a 'derivative' is literally made of expectations and expectations of expectations, that is, it is made of 'numbers' and 'discourses': actually they all are linguistic entities (PETTIT 2001; MAURER 2002; SEARLE 2005). In such a case language becomes an entity on its own, an autonomous entity which "makes decisions" about our very lives. While it "has" an effective power on human bodies (if the value of a derivative goes down, the risk of unemployment goes up), the contrary is not admitted (the derivative is an independent variable of the economic cycle, the human job is a dependent one). From this point of view Saussure's quotation today is literally true (it is a paradox that a 'new realism' is appearing just in the time when financial – that is, 'linguistic' – capitalism is emerging all over the world; MARAZZI 2008). Therefore, such a renewed centrality that the question of human body is assuming is coherent with IPL tradition that always has considered language problems political problems too, and vice versa.

As a consequence the question of body and immanence is now returning to the fore

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(AGAMBEN 1999; 2014)[11]. The theoretical and anthropological question IPL poses itself is: how can an actual human body resist the overwhelming force of language? The basic idea is that language introduces transcendence into human life (AGAMBEN 1982; SEVERINO 1992; CIMATTI 2013; 2015), that is, a separation between actual bodily lives on the one side and an abstract and theological world filled up by entities like 'mind' and 'thoughts', 'State' and 'private property', 'derivatives' and 'PIL' and so forth on the other. Take the case of the separation between mind and body, which is the origin of all other separations. It is a separation that nonlinguistic creatures do not know: a mouse is a living being that always lives where it actually lives. A mouse does not hope or regret something: its life is completely tied to what actually is happening to its own body. A mouse lives in the *here* and *now*. There is no logical space for a separation in a mouse body and a mouse mind. There is always one and just one body, the actual body of the mouse which lives in this actual world. On the contrary, a human being is separated in two very different entities: the mind and the body. A mind is nothing else than an entity who names itself as an 'I' (DENNETT 1991; CIMATTI 2000), while the body is what the 'I' names as 'my own body'. The very existence of "mind" implies that what once upon a time was a unitary organism that has been split into two parts: «in the very same moment a thing is named, it loses its own content, because it moves into the depthless space of sign. In such a way the moment language takes possess of the thing, it is the moment it is annihilated too» (ESPOSITO 2014: 54). Therefore when a thing enters into the space of language «it is transposed into a different dimension from reality» (ibid). If the 'I' is the scar that transcendence leaves on the human body, now the question poses itself of how imagining a way out of such a situation.

According to ESPOSITO (2014), for example, the first theoretical task is to deconstruct the very ancient metaphysical distinction between 'persons' and 'things'. This is the first distinction language introduces in human world, and into the very same human body. What Esposito aims to do is to define a new status of the body, where it is no longer «classifiable neither as a person nor as a thing» (ESPOSITO 2014: 76). Such a body would place itself beyond transcendent entities; therefore, it could live in a more inclusive way with the nature and the other bodies. According to CIMATTI (2013) the movement beyond language aims toward a 'new' human body, which is no longer afraid of animality; a body which gave up to the 'I' because it no longer would be signed by transcendence. Finally, in his last book Giorgio Agamben tries to define the ancient/new concept of *uso* (use). Agamben's attempt is to imagine

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[11] An anonymous referee somewhat charges the present IPL reconstruction to adopt a «naïve materialistic framework, revealed by the frequent use of the 'body' category instead of that one of 'person', 'subject', 'man' or 'human agent' etc.». It is not immediately apparent why to avoid such ontologically and psychologically shaking entities like 'person', 'subject' or 'human agent' should be *naïve*. On the contrary, the strong IPL biological stance stresses that what is real and actual, within human language activity, is just the body presence. According to the same referee such an attention to the actual body «doesn't seem to be thoroughly consistent» […] «with the declared and appreciable will to avoid reductionnisms». I thank the anonymous reviewer for this observation, because it allows to be more explicit about such a point. IPL looks for reducing to a minimum the entities required to give account of human language. Following the Saussure theory of language, there are three levels of explanation: the biological level of the language faculty (*faculté de langage*); the socio-political level of the different spoken (signed) languages (*langues*); finally the body that actually uses a language (*parole*). No other entity is required.

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a relationship between human beings and nature which is not based on destruction and consumption. Such a relationship is exactly the kind an 'I' cannot help to impose on nature, just as it is in charge over 'its' own body. The basic idea is that in a relationship of use, neither the user nor the used should be separated one from the other; at the very same time the user makes use of itself during the use, as the used makes use of the user while being used: «in the use man and world are in a relationship of absolute and reciprocal immanence; therefore, «subject and object are deactivated and make inoperative [*inoperosi*], and, in the place of them, it is use which takes over as a new figure of human praxis» (AGAMBEN 2014: 55).

6. Concluding remarks

While the 'linguistic turn' largely 'overestimated' the role of language in human experience and in philosophy, nowadays we are seeing an 'ontological turn' that widely 'underestimates' its role. In this paper a different philosophical tradition is presented, Italian philosophy of language, which is deeply rooted in Italian history and culture. The basic assumption of such a tradition is that one cannot understand human language without taking into account the inextricable connections it entertains with the 'whole' set of characters of species-specific human form-of-life. According to IPL a separate object like 'language' does not exist in isolation from human society and history. A typical Italian philosopher of language does not describe a single aspect of language – semantics, for example – without also considering (explicitly or implicitly) at least its pragmatic and socio-political aspects. According to IPL tradition there is not such a thing like 'philosophy of language' as a separate object of inquiry. IPL promotes a non 'specialist' view of human language: «Thus we realize ever more clearly that our optimum goal is the observation of language in all its complexity. To paraphrase Terence's saying, *Linguista sum; linguistici nihil a me alienum puto*» (JAKOBSON 1971: 555).

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