

Conceiving a “Spatial Justice” by the Yardstick of a “Socio-Discursive Justice”

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to invite the reader to (re)think the importance of the language dimension in its dialectic with the social and spatial dimensions. Far from an irenic conception of language, in which it is understood only as a medium for the neutral exchange of information, language here is regarded as the agent and reproducer of social relations. In this sense, the author proposes a theoretical development on a “spatial sociolinguistics” approach that combines social geography and sociolinguistics and takes place within a contemporary matrix characterised by “supermodernity” and “postsocialism”. This development is then complemented by an analytical exploration of the discursive construction of “marginalised” urban spaces. Finally, the author adopts a political philosophy perspective in order to try to conceive a “socio-discursive justice” characterised by a correlation between social spaces and discursive spaces and to identify its implications in epistemological, theoretical, methodological and political terms.

Keywords: language, space, politics, recognition, marginality

RÉSUMÉ

Le propos de cet article est d'inviter le·la lecteur·rice à (re)penser l'importance de la dimension langagière dans sa dialectique avec les dimensions sociales et spatiales. Bien loin d'une conception irénique du langage où ce dernier ne serait pensé qu'en terme d'échange neutre d'informations, le langage est ici considéré comme agent et reproducteur des rapports sociaux. Dans ce sens, l'auteur propose un développement théorique sur une approche de « sociolinguistique spatiale » mêlant géographie sociale et sociolinguistique et prenant place dans une matrice contemporaine caractérisée par la « surmodernité » et le « postsocialisme ». Ce développement se voit ensuite notamment complété par une perspective analytique autour de la construction discursive des espaces urbains « marginalisés ». L'auteur s'efforce enfin de penser dans une perspective de philosophie politique une « justice socio-discursive » caractérisée par une corrélation entre espaces sociaux et espaces discursifs et trouvant ses implications en termes épistémologique, théorique, méthodologique et politique.

Mots-clefs : langage, espace, politique, reconnaissance, marginalité

Introduction

Discourses should not be seen as an abstract instance divorced from urban social phenomena. On the contrary, they are agents and producers of the social relations of which space is an inseparable corollary. This might be a succinct way of summing up the urban sociolinguistics approach that Bulot defines as a “sociolinguistics of discourses because it problematizes the correlations between space and languages around discursive materiality” (Bulot, 2005, p. 220). This attempt at a definition contains several implications that are worth highlighting if one wishes to understand social situations through the prism of a “spatial justice” which then becomes inseparable – as we will see – from a “socio-discursive justice”. From this perspective, therefore, the purpose of my contribution will be to try to show the heuristic value of a sociolinguistic approach to the relations of domination and oppression that play out in urban spaces.

A spatial sociolinguistics?

So what are the implications of a sociolinguistic approach? First of all, it implies moving away from the dominant *doxa* regarding language that underpins and facilitates the well-known ideology of communication: “language is an instrument of communication” (Lecerle, 2004, p. 64). To reject this *doxa* is to take the view that to speak is not simply to exchange information, but that language consists primarily in the production and perpetual negotiation of meanings. By means of language we categorise, we organise the world around us, we evaluate, we assign definitional traits, we cooperate but also engage in conflict, we can fight, take power, we can convince, act and prompt action, we can express feelings or (re)produce representations of reality, etc. To speak is to visualise the world in which we live, how we conceive it, and ultimately how we conceive ourselves and others. To speak is also to have a place in a discursive political space that cannot be understood as distinct from social space. So we are a long way here from a dichotomous Saussurian conception that separates “what is social from what is individual” and “what is essential from what is accessory

and more or less accidental", i.e. from a separation between language and speech (Saussure [de], 1995, p. 30). However, beyond this radical refutation of language as a phenomenon that could be studied in itself and for itself because it is external to the social (and therefore to the human), there is also the no less essential idea that language is not a neutral tool: "language is not transparent to the world; it has its own opacity through which a view, a particular sense of the world is constructed" (Charaudeau, 1997, p. 9). These initial considerations thus bring us to what I will call here a binary model that encapsulates the sociolinguistic approach, in other words the study of the covariance between language and the social.

SOCIAL ↔ LANGUAGE

One point needs to be made here. The language/social distinction should be seen as a necessity of theoretical conceptualisation and explanation, but should in no way be understood as referring to an actual empirical reality. The gamble of abandoning one dichotomous view (language/speech) is doomed to failure if it leads to the establishment of a new dichotomy (language/social). The reader should therefore bear in mind the artificiality and abstraction of such a distinction, which is only relevant for purposes of theoretical demonstration. In fact, this is what Bulot means when he speaks of a "sociolinguistics of discourses", where the notion of discourse refers to Guespin's conceptualisation, citing Robin:

"the conditions of production (institutional framework, ideological apparatus of embeddedness, underlying representations, political conjuncture, power relations, strategic effects sought, etc.) are not a simple context, "circumstances" that in their own way exercise simple constraints on discourse, [...] these conditions characterise discourse, constitute it and, in constituting it, can be identified by linguistic analysis" (Robin R., 1973 quoted by Guespin, 1976, p. 4-5).

While it is essential to grasp the conditions of production in a sociolinguistics of discourses, they are understood from a radical dialectical perspective (set out above by Guespin) which tells us precisely that we are not dealing here with two distinct

objects, which could be analysed separately, the social on one side and language on the other. In other words, as so understood, the concept of discourse challenges dichotomous approaches that understand the social world as a set of binary pairings – language/social, language/representations, language/history, etc. We start from the idea that discourse undoubtedly acts upon the social, even produces it (Saussurian conception of a separation), and that the social acts upon language (as in Anglo-Saxon pragmatics, which emphasises the fact that language can only make meaning if the context of its production – i.e. the social – is known), in order to draw on a principle of “organisational recursion” to arrive at a single process in which “products are producers of what produces them” (Morin, 2005, p. 114).¹ The standpoint set out here is essential, since the aim is not (or no longer) to see discourses as simple revealers of a social reality outside language. Nor is the idea to see discourses solely as vehicles of social representations in which language is no more than a simple transitional object through which to think about general societal questions. Rather, the sociolinguistic perspective prompts us to consider the fundamentally material and organising dimension of language. Indeed, it emphasises the “refractive” capacity of language in order to show that language is not a simple representation of reality and that in this sense it implies “reality-in-becoming” (Voloshinov and Bakhtin, 1977, p. 37). It is here in particular that this article seeks to make a contribution: while language has become a focus of some attention in numerous recent works in all disciplinary fields, its “refractive” dimension is more rarely problematised and considered in all its implications. So the approach put forward here does not seek to substitute for writings and theories that emphasise the role of language in processes of exclusion, whether in geography or in sociology, but to offer an additional perspective for a sociolinguistics that is open to spatial questions and a geography that explores socio-discursive aspects.

This socio-linguistic dialectic echoes the socio-spatial dialectic formalised by Soja: “In this notion of a socio-spatial dialectic, [...] the spatiality of whatever subject you are looking at is viewed as shaping social relations and societal development just as much

1. I owe much to Thierry Deshayes for the phrasing of the recursive and dialectical principle set out here.

as social processes configure and give meaning to the human geographies or spatialities in which we live" (Soja, 2010, p. 4). The spatial is therefore socially produced, but the reciprocal is also true. This understanding of social geography thus entails the view that space is not outside the social, external to social phenomena, a simple substrate of day-to-day activities, but it is rather an object of conflicts that contribute to the construction of social inequalities. Both signified and signifier, it is easy to understand how space cannot be described neutrally and solely in its physical dimension, without reference to its pre-eminent role in social construction.

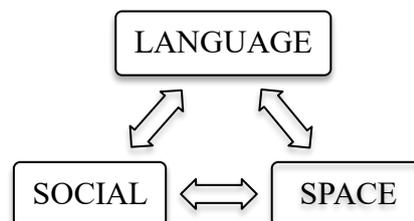
"The space that confronts us on a daily basis is both a set of representations of space as they are put into words by our interlocutors and by ourselves (the ideas we have of the "inner city", of "the suburbs", of a given neighbourhood, a given street, etc.), they are the socio-spatial standpoints from which we see the world, and which constitute us as speaking subjects, and they are our practices of space (fundamentally interwoven with our representations and uses of language). They are also our real movements and what we find relevant, significant, what we see or do not see, on the basis of our codes, from our social positions" (Deshayes and Vétier, 2017, p. 53).

We could therefore advance a second binary model (once again radically dialectic) around the covariance between space and the social.

SOCIAL ↔ SPATIAL

There is an undeniable parallel between the two approaches, in which language and space are alternately seen as products and producers of social relations. However, this parallel is not only undeniable – it is also heuristic in nurturing a more complex approach to socio-spatial phenomena. Indeed, it is possible to move from two binary models to one ternary model (which loses nothing of its dialectic), and this transition operates in particular around the materiality of language. This relates to the fact that discourses have their own materiality which, as Saint-Ouen says, "organizes language, and also reality" (Saint-Ouen, 1984, p. 448). In other words, discourses have a material existence, they have visible and concrete effects, they contribute to the production of

spaces, to the way in which places are perceived but also conceived and experienced, in short, language is undoubtedly social praxis “in that it transforms the social, in that it constructs it” (Canut, 2017, p. 323). In reality, this discursive materiality expresses nothing more than the idea of a social constructivism in which language is no longer simply an informational tool but in which, on the contrary, the discursive universe is recognised and conceived in all its material dimension. In this sense, space should be understood as enunciative space, i.e. a “product of discourses and representations that come to constitute the social reality we inhabit” (Bulot, 2008b, p. 1). We can therefore speak of the socio-discursive construction of space.



Having reached this point, there remains one more factor to elucidate: it concerns the proposal of a terminological transition from an urban sociolinguistics (a term coined by Thierry Bulot) to a spatial sociolinguistics. It is particularly important to emphasise this proposal in that a researcher who claims to take a sociolinguistic approach must be aware, given the developments above, of “the part played by words in the construction of social reality” (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 155). The city, in urban sociolinguistics, “is conceived as a terrain, and not only as a research location” (Gasquet-Cyrus, 2002, p. 56). Urban sociolinguistics, therefore, is not a sociolinguistics in the city or on the city, which would simply be a sociolinguistics transposed to a particular place, the city, but rather a sociolinguistics that takes the specificity of the urban into account in its approach and in its interpretations. This urban specificity operates around the ternary dialectic proposed above and around the notion of urbanisation. For Bulot, “one must however be able to enrich the linguistic approach to the urban phenomenon by going beyond the ordinary meaning of urbanisation, which simply refers to the expansion of cities, and by affirming the dynamism of urban

space with respect to its correlative dimension: spatial mobility put into words, socially evaluated in discourse, characterised in language" (Bulot, 2001, p. 265). Urban sociolinguistics is therefore above all a "sociolinguistics of spatiality" (Bulot, 2009, p. 65) that is much more than the mere geographical setting of the city conveyed in everyday speech by the term "urban". "The pairing of density + diversity (the maximum number of different "social things" in the minimum space) is thus a good description of urbanisation, i.e. that which makes a city a specific object" (Lévy, 1999, p. 208). Urban mass is thus far from the only thing. Intensity of social interactions is also central. Urbanness thus occupies multiple scales, since every inhabited space has its own centralities, alternatives that are therefore more relevant to understanding than the binary concept of core and periphery at purely municipal scale. Moreover, this notion of urbanisation is essential to understanding in particular why urbanised space is the locus *par excellence* of categorical and axiological analyses (Mondada, 2002, p. 72-90). True, "no subject, no object, no phenomenon actually evades the classifying and naming activity of human beings" (Matthey and Trimaille, 2013, p. 85). But the processes associated with urbanisation play a particularly dominant role here because they foster encounters and discourses about others. "One of the effects inherent in spatial mobility is to produce distance between individuals and groups, to reshape social ties in particular around shared representations about others and about oneself" (Bulot, 2008b, p. 4).

"Urbanisation is *de facto* something other than the mere quantitative increase in habitat density and the spread of an urban culture. It is a product of conflicts and tensions" (Bulot, 2001, p. 308). In my view, this shift corresponds to the change observed in Lefebvre's writings, with the transition from a "right to the city" (Lefebvre, 1968) to "the production of space" (Lefebvre, 1974), and marks the transition from a process that first takes place in the specific place of the city to a global "right to space". To refer to the approach that I develop in this article, therefore, I propose to speak of spatial sociolinguistics (rather than urban sociolinguistics). The reasons for this are essentially twofold: first, to refer explicitly to this specificity of a global process of spatiality, which must also be understood from its sociolinguistic perspective; second,

to facilitate understanding of this approach and the problem it tackles (which also modestly entails making it accessible and usable for more people working on problems associated with space and not only with the city).

A “supermodern” and “postsocialist” perspective on conflicts

Density, diversity, spatial mobilities, those are the three points that could characterise urbanisation as I understand it. In this descriptive triptych, the city is no longer the only locus of urbanisation in an era of and in the light of two societal regimes that reveal a contemporary reshaping of social interactions: the regime of “supermodernity” conceptualised by Augé (1992) and the “postsocialist” era developed by Fraser (2005). As we will see, these two regimes directly echo the problem explored in spatial sociolinguistics, i.e. how to problematize space and conflicts from a socio-discursive perspective that does not ignore the “refractive” capacity of language.

The essential trait of supermodernity is the figure of excess. In this sense, the anthropologist’s decision to use the prefix “super” instead of the prefix “post” allows him to emphasise this essential characteristic. While the regime of supermodernity draws on a postmodern perspective that notably consists “in the erasure of modernity conceived as a vehicle and factor of progress (the ideology that constructs all change as leading human societies in a positive direction)” (Bulot, 2007, p. 20), Augé proposes to go further by emphasising three aspects of excess considered as the primary driver of social phenomena. First, excess of time: the difficulty of thinking about time because of the proliferation of events, in other words a form of “acceleration of history” that modifies the perception of time and prevents people internalising change because of the lack of time (Augé, 1992, p. 40-43). Then, excess of space: marked by the almost uninterrupted transmission of images and sounds from local or remote space, in this case the emphasis is on a spatial superabundance of the present, with the idea that this omnipresence of images is a corollary of ever faster travel, which produces a change of scale (“the shrinking of the planet” referred to in Augé, 1992, p. 44-48), and

hence profoundly alters the relationship to space, as different geographers have noted (Hérin, 2002; Frémont, 1999; Buléon, 2002). Finally, excess of ego: once again characterised by an acceleration, this time in the personal production of meaning (here we explicitly find the postmodern condition). There is a superabundance of the sense of identity which, with the erasure of modernity, gives individual identity primacy over collective identity (a primacy that I would reformulate from Fraser's perspective as a primacy of status rather than of identity). Individuals "expect to interpret the information they receive by and for themselves" (Augé, 1992, p. 51).

In the light of these three figures, one can understand the importance of fitting the problematisation of the relationship to space into a larger context, a contemporary matrix of tensions and conflicts in which the language dimension plays a pre-eminent role (notably through the superabundance of events and media). "Like it or not, language – which is largely external to us and precedes us – is steeped in these phenomena of classification, categorisation, demarcation, domination, phenomena that we often reproduce unwittingly, but in relation to (or indeed against) which we also constantly position and reposition ourselves. These different phenomena have real social and political impacts" (Deshayes and Vétier, 2017, p. 54). Moreover – and this is also why the societal regime proposed by Augé should be borne in mind – it is so important to consider spatial mobility, and also visual and aural mobility, because they foster encounters and discourses about others in which "identity" claims (which I will therefore understand as "status" claims in alignment with Fraser) themselves become the matrix of conflicts.

In this respect, it is essential to take into account the three figures of supermodernity developed by Augé because "the abolition of time and distances through immediate knowledge of events taking place at the other end of the world trivializes the experience of otherness while at the same time rendering it increasingly difficult" (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2005, p. 37). In "a curious mix of knowledge and real and rapid information, of hypertrophied media coverage and zones of shadows and silences" (Buléon, 2002, p. 82), supermodernity turns the spotlight on a disparate selection of

social and cultural situations around the world and, through the proliferation of polarised identities, generates “an increased need to emphasise differences” (Buléon, 2002, p. 85). Caught up in supermodernity, individuals find it hard to conceive change in their own societies and the notions associated with them (identity, sense of unity, nation state, democracy, etc.). This is also the view advanced by Fraser when she writes that “the current struggles for recognition are occurring as a time when transcultural interaction and communication are increasing to massive proportions, whereas the acceleration in global migrations and media flows are hybridising and pluralizing cultural forms” (Fraser, 2005, p. 72). The “principle of reification” thus proposed by the author to conceptualise the disruptions and conflicts brought about by the “postsocialist” era therefore directly echoes and even takes form within the regime of supermodernity.

Fraser’s thought is germane to my argument in two ways. On the one hand, at its core is the intersubjective condition of recognition which primarily takes place through language and is undermined “by capitalism on the path to rapid globalisation [which] accelerates transcultural contacts, disrupts interpretative patterns, pluralizes horizons of values and politicizes identities and differences” (Fraser, 2005, p. 93). On the other hand, this denial of recognition is approached not from a psychological perspective (which can also be pertinent) but from the angle of status situated in social relations, and therefore in terms of justice. “From this point of view, to be denied recognition is not simply to be a victim of the contemptuous, derogatory or hostile attitudes and beliefs of others. It is being prevented from participating in social life as an equal, because of institutionalised models of cultural values that constitute certain people as beings who do not deserve respect or esteem. Insofar as these models of disdain and low esteem are institutionalised, they hinder parity of participation, just as surely as do inequalities of a distributive nature” (Fraser, 2005, p. 50). There are two fundamental aspects of language that are unquestionably highlighted here: language as the agent and producer of social relations through the intersubjective condition of recognition, and language in its materiality (notably in and through institutions) and the effects that it generates in terms of recognition as an equal in social interaction. These two

fundamental aspects of language then need to be (re)situated in relation to the three figures of supermodernity: the intersubjective condition of recognition arises in a context of superabundance – of events, media and space – that renders it all the more difficult; as for the effects in terms of recognition, they also occur in a context of acceleration in the individual production of meaning characterised by the importance taken by individual status and its recognition. From a “postsocialist” and “supermodern” perspective, it would therefore seem that social relations should be described in terms of “socio-discursive justice”, where discourse becomes a central component in the dimension of conflict. It goes without saying that these ideas about the linguistic dimension in no way erase the spatial dimension of justice, which is inextricably linked with it. It is this link that the theoretical detour above sought to demonstrate and that the analytical development below will aim to confirm.

Social, geographical and discursive distancing.

Taking a spatial approach to justice is very valuable, because it can account for the interplay of power and dominance relations associated with space. In the light of my arguments above, it would also seem of heuristic value to complement this approach with a language-based perspective. In this respect, the so-called “quartiers prioritaires de la politique de la ville” (urban policy priority districts) in France offer a revealing illustration. Given this official title for public policy purposes, these urban areas can also be found under multiple descriptions that form part of a quasi equivalence class:² “vulnerable districts”, “problem districts”, “districts in difficulty”, “disadvantaged districts”, or simply “suburbs”.

2. The notion of equivalence class relates here to the “lexical entry analysis” approach developed in 1976 by Marcellesi (Marcellesi, 1976). This notion of equivalence classes is borrowed from Harris, with the idea that a text can be described with no initial reference to meaning simply through the distributional structure of the different elements. On this basis, certain elements belong to equivalent discursive environments, and linked in this way they form what is called an equivalence class (Harris, 1969). In other words, in the present case, the idea is to point out that these terms implicitly operate as synonyms.

The naming process that produces the quasi equivalence class described above seems to borrow directly from two figures of speech that are highly relevant to the next stage of my argument. The first figure is synecdoche, “in which a term for a part of something refers to the whole of something or vice versa”. In our context, it points to a relationship of inclusion between the objects referred to by the literal meaning (“estates” in the toponymic sense, as groups of buildings; “districts” in the administrative sense as subdivisions of cities, or in the emotional sense, “neighbourhoods”, villages in the city; “suburbs” in the geographical sense, as the outskirts of cities) and those referred to by the figurative meaning (the low-rent social housing (HLM) estates/districts/suburbs built in the Priority Urbanisation Zones in the years 1955-1975)” (Genestier and Jacquenod-Desforges, 2017, p. 20).³ It is in this use of synecdoche that the absence of an adjectival qualifier for the plural term “the districts” takes on meaning. Indeed, it seems to have become increasingly common to elide the epithet applied to the word “districts”, as the plural word has come to refer to a set of urban spaces that are perceived as homogeneous. Through the use of the syntagm “the districts”, and by means of synecdoche, there is a shared implication that what is being referred to is not districts in the geographical sense but districts in the figurative sense or, as Bulot would say, districts with values and identities attached (Bulot, 2002). Through the use of synecdoche, “the districts” are thus presented as objectivised realities, whereas the term in fact reflects a measurement of social distance and a “confusion between geographical distance (which does not seem subject to interpretation) and social distance (which seemed equally objective but not necessarily an expression of positive value for the person who observes it)” (Bulot, 2008a, p. 16).

The second linguistic process is metonymy, a figure of speech in which a thing or concept is referred to by the name of something closely associated with it. For our

3. Translator’s note: obviously, France’s “quartiers prioritaires de la politique de la ville” are specific to French urban policy. However, Anglo-Saxon countries have their own equivalents, to which the same linguistic observations apply. For example, the United States has its “housing projects”, urban subsidised housing districts associated with multiple social problems and referred to simply as “the projects”. Similarly, Britain has its “council estates”, which resemble the projects and *les quartiers* insofar as they are residential spaces historically characterised and/or stigmatised in the popular imagination as focal points for multiple social problems. In all three cases, the term refers both literally to a physical entity, a fragment of urban fabric, but also figuratively and implicitly to a set of perceived sociocultural characteristics that these entities have in common.

purposes here, it refers to “a relationship of continuity between the objects referred to by the literal meaning (estates/districts/suburbs), which are urbanistic in nature, and those referred to by the figurative meaning (the inhabitants of the estates/districts/suburbs), which are human in nature” (Genestier and Jacquenod-Desforges, 2017, p. 20). However, this should not be understood solely as a linguistic process, because it corresponds to what Bourdieu called “substantialist thinking about places” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 250), in other words the idea that social practices are generated by places, rather than by the people who live in them. In consequence, spaces are often constructed in discourse as essentialised, with the result that phenomena are naturalised, taken for granted as spontaneous and therefore not open to question. “The power of spatial metaphor is that through this naturalisation it makes categories like the “district”, the “suburb”, etc., which are all social constructions, seem inevitable” (Hambye, 2008, p. 39). These categories implicitly correspond to a number of social practices characterised by two factors: social delegitimation and universalising stereotypes. In the case of social delegitimation, such social practices would include: groups of people in public space, challenging and problematic in the case of “the districts”, but taken for granted and accepted in other urban areas whose inhabitants are non-racialised and of higher social status; the symbolic exclusion experienced in the context of an urban regeneration project, where the introduction of new retail outlets “designed to attract new populations” symbolises a rejection of the existing population; or else disparaging references to the use of *Verlan* (a particular form of French urban slang, involving syllabic reversal) or other language practices that represent a “threat” to the French language, which is conceived as an ahistorical code whose “purity” needs to be protected but that is at the same time profoundly social (since it refers to a centrality that cannot be understood as solely geographic). In the case of universalising stereotypes, I am referring to a set of unchanging and objectivised characteristics that allow no room for complexity: referring to these urban areas as “rough”; instantly identifying groups of people in public space as necessarily foreign (on the basis of markers like skin colour, language, etc.) and/or unemployed (conjuring up a whole set of stereotypes about layabouts and welfare queens);

conceiving residents of these zones as economically deprived and reduced to that trait alone (“poverty piled on poverty” as one elected housing officer put it at a public meeting in one of the urban policy priority districts). This essentialisation of people (reducing them to a single stereotypical trait) implicitly entails thinking about them as invariably in need but also as lacking any capacity for other social practices, to the point that certain social actors deny them all ability to reflect on their own day-to-day experience and hence to be political interlocutors. On the basis of these concrete examples from field research, we can suggest that this second metonymical process is inherent in a spatialism that claims a “direct causal relationship between spatial forms and social practices, which is used to transmute problems specific to a certain type of society into problems attributable to a certain type of space” (Garnier, 2011), and thereby erases everything related to the structural relations that are at the very foundation of social inequalities. Moreover, it is interesting to note that spatialism underpins the implementation of “urban policy” itself, a fact that is very far from trivial. “But the claim is always that specific policies apply to the space, or to the “territory”: one might wonder why it is not anti-Republican, in a France that calls itself one and indivisible, to discriminate in the treatment of spaces, when it would be to discriminate in the treatment of groups” (Hancock, 2009, p. 64). Hancock goes on: “the Urban Priority Zone then functions as a euphemism for the specific difficulties of populations “of immigrant origin”, which no one wants either to see or to count” (Hancock, 2009, p. 64). It is clear how it is possible, through language tricks and euphemisation processes, to implement public policies that marginalise certain social groups, on the basis of spaces or “territories” that are considered to have specific traits.

This short digression on the naming of marginalised urban spaces highlights the importance of language in the construction of socio-spatial situations. In this respect, this process is just one example of what Dikeç brilliantly shows in his article connecting the injustice of spatiality and the spatiality of injustice, i.e. the socio-discursive construction of these urban spaces. This construction has notably been used, through spatial metaphor, to conceal “certain aspects (the structural dynamics, the persistence of inequalities, racism and discriminations, etc.) and to expose others (for example

violence, delinquency, insecurity, etc.)” (Dikeç, 2009, p. 3). Several studies and analyses support the author’s arguments on this issue. The problem of the discursive construction (and therefore the materialisation of the definitional social and spatial traits) of these urban spaces is not only that it diverts the spotlight away from the dynamics of discrimination/segregation. It also and above all lies in the reification of a marginality that assigns each person their place and decides whether or not those who are not supposed to speak will be able to participate in decisions that concern the (re)production of their conditions of existence. And they are not supposed to speak because they are touched by the twofold stigma mentioned above – the combination of social delegitimation and universalising stereotypes – which distances them (from the moment of the naming that quasi-automatically attributes definitional traits) from norms that are perceived as socially valuable and legitimate. This distance from the norm is notably embedded in the language used to construct an order of things, a process that relies on space as it is conceived and that becomes a social marker or attribute. What is sayable influences what is audible and who is visible, and subsequently affects whether or not people have the possibility of contesting this order of things and possessing radical power over the real conditions of existence. And this is indeed the central question at work through the discursive construction of spaces, the issue of:

“the social and political recognition of working-class districts. The discourse on social mixing turns working-class districts into pathological spaces. In this way, society shows the inhabitants of these districts an image of themselves that is of great symbolic violence. To be constantly described as residents of ‘problem neighbourhoods’ or ‘no-go areas’ does not help people to feel recognised: instead, they feel despised” (Charmes, 2009, p. 13).

Through language, an order of things is constructed, everyone is assigned a place, those who can speak and those who cannot, those with the legitimacy to do so and those without. In this respect, therefore, I would call districts described as priority urban policy zones marginalised urban spaces, where marginality refers to the social and

geographical distancing through language of a norm that is not – or not sufficiently – fulfilled, and ultimately to the distancing of the capacity to be a political interlocutor.

Recognition of the socio-linguistic dimension, therefore, should prompt us to question people's power of social transformation by questioning the place assigned to each person. In this investigation, the researcher's role should not be ignored, quite the contrary, because he or she contributes to the construction of the social world through the effects of their own research stance and theoretical positions. The places to question also include the researcher's own place and the place that he or she assigns to the the research subjects. Incorporating the dimension of language into the understanding of social relations thus prompts the researcher to question his or her stance and its "epistemopolitical" implications: "In employing this neologism, I am highlighting the fact that in the field of a critical sociology, no epistemological engagement is worth anything if it does not concomitantly adopt a radical democratic engagement" (Nicolas-Le Strat, 2018, p. 156). From a perspective of "scientific militancy" as Bulot calls it, this epistemological stance necessarily leads us to adopt a political theory (i.e. a societal model) that underpins our social theorisation. This is all the more true if the subject of our investigation is spatial justice.

"The contingency of the established order can be contested by opening up new discursive spaces organised around different terms, which could constitute the basis of new political formations capable of influencing the police. It is in this sense that we can employ the notion of "spatial justice" to criticise the systematic exclusion, the domination and oppression that are reproduced, among other things, through the policing order" (Dikeç, 2009, p. 7).

When Dikeç speaks of the policing order here, he is referring to Rancière's conceptualisation of it as "the activity that organises the gathering of human beings into a community and that orders society in terms of the possession of functions, places and titles" (Rancière, 2009, p. 114). The philosopher approaches policing in correlation with politics, in other words with conflict, with the activity that disturbs this policing order, with the crossing of the boundaries imposed by the police, which are

those of the sharing of the sensory (Rancière, 2009, p. 115-116). This reconfiguration of the sensory, which is at the very heart of the regime of politics as understood by Castoriadis and Rancière when they speak of “democracy”, is equivalent to “a redistribution of enunciative capacities” (Rancière, 2009, p. 609), which directly echoes Dikeç’s “new discursive spaces”. However, here the sociolinguistics approach enables us to understand that these famous enunciative capacities are not simply unequally shared tools that can be redistributed for everyone to use. There is an order of discourse as Foucault said and as Rancière or Dikeç say in their own way, and this order of discourse supports and is supported by institutions. “Language is not only material in that it exercises a material power over bodies [...], but in that it contributes to the materiality of institutions” (Lecerle, 2004, p. 98). In this sense, institutions are “collective arrangements of enunciation” (Lecerle, 2004, p. 157), they contribute to the attribution of an identity, of a place, of a part to play in the social arena. This does not mean that we are arguing that individuals are socially determined. On the contrary, the position of scientific militancy invites us to consider individuals not in terms of “illusion”, the view that they are trapped in their own domination from which only the researcher can extract them, but in terms of “realism”, strategies that individuals are or are not able to establish on the basis of the likelihood of their success (Boltanski, 2015, p. 192). Individuals negotiate with these constraints, position themselves with or in opposition to them, accommodate to them or not, but regardless, it is they who define the framework for what is thinkable, what is sayable, what is audible and what is visible. And it is indeed these institutions, these institutionalised models for the interpretation and evaluation of cultural values, which are central in the approach to injustice proposed by Fraser, and make it possible to think about “parity of participation”. While it is pertinent to my argument to be able to talk about the denial of recognition in terms of justice, it is equally so to be able to talk about justice in terms of “parity of participation”, i.e. “the fact that certain groups and individuals are denied the possibility of participating in social interaction on an equal footing with others” (Fraser, 2005, p. 50). This notion thus relates to the idea of being considered and acting as an equal in social interaction. Equality is no longer a goal to be achieved but becomes the

prerequisite of conflictual (and therefore democratic) practices. Like one of the “ignorant masters” posited by Rancière, who presupposes equality of intelligences, equality is thus no longer the end goal but the starting point.

This detour through political philosophy may seem a long way from our preoccupations with spatial justice. In the approach I propose, it is nevertheless fundamental. This paradigm shift is powerful in more ways than one, since it enables conflict to be re-examined as a democratic guarantee, in relation to a social interaction in which the primary medium is language. The individual researcher is also inevitably engaged in this struggle for an equality of recognition. Individual researchers participate through their social theorisations, in how they conduct their fieldwork, how they consider the people they interview (as in “illusion” or in “realism”), in the construction of the social world. The importance assigned to the socio-linguistic dimension thus moves us away from a conception of the researcher as someone who delivers theories and social critiques from an ivory tower. The topicality of this question is moreover confirmed by the frequency of debate around it in all disciplinary fields in recent years. Theory and praxis become inextricably linked here in the attempt to think about (or even act upon) the social complexity that interests us. For how can this equality, posited as a starting point, be understood if not in the light of the combined spatial dimensions (notably with respect to spatial segregations)⁴ and the discursive dimensions (notably with respect to discursive segregations)⁵, which I conceptualised as the process of marginalisation.

Conclusion

The spatial sociolinguistics approach prompts us to re(think) the importance of the language dimension in its radical dialectic with the social and spatial dimensions. In

4. As I understand it, spatial segregation arises out of a combined process: a social reality of distancing and a geographical separation (Grafmeyer, 1996, p. 209).

5. The process of discursive segregation relates to “the establishment of a boundary by putting space into words” (Lounici, 2006, p. 124) and therefore fundamentally to the socio-discursive construction of space itself.

the course of this article, I have tried to cover a number of implications of this standpoint from the perspective of research into the issues of spatial and social (in)justices. Succinctly, it could be said that language allows us to conceive the social world that surrounds us, that it is both the agent and (re)producer of social relations, and that it can (and must) enable us to think about the contradictions and precisely the injustices that concern us (despite ever more frequent use of discourse for purposes of conflict euphemisation and social appeasement).

Moreover, as I understand it, Fraser perfectly reveals the link between questions of spatial justice (even though she does not explicitly talk about it) and language, through the notion of parity of participation. According to her, at least two conditions must be met in order to aspire to this parity of participation. The first is called "objective" and relates to the material conditions of existence, which must "provide participants with independence and the possibility of self-expression" (Fraser, 2005, p. 54). The inequalities targeted here are specifically material and spatial, which hinder parity of participation. They are central in the case of marginalised urban spaces and also relate to issues of distributive justice. The second condition is called "intersubjective" and "assumes that the institutionalised models of interpretation and evaluation express equal respect for all participants and offer equality of opportunity in the quest for social esteem. This condition banishes cultural models that systematically denigrate certain categories of people and the qualities associated with them" (Fraser, 2005, p. 54). Two fundamental points need to be raised here. On the one hand, an approach through spatial sociolinguistics prompts us to think that, if these cultural models denigrate certain categories of people, they do so in particular through the denigration of certain urban spaces metonymically associated with those categories of people. Through the spatial metaphor and the signalling function it performs, language is able to demarcate spaces, to circumscribe them, to evaluate them, to order them hierarchically, to give them definitional traits, and to present this whole discursive construction as objective data through a process of naturalisation. On the other hand, a spatial sociolinguistics approach also emphasises the fact that these cultural models are institutionalised by

the language that em-bodies them, that gives them their materiality and, ultimately, the possibility precisely to act upon bodies.

In this sense, it is my conviction that the language dimension should be at the heart of research on spatial justice, epistemologically through what it implies in terms of the researcher's standpoint, theoretically through what it implies in terms of a radical dialectic between discourse, the social sphere and space, analytically through what it implies in terms of the analysis of the discursive constructions of spaces and social relations, and finally politically through what it implies in terms of the mediation of research and the researcher's co-action in a social change associated with advocacy of a social model. A sociolinguistic approach to spatial justice thus has numerous implications that revolve in particular around the notion of "parity of participation" (which also resonates, as I have shown, with other notions of political philosophy). It relates to the fact that we all have political knowledge, which radically infringes the separation between those able to speak (because they are legitimate or authorised, as Bourdieu would say) and those who cannot, between those who possess knowledge and those who do not. From the perspective of a "concrete utopia", to borrow from Lefebvre, the researcher must therefore start from this horizon of possibility in order to conceive a "spatial justice" in the light of a "socio-discursive justice", in other words conceive social spaces in correlation with discursive spaces, in such a way that everyone has the power to radically shape the processes of marginalisation that they experience.

To quote this article : Nicolas KÜHL, « Conceiving a "Spatial Justice" by the Yardstick of a "Socio-Discursive Justice" » ["Concevoir une 'justice spatiale' à l'aune d'une 'justice socio-discursive'"], *Justice spatiale/Spatial Justice*, 15, September 2020 (<http://www.jssj.org>).

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