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Marradi and Language

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Abstract

The methodological reflection made by Alberto Marradi is critical and innovative also thanks to his original attention towards gnoseology. In his two most recent volumes this attention is even more in-depth. According to Marradi, knowledge is the result of the interaction among three crucial "spheres": referents, thought and language. At least from the "linguistic turn" onwards, language has become a protagonist in many fields of knowledge; but this protagonism is understood in different ways and gives rise to controversies. The first part of this essay concerns the conception of language according to Marradi, with various references to the current debate. The second part illustrates the use of language by Marradi himself, both in his writing methods and in his activity as an educator. This gives rise to a completely original and fundamental teaching in the panorama of social sciences.

While the first two are object How The first part of this article illustrates and comments on Marradi's conception of language. The second part is dedicated to how Marradi himself uses language.

Keywords: language, thought, gnoseology, Marradi.

Scientific knowledge and the methods behind it represent a 'distillation' of more general cognitive processes: that is why Marradi has been writing about his methodological reflections starting from gnoseology for a long time now and in increasing depth. This approach is clearly visible in his main text (1984a), which inaugurates an innovative and critical perspective. Gnoseological studies consider the limits of both ordinary and scientific knowledge; gnoseology can therefore be critical, and hence frowned upon by those who do not like to highlight these limits (Marradi, 1996, p. 86).

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Other important milestones in Marradi's gnoseology can be found in an article (1994) on the nexus between thought, language and 'referents'[1], a gnoseological rereading of Weber (2007a) and in a new handbook that is more wide-ranging than the previous version (2007b). The two most recent volumes (2022, 2023) can therefore be considered the *summa* of a reflection process spanning four decades.

The second one of these two volumes is devoted to the instruments of knowledge (classifications, assertions, explanations), the first one concerns knowledge itself. In brief, Marradi considers knowledge to be the composition of three 'spheres', which he goes on to analyze in much greater depth than in his previous works: referents, when we perceive a cognitive object; thought, when we preserve and systematize that perception; and language, when we communicate to ourselves and others what we have perceived and thought.

Put this way, knowledge appears to be a sequence of phases, where each one constrains and univocally determines the others; whereas in reality, the relationships between the three spheres are more complex since they are 'non-rigid joints': meaning that each sphere filters, represents, and re-elaborates, or in short, interprets the others.

On other occasions (2024), I have reviewed and commented on both of Marradi's two most recent volumes; here I would like to delve more deeply into his view of what language is (par. 1) and how he uses it in his work as an author and lecturer (par. 2).

1. Language according to Marradi

Marradi understands language as a system of signs shared by a community, that is comprehensible within this community, tends to remain stable over time, and has the function of recording and communicating thoughts about any referent, that is, about one or more spheres of reality (2022, p. 92).

It seems to me that the language of animals also falls under this definition; and indeed Marradi has long shown sensitivity and attention to thoughts, emotions and communication methods of animals. The question is how similar is the way of thinking and communicating of animals to the one humans.

On the continuity/discontinuity between humans and animals, interpretations are contrasting; I could summarise them in two different positions (cf. Gensini, 2020). According to some, man became such thanks to

[1] According to Marradi, referents are the objects to which thought refers, those we perceive and how we perceive them. In this sense - it seems to me - there is a similarity with the Kantian concept of phenomenon (Montesperelli, 2024).

a rupture, a qualitative leap compared to all other animal species. This leap freed humans from their animal instincts and enabled them to acquire autonomous thought, helping them to maintaining a critical distance from their biological and social reality.

This human-animal difference was already supported by Aristotle, who added that it is also reflected in language: man has *logos*, i.e. rationality and language, which is extraordinarily creative, refined, elaborate and versatile; animals, on the other hand, have only the *phoné*, i.e. the voice, which merely enables them to communicate pleasant or unpleasant sensations.

This discontinuity that separates humans from animals is supported by a long tradition, ranging from that of the ancient Hebrews to to that of the present day[2], including contemporary sociology. According to Crespi (2005, pp. 4-7), for example, animals express elementary emotions, but are unable to give them a name or a symbol, nor can they reflect on their language, as humans are able to do.

On the contrary, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, man's qualitative leap over animals is the basis of all 'bourgeois thought', which they criticise (1947/2010, p. 263). Other scholars argue for the existence of a cerebral and linguistic continuity, derived from a common origin; man and other animals can be found along the same evolutionary line (devoid of fractures), in which all species vary only in their degree of complexity.

Marradi places himself in this second line of thought, in favour of a continuity between humans and other animals (see e.g. 2022, pp. 9, 77, 93, 107). However, in the text I am commenting on, he devotes particular attention to human language, especially the verbal one (see e.g. 2022, pp. 92-96). There are many forms of human language (mathematics, music, art, etc.),but verbal language is the only one that can be used to speak about the other languages; stated differently, words alone can compose a meta-language (cf. Marradi, 2022, p. 94).

In his reflection on verbal language, Marradi seems highly curious about the relationship between ordinary-natural languages and scientific-formal languages. Also on this matter, views diverge: Positivism, neo-positivism, and a part of analytical philosophy believe that these are two separate planes; and in this way they think they are preserving the intangibility, the objectivity, the 'purity' of science. In my opinion, this pretense of purity is yet another variant

[2] Also part of this tradition are medieval philosophy, followed by Kierkegaard, today Western anthropology, behaviourism, the philosophers Scheler, Heidegger, Cassirer and the linguist Chomsky. On the opposite side - that which upholds human-animal continuity- we find, for example, Lucretius, Porphyry, Montaigne, Descartes, much later Gehlen, today the linguist Benveniste, right up to contemporary ethology.

of the illusory and centuries-old search for an ideal, perfect, logical, universal language, uncontaminated by ordinary language (Eco, 1993).

It seems to me that equating the brain with a computer and human language with computer language, or the language of artificial intelligence, is yet another variant of the search for a 'perfect language'.

Yet, according to Marradi, the language of the computer or artificial intelligence is far from perfect: neither go beyond the syntactic level of calculating predicates and therefore do not access argumentative design and inferential levels (Marradi, 2022, pp. 118, 142).

Husserl, Gadamer, Austin and others criticise any presumed perfection, or even the existence of a separation between scientific and ordinary language, a hypothetical division capable of avoiding contamination that is deemed harmful. Marradi should also be mentioned among the critics of this separation: "Formal languages are not fully autonomous, as some of their devotees sometimes seem to think, from natural languages" (2022, p. 117). Nor are formal languages more precise than ordinary, natural languages. In fact, after having empirically surveyed the use of so many scientific terms for decades, Marradi's conclusions are explicit: "I believe that the thesis (...) of a sharp break between ordinary and scientific language is one of those self-gratifying theses that scientists subscribe to without ever bothering to subject them to empirical scrutiny" (1996, p. 71; cf. 1987).

In the book that I am commenting on, Marradi deals with language in general, with the limits and potential of every language, which, despite being necessary, is always reductive. This ambivalence between limits and necessities is typical of every symbolic form. Ultimately, the ambivalence of language lies in the continuous, reciprocal referral between the determinate and the indeterminate, "between the finite character of saying and the infinite possibility of saying that (...) is manifested in the capacity of language's continuous un-saying" (Crespi, 2005, p. 140; italics by the author; cf. Marradi, 2022, pp. 99, 152, 157).

This infinite possibility of saying and un-saying, this possibility of a transformation of language that is never frozen, recalls the innovative power of language. I'm pretty sure that this creative energy is narrated in the mythologies of many peoples. For example, in Genesis, it is only when Yahweh gives a name to each living thing that creation is fully realised. The prologue of the Gospel of John reveals that everything stems from communication: 'In the beginning was the Word (*logos*)', that is, at the origin - not only chronological but ontological - there is something that is word, thought and communication.

Marradi recognises the importance of language, without reducing it exclusively to its instrumental role, to a means of communication[2]. Thus, at first glance, it would seem that he adheres to the 'linguistic turn', the greatest exponents of which are above all Wittgenstein and Heidegger[3]. For them, the limits of language coincide with the limits of our world: for Wittgenstein this happens because language and the world have the same logical form; for Heidegger because language pre-exists and orients each individual. But Heidegger further accentuates the strategic action of language: in fact, he arrives almost at a personification of language, as if it were more of a protagonist than human beings (cf. Montesperelli, 2017a).

Marradi's adherence to the linguistic turn is only partial. On the one hand, he shares the conviction that language is crucial and not just a tool for communication; moreover, he is close to the pragmatist tendency of the 'turn', according to which knowledge needs communicative interactions between subjects. But, on the other hand, he rejects the more radical, determinist positions, according to which reality in its entirety is constructed, derived from language or is the equivalent of language itself.

In fact, determinist orientations from various origins coexist within the 'linguistic turn'. To give an example, for some Marxists the social structure determines and forms language; on the other hand, according to behaviourists, language does not determine but is itself determined, i.e. it is formed, constructed by human behaviour. In contrast, the philosophy of language (especially in Anglo-Saxon philosophy) maintains that language shapes thought. Marradi also places Gadamer in the latter type of determinism, (see e.g. Marradi, 1994, p. 169), although - I would argue - only certain traits of his philosophy seem determinist (refer to Montesperelli, 2017b).

For many other traits, contemporary hermeneutics cannot fall into determinism, as it assumes that interpretation derives from an interpreter; but it also outlines a tension, a certain irreconcilability between the interpreting subject and language. Schleiermacher already linked hermeneutics to language, to the point of concluding that there cannot be one without the other; but he then added that the subject-language relationship is always dialectical. More recently, Gadamer confirms the dialectical nature of our relationship with

[2] In this sense, Marradi is distant from analytic philosophy, which considers language primarily as an instrument of thought.

[3] To outline briefly, the 'linguistic turn' is a trend that places language at the centre of every gnoseological, epistemological and cultural phenomenon; and which dates back to Schleiermacher, Romanticism and then historicism; it then became more diffused towards the middle of the 20th century.

language: 'we are immersed in language, but we are not imprisoned by it' (1967/1973, p. 89).

Marradi takes a similar position: language is not entirely predominant, but it is nonetheless crucial for many reasons, which he illustrates at length and which I will summarise in three fundamental functions: mediation, communication and complementarity with thought.

To say that language performs a mediating function means that it is a medium, standing in the middle, connecting the mind to the world (and vice versa). In this regard, Heidegger gives an example (taken from his own daily life in the Black Forest): "If we go to the fountain, if we pass through a forest, we always pass through the word 'fountain' and the word 'forest', even if we do not utter these words and do not refer to anything linguistic" (1950/1968, p. 287). In other words, we can perceive a referent through language (cf. Gadamer, 1960/1983, p. 515). However, the relationship between the referent and the language is in turn mediated by thought (Marradi, 2022, pp. 142-143).

In short, it seems to me that Marradi outlines an interaction between the three 'spheres', in which each one is a condition of the other two. This 'interactionist' view entails at least a couple of important consequences. The first: that language is not a closed system, as it was considered by some structuralist theories; but it is open thanks to the joints it possesses that connect it to thought and external reality. Ricoeur (1986) also insists on this openness of language.

The second: given that - as I mentioned earlier - each sphere mediates the relationship between the other two, these reciprocal mediations negate the possibility of an objective, integral, transparent, 'photographic' knowledge of the referents (cf. Marradi, 2022, p. 123). Once again Marradi's critical, anti-objectivist, anti-positivist vision resurfaces.

Let us now turn to the communicative function of language. Marradi is an Enlightenment thinker[4], or rather a neo-enlightenment thinker. Thus, among all the various forms of communication, he cannot fail to privilege language as argumentation; and also as a confrontation between different views, an exchange that tends to be arbitrated by reason (see e.g. Marradi, 2022, p. 93); on these aspects I find considerable consonance with the neo-Enlightenment of Habermas and his 'communicative reason'.

However, consonances are also found in other schools of thought, including that of contemporary hermeneutics, which considers language as a

[4] On Marradi's 'enlightenment' - not referring to the particular historical movement, but in general - I refer to Montesperelli (2024).

fundamental element of the pre-understanding[5] that makes all understanding possible. Since language as pre-understanding constitutes a starting condition shared by all, this sharing, this equal co-participation means that the deeper, more essential nature of language is dialogical. Wittgenstein stated something similar when he wrote that a language spoken by only one person would be meaningless, non-existent (cf. Marradi, 2022, p. 104).

This is not to say that language is only projected towards others, for it is also very important in the subject's relationship to itself. For example, according to Schleiermacher, the use of the pronoun 'I' facilitates the infant's acquisition of full self-awareness. Similarly, language helps each subject to define themselves as a corporeal individual: as Lacan writes, 'The body rejoices in the real through language' (quoted in Crespi, 2005, p.9).

As for the connection between thought and language, a beautiful expression by Plato comes to mind, when he defines thought as the soul that speaks to itself (Sophist, 263e); thus inner thought needs speech. And to remain with the Greek origins of our civilisation, Gadamer adds that the neuter gender in Greek nouns facilitated the formation of abstract concepts, which are so important in thought (1960/1983, p. 447; 1993, pp. 18-19). In addition, consider the differences between cultures based on orality and cultures based on writing (see e.g. Ong, 1982; Ricoeur, 1986)[6].

According to Marradi, language is not always indispensable to thought, but it can nevertheless help to organise it, to anchor it, limiting its fluidity and its indeterminacy (2022, pp.101-106): for example, when we classify, we define; and in order to define, the words that fix classes are also important (Marradi, 2023, pp. 37-68).

Aristotle, in contrast to his teacher Plato, argued for the conventional nature of language. Marradi echoes this thesis when he affirm that the origin of language is historical, also linked to usage (2022, pp. 98-99; cf. Wittgenstein, 1958). Thus this conventional and historical character also allows for a distorted, 'ideological' use of language itself.

It does not seem to me that Marradi often uses the term 'ideology', least of all in the traditional Marxist sense. However, he repeatedly denounces the existence of 'protective belts' that aim to legitimise the supposed scientific

[5] According to hermeneutic phenomenology, from the very beginning of one's life each individual finds himself within a world already given, that is, within a network of relationships (including linguistic ones) that precedes any conscious cognitive activity on the part of that individual.

[6] In our culture, 'not only everything we see, but our very eyes are saturated with written language. Through the centuries, the habit of reading has transformed Homo Sapiens into Homo Legens' (Calvino, 2002, p. 119).

nature of the researcher. These 'belts' are smokescreens putted up around linguistic expedients: vague statements, vague words, 'stretched' meanings, i.e. unduly extended, to make the researcher's statements ambiguous, polysemous, and thus to keep them from any criticism; in other cases, the use of pre-assertions (concepts and terms) allude to an objectivist conception of knowledge and this too is a means for the researcher to boast of their own 'scientific' objectivity (Marradi, 1984b, pp. 157-164; 1990, pp. 74-76).

The presence of these "belts" confirms how important words are for concealing, distorting and misleading. Concerning this masking function of language, I seem to notice a convergence between Alberto Marradi and Umberto Eco. Echoing Propp's masterpiece, Eco even talks about a "morphology of the lie", that is, narrative schemes, persuasive techniques, clichés, "linguistic taboos" and "magic words" that serve to protect and mislead. Rather than a belt, Eco talks about a vicious circle between facts and words: facts matter because, since they exist, they have been designated with certain words; and, since words function in their connotative function, what remains as yet to be proven is accepted as already proven (Eco, 2023, pp. 32-35).

At times – Eco adds – we are aware of these mechanisms; but we prefer not to bring them to light, instead choosing to keep quiet about them, I would say out of fear, mental laziness, conformism, and so on.

2. Marradi's language

As we have seen, among the many important functions performed by language, Marradi focuses on that of anchoring, organizing and systematizing thought. Hence his attention to sober, meaningful and effective language. But this is also where his criticism of what he considers the current cultural and therefore linguistic degradation of the country originates.

These days, every now and then complaints arise as to the current use of language: the "popularization" of the lexicon, the indifference towards important grammatical and syntactic rules, the lexical and thematic simplification, the informality of the language, etc. Furthermore, the almost complete disappearance of moods (especially the subjunctive and conditional forms) and of past tenses ends up squeezing thinking into the present, without projecting it towards the future.

Simplifying language, spelling, grammar, style, and rhetoric means reducing creativity, inventiveness and critical spirit. Some contemporary writers, starting with Orwell, confirm this: in their fictional stories, totalitarian regimes aim to reduce the number and meaning of words, because this limits thought itself. Furthermore, the impoverishment of the vocabulary and consequently of the

means to express one's emotions instills a sense of anguish, thus increasing the propensity to aggressiveness.

When we talk about changes in language, it is generally young people who are the subject of the feedback, also because empirical detection of changes is easier in schools or universities. I remember a sweeping and detailed complaint published by the great architect and urban planner Leonardo Benevolo. Based on the textual analysis of 3,000 essays written by university students, the conclusion drawn was unequivocal: students are relegated to "a semi-illiterate state that cannot be solved for any specific teaching" (1979, p. 2).

The relationship between language, culture and ideology (the latter understood in the sense of Marxian origin) was already evident at that time. In the Seventies, a certain sensation was caused, especially among sociologists, by a book edited by Marzio Barbagli, entitled "School, power and ideology" (1972), which quickly became a classic. In the book, various scholars - including Bourdieu and Ővermann - addressed the then "cultural deprivation", connecting it with language and education.

Were I to consider my own, necessarily partial experience, I would say that the situation of many young people (and nowadays of many adults) has shown no improvement compared to those years; in fact, the situation has perhaps deteriorated. In brief, the most significant lacks that I have noticed - which many colleagues also confirm - are the following: serious lexical, grammatical and syntactic deficiencies in the use of standard Italian; defects in argumentative logic; difficulty in identifying the main themes, their logical sequence and contradictions between one's statements; stereotyped formulas, apodictic declarations, clichés, expressions that are semantically poor, descriptive and generally show very little interpretative effort.

In my opinion, a further sign of the "barbarisation of language" is represented by the spread of Anglicisms or other "exoticisms": a term linguists define the use of foreign words or phrases when as Italians we address only other Italians. A similar, and perhaps even more striking, xenophilia concerns the English pronunciation of Latin words: for example, /d□u:njᵊ/ for junior and /si:nioᵊ/ for senior. It is all the more reprehensible to use English making sometimes comical mistakes, as has happened to a number of politicians and high officials.

In reality, standard Italian includes very few English terms. According to a recent census by the Accademia della Crusca, there are only 5,850 headwords out of a total of 328,387, including composite words (e.g. flat-iron). Therefore, the English terms included in our vocabulary make up just 1.7%. Yet university texts and lectures, speeches in conferences and seminars, political documents, administrative documents and even advertising spots are full of Anglicisms, despite the fact that both the authors and the audience are Italian.

At times we justify ourselves in the name of the greater brevity of English terms compared to the Italianequivalent; yet this brevity is not always real[7]. My impression of so much exoticism is that often the reasons are to be found elsewhere: self-gratification, self-legitimation, snobbery, ciceronism, etc. These are adulterations of language that make it more opaque.

If we think back to the "Sapir-Whorf hypothesis", on the close relationship between language and thought, we can start to believe that the criticism of exoticisms is not necessarily dictated by an antiquated purism. I should add that I have never read or heard Marradi fall into "exotic" inelegance, (see Marradi, 1997, par. 5.2), despite the fact that he knows various foreign languages well.

He and many other scholars attribute the regression of our language to traditional and new media, advertising, political communication, and inadequacies in schools and universities[8]. It is possible, however, that the roots of the problem date back prior to the last fifty years. I am referring to an intense debate, triggered by an article by Pasolini in the Italian newspaper Il Giorno, summarized in the title "La questione della lingua italiana" (the question of the Italian language) and continued with the contributions of many prominent personalities, including De Mauro, Arbasino, Fortini, and Calvino.

According to Pasolini, a national language has never truly existed in Italy. This lack has made us linguistically fragile, vulnerable to an ongoing "homologation", which has now distorted the thoughts of Italians as much as their language. The language of technology has descended from the north towards the centre-south; the language of bureaucracy has come up from the south. The mixture these two languages has been propagated, imposed, and made hegemonic by many different agents: not only the media, the political system, public institutions, but also schools and universities.

In particular, the university is no longer a place of creative, innovative thought and language; it has been homologated into a dull, impoverished, routine, largely bureaucratic and technocratic language (perhaps, this is a prophecy about the future advent of Anvur[9], who knows?).

Calvino's analyzes are similar: the mixing of technology and bureaucracy in the Italian language has made it evanescent, confused, elusive, and difficult to

[7] For example, our Anglicism "social" would be incomprehensible to English speakers, since the longer expression "social network" is more generally used (Gheno, 2019, pp. 61-62). If it were simply a question of the brevity of terms, we could just as well use the dialects of the central-south of Italy, which abound in truncated words.

[8] The university is burdened by an entire system governed almost entirely by quantitative criteria; hence, in my opinion the quality of thought and language does not seem to be encouraged.

[9] In Italian: Agenzia nazionale di valutazione del sistema universitario e della ricerca.

understand, to such an extent that we can now talk about an "anti-language" - i.e. a language that is no longer a language because it is almost silent.

Whoever reduced the language to incommunicability is not some external, distant, superior, overarching power. But it is a widespread, rampant "semantic terror"; it is the fear of exposing oneself, clarifying, being meaningful, calling things by their name. In short, anti-language is the result of self-censorship. Personally, I would add that self-censorship is always a form of repression, whether direct or indirect, by some power.

Using a metaphor that later became commonplace, Calvino argued that the anti-language spread like the plague, with the speed of an epidemic: "Italian is becoming an increasingly abstract, artificial, ambiguous language; the simplest things are never said directly, concrete nouns are used increasingly rarely. This epidemic first hit politicians, bureaucrats, intellectuals, then it became generalized, as it spread to ever larger masses of political and intellectual consciousness" (2002, p. 120).In his splendid "American Lessons", in particular the letter dedicated to exactitude, Calvino adds: due to the action of this "plague", Italian has lost its cognitive strength and immediacy, "like an automatism that tends to level out all expression to the most generic, anonymous, abstract formulas, to dilute the meanings, to blunt the edge of expressiveness, to extinguish the spark that shoots out from the collision of words with new circumstances" (1993, p. 66). In short, a muffled, dull, smoky, inconsistent language that puts the brain to sleep, with serious political and cultural consequences.

If we were to follow these roots to the deepest levels, we could find Heidegger and his analyzes of the developments of Western thought and language up to the present day: summarizing drastically, the history of an entire, very lengthy era of Western thought has resulted today in the advent of the current technological society, which is profoundly nihilistic. In fact - Heidegger continues - this society of ours is not only centered on technology, but is dominated by the fascination for the technological, which is an unfounded fascination, heading towards nothingness. This nihilism spills over into language, which expresses only chatter, emptiness, and nothingness.

Luckily for us, Calvino's "plague" does have antibodies; and the nihilism of language is contrasted by those who attempt to carefully reattribute meaning to words. In this regard, Don Lorenzo Milani comes to mind, in particular his teaching focused on language, including the sobriety of language as a means to achieve clarity of thought. A passage from the Letter to a Teacher explains the rules to be followed: "Have something important to say that is useful to many. Know who you are writing to. Collect everything you need. Find a logic on which to order it. Eliminate any unnecessary words. Eliminate every word we don't use when speaking. Don't set yourself time limits" (Milani, 1967, p. 20).

For Don Milani what is at stake is not the pleasure of the text, but the relationship between language-education-emancipation. Paulo Freire's assumptions are similar: acquiring mastery of language corresponds to the ability to master one's own reality; knowing how to read and write means analyzing reality and rewriting it, thus transforming it.

Subsequently, in 1975, Tullio De Mauro and a group of his collaborators, who were inspired by Don Milani's teachings and who gathered together under the name of "Group for Intervention and Study in the Field of Linguistic Education" (in Italian, GISCEL), published 10 important theses in which they argued that the teaching of language constituted the cornerstone of a renewed and democratic didactic approach.

Paul Grice (1975) also formulates some important maxims, again dictated by concerns that are not merely aesthetic: say neither too little nor too much; talk about things you are convinced of, so your communication will be more effective; be relevant, don't ramble; be clear. Marradi's prose gives us a clear example of how to apply these criteria. It seems to me that the relationship between Marradi and language is analogous - albeit in another field - to the phenomenological and alienating approach that Calvino suggested (and applied) regarding literary writing: "breaking the screen of words and concepts and seeing the world as if it were presenting itself to our gaze for the first time (...), casting a gaze on the landscape free from any cultural precedent (...), shattering everything we see into minimal elements, recomposing them into significant segments, discovering regularities, differences, recurrences, singularities, substitutions, redundancies (...), fixing the attention on any object, the most banal and familiar, describing it meticulously as if it were the newest and most interesting thing in the universe" (2002, pp. 121-122).

Marradi's alienating approach, his breaking away from cultural precedents, his questioning gaze directed at every aspect that is commonly taken for granted, are criteria that concern above all his way of analysing thought and language. Dissecting a sentence or even a single word, replacing them or recomposing them in a different way to release new or more precise meanings; this is the phenomenological goal that Marradi applies to the use of language[10].

This writing method leads him to pay great attention to his texts: despite demonstrating rigor and fluency in his composition, I have often seen him correct a piece of his writing several times, until he arrives at the final version. One highly significant example of this self-correction is found in the copy of

[10] Etymological analysis, which often dates back to Greek origin, is also part of the criteria in the approach adopted by Marradi: it is a way of confirming the connection between word and thought, two concepts which in fact are emblematically united in the Greek term *logos*.

the book entitled "Concepts and Methods", which he later corrected to "Concepts and Method", in the singular (1984a). This is not the only adjustment, even though it is an important one. There are others, introduced about ten years after the first edition[11]; these amendments – handwritten in pencil on the printed text – are a sign both of his precision, of which I spoke above, and of the development of his thought. In my opinion it is possible to identify four different types of changes that Marradi makes to the original text. I have summarized these changes below, dividing them into the disciplinary area to which they belong:

a) Gnoseology: the distinction and interaction between thought and language (an anticipation of the development of his subsequent epistemological reflections); the centrality of the subject in the creation of statements, indicators and operational definitions; the problematic nature of the concept of objective knowledge;

b) Methodology: differences between the natural and social sciences (e.g. differences between the concept of universe and that of population); differences between 'empirical detection' and 'measurement', or between 'information' and 'data', or between 'properties' and 'variables'; the relationship between social sciences and philosophy;

c) Logic: to avoid category errors, distinction between logical categories: 'concepts' distinguished from 'terms'; 'statements' distinguished from 'propositions'; 'abstraction' clearly distinguished from 'generalities'; 'terminology' (set of terms) distinct from the singular 'term';

d) Rhetoric (understood as the art of writing[12]): although at times the criteria of expository elegance seem to emerge, three other characteristics also prevail: parsimony in the use of terms; attention to maximum comprehensibility; and, always in the name of clarity, the compelling continuity in every passage from one sentence to another.

Marradi's rhetoric - see point d) - aims towards a Tacitician rather than Ciceronian prose, a comparison proposed several times by Marradi himself; in

[11] I thank Alberto Marradi, who authorized me to summarize the corrections he made. For the possibility of analyzing them, I thank Gabriella Punziano, who lent me the corrected copy of the book.

[12] The various phases with which a speech should be developed are part of rhetoric and which, according to the ancient philosophers, were above all the *inventio* (the presentation of the arguments), the *dispositio* (the order of the arguments), the *elocutio* (the ideas expressed on the basis to a specific and accurate combination of words). To this should be added dialectics, that is, the illustration of different positions, before reaching conclusions. All of Marradi's texts, including his latest two books (2022, 2023) include these elements.

short, not disordered, redundant, baroque Italian verbosity, since this involuted style would encourage confused, twisted, and fallacious thought[13].The great care that Marradi dedicates to the drafting of his own writings is the same care with which he corrects texts submitted to him by others, paying careful attention not only to the substantive, methodological, and epistemological meanings, but also to vocabulary, morphology and syntax. I believe he has corrected hundreds of texts written by others (students, pupils, colleagues). This vast experience has enabled him to record the linguistic changes that have taken place over several decades.

Having one's own text corrected by Marradi - and perhaps asking for an explanation of the corrections made by him - becomes a truly formative experience. If we take up the ancient distinction between hÝbris and pietas - i.e. between arrogance and concern for one's neighbour - those corrections, though severe, are the fruit of an attitude of pietas[14]. It is precisely this generous passion for the education of others that has meant that many, including those who have now reached retirement age, still recognise themselves as his pupils; and continue to feel a deep sense of gratitude to him.

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[13] A further example of how much care for concepts, language and definitions converge in Marradi can be found in a large part of his book on the technique of 'stories' (2005, pp. 63-174). The focus on definitions can also be seen in his efforts in the drafting of the glossary for the Human Sciences Methodology Series, edited by FrancoAngeli.

[14] Marradi's sensibility, aimed at the correct use of language, is also made explicit in one of his publications entitled significantly: 'Let us return to writing (and speaking) in Italian' (1997, see especially section 5.2).

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