

## SYNTAX, SPEECH AND RELATIVES: AND “SEMANTICS” EXUDE PASSIONS<sup>1</sup>

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“There can be no discourse without language, which is equivalent, in a way, to saying that there can be no Discourse Analysis without a syntactic theory” (Possenti, 1999, p. 211).

- **ABSTRACT:** Anchored in the argument that, since the School of Port Royal, there has been a pendular circularity between Logic and Rhetoric, based respectively on a universal theory of ideas or on individualistic subjectivism, Michel Pêcheux (1982) uses relative clauses as a linguistic phenomenon to support the development of a materialist theory of discourse based on Linguistics and Historical Materialism above all. For the author, it is not always possible to define whether a relative clause is appositive or determinative, since they carry an ambiguity that can only be equated in the light of the historical conditions related to their appearance. This study focuses on the ambiguous nature of certain relative clauses, using as data cases collected by postgraduate students attending a course on ‘Discourse Theory’ and which touch on controversial social issues, because, at the very limit, they are intended to establish the “best” forms of personal action.
- **KEYWORDS:** syntax; semantics; discourse; relative clauses; ideology; ambiguity.

### Introduction

In *Language, semantics and ideology: stating the obvious* (1982), especially in Part 1, “Linguistics, Logic and Philosophy of Language”, in Section 1, “A glance at the historical development of the relationship between ‘theory of knowledge’ and rhetoric in regard to the problem of determination”, and in Section 2, “Metaphysical

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realism and logical empiricism: two forms of regressive exploitation of the sciences by idealism”, Pêcheux problematizes the fact that, from Aristotelian philosophy to Semantics, there is a recurrent circularity that crosses the thread of “[...] *analytics* (the rules of demonstrative reasoning which give access to knowledge) and that of *rhetoric* (the art enabling one to convince by the use of the verisimilitudinous)” (p. 40).

On the one hand, there would be the theory of knowledge, logic and metaphysical realism, whose goal would be the discovery of essential truths (universal theory of ideas), disembodied from history and temporal and ideological contingencies. On the other hand, rhetoric and logical empiricism would appear, which, through the drift between Leibniz’s “truths of fact”, Kant’s “analytic judgements”, Frege’s “inessential”, Husserl’s “psychological experience”, Saussure’s “speech” and Chomsky’s “performance”, would have led to the thesis of creative subjectivity, freeing the subject from the bonds that coerce him. While in the first case, there would be a crystallized immobility and language would be the covering of truth, in the second, the conscious subject would have control over language and would make it bend to his intentions.

Throughout the book, Pêcheux uses the case of relative clauses (appositive and determinative) to support the thesis of the strange ballet that tends, in a polarized way, towards logic and abstraction or towards empiricism and subjectivity, obliterating scientific disciplines and the fact that “the ‘external’ material world exists (real object, concrete-real)” (p. 74) and that “objective knowledge is independent of the subject” (p. 74). In between these two hypotheses, for the author, there are relative cases that do not allow us to positively decide which pole they belong to, given the ambiguity that constitutes them.

The philosopher deals with this ambiguity in detail in the study “Language, ‘Languages’, Discourse: Discursive Effects Linked to the Functioning of Relatives in French” (2011 [1981]), in which, based on the cases of “Circles that are closed figures have a calculable surface” and “Numbers that are divisible by another number are not prime”, he argues that it is not always possible to discern whether the property is attributed to the whole or to the part, that is: whether what we have is the “evocation of a specific property” or “a division in the whole (...) . a boundary” (2011 [1981], p. 132). According to the author, “these very simple things become complicated, however, as soon as we vary the domain of the examples” (p. 133). This study is based on the observation of the domain in which there is an ambiguous fluctuation regarding insertion in one pole or another (or neither), understanding, with Possenti (1999, p. 214) that there is no “neutral semantics, that is, the imposition that all speakers of the same language are subject to the same semantic restrictions”.

Regarding the statements selected for this study, it should be noted that they were collected by postgraduate students when, during the course “Discourse Theory”, they were asked to find or produce relative statements that would be used to verify the author’s postulates after reading the aforementioned parts of Pêcheux’s work. During the weekly classes, a significant corpus was obtained, either from third parties or from cases produced by the students. In this study, the cases were chosen because, in view of

the ambiguity (appositive/determinative) pointed out by Pêcheux, it is possible to verify that the relative clauses are not only a linguistic phenomenon that sometimes escapes abstract logic or subjective empiricism, but have their roots in historical contingencies, conveying political, moral and religious rules that intertwine to reinforce ideological shackles, which means, for Possenti (1999, p. 214) that “discursive restrictions” weigh on syntax.

### **Illustrative cases: complete family vs. innocent children...**

In order to get closer to the object of study, namely the determination of political, moral and religious discourses on relative clauses, we revisit the event in which, during the celebration of “Family Day”, the priest invited members of the community and their families to Sunday Mass in order to give his homily; it should be borne in mind that the guests belonged to different family compositions. After explaining to those present what he was celebrating, the preacher asked the families to stand and introduced them, highlighting their components: father and daughter, mother and children, grandparents and grandchildren, and so on. Something unusual happened, given the church’s resistance to certain changes: an effect of novelty and surprise hung in the air.

However, the politically correct discourse that gave shelter to diversity faded when the priest said of a family: “And here we have a complete family, with a father, mother and children”. The discourse that sought to open up to different family constitutions fell apart under the allegation that, in one case (and not the others), the family would be “complete”, implying that the others would not be; and, therefore, not-families. Although for the majority of those present everything seemed normal, the restlessness of some was visible, the exchange of controversial glances from others and the whispers of many others. The preaching that began with the premise of openness to breaking with the crystallized model collapsed, considering the causal link created between the family being “complete” by having a “father, mother and children” and implying the mismatch of the others in the face of the precepts disseminated and defended by a premise, above all, religious, in this case; but also, moral and political.

There are also two issues to consider: a) the “complete” family was made up of a married couple and a couple of children, the eldest a boy, which meets the model advocated by a certain discourse; b) the listing made by the preacher, in hierarchical terms, establishes, via enunciation, a gradation of values that gives primacy to the man and puts the woman in second place, leaving the children to depend on their parents. It must be stressed this is not a matter of disapproving of the priest’s failure in his goodwill to put himself in a position of acceptance and warmth, but of realizing that the discourse determines the subject and, at the limit, prevents him from distancing himself from the discursive practice that determines him, via appositive adjectivation in this case, imbricating religious precepts, moral dictates and modes of relationship between men under conservative hierarchies and geometries.

On another occasion, the same priest, upon addressing education at home, said “children amuse us, because they are naïve and innocent”, which could be paraphrased as “children, who are naïve and innocent, amuse us”, transforming it into an appositive adjective, which, in theory, would address something intrinsic to children, given that they are carriers of naivety and innocence and the amusement produced would be due to an immature simplicity. In this case, there is a heterogeneous mixture of religion, morality and politics, since the event, in addition to man’s relationship with the divine, establishes a way for parents to deal with their children, acting in the supposedly appropriate way to treat them.

In a later conversation with a psychologist, when asked if children are naïve and innocent, the answer was laconic: “some do”, whose restrictive interpretation overlaps with the explanatory one, given that that statement, if uttered by this professional, would occur in the form “children who are naïve and innocent amuse us”, with the reading taking “children who are naïve and innocent” (only them) as a block made up of a single syntagma, sectioning the world of children into children of two categories: naïve and innocent and clever and manipulative, with other guidelines for the moral and political world. The hypothesis we want to establish is that the discourses are not based on the same premises and divide the world in different ways according to their dictates; this is the ambiguity that Pêcheux addresses and which provides definitive access to the object of study of this work.

### **Explanatory/Appositive Relative Clauses: notes**

With regard to relative appositives, it is assumed that they refer to universal ideas that, despite historical and ideological contingencies, touch the essence of the individual, reaching intrinsic properties that must be present or the being will fade away. According to Pêcheux (1982, p. 13), in the case of explanatory/positive adjectives, if, in Aristotelian terms, “a certain accident is linked by an essential connection to a substance, the substance cannot continue to exist if the accident in question is lacking”. In other words, an explanatory adjective attributes to the being (to the substance) an intrinsic property or accident that belongs to it by means of a constitutive and natural relationship.

In “the tiger, which is a feline, has a body covered with fur”, “the sun, which is a star, illuminates the earth”, “the square, which has angles and vertices, is a geometric figure”, and “the peacock, which is a bird, has feathers and a beak”, the relative clauses introduced by the relative “which” are appositive because they touch the essence of the being, recovering a property or accident without which the substance itself would disappear or become something else. We are therefore in the presence of what is universal and ahistorical, since every tiger is a feline, the sun is a star, the square has angles and vertices, and the peacock is a bird, properties that cannot be taken away, otherwise the beings in question will disappear; in other words, they refer to attributes

that cannot be absent without destroying the being: the tiger, the sun, the peacock and the square cannot not be a feline, a star, a bird, and not have angles and vertices, respectively, since these are properties that constitute them and belong to their nature.

Based on a logic that transcends time, space and person, in other words, on conjunctive dictates, a relative appositive touches on what is the real of being, on “points of impossibility determining what cannot be thus. The real is (the) impossibility... that things could be otherwise)” (Pêcheux, 1988, p. 637) and, structurally, it can be converted by a relation of causality with respect to the main clause in which it fits; that is, because it is a feline, the tiger has its body covered with fur; because it is a star (it has its own light), the sun illuminates the earth; because it has angles and vertices, the square is a geometric figure; and because it is a bird, the peacock has feathers and a beak. By means of the relative clauses, the subjects enter the sets in which they are contained, forming part of a logical and deductive whole.

The theory of knowledge that underpins this mode of prediction, anchored in logic as a working method, postulates the thesis that cognition, that is, understanding (the discovery of the “set of essential attributes” (Pêcheux, 1982, p. 21)), is achieved to the extent that historical and/or ideological biases are overcome, reaching the essence of beings and the real that constitutes them and subjects them to inexorable laws. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the subtitle of Pêcheux’s *Language, semantics and ideology* is “stating the obvious”, since to affirm that the tiger is a feline, the sun is a star, the square has angles and vertices, and the peacock is a bird is to affirm the obvious; however, it could be argued that the obvious is not always the case (denialism is the order of the day and fake news is commonplace).

Consider, however, the case commented on by Pêcheux: the relative clause, in “Men who are rational are free”, seems to induce an appositive/explanatory reading, since rationality would be intrinsic to everyone who is said to be a ‘man’. Or: given all men, it would be true that they possess reason and, consequently, freedom. Or: the freedom of every man would be due to the fact that he is rational. In terms of standard written language, the relative clause “who are rational” should be placed between commas, because it would recover, as a return of the unthought in thought, an evident knowledge that supports the articulation of the causality between the property and its corollary: men are (it is obvious) rational (as everyone knows) and are therefore free, that is, freedom has to do with the rationality that accompanies them and cannot be denied under penalty of mutilating/destroying the nature of the being.

For now, however, it is enough to recall the times when certain groups of men were persecuted, killed, enslaved, and exterminated because, unlike the others, they were not men and therefore could not be free and belonged to others who were freer because they bore the mark of reason. Some men are endowed with reason and others lack it, which would explain why some are men (or more men) and others are not, and therefore cannot enjoy the freedom guaranteed to others. In this case, there is a drift from a spontaneously explanatory reading to a determinative/restrictive one, since only some would be endowed with reason and enjoy the right to freedom. The

case shuffles the decision as to whether to be included in one of the classifications, showing that “for each subject, in principle, insofar as it occupies one or another position (now, ideological, discursive) (a certain) possibility is not realized (Possenti, 1999, p. 213).

### **Restrictive/Determinative Relative Clauses: notes**

The restrictive or determinative relative clauses, on the other hand, refer to the attachment of a property that does not refer to the whole, but isolates a certain individual or group from a collectivity, due to the fact that, without losing the general traits that make them part of a whole, they have properties that distinguish them from others. The fitting of the relative clause, rather than capturing the whole by means of essential attributes, addresses what is contingent and the absence of the attribute does not destroy the entity because it no longer has a trait or characteristic. In determinatives, the entity is “labelled by its union with a substance of characteristic properties, the entity (or class of entities) being thus determined as a species within a genus” (Pêcheux, 1995, p. 23).

In “Lion is a feline that has a mane”, “Planet is a star which has no light of its own”, “Triangle is a geometric figure which contains three angles, three vertices and three edges” and “Vulture is a bird which feeds on decaying remains”, the relative words joined by the relative “which” are determinative, since the being to which a certain property is attributed constitutes a separate group, which does not share the traits attributed to it with its kind, which allows us to say that not every feline has a mane, not every star has its own light, not every geometric figure contains three angles, three vertices and three edges and not every bird feeds on decomposing remains. Without ceasing to be a feline, a star, a geometric figure or a bird, a lion, a planet, a triangle and a vulture all have properties that make them particular, even though they share the attributes that make them part of the larger collective.

In determinatives, what is observed is not essence, nature or constitution, but particularity, contingency and specificity, because only the feline lion, the star planet, the geometric figure triangle and the vulture bird has a mane, no light of their own, contains three angles, three vertices and three edges and eats decaying remains and the other felines, stars (or some of them), geometric figures and birds do not have a mane, their own light, three angles, three vertices and three edges or eat remains. In the case of appositives, the observation refers to the universal and essential whole, while restrictives section the world into differential elements by constructing classificatory grids that allocate each and every one to the group or subgroup that defines them, dissecting reality, creating a “biologization” of genera and species and constructing a broad taxonomy.

With this way of observing reality and creating classificatory grids and categorizations of what is made known, man would be destined to capture the laws of the universe and organize them in descriptive tables, just as the geographer produces

maps and the chemist constitutes a table of elements, detecting all the distinct parts and subparts, which are subjected to general determinations. At the limit, between the creation of appositives and determinatives, “logic [...] is the first foundation and the ‘art of speaking’ has no other aim than to conform to the rules that constitute that logic, as rules immanent in the very order of essences”, leaving man to submit to a “pedagogy of truth” and “the subordination of the fields of grammar and rhetoric to that of knowledge” (Pêcheux, 1982, p. 24), which expels imagination, desire, dreams, history and ideology; exemption, neutrality and impartiality should then command the gaze that investigates and observes.

Sometimes, however, the decision is not so categorical. The relative clause embedded in “Men who run away are cowards” seems to tend toward the determinative interpretation, since the attitude of running away would not be inherent in all men, but only in those who are said to be cowards. In other words: given all men, it is not true that cowardice applies to everyone, being inessential in relation to being. Or again: running away would show the cowardice of some and not running away or confronting would show the courage of others. In terms of writing, the restrictive relative “who flee” should come without commas, since it would constitute a single syntagm with the nucleus “the men”.

In this case, contrary to the interpretation that fear and flight are inseparable characteristics of men, there would be a split between those who are cowards and, because they are cowards, flee and those who, because they are not, do not flee. While in the appositive, the cause would be in the adjective, in the restrictive, the cause would be outside it, explaining the fit of the relative clause. However, if we consider that anyone can be afraid and run away when faced with different dangers, we can conclude that anyone is a coward and runs away when faced with a greater or lesser threat, thus swapping the restrictive reading for the explanatory one. Thus, it seems possible to assume that the spontaneous explanatory or restrictive reading for the rationality and cowardice of men admits the opposites, making the context, situation or conditions of production vary, which leads to the conclusion that syntax is relatively indeterminate and ultimately serves “relations of restriction” (Possenti, 1999, p. 212) imposed by discourse.

The statements about rationality and cowardice are discussed by Pêcheux in *Language, semantics and ideology: stating the obvious* (1982) in order to question possible spontaneous explanatory and restrictive interpretations. The aim is to take forward the problematization raised about the relative clauses “about which linguists claim to be ‘ambiguous’” (p. 12) in face of the opposition between explanation and restriction. It is a matter of problematizing that, in the case of the relative clauses, which seem to point to a pure linguistic phenomenon, a “philosophical problematic” (p. 14) is articulated, in view of the debate on “necessity and contingency” (p. 13) and “a political question” (p. 14), that seeks to impose ways of social relations, showing that “the cold spaces of semantics conceal a burning subject” (p. 14). This study is about relative clauses that carry ‘ambiguity’, using as its corpus data collected by

postgraduate students in the course “Discourse Theory” and that refer to sensitive social issues, mixing moral, religious and political dictates.

### **About the Data Corpus**

With the framework outlined, it is possible to address the problem related to the goal of this study (we repeat, the intersection between political, moral and religious discourses), with the interdetermination and reinforcement of one by the other, which is presented through the observation of the use of ambiguous relative clauses, precisely in cases where they fluctuate, in an uncertain way, between the whole and the part, between the genre and the species, and whose exit between one choice and another can only be more or less obtained in the light of the conditions of production. In addition, heterogeneity, with religious discourse sometimes subsuming or supporting the others, reaches the formal and institutional political discourse, consequently undermining the principle of the secularity of the State and proposing a fundamentalist and reactionary perspective of society.

### **The man who cannot provide for his family...**

E1: The man (?) who cannot provide for his family (?) is a failure and incompetent.

E1 was produced by a member of parliament during the discussion of the law on equal pay for men and women in the same job, based on the MP’s question, which was based on the fact that men do not always have a paid job because they are unemployed, and that women are the only source of income, which makes the lack of income a poignant problem, or that he works but doesn’t have adequate pay to meet family expenses. The deputy argued that, given the current situation, it was necessary for both men and women to provide the economic conditions for the family’s survival, with the above statement as a response.

At first glance, the relative clause “who is unable to provide for his family”, headed by the relative “who”, which attributes the inability to provide for the family to the “man”, could, with good will, be considered appositive, given that failure and incompetence would be the consequence of the cause of the inability to “provide for his family”. Therefore, it would be “acceptable” to conclude that every man is unable to give his family what is available and could be considered to have failed in his natural obligation to provide. In an attempt to consider it as explanatory, the relative should be isolated from the name to which it refers, making it the cause of what is claimed in the main clause that surrounds it. In this way, it could be said that no man can “provide for his family”, and therefore all are failures and incompetents. While this may seem



like an appealing reading, it is not. What's more, the relative clause attributes the duty of provision solely to men (and only men), which doesn't hold up in the light of everyday family life.

Contrary to the line of interpretation that would consider the relative clause as appositive, attributing the property in question to men as a whole, the intended effect of the speech was restrictive, since the deputy would not be considered a failure or incompetent, since as a parliamentarian he would provide for his family, albeit with public funds. In this sense, there are those among men who are competent and successful and those who do not share these attributes, and the cause of the event under discussion is not in the relative clause (as happens in explanatory clauses), but in the main clause that surrounds it. Instead of relying on a diapason that considers the constructed reference to be attributed to all men, it refers only to those men who [...]; and not to the others.

When asked about the reductive nature of the statement, given the hasty generalization and superficial reasoning, lacking in reflective depth and erasing the conjunctures that affect family economic life, the laconic response was "let them (men) work harder" (a crystallized cliché of bourgeois ideology that defends meritocracy), revealing the restrictive operation of the parliamentarian who divides the world between good and evil, right and wrong, according to a Manichean, conservative and reactionary ideology.

Given the aim of this study, it is important to note: a) the moralizing bias of the discourse, which categorically establishes a division between those who would be right because they work and support their families (yet another repetition of the "Cicada and the Ant") and those who would be wrong (because they are "vagabonds" and do not work hard enough) because they cannot do it, without a broader reflection on the economic conditioning factors of an era that does not have room for everyone; b) the political bias (in the broadest sense) of the discourse, which, being hegemonic, would impose forms of social relations that shame the displaced, ignoring the causes of diversity; c) and the religious bias of the discourse (why not say it?), since, anchored in a heteronormative standard, it would define, if it had the opportunity, the "proper" space for each person, with the care of the home and the family falling to the woman and the provision to the man, according to the model of the family advocated by various schools of religious thought. It can be seen, therefore, that "the criteria of enunciability do not coincide with those of grammaticality" (Possenti, 1999, p. 213); and, it should be added, neither with those of acceptability.

### **The woman who refuses to be a mother...**

E2: The woman (?) who refuses to be a mother (?) is selfish and perverse.

This statement is significant because it was made by a student with a degree in psychology who wanted the interpretation to be appositive, without, however, accepting that the refusal to be a mother could be qualified as "selfish and perverse". The argument

consisted of the thesis that if it were not for the social constraints imposed by education and the world of work, no woman would want to be a mother, given the suffering of pregnancy and childbirth and the postnatal activities that mean fatigue and renunciation. On the basis of the cases treated in her clinic, the student tried to make the point that since all those who came to her were dissatisfied with being a mother, this would be the tendency of everyone, which could only be avoided by social coercion

According to the thesis, the relative clause, defended as appositive, “who refuses to be a mother”, initiated by the relative “who”, which takes up “woman”, should characterize an essential attitude that considers the refusal of motherhood as natural and intrinsic. In this case, the woman (consciously or unconsciously) does not want to be a mother, and the personal fulfillment of motherhood would come from the prohibition suffered in childhood/youth. It would be necessary to assume that the woman is not convinced of motherhood, which would make her selfish and perverse (a label rejected by the student), since her goal would be her own pleasure, which would not be served by procreation, a thesis, incidentally, based on psychoanalysis. The lesson here emerges from the kerfuffle (ambiguity, for Pêcheux) created around the argument.

Against the appositive perspective defended, the statement allows for a determinative reading that does not attribute what is said to all women, but to some of them. Thus, the relative clause “who refuses to be a mother” would be attributed only to women who do not accept motherhood, who are “selfish and perverse,” since they differ from the others in what would be the natural tendency toward procreation, care, and unconditional love. In this case, the cause of the refusal would be selfishness and perversion and not, as before, the refusal to be a mother, which would demonstrate the woman’s egocentric constitution. As mentioned before, the controversy is relevant, and despite the students’ acceptance of an appositive or determinative reading, the rejection was unanimous with regard to the qualifiers.

What is important in this study is the polemical fluctuation that surrounds this statement, since it indicates contradictory points of view that touch on the ideological constitution of the discourse, qualifying women or part of them in a demeritorious way in the face of their refusal to be mothers. The way out would be to submit to the social dictates that define the “natural” destiny of the body and to accept the previous and external predictions that show that, with regard to motherhood, women are subject to moral imperatives that define duties and obligations, political imperatives that define the social relations that are considered adequate, and religious imperatives, since it is up to them, above all, to multiply and increase humanity. In other words, the way out of the dereliction that haunts the statement is either through acceptance of the predetermined dictates or through resistance (always an uncomfortable task). In general, salvation and redemption come through the first route, since anyone who rejects what has been established is considered a priori to have some kind of disorder and may represent a risk to the balance of the social fabric.

## **The call girls who sell their bodies...**

E3: The call girls who sell their bodies are bad examples for girls and a disservice to society, because they sell their bodies.

E<sub>3</sub>: The call girls (?) who sell their bodies (?) are bad example for girls and a disservice to society.

The statement, considered to have a causal in “because they sell their bodies”, caused a stir, which was resolved by arguing that, if the appositive contains a causality, a causal can be converted into an explanatory, a convincing hypothesis that led to the transformation of the statement. Although it does not seem to be the case that an explanatory and a causal are exactly equivalent, since, discursively, the intradiscourse is decisive for the effect of meaning (a cause is not an adjective and vice versa), the conversion was nevertheless accepted in view of the plausibility of the argument and the demonstration presented.

In the relative obtained through the conversion “who sell their bodies”, headed by the relative “who” which takes up “call girls”, the interpretation was assumed to be appositive because of the origin of the conversion, since it could be said that all call girls sell their bodies, this attitude being an essential characteristic that constitutes them; that is, if they do not sell their bodies, they are not call girls; if they do, it is from the body trade that the bad example for the girls and the disservice to society come. This generalized reading of call girls seemed appropriate until the controversy arose.

A contradiction arose in relation to the sale of the body, whose defense was based on the argument that what is taking place is a job designed to generate an income that often provides for the girl’s family; at the same time, it was commented on the cynicism of those who depend on the buying and selling of products to want to ban/judge a form of commerce. A second contradiction attacked the idea that the call girl was seen as a bad example “for girls”, since the activity she carried out took place in discreet places, without anyone being able to see what was going on; even less for girls who, if they did not want to know, had no contact with them; and finally, they were a bad example “for girls” and not for boys, which demonstrated the sexism of the judgment. A third contradiction was the “disservice to society”, with the defense based on the premise that “sex workers” (another discourse) do not assault/rob/exploit anyone because those who seek them out do so on their own initiative. And finally, the final contradiction was based on the argument that it is not uncommon for people to have sex for money without being labeled a call girl; dinners, trips, gifts, among other benefits, would point to a form of commodification of the body in order to earn dividends.

This statement was notable for the controversy it provoked, with students vehemently condemning the activity and those who seemed to have an empathetic view, based on the need to survive, lack of jobs, lack of training, inadequate income for workers, among other factors. The presence of a psychologist, a law student, and a historian provoked

a heated controversy, reinforcing the case for ambiguity in many aspects that cannot be subsumed by a transcendental, timeless, and ahistorical metaphysical realism or by a logical empiricism that seeks to encompass everything in laws or, at the limit, seeks an individualizing subjectivity as a solution. This case shows, in an emblematic way, how the relative clause can be transferred from one discourse to another in the light of historical and ideological contingencies that cause moral, political and religious principles to change, the latter being more resistant than the former, since statements like the one in this case would be rejected a priori and unworthy of further discussion because they refer to an activity considered sinful. In this sense, we have to agree with Possenti (1999, p. 219), for whom “syntax alone cannot be expected to guarantee certain effects of meaning, although it sets limits to interpretation”..

### **Homosexual men...**

E4: Homosexual men are victims of disease and need to be treated.

E4<sub>1</sub>: Men (who are) homosexual are victims of disease and need to be treated.

The statement is relevant because, unlike the others, the relative is constructed with the omission of the relative and the linking verb, bringing the property “homosexuals”, without the other components that can be recovered, given the ellipsis that omits them, which seems to happen in cases where the adjective is used and not otherwise. Thus, there would be the relative “(who are) homosexuals”, which would take up the previous term “men”, attributing to it the characteristic mentioned. In this case, it seems difficult to postulate the ambiguity that Pêcheux speaks of, since the accident referred to isolates the group of men who are said to be homosexual from those who would be heterosexual. It seems that this relative does not support an appositive reading, which maintains that every man is homosexual and that only under the weight of social dictates is he led to heterosexuality, despite psychoanalysis’ defense of a diffuse sexuality in childhood.

If we accept the determinative interpretation of the statement, then the ambiguity would not be in the classification of the relative clause, but in the discourse that surrounds it and constructs a reference that is not accepted without controversy. By dividing the world into two groups, one, homosexuals, would be “victims of disease” and the other, heterosexuals, would be made up of men whose sexuality had been well constructed in childhood and lived without major problems in subsequent phases. Neither seems to have the best understanding, given that the supposed “disease” of homosexuality has not been proven and there is no good explanation why a certain sexuality ends up imposing itself on each person (what is known is that sexuality is plural and one or more forms can impose themselves), and given that those who have become heterosexual often say they are dissatisfied with the orientation that captured them, and the understanding

of homosexuality as a disease does not even remotely address the issue, but is still an uncertain way of conceiving it.

And there are other controversies about this statement. If the concept of homosexuality as a disease is not supported by demonstrable evidence, it follows that it cannot be assumed that there is a treatment for it or that it should be subjected to a “cure”, of which, incidentally, we have no idea what it is, even if it is postulated that it is not a matter of drug treatment but of supervision by a professional specialized in psychological disorders, which is another way of relying on prejudices about what is not understood, if it is necessary to understand it at all. And here too, as in the previous case, the concern with control and direction is exercised over a preferred body (the male) and not that of the woman. Male homosexuality seems to be more disturbing than female homosexuality, which makes the latent machismo explicit, which, by the way, coexists well with the idea of “two women having sex”.

Despite the superficial analysis of this statement (and the others), there is a recurrent function: against a logic that pretends to discover universal appositional relations, reaching concepts, or that wants to search for laws that govern sets of empirical phenomena, drawing determined notions, in both cases with effects of scientificity, there are, in rupture with these paths, perceptions and conceptions that, materializing discourses, define worldviews that infuse moral dictates, with duties and obligations, political ones, with ways of prescribing relations between men, and religious ones, with ways of conceiving the transit between man and the divine. In E4, these dictates seem to be imposed through the prescription of sexuality, the use of the body, and spiritual conduct, biased by specific views and not immune to controversy and ambiguity.

### **The woman who is submissive...**

E5: A woman must resign herself to earning less than a man, even if she does the same job, because she is submissive to the man; it's in the Bible.

E5.: A woman (?) who is submissive to a man (?) must resign herself to being paid less than him, even if she does the same job, it's in the Bible.

This statement, unlike the others, refers to political discourse in the strict sense: formal and institutional. It was uttered from the rostrum of the Chamber of Deputies when the bill to equalize the salaries of men and women for the same professional activity was being discussed. Bill 1085/2023, which was approved by the Federal Senate on June 1, 2023, amended the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT) on the aforementioned equality, considering it advisable. During a discussion in the Chamber of Deputies, a deputy argued that men and women should have different salaries, even if they do the same work, claiming at the end of his speech that given the submission of women to men, as advocated by the Bible, the differentiation was justified and ideologically well-founded.

For the purposes of this study, the relative “who is submissive to man” is of particular interest, headed by the relative “who”, which takes up the syntagma “a mulher”, making it part of the adjective relating submission to “woman” (women). At first glance, a restrictive reading seems appropriate, since the statement seems to lead to a single complex name (“the woman who is submissive to man”), separating those who are submissive from the others, so that there are two groups: those who would be submissive and those who would not have this trait; the submissive ones should have lower salaries, which would not apply to the others. Questioned by a parliamentarian about this thesis, it was in the same unsuccessful attempt to establish a definitive reading that the deputy tried to take refuge.

Although the restrictive interpretation that would serve as a refuge for the parliamentarian seems possible, the appositive interpretation is necessary because the restriction, if approved by the House, would be difficult to apply because there is no criterion for distinguishing between submissive and non-submissive women. The resolution of the controversy comes from the realization that since this is a law, it is generic and applies to all women, in this case, not just some of them, so that it would be indiscernible to which group the postulate would apply if the hypothesis prevailed; and there was no shortage of good souls, even women, who defended the postulate. The statement doesn’t seem to support any other reading than the explanatory one, which would concern all women, touched by a religious and moralizing discourse, implying political and legal dictates.

In addition to the prejudices (“women are inferior to men”), the machismo (“women should earn less because they get pregnant”) and the lack of lucidity of the parliamentarian, which are anchored in crystallized and dehumanizing preconstructions, we must also take into account the fact that the basis of the apposition is the Christian discourse (and no other) on the Old Testament, the fact that the basis of the apposition is the Christian discourse (and no other) related to the Old Testament, which is punitive, conservative, moralizing and inaccessible to progress and updating, rooted in dictates that go beyond even the biblical text used by the deputy as an argument of authority. In the end, what we see is the use of a religious discourse that, if it were to prevail, would impose the dictates of a faith on politics, creating a society characterized by the uniqueness of conceptions of a theocratic state, based on a biased vision, to the liking of the deputy/ideology. This would negate any point of view other than the one (supposedly) defined by religion and the deputy, ignoring the laws approved by Parliament, the legal bodies and the Federal Constitution, which advocate the secularity of the State and respect for the plurality and diversity of faiths.

### **To create an effect of completeness**

The data of this study, which constitute a quantitatively significant corpus of data/expressions, were selected because they show the ambiguity that Pêcheux speaks of

and allow us to see how, in the relative clauses (appositive and restrictive), questions of a moral, political and religious nature converge, and, why not, also of a legal nature, since the “laws” defined by them have repercussions on the courts. What the relative clause phenomenon reveals is that, in addition to the appositives that behave as if they were logical-mathematical entities (the sun that is a star, the earth that is a planet, the tiger that is a feline, the peacock that is a bird, the triangle that is a geometric figure), there are others that, although similar, are based on judgments anchored in ideological dictates (the call girl who sells her body, the man who can’t support his family, the woman who does not want to be a mother, the man who is rational, the children who are innocent).

This observation leads to Pêcheux’s postulate that “ideological processes simulate scientific processes” (1982, p. 58), since they are based on procedures that produce evidential effects that would support claims based on logical parameters when, at the limit, they are anchored in ideological injunctions circumstantiated by a deictic axis of time, place, and group. In the sense of a logical construction by means of a syllogism, to say “the triangle that is a geometric figure” or “children that are innocent” is to enunciate, apparently, premises of general validity, since, as a construction, every triangle is a geometric figure, just as every child is innocent; however, we have to weigh the fact that only the first case is irrefutable, while the second is not, and is therefore ambiguous and can fluctuate with different effects in different discourses.

In the light of this observation, another of Pêcheux’s theses can be recovered: it is that in the relative clauses (but not only in the relative) there is sometimes an equivalence between science and institutions, that is to say: given the movement of the same linguistic ingredients and the appearance of the use of the same reasoning, fixed and unambiguous statements that deal with logical-mathematical entities and refer to conceptual procedures are paired with others whose effect of scientificity and systematization is based only on the same resources, but anchored in the dictates of a certain worldview. Relative clauses are just one more place among others where the simulation of univocity and transparency by ideology and the entanglement between science and institutions (morality, politics, religion, law, pedagogy) occur, and therefore deserve to be given due attention so as not to fall prey to the temptation of hasty logic that sediments beliefs and values that are not always the most humane.

CATTELAN, João Carlos; OLIVEIRA, Isabela Karolina Gomes Ferreira. Sintaxe, discurso e relativas: e a “semântica” exala paixões. *Alfa*, São Paulo, v. 68, 2024.

- *RESUMO: Pautado na defesa de que, a partir da Escola de Port Royal, teria existido uma circularidade pendular entre a Lógica e a Retórica, pautadas, respectivamente, numa teoria universal das ideias ou no subjetivismo individualista, Michel Pêcheux (1995) se vale das orações relativas como fenômeno linguístico para sustentar o desenvolvimento de uma teoria materialista do discurso amparada, sobretudo, na Linguística e no Materialismo Histórico.*

*Para o autor, nem sempre é possível definir se uma relativa é apositiva ou determinativa, uma vez que elas seriam portadoras de uma ambiguidade que se equaciona apenas à luz das condições históricas de seu aparecimento. É sobre o caráter ambíguo de certas relativas que este estudo se desenvolve, tendo como dados casos recolhidos por alunos de pós-graduação na disciplina de Teoria do Discurso e que tocam em questões sociais polêmicas, porque, no limite, por meio delas, pretender-se-ia estabelecer as “melhores” formas de atuação pessoal.*

- **PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Sintaxe; Semântica; Discurso; Relativas; Ideologia; Ambiguidade.*

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