PHONIC PROCESSES IN THE PRODUCTION OF MEANING: PHONOLOGY IN THE PRAGMATIC TURN[1]

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The book *O gesto audível*: *fonologia como pragmática* (The audible gesture: phonology as pragmatics[2]), by Eleonora Cavalcante Albano, was released in 2020, by Cortez Editora, right at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. This tragedy significantly impacted many of our academic practices and dispersed attention from essential scientific developments. The book launch, which was planned to take place traditionally in the first half of 2020, was canceled, like several other events. These facts certainly contributed to the book not receiving the attention it deserves.

Structured in six chapters, the book includes 255 pages, an acknowledgements section, a brief prologue, an index, and references. It is an open work, as its author rightly announces in the preamble. Thus, instead of offering ready-made formulas and exercises with answer keys, customary in academic textbooks released by commercial publishers with the primary objective of meeting market demands, the book reviewed here presents itself as an invitation to a joint reflection. The book reflects the author's philosophical practice. It also summarizes – although not exhaustively – the author's academic contribution, especially her role as coordinator of the historical research group DINAFON (*Dinâmica Fônica*), based at Unicamp.

In the opening chapter, "Language and human gestuality[3]", the book's proposal is outlined, which is to situate and attribute to the articulatory gesture and the dynamics of the production of language – oral or gestural – the status of primary social action for the negotiation of significance. In other words, the idea is to conceive the linguistic sign as composed of activities embedded in actions, in which the signifier is part of pragmatics. The author, however, warns that the attempt to think of the signifier as something not static but rather a concept that contributes to the attribution of meanings is not only aimed at theoretical elegance. The objective is to align the abstract conception of the phonic signifier with the recognition of its corporeality. This will ensure the simultaneous understanding of the more stable aspects of this concept and its variability in time and space.

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[2] Author's translation.

[3] Author's translation.

All the illustrations corroborate one of the book's central theses: that phonology is the logic of the production of articulatory gestures and their sensitivity to the linguistic context through coordinated movements. To develop this argument, the chapter presents a thought-provoking historical course of linguistic ideas, describing classic and recent studies that reflect on the origin of language, such as, for example, the conception of Nicaraguan sign language, cases of language deprivation, and studies with primates. It is a transdisciplinary proposal that questions the border between life and social sciences. It is essential to say that this first chapter is written in unequivocal language, making it accessible to non-specialists and undergraduate students — something relatively rare in a work that profoundly discusses abstract concepts.

In its second chapter, entitled "Gradients and phonic categories[4]", the book presents numerous examples of analysis from the perspective of laboratory phonology, showing how several classic questions about human language no longer support "yes" or "no" answers due to the nature of the gradient of linguistic phenomena. It is worth mentioning here that Eleonora Albano introduced the studies of Laboratory Phonology in Brazil. She supervised the first researchers in this field of investigation in Brazil and produced a vast and expressive bibliographic material based on this theoretical approach, which is often cited.

In this chapter, phonological systems are discussed in the light of different theories, and gaps often found in scarcely studied languages are highlighted. The author reiterates the advantages of articulatory gestures in classifying phonological systems. The chapter brings together elucidative illustrations, as the Rwandan example, discussed from page 57 onwards. When reflecting on how Rwandan speakers can produce complex segments in a relatively short time interval while still being intelligible to the speech community, the author concludes that articulatory gestures can do more than assemble words or assign linguistic boundaries.

The phonological gesture does, in the Austinian sense, "phonological things"; that is, it creates sounds from mutable rules that are necessarily public and shared. Thus, the articulatory gesture is situated in the logic of speech and not only in its physical aspect. In this sense, when we approach phenomena of language variation, such as, for example, gradient allophones, it is appropriate that the treatment be phonological - and not strictly phonetic, as proposed in areas such as sociophonetics. To corroborate the proposal of the integration between concepts of categories and gradients, the author offers a lively discussion about the syllable statute from the theoretical perspective that the book advances.

The third chapter, "Phonic dynamics and sensorimotor skills[5]", begins by stating that gestural phonology is responsible for proposing a method for analyzing a phonic phrase that is not just an axis of succession and with a phonic paradigm that is not just an axis of substitution, as the structuralist model proposes it. In particular, it

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4   Author's translation.

5   Author's translation.

discusses how to analyze the issues of the time frame and the internal organization of the steps at each level since the notions of syntagm and paradigm are characterized by overlaps and misalignments. Although these issues have been debated for about three decades, they still need to be understood entirely. So, for example, how to approach higher-level units when observable articulatory gestures are limited to the level of the segment?

In the chapter, the author presents the development of research in gestural phonology that she closely followed over the last two decades, discussing, among other things, the problem of postulating static gestural landmarks and the possibility of marking coordinated movements through specific models. She observes, however, that gestural phonology will only be entirely defensible when it does more justice to its Saussurean heritage. There is, at this point, an essential discussion about higher-level phonological units. According to the author, the examination from the prominence perspective has the advantage of making us aware of how gestural phonology struggles between idealism and physicalism. This happens because the notion of prominence has very ancient humanistic roots. On the advance of physicalism in the human sciences, the author warns that attention is needed not to fall into the traps of scientific fads and the fragmentation of thought. This, incidentally, is a topic she has been discussing in her articles on the site *A Terra é Redonda*,[6] to which she contributes.

The fourth and fifth chapters explore Brazilian contributions to the field of gestural phonology. The first, "Brazilian contributions: classical issues", deals with traditional phonological problems, reporting results of recent laboratory studies, while the second, "Brazilian contributions: border issues," deals with problems that cross disciplinary boundaries. These introductory chapters outline the application of the model in the Brazilian scenario, which shows the vitality of the approach and its power of analysis.

In the fourth chapter, concepts of categories and gradients are discussed regarding studies of Brazilian Amerindian languages; it resumes the discussion on the arbitrary specification of lags between articulatory gestures, this time presenting results of studies on the role of reduction in driving and disseminating linguistic variation and change; it offers the results of several studies carried out at the Laboratory of Phonetics and Psycholinguistics-LAFAPE, pointing out factors that may affect the formation of family similarities in the phonic field; it also demonstrates the compatibility of the notion of articulatory gesture with a philosophical position, situating phonic processes and changes in an alternative theoretical framework to idealism and physicalism.

The fifth chapter begins with a discussion of how the conception of language as an action was responsible for eliminating the boundaries in the philosophy of language, the so-called pragmatic turn. It discusses the concept of accommodation, presenting a comprehensive literature review with examples of research carried out at LAFAPE and DINAFON laboratories. Initially, it proposes a horizon that considers multiple brains or coupled brains. This proposal allows a better understanding of the phenomenon of

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[6] https://aterraeredonda.com.br/tag/eleonora-albano/.

accommodation. However, the results of reviewed studies suggest that accommodation development is complex and gradual, depending on social and cognitive experiences.

Subsequently, the chapter points out the incipience of studies on phonic accommodation in childhood, something fundamental for a better understanding of the concepts of imitation and accommodation. Based on a discussion of several studies, the author argues that the notion of oscillator coupling accounts for broader temporal patterns, such as, for example, those involved in the acquisition of prosody, and narrower temporal patterns, such as those involved in the acquisition of segments. The following section discusses the various forms of phonic accommodation, considering their products of social differences that need to be addressed in a version of gestural phonology attuned to the social nature of language acquisition.

Finally, the last section describes the results of studies that demonstrate how bilinguals, voice professionals, singers, and professional speakers combine demands from different cognitive domains on their vocal tracts, thus corroborating the hypothesis that language acquisition extends far beyond childhood and adolescence. The chapter ends concerning gaps and challenges in the field, as, for example, the operationalization of a notion of articulatory gesture that is not only extensible and embodied but also situated and socialized.

The sixth and final chapter of the book, "Dilemmas, challenges, horizons[7]", begins with the book's central thesis, which was postponed precisely to familiarize the reader with the ideas and facts supporting the central hypothesis. Eleonora Albano proposes that all phonic processes are potential meaning producers, even if this power never takes place. This would be coherent phonology with the implications of the pragmatic turn — which requires us to learn to deal with increasingly more expansive and finely characterized temporal windows. The chapter and book conclude with hard-hitting political stances. One of them is that nothing creative can be produced without infringement of established powers, especially in times of obscurantism. The book *O Gesto Audível* boldly breaks with traditional theoretical proposals, offering the investigation of language a necessary, urgent, and inescapable contribution.

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[7] Author's translation.