Irony as a Communicative and Argumentative Strategy / *A ironia como estratégia comunicativa e argumentativa*

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ABSTRACT
This article draws upon the polyphonic theory of Bakhtin (1970a, 1970b) as well as certain concepts utilized by Ducrot (1984), showing, in the field of a theory of discourse analysis — in this case, Charaudeau's semiolinguistics (1983, 1992, 2008) — some procedures which lead to the construction of irony. The study takes into account that this linguistic phenomenon appears as a means of communication susceptible to the creation of argumentative strategies even if the latter are not presented in a non-conventional way. To illustrate this, the study uses, as a basis for reflection, excerpts from the memoirs or life narrative of a French artist whose form of writing, according to Bakhtin (1970b), may fall into the category of Carnival literature.
KEYWORDS: Irony; Communicative strategies; Life narrative; Discourse analysis

RESUMO
Neste artigo, tomando por base dados vindos da teoria polifônica de Bakhtin (1970a, 1970b) e também alguns conceitos que Ducrot (1984) elaborou a partir desta, procuramos mostrar no âmbito de uma teoria de análise do discurso – no caso, a Semiolinguística de Charaudeau (1983, 1992, 2008) - alguns dos procedimentos que levam à construção da ironia, tendo em vista que, para nós, este fenômeno linguageiro aparece como um meio de comunicação suscetível de criar estratégias argumentativas, ainda que estas se apresentem de forma não-convencional. Para ilustrar o que foi dito, tomamos como base de reflexão excertos do livro de memórias ou da narrativa de vida de um artista francês cujo modo de escrever poderia se enquadrar na categoria dos escritos carnavalescos, segundo Bakhtin (1970b).
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Ironia; Estratégias comunicativas; Narrativa de vida; Análise do discurso

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> *Ah! chers lecteurs, ce qui manque le plus au monde, c'est le sens de l'ironie. Si nous pouvions rire de nous, de notre sottise, comme aussi de ceux qui l'exploitent et qui en vivent, nous serions sauvés!*
>
> George Bernanos

Introduction

In this study, irony is considered as a paradoxical means of communication that conveys messages that are evident to some, but obscure to others; intelligent to some, but aggressive to others. While the humor present in linguistic exchange is generally favorably regarded and considered friendly, irony tends to be frowned upon. As a result, the subject-who-ironizes is more feared than loved by his interlocutors who, at times, do not hesitate to call him/her an *ironic person* with a *non-positive* axiological load. This is perhaps a stereotypical view of both humor and irony, but it is still an oft-stated view recurring throughout research on the topic. I would therefore like to present here some reflections on the curious linguistic phenomenon known as irony.

Like the devil jumping out of the box, irony can appear unexpectedly in a playful or provocative statement (albeit innocently), or in a word, gesture, or gaze. In one of his texts, Proudhon (1849) writes, "Irony, true freedom! It is you who deliver me from the ambition of power [...] the fanaticism of reformers, superstition of this great universe, and worship of myself."[1]

In this respect, I am in agreement with Proudhon: What would we do without a good dose of self-criticism in this world of signs and conventions, a world that forces us to adopt certain social roles and, as a result, more or less codified behavior? What would we do without the freedom to laugh at ourselves and at what we do not approve of in society, although we do laugh, albeit discreetly, because irony also knows discretion. Without it, how can we kindly and smilingly challenge something heard or seen that we do not agree with? Or how do we face—with no weapons other than words—what has deliberately been constructed to destabilize us?

[1] The original in French: *Ironie: vraie liberté –c'est toi qui me délivres de l'ambition du pouvoir, de la servitude des partis, du respect de la routine, du pédantisme de la science, de l'admiration des grands personnages, des mystifications de la politique, du fanatisme des réformateurs, de la superstition et de l'adoration de moi-même*.

However, the more we study the phenomenon of irony, the longer the road to be followed seems to be, hoping that one day—empty utopia!—we can finally grasp it in both hands and say, "Finally, I understand all the intricacies of irony!" In this relentless pursuit, all that this study aims to present are some considerations of the phenomenon as well as its performance and purpose within the genre of life narrative.

Why do some individuals speak ironically when narrating their lives? We can venture some answers: Narrators use irony to render past events more acceptable, "pretending" that they were not hurt so much but that they still managed to build a life despite all obstacles; they also use irony to imagine life as something unique and special, even after concluding that all destinies and lives are unique and special and that everyone can be an object of narrative.

In this article, I would like to show how Mikhail Bakhtin (1970a, 1970b) helped us to better understand the phenomenon of irony and how Oswald Ducrot (1984) relied on the concepts from the Russian master to apply polyphonic theory to his linguistic pragmatics. To illustrate this, the study draws upon statements found in the book written by the French artist, Charles Aznavour, which will be freely translated in the article. This production by Aznavour will be considered as an example of life narrative, a term equivalent to *récit de vie* by Daniel Bertaux (1974) and *storytelling* by Christian Salmon (2007). For our purposes, this phrase suits the discursive procedures to be exposed here more adequately than other terms such as *autobiography*.

On the one hand, the aim in proposing such an article is slightly egoistic: Resuming the intricate pathways that lead to an understanding of irony as a linguistic phenomenon, while emphasizing the enormous contribution of Bakhtin in such a task. On account of the latter, we have been able to observe in irony not only the use of simple malicious antiphrasis: Irony can manifest itself as an antiphrasis, but this is not its only resort. Irony comprises and helps compose speech of a transgressive nature, which makes room for laughter by disrupting conventions. Moreover, it can also be used to express bitter criticism of dogmatic attitudes, totalitarian discourse, and speech genres that are deemed unassailable. On the other hand, this article also examines the inclusion of irony in the aforementioned genre of life narrative, a discourse in which a man is willing to talk about himself to certain readers.

This practice has been and is still used by several personalities. In fact, at present, speaking about oneself has become a valuable avenue for writing books that are much sought after by different readers. Usually framed in the "biographical" genre, such books now constitute a suitable substitute for the "self-help" genre according to Arnaldo Cortina (2013).[2] Reading about the life of *another person* leads to a better understanding of ourselves and our own lives.

In recent years, we have observed that the life experiences narrated in the form of books (or other vehicles such as newspaper chronicles, self-portraits, song lyrics, poems, comics, and so forth) tend to merge the private life of an individual with his professional life. In other words, the intimate world of an existence is fatally merged with the universe of his scientific or professional discourse. Thus, in one narrative and even sometimes in the same statement, different voices or subjects unfold: One subject talks about his intimate life, while another one explains the course of his professional life. The paths taken by the two subjects or the place where they seem to intertwine, separate, and reunite have enticed me and inspired my desire to write this article. The article will thus present some observations concerning the path of this divided subject, which, when speaking freely about himself "as the essence" (DUCROT, 1984, p.99), cannot escape the collective word by referring to the world that provides him with his *livelihood*. Moreover, when exposing a life story, how can we dissociate these two aspects? There is a conscious or unconscious unfolding of subjects in these types of narratives. Such discourse may manifest in certain written productions as a submission to a kind of paradoxical argument.

In other words, we are referring to the argumentative strategies that generate an understanding of the other through irony. Irony seeks unconventional means to strike a balance between the past and current *ethos* of the subject. This merging may also be driven by the desire that the written content of the subject-narrator[3] acts as a vent, with

[2] Information conveyed by Professor Arnaldo Cortina (UNESP-Araraquara) on July 11, 2013, at a round table discussion entitled "The best-selling memoirs in Brazil" held at 61º GEL, USP.

[3] As a discourse analyst, I consider it more convenient here to use the term "subject," as proposed by Charaudeau (1983, 2008). The French linguist believes that there is no single subject in any utterance or text, which leads us to approach his theory based on Bakhtin's ideas. One of the strengths of Charaudeau's theory is its declarative framework, whereby the division of the subject is evident. The framework in question coexists with a communicating subject (e.g., author, empirical being) who, on taking the floor when speaking, becomes a subject-enunciator. Here, I take the liberty of calling the latter the subject-narrator or ironic-subject. For further explanation of the division of subjects, see works by Machado and Charaudeau cited in the reference list.

the (almost psychic-clinical) merging of the two selves (the *self* from the past and the *self* from the present) bringing a sense of coherence to an incoherent world. The utopia of a single *self* or subject appears to be the basis of many life narratives.

1 Some Considerations on Carnival Speech

Analyzing certain statements by the French artist—composer, poet, singer, dancer, and actor—Charles Aznavour may seem odd to purists. I hence feel obliged to explain why his book—doubly qualified as a document and memoir on its cover—attracted me. Three reasons may be put forth.

The first concerns the concept of carnivalized literature taken from Bakhtin and extensively explained in his book, *L'oeuvre de François Rabelais et la culture populaire au Moyen Age et sous la Renaissance.*[4] In this book, the author explains that it is not the Carnival itself that constitutes a literary fact: It is a mixture of discursive registers, the non-compliance with certain established rules, and the insolence to express, quietly or loudly and clearly, truths that should preferably remain hidden. To preserve the fragile social harmony, it is preferable for certain things to remain unsaid and certain facts to be concealed. However, the carnivalized literature, which permits the inclusion of irony and parody at its core, inevitably disrupts this balance and harmony, or at least, makes it shudder.

Bakhtin conducts a reading of Rabelais' work like no one before him. He connects the French author's way of writing to polyphony and dialogism, represented as an open work because of the crossed meanings that emerge other than the printed words. It is a work full of "voices," as Bakhtin says, or "discourses," as one would say nowadays: Legal discourse, religious discourse, marginalization discourse, power discourse, and so forth, which all meet and confront each other. The refined speech of the literati, for example, encounters the coarse speech (filled with profanity) of rude individuals. Bakhtin expresses the great metaphor of the Renaissance man facing the discovery of new worlds in addition to facing life's own mysteries: Being born, living,

[4] In reference to the book translated from Russian into French by Andrée Robel and published in 1970; for the English translation, see *Popular Culture in the Middle Age and the Renaissance*. This book as well as another work by Bakhtin in French translation, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetry*, are used since this thesis was written and defended in French in France. Moreover, as a teacher of French literature in Brazil, French translations are used more frequently than Brazilian ones for practical reasons.

dying, being buried, and returning in the form of a small plant or something else. To achieve this, he draws a vertiginous circle, starting from the head (the "noble" part of Man) and descending to the "less noble" parts, that is, the organs governing vital human needs that seem to overcome the body: Nose, breasts, stomach, buttocks, genitals, etc. Thus, the man who eats, drinks, vomits, defecates, and urinates causes his body to return to the earth in a circular motion. He is then reborn: The human species thus continues the cycle of life and death.

So where does Carnival fit into all of this? In the late Middle Ages and during the Renaissance, Carnival played a symbolic and key role in people's lives. At the time, people generally had a significantly shorter lifespan due to wars, famine, and disease. Death was not regarded with as much terror as it is nowadays. In the Middle Ages, death was considered normal. In past centuries in Paris, people went to the *Place des Grèves* to watch a "show," which involved hanging the condemned. All this may seem barbaric, but the thought of the French Middle Ages and Renaissance regarding the mystery of life and death were quite different to our own.

Returning to the subject of Carnival and its symbolic role in people's lives, one Bakhtin scholar stated the following:

> The carnivalesque principle abolishes hierarchies, levels, social classes, and creates another life, free from conventional rules and restrictions. In carnival, all that is marginalized and excluded – the mad, the scandalous, the aleatory – takes over the center in a liberating explosion of otherness. The principle of material body—hunger, thirst, defecation, copulation—becomes a positively corrosive force, and festive laughter enjoys a symbolic victory over death, over all that is held sacred, and over all that oppresses and restricts (STAM, 1992, p.86).

In the reflection proposed by Stam based on the work of Bakhtin, it should be noted that Man is only himself when he abandons the dogmas that keep him from being free and, especially, all that is imposed by law, religion, and all the sacrosanct institutions of society. In this context, it is only natural that Bakhtin considers Rabelais to be rebellious or subversive to a certain extent in the positive sense of the word. With his peculiar writing, Rabelais transposes in literature the spirit of Carnival, which is nothing more, according to Bakhtin, than "[...] life itself….shaped according to a certain pattern of play" (BAKHTIN, *apud* STAM, 1992, p.86).

Carnival is ultimately the place for improvisation, linguistic exchanges, and replicas. The discourse generated there so as to penetrate such a *serious work*, dominated by a purportedly *official* language, will divert this work—in a good way—from its objectives or main purposes, or otherwise reduce the value thereof. In my view, the *non-serious* discourse that irony can generate is carnivalesque, as it encompasses the ability to mean by not meaning. In this speech, a game is set up with words, capable of subverting or even transgressing the norms established in social life.

It is not that irony is devoid of laughter, even though it would appear to be more perverse than jovial. Ironic laughter is deeply ambivalent, as it unites death and resurrection. It is laughter linked to a particular view of the world. What is fascinating in the work of Bakhtin (1970b) is the profound connection that he establishes between social issues and History.

Several theories of discourse analysis exist, all of which are valid. However, for me, the most important one, because it allows us to address the entire transgressive system linked to the phenomenon of irony, is the theory that has a touch of the Russian Master's magic: Here, I am referring to the reading of the semi-linguistic theory of Patrick Charaudeau.

This can best be explained through Bakhtin's observation with regard to the transgressive laughter of the Carnival, a bridge leading to a carnivalized literature. In this festivity, or rather what it represents, we see another bridge that allows us to opt for the aforementioned discursive-analytic theory and cheerfully transgress some of its concepts or give greater emphasis to some elements rather than others. In short, it is a way of seeking new solutions to puzzles using this theory in the sense that linguistic usages seem to multiply with the passage of time. In so doing, we can say that Bakhtin's research on the Carnival and the carnivalized word, while assuming such a broad anthropological dimension, may be combined with our analytic-discursive view.

3 A Carnivalized Discourse in Full Life Narrative?

Let us return to the artist—better known in Brazil as a singer—Charles Aznavour. The narrative of his life was not a random choice for this study, as I sought someone who did not see himself as a writer in world literature and did not want to talk

about his life only for others to rewrite it, but rather someone who ventured to talk about himself. In Aznavour's own words: "In 1974, I had already produced a biography, but in this case, I was helped by the journalist Jean Noli, who [...] rewrote the pages that I handed him in prose. It was a little bit of my life, but told through the voice of another person" (2003, p.11-12).[5] After this experience, Aznavour became engaged in the task of writing and publishing his writings, which resulted in a rich and subjective narrative from the perspective of speech analysis and the ironic usage of language.[6]

The second reason that led me to adopt the sayings from this book as the subject of this study was the poise of the writing style that sought authenticity, therefore merging emotions (largely translated through irony) in a life story. Though perhaps without this conscious intention, Aznavour adopts a style that reminds us (*mutatis mutandis*, of course) of other French writers who do not hesitate to merge written and spoken accounts in their works. Writing (almost) as we speak: There is the effect that the book was produced within us, in a quick first reading.

Finally, to the third reason for *adopting* the author Aznavour as an illustration in this article: Through a fuller and closer examination connected to discourse analysis, we observe that his irony consisted precisely of a mixture of records (oral and written), discourses and voices.

The polyphony of the book leads us to identify the presence of argumentative strategies to capture the reader, but it also explains our fondness for the book, as irony has always been seen as a polyphonic process *par excellence*.

Before turning to the analysis of some excerpts from the book, it is still necessary to summarize—for the benefit of unfamiliar readers—the narrative of the life of Charles Aznavour, according to his book. He was born in Paris eighty-nine years ago. He was the son of Armenian immigrants and refugees who chose France as their host country. During his parents' youth, after the revolution against the Ottoman government, Turkish officers occupied the Turkish government. In 1916, they had the unfortunate idea of imposing racial hegemony, and Armenians were subsequently

[5] My French translation: *Il m'était arrivé déjà en 1974 en produire d'une plus pour cette première, je fait m'étais aider par le journaliste Jean Noli, qui avait [...] Rewrité les pages en prose que je lui communiquais. C'était un peu ma vie, mais racontée par la voix d'un autre* (AZNAVOUR, 2003, p.11-12).

[6] In his book, *Le temps des avants*, Aznavour thanks his two friends, Stéphanie Chevrier and Gérard Davoust, for correcting his spelling mistakes (AZNAVOUR, 2003, p.2).

attacked and killed. It was the first genocide of the twentieth century, now recognized by some but denied by others. It must be said that Armenians born in Russia were not systematically killed, and Charles' father, Micha Aznavourian of Akhaltzkha (Georgia), managed to escape the massacre, even though his wife was Turkish. Both were artists and they were never against the chosen vocation of their children, who also had a tendency for the stage. Charles is French, born and raised in France. Since a very young age, following the example of his sister Aida, he tried to enter show business: Writing short songs, dancing, miming, and eventually singing. His life was not easy and times were hard, but the Aznavourian family survived the Second World War, living in Paris with rationing and restrictions imposed by the German invaders. Gradually, and with the help of a few friends (among whom Charles Aznavour always mentions Edith Piaf), the young singer kept climbing until he attained great success that went beyond the borders of France. At the time of writing and according to his book, he is the father of a large family, is happily married, and lives in Switzerland. It is also noted that he has made several films, some directed by renowned film makers such as Truffaut for example. In this summary of his life narrative, the manner in which it is reported makes everything seem so easy. However, the difficulties due to the modest circumstances of his parents and life in France at the time were not insignificant, and the artist received many "no's" from entrepreneurs and others before becoming famous. In his memoir, he literally dives into his past.

From the beginning of the book, the reader easily perceives that the subject-narrator[7] provides ample room for irony, be it a cheerful, relaxed, or bitter irony. He has a critical view of the world and his contemporaries, and spares no one in his criticism: Not even himself.

Although in my doctoral thesis in 1988,[8] I argued that irony was a mode of communication, I have now extended my understanding of the phenomenon. Irony is used to communicate something to someone, by drawing their attention to what is being said and using a game proposed by the linguistic phenomenon in question: An attention-capturing game as argumentative strategy. This will be the focus of the next section.

[7] The subject-narrator is a "paper subject" who lives in the world of words.
[8] For more information, see the reference list.

4 Irony as a Communicative Strategy

Numerous strategies aim to express the communicative act more effectively. In this study, irony was chosen. Its use gives more flavor to the communicative method, whatever that method may be—speaking, writing, painting, music, gestures, etc.—and it forms part of a communicative process in which the speaker seeks to convey his opinion about something to a given receiver. The ironic-subject prefers—for some reason or another—to state something through a *non-truth* that will undoubtedly protect him from the sanctions potentially triggered by an aggressive or direct statement. When used in communication, irony is part of a playful cat and mouse game—sometimes cruel—between the communication subjects. As a result of this reasoning, I believe that it can be included in the wider context of argumentation.

By communication strategy, defined in an oversimplified form, we may understand the vast network of strategies put into practice in linguistic usage as well as the different kinds of discourse used to transmit the ideas aiming to modify someone's judgments about something, or at least, to show that the speaker has no restrictions with regard to the target of irony. Nevertheless, perhaps because of a certain elegance of mind, such a communicative-subject should rather not express the fact too evidently.

In the scope of such ironic constructions, while examining some randomly chosen excerpts for this article, we may note that certain processes are repeated. First, all excerpts are polyphonic. The voice of the "speaker," as Ducrot would say (1984, p.193), treats the statement as a whole, but allows the intrusion of other discordant opinions. However, this clash of voices is not incoherent because irony always leaves more or less obvious clues that reveal its use, at least for the majority of readers.

Let us speak parenthetically here so as to better explain the presence of Ducrot in this article. According to his own words, Ducrot (1984, p.171) was inspired by Bakhtin to create a "reinterpretation"[9] of his theory of polyphony. As Bakhtin's theory applied to texts, Ducrot aimed to diversify it and apply it to statements.

In my opinion, the key point in this "reinterpretation" is the division that the linguist (DUCROT, 1984, p.199-200) makes between the "speaker" and "enunciator" (or "enunciators"). Summarizing and following Machado (1991, p.17-18), for Ducrot,

[9] This is my own term.

the "speaker" is the entity responsible for the utterance as a whole, while the "enunciator" is the entity placed in the scene by the speaker, somewhat co-responsible for the utterance in question. This would imply a distribution of roles in the polyphonic statement: Some would present but not assume what they present, while others would assume but not be the official "owners" of the statement. It is worth remembering that while Ducrot recognizes the existence of an empirical-subject, the producer of the statement, he would rather not analyze it in the context of linguistic pragmatics. However, such a subject was considered by others, such as the linguist and discourse analyst Charaudeau in his semilinguistic theory published in 1983. To end this parenthetical statement, it should be iterated that in the study of polyphony within the utterance, the nomenclature proposed by Ducrot will not be adopted, but rather Bakhtin's term of "voices," since it is broader and avoids possible terminological confusion.

The following excerpts from Aznavour's book form part of or are connected to his life narrative, and as a result, the subject-narrator is an important figure. As already mentioned, in our analysis, this figure shall be referred to as a *subject-narrator* or *ironic-subject* since both terms alternate or complement each other, but this is also done in an attempt to show that these *subjects* from the paper world differ from the *communicating-subject* signing the book, Charles Aznavour. In this sense, he is a being from the real world, an empirical subject, with his music, life, family, friends, difficulties, and success.

Let us begin with excerpt (i):

> [...] I started this work seriously, remembering what Harold Robbins, the American writer who publishes and sells a lot, told me one day: 'The public loves success stories, especially if there is a lot of fighting in them and if the beginning of the career is difficult' (AZNAVOUR, 2003, p.12).[10]

The subject-narrator states that he began his writing work in the most serious possible way. However, soon afterwards, he introduces another voice in this statement: That of the writer Harold Robbins, whose words enclosed in quotation marks contradict

[10] My translation from the French: [...] *je me suis attelé à la tâche, me souvenant de ce qui m'avait soufflé un jour Harold Robbins, écrivain américain à très gros tirage: 'Le public aime les success stories, particulièrement s'il y a eu bagarre et si les débuts ont été difficiles'*.

the reality of his work: Robbins' voice thus gives him a complete and ready recipe to ensure the success of his book. Now, the (serious) direction of Aznavour's life narrative is distorted by the (non-serious) inclusion of this statement, which can be considered as banal simplicity: The public loves books in which primary feelings are exposed. The ironic-subject seems to challenge the reader: "And what about me? Do you think I'm going to do this or not?"

Let us now examine the case of excerpt (ii): "They always ask us: Tell us about your life, your sorrows, your success, your encounters, and especially your amorous adventures. And why not the way we act in bed?" (AZNAVOUR, 2003, p.7).[11] The offence proposed by the ironic-subject kicks in at the end of the excerpt, with a slightly aggressive and direct question addressed to all those who may ask Aznavour, the empirical-subject, for juicy details about his life: Journalists, editors, and so forth. We may note in (ii) a division between the voice of the narrator-subject (serious) and the ironic-subject. The former does not hide his distrust of journalistic and editorial harassment, and he doubts the seriousness of the voices and intentions of such third parties. In other words, it could be said that in (ii), there are two *types of voices*: The first formed by a *voice* that maintains a *serious discourse* in the sense of *non-ironic*, the second formed by a question posed in a provocative manner by the ironic-subject to the hunters of sensational news. Now, this question, in its *raw state*, could be imagined as follows: "Why don't you just ask me to tell you about my sexual exploits?" There is therefore a mismatch between the first and second voices, and thus, the irony arises in this mismatch.

This same criticism of "fads" in terms of editing as well as the criticism of everyday life is also revealed in extract (iii):

> Now, organic is fashionable: What we eat, drink, and produce must be organic. So I decided to sacrifice myself to this trend by producing my organic produce in the form of memories [...] as organic is trendy, many publishers and even some famous figures said they would be interested in publishing my life. I then decided to meditate on the

[11] My translation from the French: *On nous demande souvent: racontez-nous votre vie, vos malheurs, votre réussite, les rencontres que vous avez faites et, surtout, vos aventures amoureuses. Et pourquoi pas notre manière de nous conduire au lit?*

> issue. Not that I'm slow, but it took me fifteen years to think about it before deciding (AZNAVOUR, 2003, p.11).[12]

In (iii), an ironic-subject mocks what he calls "fashionable organics": Everything you eat, drink, and read today should be "organic!" He purposely amalgamates a writing genre (biographies) with the modern way of looking at the world: To be "organic" is something *In*, as women's magazines would say. Again, the echo of other voices in the statement is, as a whole, felt. The voice underlying the statement manifests at the end, but it is also ironic: "So I decided to meditate on the issue. Not that I'm slow, but it took me fifteen years to think about it before deciding." This highlights the fact that the empirical-subject or communicating-subject, Charles Aznavour, cares little about publishing his biography or life story or not: Those who are familiar with the artist know that he always had an agitated pace as opposed to acting slowly.[13]

But how should this ironic-subject who laughs about the very work that he is writing be contained? The response is found in extract (iv):

> However, I lived a life that perhaps deserves, note that I say 'perhaps', to be recounted. What will be the reactions of those who read me? Having now reached an age at which an individual no longer cultivates many illusions, I still wonder: The style, the way you write, is it worth more than what I have to say? Will it be necessary, as they said about my voice, to incorporate my pity? Ah, at this point, it doesn't matter, what the hell! So, once upon a time, twice, three times, many times, there was a boy who had the unpronounceable name of Charles Aznavourian (AZNAVOUR, 2003, p.13).[14]

The above excerpt attempts to minimize the apparent refusal of the actor to submit to the writing exercise that consists of narrating his life. It reflects an internal struggle between the communicating-subject, empirical-subject, and subject-narrator.

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[12] My translation from the French: *De nos jours, la mode est au bio : ce que l'on mange, boit, produit se doit de l'être. A mon tour, j'ai décidé de sacrifier à cette tendance en produisant ma bio sous forme de souvenirs [...] c'est plutôt que les bios étaient dans le vent, nombre d'éditeurs, et de plus prestigieux, m'ont fait savoir qu'ils seraient intéressés à m'éditer. J'ai alors à mon tour médité sur la question. Ce n'est pas que je sois lent, mais cela m'a pris quinze ans avant de me décider.*

[13] Perhaps respite from this agitation has come with age and the tranquility that brought success to his life.

[14] My translation from the French: *Pourtant, j'ai vécu une vie qui vaut peut-être, je dis bien peut-être, d'être racontée. À quelles réactions dois-je m'attendre? Ayant atteint l'âge où l'on se fait peu d'illusions, je me pose tout de même des questions: le style, la manière d'écrire valent-ils mieux que ce que l'on a dire ? Faudrait-il, comme on me conseillait pour ma voix, retenir ma plume? Ah, et puis au point où j'en suis, tant pis, que diable! Donc, il était une fois, deux fois, trois fois, il était plusieurs fois, un garçon répondant au nom imprononçable de Charles Aznavourian.*

But this is done playfully through the self-derision found in the second "perhaps," enclosed in quotation marks in the original narrative.[15]

Let us continue the analysis of this excerpt. We observe that different voices (BAKHTINE, 1970a, p.267) are evoked: The subject-narrator addresses the reader with his "note" as well as a third party, which we shall call the *critical voice*, a distant echo of one of the many failures of the singer's or Aznavour's career. Furthermore, this narrator lets in another ironic statement and transgressive voice that seems more connected to the subject than others and that, in direct discourse, defies all by exclaiming in a near outburst, "Ah, at this point, it doesn't matter, what the hell!"

This excerpt, rich in differing voices, ends with a *pied de nez* that the subject-narrator of Charles Aznavour' life narrative takes back to such a genre by stating, "So, once upon a time, twice, three times, many times, there was a boy who had the unpronounceable name of Charles Aznavourian."

The voices in excerpt (iv) reveal the writer's conflicts as well as his insolence toward the world. This insolence was—admittedly—one of the weapons that drove Charles Aznavour to success, resulting from his fearlessness and desire to provoke the other, that is, a transgressive power assumed by its positive side.

As to the usage of "once upon a time," it provides the reader with a *genre effect*, in this case, that of a fairy tale. According to Charaudeau,

> All forms of *pastiches, parodies, plagiarism*, etc., use processes that allow the conservation [...] of the discursive functions of the original text to produce an effect of similarity. [...] However, it may occur that this effect appears through *non-compliance*, that is, the displacement of descriptive norms imposed by certain genres (1992, p.698).[16]

Following this reasoning, we note that the "once upon a time" of the subject-narrator in the passage in question already operates as an index of irony because it violates the rules of a genre such as the life narrative. Moreover, the transgression is magnified through the repetition and parody of the segment: "once upon a time." The

[15] Following Sperber and Wilson (1978, pp.399-412), we may say that this "perhaps" falls into the category of "ironic references."

[16] My translation from the French: *Toutes les formes de pastiches, parodies, plagiats, etc., utilisent des procédés qui permettent de garder [...] les fonctions discursives du texte de départ pour produire un effet de ressemblance.[...] Mais il peut se faire que cet effet apparaisse par non-conformité, c'est-à-dire par déplacement des normes de description imposées par certains genres.*

genre effects related to fairy tales are thus the target of an ironic parody: And what if the book being written is an ironic parody of a lifetime? The subject-narrator repeatedly returns to this question throughout his life narrative. After all, diving into an already distant past allows the creation of fictional elements by the memoirist, even though his initial intention is to tell the truth about the empirical subject who signs the book.

But how does one tell the truth about a life while seeking it in an already distant past? The facts as they were lived fatally overlap with others that are relocated and adjusted, or even imagined.

The great French specialist in biographies and autobiographies Philippe Lejeune (2013, p.393) expresses his feelings about the presence of such fictional genres, stating, "I like autobiographies and I like fiction, but I do not appreciate their combination."[17]

At this point, a discursive analysis like semiolinguistics (CHARAUDEAU, 1983, 1992, 2008), which permits the existence of "effects of fiction" blended with factual reality to compose a narrative, could resolve this issue: Writing that intends to be autobiographical and dives into a *chiaroscuro* past through the passage of time ends up using countless "effects of fiction."

Within Bakhtinian polyphony, the use of the above-mentioned effect of fiction in excerpt (iv) may be seen as a call for input from other voices that speak and live in worlds or other discursive genres that differ from that of the life narrative. Nevertheless, such usage reveals an argumentative strategy aimed to capture the reader.

Furthermore, it is not the narrator of Aznavour's life who will contradict us, as excerpt (v) makes his intention quite clear: He will not project himself into the future because he is already worn-out due to his age. All that remains is to seek inspiration by diving into his past. Let us consider the following:

> Young people dream about their future; as mine is largely consumed, I am seeking inspiration by delving into my past—I should say our past, because the past is never completely personal. However, the past is collective, especially in the case of an Armenian family (AZNAVOUR, 2003, p.15).[18]

[17] My translation from the French: *J'aime l'autobiographie, j'aime la fiction, j'aime moins leur mélange.*
[18] My translation from the French: *Les jeunes rêvent à leur futur ; le mien de futur étant largement consommé, je cherche à me ressourcer en plongeant dans mon passé – je devrais dire notre passé car le passé n'est jamais tout à fait personnel, au contraire, il est collectif, particulièrement pour une famille arménienne.*

In this excerpt, the presence of the word "inspiration" should be called to our attention—until recently, it was only connected to fictional works. If there is some irony in the excerpt, it would only be in one segment of the text: "Young people dream about their future; as mine is largely consumed, I am seeking inspiration by delving into my past." We observe here a sweet irony smiling tenderly before the inevitable passage of time. However, in the same statement, a change occurs in another segment of the text, from "—I should say our past [...]" to the end of the excerpt. Another less tender voice makes an allusion to the "collective past": It hardens or saddens the statement as a whole in recollection of the Armenian holocaust, albeit discreetly.

Touching upon this tragic past, Aznavour continues to discuss it, always in the regime of irony. In excerpt (vi), the issue assumes tragic colors:

> [...] this world in which the new "Young-Turk" government was expecting to see all [the Armenians] disappear. Eliminated, annihilated, goodbye, or better, to hell with these Armenians, and on the way to the final solution! Oh! What a lovely phrase! (AZNAVOUR, 2003, p.17).[19]

Here, the subject-narrator, in the space of a few lines, tells of the ordeal of his Armenian ancestors. At first glance, one might think that at least the first part of his statement is serious (without irony). However, the quotation marks around "Young-Turk" are revealing: This is another case of an ironic statement. This situation was accepted by the Turkish government in one way or another and is usually cited without quotation marks; here, the one who does not accept this is the ironic-subject.

Note that the nominal phrase "Young-Turk" does not only designate one person, but all elements of the revolutionary party that gave rise to this government in the second decade of the twentieth century. Discursively speaking, it is an entity. Yet suddenly, this entity takes shape and begins to speak, occupying almost the entire space of the utterance. It calls for the total elimination of Aznavour's ascendants. However, the voice of the ironic-subject returns to face the voice of power, ending the statement with an ironic antiphrasis: "Oh! What a lovely phrase." This brings us back to Proudhon, quoted earlier in this article: "Irony, true freedom."

[19] My translation from the French: [...] *ce monde où le nouveau gouvernement 'Jeune-Turc' espérait tant les voir tous [les Arméniens] disparaître. Éliminés, annihilés, adieu, ou plutôt au diable, ces Arméniens, et en route pour la solution finale! Oh! La jolie phrase.*

Still in extract (vi), in terms of the procedures that trigger irony, we observe that the subject-narrator deliberately mixes voices or other fragments of voices with his own to argue against the absurdity of the situation brought about by the power and its harmful consequences against an entire people. Irony thus seeks to shock the reader and influence him or, at least, awaken his consciousness to the fact that there was genocide of Armenians in 1916: The strategy manifests in the fact that an atrocious event in history is transmitted through the tone of mockery.

The insolence of the empirical-subject Aznavour summons ironic voices that come from many corners to help him tell his story. Moreover, just as Narcissus loves his own image, the subject-narrator of the book seeks someone with whom the empirical-subject can identify in his youth. Thus, in excerpt (vii), a known French literary character enters: "Like Rastignac, I could not stop myself from saying with a tone of triumph: 'Now it's between the three of us and you, America!'" (AZNAVOUR, 2003, p.201).[20]

The Narcissus of the young Aznavour is none other than Balzac's character Rastignac. What a double irony! The ironic-subject when mocking the ambitious Rastignac also mocks young Charles and his claims. Thus, we witness an unusual meeting of two subjects from the "paper world," Rastignac and Charles, with the difference that the latter is indeed very real.

The end of the excerpt in question, "[...] Now it's between the three of us and you, America," emerges as an ironic parody of the famous *A nous deux, Paris*, the challenge of the Balzacian character launched at the end of the novel, *Le Père Goriot*. Rastignac was alone when issuing a challenge to Paris, while the young Charles had left Paris with two friends to seek glory in America when launching his challenge. The voices of the subject-narrator in the life story of Aznavour and that of Balzac's subject-narrator intertwine, with irony emerging from this interweaving.

Seen in these terms, how does one neglect the presence of fiction in our lives and, most of all, in all life stories? It is indeed these fictional effects that color and attract readers. Moreover, the irony in the case at hand leads the narrated statements to an argument: The book, *Le temps des avants*, tells them the *truth* about Charles

[20] My translation from the French: *Comme Rastignac, je ne pus m'empêcher de dire triomphalement: "Amérique, à nous trois!"*.

Aznavour, but what is the truth of a life? A curious argument, undoubtedly, leading, not to a logical argumentation itself (certainly not the case here!), but more to a kind of argument for the seduction of the word, which aims to make the reader reflect on life itself. And while we are on the subject of reflections...

Some Reflections to Conclude

Whoever signs what he/she writes—be it an essay, novel, or text such as this one—assumes responsibility for his/her writing. However, when the writing process begins, the first *I* that commands it should evidently be able to control it and the manner in which it is written. It can feel like the other *I* is taking control over what is being written and that it is going somewhere other than where initially anticipated.

Thus, unwittingly—at least, this was not my first intention—this article raised certain issues that will be highlighted below, without, nonetheless, presenting an accurate conclusion, only reflections that occur at this moment and that may also change with the passage of time. This can be complemented by further studies on the *duo* formed by uniting the argument through irony and the life narrative.

First, in terms of the discursive analysis of excerpts from the book, *Le temps des avants*, when discussion irony as a strategy to capture the reader's attention, at times, concepts or terms borrowed from both Bakhtin and Ducrot are used, without creating a distinct separation between the two theorists. The intention was to stall somewhat the difference propagated by certain authors between the polyphony of Ducrot and that of Bakhtin. For us, polyphony is no more than a Bakhtinian creation. There exist other readings of the theory of the Russian master, and among them, I immensely enjoy that of Ducrot. This issue can essentially be exemplified, *mutatis mutandis*, by Lacan's rereading of Freud's work. One reading does not reduce the work of the founder of psychoanalysis, and different researchers orient themselves toward one or the other or both for particular issues. In our specific case, situated within discursive-linguistics, I took a special liking, as mentioned above, to the "voices" of Bakhtin.

Second, some puzzles arising from fiction in stories, life narratives, memoirs, or autobiographies can be elucidated within the framework of discursive analysis: This is what this article attempts to show, albeit in panoramic mode.

Third, in a nearly tautological fashion, I affirm that the professional life of the storyteller ends up entangled with his personal story, passions, aspirations, and disappointments—his feelings. However, for want of space, this subject was little developed in this article. However, it will suffice to say (in our favor) that if Charles Aznavour had not enjoyed the prestige brought by his profession (the fruit, of course, of his talent and a helping hand of fate), he would not have written or been repeatedly asked to write *Le temps des avants*.

To conclude, a brief note should be made about the strategic aspect in the use of irony in documents that aim to communicate something to someone, as in the case of this book, which was the subject of our analysis and considerations. Irony manifests itself as a process connected to the style of being and the writing of every human being. There are some individuals who never use irony. There are others who use irony in a blunt, aggressive, and offensive manner. There are also those who prefer to use irony through a subtle and strategic game that seeks to influence others in some way or make them more or less conscious of the absurdity or ridiculousness of certain opinions and situations. There are several manners to approach irony: I prefer those suggested by Bakhtin, including his concepts on polyphony, complemented by Charaudeau's ideas on the division of subjects in a communicative or speech act.

Finally, I believe that the act of telling a personal story and inserting subtle touches of irony seems to be a proper ingredient in an argumentative and communicative strategy, which, when applied to a life narrative, furnishes it movement and lightness. Evidently, such an application may be the result of an elaborate written work or it may be a more or less conscious strategy. In this respect, irony may well be a natural and spontaneous linguistic phenomenon for some. It would certainly appear to be the case for Aznavour.

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