

SOUND FORMS AND MEANINGS IN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: LISTENING AS THE HOLDING OF AN ENUNCIATIVE PLACE

Carmen Luci da Costa SILVA*
Lourenço CHACON**

- **ABSTRACT:** this study is inspired by Barthes' (1991) contemplation of listening, dialoguing with the linguistics proposed by Émile Benveniste and its interpretations, which regard the linguist's perspective as enunciative-anthropological (DESSONS, 2006; FLORES, 2013). The integration of these theories enabled the framing of the following questions: (1) how does the child, in their first vocalizations, hold their enunciative place of listening in the interlocutory relations with the other? (2) How does the child, in this enunciative place of listening, delimit the relation between phonic forms and meaning, in their dual – systemic and discursive – aspect? Methodologically, the study uses a child's longitudinal language events in their first eleven months of life, selecting enunciative scenes. The following results were obtained from the analysis: evidence that the child holds their place of listening to themselves and to the other by calling upon the voice of the other, by switching between sound production and pauses in self-listening, by the way they state their position as speaker-listener, and by positing a main interlocutor in the enunciative invertibilities of emission and listening. The holding of this enunciative place enabled indications of discursive meanings and of embryos of systemic meanings of the phonic forms in the emissions to be present.
- **KEYWORDS:** language acquisition; enunciation; listening; phonic forms; meanings.

Introduction

This study is a by-product of Silva's (2009) reflections on how children acquire a first language. The earlier research looked into a child's introduction to the mother tongue based on language facts observed longitudinally from the age of eleven months to three years and four months. The study revealed the presence of three macro-operations of acquisition using Benveniste's enunciative approach: (1) the child's taking

* Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). Instituto de Letras. Porto Alegre – RS – Brazil. clcostasilva@hotmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0002-6036-5285.

** Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP). Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências. Marília – SP – Brazil. lourencochacon@yahoo.com.br. ORCID: 0000-0001-8000-7672.

an enunciative stance, which pertains to inter-subjectivity and is characterized by the passage from being summoned to summoning other; (2) an operation of reference, in which the child transitions from a received reference onto a reference constituted within their speech; and (3) the enunciative inscription of the child in the language-discourse, in which the child transitions from a discursive use of subjective instantiation through forms and functions onto a discursive use in which the enunciation constitutes another enunciation (double-constituted intersubjectivity with uses of reported speech). Silva's research yielded additional concerns: what could the language facts observed in a child younger than eleven months old reveal? How does this child, in the dawn of their "life in language", realize an enunciative stance? What is the role of listening in the said stance-taking?

In addition to the above, our contact with Roland Barthes' *On listening*, found in *Einaudi Encyclopedia*, led us to reflect on the role of listening in children's acquisition of a mother tongue. This is a matter which has inspired philosophers, anthropologists, psychoanalysts, sociologists, among other scholars, because it involves major human issues in biology, cognition, society, culture and the unconscious. And what could Linguistics and linguists formulate in this regard? In recent years, this phenomenon has been a matter of concern for linguists, especially those subscribing to the postulates of Ferdinand de Saussure (COURSIL, 2000; PARRET, 2014)¹. While acknowledging the listener as an element in processes of exchange and dialogue, it would appear that Linguistics has often relegated it to a peripheral position by placing emphasis on the speaker. For Benveniste readers and scholars, the role of the addressee, with more comprehensive investigations into *listening*, still seems not to be a central theme of theorization².

Such preoccupations led to two questions which we endeavor to answer in the pages that follow: (1) how does the child, in their first vocalizations, hold their enunciative place of listening in the interlocutory relations with the other? (2) How does the child, in this enunciative place of listening, delimit the relation between phonic forms and meaning, in their dual – systemic and discursive – aspect?

To answer the above questions, we chose to focus on listening by resorting to Émile Benveniste's approach, concurrently guided by the belief that it is possible to expand his reflections to contemplate listening in the inter-relationships between the major language problems faced by humans: the relationships between biological and cultural aspects; between subjectivity and sociality; and between the symbolic and the thought. We look at Barthes' (1991) notions of "listening", to be further developed in the manuscript, as

¹ In Brazil, the effects of Saussurean-inspired studies on *listening* have appeared in studies such as those by Stawinski (2016) and Milano, Stawinski, Gomes (2016). In acquisition studies, in dialogue with the linguistic reflections of Saussure (2000) on language, of (1967, 2003) on metaphorical and metonymic processes and of Freud-Lacanian psychoanalysis on listening, De Lemos (2002) also presents reflections on the role of the child's listening in an acquisition structure in which the other, the language and the child are all present.

² Silva and Oliveira (2021) presented a study on the role of listening by children (in a Benvenistian approach) in both spoken and written acquisition, with special attention to the reference-correference relationship.

potential disruptors in the field of language acquisition due to their regarding listening as critical in children's transition from *infans* to speakers of a language.

In the field of language acquisition, upon investigating the child-language-adult relationship, De Lemos (2002) reflects on listening (in the sense preferred by Lacanian psychoanalysis) in acquisition, as distinct from hearing, with the latter considered to be a sensory activity of a physiological order. Listening can be perceived when the child distances him/herself from the other's speech through the effects of the difference between his/her speech and that of the other, which occurs due to changes in position, in a structure in which the other (the adult), the language and the child are all present. In each position, she notes, based on the facts of a child's speech in episodes of dialogue, the dominance of the other's speech (first position), of the language (second position) and that of the subject (child) divided between the speaking party and the listening party (third position). It is in the third position that the child, as a speaking subject, is divided between the one who speaks and the one who listens to his/her own speech. We are in agreement with De Lemos as we argue that hearing is distinct from listening and thus intend to look not only at the way in which the child listens to his/her own speech, but also at how he/she listens to the other. In order to expound on this matter, we will start from the idea that the child, by taking the enunciative stance of the one who listens, establishes him/herself in the system of his/her mother tongue.

This text is organized into four sections: (1) in the initial chapter we build upon the theoretical vantage point from which reflections will be made on *listening* in the enunciative act of acquiring the mother tongue; (2) in the methodology chapter we present reflections on language analyst's notion of listening from the theoretical point of view of the study; (3) the analysis, in which we verify how the child realizes his/her enunciative listening role; (4) final remarks, in which we return to the theory to synthetically discuss our analysis and finally answer the questions posed herein.

Listening as a language phenomenon: the writings of Barthes

This study was motivated by Roland Barthes' (1991) *Listening*. The theorist's reflections begin with an intriguing formulation: "*Hearing* is a physiological phenomenon; *listening* is a psychological act" (BARTHES, 1991, p. 245, emphasis in original). The relationship and distinction between hearing and listening, as well as the idea of listening as an act, piqued our interest. Barthes proposes three stages of listening, providing insights on how each one works.

In Barthes' view, the first stage has to do with sensory behaviors such as touching, tasting, smelling, seeing and hearing. Rooted in the biological act of hearing, listening, from an anthropological point of view, "[...] is the very sense of space and of time, by the perception of degrees of remoteness and of regular returns of phonic stimulus" (BARTHES, 1991, p. 246). For mammals, he argues, territories are marked out via smells and sounds; for man, he contends that "[...] the appropriation of space is also

a matter of sound: domestic space, that of the house, the apartment—the approximate equivalent of animal territory—is a space of familiar, *recognized* noises whose ensemble forms a kind of household symphony.” (BARTHES, 1991, p. 246, emphasis in original). This recognition does not yet involve the symbolic statute of sound, a recognition of distinctiveness. Rather, it is a place where listening, as phonic recognition, finds shelter to establish itself. The philosopher mentions the anguish of a hospitalized child who no longer hears the familiar noises of motherly comfort. For Barthes, it is against this auditory background that listening arises as an exercise in intelligence and selection.

Therefore,

[...] the ear seems made for this capture of the fleeting index: it is motionless, fixed, poised like that of an animal on the alert; like a funnel leading to the interior, it receives the greatest possible number of impressions and channels them toward a supervisory center of selection and decision; the folds and detours of its shell seem eager to multiply the individual’s contact with the world yet to reduce this very multiplicity by submitting it to a filtering trajectory (BARTHES, 1991, p. 248).

Thus, for the philosopher, this is the role of the first stage of listening: to turn that which is undifferentiated and confused into distinct and pertinent. This first level is responsible for selection and decision during the individual’s multiple experiences with the world, a process that sees listening constitute itself as the very operation of a metamorphosis – that is to say, a progression from the multiplicity of nature through filtering what is relevant in a given social space.

In addition to this first stage, Barthes expounds on a second type, which, in his view, seems to be linked to what distinguishes humans from animals: the intentional reproduction of a rhythm. For the author, the first rhythmic representations coincide with the appearance of the first human dwellings. Nevertheless, he of course cautions that “[...] we know nothing about the birth of phonic rhythm; but it would be logical to speculate (let us not reject the delirium of origins) that to produce a rhythm (incisions or beats) and to build a house are contemporary activities.” (BARTHES, 1991, p. 248). Therefore, the “operational characteristic of humanity” would be precisely the extensively repeated rhythmic percussion: “[...] by rhythm, the pre-anthropoc creature enters the humanity of the Australanthropes.” (BARTHES, 1991, p. 249). It is also owing to rhythm that listening stops being pure surveillance and becomes creation. Without rhythm, “no language is possible: the sign is based on an oscillation, that of the *marked* and the *non-marked* [...]” (BARTHES, 1991, p. 249, emphasis in original). The Freudian child would exemplify this in the symbolic game miming the presence and absence of his mother:

Let us imagine this child listening for noises which can tell him of the mother’s desired return: he is in the first stage of listening, that of indices;

but when he stops directly supervising the appearance of the index and begins miming its regular return himself, he is making the awaited index into a sign: he shifts to the second stage of listening, which is that of meaning [...] (BARTHES, 1991, p. 249).

In this instance, Barthes refers to the passage from encrypting reality to deciphering it. This second stage is the one that probes and places two subjects in relation to each other, even amidst a crowd, as it involves a person's speaking when s/he wants to be heard amid the singularity (i.e. the emphasis) of that saying. Thus, the injunction to listen (listen to me) would correspond to the interpellation of one subject by another, placing above all else the almost physical contact between the subjects (by voice and ear): *Listen to me, know that I exist* is, in Jakobson's terminology, evoked by Barthes, a phatic expression functioning as the operator of an ideal inter-subjectivity. Below is Barthes' synthesis of the first two stages of listening:

Just as the first listening transforms noise into index, this second listening metamorphoses man into a dual subject: interpellation leads to an interlocution in which the listener's silence will be as active as the locutor's speech: *listening speaks*, one might say: it is at this (either historical or structural) stage that psychoanalytic listening intervenes. (BARTHES, 1991, p. 249, emphasis in original).

Finally, the third stage, linked to Freud-Lacanian Psychoanalysis, would correspond to that of the unconscious, which, for Lacan, is structured as a language. This listening is that of the psychoanalyst. It is the listening of an unconscious that speaks to another who is assumed to be hearing: "What is thus spoken emanates from an unconscious knowledge transferred to another subject, whose knowledge is presumed." (BARTHES, 1991, p. 252). Upon reflection on this third stage, Barthes argues that the purpose of Psychoanalysis: to reconstruct the history of the subject in their speech. Based on this purpose, he draws an analogy between the psychoanalyst and the patient and the child in language because, just as the psychoanalyst strives to capture the signifiers and, in so doing, to apprehend, in the speech, the language as the unconscious of his patient, the child, immersed in the language, captures the sounds, the syllables, the consonances, the words and, in this way, learns to speak. Barthes argues that listening, on the part of the child, "[...] is this means of trapping signifiers by which the *infans* becomes a speaking being." (BARTHES, 1991, p. 256, emphasis in original).

Continuing his reflections, the philosopher discusses the role of listening and its power in phenomena such as the implicit, the indirect, the supplementary, the overdeterminations – in short, across the realms of polysemy. Therefore, the roles involved in listening are not fixed, at which point Barthes repeats the axiom "listening speaks". Here, differences are pointed out, since, in traditional societies, there are marked places of speech and listening; nowadays, these places are less and less protected. In

this sense, the freedom of listening would be linked to turn-taking: “[...] in order to liberate listening, it suffices to begin speaking oneself [...] a listening which circulates, which permutes, which disaggregates, by its mobility, the fixed network of the roles of speech” (BARTHES, 1991, p. 259). Finally, he points to dispersion, in which, over the course of a listen, there is a ceaseless production of new signifiers without ever deterring meaning. This phenomenon (referred to by Barthes as a “shimmering” of signifiers or significance) is distinct from signification, as it involves not only syntagmatic extension, but a verticalization in which listening is exteriorized and the subject renounces his/her intimacy. The scholar contends that freedom of listening is as necessary as freedom of speech, as the subject is not obliged to “[...] to take his pleasure where he does not want to go.” (BARTHES, 1991, p. 260).

The philosopher’s words about *listening* left us – to use the Barthesian term – *indices* of restlessness: the inter-subjectivity involved in *listening* and the consideration of *listening* as an act, which places it as an activity of a speaker in front of the other’s words; and the individuality (singularity) and sociality involved in the act of listening, which sometimes involves transforming noises into clues (first listening), distinguishing significant noises in the relationship with another (second listening) and wanting to “grab hold” of signifiers in an operation to select what to listen to (third listen).

In light of the foregoing, let us move on to Benvenistean indices in order to extract linguistic-enunciative elements which allow us to hone in on theoretical reflections about *listening* and its role in the child’s passage from *infans* to speaker of his/her mother tongue.

From Barthesian ideas of *listening* towards a notion based on Benveniste’s Theory of Language

To regard listening as linked to the anthropological tenets of Émile Benveniste’s Theory of Language³, as interpreted by Dessons (2006) and Flores (2013), is to consider the fact that man enunciates both for and with the other. On the one hand, we are living beings, equipped with the biological apparatus that allows us to see, hear, and smell – to feel signs of the *here* and *now* where we are located; on the other hand, something keeps us from fully taking stock of the space surrounding us, be it by sight, hearing, or smell. In fact, we make a selection, a cutout within our field of vision, hearing and even smell. What makes us move from this “scale of the living” to the “history of men”, as Barthes (1991) points out? The big answer seems to lie

³ According to Flores (2013), the idea of a Theory of Language as proposed by Benveniste involves considering the enunciative proposal as a part of this reflection, perhaps a very important part, but not the only one, as there is, in his work, a persistent preoccupation with the different modes of human presence in language. Furthermore, we consider that, in the preface to *Problems in General Linguistics I*, Benveniste, when pointing out that he will outline an overview of recent research on the theory of language and the perspectives they open up, he seems to place himself in this opening of perspectives of what he terms a “Theory of Language”.

within language and human entry into a language. In this work, we are interested in dealing precisely with what is beyond the biological condition of listening. This is because our rise from the animal series to *homo sapiens*, although it may have been favored, as Benveniste (1995) says, by our body structure or nervous organization, goes beyond biological conditions inherited from nature. Indeed, the linguist draws attention to the fact that this rise is due, above all, to our faculty of symbolic representation, a faculty that enables our human constitution as speakers. In this study, by expanding on Benveniste's reflections, we intend to focus on the human condition of "listeners in language".

The first type of listening pointed out by Barthes seems to be linked to the physiological faculty of hearing. Still, this listening presupposes the capture of familiar clues, from which it becomes possible to distinguish man (whose detection efforts are more linked to sight and also to hearing) from animal (mostly guided by smell). This question seems to involve Benveniste's discussion of human and animal reactions to signals. The role of the first listening – of turning the undifferentiated and confused into distinct and pertinent – seems to be a condition for the second listening, which has to do with establishing the speaker in an interdependent relationship with the listener. The relationship between a human who speaks and a human who listens is, therefore, linked to the emission of rhythmic sounds and to the perception of the said sounds as the production of meaning, to use a Barthesian notion. There seems to be room for dialogue between Barthesian and Benvenistian musings on "[...] the condition of inter-subjectivity, the only one which makes linguistic communication possible" (BENVENISTE, 1995, p. 293, our translation)⁴ since, like Barthes, Benveniste situates our human condition as symbolic beings:

Man too, as an animal, reacts to a signal. But it uses the *symbol* that is instituted by man; it is necessary to learn the meaning of the symbol, it is necessary to be able to interpret it in its significant function and not just to perceive it as a sensory impression, as the symbol has no natural relationship with what it symbolizes. Man invents and understands symbols; the animal does not. Everything follows from there. (BENVENISTE, 1995, p. 29, our translation)⁵.

The sign, therefore, as a significant unit, because it is distinctive, is constituted via a relation of meaning through the establishment of differences. The symbolizing faculty, which is at the base of conceptual functions, only appears in man and is what

⁴ Original: "[...] a condição de intersubjetividade, única que torna possível a comunicação linguística." (BENVENISTE, 1995, p. 293).

⁵ Original: "O homem também, enquanto animal, reage a um sinal. Mas utiliza o símbolo que é instituído pelo homem; é preciso aprender o sentido do símbolo, é preciso ser capaz de interpretá-lo na sua função significativa e não mais, apenas, de percebê-lo como impressão sensorial, pois o símbolo não tem relação natural com o que simboliza. O homem inventa e compreende símbolos; o animal, não. Tudo decorre daí." (BENVENISTE, 1995, p. 29).

guarantees the possibility of language and speech in human societies – constituted by a particular language, inseparable from a defined and particular society.

These two institutions – language and society – are given to humans because we are born in a world of words, which makes Benveniste defend our birth in culture, not in nature. We thus consider that the child’s passage from *infans* to speaker involves *listening* to forms and meanings that are instilled into him/her because “[...] the child is born and develops in the society of men. It is adults, their parents, who inculcate in him/her the use of the word.” (BENVENISTE, 1995, p. 31, our translation)⁶. The term “inculcate” appears in Benveniste precisely when it refers to the acquisition of the mother tongue by the child. However, it is important to emphasize that the use of this term should not imply the linguist’s defense that the adult imposes the use of the word on the child, who is considered passive. The child, while active in the process, is constituted by this language because, as Benveniste (1989) argues, it is not possible for someone to invent a system alone, as one enters the world with an already organized linguistic and social system:

there is no imaginable apparatus of expression that a human being could invent alone. Stories of invented, spontaneous language, outside of any human learning are fables. Language has always been *inculcated* in young children, and always in relation to what have been called realities which are necessarily defined as elements of culture. (BENVENISTE, 1989, p. 24, emphasis added, our translation)⁷.

Looking and *listening* thus presuppose an enunciative configuration, in which the other and the child are in a discursive reality. This implies considering that, via the relationship between emissions and listening, the child is constituted by his/her mother tongue at the same time as s/he constitutes it.

If the child apprehends man’s world through language, how does s/he apprehend it? What is the role of *listening* in this apprehension? If we return to Barthes’ second stage of *listening* – the one that places the human in a dual relationship, in which the speaker’s interpellation, derived from his/her listening, leads to a new dialogue with the other of this enunciative relationship – we may think that the enunciative inversibility *I-you*, repeatedly emphasized from the point of view of emission, also occurs under the bias of perception. There is, therefore, in enunciative relations, inversibility; therefore, an inter-subjectivity of *listenings*. From this perspective, the second level of *listening* seems to be connected to the enunciative act: if Barthes

⁶ Original: “[...] a criança nasce e desenvolve-se na sociedade dos homens. São homens adultos, seus pais, que lhe inculcam o uso da palavra.” (BENVENISTE, 1995, p. 31).

⁷ Original: “[...] não há aparelho de expressão tal que se possa imaginar que um ser humano possa inventar sozinho. As histórias de língua inventada, espontânea, fora de qualquer aprendizagem humana são fábulas. A linguagem tem sempre sido inculcada nas crianças pequenas, e sempre em relação ao que se tem chamado as realidades que são realidades definidas como elementos de cultura, necessariamente.” (BENVENISTE, 1989, p. 24, grifo nosso).

says that “listening speaks”, we shall reinterpret this saying to argue that “listening is an enunciation”.

It is in their history in language that humans, with their *listening*, are raised to a condition of “grasping signifiers”, an expression by Barthes (1991) that we complement, in dialogue with Benveniste’s “inculcate”, by stating that the human is also grasped by signifiers of the other.

Both “grasping signifiers” and being grasped by the other’s signifiers are linked to the fact that the child lives entangled in the web of the mother tongue via utterances with the interlocutors of his/her interactions, utterances that carry coercions of the language and cultural values of a society impregnated in that language. It is in the game between emission-listening that silence also appears as significant.

The anthropology of language, as derived from Benveniste’s vantage point, finds in acquisition one of its great foundations, because the establishment of the child in a language is linked to their entry into human society. This establishment involves “listening” as a place of transit through which the child is constituted by the symbolic itself and by the organizational principles of his/her language, at the same time that s/he constitutes them. It is due to being immersed in utterances that the child’s *listening* (of him/herself and of others) allows the *infans* to constitute and be constituted of their mother tongue, with the constituent linguistic and cultural values of that language. This establishment is possible in the exercise of language, a space in which the child and the other may be operating in the doubly mediating function of language: as speakers that emit to create a reality of speech and as speakers who are listening (to themselves) to recreate this discursive reality. It is in this movement, according to a reflection from Benveniste, that language exercises its role as a mediator between man-man and man-world.

According to Benveniste (1989, 1995), because we are in the symbolic of language and enter a spoken and speaking world, we live entangled in forms and meanings. On the one hand, meaning is linked to the search, in discourse, for a global understanding of the combination of forms and their relationship to a given situation (discursive meaning). On the other hand, meaning is linked to the discrimination (distinctiveness) of each unit (form) in relation to the others, a condition for each form to acquire a systemic *status* in a given language. Conceiving of this double understanding of meaning, the linguist argues that it is via discourse that language is formed and configured. Therefore, our interest in reflecting on how, in child-other discourses, *listening* engenders the relationships between forms and meanings (discursive and systemic), taking this double aspect of meaning by the “effects” and “evocations” that can be inferred in the child-other enunciative relationships.

In this study, as anticipated, we will enter the world of *listening* so that we too can hear how listening appears in child-other utterances. This entry involves the perception (as analysts of language acquisition facts) of the child’s listening to the other’s emissions, as well as the child’s self-listening. In this case, we consider *listening* as an important enunciative movement for the child to assume an enunciative role so that s/he can become a language speaker.

With *listening* understood as a form of enunciation, we hereby propose a shift away from Barthes' notions of *listening* toward the Benvenistean enunciative approach, as shown below:

Table 1 – Theoretical framework.

<p>The act of <i>listening</i> – as put forth by Barthes (1991) – shifted toward acquisition</p>	<p>Enunciative acts of vocal emission and listening – as proposed by Benveniste (1995; 1989) – shifted toward acquisition</p>
<p>First type of listening <i>Listening</i> as linked to the faculty of hearing the noises of the space the human occupies. In this case, it should be verified whether the child evinces signs of differences, in his/her hearing, between ambient noises and the human vocalization of his/her interlocutors.</p>	<p>From biological to symbolic <i>Listening</i> as a transition from the purely biological to the symbolic, via the child's recognition of the distinction between human vocalization and other noises.</p>
<p>Second type of listening <i>Listening</i>, both the child's and that of the other, as decoding, in which the ear (biological) transitions to the symbolic instance, producing and capturing units with value (distinctiveness). It is up to the analyst to listen to this movement of decoding via enunciative child-other relationships.</p>	<p>Enunciation as a place where one convenes with the language <i>Listening</i>, both the child's and that of the other, an understanding of the global meaning of sentences and as a way of capturing distinctiveness in a transit that goes from an embryo of distinctiveness towards the funneling of features of their mother tongue.</p>
<p>Third type of listening <i>Listening</i> in an inter-subjective space of psychoanalytic transference that implies an "I listen" and a "listen to me", in which case listening does not involve what is said, but who emits and who listens. Thus, "I listen" involves the speaker realizing that s/he is listening to the other and to him/herself, and the "listen to me" would involve an appeal to the other, to the speaker. Although Barthes is dealing with listening as linked to psychoanalysis, these relationships between "I listen" and "listen to me", all differences considered, appear in the act of acquisition, as they involve precisely the inter-subjective relationship, attitudes and positions in the discourse related to who and to how this person is participating in the interlocution game with the child and his/her appeals and those of the other to occupy an enunciative place.</p>	<p>Enunciation and the intersubjective place of relationship with the other in an occupation of an enunciative and social space A <i>listening</i> that involves the aspect of inter-subjectivity, one that constitutes enunciation, in which the people in the discourse are constituted in the enunciative relationship and are situated in the enunciative and social space in their language experiences.</p>

Source: Authors' elaboration.

With these displacements, we verify the child's listening movements in their occupation of an enunciative place in the relationship with others in their lives. From this theoretical outline, let us move on to the methodological section.

Methodological considerations: the language analyst's listening to acquisition-related facts

Culling language facts warrants thinking about the researcher's listening movements (considering this listening in its uniqueness) as constitutive of the researcher's actions. The study thus involves listening to previous hearings since, when we turn to the language facts of a child, we necessarily listen to (through the theoretical construct previously established) how s/he moves in relation to hearing his/her emissions by a documenter and by those around the recorded enunciation – parents, grandparents, and whomever else.

The data on the child belong to the collection of the interinstitutional research group NALíngua (Center for Language Acquisition Studies), led by professors Alessandra Del Ré, PhD (UNESP) and Márcia Romero Lopes, PhD (UNIFESP). This group relies on language acquisition *corpora* comprising data from children followed longitudinally in naturalistic situations (DEL RÉ; HILÁRIO; RODRIGUES, 2016). In this study we worked with an eleven-month span of the life of “G” – the period belonging to the larger *corpus* of that child's life followed from their 1st month of life to the age of 6 years and 11 months.

It should be noted that this study challenges classical methodological paradigms – namely, the inductive and deductive methods – as it does not strictly classify as either. Rather, this was a mixed-method research, as there is a “back-and-forth” theory-data/data-theory relationship which, on the one hand, allows the theoretical point of view to determine the researcher's listening to the linguistic/language facts manifested in the enunciations emitted and perceived in the interlocutory child-other relationships and. Likewise, listening to these interlocutory relationships leads the researcher to revisit the theory and highlight aspects of it to determine the focus of the phenomenon to be listened to. The research thus approaches the abductive method, as we start from observations of language facts with preliminary results, supported by general principles, to produce specific questions, with the development of a particular theorization to answer questions, and a subsequent return to the language facts to yield possible explanations and openness to the new, a novelty that appears with a “tone” of discovery rather than truth⁸.

⁸ In the text “Finally Peirce”, Vogt (1973) makes interesting distinctions between the deductive, inductive and abductive methods based on a reflection on the Brazilian edition of some texts by Peirce, gathered in the work entitled *Semiotics and philosophy – selected texts by Charles Sanders Peirce* (1972). In the text, Vogt (1973) presents deduction as reasoning whose conclusion is based on premises – applying a general rule to a case to reach a particular result. Inductive reasoning develops from a case, with its result in order to, from there, work out the rule. On the other hand, abductive reasoning starts from a result, and, applying a certain rule to it, one arrives at a new case. In this sense, the production of novelty, even if provisional, would be linked to the abductive method.

As regards the child's language facts, we argue that the researcher's work with longitudinal data concerns a singular listening for the interlocutory events, in which the listening in the child-other relationship is also involved. Such interlocutions constitute the relationship between synchrony (the present) and diachrony (the past). In this case, the researcher synchronically looks at and listens to the scenes of the interlocutions in order to, before the diachrony of these interlocutions, verify the child's general movements in the utterances that indicate how s/he builds his/her history of utterances. In this case, the evidential paradigm, presented by Ginzburg, helped us to listen to the traces that stand out in the facts of language, because "if reality is opaque, there are privileged zones – signs, clues – that allow us to decipher it." (GINZBURG, 2007, p.177, our translation)⁹. The hallmark of this paradigm is related to the collation of "apparently negligible" clues (GINZBURG, 2007, p. 178, our translation)¹⁰ by studies that focus on the general, not the specific. Thus, in the case of this study, it is a question of observing the child's ways of listening (his/her own and of his/her interlocutor's) in the enunciative inversibility *I-you*. Therefore, we try to listen to the enunciative inversibilities of both emissions and listening. From the way the researcher listens to these language facts – in the synchrony of each scene and in the diachrony of all scenes – one is able to highlight the traces linked to the aspect of listening in scenes of G's linguistic/language exercise with his/her interlocutors.

It is worth noting that we consider the researcher's listening – the third ear (NORMAND, 2009) – as already impregnated with a point of view about language. We cannot escape from this, since the facts are the result of this point of view. In this sense, the selection of language facts and the records for the constitution of the analysis facts are products of this point of view. These records, if taken as an orthographic transcription, even if they have a certain proximity to the phonics of the spoken utterances, or as a scene report, will involve the observer's subjectivity and the constitutive loss linked to the choice of what will be looked at, listened to and commented on. We understand that, when updating the spoken data, "through an interpretive gesture, the speaker-transcriber inscribes a marked writing and highlights the constitutive subjectivity of every enunciative act." (SILVA, 2009, p. 280, our translation)¹¹. Here we consider this speaker as a descriptor of the enunciative scenes. This description is therefore an enunciation that comes from another enunciation. There is, in this process, a loss, because the analyst cannot apprehend the whole, just as s/he will not be able to analyze the entirety of meaning (SILVA, 2009). There is always something that escapes, which is constitutive of the act, both of transcribing and reporting a language fact, and even of the very act of analyzing.

⁹ Original: "Se a realidade é opaca, existem zonas privilegiadas – sinais, indícios – que permitem decifrá-la." (GINZBURG, 2007, p.177).

¹⁰ Original: "aparentemente negligenciáveis" (GINZBURG, 2007, p. 178).



¹¹ Original: "por meio de um gesto interpretativo, o locutor-transcritor inscreve uma escrita marcada e evidencia a subjetividade constitutiva de todo ato enunciativo." (SILVA, 2009, p. 280).

In this research, complexity is linked to the object of *listening* itself, which refers to the dual functioning of language, considered on the one hand as an immaterial symbolic fact, and, on the other, as a material-physical phenomenon, an argument corroborated by Benveniste:

[...] language is a special symbolic system, organized across two planes. On one side, it is a physical fact: it uses the mediation of the vocal apparatus to produce itself, the auditory apparatus to be perceived. In this material aspect it lends itself to observation, description and recording. On the other hand, it is an immaterial structure, communicating meanings, substituting events or experience for their “evocation”. (BENVENISTE, 1995, p. 30, our translation)¹².

In the study, we deal precisely with what is evoked in G’s language facts from the first to the eleventh month. Therefore, there is no formal transcription, but records of what is salient in the child’s and his/her interlocutors’ ways of listening, records that were produced by “listening” carefully to G and his/her dialogue partners in each session, in situations of dialogue with clippings of enunciative scenes relevant to this study, as illustrated below:

Table 2 – Illustration of the description of the enunciative scene.

Father and mother are in the kitchen with G, who is sitting at the table. Father and mother interact with him/her with requests for him/her to make a face. The mother interacts and films the situation and the father figures as the main interlocutor.	
Child G (09.06)	Interlocutors
G: grimace (looks to the father) 	FATHER: make a face (pause) make a face, G
G: grimace (looks to the father) 	FATHER: go, go (“grimace” sound), make a face

Source: Authors’ elaboration.

The heading of the above table contains a general description of the scene. Two columns follow: one for the child’s language actions – both verbal and non-verbal – and another for the actions of the interlocutors – verbal and non-verbal. The arrows,

¹² Original: “[...] a linguagem é um sistema simbólico especial, organizado em dois planos. De um lado é um fato físico: utiliza a mediação do aparelho vocal para produzir-se, do aparelho auditivo para ser percebida. Sob esse aspecto material presta-se à observação, à descrição e ao registro. De outro lado, é uma estrutura imaterial, comunicação de significados, substituindo os acontecimentos ou a experiência pela sua “evocação”. (BENVENISTE, 1995, p. 30).

between one column and another, indicate the enunciative inversibility of the partners in language, through verbal and non-verbal actions.

The statement “We speak with others who speak, such is the human reality.” (BENVENISTE, 1995, p. 65, our translation)¹³ carries the transversal anthropological assumption, attributed to Benveniste’s linguistic approach, and calls us to think on how children, as infants, enter this speaking world and how they listen and are listened to in it to become speakers in their own right. This is a speaking world with a language that, in Chacon; Villega’s words (2012), appears for children as a “turbulent” other.

The discussion undertaken in this section will serve as a guide for the listening/analysis of the language facts presented by G before his/her interlocutors. When speaking of enunciation through enunciations, the language researcher shows their condition as a commentator, analyst and interpreter of what s/he hears. And being in that place of someone who listens in order to “speak about” in a new way causes changes in the relationship with the research effort, due to the “[...] desire to say, one that inhabits all speakers.” (HAGÈGE, 1985, p. 259, our translation)¹⁴ as a possibility of constant reinvention in language. This reinvention involves, as in this study, an enunciation to talk about another enunciation, whether this enunciation is an act of emission or an act of listening.

Based on these methodological considerations, we present our analyses in the next section.

The child’s *listenings* in the inversibility of people in the discourse and its assumption of an enunciative position

Conceived within the inter-subjective “child/other” relationship, each of Barthes’ three *listenings* (1991) contains enunciative inversibility (BENVENISTE, 1995, 1989) and show the child fulfilling his/her enunciative listening role through *his/her listening to the emissions of the other and self-listening*.

¹³ Original: “*Falamos com outros que falam, essa é a realidade humana.*” (BENVENISTE, 1995, p. 65).

¹⁴ Original: “[...] *desejo de dizer que habita qualquer falante.*” (HAGÈGE, 1985, p. 259).

Table 3 – Description of scene I.

The child is in the stroller with vocalizations that suggest discomfort. Looks at the camera and frowns. At first, there is no speech from the interlocutor(s), but there is the human presence of the person filming the scene. The grandmother then enters the scene.	
Child G (01.19)	Interlocutors
G: ascending pitch vocalizations. \Rightarrow	GRANDMOTHER: what're you complaining about?
G: turns to look at grandma and stops emitting vocalizations \Leftarrow	GRANDMOTHER: what're you complaining about?

Source: Authors' elaboration.

In this scene, the child vocalizes in an ascending tone and looks at the camera, in search of a supposed interlocutor. Here, the child assumes an enunciative role of emission and seems to seek to occupy the enunciative place of listening to emissions of another. S/he is listened to by the grandmother, who, possibly because of this rising tone, interprets the vocalizations as evoking senses of “complaint”. When she asks “what’re you complaining about?” in response to the child’s supposed emissions of annoyance, the grandmother shows that she seeks a response from the child, which comes from her second utterance of the same sentence, when G turns his/her gaze to her and ends the emissions. In this scene, in the words of Barthes (1991), the child seems to be “encrypting” reality in search of signs of a “human voice” noise. Upon finding it, G stops vocalizing and looks at his/her interlocutor. The child seems to carry out the movements pointed out by Barthes: encrypting reality in order to decipher it, as the child’s vocal works as a question that leads to a dialogue with the grandmother. There is a metamorphosis of “man into dual subject” (BARTHES, 1991), a condition of difference (absence and presence of voice) for the foundation of the sign in the human, apprehension of distinctiveness linked to second listening.

Indeed, the grandmother responds to G’s call (ascending emissions) through the interrogative function, which, at the second uttering, obtains as a response from G the gaze directed at her. Although there are gestural elements (such as the look and frowning), it is the linguistic elements (the fact that the grandmother has enunciated herself through phonic forms organized in words) that leads G to stop “complaining” and direct his/her look at the desired interlocutor: at an active interlocutor in language, one with a voice. In this scene, there is a human who films, but does not constitute themselves as the child’s interlocutor (perhaps because of their linguistic silence). The emissions of G, in an ascending tone, evoke a kind of “appeal” from the grandmother, as she reiterates the question “what’re you complaining about?”. In this case, it seems

to us that there is an effect on the grandmother pertaining to the phonic forms emitted by G in an ascending tone: as if the child were calling on her to listen, according to Barthes' expression, "listen to me".

The scene focuses on the constitutive inter-subjectivity of enunciation in the game between phonic/vocal emissions and listening. Here the "factual communion" pointed out by Bronisław Malinowski, and revisited by Benveniste (1989) in "The formal apparatus of enunciation", seems to gain prominence considering that discourse, in the form of dialogue, is an important factor in establishing collaboration between the partners. Each utterance, in this case, is an act that serves to unite a speaker-listener and a speaker-transmitter through a feeling. In this case, there is an enunciation that is satisfied in its realization (apparently) without the need for reference; a relationship formed between partners (child and other) in which the sound – that is, the phonic aspect of language, is responsible for establishing this "psychosocial" bond in which the child shows signs of seeking to occupy an enunciative position.

Enunciative scene II – description and analysis

Table 4 – Description of scene II.

The child performs vocal emissions and looks at the interlocutor. G's interlocutor is the one who films him/her. This interlocutor-child enunciative relationship is never inverted. G emits distinct sounds with alternating pauses between them.	
Child G (05.03)	Interlocutors
G: ah (extended), uh, uh uh uh uhn (long pause) ga (elongated vowel) (short pause) uh uh uh uh uh (short pause) ga (small cough) uh uh uh uh ga (elongated vowel) (short pause) uh uh ga éh uh uh uh éh uh (short pause)uh uh.	Absence of return emissions toward G

Source: Authors' elaboration.

Scene II reveals G's "language presence" as carried out through self-listening. This scene emphasizes the child in the enunciation, combining two types of phonic contrasts likely to be significant in language: volume + vowel quality. In addition to this contrast, this scene presents the pauses playing important roles: (1) distinguishing the volume of vowel sounds ("uh uh") from the volume of sounds with the structure consonant + vowel ("ga"), a syllable which, in addition to the difference in vowel heights, it is marked by the elongation of the vowel "a"; (2) distinguishing the quality of vowels: closing (/u/) and opening (/a/). Here, it is important to highlight that pauses fulfill a triple function: *physiological*, for breathing; *linguistic*, for the establishment of






contracts; and *enunciative*, listening to oneself (self-listening), which can be expressed as “I listen to myself”.

In this scene, there are signs that the child listens to his/her own emissions in a “rhythm” (BARTHES, 1991), which is marked by alternation and repetition of phonic structures. Unlike the first listening, which is also linked to the “undifferentiation” of sounds, in this second listening, the confused and indistinct become distinct and relevant. Likewise, there are embryonic elements of the distinctiveness of sounds in the passage from the biological (ear) hearing to a listening that captures regularities with the potential to determine the senses through possible phonic differentiations in the linguistic system of the child’s mother tongue.

The child’s listening to sounds highlights their relationship with language and the possible pleasure or discovery of being present in this experience in which they move from the place of the one who emits to the place of the one who listens – an inversibility that makes itself clear not only via phonic contrasts, but also by the contrast between the production of sound and the silence (in the pauses that delimit the organizations of phonic forms emerging in the participants’ enunciations).

Thus, before referring to the speech (SILVA, 2009), what is relevant to the child, at first, seems to be this relationship with the sounds to which s/he gives him/herself with pleasure in the face of the other’s utterances. Thus, it carries the *you* in its appeal, by presenting a dominance of the *self*, a fact that, for Dufour (2000), is one of the fundamental conditions for the production of a symbolization space, determining the assumption of the individual as a speaking subject. This assumption, in this scene, seems to be linked to the enunciative position occupied by the child, as the movement between emission and listening brings evidence of contrasts that will enhance intra-linguistic or systemic meanings, a condition to establish him/herself in the phonic forms of their mother tongue.

Table 5 – Description of scene III.

<p style="text-align: center;">Child G (07.29)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Interlocutors</p>
<p>G: looks closely at the father, mouth  partially open, with an evocation of pleasure from listening to the song.</p>	<p>FATHER: Clap your hands, clap your hands, clap for <i>São José</i>, clap your hands, clap your hands for when daddy gets here</p>
<p>G: continues to look closely at the father, mouth half-open, with an evocation of pleasure from listening to the song. Claps with father’s help. </p>	<p>FATHER: Clap your hands, clap your hands, clap for <i>São José</i>, clap your hands, clap your hands for when daddy gets here (takes G’s hands to help)</p>
<p>G: continues to look closely at the father, fingers in mouth, with an evocation of pleasure from listening to the song. </p>	<p>FATHER: Clap your hands, clap your hands, clap for <i>São José</i>, clap your hands, clap your hands for when daddy gets here</p>
<p>G: makes sounds that suggest dissatisfaction listening to the phonic forms emitted by the father (“itiu”),  a different sound from what the father had been singing. </p>	<p>FATHER: Pause with pronunciation of another sound. FATHER: itiu FATHER: uh (nasalized vowel extension)</p>

Source: Authors’ elaboration.

In this scene, a song present in G’s family culture is brought to the forefront of the interactions, and the father is a symbolic representative of one who “inculcates”, a Benvenistian term, the values of the said culture via musical language. The interesting aspect of this scene is that G, listening intently, gives signs of taking pleasure in the father’s singing. The melody and rhythm in the father’s sung utterances establish G as an addressee who establishes him/herself as a *listening self*, which evokes listening choices, since the father, when changing his mode of phonic enunciation, elicits a return enunciation from G with phonic forms that evoke discontent with this listening. This indication is related to Barthes’ argument (1991) which states that the subject is not obliged “[...] to take his pleasure there where he does not want to go”. In this case, there are traces, in the child’s listening, of an operation of selecting what to listen to.

This is where we find the “*accentuation of the discursive relationship with the partner*” (BENVENISTE, 1989, p. 87, author’s italics, our translation)¹⁵ in which the child’s listening to the other’s emissions has a fundamental role, seen by the repeatability of phonic forms arranged in song and by the phonic emission of discontent evoked by the child in face of the change in the father’s mode of enunciation. This song is part of the construction of the musical culture of G with his father, who introduces him/her to the organization of the sounds of the language, also via song.

In G’s childhood universe, the song, with some variations, exemplifies traditions of the Brazilian family universe, a fact that shows the close connection between language and society, as pointed out by Benveniste (1989), when he considers that the inclusion of the speaker in his/her speech establishes that person in society. Such a formulation leads us to consider that G includes him/herself in the other’s discourse and expresses what s/he wants to hear from that other, which establishes him/her in the society where s/he lives. It is by declaring a listening position that G determines, in this scene, his/her desired mode of enunciation, in this spatio-temporal relationship shared with the father, in which they constitute themselves as subjects in language, in the *I-you* inversibilities of emissions and listening. G fulfills his/her enunciative listening role and thus asserts his/her position as “*I*” in the capacity of speaker-listener.

In this inter-human relationship, in a linguistic exercise (of language), the child is constituted as a subject by traits shared in that society and language, at the same time that s/he establishes him/herself in the dual nature of language, which allows him/her – either through listening or through emissions – to evoke the presence of social and individual elements.

In the fulfillment of their enunciative role, *what* and *how* does a child listen?

The fulfillment of an enunciative role involves movements of emission and listening. Therefore, taking this enunciative stance one shifts within inter-subjective relations in emissions and in listening alike.

With regards to the child’s listening to the other’s emissions, there are important signs: (i) the child’s search for human sounds; (ii) the implantation of an enunciative partner that inverts from the *self that emits* to the *self that listens*, an invertibility established with the father; (iii) the assumption of a listening stance (via pauses and silences) and the manifestation of their attitude as a *listening self* (desire to listen to sounds that evoke the poetics of language). In these listening and emission movements, the child is captured¹⁶ by sounds of the mother tongue, concurrently inferring their meaning. This fact involves broadening Barthes’ game of grasping signifiers through

¹⁵ Original: “[...] *acentuação da relação discursiva com o parceiro*” (BENVENISTE, 1989, p.87, grifo do autor).

¹⁶ The notion of capture in the field of language acquisition is explored by De Lemos. Considering language in its logical anteriority in relation to the subject, this author conceives that, in its symbolic functioning, the child “[...] is captured by a linguistic-discursive functioning that not only imbues it with meaning but also allows it to mean something else, in addition to what it originally meant.” (DE LEMOS, 2002, p. 55).

which the child becomes a speaker, a process which, in our view, involves both grasping signifiers and being grasped by the signifiers that emerge from enunciative relationships with the other.

As for G's self-listening, there is inversibility between the place of listening and emission, with evidence of important contrasts such as volume variation and vowel opening and closing, in addition to the important alternation between sound production and silence (pauses that delimit the phonic structures emerging in their utterances). Thus, in this self-listening, moments of pause play both biological and linguistic roles (respectively: breathing and contrasting sound units). The relevant enunciative aspect here involves the fact that the child experiences a kind of utterance in a "monologue", which, according to Benveniste (1989), works as a relationship between a *speaking self*, s/he who emits, and a *listening self*, one who listens to what is emitted. These places occupied by the child (i.e., stances of emitting and listening) evince contrasts that will potentiate intra-linguistic or systemic meanings, a condition for establishing themselves in the phonic forms of the mother tongue.

The study question was answered by analyzing the scenes synchronically and diachronically. Based on our observations, we must point out that the child's listening, in their inversibility of phonic emissions, are places where meanings are attributed in their discursive and systemic natures. It is by fulfilling an enunciative listening role that the child establishes meaning in the speeches and establishes him/herself against the phonic forms of the spoken language. S/he therefore circumscribes the relationship between phonic forms and meaning, in its systemic and discursive aspects.

Conclusion

In this text, by combining theoretical postulates and an analysis of the child's language facts, we sought to answer the following questions: (1) how does the child, in their first vocalizations, hold their enunciative place of listening in the interlocutory relations with the other? (2) How does the child, in this enunciative place of listening, delimit the relation between phonic forms and meaning, in their dual – systemic and discursive – aspect?

The first question involved observing and analyzing evidence of the child's occupying their place of *listening* as follows: (i) through a call to the voice of the other and the subsequent silence, when this voice is present in its context of enunciation, in the case of the enunciative scene I; (ii) through the alternation between sound production and silence in self-listening, as in scene II; (iii) by the way in which the child declares his/her position as *I*, as speaker-listener, by leaving traces of preference for phonic forms related to the poetics of language over other forms emitted by the father, as in enunciative scene III; and (iv) through the implantation of the father as the main interlocutor in the enunciative inversibilities of emission and listening in scene III.

The second question involved observing and analyzing evidence of the meanings produced in the enunciative relationships linked to interlocution (discursive meaning)

and to the organization of language (systemic meaning). In this case, we verify that the pauses have a triple function: *physiological*, for breathing; *linguistic*, for the establishment of contracts; and *enunciative*, listening to oneself (self-listening) and to the other. Playing the enunciative listening role with evidence of establishing a relationship between phonic forms and meaning involved two aspects: (i) as regards the discursive meanings, there are important traces suggesting that the child's relationship with the father is extended to the relationship between language and society, as the child manifests a listening position by evoking the choice for a song present in their family universe, also present in the Brazilian social universe, as we see in enunciative scene III; (ii) as for the systemic meanings (linguistic oppositions), the child's emissions indicate two types of phonic contrasts that can be significant in the organization of a language: volume + vowel quality, as seen in enunciative scene II.

It was by studying the linguistic/language operation that we were given access to the mechanisms of the phonic functioning of a child's utterances over their language history. It was by looking at the interlocution that we were able to witness evidence of G's discoveries, based on the overlap between the individual and the social of his/her mother tongue, via the vocal/phonic aspect of the enunciation.

Listening, situated between form and meaning, is thus seen as a condition for the child's entry into their mother tongue. Without meaning, we would live in a world of inert forms and without the creative power of language. A world without the possibility of humanity or society.

SILVA, C.; CHACON, L. Formas sonoras e sentidos na aquisição da linguagem: a escuta como ocupação de lugar enunciativo. *Alfa*, São Paulo, v.67, 2023.

- *RESUMO: Este estudo se inspira na reflexão de Barthes (1991) sobre escuta, em diálogo com a linguística proposta por Émile Benveniste e suas releituras, que consideram a perspectiva desse linguista como enunciativo-antropológica (DESSONS, 2006; FLORES, 2013). A integração dessas vozes teóricas possibilitou a formulação das seguintes questões: (1) como a criança, em suas vocalizações iniciais, preenche seu lugar enunciativo de escuta nas relações interlocutivas com o outro? (2) como, nesse lugar enunciativo de escuta, a criança circunscreve a relação entre formas fônicas e o sentido, em seu duplo aspecto, sistêmico e discursivo? Metodologicamente, o estudo vale-se de fatos longitudinais de linguagem de uma criança nos seus primeiros onze meses de vida, com a seleção de cenas enunciativas. Por meio da análise, chegou-se aos seguintes resultados: indícios da criança ocupando seu lugar de escuta de si e do outro por meio de um chamado à voz do outro, pela alternância entre produção de som e pausas na autoescuta, pelo modo como declara a sua posição de locutor-ouvinte e pela implantação de um interlocutor principal nas inversibilidades enunciativas de emissões e de escutas. Esse lugar enunciativo preenchido traz indícios de sentidos discursivos e embriões de sentidos sistêmicos às formas fônicas nas emissões.*
- *PALAVRAS-CHAVE: aquisição da linguagem; enunciação; escuta; forma fônica; sentido.*

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