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**Role of dialogic processes in  
the (re)designing of future expectations**

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# Role of dialogic processes in the (re)designing of future expectations

## 1. Introduction

In France, each year more than 10000 students get a Doctoral degree.

Almost all of them picture themselves in the future role of either a researcher in a state-run research unit or of a university professor.

Employment in these domains is scarce: And about 4/5 of these young doctors must redesign their future expectations when they have got their degree.

L'Association Bernard Grégory (ABG) aims to help young doctors in their transition to work.



3 parts:

- The life-long self construction model.
- Two young doctors involved in this research and an exercise they did during the career guidance intervention they participated in.
- An analysis of the dialogical processes involved in their reflection within the framework of the Emile Benveniste general linguistic theory (1971).

## **2. The self-construction factors and processes**

The life-long self-construction model is a synthesis of different approaches to the self-construction factors and processes.

It conceives the human individual as a plural and dynamic being, committed to a continuous process of self-synthesis in view of some possible future prospects. This meaning making processes permit individuals unify in a certain way their past and present experiences and their current expectations.

### **Identity is plural:**

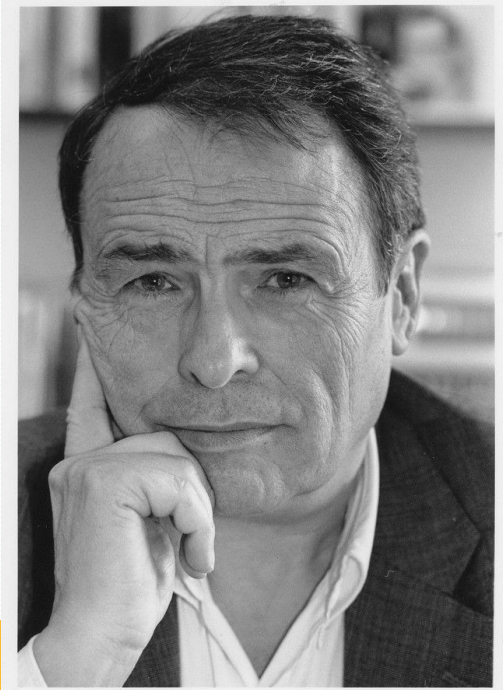
Each of the individual domains of experience (past, present and expected) leads the person construct a certain “subjective identity form” (SIF):

A SIF is an organized set of ways to be, to do and to interact (in relation to some schemata and scripts), of ways to relate to oneself, to one's experiences and to the others, in relation with a more or less clear and explicit view of oneself in this domain of experience.

Then, identity is a certain organization of these subjective identity forms. It is a subjective identity forms system (SIFS) where one or a few of them are core ones (for example: the one that corresponds to the person's current work activities) and others are peripheral.

Some of these subjective identity forms correspond to past experiences still playing a role in the present. Others SIF are expectations about self in the future. Each of these expected SIF (ESIF) corresponds to a certain self-synthesis that allows the individual to unify him/herself from this future perspective.

For example, Piriou and Gadea (1999) have shown that French students who actually mastered in sociology identified with the figure of the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. They saw themselves in the future in a vocational ESIF – sociologist – that matched the view they have constructed of “The sociologist” in relation to this famous researcher main features as they have perceived them.



## Identity is dynamic

The dynamism of this self-construction process originates in a tension between *two forms of reflection*.

One of them corresponds to *a person's identifications* (or rejections) with images of people around him/her or celebrities, or with major ideals. It is an identity's stabilizing factor based on an expectation to “become as” or to “construct oneself thus”. As it is a relation of self with a certain picture of someone else or of a general ideal, this form of reflexivity may be described as *dual*.

The other form of reflection is grounded on the dialogic processes of interpretation of the person. It is a (intra or inter-personal) *dialogue* that implies a continuing move of thought from the positions of the ‘I’, to the ‘you’ and the ‘s/he’. As such it is *trinity reflexivity* (Colapietro, 1989; Jacques, 1991). It is *a continuing process of creation of new potential perspectives* for oneself and one's diverse experiences. It is an on-going process of questioning and of surpassing oneself, insofar as each potential life prospect can be reinterpreted and seen otherwise.

This form of reflection is especially solicited in life and career construction interventions.



### **3. A counseling intervention which aims to help young doctors transform their vocational expected subjective identity form**

Hypothesis:

On the occasion of a series of career counseling interventions offered to young doctors by the ABG, they would transform their vocational expected subjective identity form (ESIF) (and in some cases would modify their SIFS structure).

Such a transformation may be more or less profound. It may be a relatively light modification, as in the case of an anchoring in the world of work of an ESIF that previously related back to the academic world.

Some changes may be more considerable, as in the case of the development of a new ESIF replacing the one constructed during the preparation of the doctoral thesis.

An exercise was given during the second phase of the guidance intervention (one week after the first one). It intended to help counselees develop their reflexivity on themselves and on their past, present and anticipated experiences, while leading them examine and discuss them from the point of view of some future perspectives.

This exercise was a transposition in the career guidance domain of the “Method of instructions to a double” elaborated by Oddone, Re & Briante (1974; 1977) for their research on the development of working activities.

Participants received the following instruction:  
***“Imagine, tomorrow you have an interview for a job you had applied for. But you cannot be present. I’m your double. Please give me all instructions I need to replace you during this interview so as to the recruiter does not notice the substitution”.***

Oddone, Ivar; Re, Alessandra & Briante, Gianni (1974). ***Esperienza operaia e psicologia del lavoro***. Roma : Editrice sindacale italiana.

Oddone, Ivar; Re, Alessandra & Briante, Gianni (1977). ***Esperienza operaia, coscienza di classe e psicologia del lavoro***. Torino: Einaudi.

This exercise required that counselees made a double shift:

- They had to examine their doctoral experience (and their different past experiences) from a particular future perspective: the one of a job in a company, a perspective they usually had never considered so precisely.
- They had to develop a fresh look at themselves and their different experiences in order to express them to a person who was supposed to be their double. This procedure intended to stimulate intense trinity reflexivity in counselees.

Interviews were audio-taped.

Participants were asked to listen to this tape in the following days and transcribe the interview.

This led them to take again a distance in relation to what happened during the exercise, to gain knowledge of the double's questions and to point out the instructions they gave him/her and how they formulated them.



Two young doctors participated in this research:

Mrs. L was 33 years old. She held a doctorate in political science, a post master degree in information and communication sciences and a master degree in philosophy. After she failed in different competitive exams meant for the selection of researchers, associated professors or high-school teachers, etc., she contacted the ABG. She said then she had difficulty defining a career plan. Her major concern was to find a job that matched her qualifications.

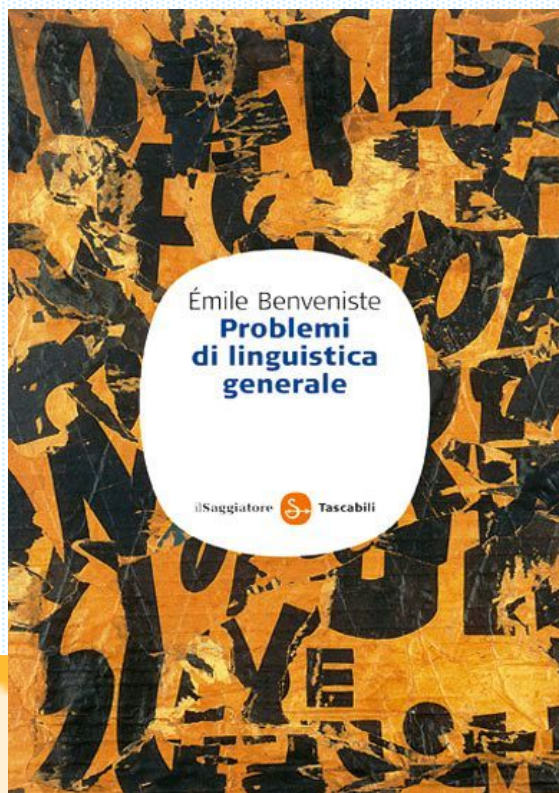
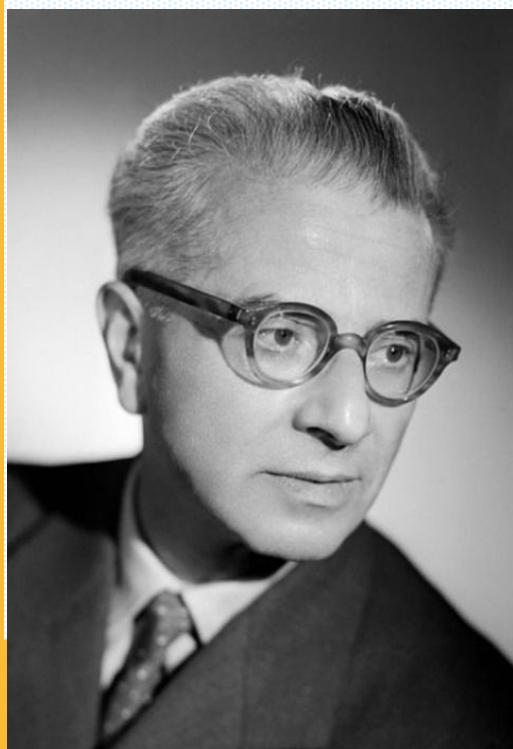
Mr. G was 29 years old. He got his doctoral degree in neurosciences. After two postdoctoral years in USA, he was looking for a researcher position in a private company. When he contacted the ABG, he said he was expecting to be prepared for a job interview. At the beginning of the counseling intervention, he asserted that he had no idea of the private company demands and how he should introduce himself to such companies.

## 4. Dialogue and the subjective identity forms transformation

Only a part of an analysis of the utterances produced during the “Instructions to a double” exercise will be presented.

### 4.1 An analysis within the framework of the Benveniste discourse theory

These utterances were analyzed within the framework of the Emile Benveniste discourse theory.



#### *In English:*

Benveniste, E. (1971). *Problems in General Linguistics*. Trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Miami Linguistics, 8). Coral Gables (FL): University of Miami Press.

Benveniste placed meaning making at the very heart of the linguistic research. He wrote (1971):

Language is “so organized that it permits each speaker to appropriate to himself an entire language by designating himself as I. (...) Personal pronouns provide the first step in this bringing out of subjectivity in language” (p. 226).

Accordingly, language is “the possibility of subjectivity because it always contains the subjective forms appropriate to the expression of subjectivity” (p. 227).

Language “puts forth empty forms, which each speaker, in the exercise of discourse, appropriate to himself and which he relates to his person, at the same time defining himself as I and a partner as you” (p. 227).

As a consequence, the study of the utterance processes is a major mean to approach subjectivity.

An **utterance**: an act of producing a statement that an individual addresses to an addressee in a certain situation. It is a process by which a speaker, seizing the formal language apparatus, expresses his/her speaker's stance.

One of the Benveniste observations is of major importance: *any addressee relationship brings influence processes into play.*

*While expressing, a speaker performs an action, the goal of which is to influence an addressee: an addressee who may be the speaker him/herself*, in the case of an intrapersonal dialogue.

Benveniste (1970) distinguished different linguistic markers of this influence process: questioning, enjoining, asserting and some formal modes.

- ***Question*** designates utterances constructed so as to cause an answer.
- ***Injunction*** refers to linguistic forms that consist in giving orders.
- ***Assertion*** designates linguistic forms that aim at communicating convictions.
- ***Formal modes*** relate back to the different linguistic forms that express the speaker stances on what he/she says: expectation, wish, apprehension, uncertainty, indecision, refusal of assertion, etc. 12

## 4.2 An analysis of the utterances having a dialogical form

Three fundamental forms of dialogues were distinguished:

- *Interpersonal dialogues* are utterances via which I (Mr. G or Mrs. L) addresses the counselor and not the double.
- *Intra-personal dialogues* appear as a dialogue of oneself with oneself. For example (utterance 92), as Mrs. L was instructing her double about her interests, she stopped doing that and asked herself: “How could I say that without looking too pedantic?”
- *Outward expression of intra-personal dialogue* matches the dialogic structure that the “instruction to a double” exercise intends to develop. It is a dialogue between I (subject) and I (double).



**Table 1 – *Distribution of the utterances the form of which was dialogical in relation to the type of dialogue they displayed.***

Dialogical Forms	Utterances		Total	
	Mrs. L	Mr. G		
Intra-personal dialogue	4	8	12	28%
Outward expression of intra-personal dialogue	18	4	22	51%
Interpersonal dialogue	4	5	9	21%
Total	26	17	43	100%

The dialogical forms that relate to reflexivity, i.e. a dialogue of “I” with oneself made a total of 79% of the utterances.

***A major difference between Mr. G and Mrs. L:***

18/26 of Mrs. L utterances were outward expressions of her intra-personal dialogues. She addressed to her double (in this instance: the counselor) what she said to herself.

Mr. G is more self-centered: 8/17 of his utterances were intra-personal dialogues.

It looks as if, during this exercise, Mr. G was more in a process of constructing assertions about himself and if Mrs. L was more in a process of wondering about what concerning herself it would be wise to emphasize to get a job.

**Table 2** – Distribution of linguistic markers of reflexivity in utterances the form of which was dialogic

<b>Linguistic Markers</b>	<b>Mrs. L</b>		<b>Mr. G</b>		<b>Total</b>	
Question	6	21%	4	18%	10	20%
Injunction	7	24%	1	5%	8	16%
Assertion	14	48%	11	50%	25	49%
Formal modalities	2	7%	6	27%	8	16%
Total	29	100%	22	100%	51	100%

Assertions prevailed (49% of the utterances). Then, came questions (1/5 utterances).

***The two doctors distinguished themselves by their uses of injunctions.***

Mrs. L used them quite frequently: A quarter of her utterances were injunctions. For example: “... No! You don’t have! ... But you cannot say that! You cannot say ... that you have never applied yet” (Utterance 137).

Mr. G uttered only one injunction (utterance 67: “I have to work on this issue... as I don’t know...”).

### 4.3 Two kinds of dialogic utterances related with the two kinds of reflexive processes

All the different analyzes produced a same kind of results:

Mrs. L wondered about herself, whereas Mr. G tended to give more importance to assertions on himself. In doing so, these two doctors were in the process of constructing two different kinds of expectations about themselves.

All happened as if *Mr. G stuck to the vocational subjective identity form he constructed earlier*, notably when he used to write his doctoral dissertation: “*researcher in neurosciences*”.

One could say – while referring to the life-long self-construction model – that *he favored the dual reflection processes*. He relied on the vocational identification he developed when he was a doctoral student.

Mr. G reflection, during the “instructions to a double” interview (and also on many other occasions) consisted to *carry out a supplementary process of trinity reflection in order to specify his vocational ESIF* and find new attributes, so that this SIF could be recognized, in a near future, as an actual career subjective identity one: validated by a recruiter.

The trinity reflection processes that Mr. G carried out, were second to the dual reflection ones: these dialogic processes only aimed to precise his established vocational expectation (identification) from the point of view of the (assumed) expectations of a potential recruiter in a potential company: a recruiter and a company that were relatively clear (at least in Mr. G mind).

To summarize these observations in the old language of Ginzberg & al. (1951): Mr. G was performing a process of specification and realization. 17

Differently, Mrs. L *avored the trinity reflection as her goal was to sketch – and possibly specify – an expected career subjective identity form, with which she could identify*. This appeared by the kinds of influence (on herself) markers she favored: questions and injunctions.

Mrs. L. used *the dual reflection processes only as additional to her trinity reflection*. This is manifested by her looking for past events in her life that would allow her to unify it from a certain fundamental future prospect of professional nature (but not only) within the framework of a coherent life story. She achieved it in creating – at the end – a new vocational ESIF that allowed her to sum up her life experiences from this future perspective: communication officer, specialist in bioethics issues. But to do so, she had to wonder about what imported most in her life (work? Nurturing children?).

In the language of Ginzberg and al. (1951), one could say that Mrs. L thought and speech acts displayed a process of *exploring her life in order to crystallize it from a certain future perspective that unified it*. This process of self-reconstruction may be observed in her activation of thought acts that yielded a distance with her previous experiences and their restructuring. 18



## 5. Discussion and conclusion

This analysis disclosed two different modes of “significance processes” (Jacques, 1991): two kinds of dialogic processes related to some specific acts of thought having, together, different impacts.

- One relied mainly on the dual reflexivity – linked with a certain vocational identification. The trinity reflection was only initiated in order to specify this expectation and, mainly, to modify its anchoring point (which, at the end of the process, was not anymore the past academic laboratory where the doctorate has been prepared, but a pharmaceutical company where a job should be available).
- Another put forward the trinity style of reflection. Under the circumstances, an evolution appeared that could be named a personalization act (Malrieu, 2003), which led to the construction of a new vocational expectation.

A major limit of this piece of research is it is based on only two extremely contrasted cases. This forbids any causal attribution.

Two elements seemed to play a major role in the creation of these future prospects about self that, likely, empower individuals:

- The *creation of a certain narrative about self* (Savickas, 2005; Savickas, 2011). The ‘instructions to the double’ exercise led Mr. G. and Mrs. L produce a certain story about themselves. They had to *compose – in a certain way – some of their life themes* that – then – appeared to them as fundamental ones, a composition they elaborated *in view of* meeting the instruction: what the double will say to defend my application for this job.
- This creation of future prospects about self involved *meta-cognitive processes* (Kridis, 2008). One core element in the dynamism of this process of creating a story about “self as seen from that future prospect” seems indeed to be a reflexive turning back to oneself. This turning back involved meta-cognitive processes that allowed counselees *adopt a critical stance on the establish meanings* they granted more or less explicitly to their various experiences. These meta-cognitive processes develop on the occasion of intra- and interpersonal dialogues. This stresses the power of the deliberative processes brought about by career counseling (Lhotelier, 2001; Savickas, Nota, Rossier, Dauwalder, Duarte, Guichard, Soresi, van Esbroeck, & van Vianen, 2009).

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**Thank you for your attention!**