

Émile Benveniste, la croisée des disciplines

International and Interdisciplinary Colloquium organized by the Cercle Benveniste

University of Calgary

June 03 & 04, 2016

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Cercle Benveniste at the University of Calgary is organizing its first international colloquium entitled « Émile Benveniste, la croisée des disciplines » on June 03 and 04, 2016. The conference is meant to be an intellectual rendez-vous around Benveniste's contributions, through the exploration of his actuality in linguistics, literature and many other disciplines of the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Émile Benveniste (b. Aleppo, Syria, May 27, 1902 – d. Paris, France, October 3, 1976) is one of the most influential figures in linguistics. To wit, he was appointed chair of comparative grammar at the *Collège de France*, from 1937 to 1969. Former student of Antoine Meillet (who himself was a student of Ferdinand de Saussure), Benveniste spoke Persian, and is well-known for his work on Indo-European and also the two volumes of *Problems in General Linguistics* (1966 et 1974), which feature several key texts that will culminate in the shaping of both linguistics and semiotics, while paving the way to pragmatics. The articles and texts in question represent approximately 25 years of research, written in a rigorous yet accessible style. Benveniste's different contributions show that not only did he revolutionize the study of language, but he also built bridges between the universe of linguistic signs and several disciplines such as literature, philosophy, history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, psychoanalysis, translation, education sciences, information and communication sciences, cultural studies.

This colloquium is an invitation to (re)read texts by Benveniste from the standpoint of our respective fields; a concerted reading that would help us assess the impact of a very important (but sometimes forgotten) researcher. Benveniste's story resembles that of Monsieur Jourdain's prose: one does it without knowing. Key concepts such as utterance and enunciation; speaker; discourse; subjectivity, are used (sometimes profusely) well beyond language sciences, without people knowing they come from him. We therefore invite colleagues, graduate students and professionals of all disciplines interested in the exploration and the study of topics present in the bibliography here-below, to join us in a collective environment of deliberation and sharing, with the main thread being the thought and contributions of Émile Benveniste. Papers can be general or target specific case studies, as per the following angles:

Angle 1: The actuality of Benveniste

Benveniste occupies a strategic place within the epistemology of language sciences. His contributions are both diachronic (writings on Indo-European; history of saussurian structuralism) and synchronic (description of ancient and modern languages). Geographically, he did not limit himself to a single corpus, since he was also interested in ancient Iranian, the Ossetian language, native-american languages (for which he traveled to Canada). He did not shy away from using Greek and African languages, like Ewe, to illustrate his articles. Lastly, socio-anthropological and philosophical questions traverse his writings, whether he is discussing the role of language in human experience or in Freud's discoveries; whether he is analyzing the vocabulary of Indo-European institutions or the notion of rhythm; whether he is studying the history of the word "civilization" or the archeology of the word "scientific". What can we learn from his descriptions of languages (ancient and modern) and from his thoughts on world languages? What is the relevance of the concept of *enunciation* today?

Angle 2: Benveniste's Poetics Project

The recent publication of the book *Baudelaire* by Benveniste indicates that he was planning a project on general poetics, conceived as a subdivision of linguistics. To quote him directly: "The theory of poetic language does not yet exist. The objective of the current essay is to hasten its advent" (p. 452); and further "Poetic language ought to be considered in itself and for itself. It has a mode of significance that is different than that of ordinary language, and it should be equipped with an apparel of distinct definitions" (p. 640). Is such linguistics of literature (that aims to

discover “the functioning of poetic language”) still possible? If so, how does Benveniste’s perspective differ from other similar projects?

Angle 3: Benveniste across disciplines

The writings gathered in *Problems in General Linguistics* come from texts published in journals as diverse as (but not limited to): *Acta linguistica* ; *L’Age de la science* ; *L’Année sociologique* ; *Athenaeum* ; *Le Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris* ; *les Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* ; *Diogène* ; *Échanges et communications* ; *les Études philosophiques* ; *L’Homme* ; *le Journal de Psychologie* ; *Langages* ; *Lingua* ; *la Psychanalyse* ; *Recherches structurales* ; *Semiotica* ; *Die Sprache* ; *Word*. What is Benveniste’s contribution to these various research fields? In which way is the researcher relevant in these disciplines? Which of his notions inform these disciplines and in which ways do they contribute to the development of the disciplines in question?

Angle 4: The posture of Benveniste as a researcher

It is also possible to reflect on the very posture of Benveniste as a researcher. Indeed, here is an individual often described as someone extremely discrete and modest. Yet, his influence runs throughout the current field of language sciences and beyond. His sobriety is also visible in the fact that both volumes of *Problems in General Linguistics* have the exact same table of contents: “I. Changes in Linguistics; II. Communication; III. Structure and Analyses; IV. Syntactic Functions; V. Man and Language; VI. Lexicon and Culture”. In today’s world, characterized by overstatements, this is an interestingly rare model. What does such a posture teach us about research activity and dissemination of science? What is the place of researchers in society?

Axe 5: Why we love Benveniste

« Pourquoi j’aime Benveniste ». Such is the title of an homage to Benveniste by Roland Barthes. Barthes had his reasons. What are ours? What links exist between Benveniste and other luminaries of 20th Century thought ?

The call for papers should be sent to the following email address: s.amedegnato@ucalgary.ca. Deadline: **January 15, 2016**.

Please provide the following information when submitting your proposal:

- 1) Name(s) of the author(s)
- 2) Institution (if any)
- 3) E-mail address
- 4) Title of the paper
- 5) Abstract of approx. 1500 characters

The languages of the colloquium are English and French.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Dr. Chloé Laplantine (Université Paris Diderot)

REMARKS

1. As an outcome of the colloquium, a selection of texts, once peer-reviewed, will be published in the form of a collected work.
2. The colloquium will take place alongside the SSHRC Congress 2016 of the Humanities and Social Sciences, May 28-June 03 (<http://congress2016.ca/about/about-university>). We hope the timing will provide added incentive to participate, if you were already thinking of traveling to Calgary for the Congress.

BIBLIOGRAPHY (PROVIDED TO INFORM DISCUSSIONS)

Books by Émile Benveniste

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Books on Émile Benveniste

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