

Speech about Work: Formative/Foundational Effects of Linguistic Activity

New relations of spoken language probably demand training officers to consider the fact that the exercise of language by the subject is already a kind of “work”, a development of self in relation to a job done by oneself in a professional context. (These thoughts are developed from studies which deal with acquired abilities as well as with representations on work through discourse analysis in the analyses of training practices.)

1. Speech in the workplace and discourse about work

A distinction will be established between:

linguistic practices in the workplace, that is to say, speech in the working environment.

the practice of language about work, that is to say, speech in the training environment. Only the latter will be the object of the following thoughts.

2. Professional training and speech activity about work

If training implies “thought on knowledge at work in every activity”, it appeals to interpersonal communication and implies a verbal activity which will be addressed from the perspective of these two aspects, speech and linguistic: speech, in so far as the subjects communicate by language with a third party, and linguistic in so far as they mobilize for their own sake linguistically determined forms.

3. Linguistic activity: realization of the nature of knowledge about work

The realization of the nature of knowledge about work and its analysis can lead the training officer or the researcher to recognize the formative and foundational properties of linguistic activity. By formative/foundational properties, I mean certain effects, conscience or not, of a verbalization about the work activity: the development effects of the subject’s identity, inherent in any discursive activity. The knowledge revealed in the subject’s speech is expressed through “subjectivity” of the speaker: in the E. Benveniste sense, the words themselves are the carriers of the position and attitude of the subject, as much in relation to himself as in relation to his entourage.

4. Analysis of the bodies of knowledge on work: “foundational” effects and linguistic signs

Considering the nature of the bodies of knowledge on work requires the adoption—beyond the point of view of the analysis of contents (seeking to categorize the contents of speech about knowledge)—another point of view, that which seeks to locate linguistic forms which are unique and specific to subjects within which these contents are delivered. And then, analyzing the knowledge also comes back to locating the linguistic signs through which it is expressed in order to approach some of the effects of identity development of the subjects within their speech about work (distance, polyphony, modalizations).