

# Introduction

Emanuela Scribano

Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia, Italia

The topic of linguistic analysis is not among the most popular in the literature on Spinoza's philosophy, also because of its unsystematic treatment in the philosopher's writings. Indeed, although not systematic, Spinoza's investigation of the origin, function, and cognitive value of language is present in all his works. In the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, in the *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, and in *Ethics*, language is linked to imagination and inadequate knowledge. In *Ethics*, language also becomes the example par excellence of the association of ideas, therefore of memory and imaginative knowledge. For this reason, the same word does not necessarily correspond to the same meaning. Moreover, a word does not always correspond to an idea; it is perhaps inadequate but susceptible to univocal definition, as is the case with words that express universal notions. In cases of extreme philosophical importance, Spinoza considers language to express the most common prejudices directly. In all these texts, language proves to be the instrument of communication in the absence of adequate ideas, and an organ of expression of imaginative knowledge.

If language is the repository of the errors of the imagination, philosophy must first address the beliefs deposited in linguistic uses, and second, try to oppose them. In doing so, however, it is forced to use the same language modeled on inadequate knowledge. The problem of expressing true ideas through language gave rise to opposite interpretations by D. Savan ("Spinoza and Language", *The Philosophical Review*, 1958) and G.H.R. Parkinson ("Language and Knowledge in Spinoza", *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 1969). Pierre-François Moreau, in his *Spinoza*.



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*L'expérience et l'éternité* (Paris, PUF 1994) suggested that Spinoza has a "strategy of philosophical language", where modifications in common language are "consciously introduced ... to make it capable of expressing what is adequate" (366-7). The problem of the relationship between language and philosophical truth was recently taken up again by Celine Hervet, *De l'imagination à l'entendement: la puissance du langage chez Spinoza*, Paris, Garnier 2012, and by Mogens Laerke, "Spinoza's Language", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 2014.

In this issue of the *Journal for the Philosophy of Language, Mind and the Arts*, the essay by Giacomo Tore, "Ordo et connectio verborum. Spinoza on the genesis and nature of human language", is dedicated to the classic theme of the relationship between imagination and intellect, suggesting a coherent theory of the analysis of language in Spinoza's writings. Andrea Ricci Maccarini's "Communicating Thoughts through Bodies: An Ontogenetic Approach to Spinoza's Theory of Language" proposes to read Spinoza's theory of language within a conceptual framework in which communication functions as a *notio communis* that underlies every form of corporeal interaction. Pierre-François Moreau's "Spinoza et le langage comme pratique" aims to bring out an implicit theory of language as social practice rather than as a system of signs. Language may be considered as an institution that makes collective life possible, rather than as a mere instrument of representation. Matteo Camerini and Attilia Di Corato's "Exempla desiderare. Spinoza and the Facies Totius Universi" considers the function and status of imaginative language, particularly concerning his use of examples.

If we put to one side the unfinished *Hebrew Grammar*, Spinoza's most elaborate thoughts on language are in the *Theological-Political Treatise*. In this work it is not a question of bringing out the inadequacy of the ideas that correspond to ordinary language, but of identifying exactly the meanings of the Hebrew language, whether they are adequate ideas or not. By ignoring the linguistic habits of Hebrew, one risks attributing meanings and intentions to the speakers and to the words used by the authors that were not those of the authors themselves. The philosophical implications of Hebrew Grammar deserve a deep investigation as an example of scientific study of a language. The Italian translation of the *Compendium of Hebrew Grammar*, edited by Pina Totaro (Firenze, Olschki 2012), encourages deeper exploration of this aspect of Spinoza's thought. Pina Totaro, in his "The 'Style of God': Language as Historical Mediation and the Transformation of Biblical Authority in Spinoza", included in this issue, argues that Spinoza's notion of the "style of Scripture" provides the methodological key to his historical conception of revelation and, more broadly, to a new theory of linguistic mediation. A comparative analysis with Robert Boyle's theory of accommodation highlights two distinct early modern strategies for stabilizing scriptural authority:

one grounded in divinely regulated linguistic adaptation, the other in historical-philological reconstruction. In the essay “Spinoza and the Language of Scripture”, Steven Nadler wonders whether the irremediable gaps in our knowledge of ancient Hebrew do not undermine the moral motivational role that the Bible is supposed to play for those ignorant people who read it, in particular the masses.

Finally, the political use of language underlined in *Theological-Political Treatise* and in *Political Treatise* deserves closer attention, as Laurent Bove has suggested in “La théorie du langage chez Spinoza”, *L’Enseignement philosophique*, 1991. In this direction, Filippo Mignini’s essay “‘Ad captum vulgi’. The Meaning and Limits of a Spinozian Syntagm” distinguishes between projects of popular emancipation to be conducted through oral teaching and the possibility of disseminating philosophical knowledge through writing, which Spinoza considered difficult and dangerous. A comparison with the theses supported by Koerbagh further illuminates Spinoza’s stance.

By investigating the different aspects of the analysis of language in Spinoza – its cognitive function, its role in orienting beliefs, its cultural meaning, its relationship with truth and with different cultural contexts – the essays included in this issue intend to show how language is a theme that emerges repeatedly and with different intentions in Spinoza’s entire work. The lack of an organic treatment of language thus also appears to be the consequence of the multiplicity of meanings that language assumes in the different contexts in which it operates.

