Abstract: The relation between language and consciousness is at least threefold. First it should be stated more precisely what is meant by the term ‘consciousness’: since it is polysemous, its different meanings should be kept distinct in order to avoid misunderstandings. The essential result of some initial considerations about the linguistic sign ‘consciousness’ is a fourfold relativity of this concept.

In a following step, the ‘classical’ triangular model of the linguistic sign, suggesting an identity between thought and language, is replaced by a tetradic one. There is good evidence that our conceptual apparatus – and also part of our consciousness – should be seen as being independent of language.

Before this background, the next step shows that, whereas language is not necessary for us to cope with and to handle basic concepts, a second relation between consciousness and language has to do with the formation of complex concepts.

The third relation between consciousness and language highlights the fact that language not only is our favourite means in order to express contents of consciousness and to have others partake of them: communication with others is even most fundamental in order to be sure of one's own identity.

1. What does consciousness mean?

A characteristic of our human languages is the polysemy of signs. As Aristotle put it in his de Sophisticis Elenchis in a passage where he explains why doing things with words is different form acting with things (165a 10–13): “the number of words and concepts is limited whereas the number of things is unlimited. Thus of necessity one word cannot but have many meanings.” Since the number of entities to be named is in fact infinite whereas the number of signs should be kept finite, the polysemy of verbal signs is unavoidable. This means that – as did Aristotle himself in all his treaties – any scholar or scientist, before dealing with a question, should distinguish, and then thoroughly keep separated, the different meanings central terms have. Unfortunately, even modern philosophers and scientists rarely live up to Aristotelian standards.

Since it stands to reason that consciousness is one of these polysemous terms, how could its different meanings be made explicit? The answer is simple: the possibility is opened by the fact that we always explain one sign with the help of other signs. A couple of examples will make clear what is meant.

(1) We should all be familiar with the following kind of situation: we go for a walk with one of our young children or grandchildren, we come across a kind of building and comment this by saying: “look, there is a ruin.” Inevitably the child will ask: “What is a ruin?” Then we will explain the meaning of ‘ruin’ using other words, for instance “what remains of a building that has been demolished or decayed”, a procedure called definition by genus proximum (building) and differentia specifica (in decay).

(2) While observing ourselves, we may discover another case of making explicit the meaning of a word with the help of other words: when speaking, we permanently use the technique of repeating the same thing with other words, saying for instance: with other words, in other terms, let me put it in another way, dicho de manera diferente, como quíen dice, altrimenti, cioè, autrement dit, and the like.
All our dictionaries are built according to the same principle. Words are always explained with the help of other words. A dictionary entry for, say, ‘consciousness’ will refer, e.g., to awareness, sensation, feeling, knowledge, internal perception, intuition, intellectual activity, mind... Sometimes definitions may be simply circular as could happen with, e.g., conscious and aware. Sometimes – above all in good dictionaries – there is quite a large number of intermediate steps until we come back to the original concept.

Now this simple fact gives us the possibility to eschew the outlines of an ordinary language theory of consciousness simply by looking up dictionary entries and subsequently systematizing the references and cross references we find there. A result for English is visualized in the following scheme (where, nevertheless, the ordering of the concepts is due to the present author):

![Diagram](image)

Figure 1: An ordinary language theory of Consciousness as mediated by English

A first axis is the vertical one between what we consider as the outer world of Reality and its internal Representation. The totality of processes that are going on in this representation is called MIND. At the borderline between Mind and Reality is our body with its senses. They are the filter through which experience is mapped into the Mind. We tend to separate these senses and the experience they vehiculate into two domains: the domain of Feelings, Sensations, Emotions on the one hand, and the domain of Perception or Apprehension on the other one. ‘Perception’ and ‘apprehension’ are metaphors inspired by one of the senses, touch. The domain of perception is lexically well equipped in all our languages. Some of the relevant
expressions are listed on the right hand side in the scheme (knowledge, understanding, and so on).

In order not to produce an incoherent and incongruous heap of representations, these two domains and their respective instantiations are integrated and ordered over time by Memory. This memory is thought to be the basis of what we call Identity, that is the identity over time: I am aware of still being the person I was yesterday.

The two sides of Mind oriented from left to right in the above scheme constitute a kind of scale that may be seen as a second axis in the scheme, viz. the horizontal one between [Intentional] and [Unintentional] processes.

Now what is the role of Consciousness in our languages? It is thought of as a detached part of Mind, best represented as a third axis perpendicular to the domain of Mind, namely as a level of monitoring telling me who I am, at which place I am actually, at what time this takes place and who are the people around myself. In this context, we use awareness, orientedness as near synonyms of Consciousness. Finally, it should be mentioned that there is only one topic in the above scheme dictionaries generally do not refer to in the context of consciousness: Proprioception.

As has been said, the scheme outlined above represents our linguistic knowledge about consciousness as manifested by the network of references we find in our dictionaries (which, as we know, cannot but define one term with the help of others). – This ordinary language theory of consciousness allows us to already make some points as regards the central concept under discussion.

1. Most evident is that consciousness – being by and large a product of the mental representation of the world in and around us, filtered by our senses – cannot be separated from our body. The Cartesian opposition between matter and mind is a construct without the slightest correlate in reality. Consciousness is an embodied consciousness. The idea that one day our mind could be transferred and saved onto a hard disk is simply absurd¹. Proprioception as a perception of the interaction that takes place between myself and the outside world can even be thought of as a “core consciousness” implying the brainstem and the cerebellum, i.e. parts of our brain that, in contradistinction to the forebrain, are not currently associated with consciousness².

2. Consciousness (and thus of necessity also the opposite term, ‘unconscious’ and ‘unconsciousness’) is a thoroughly relative concept:


(a) *Consciousness as intentionality*. Relativity is first and foremost demonstrated by the axis going from the left to the right hand side of the scheme: we are – subjectively and objectively – more conscious of the things we know and think of than of impressions we feel\(^3\). In Italian we could speak, e.g., of a “sensazione indefinita”.

(b) *Ontogenetic relativity*. There is relativity in an historical (i.e. ontogenetically historical) sense. As adults we are more conscious of ourselves and our situation than are children or toddlers. This is due, among other things, to both cognitive evolution and knowledge through experience and learning.

(c) *Consciousness as attentiveness*. There are degrees of consciousness due to a higher or less high amount of attention, attentiveness or concentration (vs. absentmindedness, distractedness, etc.).

(d) *Consciousness as low degree of automation*. A further example for the (ontogenetic) relativity of consciousness – and at the same time an example for the role our body has in this context – are automated processes.

The last point will be illustrated in the following scheme. It goes back to Donald T. Stuss and was adapted to pragmatic disturbances by Renate Drechsler\(^4\).

\(^3\) This is the theme developed in the contribution Tim Crane made to the present symposium.

The three levels of this model correspond to three degrees of consciousness. Normally, we are not conscious of low-level automated processes like going upstairs or downstairs. We even have to re-learn them consciously after having spent some weeks with a plaster on our leg. The three levels are shown again in the original version of the scheme (Stuss 1991):

Figure 3: Three levels of attention/consciousness as proposed by Donald T. Stuss.

The low degree of consciousness as manifested in automated processes is a well-known fact in psychology. In his book *Thought and Language*, Lev Semenovich Vygotsky refers in this context to the law of Claparède:

“The law of awareness [was] formulated by [Edouard] Claparède [1873-1940], who proved by very interesting experiments that awareness of difference precedes awareness of likeness. The child naturally responds in similar ways to objects that are alike and has no need to become aware of his mode of response, while dissimilarity creates a state of maladaptation which leads to awareness. Claparède's law states that the more smoothly we use a relationship in action, the less conscious we are of it; we become aware of what we are doing in proportion to the difficulty we experience in adapting to a situation”.

What Vygotsky calls „the difficulty we experience in adapting to a situation” corresponds to level 2 in Stuss’ scheme. What we are doing when acting on the level of executive functions becomes conscious on the highest level.

In order to show that the Italian version of the ordinary language model of consciousness is not too far from the English one, I add the corresponding scheme for Italian. The main difference lies in the fact that, like in French, *coscienza / conscience* means also

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‘consciousness in a moral sense’.

In Italian, too, there is a difference between the more noble senses (capire, conoscere, sapere, ragionare) and the other ones (emozioni, sensazioni, sentimenti) etc. In contradistinction to English, in the horizontal dimension, the domain of the sensations is larger in that sentire means both ‘to feel’ and ‘to hear’. Thus the point of transition between the less and the more noble senses is somewhat blurred. Mental processes are integrated and ordered through memory with its identitarian function. There are the same two axes from bottom to top (representation) and from left to right (involuntary / voluntary processes). Consciousness can again be seen as a third axis perpendicular to the plane of MENTE. In Italian, the relation between coscienza and the right hand side of the scheme is even more visible than in the case of English: the semantic relation between coscienza and conoscere / conoscenza is obvious. This coscienza guarantees that we know who we are, where we are, in what time we live and who are the persons and objects around us.

2. To what extent is the conceptual domain separate from and even prior to language?

The ‘classical’ triangular model of the linguistic sign suggests an identity between thought and language. Since there is good evidence that our conceptual apparatus should be seen as being different from language, the misleading triangular model should be replaced with an –at least– tetradic one.

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6 This was especially the topic of a round table discussion during the symposium.
The triadic model is good for a first demonstration of how symbolic signs work. In order to denotate something, for instance the present book, I use a chain of sounds, ‘book’. There is no direct link, though, between the sign and the thing meant: this is why the line between signans and designatum is represented as hatched. The link is mediated by the meaning the sign transports or the concept it expresses.

![Diagram of triadic model](image)

Figure 5: ‘Classical’ model of semantics (Stoic philosophers, Ogden and Richards).

Nevertheless, this both old and modern model (the stoic philosophers were the first ones to foster it) is far too simple. We will have to go back in time in order to find a more adequate one. – In the middle phase of the epoch of scholasticism, there was a group of thinkers nowadays dubbed modistae: People like Siger of Brabant, Michel of Marbais, Bothius and Simon of Dacia or Thomas of Erfurt. Their grammatical reasoning was triggered by Aristotle who, in his *Second Analytics*, established a distinction between ‘art’ and ‘science’. We are only entitled to call a discipline ‘science’ when it is rational and whenever its object is the same one for mankind. These two premises lead the modistae to the conception of a universal grammar exemplified by Latin.

The kernel of their discipline is a model of semantics that is thought to reflect the process going on in our minds when linguistically dealing with the external world.
First there is a **Res**, a thing we perceive. The act of apprehension meets with a **Conceptus**, a concept, in our mind. Concepts correspond to different kinds of perception (*modi intellegendi*) that are based in mind whereas the *modi essendi* of objects are thought to be based in the real world.

Now these *concepts* are clearly distinct from linguistic *signs*. Linguistic signs only originate in a second step: the **Significatio** with its typical *modi significandi* that gave these schoolmen their name as *modistae*. One of their examples will show what is meant: Somebody or something – e.g., a Res – hurts me. This meets with the sensation and then the concept of ‘pain’. In order to translate this concept into a linguistic form, I have a whole range of possibilities at my disposition: an exclamation like ‘ouch’, a noun like ‘pain’, an entire sentence like ‘it hurts terribly’, ‘I have a headache’. I can do it in English as well as in any language whatever, and so on. Sometimes it could even happen that the concept I clearly have cannot be expressed at all, a fact stressed in the contribution Lewis Wolpert made to this symposium on the topic of a phenomenon he dubbed ‘malignant sadness’. – To the linguistic realization of the Significatio I have chosen the last stage in the model, the **Vox** or **Dictio**.

This model is summarized in a well known sentence: *Voces significant res mediantibus conceptibus* – the words signify (significatio, modi significandi) things thanks to a mediation by concepts.

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Thus one of the special merits of the medieval schoolmen is the clear distinction between two
domains that should be kept apart, viz. the domains of concepts and significations: Concepts,
with their specific *modi intelligendi*, originate by a first act of mental imprinting in perception
(*prima impositio*), whereas significations with the specific *modi significandi* of the respective
word classes only originate in a subsequent second imprinting, a *secunda impositio* – a
process incidentally called *duplex articulatio*, however in a sense different from the one the
term has after André Martinet.

There is ample linguistic evidence showing that the semantic model of the medieval
schoolmen clearly outperforms the usual semantic triangle. One might cite a host of evidence
from neurological studies as carried out particularly by Antonio and Hanna Damasio and their
group⁸. Normal linguistic evidence that can be derived, e.g., from patterns of language
change in certain domains will do instead:

[act of counting → result of counting] French *addition*
[envelope → its content] Ital. *bustarella* ‘bribe money’
[roof → house] Ital. *tetto*
[small shield → target] as in Engl. *target*
[muzzle of a firearm] → mouth (Ital. *bocca*)
[instrument used as a lever] → *crowbar* in English, *piede di porco* in Italian.

The linguistic meaning of, e.g., *piede di porco* ‘foot of [a] pig’ has nothing to do with the
instrument under discussion – there is a similarity on the conceptual level instead. Here a
locus classicus should be mentioned, a seminal paper published by a French psychologist in
1921⁹. I will skip these examples in order to make one further step in the direction I am
interested in: namely the assumption of the existence of *basic concepts*.

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⁸ Grabowski, Thomas J. & Damasio, Hanna C. & Damasio, Antonio R. 1998. “Premotor and
prefrontal correlates of category-related lexical retrieval”. *Neuroimage* 7.3: 232-43. –
Damasio, Antonio R. & Tranel, Daniel T. 1993. “Nouns and verbs are retrieved with
differently distributed neural systems”. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of
the U.S.A*. 90.5: 4957-60. – Damasio, Hanna C. & Grabowski, Thomas J. & Tranel, Daniel T.
1997. “A neural basis for the retrieval of conceptual knowledge”. *Neuropsychologia*. 35.10:
1319-27. – Tranel, Daniel T. & Logan, Christine G. & Frank, Randall J. & Damasio, Antonio R.
1997a. “Explaining category-related effects in the retrieval of conceptual and
lexical knowledge for concrete entities: operationalization and analysis of factors”.
*Neuropsychologia*. 35.10: 1329-39. – Friederici, Angela D. & Opitz, Bertram & von Cramon
⁹ Roudet, Léonce. 1921. “Sur la classification psychologique des changements sémantiques”.
lexikalischen Bedeutungs wandels am Beispiel der romanischen Sprachen*. Tübingen:
Gruyter. (Cognitive linguistics research; 13).
In 1751, James Harris put forward a scheme showing three possible phases of an action – an initial, a medial or progressive, and a terminal phase. To these three phases (which he combined with past, present, future, and an aorist into a twelve place table) we may add a pre-initial and a post-terminal one. This results in the following five conceptual phases that can be expressed in any language whatever (that is: they belong to the conceptual domain of the tetradig sign model), with the pre-initial, the post-terminal, and the progressive one in the middle being typical starting points for grammaticalization. We tend to express such phases with the help of verbal periphrases using a number of basic concepts that are identical all over the world. The typical concepts that allow us to express the pre-initial phase are the concepts to GO (e.g. French je vais chanter), modal verbs (English I shall, I will sing, Latin cantare habeo ‘I have to sing’) and temporal adverbs like by and by → baimbai → bai in Tok Pisin or lo < Span./Port. luego/logo ‘soon’ in Papiamento, the two of them Creole languages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>pre-initial</th>
<th>initial</th>
<th>progressive</th>
<th>terminal</th>
<th>post-terminal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>typical starting point for new future forms</td>
<td>typical starting point for new progressives and imperfectives</td>
<td>typical starting point for new perfective and perfect forms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g., Latin cantare habeo --&gt; Italian canterò</td>
<td>e.g., English he is singing or Spanish sigue cantando</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g., Latin habeo cantatum --&gt; Italian ho cantato</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7: Cognitive pattern behind a typical process of language change

This is to say that there exist basic concepts used by speakers of languages all over the world in order to express – by the means of verbal periphrases – certain contents:

TO BE SOMEWHERE, TO SIT, TO BE IN AN UPRIGHT POSITION, TO BE IN AN HORIZONTAL POSITION
TO TAKE, TO GIVE, TO GET, TO GRASP
TO COME, TO GO, TO ARRIVE, TO DEPART
TO HAVE, TO HOLD, TO POSSESS
TO MAKE, TO CAUSE

To these we may add modal concepts and the concepts for the five phases of action themselves: TO INTEND, TO START, TO BEGIN, TO CONTINUE, TO STOP, TO ACCOMPLISH, TO BE FINISHED WITH.

Since (a) such a basic conceptual framework [phases of an action] is used by the speakers of languages all over the world; and since (b) the same speakers use the same concepts [e.g., TO COME, GO etc.] in order to analytically distinguish the positions in this scheme, thus eventually restructuring and reinventing parts of the verbal grammar: not only should all of us have (a) and (b) in common. Above all, (a) and (b) may be supposed to exist in children even

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before they get acquainted with the linguistic ‘fillers’ of these concepts. This solves the problem of ‘bootstrapping’ in ontogeny. This means that even humans who do not acquire neither an acoustically based language nor a sign language – such cases exist – may manage to live in a quite normal way. A case in point is a person dubbed Ildefonso whose life before and after he became acquainted with American Sign Language was described by Susan Schaller12. This deaf young man who acquired sign language in a very arduous way only at age 27 was able to give an account of his former life.

3. What makes things more complicated
Up to now, I have made two steps: The first one has shown that our natural languages embody a kind of ordinary language theory of consciousness. This theory suggests that there is a – if thoroughly relative – link between knowledge and consciousness and that this knowledge is thought to be mediated by language, as for instance in the triangular model of semantics. Starting from the semantic model of the medieval schoolmen, the goal of the second step was to show that we should tell a conceptual from a linguistic side of consciousness and that we even need this separation in order to explain the phenomenon of semantic change.

Unfortunately, things are somewhat more complicated. Whereas language is not necessary for us to cope with and to handle basic concepts and to categorize the world around us (see Ildefonso before he got acquainted with sign language), the second relation between consciousness and language has to do with the formation of complex concepts.

The important role language has in this context is shown by the way our children use language: already before age two, they tend to go around and to name objects. They ask for the names of objects according to exactly the kind of procedure I used at the beginning of my contribution in order to demonstrate that words are defined with other words. Above all, starting from about age two, they begin to speak to themselves13. What could be the sense of speaking to oneself? Isn’t language made for communication with others? A most convincing answer to this question was given by Lev S. Vygotskij in 193414.

The following table (Figure 8) should give us an idea about what happens when we speak to ourselves:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thinking</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>internal</td>
<td>external</td>
<td>external</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-linear, simultaneous</td>
<td>linear</td>
<td>linear and even two-dimensional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unordered</td>
<td>ordered</td>
<td>ordered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘immaterial’</th>
<th>‘immaterial’</th>
<th>‘material, visible’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>reduced scope of communication in space and time</td>
<td>large scope of communication in space and time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rapid processes</td>
<td>process takes time</td>
<td>process takes still more time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we can observe ourselves in these activities taking an external stance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8: Some of the differential characteristics of Thinking, Speaking, and Writing

Our internal representations tend to be to a large extent simultaneous, unordered, and unorganized. When we transform them into a linguistic utterance, we of necessity have to break complex units into pieces and to string them together in a thoroughly ordered way – this is the *raison d’être* of grammar – on the thread of speech. We thus externalize and make linear what was internal and non linear beforehand. We do this in a process that takes time, thus slowing down the much more rapid internal process. At the same time, we hear ourselves speaking, that is, we acoustically perceive and understand what we are uttering\(^\text{15}\).

Now, in order to understand the importance of this process, we only have to observe ourselves: in situations that are difficult, we tend to do exactly the same thing: we speak to ourselves in order to get things clearer. In a more general way, we see that, starting from a certain age, we use language in order to acquire and to augment knowledge. In other words: The knowledge we acquire is to a large extent mediated by language, be it spoken or written\(^\text{16}\). This can be shown in another domain, too. As already small children are endowed with basic non-linguistic concepts we share with all humans, all of us are equipped with basic arithmetic concepts. Nevertheless, mathematics in its more developed form depended, historically speaking, entirely on written symbolization. Looking at the history of mathematics, we see that the entire progress that has been achieved was due to a progress in formalization\(^\text{17}\). History shows that in this case nearly all formalization is based on the abbreviation of words we use in ordinary language. The breakthrough in 17\(^{\text{th}}\) century mathematics – above all analytical geometry and calculus – is due to a progress in this technique of abbreviating and formalizing.

The same thing holds for abstract concepts, the concepts for entities that are outside the range of our sensory experience, and so on.


Thus, although we should tell the domain of concepts from the domain of language, there remains a strong link between knowledge and consciousness: this is tantamount to saying that language in its spoken and in its written form enables us to enlarge the range of our knowledge, thus creating the potential to enlarge the range of things, entities, processes, acts we may be conscious of (above: “ontogenetic relativity of consciousness”).

4. The importance communication has for consciousness
Apart from the problems of polysemy and relativity of the concept of consciousness and the function of language as a means for complex conceptualization, there is a third link between language and consciousness I would like to put forward in the last part of this contribution. It is about the importance communication with others has for consciousness, not the least for our identity.

I will start from an important work done by Michael Tomasello and his collaborators. In various studies, they focussed their attention on the importance joint attention has in the ontogenetic evolution of our children. Tomasello’s central thesis is best shown by the following three scenarios:

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Joint attention scenario 1
(check attention, 9-12 months of age)

The child and another person look at something, with both knowing that the other one engages in the same activity

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Figures 9 to 11: The three joint attention scenarios according to Michael Tomasello (1999).

Joint attention scenario 2
(gaze following, 11 to 14 months)

The child follows into adult attention to more distal external entities

Joint attention scenario 3
(imperative pointing, 13 to 15 months)

The child directs adult attention to external entities
Why are these joint attention scenarios so important? There are three answers.

(1) The first scenario is identical with situations where objects are named. Joint attention is an activity that is fundamental for communication by language.

(2) Humans lacking this basic faculty to take the stance of others – that is to see themselves from the outside – are called autistic. They will not be able to play roles or to recognize the roles others play, they will not recognize second thoughts, they will not have access to metaphorical or ambiguous speech, and the like. This is why it is so important that children engage in playing roles – we all know to what extent they love this kind of activity, taking for instance the role of their father, their mother, their brothers and sisters. The fundamental mechanism in this case is the dialectics between self and otherness that presuppose each other not only logically, but, above all, in social life.  

(3) The third answer comes from etology: What is the advantage of consciousness in general and especially of a consciousness enhanced by the command of a language, be it a sign language or articulated speech. As Hubert Markl put it, consciousness allows us

“to plan our own behaviour on the basis of experiences we made, and to take into account, while doing so, the behaviour of others in order to assess their possible reactions, thus giving our own strategies a fair chance to succeed.”

This means that consciousness as a social consciousness allows us to take profit of our faculty to internally conceptualize and represent the external world, playing through not actual, but possible scenarios that are based on our anterior experience. This shows at the same time the crucial importance memory has in this context.

At the same time, this allows me to take profit of literature – since playing through not actual, but possible scenarios that are based on our anterior experience is more or less what literary writers do, too. It allows me to mention in this context the importance of symbolic forms.

Why do we have such symbolic forms as plays, novels, films? They imagine mental representations of possible actions carried out by fictitious persons. That is to say that they create models of reality or of possible reality.

I will now use two literary models in order to show how important writers grasped and represented the socially relevant problems of consciousness in their symbolic forms of literature.

The first example is La vida es sueño (1634/35) from the Spanish author Calderón de la Barca. – Due to a negative horoscope, a king secludes his son, Segismondo, from the real world and has him brought up alone in a tower. One day, Segismundo

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encounters there Rosaura, a woman in men’s clothes, who complains about having been dishonoured by her unfaithful lover. While doing so, she becomes an eyewitness of Segismundo’s existence and of his having been secluded. Later on, the father wants to give his son a chance: He sends him to sleep and brings him to the outer, normal world where his qualities as a governor are to be tested. This experiment turns out to be so negative that Segismundo is again given a soporific and is brought back into the dungeon. There he thinks that his time as a governor was but a dream. Now, when Segismundo is eventually set free by the people, it is only Rosaura – who had seen him in both the tower and in the real world – who can guarantee him that his time as a ruler was not a dream. That is, our identity always has to be confirmed by others in order to be socially relevant, i.e. in order to be a true identity.

My second example for the social implications of identity and consciousness is *Enrico IV*, a play the Italian author Luigi Pirandello wrote in 1922.

During carnival where he plays the role of Emperor Henry IV of Germany, a wealthy Italian nobleman falls off his horse. Having hit his head, he awakens believing – as the costume he's still wearing indicates – that he really is the medieval ruler. His family treats him exactly the way parents have to choose with autistic children: they adapt the surrounding world to his needs, in the present case the castle of his sister, where he is humoured by ‘courtiers’ and others in medieval costume who help him maintain his illusion. Nonetheless, when the play starts, it becomes clear that already since the past few years Henry himself had regained his former identity, i.e., that he is consciously enacting the role of Henry.

In this situation, the woman he has once loved, Matilda, arrives at the castle on a mission to cure him, accompanied by a psychiatrist who hopes to shock him into reality with a cruel trick of mistaken identity involving the woman's beautiful daughter Frida. Unfortunately, the cure is not successful in that he commits a capital crime during this attempt. In order not to be sentenced, he cannot but remain Henry IV until the end of his days because a person living in the 20th century and believing he is the 11th-century Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV cannot be juridically responsible for his acts.

5. Summary

1. There is an “ordinary language theory of consciousness” showing, among other things, an at least fourfold relativity of the concept of ‘consciousness’ and thus at least four different meanings of ‘consciousness’, let alone those meanings that were not mentioned at all (for instance the Italian concept of ‘coscienza’ in its moral sense). As a consequence, the antonyms of ‘consciousness’ and ‘conscious’, viz. ‘unconscious’ and ‘unconsciousness’, are at least equally polysemous.

2. The sign model of the medieval Modistae with its separation between concepts and meanings/significations has far more explanatory power than the usual semantic triangle which suggests a misleading identity between ‘thought’ and ‘language’. The modistic model accounts for both universal properties of our languages and universal principles of their permanently being restructured on the basis of such concepts that do not necessarily presuppose a linguistic form.
3. Language is nevertheless our favorite means in order to build a complex system of knowledge that creates the potential to enlarge the range of things, entities, processes, acts we may be conscious of (a major aspect of the “ontogenetic relativity of conscience”).

4. Consciousness has a major social component (to be conscious of one’s own social role and of the roles others act out.) Its development starts in early childhood (see the joint attention scenarios). This topic is so important that writers time and again treated it in plays, novels and stories giving us profound insights into the mechanisms of consciousness and self: Calderón de la Barca, Miguel de Unamuno, Jorge Luis Borges. The most important among them is perhaps an Italian writer, Luigi Pirandello.

Appeared as