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Manual of Discourse Traditions in Romance



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3 Conceptual developments in discourse tradition theory

Abstract: The concept of discourse tradition (DT) is a core component of the system of language competence developed by Eugenio Coseriu and unfolds its analytical sharpness embedded in the differentiations of that model. The idea of DT is based on the concepts of historicity, individuality and tradition. A central topic of the debates and controversies that have arisen in Romance linguistics is the question of how historicity and individuality enter into the idea of DT. In comparison, the concept of tradition has been studied in far less depth and is therefore given additional consideration in this contribution. As a concept, DTs include very different patterns of text design. This wide scope enables them to function as a dynamic, transdisciplinary concept but also calls for categories that allow a refined description of the different types of DT. Therefore the development of criteria for a categorization of DTs is a further central aspect of this chapter. The application of these criteria is illustrated using the example of the topos of unspeakability in various discourse types and genres.

Keywords: Cooperative Principle, discourse traditions, *energeia*, historicity, individuality

1 Discourse traditions as a concept in the system of language competence

1.1 Three points of view, three types of knowledge

DTs as a concept are inextricably linked to the Coserian system of language competence (Coseriu 1955–1956; 1974, ¹1958; 1985; 1992; ³1994, ¹1980; ²2007, ¹1988). This system combines three types of knowledge with three points of view, namely the activity of speaking (*energeia*), the knowledge underlying the activity (*dynamis*) and the resulting product (*ergon*) (Coseriu ²2007, 71). The concept of *energeia* captures speaking as a creative activity that generates something new beyond what is learned. In doing so, it builds on the stocks of knowledge assembled under the aspect of *dynamis* and at the same time, through its creativity, expands the knowledge on which it is based. Thus, *energeia* is not merely the actualization or application of knowledge, but rather, as a creative activity, constantly engenders something new. These three points of view are combined with three types of knowledge hosted on three levels of speaking (see Table 1), which are derived from the Coserian definition of speaking as a “universal general human activity, which is realized individually in specific situations by indivi-

dual speakers as representatives of language communities with shared traditions of speaking” (Coseriu ²2007, 70; translation A.S.). Coseriu refers to these three types of *dynamis* as “elocutional knowledge”, “idiomatic knowledge” and “expressive knowledge” (Coseriu ²2007, 70). In Romance linguistics, other terms have emerged in parallel, which capture the type of knowledge more clearly and are therefore primarily used here.

Table 1: Language competence: Rules and traditions (Coseriu ²2007, 75; modified version, cf. Schrott 2014; 2015; 2017; 2020; 2021a).

Level	Point of view		
	Activity (<i>energeia</i>)	Knowledge (<i>dynamis</i>)	Product (<i>ergon</i>)
Universal level	Speaking in general	Elocutional knowledge Universal principles and rules	–
Historical level of languages	Speaking a particular language	Idiomatic knowledge Linguistic traditions	–
Individual level of discourse	Discourse as speaking in a particular situation	Expressive knowledge Discourse traditions	Text

The “elocutional knowledge” captures the universal principles and rules that apply in all languages and cultures. The historical level of languages hosts the “idiomatic knowledge” as the mastery of particular languages. The more recently coined term “linguistic traditions” (*tradiciones idiomáticas*, *einzel sprachliche Traditionen*, cf. Schrott 2020; 2021a) emphasizes the important characteristic that languages are passed on as traditions from one generation to the next. The third level embraces discourse as individual performance in specific speech situations including speech acts and verbal interactions (Coseriu ²2007, 85). It is considered an “individual level” since speaking as an activity is always performed in concrete speech situations and since people act and speak as individuals (Coseriu ²2007, 70–71). The “expressive knowledge” assigned to this level is cultural knowledge that guides the speakers in the composition of discourses and thus enables them to adapt to speech situations and to successfully realize the communicative tasks they intend to perform.

In Romance linguistics, the “expressive knowledge” is mostly referred to as “discourse traditions” (*Diskurstraditionen*), which, again, has the advantage of clearly identifying the traditional character of this type of knowledge. The term “tradition” is already occasionally found in Coseriu (²2007, 81; ³1994, 46), but the idea of traditionality was made known primarily by Schlieben-Lange (1983) and developed significantly by Koch (1997; 1999; 2005; 2008) and Oesterreicher (1997; 2001; 2005; 2015a; 2015b). In addition to Koch and Oesterreicher, the concept of DT was also substantially influenced by Kabatek (2001; 2005; 2011; 2015; collected essays on DT, 2018) and

finds detailed treatment in the publications of Lebsanft (2005; 2006; 2015), Lebsanft/Schrott (2015) and Schrott (2014; 2015; 2017; 2020; 2021a). The term “tradition” clarifies that both types of tradition, linguistic traditions and DT, are habitualized knowledge and – in contrast to universal rules – are learned and passed on as historically changing habits. The difference between individual speech as an activity (*energeia*) and as a product (*ergon*) is captured by the terms “discourse” and “text”: “discourse” denotes the activity, whereas “text” denotes the product (Coseriu ²2007, 74–75). Since the activity precedes the product, expressive knowledge provides direct guidance for the activity and manifests itself in the product only via the activity. The term “*discourse* tradition” emphasizes this relatedness more clearly than “*text* tradition”.

In order to underline the impact of DTs as historical and cultural knowledge, the following sections highlight the complex relationships between DTs, linguistic traditions and universal principles of speaking.

1.2 DTs and linguistic traditions: language and culture

As cultural knowledge that shapes speech as an activity and moulds the text as a product, DTs are not bound to individual languages and therefore can be transferred from one language to another. DTs can be of a general nature, such as the maxim to speak to children in a way that is understandable to them (Coseriu ²2007, 161), they can represent everyday routines such as greetings (Coseriu ²2007, 164–165) or be very specific, such as the norms for writing a sonnet (Coseriu ²2007, 163). Since DTs are independent of the individual languages, they are preserved as cultural text patterns when translated into other languages and can be recognized as one and the same phenomenon in different languages (Coseriu ²2007, 162–164; Wilhelm 2015, 64–66). One such language-independent structure is, for example, the tradition of the sonnet (Coseriu ²2007, 163), which exists in a multitude of languages and, constant in its design, can be transferred from one language to another.

As a cultural, non-linguistic type of tradition, DTs are related to linguistic knowledge in two ways. First, DTs are dependent on the particular languages, since they are always realized within particular language systems and can therefore only take shape through the linguistic material of the various languages. In this sense, DTs are subordinate to language. The mastery of a language is a precondition for the application of a DT in that language (Albrecht 2003, 38–39; Lebsanft 2006, 535–537; López Serena 2011, 62–64; Kabatek 2015, 57–59). Second, DTs are a regulating factor when the speaker makes a selection from his linguistic repertoire. When speakers want to implement a communicative intention in a particular speech situation, they can make use of different options offered by the languages they master. The selection of the linguistic structures appropriate to the concrete situation and to the speaker’s intentionality is provided by DTs: the cultural discourse-traditional knowledge guides the speaker in choosing the adequate linguistic forms and structures. In the process of

forming individual discourses DTs appear as a regulating element or *regulans* that selects certain elements from linguistic knowledge which therefore can be described as *regulatum* (Koch 2005, 231–232). Both types of tradition are in a relation of interdependence which is not symmetrical, but rather comprises two different types of dependencies. Coseriu’s model and Koch’s differentiation of *regulans* and *regulatum* make it possible to analyse the complex interaction of linguistic traditions and DTs, language and culture, more precisely. This is especially crucial for branches of linguistics that study language and speech in their cultural contexts, such as pragmalinguistics.

1.3 DTs and universal principles of speaking

DTs and universal principles have in common that they are independent of particular languages; both types of knowledge are not part of linguistic knowledge, but forge the use of that linguistic knowledge. The decisive difference is that elocutional knowledge by definition captures the universal core of speaking, whereas DTs are historically changing knowledge that ensures that discourse is appropriate to the speaker, the situation, the addressee and the subject of speech (Coseriu 2007, 174–175, 180).

In order to understand the functioning of DTs, their connection with the universal rules of speech is crucial. The elocutional knowledge of the universal level comprises fundamental cognitive and communicative-semiotic abilities and is therefore a prerequisite for speaking in general (Coseriu 2007, 89–90; Oesterreicher 2001, 1558–1559). A central universal principle hosted in the universal layer of speaking is the “Cooperative Principle” established by Grice (1989, 1975). This principle is central to the connection of DTs with universal rules of speaking. The systematic coupling of the principle of cooperation and the concept of DT is able to reveal how historical-cultural knowledge and universal principles intertwine and shape speech (cf. Lebsanft 2005; Schrott 2014; 2015; 2017; 2020; 2021a): DTs are the crucial link between universal principles and discourse as an individual activity in a specific speech situation. DTs can accomplish this task as they provide a cultural and historical specification of universal rules and principles. For example, turn-taking is a universally valid pattern that is realized in different ways depending on the DTs which shape the transition from one speaker to another as part of a culture-specific interaction style. Analogously, this applies to narration: remembering the past is a universal need of human beings, which is, however, realized in different cultural DTs of narration.

The set of universal rules that provide the framework for DTs as historical-cultural knowledge are the four maxims of the Gricean “Cooperative Principle” (1989, 1975, 26). The four maxims, which enable and ensure cooperation in the sense of communicative trust (Coseriu 2007, 96), are based upon four core values. They demand truthfulness and plausibility (maxim of Quality), an appropriate content of information (maxim of Quantity), restriction to relevant content (maxim of Relation) and a realiza-

tion that is clear, orderly and comprehensible and thus meets the rhetorical ideal of *perspicuitas* (maxim of Manner: be perspicuous). Thus, each of these maxims stems from a value that is universal as a parameter regulating discourse, but whose realization is historically and culturally variable (Schrott 2014; 2015; 2017; 2021a). For it depends on the cultural values of the different cultural communities how strictly or widely defined the requirements for the quality or quantity of speech are, and what degree of relevance or clarity is expected and endorsed. These historical specifications of the maxims are provided by DTs. They supply the knowledge that guides the speakers to shape discourses in such a way that they correspond to the universal maxims of Quality and Quantity, Relevance and Manner by adapting these core values to the historical and cultural environments of individual discourse.

To sum up, the Gricean maxims are the universal frame that embraces the functioning of DTs as cultural and discourse-designing knowledge. For this reason, the Cooperative Principle and its maxims have a central position in the system of language competence: they are the hinge that connects the universal and the individual layer of speech (Schrott 2015; 2021a). This link offers a methodological basis for pragmalinguistics as a discipline that is centrally concerned with the interplay of universal and cultural components in communication. Therefore, DTs can be considered as a core concept of pragmalinguistics.

1.4 Language competence and pragmalinguistics

Coseriu's system of language competence is based on the concept of speaking as an activity and thus has a close proximity to pragmalinguistics, which analyses linguistic phenomena with a focus on speakers and language use (Escandell Vidal 2004, 348–350; Verschueren 2009, 14–16). Because of this conceptual proximity, the model of language competence is also a systematization of pragmalinguistics (cf. Schrott 2014; 2015; 2017). The distinctions between universal rules and historical traditions on the one hand, and between linguistic knowledge and cultural knowledge on the other, are central criteria of analysis in pragmalinguistics. The added value of Coseriu's system is that these criteria are recorded in a highly coherent system. On the basis of the three levels of language competence, it is therefore possible to develop a model of three levels of pragmatics, starting from the point of view of *dynamis*, i.e. from the rules and traditions that are effective in speaking (cf. Schrott 2014, 10–11; 2017, 37–38; 2020; 2021a).

Table 2: Linguistic pragmatics.

<i>Level</i>	Universal level	Historical level	Individual level
<i>Rules and traditions</i>	Universal principles and rules	Linguistic traditions	Discourse traditions
<i>Relations between rules and traditions</i>	<i>Specificatum</i>	<i>Regulatum</i>	<i>Specificans Regulans</i>
<i>Fields</i>	Universal pragmatics	Language pragmatics	Discourse-traditional pragmatics
<i>Perspectives</i>	Universal	Historical	Historical

The universal principles and rules are the central object of investigation of universal pragmalinguistics, which focuses on fundamental communicative abilities and investigates general rules of speaking, e.g. when verbal interactions and speech act types are investigated from a universal perspective. At the historical level, the focus is on forms and structures of particular languages and their potential for interaction. On the individual level, DTs are analysed as cultural models that shape speech. As languages and their traditions as well as DTs change in time, these two branches of pragmatics have a historical perspective. The model of pragmalinguistics derived from the Coseriu system has the advantage of clearly separating three types of knowledge and of being able to point out their relationships and dependencies (cf. 2.2). The model applies to different directions of pragmalinguistics and can for example be adapted to historical pragmalinguistics (Schrott 2016, 2017, 2020, 2021b; Cruz Volio 2017) or to contrastive pragmalinguistics (Trosborg 2010; Schrott 2014).

An important clarification that Coseriu's system provides for pragmalinguistics lies in the already mentioned relationships and interactions in which the three types of knowledge stand. The DTs are the decisive knowledge type. They select the linguistic traditions that enter into a speech or text and function as *regulans*, while the linguistic traditions are the *regulatum*. A second relationship links the DTs to universal principles and rules. As the example of the Gricean maxims showed, DTs provide a historical and cultural specification of universally valid rules of speech. This specification can be captured – in analogy to *regulans* and *regulatum* – by the conceptual pair of *specificans* and *specificatum*: The DTs function as *specificans*, while the universal rules constitute the *specificatum*. The DTs thus have a double function: they are both *regulans* for the linguistic traditions and *specificans* for the universal principles and rules. By these two functions they have an outstanding key position in the system of language competence and in the model of pragmalinguistics derived from it.

2 Historicity and tradition

2.1 Two types of historicity

In the reception of Coseriu's system of language competence, various additional refinements to and clarifications of the notion of historicity have been proposed. In order to understand and apply the system, it is crucial that the label "historical" is not limited to the historical level of particular languages, since speaking as a cultural activity is part of history as a whole. According to Coseriu, even speaking as a universal activity can have an evolutionary dimension and may change when fundamental parameters of communication undergo change, e.g. during the transition from oral to written cultures (Coseriu 2007, 76–77). Historicity is of course much more pronounced on the historical and individual levels. In relation to the historical level, the historical dimension encompasses the history of particular languages: the processes of language change, but also the history of the language community. The historical dimension of languages can be understood as "primary historicity", since it enriches the world through signs (Albrecht 2003, 50; Kabatek 2015, 57). The individual level captures the historicity and variability of DTs. Since communicative conditions and tasks are constantly changing, DTs are also in permanent transformation in order to adapt to changing environments and communicative challenges. Thus, DTs build on concrete languages and their linguistic material, and their historicity can therefore be understood as a "secondary historicity", which is always based on the primary historicity of language as a semiotic system (Albrecht 2003, 50; Kabatek 2015, 57–59).

The difference in the historicity of linguistic traditions and DTs is particularly evident in the groups that use these two types of tradition. Idiomatic knowledge is practised in language communities as traditions of the language common to all members. A language community is highly visible as a collective in history; it is perceived as a community by members of other language communities, and when a language community goes down in history as a nation, it usually does so in part by virtue of the common language (Coseriu 2007, 86; Albrecht 2003, 44; Lebsanft 2005, 32; 2015, 106). Language communities are constituted through language: whoever speaks a language belongs to the language community. However, there can be different degrees of belonging. While native speakers belong firmly to the language community and are strongly shaped by it in their identity, people who speak a language as a foreign language usually have a looser bond with the language community in question.

In contrast to linguistic traditions, DTs influence the speakers who practise them in different ways. A group using a particular DT does not become visible and effective in a comparable way to a language community, because people are much more strongly influenced by the (few) languages they speak than by the multitude of DTs they employ. Human beings are inseparably linked to their mother tongue. In contrast, DTs are options available to speakers, among which they can always make a new choice in different speech situations (Kabatek 2001, 99–100). DTs are also carried

by collectives, which are, however, configured differently than language communities (Coseriu ²2007, 86; Lebsanft 2006, 532, 535–537; 2015, 108–110; Schrott 2014, 29–34; 2015, 123–124). Since a person masters far more DTs than languages and uses a variety of DTs in everyday language, the groups that carry DTs are very changeable and usually define the identity of their members far less than language communities do. The collectives that practise a DT can be very different in size. They may involve several language communities, such as the technique of expressing a polite request by asking a question (*¿Me puedes pasar el pan, por favor?*) that is common in Spanish, French, German and other languages (cf. Schrott 2014; 2020). This widespread use may be responsible for the fact that most people who use that DT will not see it as an important part of their identity (at best as an element that makes someone a polite person). The situation is different with DTs which are very specific and elaborate and are only mastered by a few. Thus, the group of people who know how to write sonnets may well understand this DT as an important part of their identity. Another special feature is the way in which groups linked by DTs are constituted. People do not form a community simply because they use the same DTs, since the common use of certain DTs is a phenomenon that is based on having the same education and cultural equipment. Coseriu (²2007, 86) illustrates this with the example of the priest who masters highly specific DTs that characterize him as a priest, but do not make him a priest, because this affiliation demands other prerequisites, e.g. appropriate training and ordination to the priesthood. Thus, sharing expressive knowledge does not create a community, but is the expression of an already existing sociocultural bond that makes people use certain DTs (Coseriu ²2007, 86; Lebsanft 2015, 109; Schrott 2014, 31–32; 2015, 123–124). This differentiation implies that the speakers of one and the same language community can diverge considerably in their cultural experiences, while conversely speakers with very similar cultural horizons can belong to different language communities.

2.2 Historicity and individuality

The Coserian model characterizes both idiomatic knowledge and expressive knowledge as historical and traditional, which is made even clearer by the chosen terminology, i.e. linguistic *traditions* and discourse *traditions*. The semantics of historicity can be found in the designation of the second level as the “historical level” of particular languages, but not in the label of the third level as the “individual level”. The different denomination of the levels, both of which contain historical knowledge, and the idea of individuality have been the starting point for an intensive discussion in Romance linguistics about the place of DT and the concept of individuality in the Coserian system. In the following, the aim is not to recapitulate these argumentations and controversies in their detailed course, but to record the gain in knowledge that has resulted from them.

The undoubtedly historical character of DTs prompts Koch (1997, 45–46; 1999, 403; 2008, 54–55) not to leave this type of knowledge at the individual level, but to assign it to the historical level at which Coseriu only locates the idiomatic knowledge of speaking particular languages, a modification that is supported by Oesterreicher (1997; 2001; 2015a; 2015b) and adopted by Wilhelm (2011a; 2011b). As a consequence of this modification, Koch divides the historical level in two – one level for the linguistic traditions and a second for the cultural DTs (1997, 45–46) – in order to clarify that both knowledge types represent different types of historicity (Koch 1997, 45–46, 50, 53, 71; 2008, 54–55). The reason for shifting the DTs from the third to the second level is that, in Koch's view, the concept of individuality and individual speech are not compatible with the supra-individual character of traditions. Koch (1997, 46) and Oesterreicher (2001, 1562; 2015a, 20–21; 2015b, 115–118; cf. also Wilhelm 2011a, 158–162) understand the individual level and its individually realized discourses as a mere application of knowledge on which no supra-individual traditions or norms are to be found.

Koch's modification has the advantage of clarifying the historical character of DTs and bringing the two types of tradition, which are closely intertwined in speech, closer together in the three-level model as well. However, it has been argued that this merging also causes various ambiguities (Lebsanft 2005, 30–32; 2015, 98–104). According to Lebsanft, a weakness of Koch's modification is that it is based on a notion of individuality that does not correspond to the concept that Coseriu uses as a cornerstone of his model of language competence (Lebsanft 2005, 31–32; 2015, 104–105). Koch understands individual speech as an activity consisting of singular discourses that arise in unique, non-repeatable speech situations (Koch 1997, 46; 1999, 402–403; 2008, 55). Individual speaking therefore is considered as an activity which merely applies knowledge and accumulates linguistic data (Koch 2008, 54). Coseriu, on the other hand, understands individual speech as an activity that has creative potential because it is carried out by individuals who are gifted with creativity (Coseriu 1974, 92). The basis for creative innovations are individual, creative acts that express new ideas in a new way (Coseriu ²2007, 70–71, 85). This creative individuality is what Coseriu has in mind when he calls the third level the "individual level". Such an idea of individuality has its own tradition in Romance linguistics and is already crucial in Ramón Menéndez Pidal's concepts of language change (1945; ⁸1976, ¹1926). Menéndez Pidal understands creativity as a force that comes from individuality: language change can be traced back to individual, creative acts that generate innovations (1945, 196), which other speakers can adopt. If the innovations are chosen sufficiently often by other speakers, they become collective tendencies and finally traditions of speech (Menéndez Pidal ⁸1976, 532). The reference to Menéndez Pidal thus helps to clarify that the concept of individuality refers to individual discourses in the sense of creative acts accomplished by individual human beings. The fact that people speak as individuals, not as a collective, gives them the liberty that is the basis for this creativity. Speaking as *energeia*, which creates something new beyond existing knowledge, is therefore rooted in the creative power of individual speakers. In individual discourse, the

speaker varies existing traditions and suggests variations to the interlocutor so that something new is created by taking up something familiar (Coseriu ²2007, 71, 85–86; Lebsanft 2005, 31–32).

Another objection is that Koch's version of the model (1997; 1999; 2008) does not address the three points of view, *energeia*, *dynamis* and *ergon*, and hence changes the system in its very substance. This fading out of the idea of *energeia* together with *dynamis* and *ergon* has the effect that the notion of individuality can no longer be understood in the sense of creativity which it has in the Coserian system. The logical consequence of excluding the viewpoint of *energeia* and of reinterpreting the term "individual" is that the individual level appears as an area of mere application, completely stripped of its creative abilities (Lebsanft 2015, 98–99). Thus, the concept of *energeia* loses its place of action in the Coserian system and the idea of speaking as *energeia* is lost (Lebsanft 2015, 99). The very basic idea of the Coserian model, namely speaking as *energeia*, can only be coherently maintained if the individual level remains a layer of speaking in which speakers can access *and* change DTs. Because of these shortcomings, I follow the original Coserian model and continue to locate DTs on the individual level: Coseriu's distinction between a historical level of languages and an individual level of DTs is essential for the coherence of the system of language competence as a whole. One lesson to be learned from the controversy surrounding the location of DTs is that, when using the model, it is necessary to define very clearly what Coseriu means by the term "individuality" and why this term is a crucial element of the model.

2.3 Traditionality

The second important concept that goes into the idea of DT is *tradition*. The traditions of speech result from the *energeia* that constantly creates something new, which is then passed on as habit and tradition (Coseriu 1974, 92). It is the creating of traditions that makes language a cultural competence: speaking is a cultural activity because it creates something new that can be learned and transmitted (Coseriu 1974, 92; ²2007, 69). Culture is thus the totality of traditions by which a community is characterized and distinguished from other collectives (Gardt 2003, 271). The idea of tradition in language and speech owes much to Ramón Menéndez Pidal (⁹1991, ¹1942), for whom traditions are the basis of all human communities and cultural activities. Menéndez Pidal (⁹1991, 458) sees tradition as the transmission of knowledge and practices with social significance for a community. For Menéndez Pidal (*ibid.*), language is the cultural activity that is most strongly influenced by tradition. He develops his idea of tradition on the one hand from his studies on language change and language history and on the other hand from his research on *poesía tradicional* in Spain.

In the previous section it became clear that language traditions and DTs are historical in different ways. This leads to the question whether both types of tradition are "traditional" in the same or in different ways (cf. Schrott 2015).

As far as linguistic traditions are concerned, they display two traditionalities, one of which concerns the linguistic sign, while the other acts as a framework for creativity and change. The primary traditionality of languages is semiotic. This semiotic foundation of language as tradition can be traced back to Ferdinand de Saussure and his *Cours de linguistique générale* (2013, 1916; cf. Lebsanft/Schrott 2015, 25). For Saussure, the concept of tradition is indispensable for the theory of the linguistic sign, because the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign is attributed to the power of tradition (2013, § 2, Premier principe). According to Saussure, every means of expression functioning in a linguistic community is based on a “habitude collective” or a “convention” (Saussure 2013, 172). The arbitrariness of the linguistic sign and its determination by convention and tradition are mutually dependent (Saussure 2013, 180):

“C’est parce que le signe est arbitraire qu’il ne connaît d’autre loi que celle de la tradition, et c’est parce qu’il se fonde sur la tradition qu’il peut être arbitraire.”

Since the linguistic sign is arbitrary, it is only through conventions, habits and traditions, which by definition are practised by a collective, that it is made conceivable and stabilized as a sign: the tradition allows for the arbitrariness of the sign.

Furthermore, linguistic traditions are characterized by a second type of traditionality which forms the framework for creativity and language change. It is fundamental to linguistic traditions that the creation of something new is at the same time the continuation of a tradition (Coseriu 1974, 185). The already existing linguistic traditions provide the framework as well as the room for these innovations, thus giving language both firmness and scope for variation (Menéndez Pidal 1945, 196; cf. also Garatea Grau 2005, 72–76). Variations evolve within the framework set by the language, hence revealing flexibility and stability at the same time. Each individual speaks in a new way, but remains within the language system in order to be understood (Menéndez Pidal 1968, vol. 1, 44).

The concept of tradition as a habit that balances stability and variability also characterizes DTs. However, while linguistic traditions have an additional semiotic dimension of traditionality due to their primary historicity, DTs do not have this dimension due to their secondary historicity. Linguistic traditions and DTs have in common that change is both innovation and a continuation of traditions, so that the traditional and the innovative are in balance (Coseriu 1974, 184). As both types of tradition are practised by individuals who always act as members of a group and as individuals (Menéndez Pidal 1945, 196), linguistic traditions and DTs are both applied in a field of tension between individual creativity and community ties.

The notion of tradition as a framework that enables and at the same time limits creativity is shared by both DTs and linguistic traditions and can be described by categories common to both. One such category is the strength or flexibility that characterizes a tradition. A general tendency is that traditions that are practised by many people change relatively slowly. Innovations have to be adopted by many in order to

become entrenched, and consequently there are comparatively few innovations, and most of them become established only slowly. Traditions that are practised by a small group, on the other hand, are more varied and change more quickly, because innovations by individuals assert themselves more easily and more quickly (Menéndez Pidal 1991, 459). Speaking as a social activity and habit is subject to more and stricter regulations the greater the number of speakers is (Menéndez Pidal 1945, 195). Since languages generally are spoken by communities which are much larger than the collectives that use a DT, the hypothesis seems plausible that linguistic traditions generally have a higher degree of firmness, less variance and a stronger regularity than DTs.

In this line of argumentation another hypothesis concerning variation arises, namely that DTs that are exercised by a small group are more varied, less fixed and therefore more changeable than DTs that are exercised by larger groups. The richness in variation, or the degree of variation a tradition allows, is another important characteristic of traditions. In general, variants can be relatively equal, but they can also have different degrees of validity and reputation. This is the case for linguistic traditions when certain linguistic variants enjoy a higher or lower prestige and for this reason are either “elected” or “cast out” by the speakers. However, the degree of variation is also an important category of description in DTs, because they too are often realized in variants that can have equal rights or different status (cf. Menéndez Pidal on the richness of variation in the *poesía tradicional* 1968, vol. 2, 393). While linguistic variation and its impact on language change have been intensively studied, this applies far less to the interrelations between discourse-traditional variance and the history of DTs and text genres, so that fruitful topics for future research on DTs may arise here.

3 The categorization of discourse traditions

3.1 Categories

DTs are precisely defined by the Coserian system as cultural and speech-related knowledge. However, they represent a type of knowledge that encompasses a very broad spectrum of techniques and therefore forms an umbrella term with all its advantages and disadvantages. Thus, communicative routines such as techniques for opening a conversation, requests or polite criticism belong to DTs as cultural practices, but literary genres, types of texts, literary styles, forms of interaction and cultural instructions for text design are also ultimately discourse-traditional knowledge (Koch 1997, 43–44; Schrott 2015, 122–123).

This diversity of discourse-traditional phenomena makes it necessary and useful to develop more precise categories of description and differentiation. The starting point for these categories are the basic characteristics of DTs as cultural knowledge that shapes discourses and texts and ensures successful cooperation. Three categories

can be derived from this: culturality, textuality and cooperation (cf. Schrott 2015, 125–131; 2017, 30–37). The dimension of culturality is based on the fact that DTs are a type of cultural knowledge. The second dimension follows from the fact that DTs have a formative effect in texts. Since DTs guide the design of texts, they can be described by the same parameters that are used in text linguistics to categorize text types and text genres. The third dimension is derived from the role of DTs for appropriate speaking and from their connection with the Gricean Cooperative Principle (cf. Schrott 2015; 2017).

3.1.1 Culturality: definition, specification, integration

A first category in the area of culturality derives from the criterion whether or not a DT is established by an explicit definition that is taught and learned. Thus, a DT can go back to a definition that is explicitly imparted as a norm or it can represent a tradition that has evolved through everyday language use and is acquired by the speakers without specific instruction. Examples of an everyday concept are communicative routines and interaction styles. In contrast, DTs that shape text genres like sonnets or editorials represent norms of text design which are firmly and bindingly defined. DTs that are not subject to an established definition are usually conveyed implicitly, so that the speakers are not always aware that they are following a DT. This is the case with informal types of conversation that seem to be free of fixed patterns, but are in fact moulded by their own traditions. In contrast, DTs that are set in terms of definitions are consciously learned and therefore considered as traditions or norms. A second characteristic of culturality is the degree of specification. While highly culture-specific DTs are dominated by rather small groups, less specific DTs are most commonly practised by larger groups. A third criterion emphasizes the fact that some DTs function autonomously, such as greetings, while others are part of a larger whole; this is the case when a DT is part of a larger configuration that forms a text genre (Stempel 1972, 176; Kabatek 2011, 99).

3.1.2 Textuality: text structures, environments, text semantics

Since DTs guide the design of texts, criteria of textuality can also be used for their description. Three central criteria can be mentioned here: text-internal structures, text-external environments and the formation of meaning in the text. In general, according to Raible (1980, 335–336), texts can be described and typified by their internal structures and by the way they are connected to their environments. In the case of internal structures, DTs select linguistic elements that form micro- and macro-structures, determine the speech act profile, and confer a written or oral design to the text. In addition, DTs link the text to external environments, i.e. to the respective speech situations as well as to the relevant contexts of social and cultural knowledge. Finally,

DTs influence the ways in which textual elements and structures interact to create the meaning of the text that emerges in the act of enunciation (Gardt 2012).

3.1.3 Cooperativeness and appropriateness

Since DTs are responsible for the appropriateness of speaking, they are subject to the maxims of the Gricean Cooperative Principle and act as cultural specifications of the four maxims, thus unfolding the principle of cooperation and communicative trust (Lebsanft 2005, 26–27). DTs are basically related to all four maxims, but can be particularly strongly tied to one maxim (Quantity, Quality, Relevance, Manner or *perspicuitas*). Thus, legal texts such as testimonies in court are above all committed to the maxim of quality, since truthfulness, plausibility and provability are crucial here. The relation between the Cooperative Principle and a DT is furthermore determined by the way in which the respective DT can be connected to the maxims. Thus, a DT can fulfil a maxim, but it can also (actually or only apparently) violate or break a maxim. DTs based on a consistent break with a maxim are riddles or poetic texts committed to the aesthetic ideal of *obscuritas*, in which clarity is precisely not what matters.

3.2 How to categorize a discourse tradition: the example of the unspeakability topos

The concept of the DT as a cultural tradition of speaking also includes habits of speaking that have been explored primarily in rhetoric, such as *topoi*. In what follows, the categories presented above are applied and illustrated by the ‘topos of unspeakability’ (*Unsaybarkeitstopos*) (Curtius ¹1993, ¹1948). This topos can be considered as a DT which addresses the limits of linguistic expression in the face of an extraordinary event (Curtius ¹1993, 168–170) and can be found in different discourse universes (Coseriu ³1994, 134–135; Kabatek 2011, 95–96). Three instances are presented here: the use of the topos in a hagiographic text belonging to the discourse universe of religion, the role of the topos in political discourse, and its function in the field of law and jurisdiction.

The use in religion is vividly documented in the descriptions of miracles in hagiographic texts. In the *Vida de Santo Domingo* by Gonzalo de Berceo the miracles of the saint are depicted in almost one hundred verses (290 to 383) before the enumeration finally comes to the following conclusion (*Vida de Santo Domingo de Silos*, edited by Brian Dutton, London, 1978, Tamesis):

384a Todos los sus miraglos ¿quí los podrí contar?
384b Non lis dariémos cabo nin avriémos vagar.

‘Who could tell/count all his miracles?
We would never end with them nor take any rest.’

The topos is expressed by a rhetorical question (*¿quién los podría contar?*) in which the polysemous verb *contar* states that the saint's miracles can neither be counted nor told. The topos is the conclusion of a lengthy, rhetorically elaborate description of miracles and thus realizes a rhetorical staging of the miracles while affirming at the same time their inexpressibility.

The second universe of discourse in which the topos can frequently be found are political discourses that deal with the limits of what can be said in the face of extreme events (Gülich 2005, 225). The following quotation is taken from a speech by former French president François Hollande delivered on 18 November 2015, a few days after terrorist attacks had taken place in Paris (13.11.2015):

Au cours de la nuit du 13 novembre, au moins 129 personnes ont perdu la vie. Nous pensons à elles, à ces femmes, à ces hommes qui ont été lâchement assassinés, blessés, traumatisés. Nous pensons à leurs familles, plongées dans un indicible chagrin. Ces attentats ont ensanglanté Paris et sa banlieue (<http://discours.vie-publique.fr/notices/157003011.html>, last accessed 11.04.2019).

Hollande first gives a rhetorical three-step description of the suffering (*assassinés, blessés, traumatisés*) before explicitly naming the unspeakability of the suffering endured (*indicible chagrin*). In that way the topos is surrounded by a modest rhetorical elaboration, which is much simpler than the rhetorical compensation displayed in the hagiographic text cited above.

A third universe of discourse in which the limits of what can be said play an important role is the field of jurisdiction. One example are testimonies about human rights violations which are part of the collective memory (*memoria*) in post-dictatorial societies. The following extracts are taken from the *Nunca más* report (*Nunca más*, Informe Conadep, Buenos Aires, 1984), which documents the human rights violations during the previous military dictatorship. The victims describe their imprisonment and torture:

No sé describir la sensación de cómo se me quemaba todo por dentro (*Nunca más*, p. 20, <http://desaparecidos.org/nuncamas/web/investig/articulo/nuncamas/nmas0001.htm>, last accessed 04.06.2019).

En realidad es muy difícil llegar a expresar con palabras todo el sufrimiento. [...] Pienso que es posible sólo reproducir una caricatura trágica de lo que fueron aquellos momentos (ibid., p. 32).

The testimonies not only address the inability to describe what was experienced (*no sé describir*), but also the limits of linguistic expression (*es muy difícil llegar a expresar con palabras todo el sufrimiento*).

The examples show that the topos of unspeakability has great continuity and at the same time varies strongly depending on the type of discourse or genre in which it appears. It allows variations that can be described and distinguished from each other by the categories of culturality, textuality and cooperativity.

In the dimension of culturality, the topos can be characterized according to the criteria of definition, specification and integration. As the topos is a fixed pattern that has its roots in scholarly rhetoric, it is a DT that has a firm definition and a history of its own (Curtius ¹¹1993, 168–170). This rhetorical origin is present in all three uses, but to varying degrees. The hagiographic text, which relates to the Latin clerical culture of the Middle Ages, is clearly rooted in this scholarly tradition. This learned tradition, however, is not dominant in the other examples. Considering that learned rhetoric and the rhetoric of everyday life are in constant exchange, this poses no contradiction. Moreover, the examples show that the criterion of definition can be gradual and that a DT can refer more or less strongly to its (original) definition. Regarding the degree of specification and elaboration, the use of the topos in the *Vida de Santo Domingo* is expressed by a rhetorical question which has the value of an emphatic assertion. As for Hollande's political speech, the topos is realized by a single word (*indicible*) and the use of the topos is kept deliberately simple in order to create the impression of sincerity. Unspeakability is thus simply asserted in the political speech, whereas in the *Vida* the statement that nobody can tell all the miracles must be inferred from the rhetorical question, so that the hagiographic text offers a slightly higher degree of elaboration. The strongest specification, however, is found in the testimonies, in which the topos is radically taken at its word: the topos becomes a reflection on the limits of linguistic expressiveness and is integrated into a critique of language that is closely linked to discourses on the *Shoah*. As far as the parameter of integration is concerned, the topos in all three examples is integrated into a text genre that describes extraordinary or extreme events. The topos is thus not bound to a certain genre, but to certain topics, which in turn have affinities to certain genres.

In the wide dimension of textuality only some aspects can be highlighted here. In the three texts cited, it is particularly revealing how text-internal structures and text-external environments are mutually dependent on each other. In the *Vida*, the topos is expressed through a rhetorical question formulated by the fictional narrator. These internal structures are brought to life in the environments of the medieval oral performance in which the rhetorical question addresses the audience present, thus transcending the text. Hollande's speech, on the other hand, concentrates the topos in the adjective *indicible* and makes unspeakability a characteristic of the suffering endured (*indicible chagrin*). This discretion corresponds to the tone of mourning and compassion with which Hollande addresses the French nation. In contrast, in the texts cited from *Nunca más* the witnesses explicitly relate the topos to themselves and to the limits of their expressive power (*No sé describir la sensación*). In this way the topos functions as a means of relief and alleviation for the witnesses, who are confronted with describing traumatic experiences.

As for the dimension of cooperativeness, the topos in all three texts can be interpreted as fulfilling the maxim of Quality (Grice 1989, 27). The fact that the speaker emphasizes that his description cannot do justice to the exceptional nature of an event can be interpreted as an effort for truth in the sense of the maxim. The association of

the topos with the maxim of Quality is strongest in the testimonies from *Nunca más*, as the witnesses struggle to find adequate linguistic expressions in order to depict their traumatic experiences. In the *Vida de Santo Domingo* one can find an interaction with the maxims of Quantity and Relevance that is revealing for the functioning of the topos. The use of the DT in the *Vida* unites two opposing tendencies: on the one hand, rhetorical effort is made to approach the phenomenon of the miracles, while on the other hand its ineffability is affirmed. This combination of a lengthy description of the miracles with the topos could be interpreted as a contradiction of the maxims of Quantity and Relevance (Grice 1989, 26–27), as the topos alone would already provide sufficient information and satisfy the requirements of relevance. This (possible) violation of the maxims, however, is absorbed by the conventions of the hagiographic genre, which uses the topos to create effects of intensification, and by the conventionality of the topos itself. The examples thus prove the Gricean insight that inflections or violations of maxims can be healed by conventions.

4 DT as a transdisciplinary concept

The example of the topos of unspeakability shows that the concept of DT can be used with great profit in very different types of texts and genres, and consequently in the discourse universes associated with them. DTs represent a concept that is extremely relevant not only for linguistics but also for the disciplines concerned with the discourse universes of religion, literature, politics and law, all of which are based on texts and convey knowledge linguistically.

The concept of DT has three major advantages for text-based disciplines. First, it provides a clear, systematic definition of cultural and language-oriented knowledge, which is essential for the analysis of texts as cultural objects. Second, the idea of DT allows for a more precise and comparative description of patterns, linguistic habits and routines through the categories of culturality, textuality and cooperativeness, all of which can be derived from the definition of DTs as cultural traditions of textual design linked to the Gricean maxims. Third, the concept is flexible and can be applied to various discourse universes. This flexibility makes the notion of DT an effective instrument for interdisciplinary cooperation, e.g. between linguistics, literary studies and political and social sciences.

However, DTs are not only a linguistic concept that is well adapted to interdisciplinary approaches. Since the idea of DT combines definitional precision with the conceptual openness that is needed in transdisciplinary research, DTs also have great potential for transdisciplinary research that not only uses concepts or methods from individual disciplines but intends to dynamize and develop them (Mittelstraß 2003, 9, 22). For such applications outside linguistics – e.g. in social sciences and literary and cultural studies – it will be decisive that the concept remains linked to the Coserian model, for the precision of the concept is inseparably linked to the system of the

three layers of speech, their correspondent three types of knowledge and the basic idea of *energeia*. This means that the concept of DT, when used in other disciplines, ultimately brings the entire system of language competence into these disciplines. Such a transfer is ultimately only logical: since Coseriu's understanding of language competence was cultural and social from the very beginning, the model of rules and traditions of speaking has never been exclusively linguistic.

5 References

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