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MEETING FOR THE FRIENDSHIP AMONGST THE PEOPLES

#meeting15

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## **Wonder of simple facts: men's language and the limits of understanding. Andrea Moro and Noam Chomsky**

**Rimini, August 24<sup>th</sup> 2015** – Language is men's ability to express through sound and signs what is inside the mind. It is a specific and unique feature of our species. No other living thing does it as us. It is also an ability developed suddenly, in very recent times considering the evolution of mankind. The process starts with a million years ago, but the turning point where we begin to talk about language is even more recent than 400 thousand years. It is an unprecedented evolutionary leap, which determined the future of our species. The modern linguistic and neuro-linguistic as well study and investigate what is behind the event apparently more simple, natural, and yet surprising: the speech.

The encounter was dedicated to language – its syntax, its ability to articulate itself endlessly in order to express what is inside and outside of us, its origin and its limits of representation and understanding of reality. "Wonder of simple facts: men's language and the limits of understanding" (Auditorium Intesa San Paolo B1). This event was attended by the international researcher and neuro-linguist of the Superior Graduate School of Pavia Andrea Moro, introduced by the astrophysicist at the University of Milan Marco Bersanelli, and in live audio/video, Noam Chomsky, the linguist described by the New York Times as the leading American intellectual of the last hundred years, that is since Einstein published his theory of general relativity.

Bersanelli underlined the intimate elegance of the title of the meeting, which denotes a particular way, very scientific, to look at things without taking anything for granted, so he gave the floor to Moro.

"The title comes from a phrase used by Chomsky in his 1986 book: it is important to learn to be amazed by the simple facts". Andrea Moro begins like so, remembering that he was one of the students of the American researcher at MIT in Boston – one of the top universities in the world. "The break made in the fifties by Chomsky in the study of language is absolute. Languages and syntax were considered cultural conventions of arbitrary nature. He is to introduce categories such as complexity and generativity recursive language and call it "a set of specific values of parameters in a system of invariant principles". Not a small difference, that completely shifts the research on language, grammar and syntax.

According to Chomsky and Moro, characteristic of human action, and language in particular, it is evading the mechanisms of association stimulus/response, according to the interpretations of the behavioral psychology. We use a phrase and do not understand why we used down or stored internally but because we possess the generative rule, namely the grammar. For Chomsky this ability has to be hereditary and universal, already present in every individual: "Human beings are amazingly designed, with an uncanny ability".

Moro traces the recent history of linguistics as the intellectual work of those who must judge the shape of a tapestry by analyzing the weave of threads of the hidden side, which led to the localization of physiological brain areas dedicated to language. It is surprising that the ability to speak, learnt very quickly and generally at a very young age, is only human, as demonstrated by the experiment done with some chimpanzees. Chimpanzees can learn the words, but are not able to use them in the right positions to express different concepts. And it is amazing the result of recent experiments group Moro within psycholinguistic: the internal representation of language accurately reproduces the sound envelope of speech. Language is sound.

Chomsky, in his speech from the US, proceeds epistemologically and reminds genetic and universalist theories on the philosophy of language of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, philosophers such as Descartes, Hume, Locke and Newton. The approach of Chomsky's generative grammar originates from the

intuition of the infinite creativity of language and falls off substantially from the concepts and tools of structural linguistics that characterized the first and second world war.

After spending review of the main stages of the American linguistic research, the scholar focuses on the ideas of the current linguistic frontier: the concept of external and internal fusion, with its implications on minimum computability of syntactic structures, the strength of the concept rules-dependent structure, the thesis of the perfect project that leads to the so-called "strongly minimalist thesis" and so on. "The primary task of research in linguistics" he finally notes "is to fill the large gaps that the picture still has, in an even more exciting way for the mysteries that hides the picture, maybe forever".

Bersanelli concludes, with from sincere gratitude for the wealth of the meeting: "For us, the language shows the infinite possibilities in the finite expression. We inherit it with history, and to spark off its use we need a relationship. The more we study the mechanisms, the more ineffable we become. "

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