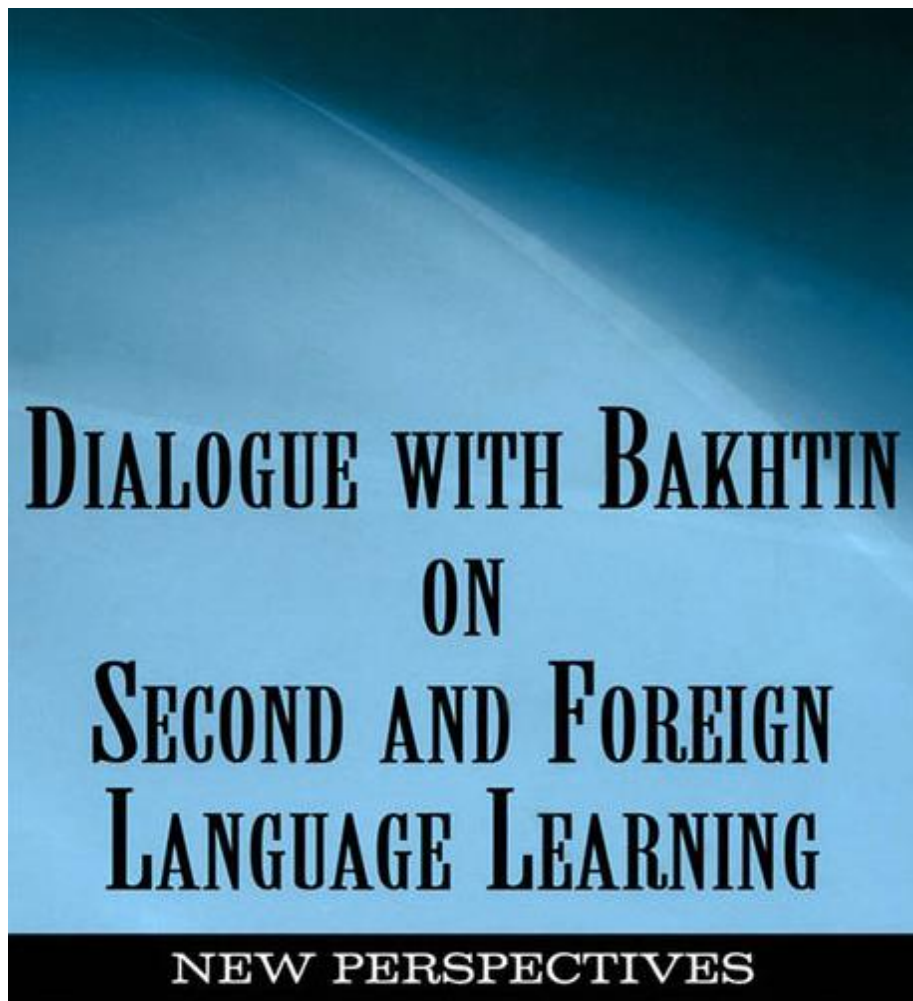


**HALL, J.; VITANOVA, G.; MARCHENKOVA, L. (Eds.). *Dialogue with Bakhtin on Second and Foreign Language Learning: New Perspectives*. Mahwah, New Jersey; London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005. 241 p.**

Orison Marden Bandeira de Melo Júnior\*



Edited by  
Joan Kelly Hall • Gergana Vitanova  
Ludmila Marchenkova

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\* Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte – UFRN, Natal, RN, Brazil; junori36@uol.com.br

The work *Dialogue with Bakhtin on Second and Foreign Language Learning: New Perspectives* – henceforth, *Dialogue with Bakhtin* – brings, in its title, two major themes of great interest for the studies of Applied Linguistics: the dialogic-discursive approach to language presented and discussed by the (Bakhtin) Circle and the studies related to the process of teaching and learning a second or a foreign language.<sup>1</sup> The preposition *with* – in *Dialogue with Bakhtin* – places the work within the actual scope of dialogue between the themes, since there is no specific essay, in the writings of the Circle, on the teaching of foreign languages, not allowing this *Dialogue with Bakhtin* to be presented as Bakhtin’s Dialogue.

Hence, this observation makes the work, despite being published in 2005, very relevant to research in the field of discourse, particularly Dialogic Discourse Analysis (DDA), as it realizes the extent of its studies, encompassing the field of language teaching as well as research on language teaching (second and/or foreign), as it is impacted by the (dialogic) conception of language of the Circle. It is important to remember, however, that Bakhtin discusses stylistic issues in *mother* tongue (Russian) teaching in an essay translated into Portuguese by Sheila Grillo e Ekaterina Américo, published by Editora 34 in 2013. According to Beth Brait, in her introduction to the work, “Bakhtin was also preoccupied with a type of teaching [the teaching of Russian in high school] that considered language abstractly, not managing to actually teach its living behavior to learners” (2013, pp.9-10; our translation).<sup>2 3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to establish the difference between learning a second language and a foreign language. According to the *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics* (2010), while learning a second language is a more general term, when contrasted with the term foreign language, it acquires a more specific meaning: unlike foreign language learning, second language learning occurs in a place where that language plays an important role in communication, commerce, education, etc. As an example of this definition, we could mention the following situations: when we take, as speakers of Brazilian Portuguese, an English course in an American university, English is studied (and approached) as a second language. However, if we study English at a language school or an undergraduate English program in Brazil, as the one offered by UFRN, English is studied (and approached) as a foreign language. [RICHARDS, J.; SCHMIDT, R. *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics*. 4.ed. Harlow, England: Pearson Education, 2010.]

<sup>2</sup> Text in original: “Bakhtin também se preocupava com um ensino [ensino da língua russa no ensino médio] que, tratando abstratamente a língua, não lograva de fato ensinar seu comportamento vivo aos alunos.” [BAKHTIN, M. *Questões de estilística no ensino de língua*. Trad. Sheila Grillo e Ekaterina Américo. São Paulo: Editora 34, 2013].

<sup>3</sup> TN. The English version of this essay is entitled Dialogic Origin and Dialogic Pedagogy of Grammar: Stylistics in Teaching Russian Language in Secondary School. It was translated by Lydia Razran Stone and published in the *Journal of Russian and European Psychology* in 2004 (vol. 42, no. 6, pp.12-49).

*Dialogue with Bakhtin* is edited by Joan Kelly Hall, from Pennsylvania State University, Gergana Vitanova, from the University of Central Florida, and Ludmila Marchenkova, from Ohio State University, viz., by three researchers from different universities that, at a meeting of the American Association of Applied Linguistics, in 2002, showed interest in sharing their studies on the language philosophy of Bakhtin and the implications of this concept in language learning. Published in 2005, the work became therefore the first, in the United States, to explore the relevance of Bakhtin's studies for research and pedagogical practices aimed at learning a second language and/or foreign language.

With 241 pages, *Dialogue with Bakhtin* is divided into two parts, the first being the largest: while the first part of the book (pp.9-169) entitled *Investigations into Contexts of Language Learning and Teaching*, is composed of seven chapters in which each presents a specific case study, the second part (pp.170-231) entitled *Implications for Theory and Practice*, brings three chapters of theoretical discussion (Chapter 9: Language, Culture, and Self: the Bakhtin, Vygotsky Encounter, Chapter 10: Dialogical Imagination of (Inter) cultural Spaces: Rethinking the Semiotic Ecology of Second Language and Literacy Learning, and Chapter 11: Japanese Business Telephone Conversations as Bakhtinian Speech Genre: Applications for Second Language Acquisition). It is important to mention, however, that the book opens with an introductory chapter, written by the organizers. Entitled Introduction: Dialogue with Bakhtin on Second and Foreign language learning, the text begins with a discussion of the studies focused on language learning and on the influence that the formalist view had in this area of knowledge. Faced with the limitations imposed by this theoretical perspective in the field of language, which includes the teaching of foreign languages, the authors present Bakhtin's contribution to the understanding of a new concept of language, which, ceasing to be understood as a set of closed systems of normative forms, is presented as "dynamic constellations of sociocultural resources that are fundamentally tied to their social and historical contexts" (p.2). Based on this conception of language, the authors present, although quickly, the concepts of utterance, discourse genre and dialogism, and point to two implications of adopting this perspective to the understanding of the teaching-learning process of a second language and/or foreign language, i.e.,

understanding (by teachers and students) that (1) language is alive and that (2) learning happens in social interaction (not in the individual cognition of the learner).

As a work dedicated to the implications of the dialogical theory in the teaching field of second language and foreign language, Hall, Vitanova and Marchenkova compile seven empirical researches in the first part of the book. Since there is no explanation about the ordering of the chapters, we will make its brief presentation according to their distinction between teaching second language and foreign language, recognizing that other criteria could be adopted, as the level of education of students-subjects of research or the DDA concepts being used. Almost all researches are related to English teaching, either as a second language (English as a Second Language - ESL) or as a foreign language (English as a Foreign Language - EFL). Only one was dedicated to the study of Swahili in an American university, viz., to Swahili as a foreign language (Swahili as a Foreign Language – SFL).

The chapters dealing with ESL are chapters 2, 3, 4, and 8. Chapter 2, entitled *Mastering Academic English: International Graduate Students' Use of Dialogue and Discourse Genres to Meet the Demands of Writing Graduate School*, is the result of a research by Karen Braxley, from the University of Georgia. Focusing in particular on the concepts of dialogism and discourse genres, she seeks to help five graduate students to master written academic genres.

In Chapter 3, entitled *Multimodal Representations of Self and Meaning for Second Language Learners in English-dominant Classrooms*, Ana Christina DaSilva Iddings, from Vanderbilt University, John Haught and Ruth Devlin, both from the University of Nevada, analyze, based on the concept of dialogism and its relationship with the heterodiscourse and the notion of meaning, the relations between sign, meaning and language established by two foreign students, one from Thailand and the other from Cuba, who recently arrived in the United States in a classroom of the third year of an elementary school. We chose to use the term heterodiscourse (instead of plurilingualism or heteroglossia) as shown by Paulo Bezerra in his translation of Bakhtin's essay *Discourse in the Novel*. For Bezerra (2015), the term heterodiscourse "translates the internal

stratification of language and encompasses the diversity of all socio-cultural voices in their historical-anthropological dimension” (p.247; our translation).<sup>4</sup>

Chapter 4, *Dialogic Investigations: Cultural Artifacts in ESOL Composition Classes*, presents the research of Jeffery Lee Orr, from the University of Georgia, done with five foreign students in the first year of university. Based on the concept of dialogism and its relation with meaning and ideology, the researcher seeks to demonstrate the dialogic nature of language to his students, thereby contributing to their ideological development.

In Chapter 8, *Authoring the Self in the Non-Native Language: A Dialogical Approach to Agency and Subjectivity*, Gergana Vitanova, from the University of Central Florida, seeks to analyze, from the concepts of agency and authorship, how five immigrants from Eastern Europe in the US may have become authors of their discourses in a second language and how they can perform an agent role. This research is presented fully in the work *Authoring Dialogic Self*, published in 2010.<sup>5</sup>

The chapters related to foreign language are chapters 5, 6 and 7, being 5 and 6 dedicated to EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and 7, to SFL (Swahili as a Foreign Language). In Chapter 5, entitled *Local Creativity in the Face of Global Domination: Insights of Bakhtin for Teaching English for Dialogic Communication*, Angel M.Y. Lin, from City University of Hong Kong, and Jasmine C.M. Luk, from Hong Kong Institute of Education, based on the concept of dialogism and its relationship with heterodiscourse and linguistic creativity, examine how the practice of English language teaching reflects and refracts language hegemony in the country and how teachers can recreate their pedagogical action in order to help students to put into dialogue the English language and the styles and language variations of their local language and to use their own linguistic creativity.

The text, far more reflective than empiric (despite the presentation of the work done with 40 high school students in Hong Kong), draws attention to school curricula needing to promote student access to social heterodiscourse, giving them space to make

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<sup>4</sup> Text in original: “traduz a estratificação interna da língua e abrange a diversidade de todas as vozes socioculturais em sua dimensão histórico-anropológica.” [BAKHTIN, M. *Teoria do romance I: a estilística*. Tradução, prefácio, notas e glossário de Paulo Bezerra; organização da edição russa de Serguei Botcharov e Vadim Kójinov. São Paulo: Editora 34, 2015].

<sup>5</sup> VITANOVA, G. *Authoring the Dialogic Self: Gender, Agency and Language Practices*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2010.

English “a language of their own by populating it with their own meanings and voices” (p.95), thus allowing them “to enrich the learning of English as a language for globalized communication and for interrogating both local and global cultural issues revolving around the differential roles and statuses of different ways of using English in our world” (p.96). This positioning of the researchers, against the hegemonic position of the English language and its teaching, leads to the concept of World English presented by Kanavillil Rajagopalan, in his article The Concept of ‘World English’ and its Implications for ELT.<sup>6</sup> For the author, “to speak of English as a world language is simply another way of drawing attention to the fact that it [the World English] is an arena where conflicting interests and ideologies are constantly at play” (RAJAGOPALAN, 2004, p.113).

Chapter 6, still in the ELF field, is entitled Metalinguistic Awareness in Dialogue: Bakhtinian Considerations. The text presents the research done by Hannele Dufva and Riikka Alanen, from the University of Jyväskylä, with 20 children between 7 and 12 years old in a primary school in Finland. The researchers, based on the concepts of Bakhtin’s dialogism and Vygotsky’s mediation, aim at investigating the metalinguistic awareness of students (in action) and its relationship with learning a foreign language.

In the last chapter to be presented, Chapter 7, entitled “Uh uh on hapana”: Intersubjectivity, Meaning, and the Self, Elizabeth Platt, from Florida State University, investigates, based on the concept of dialogism and its relationship with intersubjectivity and the notion of sense, how two foreign students in a graduate course produce meaning from the limited knowledge they had of Swahili (ESL), the target language of the lessons, and how they would build their own identity as language learners.

*Dialogue with Bakhtin* is therefore not only a dialogue with the conception of language proposed by the (Bakhtin) Circle, but a dialogue between research and researchers from different universities in different parts of the world that, by appropriating full or part of the theoretical framework of the Circle or promoting a meeting of Bakhtin with other authors, reflect on teaching second or foreign language. The richness of the work is established by the fact that it does not bring an “application” of the concepts to the area of language teaching, but that it promotes a dialogue between the two areas,

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<sup>6</sup> RAJAGOPALAN, K. The Concept of ‘World English’ and Its Implications for ELT. *ELT Journal*, vol. 58, n. 2, pp.111-117, 2004. Available at: [<http://eltj.oxfordjournals.org/content/58/2/111.full.pdf+html>]. Access on: 27 Feb. 2016.

enabling teaching per se to be impacted by this conception of language that sees verbal interaction as a fundamental reality (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.94).<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, the concept of dialogism, or the dialogical conception of language, was fairly frequent among researchers. However, upon bringing Vološinov to the center of their discussions through the work *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1986), only Dufva and Alanen, in the section Discussion of Chapter 6, point to the fact that the Russian author ventilated the issue of learning/assimilation of language, which, for him, only happens when individuals “enter upon the stream of verbal communication” (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.81).<sup>8</sup>

However, at no time do Dufva and Alanen, or the other researchers, present the discussion that Vološinov elaborates on the difference between signal and sign, being signal the unchanging content, abstracted from the field of ideology, and the relationship of these concepts with learning languages. According to Vološinov (1986, p.69), when the assimilation of a foreign language is at the level of signality (as a sign), there is mere recognition, i.e., “the language not yet fully having become a language. The ideal mastering of language is absorption of signality by pure semioticity and of recognition by pure understanding.”<sup>9</sup> Vološinov himself brings a footnote in which he discusses, in an abbreviated format, “sensible methods of teaching living foreign languages” and asserts that “under the sound and sensible method of practical instruction, the form should be assimilated not in its relation to the abstract system of the language [...], but in the concrete structure of utterance, i.e., as a mutable and pliable sign” (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.69).<sup>10</sup> We believe that this discussion would enrich the work as it would allow its readers to understand that although there is no particular essay on (foreign) language teaching, the issue has not gone unnoticed by the Circle, coming to be formally discussed by Bakhtin (2013)<sup>11</sup> and more concisely by Vološinov (1986).<sup>12</sup>

Finally, *Dialogue with Bakhtin* is a great contribution to Applied Linguistics with regard to the dialogue held with Bakhtin about learning a second or foreign language. We

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<sup>7</sup> VOLOŠINOV, V. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Translated by Lidislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.

<sup>8</sup> For reference, see footnote 7.

<sup>9</sup> For reference, see footnote 7.

<sup>10</sup> For reference, see footnote 7.

<sup>11</sup> For reference, see footnote 2.

<sup>12</sup> For reference, see footnote 7.

therefore hope that the work be more widespread in our country, in view of the growing number of both researchers in the foreign language teaching area that adopt the dialogical perspective of language in their teaching practices and discourse analysts that extend their research scope to discourses aimed at language teaching.

Translated by Marcelo Saparas – [christian\\_matt@uol.com.br](mailto:christian_matt@uol.com.br)

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