

The Bakhtin Circle and Applied Linguistics / *O Círculo de Bakhtin e a Linguística Aplicada*

*Newton Duarte Molon**
*Rodolfo Vianna***

ABSTRACT

This article aims at presenting the relations between the theoretical formulations of the Bakhtin Circle and the current discussion on the scope of the so called Applied Linguistics (AL). In order to do that, we will briefly outline the history of AL, present the main conceptions of the Bakhtin Circle's thought, and build possible dialogues between the theoretical formulations of the Russian thinkers and the main issues of the current debate in Applied Linguistics.

KEYWORDS: Applied Linguistics; The Bakhtin Circle; Voices; Interdisciplinarity; Metalinguistics

RESUMO

O presente artigo busca apresentar relações entre as formulações do Círculo de Bakhtin e os debates contemporâneos que ocorrem no âmbito da chamada Linguística Aplicada (LA). Para tanto, se fará um breve panorama histórico da LA, serão apresentadas concepções basilares do pensamento do Círculo de Bakhtin e serão construídos possíveis diálogos entre as formulações dos pensadores russos com as questões centrais do debate contemporâneo em LA.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Linguística Aplicada; Círculo de Bakhtin; Vozes; Interdisciplinaridade; Metalinguística*

* Professor at Faculdade Cásper Líbero, São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil; ndmolon@gmail.com

** PhD student at Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo - PUC/SP, São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil; CNPq scholarship; rodolfovianna@yahoo.com.br

Introduction

This article aims at presenting the relations between the theoretical formulations of the Bakhtin Circle and the current discussion on the scope of the so called Applied Linguistics. In order to unpretentiously do that, it is necessary to initially outline the history of Applied Linguistics (AL, the acronym widely used to refer to Applied Linguistics) so that, as we analyze it, it may become possible to map out the main issues and the emergence of some important theoretical impasses in the area.

This brief outline does not intend to be a summary of the history of AL, but an understanding of its emergence and subsequent development as a field of knowledge so that it may be possible to both understand its theoretical and practical objectives nowadays and relate them with the Bakhtin Circle's thought.

Secondly, some fundamental theoretical formulations of the Bakhtin Circle will be presented. Although the theory found in their work will not be examined thoroughly, this article will present the pillars from which connections with AL will be drawn. These pillars are: *verbal interaction*, *concrete utterance*, *ideological sign*, and *dialogism*.

In the third and fourth sections of this study, possible articulations between both theoretical and methodological frameworks will be demonstrated. Based on issues raised by applied linguists, this article aims at establishing a dialogue between them through the theoretical formulations of *voice* and *positioning* as well as through the study methodology of discourse called *metalinguistics* by Bakhtin.

1 Brief outline of Applied Linguistics

In the early years of Applied Linguistics, it was understood as the *application of Linguistics*. Far from being a simple rhetorical inversion, this fact reflected the initial path which solidified the discipline. And in the process of moving away from the understanding of this simple *application*, a new path was made by applied linguists which led to the current characterization of AL.

The development of Applied Linguistics started within Linguistics in a normal and natural relation of dependency between an expanding theoretical science and its incipient application (KLEIMAN, 1992). This application was characterized, at first, by the attempts to conjugate knowledge from Linguistics and the study and practices related to foreign language teaching and learning. Rajagopalan emphasizes the relation between the initial impulse of Applied Linguistics and the American government's war efforts in the mid-1940s and the beginning of the 1960s: "As well as the increasing demand for foreign language teachers to give quick-learning courses to thousands of soldiers designated to work in faraway places, linguists were summoned to dedicate themselves to research projects related to American bellic efforts" (RAJAGOPALAN, 2008, p.151). This demand represented considerable subsidy to the development of the study area.

The relation between Applied Linguistics and the teaching and learning of foreign languages has significantly *marked* the conception there has been about this area. However, since the 1990s the teaching and learning of foreign languages has not been the only interest of AL. Celani (1992) presents three distinct epistemological conceptions, which are not successive, of the development of Applied Linguistics: *Applied Linguistics as the teaching and learning of foreign languages*; *Applied Linguistics as the user and not the producer of theories*, through which AL "would verify the relation between theoretical descriptions and distinct practices" (CELANI, 1992, p.18); and, at last, *Applied Linguistics as an interdisciplinary area* through which AL is perceived as "an autonomous area which builds its own principles through experimentation and problem solving modification" as it is the "place, thus, where language study intersects with other subject areas" (CELANI, 1992, p.19).

If Applied Linguistics emerges from the necessity to apply theories from traditional Linguistics in the process of teaching and learning foreign languages, it is in this very application that theoretical impasses will emerge. AL will have to confront them since traditional Linguistics can give no or little help in order to solve them. Kleiman (1992) states that the change from the study object of languages to be taught to the language teaching and learning processes broadened the research area of Applied Linguistics and contributed to the multidisciplinary of the field, or, according to Serrani (1990), to its transdisciplinarity.

Some factors which were not considered pertinent by Linguistics became relevant in scientific investigations as long as the study focus was the *process* of teaching and learning languages. “A linguistic theory can provide a more accurate description of a linguistic aspect than another but it can be totally inefficient when it comes to the process of teaching/learning languages” (MOITA LOPES, 2008, p.18). *Multi-, inter-, trans-*, or interdisciplinarity becomes part, from the 1990s, of the central debate on how to (or not to) characterize Applied Linguistics once its scope is seen as autonomous from traditional Linguistics.

It is curious to notice that AL emerged from the application of Linguistics in situations related to teaching and learning and yet this very *application* raised theoretical-practical issues to which Linguistics itself can find no solution. Thus, it became necessary to reformulate the epistemology of the conceptual framework of scientific studies: whatever was formulated by theoretical Linguistics and applied in specific situations is now formulated concomitantly to the *application* process, which shifts the epistemological pivot. This epistemological shift transforms the prior application of Linguistics in Applied Linguistics: “The understanding that AL is not the application of Linguistics is now a truism for those who work in the field” (MOITA LOPES, 2008, p.17). Celani will say that as AL becomes independent of Linguistics, it concomitantly moves away from its unique false identification with language teaching and, specifically, foreign language teaching. The most recent graduate study programs witness to that due to their diversity of research areas other than language teaching (CELANI, 1992).

Finally, it is important to emphasize that Rojo, when citing Moita Lopes (1996, 1998), Kleiman (1998), and Eversen (1998), sees, in the characterization of Applied Linguistics from the 1990s, a “discursive insistence on contextualized, socially relevant problem solving themes related to the use of language and to discourse, and on the elaboration of pertinent and relevant results based on useful knowledge to social participants in a specific context of application (whether it is a school or not)” (ROJO, 2008, p.258).

It is, thus, within these theoretical-methodological boundaries that the current debate on the characterization of Applied Linguistics takes place.

2 The Bakhtin Circle and real life language

The totality of the Bakhtin Circle's work establishes some pillars on which the whole language conception is developed: *verbal interaction*, *concrete utterance*, *ideological sign*, and *dialogism*.

The expression *the Bakhtin Circle* is used due to the fact that their theoretical formulations and writings are a result of reflections done by Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) and a group of other intellectuals who participated in the Circle. As Brait & Campos point out:

The issue related to the signature and the Circle's composition has varied a lot. It goes from the total negation of V. N. Volochinov (1895-1936), P. Medvedev (1892-1938), I. Kanaev (1893-1983), M. Kagan (1889-1934), L. Pumpianskii (1891-1940), M. Yudina (1899-1970), K. Vaguinov (1899-1934), I. Sollertinski (1902-1944), B. Zubakin (1894-1937) to doubts related to the authenticity of certain ideas and concepts which are considered to be genuinely Bakhtinian (2009, p.17).

This article will not enter the debate over the authorship of the works referenced here; it will reference them according to the signatures present in each edition.¹

The Bakhtin Circle considers verbal interaction, the first pillar, as the "basic reality of language" (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.94). This assertion is anchored in a conception of language whose nature is communication, addressing the other. In *Speech Genres*, written in 1952-1953, Bakhtin reaffirms the core communicative function of language and criticizes other concepts related both to the nature of language as "thought formation emerging *independently of communication*," especially addressed to Wilhelm Humboldt, and to the one that sees language as "the expression of the speaker's individual discourse," referring to Karl Vossler's followers (BAKHTIN, 2010a, p.67; emphasis in the original). Bakhtin criticizes these trends since they understand that "the

¹ For those who are interested in the topic, it is possible to learn about the three main facets of the debate over the authorship of the works by the so called Bakhtin Circle in Clark & Holquist (1984), who ascribe the total of the Circle's work to Bakhtin. Morson & Emerson (1990), on the other hand, establish the authorship of the works according to the signature present in the first edition of each printed book. At last, Bronckart & Bota (2011) advocate a secondary or even minimal role to Bakhtin in the Circle's main theoretical formulations.

essence of any form of language is somehow reduced to the spiritual creativity of the individuum” (BAKHTIN, 2010a, p.67). Thus, according to Bakhtin, both conceptions relegate the communicative nature of language (which is, compulsory, inter-individual and, consequently, social) to a secondary level.

However, as they criticize the conceptions which relegate the communicative nature of language to a secondary level, the Bakhtin Circle does not share the view that sees language as a simple communication tool. To Clark & Holquist (1984), the Circle devoted their reflection to the project of gradually developing a *language philosophy* based upon its *communicative aspect*.

The Circle, therefore, asserts that communication, seen as the materialization, the concrete realization of the verbal/discursive interaction, is the generating source of language, the *basic reality of language*, as it has been aforementioned. Here communication does not mean to communicate something to someone, for it would make communication close to the theory of expression, which was criticized by Bakhtin. It would presuppose “a certain dualism between the inner and the outer elements and the explicit primacy of the former, since each act of objectification (expression) goes from inside out” (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.84). The Bakhtin Circle sees communication as the concrete realization of verbal interaction because they understand that every word is from someone and to someone; every word “expresses the ‘one’ in relation to the ‘other.’” (1986, p.86). That is, communication, as they understand it, is not the expression of something (preexistent, interior) from someone to someone through words – which would characterize it as a mere tool. Communication, seen as the basic reality of language, is the very process of expressing in *relation* to the other and not *to* the other only. This *in relation*, through which the *I* only exists *in relation* to the *other* and can only express itself this way, shapes the dynamics of verbal/discursive interaction.

It is not the place here to discuss the *I/other* binomial, through which the *I* only exists *in relation* to the *other*, in the light of the *I* and the *You* from enunciation theory. This is not about establishing the speech position (enunciation), but it is about socially building conscience and language through intersubjectivity.

And why is the *other* so crucial to the Bakhtin Circle’s thought? Because the (real or presumed) interlocutor is not passive. As he/she perceives and understands the

Bakhtiniana, São Paulo, 7 (2): 142-164, Jul./Dec. 2012.

(linguistic) meaning of discourses, he/she takes on an active responsive attitude in a simultaneous relation with the other speaker. “Any understanding of live speech, a live utterance, is inherently responsive, although the degree of this activity varies extremely. Any understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker” (BAKHTIN, 2010a, p.68). This is the first understanding of *dialogism*, which will be discussed further on.

What is “live speech” or “live utterance” from the citation above? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to discuss the second pillar of the Bakhtin Circle’s thought: *the concrete utterance*. If the fundamental reality of language is verbal interaction, and if verbal interaction takes place in and through communication as was described above, it is possible to understand that any study on language has to analyze its real and objective manifestation – not abstract and hypothetical manifestations. Language is therefore the expression of *one* in relation to the *other* in a specific moment which is socially and historically situated, and marked in time as a unique and unrepeatable event. Language, whose fundamental reality is verbal interaction, is therefore an activity which, due to its existence in relation to the other, aims at the concrete reality shared between the *I* and the *other*. This activity, due to its being a real and concrete phenomenon, takes place in a specific place and in a specific and unique time (since time does not go back), and is, therefore, unrepeatable and socially and historically situated. It is, thus, this very activity which is called *concrete utterance*.

In *Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry: Questions of Sociological Poetics*, signed by Voloshinov, it is stated that:

A concrete utterance (and not a linguistic abstraction) is born, lives and dies in the process of the social interaction of the participants in the utterance. Its significance and its form are primarily determined by the form and character of this interaction. When the utterance is uprooted from this real, sustaining medium, we lose the key both to its form and to its meaning; what remains in our hands is either an abstract linguistic shell or as abstract a schema of its sense (the notorious ‘idea of the work’ of the old theoreticians and historians of literature) – two abstractions which are not connected to each other because there is no firm basis for a viable synthesis (1983, p.17).

Although it is not a focus point of this article, it is important to highlight a fundamental aspect from the passage above. When Voloshinov states that the concrete utterance's form and meaning are basically determined by the form and the nature of the social interaction of the participants in the utterance, he points to the fundamental conception of posterior formulations on *speech genres*.

The concrete utterance, as it has been noted, is born, lives, and dies in the process of the social interaction of the utterance participants. These participants are not abstract; they are real (or presumed); they are socially and historically situated subjects. It is due to this understanding that the interlocutors of the concrete utterance are real and socially and historically situated that it is possible to understand the nature of the ideological sign, the third pillar of the Bakhtin Circle's thought.

In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* the following passage is found:

Ideological reality is the immediate superstructure over the economic basis. Individual consciousness is not the architect of the ideological superstructure, but only a tenant lodging in the social edifice of ideological signs.

With our preliminary argument disengaging ideological phenomena and their regulatedness from individual consciousness, we tie them in all the more firmly with conditions and forms of social communication. The reality of the sign is wholly a matter determined by that communication. After all, the existence of the sign is nothing but the materialization of that communication. Such is the nature of all ideological signs (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.13).

It is important to highlight, from the above statement, that the individual conscience is not the architect of the ideological superstructure, but its tenant. As the materialization of communication makes the sign exist and as this communication takes place among socially and historically situated subjects, it is the nature of the sign, therefore, to be socially and historically constituted, reflecting and refracting reality. Roughly, this is the core of the concept of sign as an *ideological sign*.

The social and historical nature of the sign, by itself, does not characterize it as an *ideological sign*. Its ability to reflect and refract reality is fundamental. The sign reflects reality through its ability to reference itself, to acquire meaning which trespasses its own peculiarities. However, Vološinov alerts to the fact that a sign does

not exist only to be part of reality; it also reflects and refracts another reality. “Therefore, it may distort that reality or be true to it, or may perceive it from a special point of view, and so forth. Every sign is subject to the criteria of ideological evaluation (i.e. whether it is true, false, correct, fair, good, etc.)” (1986, p.10). Thus, the sign’s refraction property is fundamental to characterize it as ideological.

According to *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, it is possible to understand the “criteria of ideological evaluation” as *evaluative orientation*: “Every utterance is above all an *evaluative orientation*. Therefore, each element in a living utterance not only has a meaning but also has a value” (1986, p.105; emphasis in the original). In other words, each element of the living utterance, the concrete utterance, is constituted by intrinsically articulated meaning and value.

Values, in turn, are social and historical, circumscriptive to the ideological sphere. Still, in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, it is possible to read that:

differently oriented accents intersect in every ideological sign. Sign becomes an arena of the class struggle. This social *multiaccentuality* of the ideological sign is a very crucial aspect. By and large, it is thanks to this intersecting of accents that a sign maintains its vitality and dynamism and the capacity to further develop” (1986, p.23; emphasis in the original).

Values are intrinsic to the concrete utterance because, as it has been noted, the participants of the living communication are not passive before language. Every understanding of the living speech, of the living utterance has an actively responsive nature (agreeing, disagreeing, accepting, refusing, pondering, ignoring, etc.); thus, every listener becomes a speaker, and this responsive activity is permeated, in turn, by a world view, by an attitude toward life itself, the lived life. In *Discourse in the Novel*, written in 1934-1935 (BAKHTIN, 2011a), there is an excerpt which alludes to this responsive activity: “The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention” (p.293).

However, it is important to highlight that the verbal interaction cannot be *idealized*. Individuals do not interact aimlessly or free from any kind of coercion: the concrete utterance is “constructed between two socially organized persons, and in the

absence of a real addressee, an addressee is presupposed in the person, so to speak, of a normal representative of the social group to which the speaker belongs” (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.85). It is possible to read, a little further in the same chapter, that “*the immediate social situation and the broader social milieu wholly determine – and determine from within, so to speak – the structure of an utterance*” (p.86; emphasis in the original). Therefore, individuals are real, historical, and socially organized beings who interact in concrete and material living conditions.

By following this train of thought, it is possible to understand the fourth and last pillar of the Bakhtin Circle’s thought: *dialogism*.

Due to didactic reasons, dialogism has been presented as the fourth pillar but, in fact, it is the foundation of the Circle’s thought; it is its *mater* cell.

It has been shown that, according to the Bakhtin Circle, the fundamental reality of language is verbal interaction, which is materialized by verbal communication through concrete utterances. The latter are considered concrete due to their being realized among real and socially and historically situated subjects and to their being unique and unrepeatable events. Because they are realized among socially and historically situated subjects, concrete utterances carry world views, values, evaluative orientations which build the meaning of words since sense² and value are intrinsically articulated in real life language.

Therefore, if verbal interaction is the fundamental reality of language, this very interaction is, thus, present in the concrete utterance. Moreover, speech, as the totality of concrete utterances, will also be actively responsive, for “speech can exist in reality only in the form of concrete utterances of individual speaking people, speech subjects. Speech is always cast in the form of an utterance belonging to a particular speaking subject, and outside this form it cannot exist” (BAKHTIN, 2010a, p.71). Still in *The Problem of Speech Genres*, it is stated that:

The boundaries of each concrete utterance as a unit of speech communication are determined by a *change of speaking subjects*, that

² Translator’s note: The word ‘sentido’ as it is found in the Portuguese translation of *The Problem of Speech Genres* and *Methodology of the Human Science* does not have a unique counterpart in English. In *The problem of speech genres*, we find the word *sense* (BAKHTIN, 2010, p.86); however, in *Methodology of the Human Science*, we find *contextual meaning* (BAKHTIN, 2010, p.159). *Bakhtiniana*, São Paulo, 7 (2): 142-164, Jul./Dec. 2012.

is, a change of speakers. Any utterance – from a short (single-word) rejoinder in everyday dialogue to the large novel or scientific treatise – has, so to speak, an absolute beginning and an absolute end: its beginning is preceded by the utterances of others, and its end is followed by the responsive utterances of others (or, although it may be silent, others' active responsive understanding, or, finally, a responsive action based on this understanding) (emphasis in the original).

By dialogism, it is possible to apprehend, roughly, that the understanding of any utterance is intrinsically a response to prior utterances and, once it becomes concrete, it opens the door to upcoming utterances. Utterance here is understood either as verbalized speech between real subjects or speech in the form of a text, a scientific article, a poem, etc. This makes possible to understand the famous assertion that:

The work is a link in the chain of speech communion. Like the rejoinder in a dialogue, it is related to other work-utterances: both those to which it responds and those that respond to it. At the same time, like the rejoinder in a dialogue, it is separated from them by the absolute boundaries created by a change of speaking subjects (BAKHTIN, 2010a, p.76).

Or, in another passage in *Discourse in the Novel*:

The word in the living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation in any living dialogue (BAKHTIN, 2011a, p.280).

It is important to emphasize that *dialogism* is not a synonym of *polyphony*. The Bakhtin Circle understands dialogism as an ontological quality of concrete utterances: “The speaker is not the biblical Adam, dealing only with virgin and still unnamed objects, giving them names for the first time” (BAKHTIN, 2010a, p.93). And exactly because they are not virgin anymore, these named objects (signs, as in citations) have been, are, and will be a confrontational arena of values/evaluative orientations/world views from those who concretely have uttered, utter, and will utter them:

Indeed, any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist – or, on the contrary, by the ‘light’ of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents. The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile (BAKHTIN, 2011a, p.276).

The four pillars of the so-called Bakhtin Circle have been briefly exposed, and it is noticeable how organically interconnected they are. Now it is time to further the construction of a dialogue between the Circle’s thought and the current discussion on the conceptions of Applied Linguistics.

3 Positioning and voices in discourse

As the debate on Applied Linguistics is resumed, the intersection points between the issues related to this area and the theoretical formulations by the Bakhtin Circle become clearer. The first change in the study focus of AL, as it moved from the exclusive study of languages to be taught to the teaching and learning process of those languages, brought about, as it has been stated before, new theoretical horizons to the field once focusing on this new process implied new theoretical and methodological challenges which involved the mobilization of knowledge beyond the realms of traditional Linguistics.

This shift also expanded the areas of interest of AL, for the number of studies on language manifestations in the context of identity formation, work conflicts, cultural exclusion, power relations, among others, grew continuously.

In order to concentrate on the main issue of this article, a core aspect of AL’s new orientation will be brought up: language is not *transparent*. The debate over transparency, as it has been pointed out, is not related to the capacity language has to be wholly faithful to thought, for this debate, which takes readers to a remote past, is not pertinent here. *Transparency* is understood here in terms of language *neutrality*.

Fabrício (2008) asserts that AL is currently revising its epistemological stance based on the understanding that:

- 1) if language is a social practice, as we study language, we study society and culture which it constitutes and is constituted by it;
- 2) our speech practices are not neutral and involve choices which are (intentional or not), ideological, political, and are traversed by power relations, provoking different effects in the social world; and
- 3) in the present, there is great number of semiotic systems which play a role in the process of meaning production (p.48).

The three tenets above summarize the totality of contemporary applied linguists' concerns and are the matrix of new knowledge produced in the area. This article does not intend to map out the different concepts stemming from the theoretical formulations which result from the tenets above, but to create dialogues between them and the Bakhtin Circle's thought.

The understanding of language as social practice directly refers to the Bakhtin Circle's assertion that the fundamental reality of language is verbal interaction (or discursive interaction) which occurs between socially and historically situated subjects. The Bakhtin Circle, still in the 1920s, already considered the wider context of the utterance in their studies, which understood the speaker not only as a subject but also as the subject who does not manifest himself/herself in isolation, for he/she is socially and historically immersed in reality. The understanding that language has a social nature was the foundational mark of the Russian researchers' thought.

The social nature of language to them has little to do with Saussure's remark that language is "both a social product of the faculty of speech and a collection of necessary conventions that have been adopted by a social body to permit individuals to exercise that faculty" (2011, p.9). It is exactly to criticize Saussure's thought, whose concept of language was referred to as *abstract objectivism* by Vološinov in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, that theoretical formulations regarding the current discussion on AL are found:

The linguistic consciousness of the speaker and of the listener-understander, in the practical business of living speech, is not at all

concerned with the abstract system of normatively identical forms of language, but with language-speech in the sense of the aggregate of possible contexts of usage for a particular linguistic form. For a person speaking his native tongue, a word presents itself not as an item of vocabulary but as a word that has been used in a wide variety of utterances by co-speaker A, co-speaker B, co-speaker C and so on, and has been variously used in the speaker's own utterances (1986, p.70).

The assertion that language is a *collection of contexts for the possible use* of each singular form and that a word to a native speaker *does not present itself as a dictionary entry* but as *part of the most diverse utterances* by speakers from their own community and of the *multiple utterances of their own linguistic practice* is remarkable. It is still possible to read about the same topic in *The Problem of Speech Genres*, which was written after the aforementioned work and was signed by Bakhtin, who states that:

The words of a language belong to nobody, but still we hear those words only in particular individual utterances, we read them in particular individual works, and in such cases the words already have not only a typical, but also (depending on the genre) a more or less clearly reflected individual expression, which is determined by the unrepeatable individual context of the utterance (2010a, p.88).

Today, the theoretical formulations of the Bakhtin Circle on *speech genres* are repeatedly referred to in studies on language teaching and learning. That's why this will not be dealt with in this article since there is extensive literature on it. However, it is important to bring attention to the fact that even the concept of genre is founded in *dialogism*; thus, studying genres by ignoring this fundamental concept of the Circle is limiting its real implications for the understanding of language proposed by them. It is through *dialogism* that it is possible to understand what voices are and the ideological threads that weave them.

Going back to Fabrício's remark that "our speech practices are not neutral and involve choices which are (intentional or not), ideological, political, and are traversed by power relations, provoking different effects in the social world" (2008, p.48), it is possible to relate it with the notion of *positioning* found in the studies of the Bakhtin Circle.

Before any concrete utterance, one adopts an active responsive attitude, which is the basis of dialogism. One agrees or disagrees with it, refutes it, accepts it, denies it, etc.

As the response is another concrete utterance, this very utterance, in turn, is subject to the other's or others' actively responsive attitude. Nevertheless, what makes one "agree" or not with an utterance, for example? The world view one has, which stems from the social and historical reality in which one is immersed, from one's relation to real concrete living. The actively responsive attitude is thus characterized as long as it is moved by world views, values, and evaluative orientations regarding a concrete utterance. If it were not so, it would not elicit response and, without any response, there would be passivity before concrete utterances. That's why the Bakhtin Circle was so concerned about distinguishing *phrases*, *sentences* or *words* from *concrete utterances*. It can only be considered a concrete utterance if it elicits response (in the broad meaning of the word). Moreover, in the discursive communication reality, *words*, *sentences* or *phrases* are not abstract, for they are always somebody's (who is a socially and historically situated subject) and manifest themselves in concrete social-historical and unrepeatable situations. As they become concrete utterances, "these words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate" (BAKHTIN, 2010a, p.89).

Thus, if a concrete utterance is always a response to a previous one and is open to responses to future utterances, as a response, it is always marked with an evaluative attitude from the speaker. This is what can be understood as *positioning*. Without positioning, the speaker cannot respond to anything. As answerability is fundamental to the Circle's theory, positioning becomes compulsory – whether consciously or not³. At last, in order to explicit the relation between *positioning* and Fabrício's citation, it is possible to read Bakhtin's assertion that "there can be no such thing as an absolutely neutral utterance. The speaker's evaluative attitude toward the subject of his speech (regardless of what his subject may be) also determines the choice of lexical, grammatical, and compositional means of the utterance" (2010a, p.84).

Therefore, it becomes clear that every utterance is marked by its speaker's position. This mark can be named *voice*. Voices are, then, the different positions found in utterances, positions and marks that carry value in utterances and in life. Thus, this concept agrees with Moita Lopes, when he states that in AL, specifically in language

3 That's why answerability relates to responsibility since responding to implies positioning.

teaching – learning, “there has been an ongoing trend to ignore the fact that teachers and students have bodies in which their social classes, sexualities, genres, ethnicity, etc. are inscribed in discursive positioning” (2008b, p.102). Therefore, in order for AL to be successful in their studies, a return to those inscriptions is needed. It is also possible to understand why it is also necessary to *give voice* to the mute and the oppressed in a specific social and historical situation instead of *speaking for* them, for when *speaking for* someone, it is the position of the speaker that is marked in the discourse and not the person for whom he/she is speaking.

Finally, it is important to mention Fabrício’s third tenet, which states that “in the present, there is great number of semiotic systems which play a role in the process of meaning production” (2008, p.48). There is not enough hard evidence to state that this great number is exclusive to the present, for there has always been a multiplicity of semiotic systems whose constitution varies historically. Maybe today people are more aware of this multiplicity and give it the *status* of research object.

4 Inter-, trans-, indisciplinarity: metalinguistics

The last segment of this article is intent to find contact points between the issues related to the inter-, trans- or even interdisciplinary essence of Applied Linguistics and the Bakhtin Circle’s theoretical formulations. More specifically, it will highlight the relations between the methodology found in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language and metalinguistics* in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*.

This is not the place to delve into the fruitful debate on what interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity or even indisciplinarity is, but to register the core need for an approach that goes beyond the language studies done by traditional Linguistics⁴.

It has been noted that the shift in the epistemology of AL from the study of languages to be taught to the *process* of language teaching and learning brought about

⁴ It is important, however, to call attention to the fact that whatever is currently conceived as “discipline” and “knowledge area” is more linked to pedagogical and political needs to organize research and teaching centers and to research areas of financial aid agencies than to a genuine epistemological characteristic of a study object.

new theoretical and methodological problems to this study area. This even represents a reorientation of the role of Linguistics in the Applied Linguistics field.

Celani (1992) asserts that it is clear for those whose study field is AL that, although language is in the center of their studies, language study through AL is not necessarily guided by Linguistics. As an example, she says that, in a graphical representation of the relation between AL and other disciplines, AL would not be shown at the end of an arrow coming from Linguistics; to the contrary, it “would probably be in the center with bidirectional arrows pointing to a wide number of disciplines related to language among which would be Linguistics on equal footing, in accordance with the situation, with Psychology, Anthropology, Pedagogy, or translation” (p. 21).

It is from this understanding that it becomes possible to build bridges with the Bakhtin Circle’s thought, as it will be discussed further on.

In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, published in 1929, a new proposal of language study is found. This proposal articulates knowledge beyond the one offered by Linguistics. Affirming that language evolves historically in the concrete verbal communication (not in the abstract linguistic system of language form, nor in the individual psyche of the speaker), Vološinov proposes a new methodological order to his studies, which is:

(1) The form and types of verbal interaction in connection with their concrete conditions; (2) forms of particular utterances, of particular speech performances, as elements of a closely linked interaction – i.e., the genres of speech performance in human behavior and ideological creativity as determined by verbal interaction; (3) a reexamination, on this new basis, of language forms in their usual linguistic presentation (1986, p.95-96).

It becomes clear from the methodological orientation above that the mobilized knowledge needed to meet this proposal is not found exclusively in Linguistics. Analyzing concrete conditions for the realization of forms and verbal interaction types compulsorily implies having a certain perspective which, depending on where, when and how they were realized, mobilizes several knowledge areas of the sciences called human. In other words, analyzing concrete utterances compulsorily implies the analysis

of the concrete conditions through which and in which they were realized. The idea of concreteness is not limited to the strict context of the utterance, but to its social and historical reality. And this analysis is done through the dialogical perspective.

It is important to remember that the analysis of language forms using its habitual linguistic interpretation is part of Vološinov's methodological orientation. To exclusively analyze the extralinguistic aspects of the utterance is as mistaken as the analysis of its exclusive linguistic aspect. Brait reminds that:

At this point, as it was pointed out in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, the fact that the approach to discourse cannot favor its internal aspect or, otherwise, its exclusive external perspective has become clear. To exclude one of the extremes is to destroy the dialogic point of view, which has been proposed and made explicit by theory and analysis, and has been granted as constitutive of language (2006, p.59).

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, whose English translation used here refers to the 1963 Russian edition, Bakhtin proposes what he called *metalinguistics*. His considerations are found at the beginning of chapter 5, *Discourse in Dostoevsky*. Right in the first part, the author asserts that he will make “a few preliminary remarks on methodology” (p.181). This is what Bakhtin writes in a clear way:

We have entitled our chapter “Discourse in Dostoevsky,” for we have in mind discourse, that is, language in its concrete living totality, and not language as the specific object of linguistics, something arrived at through a completely legitimate and necessary abstraction from various aspects of the concrete life of the word. But precisely those aspects in the life of the word that linguistics makes abstract are, for our purposes, of primary importance. Therefore the analyses that follow are not linguistic in the strict sense of the term. They belong rather to metalinguistics, if we understand by that term the study of those aspects in the life of the word, not yet shaped into separate and specific disciplines, that exceed – and completely legitimately – the boundaries of linguistics. Of course, metalinguistics research cannot ignore linguistics and must make use of its results. Linguistics and metalinguistics study one and the same concrete, highly complex, and multi-faceted phenomenon, namely, the word – but they study it from various sides and various points of view. They must complement one another, but they must not be confused. In practice, the boundaries between them are very often violated (2011b, p.181).

The definition of discourse as language in its concrete living totality and the understanding that Linguistics cannot analyze discourse despite the fact that it is created due to a legitimate and necessary abstraction from various aspects of the concrete life of the discourse (phonological, grammatical, etc.) in the citation above is very appropriate⁵. Further on, one can read that:

Dialogic relationships (including the dialogic relationships of a speaker to his own discourse) are the subject of metalinguistics. [...] Dialogic relationships, therefore, are extralinguistic. But at the same time they must not be separated from the realm of *discourse*, that is, from language as a concrete integral phenomenon. Language lives only in the dialogic interaction of those who make use of it (p.182-183; emphasis in the original).

Finally, taking into account the Bakhtin Circle's fundamental concepts presented in this article, it is possible to understand Bakhtin's remark that

dialogic relationships are reducible neither to logical relationships nor to relationships oriented semantically toward their referential object, relationships *in and out of themselves* devoid of any dialogic element" (2011b, p.183; emphasis in the original).

Therefore, logical and semantically oriented relationships "must clothe themselves in discourse, become [*concrete*] utterances, become the *positions* of various subjects *expressed in discourse*, in order that dialogic relationships might arise among them" (p.183; emphasis added). Due to positioning before the studied discourse, the researcher is also included as it is shown in the passage below from *The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences* by Bakhtin:

The transcription of thinking in the human sciences is always the transcription of a special kind of dialogue: the complex interrelations between the *text* (the object of study and reflection) and the created, framing *context* (questioning, refuting, and so forth) in which scholar's cognizing and evaluating thought takes place. This is the meeting of two texts – the ready-made and the reactive text being created – and, consequently, the meeting of two subjects and two authors (2010b, p.106-107; emphasis in the original).

⁵ For further information, read Brait (2008).
160

The proposal of metalinguistics by Bakhtin does not completely respond to the main issues related to the constitution of contemporary Applied Linguistics; however, the proposition to study the *dialogic relations* which build discourses is a contribution that should not be disregarded so that current theoretical and methodological challenges can be faced by AL, especially when, in its scope of analysis, language manifestations take place in concrete situations, between concrete individuals in order to solve concrete and socially and historically situated conflicts.

Conclusion

It is characteristic to the Bakhtin Circle never to focus their theoretical conceptions on the tenets of traditional Linguistics. By stating that the fundamental reality of language is verbal interaction, which is materialized through concrete utterances by socially and historically situated subjects, the Circle came across the theoretical and methodological limitations of traditional Linguistics and attempted to overcome them. As they assumed *discourse* as the object of their analysis and not the Saussurian *language*, the Circle is still pertinent today. Discourse, as it's been already cited, is language in its living and concrete integrity.

It even becomes symptomatic that, in this group, the Circle, thinkers from several knowledge areas, such as philosophy, linguistics, biology, music, poetry, history, among others, were assembled⁶. Or, in more contemporary terms, the Bakhtin Circle can be understood as a multidisciplinary group, in its informality, facing issues related to the constitution of language.

Therefore, their thought is renewed when contemporary Applied Linguistics questions its epistemological and methodological tenets. This is not about doing an anachronic shift of theories and conceptions, hoping to find a theoretical and methodological a-historical panacea. However, this also is not about ignoring all the work done by people who have, in different degrees, shared their concerns which are still pertinent today. To assume a truly dialogic attitude while critically revising theories

6 For more details, read Brait & Campos, 2009.
Bakhtiniana, São Paulo, 7 (2): 142-164, Jul./Dec. 2012.

is fundamental to the construction of knowledge, which does not mean, under any circumstances, excluding the researcher's responsibilities due to the position he/she takes and to the context in which he/she is.

To conclude, it is important to remember that new things not always represent progress and that progress is not always necessarily new.

REFERENCES

BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of Speech Genres. In: _____. *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. Mcgee. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010a [1952-1953]. p. 60-102.

_____. The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: an experiment in philosophical analysis. In: _____. *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. Mcgee. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010b [1952-1953]. p. 103-131.

_____. Discourse in the Novel. In: *The Dialogic Imagination*. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: Texas University Press, 2011a., p.259-422. [1934-1935].

_____. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Translated by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011b. [1963].

BRAIT, B. Uma perspectiva dialógica de teoria, método e análise. In: *Gragoatá. Publicação de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade Federal Fluminense*. Niterói, n. 20, p. 47-62. 1º sem, 2006.

_____. Análise e teoria do discurso. In: *Bakhtin: outros conceitos-chave*. São Paulo: Contexto, 2008, p.9-31.

BRAIT, B.; CAMPOS, M. I. B. Da Rússia czarista à web. In: BRAIT, B. (Org.). *Bakhtin e o Círculo*. São Paulo: Contexto, 2009, p.15-30.

BRONCKART, Jean Paul; BOTA, Cristian. *Bakhtine démasqué: histoire d'un menteur, d'une escroquerie et d'un délire collectif*. Genebra: Droz, 2011.

_____. *Bakhtin desmascarado: história de um mentiroso, de uma fraude, de um delírio coletivo*. Trad. Márcio Marcionilo. São Paulo: Parábola, 2012.

CELANI, M. A. A. Afinal, o que é Linguística Aplicada. In: ZANOTTO, M. S. & CELANI, M. A. A. (Org.). *Linguística Aplicada, da aplicação da linguística à linguística transdisciplinar*. São Paulo: EDUC, 1992, p.15-23.

CLARK, K.; HOLQUIST, M. *Mikhail Bakhtin*. Cambridge, Massachussets: Harvard University Press, 1984.

EVENSEN, L. S. A linguística aplicada a partir de um arcabouço com princípios caracterizadores de disciplinas e transdisciplinas. In: SIGNORINI, I. & CAVALCANTI, M. C. (Org.) In: *Linguística aplicada e transdisciplinaridade*. Campinas: Mercado de Letras, 1998, p.81-98.

FABRÍCIO, B. F. Linguística Aplicada como espaço de desaprendizagem. In: MOITA LOPES, Luiz Paulo da. (Org.) *Por uma Linguística Aplicada Indisciplinar*. 2. ed. São Paulo: Parábola Editorial, 2008, p.45-65.

RAJAGOPALAN, K. Repensar o papel da Linguística Aplicada. In: MOITA LOPES, L. P. (Org.) *Por uma Linguística Aplicada Indisciplinar*. 2. ed. São Paulo: Parábola Editorial, 2008, p.149-168.

KLEIMAN, A. B. O ensino de línguas no Brasil. In: ZANOTTO, M. S. & CELANI, M. A. A. (Org.). *Linguística Aplicada, da aplicação da linguística à linguística transdisciplinar*. São Paulo: EDUC, 1992, p.25-36.

_____. O estatuto disciplinar da linguística aplicada: O traçado de um percurso. Um rumo para o debate. In: SIGNORINI, I. & CAVALCANTI, M. C. (Org.) In: *Linguística aplicada e transdisciplinaridade*. Campinas: Mercado de Letras, 1998, p.51-77.

MOITA LOPES, L. P. Uma linguística aplicada mestiça e ideológica. In: MOITA LOPES, L. P. (Org.). *Por uma Linguística Aplicada Indisciplinar*. 2 ed. São Paulo: Parábola Editorial, 2008, p.13-42.

_____. Linguística aplicada e vida contemporânea. In: MOITA LOPES, L. P. (Org.). *Por uma Linguística Aplicada Indisciplinar*. 2 ed. São Paulo: Parábola Editorial, 2008b, p.85-105.

_____. Afinal, o que é linguística aplicada? In: MOITA LOPES, L. P. *Oficina de linguística aplicada*. Campinas: Mercado de Letras, 1996, p.17-26.

_____. A transdisciplinaridade é possível em linguística aplicada? In: SIGNORINI, I. & CAVALCANTI, M. C. (Orgs.). In: *Linguística aplicada e transdisciplinaridade*. Campinas: Mercado de Letras, 1998, p.113-128.

MORSON. G. S.; EMERSON, C. *Mikhail Bakhtin. Creation of Prosaics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.

_____. *Mikhail Bakhtin: criação de uma prosaística*. Trad. Antonio de Pádua Danesi. São Paulo: Edusp, 2008.

ROJO, R. Fazer linguística aplicada em perspectiva sócio-histórica. In: MOITA LOPES, L. P. (Org.). *Por uma Linguística Aplicada Indisciplinar*. 2 ed. São Paulo: Parábola Editorial, 2008, p.253-275.

SAUSSURE, F. *Course in general linguistics*. Translated by Wade Baskin. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011 [1916].

SERRANI, S. M. Transdisciplinaridade e discurso em linguística aplicada. In: *Anais do II Congresso Brasileiro de Linguística Aplicada. Trabalhos em Linguística Aplicada 16*, 1990.

VOLOSHINOV, V. N. Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry: Questions of *Bakhtiniana*, São Paulo, 7 (2): 142-164, Jul./Dec. 2012.

Sociological Poetics. Translated by John Richmond. In: SUKMAN, Ann (Ed.). *Bakhtin School Papers*. Somerton: Old school House, 1983, p.5-30. [1926]

VOLOŠINOV, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Translated by Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986 [1929].

Translated by Orison Marden Bandeira de Melo Jr.; junori36@uol.com.br

Received June 14, 2012

Accepted November 01, 2012