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ABSTRACT

The present work, which consists of the introductory part and five independent articles, discusses linguistic aspects of dialogism and concentrates, specifically, on the dialogical notion of meaning as first discussed by Mikhail Bakhtin and Valentin Voloshinov. This work is theoretical in nature and aims, through a conceptual analysis, to explicate the dialogical conception of language and meaning. First, it concentrates on the dialogical account of meaning *per se*, analytically discussing and further developing the dialogical notion of meaning potential. The aim is to make explicit certain important philosophical assumptions that underlie the dialogical view of meaning and to further develop the notion of meaning potential. Second, the present study also discusses the relation that holds between the linguistic ideas of Bakhtin and Voloshinov and the overall system of dialogical thinking. Thus, it also deals with the general philosophical background assumptions of dialogism, especially its epistemological and ontological implications.

It is argued that the dialogical conception of meaning is inseparable from the epistemological and ontological aspects of dialogism. In addition, the notion of meaning potential is regarded as analogous to Bakhtin's considerations of the architectonics of the act in which the uniqueness and irreducability of actual acts is emphasized. However, the dialogical account of meaning does not lead to a relativistic position according to which meanings are constructed in situations *in toto*. To make this clear the notion of meaning potential is discussed within the framework of use-theory of meaning. It is argued that the interrelation between *given* and *created* aspects of meaning is *emergent* in nature. Meaning potentials are seen as resources for social interaction that are simultaneously recreated via factual language use.

Keywords: meaning, dialogism, meaning potential, emergence, Bakhtin, Voloshinov

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CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of human existence is that human beings normally tend to experience things that happen to them and around them as having a meaning. This is especially true of situations in which we have dealings with other people: we usually try to find out what the meaning or intention lies behind this or that act and in some cases we can assign a meaning even to those acts by others which were not actually intended to express a specific meaning. The fact that our phenomenal world, the world as we experience it, is permeated by meanings is also reflected in our social and cultural practices: meanings are explicitly negotiated in mundane conversations, dictionaries are written to define the exact meanings of specific words, there are scholarly disputes concerning interpretation of literary works and so forth. What is more, although we most typically associate 'meaningfulness' with those situations which involve interaction with other people and use of language, meanings are not limited to the social and intersubjective aspects of our life. We do not find various inanimate objects – such as different artefacts of culture, for instance – as simply given without having a meaning and function. Consequently, the meaning of 'meaning' is a fundamental theoretical issue not only for, say, semantics, pragmatics and semiotics which are specifically devoted to the study of different types of meanings, but also for other disciplines which deal with various aspects of human life.

The notion of meaning is also the hero of the present work, which approaches this complex phenomenon from its own particular, and needless to say, limited point of view. It discusses linguistic aspects of dialogism and concentrates specifically on the dialogical notion of meaning as first discussed by Mikhail Bakhtin and Valentin Voloshinov. The basic assumption that underlies the dialogical account of meaning is that a linguistic expression does not have a context-free invariant meaning that would specify all its contextual uses. On the contrary, both Bakhtin and Voloshinov hold that linguistic units, such as words and sentences, can be seen as relatively open *potentialities to mean* which acquire their concrete and specific

meanings when used in a particular social context. In addition to Bakhtin and Voloshinov, the notion of meaning potential has been elaborated in detail in several works by Rommetveit who has discussed the notion partly independently of Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's ideas.

The majority of works that deal with the legacy of the Bakhtin Circle concentrate on Bakhtin's views on various aspects of literature and culture. Consequently, there are relatively few attempts to investigate the linguistic aspects of their works. Furthermore, there seem to be none that concentrate specifically on the dialogical notion of meaning and its implications for language studies. However, in dialogically oriented language studies the dialogical notion of meaning has been widely discussed, most notably, by Ragnar Rommetveit and Per Linell. The present study concentrates on the dialogical account of meaning proposed by Bakhtin and Voloshinov, but it also discusses the elaborations of their views in dialogically oriented language studies. This work is theoretical in nature, seeking to discuss analytically and explicate the dialogical conception of language and meaning. Thematically it belongs to the realm of Bakhtin Studies, although it does not aim at an exegetical account of 'what Bakhtin really meant' or a rigorous reconstruction of Bakhtin's views on language and communication. Rather, the method of this work could be characterized in Bakhtinian terms as active responsive understanding. Thus, although this work *is* about linguistic aspects of the works of Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle, my interpretation of their ideas is also influenced by the writings of other thinkers, such as the later Wittgenstein and Rommetveit, to name just a few.

The chosen framework has also several implications concerning the contents and structure of the present study. As this work belongs to Bakhtin Studies, it follows that it explores the dialogical notion of meaning and discusses the linguistic aspects of the works of Bakhtin and Voloshinov specifically in relation to their overall system of dialogical thinking. This means that in addition to linguistic aspects, this work will also discuss the underlying philosophical assumptions of dialogism, especially its epistemological and ontological implications. The chosen perspective also means

that a survey of the numerous accounts and theories of meaning proposed in linguistics, philosophy of language or semiotics and their comparison with the dialogical account of meaning goes beyond the limited scope of this work.

The chief aim of the present study is two-fold. First, it concentrates on the dialogical account of meaning *per se* and analytically discusses the notion of meaning potential that plays a central role in that account of meaning. The discussion endeavours to critically analyze the notion of meaning potential as discussed by Bakhtin, Voloshinov and Rommetveit, to make explicit important philosophical assumptions that underlie the dialogical view of meaning and, most importantly, to further develop the notion of meaning potential. Second, the present study also discusses the relation that holds between the linguistic ideas of Bakhtin and Voloshinov and the overall system of dialogical thinking. It will be argued that Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's views on meaning are intimately connected to the assumptions that concern the nature of consciousness or the self. According to dialogism, the self is inherently social in nature, meaning that it exists and is formed only in a complex relation with the environment and others. On the other hand, the self is simultaneously characterized by a certain uniqueness which stems from the fact that the positions of different individuals in relation to environment and others can never be exactly identical either in the spatio-temporal or biographical sense. The unique aspect of the self, that is, its 'non-alibi in being' is also the cornerstone of Bakhtin's ethical considerations, as it ultimately makes the individual responsible for his/her acts.

The idea of 'non-alibi in being' is important also from the point of view of epistemology, as it implies that knowledge and truth are necessarily positional and personal in nature. According to dialogism, there is no such thing as objective 'third person' knowledge that could be obtained from a God's-eye perspective. Thus, there is no way in which an individual could make mental representations of the world that would be isomorphic with it in the sense that they would directly reflect the pregiven structure of the world. It will be suggested that this principle of *non-identity* is not limited to the relation of world and consciousness only, but also characterizes the

relation between world and language. By this I mean that, according to the dialogical view, language is not understood as mirroring the pregiven structure of reality, given independently of language, but on the contrary, language can be used to pick up particular aspects of reality from a certain point of view. In this respect, it can be argued that the dialogical view of language is based on the same background assumptions that underlie Bakhtin's ontological and epistemological considerations.

The present study is structured in the following way. It consists of the introductory part and five independent articles. Four of the articles were published during the period 1994-1998, while the fifth article is forthcoming. The aim of the brief introductory part, which is divided to six chapters, is to create a 'dialogizing context' for the articles included in this work. It also discusses the basic philosophical background assumptions of dialogism and reviews research into the ideas of Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle in order to relate the topics discussed in the articles both to the overall context of Bakhtin's thinking and to the context of contemporary Bakhtin Studies. Chapter 2 discusses some aspects of the reception of the works of Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle and also pinpoints some problems associated with the appropriation of their legacy. In addition to this, it sketches the research into the intellectual contexts of Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle and aims at giving a brief overview of the competing, and often contradictory, views concerning Bakhtin's influences and intellectual contexts. Chapter 3, in turn, aims at giving a brief overview of research into linguistic aspects of dialogism carried out both in Bakhtin Studies and the dialogically oriented language studies. Chapter 4 discusses Bakhtin's epistemological and ontological considerations that can be understood as a critical alternative for both absolutism and relativism. It is argued that the ontological and epistemological commitments of dialogism also underlie the dialogical account of language, and specifically, the dialogical notion of meaning. Chapter 5, in turn, discusses those aspects of the linguistic ideas of Bakhtin and Voloshinov which are relevant from the viewpoint of the articles included in this work. It mainly explores the nature of the distinction between language and communication and the notion of language as a potentiality to mean, as

discussed by Bakhtin and Voloshinov. Finally, Chapter 6 sums up the main conclusions of the articles and discusses their implications on a general level.

Article I, *Consciousness as a Social and Dialogical Phenomenon* (Lähteenmäki 1994), discusses some ideas concerning the social nature or social ontology of consciousness, as proposed by Bakhtin, Voloshinov and also by Vygotsky. They share the view that human consciousness is immanently social and becomes individualized only through social interaction. An individual consciousness exists and is formed in the dialogue between the self, others and the social environment. On the other hand, consciousness also has individual facets that are guaranteed by the individual's unique position in the dialogue.

Article II, *But who Killed Harry? A Dialogical Approach to Language and Consciousness* (Dufva & Lähteenmäki 1996), which was co-written with Dr. Hannele Dufva, is a comment-article which critically discusses the articles by Wallace Chafe and Ray Jackendoff that appeared in the same issue of *Pragmatics and Cognition*. It attacks the computationalist and formalist view on language and consciousness presented by Jackendoff and proposes an alternative based on dialogism and a functional approach to language.

Article III, *On Dynamics and Stability: Saussure, Voloshinov, and Bakhtin* (Lähteenmäki 1998a), in turn, deals with Saussure, Voloshinov and Bakhtin and compares the way in which each conceives of the dynamics and stability of language and communication. It is argued that Saussurean account of language, which is based on the distinction between *langue* and *parole,* reflects the rationalistic world-view according to which heterogeneity of the observable world can be reduced to an underlying static system of rules. The article also points out some differences between Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's accounts and also questions the 'anti-linguist' epithet frequently attached to Bakhtin.

In article IV, *On Meaning and Understanding: A Dialogical Approach* (Lähteenmäki 1998b) the way in which meaning and understanding are conceived in dialogism is discussed. It contrasts the dialogical view of communication with the code-theoretic transfer model of communication. It also discusses the dialogical notion of

meaning that is based on the distinction between the concepts of theme (or sense) and meaning. The chief aim of the paper is to make explicit those background assumptions that underlie the so-called code models of communication and the dialogical view of communication respectively.

Finally, article V, *Between Relativism and Absolutism: Towards an Emergentist Definition of Meaning Potential* (Lähteenmäki, forthcoming), concentrates on the notion of meaning potential, as developed by Bakhtin, Voloshinov and Rommetveit. The aim of the paper is to define the notion of meaning potential in a way that would refute the possible accusation of its being a relativistic account of meaning. The argumentative strategy is based on the recontextualization of the notion of meaning potential into the Wittgensteinian use-theory of meaning. The meaning potentials of linguistic expressions are seen as *emergent* in nature and are characterized as conventionalized patterns of normatively correct situated verbal behaviour which manifest themselves and arise from social and cultural practices of a community.

2 MULTI-VOICED BAKHTIN

During last two decades the ideas developed by Mikhail Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle have been interpreted, adapted, applied and exploited extensively by representatives of various disciplines within the humanities. Bakhtin's ideas have appeared to be most popular in literary and cultural studies, but there is also a growing interest in Bakhtin in psychology, linguistics and political theory, to mention but a few. The huge amount of scholarly interest in the legacy of the Bakhtin Circle has also given rise to Bakhtin Studies or Bakhtinistics[1], that is, a special discipline devoted to the appropriation and exegesis of the works of the members of the Bakhtin Circle. In addition to this, Bakhtin's importance and overwhelming popularity is reflected, for instance, in the fact that there are several booklength studies which deal with Bakhtin's thought from different points of view[2]. Thus, more than two decades after his death Bakhtin has become a celebrated and prestigious figure whose significance is almost unquestioned. Such characterizations as the one by Tzvetan Todorov (1984: ix) who hails Bakhtin as 'the most important Soviet thinker in the human sciences and the greatest theoretician of literature in the twentieth century', have by now almost become clichés.

2.1 Bakhtin or 'Bakhtins'

When Michael Holquist (Barsky & Holquist 1990: 5) stated in 1990 that 'the Bakhtin who is most able to assume the role of being one of the major thinkers of the twentieth century is the Bakhtin who remains to be discovered', he may not have guessed that his statement seems even more apt in the contemporary context of Bakhtin Studies. Bakhtin has remained a man of mysteries and legends. As re-

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[1] Sergei Bocharov (1999: 34, 40), one of the preservers of Bakhtin, takes a hostile attitude towards Bakhtinistics and sees any attempt to standardize Bakhtin's ideas as a vulgar and anti-Bakhtinian deed.
[2] See e.g. Todorov (1984), Clark & Holquist (1984), Morson & Emerson (1990), Holquist (1990), Gardiner (1992), Vice (1997), Hirschkop (1999).

gards even simple biographical facts, it seems that we actually know very little about Bakhtin's life, although there have been several serious attempts[3] to ascertain the details of his biography. It should also be noted that Bakhtin himself had a rather peculiar attitude towards establishing the biographical facts of his life. He was expressly uninterested in the matters of his own biography and did not do much to clarify the obscurities associated with his life. On the contrary, it seems that in many occasions he actually borrowed some details from the biography of his brother Nikolai Bakhtin and also did not correct the rumours and myths concerning, for instance, his noble origins (see Bakhtin 1996a).

A more substantial issue from the point of view of Bakhtin Studies is, however, the 'damned question' of the so-called disputed texts[4]. The dispute concerns the authorship of Voloshinov's *Freudianism: A Critical Sketch* (1927) and *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929) and Medvedev's *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (1928) and also several articles published in the names of Voloshinov and Medvedev. There were rumours concerning the authorship of the disputed texts already in 1960s, but the dispute started officially in 1970 when Viacheslav Ivanov gave a lecture in which he claimed that the above mentioned texts were actually written by Bakhtin whereas Voloshinov and Medvedev were only supposed to have made 'small insertions and changes' in them (Ivanov 1996). Thus, it became common practise in both Russia and the West to credit Bakhtin with the authorship of the works published under the names of Voloshinov and Medvedev. This continued until 1990[5] when the question of the disputed texts was revisited, most notably, by Morson and Emerson in their *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics.* The most recent and up-to-date discussion of the authorship question can be found in Ken Hirschkop's latest book, which makes a significant contribution to the demystification of Bakhtin. After a detailed and careful examination of the existing evidence, Hirschkop (1999: 140) concludes that there is no decisive evidence,

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[3] For a recent significant contribution, see Hirschkop (1999).
[4] For discussion, see e.g. Morson & Emerson (1989: 31-49), Morson & Emerson (1990: 101-119), Osovskii (1992: 39-54), Vasil'ev (1998a: 68-74), Nikolaev (1998b: 114-157), Hirschkop (1999: 126-140).
[5] See, however, Titunik (1984) for convincing arguments for Voloshinov's authorship.

'and none is forthcoming', to substantiate the claim that Bakhtin actually wrote the disputed texts frequently ascribed to him.

Despite the fact that the majority of Western Bakhtin scholars now seem to share the view that there is no conclusive material evidence to refute Voloshinov's and Medvedev's authorship, the opposite position is commonly held by Russian scholars (see e.g. Osovskii 1992, Makhlin 1993, Ivanov 1995). The disputed texts are unambiguously ascribed to Bakhtin. Ivanov (1995: 137), for instance, argues that Bakhtin's authorship is an undoubted fact and bases his claim mainly on what Bakhtin personally told him during their private discussions. A similar strategy of argumentation, adducing verbal evidence stemming from private conversations, is also used by such Russian Bakhtin scholars as Bocharov and Kozhinov (for discussion, see Hirschkop 1999: 126-140). Yet it should be pointed out that notwithstanding the verbal reports by third parties according to which Bakhtin confirmed his authorship in private, he nevertheless refused to sign the official document that would entitle him to the copyright of the disputed texts. This further illustrates that there is no actual proof that would substantiate the claim that Bakhtin wrote the disputed texts.

As regards *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, the archival materials, which were recently published in Voloshinov (1995b), would seem to support Voloshinov's authorship. The materials contain various administrative documents dating from Voloshinov's days as a post-graduate student at St. Petersburg State University. The documents include, for instance, the plan and abstract of the book titled 'Marxism and the Philosophy of Language'. A detailed analysis of these documents as well as various verbal testimonies by third parties can be found in Vasil'ev (1998b). The documents from the university records clearly suggest that *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* belongs to Voloshinov's, but also in this case the evidence is not decisive. The issue is complicated, for instance, by the fact that the most substantial evidence, that is, the plan and the abstract of the book were penned neither by Voloshinov nor Bakhtin but are in unknown handwriting.

It should also be pointed out that the dispute over the authorship is connected with the question of the alleged Marxism of the

disputed texts. By this I mean that those scholars who take Bakhtin's authorship of the disputed texts as an uncontestable fact have to somehow explain away the 'Marxist elements' found in the texts published under the names of Voloshinov and Medvedev. A common strategy is to treat Marxist passages as merely 'small insertions and minor changes' (Ivanov 1996) which have no relevance whatsoever with regard to the actual contents of the texts. Thus, Marxist wordings are basically seen as a rhetorical disguise in which Bakhtin could discuss his original philosophical ideas in the context of contemporary Marxist society. A similar position is also taken by Makhlin (1993) who argues that the whole text of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* is nothing but a 'carnival inversion of the official language' and, therefore, the overtly Marxist phrasings do not imply an actual connection to Marxist philosophy. However, the idea that the Marxist passages of the disputed texts could be treated as a mere window-dressing to placate censors is by no means uncontroversial. This view has been challenged, for instance, by Galin Tihanov who has discussed Voloshinov's and Bakhtin's relation to neo-Kantianism, *Lebensphilosophie* and Marxism. On the basis of his detailed and rigorous analysis, Tihanov (2000: 83) convincingly argues that Voloshinov's writings on language and ideology can be seen as an attempt to translate ideas originating from neo-Kantianism and *Lebensphilosophie* into Marxist parlance. This would seem to suggest that Voloshinov was not just paying lipservice to Marxist censors, but, on the contrary, aimed at the reformulation of ideas originating from three different philosophical traditions.

Thus, the case of the disputed texts is by no means closed, and it seems that there is no final answer to the question of authorship, as there is not, and perhaps never will be, any hard evidence that would confirm either of these contradictory views. However, it should be emphasized that in spite of the attitude one takes towards disputed texts, one cannot deny the fact that the works published under the names of Bakhtin, Voloshinov and Medvedev share a common, though not identical, conception of language. This clearly suggests that the authors worked in a close collaboration[6] with each

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[6] The view according to which the texts under the dispute are to be seen as co-authored by Voloshinov/Medvedev and Bakhtin is held by Alpatov (1995: 109, 1999: 267, 2000: 181) and Tihanov (2000).

other, a fact that was readily admitted by Bakhtin himself (see Bocharov 1993: 76). Thus, irrespective of the exact form of collaboration there is no reason to belittle the originality of the ideas discussed by Voloshinov and Medvedev.

As regards the appropriation of the ideas of Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle, it seems that instead of Bakhtin we are dealing with several 'Bakhtins'. Despite the fact that Bakhtin's central role in the human sciences cannot be questioned[7], there is, however, a diversity of competing, and often contradictory, views – especially between Russian and Western scholars – on who Bakhtin was and what his project was. As regards the reception of Bakhtin, Vitalii Makhlin (1994:12, 1997a: 5), one of the most prominent contemporary Russian Bakhtin scholars, argues that the reception of Bakhtin's works from the 1960s until the end of the 1980s was characterized by a peculiar feature. Bakhtin's ideas were frequently interpreted from theoretical positions he actually criticized throughout his intellectual career and it was from this critique that his own ideas emerged. Consequently, the reception of Bakhtin has produced different 'Bakhtins', and there are often contradictory views on his oeuvre. Bakhtin has been claimed as a postmodernist, a structuralist, a religious thinker, a cultural historian, a philosopher, a sociologist, a literary theorist and so forth, although Bakhtin himself preferred to refer to himself as a 'thinker'. Furthermore, the reception of the ideas of Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle is also significantly effected by the fragmentary nature of their legacy. As Brandist (1998: 107) points out, many of Bakhtin's central concepts have been used and applied without a reference to their development in the course of Bakhtin's career for the simple reason that there is no chronologically organized and extensive edition of their works. Thus, what we find in many cases is an overzealous application of isolated concepts with no reference to their role in the overall system of Bakhtin's thinking.

It can also be argued that the early reception of Bakhtin created a mythical figure who was claimed to be an 'ancestor of current schools of thought or […] a lonely Russian genius whose ideas were sublimely detached from cultural background and historical argument', as Tihanov (2000: 4) aptly puts it. The highly idealized and

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[7] For a harsh criticism of Bakhtin's ideas, see Reed (1999), Isupov (1999).

euphoric picture of Bakhtin is criticized also by Emerson (1995a: 2) who accuses some over-anxious Western scholars for their 'hurrah-collectivism that incorporates Bakhtin's ideas into one or another suprapersonal theory'. On the other hand, thanks to a critical approach to Bakhtin's texts which started in late 1980s (see e.g. Hirschkop & Shepherd 1989), the mythical picture of Bakhtin – enhanced by the obscurities of his biography – has started to change to a more realistic one (see especially Hirschkop 1999).

As noted above, one reason the appropriation of the ideas of the Bakhtin Circle has been rendered difficult is the lack of a complete, chronologically organized edition of their work. However, the situation is gradually changing, as the publication of the *Collected Works* of Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle has started in Russia[8]. This project is extremely important from the point of view of the re-evaluation of the legacy of the Circle, as it makes previously unpublished materials available. Equally important in this respect is the project dedicated to the electronic edition of the works of the Bakhtin Circle at Bakhtin Centre of the University of Sheffield (see Brandist & Shepherd 1998). This pays special attention to the well-known problems associated with English translations of the texts of the Bakhtin Circle.

Another intriguing and controversial issue concerning the appropriation of Bakhtin's ideas is the nature of his relation to Marxism (see also Hirschkop 1999). While some Western interpreters of Bakhtin have taken him as a Marxist thinker, Russian scholars, for whom Bakhtin seems to be essentially an anti-totalitarian – and in many cases also a deeply religious – philosopher of freedom, generally argue that this interpretation is totally unacceptable and illegitimate[9]. One obvious reason for such contradictory views is that the term 'Marxism' bears different connotations in the West and Russia. As Pechey (1999: 322) points out, Bakhtin's ideas are, in certain respects, very close to Western Marxism while he is at odds with its Soviet version. Brandist (2000b: 70), in turn, argues that

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[8] As David Shepherd (see Hitchcock 1998: 762) points out, although Bakhtin's *Collected Works* is meant to be a definitive edition of the works of the Bakhtin Circle, it nevertheless is a collected, not complete works which means that all Bakhtin's notebooks will not be included in the edition.

[9] The issue of the alleged Marxism of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* is discussed in detail by Alpatov (1995, 2000).

although Bakhtin definitely was not an orthodox Marxist, his views presume a perspective which also includes Marxist elements. Thus, it seems that the apparent contradiction between Western and Russian scholars concerning Bakhtin's alleged Marxism basically can, at least in part, be explained by terminological differences. In addition to this, it is not always clear what is meant by the question of Bakhtin's alleged Marxism. It seems that the majority of Russian scholars, for understandable reasons, often take the suggestion of a connection between Bakhtin's ideas and Marxist theorists to imply that Bakhtin is claimed to be a Marxist. Bakhtin himself reportedly stated that he never was a Marxist (Bocharov 1993: 76-77). Thus, the issue is not whether Bakhtin was a Marxist or not, but whether some of his writings have been influenced by ideas discussed by Marxist theorists and may be relevant for the contemporary Marxist theory. In this case, it is perfectly consistent to hold that there can be found certain similarities and parallels between Bakhtinian thought and the ideas discussed by such prominent Marxist theorists as Lukács (for details, see Tihanov 2000), although Bakhtin never was a Marxist in the Soviet sense of the term.

Furthermore, there are different views concerning the appropriation of Bakhtin's works dating from different periods and their mutual relation. The fundamental question is whether Bakhtin's early and later works do form a unified programme or whether he is best characterized as a 'broken thinker', as Wall (1998) puts it. Wall (1998: 672-673) sees Bakhtin's fragmentary early texts as 'false starts' and argues against an essentialist view on Bakhtin's legacy that treats his early texts as if they 'contained all the parts that were missing when we previously read Bakhtin's later works'. Yet it seems that many Bakhtin scholars are ready to subscribe to some form of 'unity view' according to which Bakhtin's early and later texts form a coherent and unified philosophical programme, although even these researchers have suggested different terms for Bakhtin's project. Clark and Holquist (1984: 63-94) call it 'architectonics of answerability' whereas Morson and Emerson (1990) characterize Bakhtin's programme as 'prosaics'. In his monograph on Bakhtin, Holquist (1990: 15) argues that the idea of dialogue underlies everything Bakhtin ever wrote and consequently terms Bak-

htin's oeuvre as 'dialogism'. Makhlin (1997b: 46), in turn, characterizes Bakhtin's unique project as 'social ontology of participation' which refers to Bakhtin's Western philosophical context and his response to it. Those scholars who accept the idea that Bakhtin had a coherent philosophical programme seem to share the view that notwithstanding the substantial terminological and thematic differences between different texts, Bakhtin's writings from different periods represent his attempts to pursue different answers to the questions he kept returning[10] to throughout his intellectual career.

To sum up, although Bakhtin has now firmly established his place in the history of the human sciences, we are still confronted with the diversity of views on 'who Bakhtin was'. Thus, in spite of the huge amount of research done into Bakhtin – or perhaps because of it – we are confronted by a multiplicity of 'Bakhtins' with their unique voices instead of a single canonized Bakhtin. It can also be argued that there are good grounds to talk about a 'Bakhtin industry' that has created and keeps creating new Bakhtins for different purposes. Consequently, scientific rigour is required not only for establishing the facts of Bakhtin's biography which is full of obscurities and legends (see e.g. Hirschkop 1998, 1999), but also for a critical re-evaluation of the legacy of Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle as well as the reception of this legacy both in the West and in Russia.

2.2   On the Intellectual Contexts of Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle

The notions of dialogue and dialogism are most frequently associated with the works of Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle. However, there are also other approaches that could be characterized as essentially dialogical irrespective of the fact that some of them may not have used the term 'dialogue' explicitly. Makhlin (1997a: 8), who sees Bakhtin as an initiator of a unique philosophical programme, argues that the historical context to which Bakhtin's dialogism is

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[10] Hirschkop (1997: 55) argues that the reason which kept Bakhtin returning to same questions is that he felt that 'he never got it right' which is, to Hirschkop, testimony to the weakness of his thought.

rooted, is the post-idealist philosophy of the 19th and 20th centuries, specifically the 'social ontology' of the 20th century. Thus, in his detailed study of the relation between Bakhtin and Western dialogism, Makhlin (1997a: 45-46) suggests that Bakhtinian thought is intimately connected to the 'change of paradigm' in the humanities and mentions such prominent figures as Karl Jaspers, Franz Rosenzweig and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy[11], as influential representatives of the Western dialogical paradigm. It has also been suggested that the emphasis Bakhtin places on the role of the other and otherness makes his thought reminiscent of Feuerbach's philosophical anthropology and Buber's dialogism (see e.g. Demidov 1995: 12-18, Kulikov 1995). Holquist (1990: 55-57) maintains that there are also certain similarities with Mead's (1983) social interactionism. Bonetskaia (1995: 32), in turn, argues that Bakhtin's ideas are close to humanist thought and hermeneutic tradition which pays special attention to the questions of human existence and to the creativity specific for human action. In Pankov's (1995: 42) view, dialogism is in some respects akin to phenomenology and existentialism, especially to Edmund Husserl's thought. The parallels between Bakhtin and phenomenology are emphasized also by Gardiner (1998, 2000) who has compared Bakhtin's ideas with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological thought (see also Dufva, forthcoming). According to Gardiner (1998: 132), both Bakhtin and Merleau-Ponty seem to criticize 'the central ethical, epistemological and ontological pitfalls of modernity in strikingly similar terms' and resist closure and finalization of human existence.

Even this brief list of thinkers and philosophical traditions which can be characterized, at least to a certain extent, dialogical should make it clear that Bakhtin did not develop his ideas in an intellectual vacuum, but on the contrary, was sensitive to the contemporary intellectual climate. Thus, it should be stressed that the fact that there can be found certain similarities and parallels between Bakhtin and many important figures of the philosophy of the 20th century suggests that Bakhtin was not an isolated genius who, detached from any historical context, anticipated those ideas that

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[11] Bakhtin and Rosenstock-Huessy are discussed in Pigalev (1997). See also Makhlin (1998: 23).

were to become relevant in the Western philosophy and in literary and cultural studies. On the contrary, it should be clear that the resemblance between the ideas represented by contemporary thinkers partially stems from the fact that they were exposed to shared ideas and responded the questions which were seen as relevant in their time. Thus, it is not a surprise that there can be found parallels between Bakhtin and, say, representatives of phenomenology. In fact, it would be more surprising if there were not any if we take their shared intellectual context for granted.

As regards Bakhtin's actual sources, the picture seems to be much more complicated. When trying to establish the intellectual origins of this or that thinker, there are normally several sources of information that might appear to be useful. One could base his/her analysis, for instance, on such facts as under whom the scholar in question has studied or to whom s/he refers in his/her writings, with whom s/he has been in correspondence and so forth. However, in Bakhtin's case the situation looks rather different, for establishing his possible intellectual sources is complicated, at least partly, by the obscurities of his biography. Bakhtin did not have an academic career in the traditional sense of the word. In fact, it seems that he did not actually study at a university, at least he was not officially registered as a student (see Pan'kov 1993, Hirschkop 1998: 580). As regards his writings, it is obvious that Bakhtin did not always indicate the sources he drew from in a way that would be in concordance with present academic standards (see e.g. Poole 1998: 568). Thus, in order to establish Bakhtin's intellectual sources, a researcher cannot count on the usual sources of information. There are, of course, verbal testimonies by third parties as well as Bakhtin's own statements (see Bakhtin 1996a) concerning his influences, but even they do not specify the exact nature of influence that this or that author may have exerted on Bakhtin. Consequently, it seems that Bakhtin's intellectual sources can be traced only by a rigorous comparative analysis of Bakhtin's texts and possible source-texts.

The fact that Bakhtin has been celebrated as a totally unique and original thinker or as an inventor of many schools of thought stems, at least in part, from the ignorance of his actual intellectual sources. However, in recent years, much critical and analytical re-

search has been done to uncover the origins of Bakhtin[12] which is to be seen as valuable, as it has replaced the earlier highly idealized picture of Bakhtin with a more realistic one. Thanks to the critical and re-evaluative approach to the legacy of the Bakhtin Circle, we no more see Bakhtin as an isolated figure coming out with a totally unique philosophical conception, but instead, are now seeing a thinker whose ideas are deeply rooted both in the Western and Russian philosophical tradition. Furthermore, the re-evaluation of the legacy of the Circle can be seen as important also because it has made it evident that the role of the other members of Bakhtin's group, say that of Voloshinov, Pumpianskii (see e.g. Nikolaev 1998a) and Kagan (see e.g. Poole 1995, 1997), has been more important than it was suggested earlier.

As to Bakhtin's direct influences, recent research into Bakhtin's intellectual sources suggests that Bakhtin drew especially from the German academic philosophy. It is generally held that the most important single school of thought that exerted influence on Bakhtin and the members of the Bakhtin Circle was neo-Kantianism[13], specifically the Marburg school[14] (see also section 4.2). Neo-Kantian ideas were well known to the members of the Bakhtin Circle primarily through Matvei Kagan, a member of the Bakhtin Circle who, together with Ernst Cassirer and Paul Natorp, studied in Marburg under Hermann Cohen (Bakhtin 1996a: 39-41). The basic assumption to which all neo-Kantian philosophers subscribe is that there is a fundamental split between two autonomous realms of *what is* and *what has validity*. According to Rose (1981: 6), this distinction was first developed by Rudolf Hermann Lotze, for whom the validity of propositions is not determined by a reference to empirical reality but by logic which exists as an autonomous realm independently of

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[12] For discussions on Bakhtin's influences, see most notably Bonetskaia (1991, 1994), Brandist (1997, 1999, 2000a), Emerson (1991, 1995b), Hirschkop (1999); Holquist & Clark (1984), Makhlin (1995), Nikolaev (1998a), Poole (1995, 1997, 1998), Tamarchenko (1995), Tihanov (1998).

[13] According to Rose (1981: 2, 6), neo-Kantianism is a rather vague and sometimes even inaccurate term which refers to thinkers who attempted to give new answers to the Kantian question of validity on the basis of the validity-logic first developed by Rudolf Hermann Lotze.

[14] The importance of neo-Kantianism has been noted by many Bakhtin scholars already in 1980s, but it is only quite recently, when studies based on archival and textual evidence have revealed the importance of this connection. See e.g. Brandist (1997, 1999, 2000), Poole (1998).

empirical reality. The fact that Bakhtin's thought can be seen as incorporating the basic idea of Lotze's validity logic was first noted by Brandist (2000a: 7). The importance of the distinction between *what is* and *what has* validity is perhaps most clearly reflected in the early fragment known as 'Toward a Philosophy of the Act' in which Bakhtin (1993: 2-3) argues that

> [a]n act of our activity, of our actual experiencing, is like a two-faced Janus. It looks in two opposite directions: it looks at the objective unity of a domain of culture and the never-repeatable uniqueness of actually lived and experienced life.

This passage seems to suggest that Bakhtin subscribes to the neo-Kantian idea that there are two distinct worlds or separate realms: the world of culture and the world of life. What is more, Bakhtin also seems to accept the neo-Kantian idea that *what has validity* is basically independent of empirical reality. According to Bakhtin (1993: 3),

> this universally valid judgement belongs to the theoretical unity of the appropriate theoretical domain, and its place in this unity exhaustively determines its validity.

Thus, Bakhtin argues, in Lotzean spirit, that the validity of judgements is totally independent of the world of life, for it is determined within the world of culture, within the appropriate theoretical domain. The distinction between the world of culture and the world of life also seems to correspond to Bakhtin's distinction between two types of truth. In 'Toward a Philosophy of the Act', Bakhtin (1993: 10) distinguishes between truth as a validity (*istina*) and truth as a realization in life (*pravda*) and argues that truths as validities are independent of 'our temporality' (see section 4.2).

The recent research into Bakhtin's intellectual sources suggests that the most important single representative of neo-Kantianism and *Lebensphilosophie* who has influenced Bakhtin's group may have been Ernst Cassirer whose ideas were reportedly very well known to Bakhtin and Voloshinov. In the interviews which Bakhtin gave to Duvakin in 1973, he admits that Cassirer's (1955a, 1955b, 1963) 'famous and remarkable' three-volume *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*

influenced his own thinking (Bakhtin 1996a: 230). What is more, Poole's (1998) archival studies have revealed that Bakhtin had several notebooks that contained extensive notes on Cassirer's works. According to the recently published archival materials, also Voloshinov[15] – who, being a doctoral student, was translating Cassirer – valued highly the material Cassirer incorporated in his work on language (Voloshinov 1995b: 88). According to Brandist (1997: 20), who has discussed Cassirer's influence on Bakhtin in several articles, there can be found traces of Cassirer's 'modified Hegelianism' at least in Bakhtin's theory of novel, in the dialogical concept of sign and in Bakhtin's treatment of Renaissance and Enlightenment. Poole (1998: 44) who has studied the origins of Bakhtin's carnival messianism convincingly argues that there is textual evidence that suggests that Bakhtin relied heavily on Cassirer's work and that many of Bakhtin's central theoretical terms owe much to Cassirer's thought. It has also been suggested that Cassirer is a relevant figure respective to the dialogical conception of language (see e.g. Brandist 2000a). As noted above, both Bakhtin and Voloshinov reportedly knew Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* the first volume of which discusses Humboldt's conception of language in detail and also critically examines various trends in the history of philosophy of language.

Despite the fact that Bakhtin was well-read in German philosophy[16] and criticized Russian philosophy as 'thoughtmongering' (see Kozhinov 1992: 114), he was nevertheless a Russian thinker whose ideas share roots in Russian philosophical tradition. As regards Bakhtin's Russian influences, Makhlin (1995: 133-134, 1997b: 51), following F. F. Zelinskii, sees the 'Third Renaissance' as the relevant historical context of 1920s. The term 'Third Renaissance' refers to the essentially unofficial Russian discursive manifestation the most prominent representatives of which were such thinkers as Aleksei

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[15] The archival materials also reveal that Voloshinov was translating an article by Karl Bühler. It seems that Voloshinov's discussion of the utterance in 'Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry' owes much to Bühler's 'organon model' (Brandist, forthcoming a, e-mail to the author from Craig Brandist, 24 Oct. 2000).

[16] According to Clark & Holquist (1984: 27), the young Bakhtin read German philosophy in original. In addition to this, he also became acquainted with the philosophy of Kierkegaard. For a discussion on Bakhtin's and Kierkegaard's views on communication, see Frishman (1994).

Ukhtomskii, Mikhail Prishvin, Georgii Fedotov, Georgii Florovskii, Gustav Shpet and Lev Vygotsky. There are also radical views according to which Bakhtin is an *exclusively* Russian (religious) thinker whose ideas cannot be genuinely understood by a non-Russian person (see e.g. Kozhinov 1999). The 'founding Bakhtinians' Bocharov, Kozhinov and Gachev especially see Bakhtin as an essentially Russian thinker and play down the fact that Bakhtin's central ideas were significantly influenced also by Western philosophical thought. Yet it seems that the influence of neo-Kantianism on Bakhtin's thought is hardly in question, as there is textual evidence that seems to support this view in addition to which Bakhtin (Bakhtin 1996a: 230) himself was keen to admit his debt to Cassirer.

Despite the fact that Bakhtin's thinking was influenced by neo-Kantian ideas, which is reflected in the fact that he sustained neo-Kantian ideas also in his later works (see Bakhtin 1996e: 251), the importance of neo-Kantianism should not be exaggerated. Bakhtin's philosophical conception cannot be reduced into neo-Kantianism or any other single school of thought. One major difference between Bakhtin and neo-Kantians is that while neo-Kantians were mainly interested in the world of culture – or the theoretical world – and developed methodologies for particular domains of culture, Bakhtin (1993: 3) was troubled, as he put it, with the question of how 'the pernicious non-fusion and non-interpenetration of culture and life could be surmounted'. In other words, Bakhtin was interested in the way in which eternal and autonomous validities of the world of culture become realised in life and participate in an actual Being-as-event. Thus, it should be stressed that although Bakhtin was undoubtedly influenced by neo-Kantianism, it nevertheless represents, for Bakhtin, a form of 'theoretism', as it is based on the assumption that there is a fundamental split between the sense/content of the act and the act as a concrete answerable deed. Bakhtin (1993: 19) criticized neo-Kantianism mainly because of its 'sterility' which ultimately makes it alien to participative thinking (*uchastnoe myshlenie*). According to Bakhtin (1993: 18-19), any philosophical tradition which assumes that there is no point of transition between act's content/sense and the act as a historical phenomenon, can only account for 'unitary cultural creation' whereas 'unitary once-

occurrent Being-as-event' necessarily falls beyond its scope. This clearly suggests that Bakhtin finds the ideas discussed by neo-Kantians of limited usefulness. Bakhtin (1993: 19) also makes explicit that he values neo-Kantian philosophy mainly because it has developed methodologies for particular domains of culture. And, it can be argued that the same holds, at least to a certain extent, to Bakhtin's positive opinion of Cassirer.

In addition to neo-Kantianism, Bakhtin was engaged in a dialogue also with other Western philosophical traditions, most notably with phenomenology and *Lebensphilosophie*. In fact, Bakhtin (1993: 31-32) explicitly suggest that a philosophy that attempts to account for 'Being-as-event as it is known to the answerable act' cannot rely on universal concepts and laws, but must be based on a phenomenological description of the world. Thus, Bakhtin was not totally satisfied with the neo-Kantian philosophical conception and kept incorporating elements from other philosophical traditions in his own philosophical programme in order to, as Brandist (forthcoming a) puts it, 'to soften the rationalism and abstraction of neo-Kantian validity-logic'. As to phenomenology, it seems that Husserl's ideas had a great influence on Bakhtin's thinking (see e.g. Pan'kov 1995). Another possible source is Gustav Shpet who studied under Husserl in Göttingen and became the leading representative of phenomenology in Russia. According to Poole (1997, 1998), Bakhtin also made extensive notes of the works of Max Scheler and Nikolai Hartmann whose ideas arguably influenced Bakhtin's early works. As regards Bakhtin's relation to *Lebensphilosophie*, it has also been suggested that the works of Simmel and Rickert are possible sources for Bakhtin's early philosophy (Nikolaev 1991). The role of Simmel is also noted by Laine (1990: 15) who argues that, for Bakhtin, sociology basically amounts to Simmelian sociology of interaction which, in fact, radically distinguishes him from Voloshinov whose views were based on a Marxist social theory which stresses the hierarchical organization of society.

Thus, Bakhtin was engaged in a dialogue with both Western and Russian philosophical traditions, which means that his ideas cannot be adequately understood by detaching them from their historical context. The philosophical programme of Bakhtin does not

fit in the traditional conceptions of the Western and Russian philosophy, as it re-considers and questions the nature of their relationship, as Makhlin (1997a) points out. In this respect, Bakhtin's programme could be characterized as a unique outcome of his active and responsive understanding of the relevant Western and Russian philosophical traditions. However, in the case of Cassirer, the influence of his ideas on Bakhtin may have been much more direct. On the other hand, as Poole (1998: 566) notes, the fact that Bakhtin was influenced by Cassirer does not undermine the originality of his ideas. Similar position is also taken by Makhlin (1997a: 9) who argues that although the 'level of answerability' (*stepen' otvetnosti*) of Bakhtin's works is high, his philosophical programme nevertheless cannot be reduced into 'already known'. According to Makhlin (1997c: 214-215), the influence that the representatives of various philosophical traditions exerted on Bakhtin can be regarded as 'indirect' in the sense that they merely acted as participants of a dialogue to whose ideas Bakhtin actively responded. Thus, Bakhtin can be characterized as a multi-voiced thinker, for he assimilates and reconsiders ideas discussed by the representatives of different, both Russian and Western, philosophical traditions in order to create his own philosophical conception.

The discussion on Bakhtin's possible influences bears relevance also with respect to the dialogical account of meaning, as it makes it evident that dialogical philosophy of language differs from the contemporary mainstream philosophy of language with respect to their background assumptions. As noted above, Bakhtin was engaged in a critical dialogue with neo-Kantianism, *Lebensphilosophie* and phenomenology the representatives of which also made significant contributions to the philosophy of language. For instance, in the works of Cassirer (1955) and Husserl (see e.g. Mohanty 1976, Kusch 1989) various questions of language, and specifically the notion of meaning are discussed in great detail. Nevertheless, it seems that their contributions were, to a large extent, ignored at least in the Anglo-American context in which the analytical philosophy became the dominant and most powerful trend in the philosophy of language. As Medvedev (1991: 119) points out the works of, say, Frege, Carnap and Russell, who were mainly interested in the

logical conception of meaning, are quite distant from the interests of Bakhtin whose ideas are closer to Gadamer's (1975) hermeneutics. Yet it should be admitted that the later developments within analytical philosophy which became known as the pragmatic turn or philosophy of ordinary language brought it closer to the dialogical philosophy of language, as they both are interested in how language is actually used for different purposes.

3 ON LINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF DIALOGISM: A BRIEF SURVEY

In this section I shall give a brief overview of the research into linguistic aspects of dialogism conducted both in Bakhtin Studies and, what I call, the dialogically oriented language studies. It should be clear that it is impossible to give an exhaustive review of all central topics discussed in this area within the limited scope of this work. Therefore, the overview will be selective in nature, and I will only concentrate on those aspects that seem to be relevant from the point of view of the topics discussed in the articles included in this work. It should also be pointed out that this section does not give an overview of the research into such topics as the disputed texts and the notion of meaning potential, as they are discussed in sections 2.1 and 5.4 respectively.

3.1 Bakhtin Studies

As mentioned above, the ideas of Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle have been most popular in literary and cultural studies. Consequently, the critics of Bakhtin have produced a bulk of literature on Bakhtin's views on various aspects of literary and cultural theory, while the amount of research into the linguistic aspects of the works of the Bakhtin Circle is limited. Yet it should be pointed out that also those studies which deal with Bakhtin's ideas concerning literary and cultural theory usually incorporate some linguistic aspects, for the dialogical philosophy of language also underlies Bakhtin's views on literature and culture. For instance, Bakhtin's theory of the novel and his reading of Dostoevsky are clearly based on the dialogical conception of language which suggests that any application of his novel theoretic notions involves, at least an implicit, commitment to the Bakhtinian conception of language.

However, although there are several articles dealing with Bakhtinian conception of language, they usually do not seem to approach the topic from the point of view of linguistics and language

studies, but instead concentrate on such issues as poetic language, language and ideology, language and power, to name but a few. Another characteristic feature in the reception of the ideas of Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle is that even those works by Bakhtin and Voloshinov which specifically deal with linguistic issues or philosophy of language have been widely read and discussed not by linguists but by philosophers and representatives of cultural and literary studies (Alpatov 1995: 108).

Although there are relatively few attempts to study the linguistic aspects of the legacy of the Bakhtin Circle and their implications for language studies, it does not mean that the study of Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's contributions to linguistics have been totally neglected. For instance, the monographs on Bakhtin, including introductory readers, usually discuss at some length different aspects of the dialogical approach to language as developed by Bakhtin and Voloshinov[17]. Furthermore, the dialogical conception of language has also been discussed by representatives of linguistics as well as semiotics starting from 1970s. Viacheslav Ivanov – who was the first one to officially ascribe the authorship of Voloshinov's and Medvedev's books to Bakhtin (see Ivanov 1996) – has widely discussed the place of Bakhtin's views in the context of modern linguistics. Ivanov (1974) contrasts Bakhtinian metalinguistics with other modern schools of linguistics and poetics and argues for the view that the Bakhtinian approach to language is first and foremost relevant for the study of semantic aspects of texts.

Other attempts have also been made to place the dialogical philosophy of language in the Western context of linguistics and philosophy of language. Medvedev (1991) discusses Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's ideas in relation to the traditions of analytical philosophy and hermeneutics. He argues that, on the one hand, the dialogical account of language and communication is close to hermeneutics in the sense that they both emphasize the role of language in thinking and understanding, whereas the analytical tradition is interested in the logical conception of meaning. On the other hand, Bakhtin's approach is also akin to later developments within analytical phi-

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[17] See e.g. Morson & Emerson (1990), Holquist (1990), Gardiner (1992), Dentith (1995), Vice (1997).

losophy, especially to the ideas discussed by the later Wittgenstein, as both Bakhtin and Wittgenstein see language as intertwined with different forms of social activity. The parallels between the dialogical approach and the philosophy of ordinary language has also been pointed out by Gushchina (1992: 77). She argues that Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's views on some general problems of philosophy of language, which include the intentionality of speech acts and the problem of other minds, are in concordance with the ideas discussed by Wittgenstein and Austin. Gushchina (1992: 79) also points out that there are certain parallels between Wittgenstein's use-theory of meaning and Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's views on meaning. A comparative analysis of Voloshinov's, Hallidays's and Eco's views on semiotics can be found in Threadgold (1986).

One of the leitmotifs of Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's writings dealing with questions of linguistics and philosophy of language is the critique of Saussure's structuralist approach to language. Consequently, the critical attitude they both take towards Saussure and structural linguistics is also a widely discussed topic in Bakhtin Studies[18]. Saussure, Bakhtin and Voloshinov all argue that language is first and foremost a social phenomenon, but they nevertheless draw rather different conclusions from this shared premise (see article III). For Saussure, the social nature of language means that language is to be seen as a stable supraindividual system of linguistic forms. Bakhtin and Voloshinov, in turn, argue that the social nature of language is reflected in the dynamics and variation of language. In their view, the dynamic nature of language and the flexibility of signs stem from the functional characteristics of different forms of social interaction. Thus, as Kiklevich (1993: 11) points out, although Saussure, Bakhtin and Voloshinov share the view of language as a social phenomenon, the Saussurean account of language and the dialogical approach subscribe to different interpretations of the term 'social' (see also Lähteenmäki 1996, article III).

It should also be pointed out that the characteristic feature of Russian works on the linguistic aspects of the works of Bakhtin and Voloshinov is that the authorship of *Marxism and the Philosophy of*

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[18] Different aspects of the relation of Saussure and Bakhtin are discussed e.g. by Holquist (1983, 1990), Stewart (1986), Morson & Emerson (1990), Gardiner (1992), Kirzhaeva (1992), Kiklevich (1993), Brandist (1995).

Language is almost exclusively ascribed to Bakhtin. Thus, when trying to appropriate Bakhtin's views on language and communication, authors also refer to *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* as if Bakhtin's authorship would be a commonly accepted and uncontestable fact. What this means is that the ideas discussed in the disputed text are interpreted against the background of those works which were undoubtedly written by Bakhtin and vice versa. As a consequence of this, these authors seem to over-emphasize the ideas shared by Bakhtin and Voloshinov, while the obvious differences between their texts become necessarily attenuated, when read as works written by a single author.

3.2 Dialogically Oriented Language Studies

In addition to Bakhtin Studies, dialogism has become popular also within language studies during 1990s, and there exists a specific approach to language and communication which could be termed as dialogically oriented language studies. I use the term to refer to such scholars as Ragnar Rommetveit, Per Linell and also Ivana Marková, to name but a few, who have extensively applied the ideas developed by Bakhtin and Voloshinov in their research on various aspects of language and cognition (see e.g. Linell 1998a, Marková & Foppa 1990, 1991, Rommetveit 1992). The representatives of this approach subscribe to much broader interpretation of dialogism than what is generally taken for granted in Bakhtin Studies (see e.g. Linell 1995, 1998a). Linell (1998a: 55), for instance, suggests that Bakhtinian dialogism is best conceived as a variety of social constructionism. Thus, for him, Bakhtin is only one, albeit important theorist of dialogue. According to Linell (1998a: 40), the four intellectual traditions of the 20th century that have strongly influenced contemporary dialogism are phenomenology, pragmatism[19], social psychology and socio-cultural semiotics. Thus, in addition to Bakhtin and Voloshinov the work by the representatives of dialogically

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[19] For discussion on Bakhtin, James, Dewey and Mead, see Emerson (1993). Bakhtin and Peirce are discussed by Ponzio (1992).

oriented language studies is inspired, for instance, by Wittgenstein (1953), Vygotsky (1996), Merleau-Ponty (1994) and Prague semiotics.

According to Linell (1998a: 3), there are basically two different ways in which language can be conceptualized: it can be conceived of as a system or structure, on the one hand, or as discourse, praxis or communication, on the other hand. And the way in which language is conceived of underlies the distinction between formalist and functional approaches to language. Formalist approaches characteristically see language as a system of rules which underlies language use and into which actual discourses can be reduced. The characteristic feature of functionalist approaches, in turn, is that they look at language as discourse and concentrate on the functions of language as a form of social interaction. The representatives of dialogically oriented language studies share the critical view towards those mainstream formal and structural accounts of language in which language is seen in terms of invariant static structures and systems of abstract rules such as presented, for instance, by Saussure and Chomsky. In contrast, in the spirit of Bakhtin and Voloshinov, they emphasize the dynamic aspects of language and are interested in how language is used in various social and institutional contexts as a means for social interaction.

Representatives of the dialogically oriented language studies have been concerned with both theoretical and methodological aspects of dialogism and also carried out empirical research into various types of actual discourses. One major theoretical task has been to outline a general paradigm and a conceptual framework for a dialogical account of communication and cognition (see e.g. Marková & Foppa 1990, 1991, Marková, Graumann & Foppa 1995, Rommetveit 1992, Luckmann 1992) which includes addressing such topics as the preconditions of communication (Blakar 1992), the nature of intersubjectivity (Krauss & Fussell 1992) the perspectival nature of human action (Luckmann 1992, Rommetveit 1992) and so forth. Also the notion of meaning potential has been a central issue, specifically in the works of Rommetveit (1974, 1988, 1990, 1992) and Linell (1988, 1992) who have discussed the notion in detail (see section 5.4).

The relationship between theory and methodology has also been a central issue within the framework of dialogically oriented language studies. The basic question is how a commitment to dialogical background assumptions is reflected in the practices of linguistics and what are its methodological implications. A characteristic feature of a monological approach to language is that it chooses the posited language system as its starting point whereas the dialogical approach assumes the primacy of factual language use. The monological approach could also be characterized as system- or structure-oriented whereas the dialogical approach could be called discourse-, practice- or communication-oriented (Linell 1998a: 4). In dialogism, language is conceived of in terms of action and processes, and therefore, it would also seem to be self-evident that a dialogically oriented study of language should concentrate on actual verbal interaction and use its different manifestations as the research data. Thus, dialogically oriented language studies is intimately connected with empirical methodology and authentic discourse data.

Different methodological approaches have been discussed, for instance, by Linell (1991, 1998a), Linell, Gustavsson and Juvonen (1988), Linell and Marková (1993), Marková (1990b). The empirical research conducted in dialogically oriented language studies mainly concentrates on the analysis of different types of discourses. The blending of different voices in professional discourses has been analysed within the dialogical framework by Linell (1998b). Linell, Alemyr and Jönssön (1993) discuss the characteristics of admission of guilt as a form of judicial discourse. Aphasic discourse has been explored by Linell and Korolija (1997). Marková (1989), in turn, has studied the incompleteness of speech in relation to expression of emotions in therapist-patient dialogues (see also Leiman 1998). The nature of asymmetric relation between interlocutors in tutor-pupil discourses has been discussed by Marková (1991). In addition to the study of actual discourses, there has also been attempts to explicate the implications of a dialogical approach to the study of the interrelationship of language and cognition. For instance, Dufva (1992) has studied slips of the tongue from a dialogical point of view. The preliminaries of a dialogical approach to psychology of language are discussed in detail in Dufva (1998).

To sum up, it seems that the characteristic feature of the research carried out in dialogically oriented language studies is the assumption that the theoretical, methodological and empirical aspects of dialogism are necessarily interconnected. This means that the philosophical background assumptions that underlie the dialogical approach to language should also be reflected in the practices of linguists. The methodological implications of dialogism have been discussed, for instance, by Linell (1998a) who argues that a dialogical account of language must be based on the empirical research into the ways in which language is used in concrete social contexts. In Linell's, view this is necessary in order to guarantee the empirical validity of a dialogical account. Thus, taken the interest in such issues as the dynamics, situatedness of language, it seems that a dialogical approach to language is necessarily based on an empirical methodology.

4 BETWEEN RELATIVISM AND ABSOLUTISM

The present chapter discusses the epistemological and ontological implications of dialogism. A central motive, manifest already in Bakhtin's early writings and one he continued to develop through his life was to offer an alternative epistemology that would steer clear of both the Scylla of dogmatism and the Charybdis of relativism. For Bakhtin, observing and knowing as well as any other form of human activity are characterized by their perspectivity and positionality or, as Bakhtin put it, by their eventness. This means that there is no such thing as absolute knowledge that could be obtained from an objective third-person or God's-eye perspective, as the acts of knowing are realized in a particular context which is spatio-temporally and historically unique. Consequently, such notions as truth and meaning are to be seen as necessarily personal in the sense that they cannot be separated from a concrete subject and his/her perspective. The personal nature of truth does not however lead to relativism, and Bakhtin himself kept painstakingly arguing that dialogism is incompatible with any form of relativism.

4.1 Dialogism as an Epistemological and Ontological Stance

Despite the fact that Bakhtin's major works deal primarily with the dialogical nature of language and specifically with the way in which this characteristic feature of language is utilised and reflected in literary works, he also invests the notion of dialogue with a broader meaning. For Bakhtin, 'dialogicity' (*dialogichnost'*) is the fundamental property of not only language and communication but all human activity and human existence. This, in turn, means that knowing is also to be seen as dialogical in nature, as it represents a specific form of human activity. Thus, dialogue is, for Bakhtin, an epistemological notion. In addition to this, Bakhtin also sees dialogue as an ontologically relevant notion. Bakhtin argues that dialogue can be regarded

as, so to speak, the mode of existence of human consciousness or Being, and it also can refer to various cultural phenomena.

As noted above, dialogism is now considered as an important alternative research paradigm in human sciences. According to Makhlin (1995), dialogism can be characterized as a general episte-mological stance that represents a critical alternative to both Platonic-Cartesian and postmodern discourses. The fact that Bakhtin is strongly against Platonism and neo-Platonism (see e.g. Makhlin 1999: 403) dissociates him from such prominent Russian philoso-phers as Aleksei Losev and Vladimir Solov'ev. The epistemological aspect of dialogism is emphasized also by Holquist (1990: 15), who sees it as a 'pragmatically oriented theory of knowledge […] one of several epistemologies that seek to grasp human behavior through the use humans make of language'. Holquist (1990:19) also argues that Bakhtin's thought was heavily influenced by the new develop-ments in physics in the beginning of the 20th century that suggested that the concepts of time and space are to be seen as relative in na-ture. Thus, Bakhtin's philosophy clearly dissociates itself from the Newtonian cosmos and is more closely connected to the Einsteinian worldview which emphasizes the relational nature and observer-dependence of reality (see also Peuranen 1998: 29).

In addition to an epistemological interpretation, the term 'dia-logue' can also be used in an ontological sense. As an ontological concept 'dialogue' is primarily used to refer to the way in which consciousness or the self is supposed to exist. In its ontological sense 'dialogue' has been regarded as a 'model of the world' (Morson & Emerson 1990: 49), although, for Bakhtin, 'dialogue' is primarily a metaphor by which he tries to capture the relational and interac-tional nature of consciousness. The basic assumption shared by Bakhtin and Voloshinov, and also by Vygotsky, is that an individual or the self is to be seen as immanently social in its nature, for indi-vidual consciousness is formed and exists in a dialogue with other consciousnesses and the environment (see also article I). This also means that various mental functions cannot be regarded as separate individual properties isolated from their contexts, but must be seen in terms of a system of relations (see article II).

For Bakhtin, the dialogical nature of consciousness is reflected in the fact that the self is characterized by its 'otherness' which is a necessary constituent of the individual consciousness. To quote Bakhtin (1984: 287),

> [a] person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary; looking inside himself, he looks *into the eyes of another* or *with the eyes of another.*

In his architectonics – or philosophical anthropology – Bakhtin (1986a: 122, 1979a: 23) makes the distinction between *I-for-myself, I-for-Other* and *Other-for-me* and assumes that various spatio-temporal and meaning relations as well as values of life and different domains of culture are based on these architectonic moments. Following Holquist (1990: 19), it can be argued that the Bakhtinian notion of the self is not a self-sufficient autonomous construct, but a relational concept. For Bakhtin, the consciousness of an individual only exists in relation to the above mentioned categories or architectonic moments. This has lead Bonetskaia (1990: 11) to argue that human existence can be defined as a system of relations between the self and the other. Similar position is also taken by Marková (2000: 114) who argues that the self cannot be made categorically distinct from others, because they form a dynamic ontological unit. Thus, as suggested in article II, the social ontology of consciousness or the self means that it is created in the series of interactions between the individual and the environment which makes it as an essentially dynamic and unfinalizable phenomenon.

It should be stressed that the epistemological and ontological interpretations of 'dialogue' are necessarily interconnected, as the ontology of human existence is also reflected on our views of what knowing is. Thus, the ontological stance according to which consciousness of an individual is position-bound and constructed in a dialogue with others has important bearings to epistemology. It makes the Cartesian epistemology which is based on the categorical distinction between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge unacceptable. For the knowing subject is seen as distinct from the object of knowledge, it follows that there is no interaction action between them. That is, knowing is equated with a mechanical proc-

ess in which the pregiven structure of reality (input) is copied in the mind of the knowing subject and results in a correct mental representation (output). The monological conception of knowledge is characterized by Shotter (1993: 463) as follows:

> In our classical paradigm, we tend to think of proper knowledge as being in the heads of individuals, as being representational, systematic, ahistoric, as formulated in visual (metaphorical) terms, as separate from the knower, and as being about the objects existing over against the knower.

In this view, knowledge is equated with the end result of a process in which an individual makes accurate internal representations of the world that exists independently 'out there' (for criticism, see article IV, Marková 2000: 108).

It can be suggested that the commitment to a dialogical worldview is important from the point of view of epistemology, as it seems to presuppose dissociation also from Kantian transcendence and a priori categories. What is more, one of the basic tenets of Bakhtin's dialogical epistemology is that the relation between mind and world is characterised by its non-identity. This view implies that there is no such thing as unitary knowledge that could be attained from an objective God's-eye perspective (see also article II). In other words, Bakhtin challenges the idea according to which consciousness is seen as a mirror of nature (see also Rorty 1979) which automatically reflects the pregiven structure of reality. According to Bakhtin,

> What in life, cognition, and in performed actions we call a determinate object acquires its determinateness, its own countenance, only through our relationship to it: it is our relationship that determines an object and its structure, not conversely. (Bakhtin 1990: 5.) […] When I experience an object actually, I thereby carry out something in relation to it: the object enters into relation with that which is to-be-achieved, grows in it – within my relationship to that object. (Bakhtin 1993: 32.)

Thus, Bakhtin is expressly against the view according to which the structure of reality would be directly reflected in the mental representations of an individual and argues that the relationship between

an individual, others and the environment is essentially dialogical. The knowing subject and the object of knowledge are interdependent in the sense that the unique relationship between them determines the structure of the object that emerges in the individual's consciousness. Thus, in Bakhtin's view, the structure is never pre-given, but imposed on reality by actual acts of cognition. In this respect, objects, and reality in general, cannot be experienced as *given*, but they are necessarily *conceived*. What is more, Bakhtin sees knowledge as positional and relational in nature, meaning that knowledge is by definition affected by the characteristics of the unique position from which the observer answerably participates and actively interacts with his/her environment and others.

The way in which being and knowing are conceived of in the dialogical thought is perhaps most clearly reflected in Bakhtin's critique of, what he calls, theoretism or monologism by which he refers to different lines of thought based on Cartesian thought and rationalism. Bakhtin (1994c: 286) sees monologism and the monological notion of truth as a general structural principle of the European culture and thought that found its clearest expression in idealist philosophy. Thus, for him, monologism does not represent a particular theory that could be identified with a certain thinker or school, but is the basis of the Western scientific worldview with a long historical past (see also Kagan 1991: 23). The basic assumptions that underlie the position of a theoretist have been summed up by Morson (1999: 173) as follows:

> The theoretist world therefore consists of three sorts of things: 1) most important, rules and laws, which it is the scholar's business to discover; 2) mere instantiations of these rules – that is, concrete events – which are of interest only as confirmation of the rules; and perhaps grudgingly conceded, 3) some residue of phenomena for which rules have not yet been found or which are too inconsequential to matter.

The importance of Bakhtin's critical attitude towards theoretism has also been pointed out by Peuranen (1978: 461) who argues that it is impossible to understand Bakhtin's significance, if one is not ready to acknowledge his central role in the creation of an unofficial anti-Aristotelian worldview.

In Bakhtin's view, theoretism is mistaken in its striving to reduce unique events to repeatable abstract rules and systems. Representatives of theoretism are characterized by the fact that they are not interested in concrete acts that manifest themselves in certain contexts, but in rules and regularities which are supposed to underlie concrete spatio-temporal events. Bakhtin (1993: 12), on the contrary, argues that

> from the performed act (and not from the theoretical transcription of it) there is a way out into its content/sense, which is received and included from within that actually performed act; for the act is actually performed in Being.

Bakhtin thus argues that concrete acts cannot be regarded as occasional manifestations of abstract rules. Human existence is always characterized by its 'eventness' which cannot be captured when the interaction is approached from an outsider's third-person perspective and regarded as a mere mechanical application of rules.

Bakhtin has not infrequently been taken as a spokesman for relativism, because he has presented harsh criticism towards theoretism. One obvious reason for this interpretation is that relativism is often seen as the only alternative to absolutism (see Guba 1990: 18). Thus, Bakhtin's attack against absolutism and monologism is understood to imply a commitment to a relativistic worldview. Another possible reason for this is that Bakhtin emphasizes the positionality of observation by which he means that observation is always *relational* in nature, that is, dependent on the relation between the observer and the object. What is more, some of Bakhtin's central concepts, such as *polyphony* (Bakhtin 1984) and *carnival* (Bakhtin 1965), may provoke a relativistic reading, as they seemingly presuppose the relative nature of various cultural values. Bakhtin, however, made it explicit in several occasions that dialogism is incompatible with any form of relativism (see also Peuranen 1988: 14) as well as with dogmatism which assumes the existence of absolute knowledge. To quote Bakhtin,

> [w]hat follows from this least of all, of course, is any kind of relativism which denies the autonomy of truth and attempts to turn truth into something relative and conditioned […] (1993: 9). […] it should be noted that both relativism and dogmatism equally exclude all argumentation, all authentic dialogue, by making it either unnecessary (relativism) or impossible (dogmatism) (1984: 69).

Bakhtin sees relativism and dogmatism as two sides of the same coin which both represent essentially monological ways of thinking. Bakhtin's strongest argument against relativism is associated with the dialogical notion of truth which will be next discussed in more detail.

4.2   On the Dialogical Notion of Truth[20]

One of the central ideas of dialogism, as Makhlin (1988: 83) points out, is that truth as a realization in life (*pravda edinogo i edinstvennogo sobytiia*) is never absolute, but, on the contrary, positional and interpersonal in nature. Despite the fact that Bakhtin sees truth as a task which can only be approached interpersonally in the actual event of co-being, the dialogical notion of truth does not lead to relativism.

In 'Toward a Philosophy of the Act' Bakhtin's (1993: 9-10) argument against the relativistic notion of truth is based on the distinction between the concepts of truth as validity and cognized truth which originates from the neo-Kantian tradition (for details, see Brandist 2000a: 7-8). This conceptual distinction also seems to correspond, at least within this single text, to the distinction between the Russian terms *istina* and *pravda*. The distinction between *istina* and *pravda* is explicated by Bakhtin (1993: 46) as follows,

> The truth [pravda] of the event is not the truth that is self-identical and self-equivalent in its content [istina], but is the rightful and unique position of every participant – the truth [pravda] of each participant's actual, concrete ought.

The truth as *istina* refers to a universal truth that is valid in itself and exists independently of empirical reality and actual Being in the autonomous realm of objective culture. The truth as *pravda*, in turn, refers to a concrete truth to-be-achieved in a particular situation, that is, to a unitary and unique truth as a realization of *istina* in the actual Being-as-event. In order to clarify the distinction between two types of truth Bakhtin further compares Newton's laws with the discovery of America by Columbus.

> The validity of theoretical positing does not depend whether it has been cognized by someone or not. Newton's laws were valid in themselves even before Newton discovered them […] But these truths did not exist as cognized truths – as moments participating in once-occurrent Being-as-event […] It would be a crude mistake to think that these eternal truths-in-themselves existed earlier, before Newton discovered them, the way America existed before Columbus discovered it. The eternity of truth cannot be contraposed to our temporality […] (Bakhtin 1993: 10).

Thus, for Bakhtin, the validity (*znachimost'*) of truth is an eternal property which holds and is effective independently of the fact whether it has been cognized or not. As Brandist (2000a: 7, forthcoming b) argues, the notion of truth as validity is reminiscent of Lotze's conception of validity (*Geltung*) which was also adapted by the neo-Kantian paradigm. In Lotze's view, there exists the autonomous realm of validities which implies that the validity of propositions is established independently of empirical reality (see Rose 1981: 6). Thus, Bakhtin's notion of the validity of truth is akin to Lotze's realm of validity, as it has no connection whatsoever to empirical reality. For Bakhtin, what has a validity becomes a truth as realization in life (*pravda*) only when it participates and becomes intersubjectively cognized in the unique event of co-being. And the acts of cognition by which we make those autonomous truths a part of our lived social reality belong to 'our temporality' and are characterized by their unique positionality. From this it follows that man-made theoretical descriptions can never be absolute, but are to be seen as relative to their position.

    Yet in order to avoid relativism Bakhtin assumes that the acts of cognition, being answerable or responsible acts, are always directed

towards objective validities which hold in the autonomous realm. This position is made explicit by Bakhtin (1996e: 251) in his notes for the essay on speech genres dating from 1952-53:

> The speaker does not communicate anything only for the sake of communicating, but necessarily proceeds from the objective validity [ob'ektivnaia znachimost'] of what is communicated [...] Every utterance, in one form or another, has dealings with objective reality which is independent of the consciousness or will of people (speakers, those engaged in intercourse), and of intercourse itself. [...] Language possesses the capability to express objective truth [istina] which is independent of the very language, of the consciousness, of the intercourse.

Here, Bakhtin argues that verbal intercourse or speech communication has an objective basis and the speaker bases his utterance on the *objective validity* of the content of his utterance. Furthermore, Bakhtin (1996e: 252) stresses the autonomy of truth by arguing that language is capable of expressing objective truth (*istina*) which is independent from language, consciousness and communication.

The fact that in 'Toward a Philosophy of the Act' Bakhtin, on the one hand, makes the distinction between cognized truths and the realm of validities and, on the other hand, subscribes to the autonomy of truth suggests that the dialogical notion of truth bears a certain resemblance to that of neo-Kantianism. There are, however, also significant differences between the dialogical and neo-Kantian thinking respective to the notions of truth, consciousness and knowledge. Gogotishvili (Bakhtin 1996b: 625) argues that although neo-Kantians accept the plurality of consciousnesses, which is the basic assumption of dialogism, they nevertheless emphasize the uniformity of the organization of different *selves*. Bakhtin (1984: 81), in contrast, takes an extremely critical attitude towards such notions as 'cognition in general' or 'the unity of a single consciousness'.

In 'Toward a Philosophy of the Act' Bakhtin's dissatisfaction with neo-Kantianism stems mainly from the fact that it fails to overcome the distinction between objective realms of culture and the uniqueness of Being-as-event. The solution for this problem is first discussed in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*. In both editions of the Dostoevsky book – published originally in 1929 and 1963 – Bakhtin

(1994a; 1994c) mainly discusses the interpersonal and dialogical moments of truth whereas the distinction between truth as validity and truth as realization in life is put aside. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Bakhtin (1984: 81) argues that

> [i]t is quite possible to imagine and postulate a unified truth [istina, M.L.] that requires a plurality of consciousnesses, one that cannot in principle be fitted into the bounds of a single consciousness, one that is, so to speak, by its very nature[21] full of event potential [sobytiina, M.L.] and is born at a point of contact among various consciousnesses.

When conceived in this way, the truth does not exist before the collective use of language, but arises as a consequence of the fact that utterances are used in social interaction (Ryklin 1992: 177). Thus, for Bakhtin, truth is a dynamic and never-ending process which is characterized by its positionality and eventness. In Bakhtin's view truth arises in the 'event of co-being' where different voices engage in a dialogue and interact from their unique positions. In this view, the discovery of eternal truths would then be *a task* to which actual responsible acts are committed, although the discovery of absolute truths is something that cannot actually be achieved, it can only be intersubjectively approached.

It should be noted that, in his discussions of the notion of truth, Bakhtin's use of terminology is not consistent throughout different texts. For instance, in the Russian version of the passage cited above, Bakhtin uses the term *istina* to refer to the type of truth which is characterized by eventness and interpersonality, while in 'Toward a Philosophy of the Act' he attaches the same attributes to *pravda* and argues that *istina* is eternal and autonomous in nature, as it belongs to the realm of objective validity. This terminological difference[22] – and also the fact that Bakhtin's discussion of the dialogical notion of truth in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* seems to put aside the neo-Kantian distinction between truth as a validity and truth as realiza-

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[21] In the 1929 edition, truth (*istina*) is also characterised as social in nature, whereas in the 1963 edition the word 'social' has been left out.

[22] Although *pravda* typically means truth as realization in life and *istina* refers to 'eternal' truth, this terminological issue is by no means uncontroversial. For instance, in old Bible texts the terms are often used in opposite meanings. (Prof. E. Peuranen, personal communication.)

tion in life – clearly indicate Bakhtin's critical attitude towards the neo-Kantian account of truth. What is more, in the Dostoevsky book, Bakhtin (1994a: 63, 1994c: 287) also criticizes the neo-Kantian interpretation of Plato's idealism and their misrepresenting Plato as a 'pure monologist'. This can also be taken to mean that Bakhtin's critique of idealism and theoretism pertains, to a certain extent, to neo-Kantianism. Yet Bakhtin's criticism of neo-Kantianism can hardly be taken to signify his rejection of neo-Kantian ideas *in toto*. It rather indicates that Bakhtin discusses the notion of truth from different perspectives in different texts. Thus, the variation in the use of terms, which is a characteristic feature of Bakhtin's texts, merely reflects the fact that Bakhtin was engaged in a dialogue also with other philosophical traditions changing his perspective and emphasis in texts dating from different periods.

4.3 Anti-Realism Revisited

As was mentioned above, the dialogical notion of truth, as developed by Bakhtin, is, in certain respects, akin to that of neo-Kantianism. In addition to this, in his epistemological considerations Bakhtin relies on the distinction between what is *given* (*dan*) and what is *conceived* (*zadan*) which also originates from the neo-Kantian tradition. Neo-Kantians share Kant's idea that there is an unbridgeable gap between *what is* and *what can be known* and argue that reality is not given, but conceived. For neo-Kantians, reality is a construction created by acts of cognition which themselves are independent of empirical reality. The categorical distinction between mind and world, or what is *given* and what is *conceived*, is also reflected in Bakhtin's epistemological views, for Bakhtin holds that the relation between mind and world is characterized by their non-identity. The consequence of the distinction between mind and world is that it necessarily leads to an anti-realist stance according to which knowledge of empirical reality is, in principle, impossible.

Neo-Kantian anti-realism is criticized by Brandist (forthcoming a) who argues that it brackets out considerations of empirical reality and

forgets that whether or not the structures of the natural world are recognised they still impose inescapably given limits on human activity and the biological needs of the human being continue to influence human behaviour causally.

Brandist is right, I think, in arguing that any approach that would deny the fact that reality exists and is causally effective independently of our acts of cognition is to be seen as dubious. Yet it can be argued that the Bakhtinian version of anti-realism which maintains that reality *an sich* is inaccessible to human cognition does not, in fact, presuppose that one would have to deny the existence of observer-independent reality and its causal powers. On the contrary, it merely states an epistemological position according to which it is useless to speak of things *in themselves* and to posit their existence, for there is no ultimate way to know what these things *an sich* would be like. Thus, the fact that direct knowledge of empirical reality is seen as impossible by no means implies that empirical or observer-independent reality would not exist and be causally effective independently of knowing subjects.

It can also be argued that the idea according to which there are no absolute and final truths is compatible with the view that reality exists and has certain properties independently of knowing subject. In this respect, dialogism differs from those radical forms of social constructionism according to which reality only is discursively constructed (see e.g. Potter 1996). The radical forms of social constructionism assume that subjects construct their realities by using language or some other form of symbolic interaction which would also mean that categorization of reality is seen as monologic (from subject to reality) process. From the point of view of dialogism, however, the situation looks rather different. Although direct knowledge of empirical reality is seen as impossible, there nevertheless exists observer-independent reality which is effective and imposes material constraints on human action. Thus, our acts of structuration and categorization of reality are effected by the factual properties of empirical reality, although these properties are, in principle, unknowable *in themselves.*

The essential difference between dialogism and the radical forms of social constructionism is that in dialogism construction of

reality is not seen as purely discursive in nature, but, on the contrary, categorization is necessarily dependent on the material properties of the reality. The material nondiscursive constraints are important at least in two respects. Firstly, construction of reality cannot be seen as totally independent of material world, for constructions are, as Linell (1998a: 272) points out, constructions of something which exist outside of language and discourses. Secondly, material constraints are to be seen as important also because the categorization of reality – and cognitive processes in general – is, in the dialogical view, embodied action (see also Dufva, forthcoming). When the embodiment of human action is taken for granted, it becomes evident that the biological, physiological and neurological properties of an individual form a non-discursive basis which makes the emergence of individual cognitive processes as well as shared sociocultural practices possible. To sum up, natural reality has certain properties independently of knowing subject and language, but we cannot possibly know these properties *an sich*, although they ultimately impose constraints on human activity.

As noted above, for Bakhtin, knowing does not amount to the correct representation or mirroring of a state of affairs, but is essentially to be seen as mediated action. This, in turn, suggests that language has a central role in Bakhtin's views on knowledge. In fact, it has been argued that the fact that Bakhtin's anti-realism manages to avoid relativism is based on his views on the relation between language and thought. Gogotishvili (1992: 172) argues that, for Bakhtin, the distinction between 'relative' and 'absolute' lies not in between language and thought, but inside of linguistic consciousness. Gogotishvili (1992: 172) suggests that, although language is relative to concrete meanings of utterances that actualize themselves in particular contexts, language is to be seen as absolute in relation to lexico-grammatical meaning of linguistic units. Thus, Gogotishvili seems to think that the lexico-grammatical system of language can be seen as a *given* invariant basis that ultimately guarantees the possibility of 'objective discourse'. However, it can be argued that this view is problematic, as it seems to distort Bakhtin's idea of language as a potentiality to mean which is of course diametrically opposed to the notion of invariant literal meaning (see article IV,

article V). Furthermore, it should be pointed out that the lexico-grammatical system of a language such as we know it is always a description, that is, a man-made abstraction based on the reflection upon language which can be seen as a part of decontextualizing practices (see Linell 1992). Thus, Gogotishvili's position seems rather unattractive, for it presupposes that we take a theoretical description, which assigns invariant meanings to the lexical and grammatical units of language, and then return it back to reality and then treat it as *given*.

Following Ryklin (1992: 177), it can be argued that truth does not precede the collective intersubjective use of utterances, but, on the contrary, is to be seen as its epiphenomenon. This idea of truth as an interpersonal notion, which was discussed by Bakhtin in the both versions of the Dostoevsky book, would also seem to imply that truth, as well as our making sense of the world, cannot be based, say, on Kantian a priori categories[23]. In dialogism, the structuration and categorization of reality is seen as a dialogical and interactive process. On the one hand, a subject engages in a dialogue with the outer world and others from his/her unique position, and the reality so constructed by the subject is based on the interrelationships between these units. On the other hand, the positionality and perspectivity characteristic of this process do not lead to relativism and individualism, because, in the dialogical view, construction of reality is permeated by the social and cultural practices of a given community. We do not have a private and privileged access to reality, but the construction of reality is immanently social in its nature, as it is ultimately based on language and, what Wittgenstein called, forms of life of the community.

To summarize, it should be emphasized once again that Bakhtin's anti-realism does not lead to a relativistic 'everything goes' stance. Although the empirical world *an sich* is unknowable to us, it is nevertheless effective and imposes constraints on all forms of human activity. For Bakhtin, reality is not given in the sense that mind would have a direct access to reality and it could discover the pregiven structure of reality. Bakhtin argues that reality is essen-

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[23] My discussion here owes much to Sami Pihlström's views on the relation of transcendental philosophy and pragmatism. See Pihlström (1995, 1996a, 1996b,1998).

tially *conceived* which means that he rejects (metaphysical) realism in favour of an anti-realistic stance which assumes that our ontologizing and our attempts to represent reality are interpersonal in nature and intimately connected to language and other social and cultural practices. Bakhtin also insists that creativity presupposes *givenness.* This also implies that truth, which can be seen as an outcome of creative, intersubjective action, is necessarily based on something given. Here, it is suggested that what can be taken as *given* amounts to the social and cultural practices which are known to us as a part of our form of life, to use a Wittgensteinian expression. And the characteristic feature of various socio-cultural practices is that they have a Janus-like existence: on the one hand, they are treated as given by an individual, but, on the other hand, they also are potentially transformed by the actual behaviour of the individual (see Archer 1988, 1995). Thus, when approached from the perspective of Bakhtinian great time, it becomes evident that the socio-cultural resources of sense-making and meaning-giving which function as given for the members of a particular community, are not absolute but, on the contrary, essentially contingent in their nature.

5   BAKHTIN AND VOLOSHINOV: LANGUAGE AS A DIALOGICAL POTENTIALITY[24]

The aim of this section is to give an overview of some linguistic topics discussed by Bakhtin and Voloshinov in their writings. When trying to give even a brief overview of their linguistic ideas, one is faced with several problems associated with the very nature of the legacy of the Circle. Bakhtin – who considered himself a philosopher – was not trained in linguistics and wrote mainly on various questions of literature and culture. There exists only one book-length study devoted exclusively to the questions of linguistics and philosophy of language, namely Voloshinov's (1973) *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. The task is also made difficult by the fact that Bakhtin seems to present slightly different views in different texts (see article III). When trying to appropriate texts dating from different periods, one should also seriously ask whether all texts – working notes and those prepared for publication by Bakhtin – possess an equal authority. This question is relevant especially respective to the previously unpublished working notes included in the 5th volume of *Collected Works* (Bakhtin 1996b).

I hasten to add that due to lack of sufficient space, this overview is necessarily a selective one and pays attention only to those aspects of the works of Bakhtin and Voloshinov which seem to be most relevant from the point of view of the articles included in this work. Section 5.1 discusses Bakhtin's 'metalinguistics' and the relationship between linguistic and metalinguistic approaches. Section

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[24] Bakhtin is not the first, albeit he may be the most famous, thinker who conceived of language as a dialogue. For instance, L. P. Iakubinskii (1986) argued already in 1923 that dialogue is the natural form of language. Another notable theorist of dialogue is Jan Mukařovsky (1978), a prominent figure of Prague semiotics. However, while Iakubinskii and Mukařovsky see dialogue mainly as a compositional form, Bakhtin invests the notion with a philosophical load and sees it as a fundamental ontological and epistemological principle. It should also be pointed out that university records reveal that Iakubinskii was a member of the board which assessed the progress of Voloshinov's academic work, when he was a post-graduate student at the Institute for the Comparative History of Eastern and Western Literatures and Languages. Voloshinov refers to Iakubinskii, for instance, in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* and in the article 'Konstruktsiia vyskazyvaniia'. An editorial note to Bakhtin's working notes (see Bakhtin 1996b: 573, n. 20) reveals that Bakhtin originally referred to Iakubinskii's article 'On Dialogic Speech' in his 'Discourse in the Novel', but the reference was deleted from the published version (see also Hirschkop 1999: 123).

5.2 points out that Bakhtin gives the term 'language' different meanings in texts dating from different periods and aims to explicate the terminological differences in some detail. Section 5.3 concentrates on the way in which the relation of language and communication is conceived of in dialogic theory and section 5.4, in turn, discusses the notion of meaning potential. As a consequence of its selective nature, the overview will not cover such topics as heteroglossia, speech genres, double-voiced discourse, for instance, which are generally seen as highly original and theoretically important notions.

5.1 Linguistics vs. Metalinguistics

Bakhtin makes it clear from the beginning that his account of language, or what he calls metalinguistics, is different from and goes beyond the scope of traditional linguistics. This last is represented by contemporary structuralism and formalism. Bakhtin (1984: 181) characterizes metalinguistics, or translinguistics if you like, as

> the study of those aspects in life of the word, not yet shaped into separate and specific disciplines, that exceed – and completely legitimately – the boundaries of linguistics.

Bakhtin (1984: 181) argues that linguistics and metalinguistics study the same complex phenomenon from different, albeit complementary points of view. Thus, Bakhtin does not want to replace linguistics with metalinguistics, but attempts to provide an account of those aspects of language which are ignored, or abstracted away, in purely linguistic accounts of language. In linguistics, language is typically seen as a system of linguistic forms and rules, while metalinguistics primarily studies the way in which dialogical relationships are manifested between actual utterances. According to Bakhtin (1984: 182, 1996e: 252) dialogical relationships are impossible among linguistic elements which means that dialogical relationships belong to the realm of language use in which utterances are used to express particular meaning positions. In this respect, metalinguistics can be characterized as a general epistemological

stance in which language is approached from the point of view of the social, interpersonal and discursive functions it bears in social interaction.

It should be stressed that Bakhtin does not disparage the obvious achievements of the structural and formal linguistics of his time. He only argues that linguistics has a limited scope and this should also be acknowledged by those who do linguistics. In Bakhtin's view, the word (*slovo*), that is, how language gets manifested in concrete contexts of use, can and should be approached from both linguistic and metalinguistic points of view. He sees linguistics and metalinguistics as complementary to each other, but at the same time he makes it explicit that, on the methodological level, the units of these two approaches must be kept separate (Bakhtin 1984: 181). In Bakhtin's view, linguistics studies language as an abstract system or neutral code separated from its actual use whereas metalinguistics studies dialogical relationships which emerge between utterances when language or any other system of signs is used to express certain point of view. As Marková (1990: 6) points out, despite the fact that dialogism concentrates on the dynamic aspects of language, it does not follow that one would be automatically entitled to deny the significance of its stable aspects. On the contrary, what is needed is a complementary approach in order to understand the interplay of dynamic and static aspects in language (see also Linell 1998a).

The basic assumption of Bakhtinian metalinguistics is that language is an inseparable part of social life that means that the study of language cannot ignore the contexts in which language is factually used. In this respect, the dialogical philosophy of language is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's later philosophy and also certain functional approaches in linguistics. The position according to which language and social life are intertwined is also made explicit by Voloshinov (1976: 105):

> [t]he concrete utterance (and not the linguistic abstraction) is born, lives and dies in the process of social interaction between the participants of the utterance. Its form and meaning are determined basically by the form and character of this interaction.

In this passage Voloshinov seems to anticipate Bakhtin's notion of speech genre when he argues that language is involved in various forms of social interaction and the characteristics of different spheres of life and different social contexts are also reflected in the form of utterances (see also Voloshinov 1930: 67). This also suggests that, for Voloshinov, situatedness is the essential feature of all utterances and social interaction.

As regards the assumption that language is inseparable from the situations of factual language use, it is important to distinguish between the terms 'situatedness' and 'contextualization' as the latter term seems to be filled with monologistic overtones. As Linell (1998a: 116) points out, the term 'contextualization' seems to presuppose that there exist linguistic expressions with fixed meanings which are contextualized *after* these ready-made expressions are used. 'Situatedness', in turn, implies that the actual situation is to be seen, so to speak, as a built-in feature of an utterance. To quote Voloshinov (1976: 100),

> the extraverbal situation is far from being merely the external cause of an utterance – it does not operate on the utterance from outside, as it were a mechanical force. Rather, *the situation enters into the utterance as an essential constitutive part of the structure of its import.*

A similar position is held by Linell (1998a: 115), who argues that the context-boundedness of utterances and their meanings is not an accidental or extrinsic feature, but stems from the intrinsic nature of utterances.

Bakhtin argues that the account of communication he presents in his metalinguistics differs radically from various linguistic models of communication. In the essay 'The Problem of Speech Genres', Bakhtin criticizes Saussure's model of 'talking heads' which conceives of communication as a mechanical transmission of information and equates the role of a listener with passive decoding (for details, see article IV). For Bakhtin, understanding is creative in nature which means that it cannot be identified with a mere decoding process. According to the dialogical view, understanding is seen as a joint project in which meanings are intersubjectively constructed. This suggests, that meanings that actualize themselves in

particular contexts can be characterized as *emergent[25]* in nature, as they result from a highly complex interaction between linguistic forms and various situational and contextual factors (article IV).

It can also be argued that the differences between code-models of communication and the dialogical account basically stem from the fact they are based on a radically different background assumption concerning the ontological and epistemological aspects of human existence (see article IV). Code-models in which understanding is identified with the exact reproduction of thoughts seem to be connected to the Cartesian view according to which the relation between reality, language and individuals is essentially static in nature. Thus, it presupposes that there exist a reality with a pre-given structure, an ultimate way to make correct mental representation of the structure of reality and also a fixed relation between the objects of the world and linguistic expressions (article IV). In dialogism, consciousness is seen as both social and individual phenomenon (see article I). Consequently, our ways of making sense of the world are, on the one hand, based on those social and cultural practices that we have become to know as a part of our form of life. On the other hand, an individual interacts with reality from a unique perspective which makes the representations s/he makes specifically his/her own, as there is no alibi-in-being. From this it follows, that communication is best characterized as a joint project in which the interlocutors representing unique points of view aim at approaching each other and arriving at a compromise.

When trying to place Bakhtin's metalinguistics in the context of contemporary language studies, it has been suggested that metalinguistics would be close to pragmatics[26]. Drawing a parallel between them is, however, problematic, although the questions they deal with partially overlap. One difference between metalinguistics and pragmatics is that metalinguistics operates with totally different categories than traditional pragmatics (see also Wertsch 1991: 72). Perhaps, a more profound difference between the approaches is, however, the fact that traditional pragmatics – which includes, for instance, speech act theory (Austin 1962, Searle 1969), Gricean

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[25] Zlatev (1997) discusses the emergence of spatial meanings.
[26] For Bakhtin's contribution to pragmatics, see Pateman (1989).

maxims (Grice 1975, 1978) – is based on different philosophical background assumptions. Linell and Marková (1993) argue that the background assumptions that underlie speech act theory are essentially monologistic in their nature, because it sees a speaker as an autonomous and individual agent. This is pointed our also by Medvedev (1991: 12) according to whom speech act theory is expressly interested in *speaker's* speech acts and his/her intentions. In speech act theory a speech act is viewed as a manifestation of subjective intentions and not as genuine interaction between the interactants. Bakhtin and Voloshinov, in turn, argue that the characteristic feature of utterances is their *addressivity* (*obrashchennost'*) which means that an utterance – which itself is a response to preceding discourse – is always directed towards the other. According to the dialogical view, the meaning of an utterance that actualizes itself in a particular context cannot be reduced into a speaker's intention only, for meanings are jointly created by the speaker and the listener. Thus, the profound difference between the speech act theory and dialogical metalinguistics is that the latter sees communication as a form of social interaction and takes the intersubjective nature of meanings for granted.

5.2 On the Dialogical Notion of Language: Different Perspectives

The most detailed discussion of the dialogical notion of language can be found in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. In this book[27], Voloshinov takes an extremely critical attitude towards the Saussurean notion of *langue*, that is, language as a self-identical system of linguistic norms (for discussion, see article III). For Voloshinov, theoretical descriptions like the one proposed by Saussure are based on reflection on language and must be seen as abstractions created by linguists who distance themselves from the actual reality of language. Voloshinov discusses Saussure's notion of language

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[27] See also Voloshinov's (1928) article 'Noveishie techeniia lingvisticheskoi mysli na zapade' which is the author's abstract of the three chapters of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*.

system from two different points of view, concluding that Saussurean *langue* cannot be regarded as an ontologically real notion. First, he argues that when language is considered as a historical and spatio-temporal phenomenon, there is no way in which Saussure's *langue* could correspond to any real moment of language. Second, Voloshinov insists that language cannot be regarded as a static system of linguistic forms from the point of view of a member of linguistic community either. Thus, for Voloshinov, the theoretical descriptions presented by the representatives of pre-1930s structuralist and formalist schools are, at their best, useful abstractions which however cannot capture the 'immediate givenness' of language. Voloshinov (1995a: 312) argues that the actual reality or immediate givenness of language lies neither in the abstract system of linguistic forms nor in the psycho-physiological process of speech production, but in the actual instances of social interaction which are manifested by concrete utterances.

As regards Bakhtin, the situation looks more complicated, as he seems to present different views in texts dating from different periods[28]. In 'Discourse in the Novel', written in 1934-35, Bakhtin looks at language from what could be called a sociolinguistic point of view – as opposed to a view of language as a system of abstract linguistic categories – and emphasises the dynamic nature of language. In this text, Bakhtin sees language as a dynamic and heteroglot system of struggling ideological languages governed by various centripetal and centrifugal forces (see also article III). Bakhtin also uses the notion of 'a common unitary language' that is never given but posited, and it is opposed to the actual heteroglossia. Despite its positedness, a common unitary language cannot be seen as a mere abstraction created by a linguist. According to Bakhtin (1981: 270),

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[28] I admit that the Article I, which deals with the dialogical notion of the Self, presents Bakhtin's views on language as rather "single-voiced" in comparison with my later articles. This is partly due to the fact that the publication of the vol. 5 of Bakhtin's *Collected Works* in 1996 made previously unpublished materials available which, I argue, force us to critically re-evaluate the earlier reception of the linguistic aspects of Bakhtin's works, especially the alleged 'anti-linguistic' and 'messy' nature of his views.

> [a] common unitary language is a system of linguistic norms. But
> these norms do not constitute an abstract imperative; they are rather
> the generative forces of linguistic life, […]

Thus, Bakhtin argues that a language system is normative in nature. However, he also stresses that language as a system of linguistic norms is not an abstract obligation for a speaker. On the contrary, Bakhtin (1975: 106) holds that the speaker of a language experiences language as a stratified social and ideological concreteness which represents heteroglot opinions about the world.

As pointed out in article III, in 'The Problem of Speech Genres' and 'The Problem of the Text', written in 1953-54 and 1959-60 respectively, Bakhtin adopts a more structuralist terminology and refers frequently to the distinction between language system and speech (*rech'*)[29]. In the notes for the essay 'The Problem of Speech Genres', the relationship between language system and speech is characterized as follows.

> The inadmissibility of opposing language to speech. Speech is language in actu. Both language and speech are equally social. […] Speech is the realization of language in a concrete utterance. (Bakhtin 1996e: 258, 1996c: 207.)

The above passage makes it clear that, for Bakhtin, the distinction between language and speech is conceived of in terms of a distinction between potential and actual. Bakhtin sees language system as a potential that becomes realized in concrete utterances. Although Bakhtin states explicitly that it is inadmissible to oppose language to speech, it can be argued that he is not against the conceptual distinction between language and speech *as such*. On the contrary, Bakhtin argues that both language and speech are inherently social and therefore cannot be opposed to each other by referring to the distinction between social and individual as Saussure (1990) assumes.

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[29] L. A. Gogotishvili (Bakhtin 1996b: 566) plays down the significance of the distinction between language system and speech by arguing that the structuralist terminology merely represents Bakhtin's use of double-voiced discourse and therefore implies no actual commitment to it.

Another major difference between language and speech mentioned by Bakhtin (1996e: 261) is the *neutrality* of language system which is reflected in the fact that same elements of language can be used to express diametrically opposed points of view. According to Bakhtin (1996e: 261), dialogical relationships between different points of view, which include agreement, disagreement and so forth, are determined not by the relation between linguistic elements and reality but by the relation between actual utterances and reality. In Bakhtin's view, only utterances – real units of speech communication – express meaning positions and can enter into dialogical relationships, while the language system is neutral respective to various positions it can be used to express. Thus, for Bakhtin, language is a neutral tool or potentiality that can be used to express various meaning positions that then enter into dialogical relationship with each other.

Despite the fact that Bakhtin makes explicit the distinction between language as a neutral system and speech as a historical and spatio-temporal actualization of language, it has been overlooked by some commentators of Bakhtin. For instance, though admirable in many ways, Hirschkop's recent study suffers from this. Hirschkop cites Bakhtin's notes dating from 1950s in which Bakhtin (1996d: 226) argues that

> the utterance is the minimum of that to which one can respond <with> which one can agree or disagree.

On the basis of this citation Hirschkop (1999: 35) claims that 'the linguistic utterance' is 'the minimal structural unit of language'. Yet, for Bakhtin (1986b: 71), the utterance is not a linguistic unit but 'the real unit of speech communication' as opposed to sentence which is a unit of language. In a Bakhtinian context Hirschkop's expression 'linguistic utterance' is simply *contradictio in adjecto*. Furthermore, Hirschkop (1999: 35) argues that 'language does not articulate values or principles from a neutral perspective: […] its meanings are positions taken or refused'. Hirschkop thus seems to miss Bakhtin's point – which can be read in the sentence following the one cited by Hirschkop – that linguistic units like sentences do not affirm or deny

anything. That is, language does not express any meaning positions or values, it can only be used to express them in concrete utterances.

It should be clear by now that the notion of language does not have an identical content in texts dating from different periods. In 'Discourse in the Novel' language is characterized as a heteroglot collection of various struggling sub-languages associated with certain, often competing, social and ideological points of view. In the texts dating from 1950-60s, Bakhtin, in turn, argues that language (system) is a neutral tool, that is, totally independent of existing social and ideological points of view. Language does not express agreement, disagreement or any other dialogical relationship, only utterances do. This corresponds also to the view held by Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* in which he argues that dialogical relationships are impossible among the elements of language system. A dialogical relationship only arises when a linguistic element, say, a sentence becomes embodied and is used to express a particular meaning position in a concrete utterance.

In order to explain the fact that Bakhtin gives different meanings to one and the same term, one might suggest that Bakhtin is just being inconsistent and sloppy in his use of terms. Another explanation, which is actually used by Gogotishvili, is that Bakhtin keeps constantly changing between direct and double-voiced discourses. The structuralist notions are seen as double-voiced expressions which do not actually reveal what Bakhtin 'really' meant. Thus, the basic assumption is that despite the significant changes in terminology, Bakhtin's views on language and communication did not change during his long intellectual career. I find both these explanations unsatisfying and argue that the differences in terminology basically reflect the fact that Bakhtin approaches language from different perspectives in different texts. In 'Discourse in the Novel' in which Bakhtin argues that language is filled with ideology, he looks at language as a historical and spatio-temporal phenomenon that is akin to Saussure's *langage* and also close to Voloshinov's view of language. In later texts, Bakhtin argues that ideology and dialogical relationships exist at the level of utterances, while language system is neutral respective to different ideological points of view. Although it may seem that Bakhtin's later texts con-

tradict his earlier views, this is not necessarily the case, because the level of actual utterances or speech communication, in fact, roughly corresponds to the notion of language filled with ideology, because they both refer to language as a historical and spatio-temporal phenomenon. Thus, it can be argued that the terminological distinction between language system and speech suggests that Bakhtin discusses language from different points of view and at different levels of abstraction in different texts. Furthermore, the distinction between language system and speech, which Bakhtin draws in his later texts, is to be understood as a heuristic tool that does not necessarily imply that Bakhtin would also automatically give it an ontological status. On the contrary, it is argued that the distinction between language and speech is merely methodological, whereas at the level of ontology language is inseparable from its spatio-temporal manifestations. Thus, according to the dialogical view, there is a complex interrelationship between the conventionalized meaning resources provided by language and the actual acts of meaning-giving which utilise these resources.

5.3 Language and Communication

As we have seen, Bakhtin and Voloshinov are mainly interested in the various ways in which language is used in speech communication and in the functions language has in social interaction. Consequently, it has been frequently suggested that it is important to distinguish between language and communication[30] when discussing the dialogical approach to language. In fact, it has even been argued that the dialogical philosophy of language is not actually a philosophy of language but philosophy of communication or language use (see also Holquist 1983: 311, Clark & Holquist 1984: 222). It is, of course, true that Bakhtin and Voloshinov do not approach language as an invariant system of linguistic forms, but are mainly interested in how language is used as a tool in verbal interaction. This, however, does not imply that they would subscribe to a view

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[30] Bakhtin does not actually use the term communication (*kommunikatsiia*), but speaks of *rechevoe obshchenie* which is usually translated as speech communication.

according to which language could be conceived of in terms 'pure actuality'.

Bakhtin seems to think that the existence of a common language is a necessary prerequisite for communication and mutual understanding to take place. According to Bakhtin (1979b: 283), every utterance and text has basically two dimensions. On the one hand, every utterance is characterized by its spatio-temporal uniqueness which means that it also has an individual dimension. In other words, for Bakhtin, an utterance is a unique and answerable expression of a particular meaning position, and therefore, the meaning which manifests itself in a particular social context is essentially novel and unrepeatable. On the other hand, Bakhtin thinks that an utterance or text presupposes language by which he refers to a system of signs mutually shared by the members of a community. According to Bakhtin (1996e: 252), it is the existence of a common language that ultimately makes the mutual understanding possible. This suggests that Bakhtin and Voloshinov should not be taken as philosophers of communication *as opposed to* philosophers of language. On the contrary, it can be argued that the characteristic feature of Bakhtin's thought is that he is extremely critical towards such ways of thinking in which different aspects of reality are conceived of in terms of binary oppositions.

In this respect, the distinction between language and communication is analogous to such distinctions as *langue* vs. *parole* and social vs. individual towards which Bakhtin and Voloshinov take a critical attitude. Thus, the characteristic feature of Bakhtin's oeuvre is that it essentially represents a way of thinking which tries to do away with such oppositions that are based on the idea of mutual exclusion of the terms. As regards language, this means that Bakhtin sees linguistics and metalinguistics as complementary approaches to the study of language, not mutually exclusive ones. It can be suggested that, for Bakhtin, linguistics and metalinguistics represent different points of view on language, in other words, they are to be seen as two complementary *methodological* approaches. It should also be borne in mind that the methodological value of this or that distinction *does not* automatically imply that it would also be ontologically relevant.

Bakhtin and Voloshinov are sometimes claimed to be anti-linguists (see Stewart 1986), because of the severe criticism they address towards the structuralist and formalist tradition of linguistics. Yet it can be argued that the anti-linguist epithet is not very successful, as it clearly presupposes that the relationship between language and its use is seen in terms of a binary opposition. What is more, despite of their critical attitude both Bakhtin and Voloshinov admit that linguistics is perfectly legitimate and useful approach to language (for a detailed discussion, see article III). What is more, Bakhtin is frequently characterized as an essentially anti-systemic thinker (see e.g. Morson & Emerson 1990), and his critique of the Saussurean structuralism has been taken as a prime example of his hostile attitude towards the views according to which actual spatio-temporal acts can be reduced into and predicted by an ahistorical system of rules. Consequently, Bakhtin has been celebrated as a spokesman for the messiness and relativity of language. Although it is true that Bakhtin is mainly interested in dynamic aspects of language and argues for the view that contextual meanings cannot be reduced to or exhausted by the given aspects of meaning, I would like to suggest a rather different formulation.

It should be stressed that Bakhtin does not deny the fact that both stable and dynamic features exist in language. Rather he wants to provide us with a new way of conceiving of the nature of the relation between stable and dynamic aspects of language. And this way, I argue, is analogous to his views concerning other oppositions such as social vs. individual, relativism vs. dogmatism and *langue* vs. *parole*. For Bakhtin, consciousness, for instance, is characterized by its non-identity, that is, consciousness is not a self-contained whole, but exists and is formed only in relation to others and the environment. Similarly, it can be argued that the dialogical account of language is based on the assumption of non-identity of system, which means that there exists no pregiven supraindividual system in, say, Platonic world of ideas, that would be independent from actual spatio-temporal acts of language use. System (what an uncanny word) exists only in relation to actual behaviour which makes it essentially dynamic in nature. The Bakhtinian conception of language can be characterized as *emergent* in nature, since it is a poten-

tial which, one the one hand, functions as resources for actual spatio-temporal acts and, on the other hand, is (re)created and possibly transformed via actual use of language (for a detailed discussion, see article V).

5.4 Meaning as a Potential

In the contemporary context of language studies, the notion of meaning potential is most frequently associated with the name of Rommetveit (1974, 1988, 1990, 1992) who has discussed the potential nature of meaning since the 1970s. In addition to his own psycholinguistic research Rommetveit's work on the notion of meaning potential was originally inspired by Wittgenstein's (1953, 1964) later philosophy, Merleau-Ponty's (1994) phenomenological thought, and later on also by Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's writings on language. But as Marková (1992: 52) notes, the idea of meaning as a potential has a long history in Central European linguistic thought and can be traced back to Humboldt (see e.g. 1988) whose fundamental idea was to see language in terms of process (*energeia*) as opposed to a ready-made product (*ergon*). In addition to this, the idea that language can be conceived of as a potential to mean was also discussed by the members of Prague semiotics (Marková 1992: 53). The notion of meaning potential was a central issue at least in the writings of Sergei Kartsevskii (2000) and Jan Mukařovsky (1978) who were preoccupied by the relationship of static and dynamic aspects of meaning. The idea of meaning as a potentiality has also been discussed by Hans Lipps, a representative of neo-Humboldtian tradition, who argued that the linguistic meaning of an expression only indicates direction, while its real meaning can only be realized by a reference to its endless concrete meanings (see Mohanty 1976: 72). Within Russian tradition, analogous ideas have been expressed, for instance, by A. A. Potebnia (1968), G. Shpet (1927, 1990) and A. F. Losev (1993).

The idea that language can be conceived of in terms of a potentiality to mean plays a central role also in Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's considerations of the notion of meaning (see also Lähteenmäki

1995). Voloshinov argues that only utterances used in particular contexts have a specific meaning whereas decontextualized linguistic expressions such as words and sentences are best characterized as abstract potentialities. When explicating the difference between what he calls theme (*tema*) and meaning (*znachenie*) Voloshinov (1973: 101) argues that

> theme is the upper, actual limit of linguistic significance; in essence, only theme means something definite. Meaning is the lower limit of linguistic significance. Meaning in essence, means nothing; it only possesses potentiality – the possibility of having meaning within a concrete theme.

The notion of meaning potential can be seen as a critical response to the view according to which linguistic expressions, e.g. words and sentences, have an invariant literal meaning which underlies their contextual meanings. In this view, literal meanings which exist at the level of language system are seen as absolute and fundamental in their nature whereas actual contextual meanings are regarded as derivative from literal meanings. To be more specific, dialogism argues against the notion of literal meaning as a conceptualization of the way in which words and sentences have meanings and how communication is possible in the first place. This view does not imply that the notion of literal meaning would be seen as totally irrelevant and unreal. On the contrary, following Rommetveit's (1988: 15) discussion of the 'myth of literal meaning', it can be argued that literal meanings are, in fact, an essential part of the social reality of literate cultures.

The fact that the idea of literal meaning is seen as a myth does not presuppose that literal meanings would be regarded as unreal or as creations of an uncultured mind (see also Lähteenmäki 1999). In fact, the very confrontation of scientific and mythical views, as Losev (1994: 14) points out, is absolutely fruitless, as they represent different and incommensurable levels of reality. Here, the mythical nature Rommetveit ascribes to the notion of literal meaning is understood as merely referring to its function: myths are real, as they organize and make sense of our everyday experiences. Thus, according to the dialogical view, literal meanings are real, but they are

not given. On the contrary, as Wertsch (1991: 85) argues, literal meanings are created by 'a particular semiotic activity and a particular social language, namely the social language that concerns itself with the kinds of reflective activity found in modern, rational, literate discourse'. A similar point is also made by Linell (1992: 269), who sees the definition of meanings for linguistic expressions as a part of human language[31], and argues that literal meanings are man-made in the sense that they can be understood as outcomes of our normative decontextualizing practices.

Despite the fact that literal meanings are part of the everyday reality of a language user, it is argued that the notion of literal meaning cannot be seen as an adequate conceptualization of the way in which mutual understanding is possible or dynamic and stable aspects of meaning are related to each other. In the dialogical approach to language, the notion of literal meaning is rejected in favour of the view that a linguistic expression is to be seen as a potentiality to mean. Linguistic expressions are seen as relatively open meaning potentials which attain a specific meaning only in the dialogical interaction between interlocutors in a particular social context. Contextual meanings can be characterized as constructional and emergent in nature, for they are jointly created and negotiated (Rommetveit 1992) in the course of social interaction.

One of the basic assumptions of the dialogical account of meaning is that the meaning potential of a linguistic expression is characterized by its (partial) indeterminacy. This assumption may seem theoretically unattractive and dubious, as it seems to contradict our naive and also most expert views on how communication between individuals is possible. If there are no fixed meanings which remain same across different contexts, it may seem that there are as many possible meanings as there are situations, and consequently language could not been used as a means for social interaction. This, I argue, mistaken position is held, for instance, by Hirschkop (1999: 210) who maintains that

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[31] The basic assumption of an emergentist approach to language is that linguistic descriptions are to be seen as a part of the language described, see e.g. Määttä (2000a, 2000b, 2000c).

> [t]he immediate temptation is to take uniqueness to mean spatio-temporal uniqueness, as if the abstractly different 'moment' of every speech act was reflected in some infinitesimal difference of meaning. Not only, however, does such an interpretation make the reference to 'truth, veracity good, beauty' and so forth inexplicable, it leaves us unable to comprehend how any one could recognize the meaning of an utterance to begin with. That is, the crudely spatio-temporal or empirical specificity of the utterance does not entail a difference in meaning, for meaning is by definition an ideal moment, the identity of which depends on a certain reproducibility.

Hirschkop does not make it explicit what he means by 'meaning' and therefore it is unclear whether he refers to Bakhtin's *znachenie* (meaning, significance) or *smysl* (sense, contextual meaning). For Bakhtin, contextual meanings of actual utterances are unrepeatable because of the spatio-temporal uniqueness of utterances, whereas *znachenie* refers to those aspects of meaning which are repeatable or reproducible over different contexts of use. On the one hand, Bakhtin thinks that the contextual meaning of an utterance (*smysl*) is characterized by its 'createdness' and hence uniqueness. On the other hand, Bakhtin also makes it explicit that 'createdness' of contextual meanings is not an absolute property in the sense that they would be constructed in particular situations *in toto*. On the contrary, despite their 'createdness' and 'novelty', contextual meanings necessarily depend on something given. Thus, the speaker is dependent on and utilises the conventionalized meaning resources provided by language, but the actual meaning of this or that speech act cannot be exhausted by the reproducible aspects of meaning, as contextual meanings are, by definition, unique. Hirschkop is, of course, right when he argues that our ability to understand utterances depends on 'a certain reproducibility' (see also Dufva, forthcoming), but the assumption that the uniqueness of contextual meanings would somehow threaten our ability to understand each other is to be seen as seriously misguided. The counter-argument against this view is developed in detail in article V which aims to explicate and conceptualize the complex relationship between meaning potentials and contextual meanings in terms of the notion of emergence.

It should be stressed that, although this work clearly argues for a dialogical account of meaning, it does not follow that the dialogical notion of meaning as first discussed by Bakhtin and Voloshinov would be seen as an omnipotent and ultimate answer to those questions which traditional semantics and pragmatics were unable to answer. To quote Linell (1992: 268),

> we are left with the basic issue: what is the relation, the trade-off, between structure and (re)construction? Even if we are faced with interactional construction and negotiation, with situational attribution of meaning in a fragmentarily known world, even if this involves a creative exploitation of meaning potentials in authentic speech and communication, what structures are presupposed, if you will, are "there" to be reconstructed and negotiated? What are the pre-formed entities more or less fixed and made sense of *before* the communicative act?

In this work, the relation between structure and reconstruction, or more specifically, between meaning potentials and contextual meanings is discussed on a conceptual level. This means that the question of the psychological relevance of structures and units that are supposed to exist 'out there' lies beyond the scope of this study. The chief aim of article V is to explicate the relation of meaning potentials and actual meanings and provide a conceptualization of this relation that would free the notion of meaning potential from possible accusations of being a relativistic account of meaning. It is argued that the relation between meaning potentials and actual contextual meanings can be conceived of in terms of the notion of *emergence*[32]. This means that meaning potentials can be characterized as rules which, on the one hand, function as resources for various social and cultural practices which involve the use of language and, on the other hand, are reconstructed via actual rule-following behaviour (see also Giddens 1984).

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[32] For a discussion on the notion of emergence as a philosophical concept, see e.g. Pihlström (1999, 2000).

6   DISCUSSION

Although the present work is primarily concerned with the dialogical conception of meaning, a substantial part of this introduction also dealt with certain philosophical background assumptions of dialogism. The aim of this discussion was to create a dialogizing context for the articles and also to relate the topics discussed in the articles to the general philosophical framework of dialogism. It was suggested that the way in which meaning is conceived of in the dialogical philosophy of language basically stems from those assumptions that concern the dialogical nature of human existence. This means that a proper understanding of the dialogical conception of meaning is impossible if it is not interpreted against the overall philosophical conception of dialogism. Consequently, the discussion of the dialogical account of meaning cannot ignore, say, the epistemological and ontological aspects of dialogism, as the conception of meaning is intimately connected to the way in which the notions of knowledge and truth, for instance, are conceived.

The dialogical account of language and communication proposed by Bakhtin may seem highly idealistic or even naive, as it assumes that verbal interaction can be best conceived of in terms of a joint project to which interlocutors are mutually committed (see article IV). If one considers actual instances of verbal interaction, as well as other possible forms of human interaction, one might end up preferring such metaphors as 'chaos' or 'conflict' to 'dialogical interaction'. Thus, it may seem that when Bakhtin argues that verbal interaction is to be regarded as inherently dialogical in nature, he presents a highly idealized picture of communication which has nothing or very little to do with actual discourses. What is more, Bakhtin's philosophical conception, that is, the dialogical model of being has been frequently subjected to the same charge. It has been suggested that Bakhtin commits a gross error when he invests his highly idealistic notion of dialogue with even a broader meaning and assumes that dialogue can serve as an adequate model of human existence.

It can, however, be argued that critical comments like these are misguided, as they are based on a rather peculiar understanding of the notion of dialogue. It seems that in many cases the critics of dialogism equate the notion of dialogue with those of consensus and harmony that would exclude the possibility of conflict and struggle. According to this view, the commitment to dialogism would imply that one automatically assumes that human existence can be regarded as a continuous and flawless interaction between individuals whose mutual relationship is characterized by symmetry and consensus. Yet it should be stressed, that the notion of dialogue by no means presupposes that the relationship between interactants would have to be symmetrical. On the contrary, in actual discourses interactants come often with different ideological backgrounds, try to achieve different, perhaps contradictory goals and so forth. Nevertheless irrespective of possible conflicts, social interaction can be characterized as essentially dialogical in nature. This also holds on a conceptual level. The notion of 'dialogue' does not require symmetry, but, on the contrary, the absolute symmetry – if any – excludes the possibility of genuine dialogue. Thus, 'dialogue', in fact, presupposes an asymmetrical relationship between interactants (see Marková & Foppa 1991). If the relationship between two individuals were symmetrical, this would mean that their consciousnesses would, in principle, merge into a single consciousness. And this, in turn, would by definition exclude the possibility of dialogue and would lead to a monologue. For Bakhtin, the minimal requirement for a dialogue or a dialogical relationship to arise is that there are at least two different, and hence asymmetrical meaning positions that come to contact in an actual being-as-event and create something new.

In addition to this, the notion of dialogue is frequently identified with the notion of interaction that also distorts Bakhtinian understanding of dialogue. Although interaction naturally is a part of the story, the notion of dialogue cannot be exhausted by mere interaction, for Bakhtin invests it with a broader meaning. By this I mean, that, for instance, various functional models of cognition in which the relation between mind and world or between other minds is conceived of in terms of mechanical input and output processes can, in principle, be characterized as interactive in nature. These models,

however, could not be called dialogical for the reason that the notion of dialogue cannot be reduced to mere interaction between *separate autonomous units.* To say that consciousness is a dialogical phenomenon means that the consciousness of an individual does not exist as an autonomous entity independently of other minds and the environment, but is to be seen as an essentially relational phenomenon.

Thus, the basic assumption of dialogism is that consciousness is inherently social in nature that means that the consciousness of an individual is not an autonomous entity, but exists only in relation to other consciousnesses and the environment. In the present study, it was argued that the social ontology of human existence also underlies the dialogical approach to meaning, as discussed by Bakhtin and Voloshinov. Following Bakhtin, human existence can also be understood as consisting of active and responsive acts towards acts by others. The cornerstone of Bakhtin's ethical considerations is that *others* cannot provide *the self* with an alibi-for-being which basically stems from their mutual outsidedness (*vnenakhodimost'*). Thus, despite the fact that human action is – in an essential sense – social and intersubjective, it is simultaneously characterized by perspectivity and positionality both in spatio-temporal and biographical senses of the word. As a consequence of this all human acts are by definition unique and unrepeatable. As verbal acts can be seen as a special case of human acts, it means that acts of meaning-giving and sense-making are also characterized by their partial uniqueness, although they are simultaneously firmly rooted in the social and cultural practices of a given community.

It was argued that the considerations of the architectonics of the act which was a central issue in Bakhtin's early philosophy are also reflected in the way in which the notion of meaning is conceived of in the dialogical philosophy of language. Thus, it can be suggested that the way in which Bakhtin deals with the dynamic and static aspects of meaning can be seen as analogous to his treatment of the act in which the uniqueness and irreducability of the meanings of actual acts is emphasized. This interpretation of Bakhtin's ideas also implies a commitment to a 'unity view' according to which Bakhtin's writings, despite their often fragmentary nature, form a more or less

coherent philosophical programme. Here it was argued that the unifying feature that permeates Bakhtin's writings dating from different periods and also underlies the dialogical conception of language and meaning is the assumption that concerns the social ontology of consciousness. According to this view, consciousness is characterized by 'otherness', as it exists only in dialogue in which it participates from its unique answerable position. Thus, following Makhlin (1997a), the leitmotif of Bakhtin's philosophical programme could be termed as 'social ontology of participation' (*sotsial'naia ontologiia prichasnosti*).

Another characteristic feature of human acts, including acts of meaning-giving and sense-making, is their creativity which also stems from their spatio-temporal uniqueness. For Bakhtin, the outcome of an act cannot be reduced to rules that allegedly underlie it or to antecedent contextual conditions, for every responsive act creates something novel and unrepeatable. To quote Bakhtin (1986c: 119-120),

> It [utterance] always creates something that never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable. […] What is given is completely transformed in what is created.

Bakhtin thus insists on the importance of the unrepeatable and unique aspects of human acts. Yet he also makes it explicit that despite its ultimate creativity and novelty, an act cannot be accounted for in terms of pure actuality, for it necessarily presupposes something *given*. Bakhtin's point is that there is no causal connection between *what is given* and *what is created* in particular contexts which means that acts manifested in concrete situation cannot be reduced into anything given. What is more, Bakhtin argues that what is given is transformed in creative acts. This means that also given aspects of culture are necessarily dynamic and in the process of becoming, when approached from the perspective of great time.

As both Bakhtin and Voloshinov hold that human acts are always characterized by their eventness and spatio-temporal uniqueness, it follows that they also see meanings that actualize themselves in particular contexts (*smysl*, *tema*) as essentially unrepeatable and novel. Contextual meanings are jointly created by the speaker and

the listener in the actual 'event of co-being' which means that they cannot be reduced into given aspects of meaning whatever they might be. According to Bakhtin and Voloshinov, the moment of meaning which is traditionally called the lexico-grammatical meaning of a linguistic expression is only a technical means to create unique contextual meanings. Consequently, they argue that a linguistic expression can be characterized as a relatively open meaning potential, that is, as a multitude of possible meanings which only acquires a specific meaning when used in a particular context to express certain point of view. In this respect, the dialogical account of meaning radically differs from so called code-theoretic accounts which assume that every linguistic expression has a fixed invariant literal meaning that underlies its variant contextual meanings (see article IV, article V).

It was also argued that the differences between the dialogical account of meaning and code-theoretic accounts basically stem from the general background assumptions to which they are, whether implicitly or explicitly, committed. It seems that the idea that linguistic expressions have fixed literal meanings which are identical to all individuals is based on Cartesian assumptions concerning the relation between an individual and reality, on the one hand, and words and reality, on the other hand (article IV). It is assumed that reality has a pregiven structure of which individuals make identical representations. In addition to this, there has to be a fixed relation between the given objects of reality – or their mental representations – and linguistic expressions. In dialogism, mental representations are seen as both social and individual which means that they have both shared and unique aspects. Mental representations are social, because they emerge in social interaction and, consequently, are part of the stock of socio-cultural knowledge shared by the members of a given society. On the other hand, mental representations are constructed from a unique position which ultimately makes them individual's own representations. This also means that linguistic expressions cannot have absolute literal meanings, but meanings, in spite of their firm social basis, also are partly idiosyncratic from which it follows that linguistic expressions can be characterized as relatively open meaning potentials.

The apparent problem of the notion of meaning potential is that it is open to an interpretation of being a relativistic account of meaning. It may seem that Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's view according to which there are as many meanings as there are contexts of use leads to a situation in which every linguistic expression can mean anything. However, both Bakhtin and Voloshinov argue against any relativistic account of meaning which would make meanings dependent on the individual creativity only. For Bakhtin and Voloshinov, language is first and foremost a social phenomenon which means that despite the fact that meaning potentials are relatively open they simultaneously have a firm social basis.

The chief aim of article V was to explicate the notion of meaning potential in a way that would help to overcome the conceptual problems associated with it and, consequently, free it from the accusations of being a relativistic account of meaning. The notion of meaning potential was discussed within the framework of use-theory of meaning which makes it possible to view meaning potentials as properties that are rooted in social practices of a given community and arise from social activity. Thus, the complex interrelation between what is given and what is created, or between meaning potentials and actual contextual meanings, is conceived of in terms of the notion of *emergence.* This means that the relation between actual contextual meanings and meaning potentials is to be characterized as dynamic and reciprocal in nature. Thus, on the one hand, linguistic and cultural norms and rules are given to us and they function as resources for various linguistic and cultural practices, but, on the other hand, the actual rule-following behaviour reflects back on the given norms and potentially transform them (see Archer 1988, 1995). This means that meaning potentials are to be seen as resources for social interaction which are simultaneously reconstituted and recreated via factual acts of language use (see Linell 1998a). In this view, the meaning potential of a linguistic expression is characterized in article V as 'a heterogeneous collection of knowledge of conventionalized patterns of normatively correct situated verbal behaviour which manifest themselves and *emerge* from social practices of a given social community'.

The present work is a theoretical study that means that its chief aim was to analyse and explicate some of the central concepts that underlie the dialogical account of meaning. Consequently, it was impossible within the limited scope of this work to discuss the huge amount of empirical research on different types of discourses carried out, for instance, by representatives of Conversational Analysis, Discourse Analysis and ethnomethodology (for discussion, see Linell 1998a). In this respect, the present study, which mainly deals with (meta)theoretical and philosophical issues, may seem highly abstract and even speculative. The fact that this work makes no reference to empirical research can be seen as one of its shortcomings, for empirical research can significantly contribute to our understanding of how meanings actually emerge. On the other hand, it should be stressed that this work does not aim at making empirical statements the validity of which could be assessed by reference to the world 'out there'. It endeavours to explicate and analytically discuss these concepts and (pre)conceptions that underlie the dialogical account of meaning and also condition the way in which empirical facts are interpreted within the dialogical framework.

It can also be suggested that dialogism does not automatically exclude a non-empirical methodology that basically amounts to the explication of our intuitions concerning language and its use. Our intuitions are intimately connected to our personal history of linguistic behaviour, as they are based on the experiences of particular communicative situations we have come across as members of certain linguistic community. Intuitions of an individual are inherently social in nature that ultimately stems from the fact that they have, as pointed out by Allwood (1976: 4), developed through his/her membership of a certain socio-cultural community. In this respect, intuitions can be characterized as emergent in relation to actual instances of social interaction and they get automatically updated as new usages emerge and norms and conventions of language are transformed. From this it follows that intuitions are not ready-made and given, but must be regarded as a dynamic part of our stock of social knowledge.

Thus, if the behavioural and experiential origin of social knowledge is taken for granted, the explication and conceptualization of

social knowledge can be seen as a perfectly legitimate method. However, the characteristic feature of our intuitions about the ways we act in certain situations is that they are notoriously unreliable and are often mistaken. This means that the validity of our intuitions should not be taken at its face value, but should be checked by observing actual events of language use. In certain respects, this bears a resemblance to Allwood's (1976: 4) work who argues that it is legitimate to explicate social know-how on the basis of intuitive knowledge, but, on the other hand, the validity of these explications should always be tested in order to guarantee their intersubjective validity. Thus, it can be suggested that a dialogical account of language cannot be based exclusively either on empirical methodology or non-empirical methodology, but these different methodological solutions should be seen as complementary to each other.

On the one hand, the ontological and epistemological stance of dialogism suggests that empirical reality should not be seen as a source of absolute and eternal truths against the background of which the validity of all theoretical positing could be unequivocally assessed. We have no direct immediated access to empirical reality or to things *in themselves*, but the way in which we conceive of empirical reality is conditioned and made possible by those, often implicit, (pre)conceptions we take as given as a members of particular scientific community. Thus, we cannot see empirical reality as it is, because the structuration and categorization of reality is based on the stock of social and cultural knowledge that are given. On the other hand, does not mean that we should ignore the results of empirical research. On the contrary, what I mean is that the validity of theoretical positing is to be assessed according to whether new conceptualizations are useful, that is, whether they can provide us with better tools to cope with reality by opening new perspectives and discovering new meanings.

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ARTICLES

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V.   Lähteenmäki, M. (forthcoming) Between Relativism and Absolutism: Towards an Emergentist Definition of Meaning Potential.

CONSCIOUSNESS AS A SOCIAL AND DIALOGICAL PHENOMENON

Mika Lähteenmäki

1   Introduction

The terms *social* and *dialogical* have become increasingly popular in current psychology, linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociopsychology etc. The names frequently referred to in connection with these concepts are those of Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), Valentin Voloshinov (1894-1936) and Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). The ideas of Bakhtin, Voloshinov, and Vygotsky that remained almost unknown in the Western world until 1970s and 1980s, have recently aroused attention among Western thinkers. They have influenced the thinking of such scholars as Ragnar Rommetveit, James V. Wertsch, Ivana Marková, and Klaus Foppa, to name but a few. However, it must be emphasised that these Western scholars have not only drawn from the heritage of their spiritual ancestors, but also systemized and extended these ideas to develop the so called *dialogical paradigm* (cf. Marková & Foppa 1990, 1991; Wertsch 1985, 1991; Wold 1992).

The ideas worked out by Bakhtin, Voloshinov and Vygotsky share many important features. One reason for this may be that they all lived and worked under similar circumstances. The general intellectual atmosphere of the first turbulent years of the new Soviet Union during which the sociality of human cognition was emphasised undoubtedly had an impact on thinking of these Russian/Soviet scholars. Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's influence on each other's thinking is quite clear, because they belonged to the same intellectual circle where different aspects of philosophy and culture in general were discussed. In fact, two books and several articles published under the name of Voloshinov (the so called disputed texts) have been treated by Bakhtin scholars in many occasions (especially in the Soviet Union) as if they were written by Bakhtin

himself[33]. Without going to any details of this dispute, it can be stated that there seem to be good grounds for accepting the view taken by, for example, Morson and Emerson (1990) who convincingly argue that Voloshinov is the real author of the works ascribed to him. This interpretation also explains the fact that Voloshinov's works contain clearly Marxist elements which is not the case with Bakhtin. Ascribing the authorship to Voloshinov, however, does not change the fact that his works were greatly influenced by Bakhtin.

Vygotsky's relationship to Bakhtin and Voloshinov is not as unambiguous as that of Bakhtin to Voloshinov. Although, all three Soviet scholars developed their basic concepts and categories at the same time (1920-1930), Vygotsky lived and worked geographically apart from both the other two. In those days, Bakhtin and Voloshinov worked mainly in Leningrad while Vygotsky lived in Moscow where he had moved into after joining the staff of the Institute of Psychology in 1924. There is no evidence that Vygotsky ever met Bakhtin or Voloshinov, and he never actually explicitly referred to their thoughts in his work (cf. Kozulin 1990: 180). This does not, however, mean that Vygotsky was totally unfamiliar with their thinking. One possible explanation is that in those days the social and dialogical character of human cognition was regarded as self-evident, and there was thus no need to refer to someone in particular.

To emphasise the indisputable similarities in the works of Bakhtin, Voloshinov and Vygotsky is not to say that their thinking or approaches are identical. This, of course, would be impossible, because they were interested in different things. Vygotsky was a professional psychologist. Voloshinov, in contrast, can be characterised as a Marxist philosopher of language, while Bakhtin's main work deals with various issues of literature. They all, however, share the interest in the nature of human cognition which they approach in their work from different points of view.

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[33] For discussion, see Clark & Holquist (1984) according to whom Bakhtin is the real author of disputed texts, and Morson & Emerson (1989, 1990) who take the opposite position. For an agnostic intermediate position see Todorov (1984).

2   Vygotsky: Developmental Aspect of Consciousness

Vygotsky, like Voloshinov (but unlike Bakhtin), was a Marxist and based his work on psychology on the Marxist philosophy. When working towards a new Marxist theory of psychology, he approached the problem of consciousness from a developmental point of view. Vygotsky emphasised the important role of consciousness in explaining human action. In fact, the concept of consciousness became so central in Vygotsky's thought that A.N. Leontev and A.R. Lurija (1956: 6), who were his students and co-workers in Moscow, suggest that the intellectual career of Vygotsky could be characterised as a 'struggle for consciousness'.

In his writings, Vygotsky attacked two schools of psychology existing in Soviet Union in the early 1920s. On the one hand, he opposed the *Pavlovian* approach according to which human consciousness could be reduced to physiological reflexes and explained in purely biological terms. On the other hand, Vygotsky did not accept the so called *idealistic* approach either which saw consciousness as a subjective and metaphysical quality that could be approached only through intuition and introspection. The solution that Vygotsky suggested for both the theoretical and the methodological problems of the study of the nature of consciousness was his *cultural-historical* approach. This approach, according to Wertsch (1990: 62), can be characterised as a 'perspective that explicates how it [i.e.. mental functioning] reflects and shapes the cultural, historical and institutional setting in which it occurs'.

It is well known that Vygotsky considers human activity different from the activity of animals, because humans use tools. In this respect, Vygotsky sees no difference between psychic activity and activity in general. One of the main tenets of Vygotsky's theory is that psychic activity of human beings is differentiated from that of animals by the use of *tools*, that is, human psychic activity is *mediated*. According to him, the tools that mediate psychic activity always have a meaning, in other words, they are signs (Leont'ev & Lurija 1956: 8). Thus, Vygotsky sees consciousness as an essentially semiotic phenomenon based on the system of signs. For him signs are special 'tools for spiritual production' and psychic activity can,

consequently, be defined as *sign mediated action.* It is worth noting that in Vygotsky's use a sign 'is a symbol with a definite meaning that has evolved in the history of culture', as noted by V.V. Davydov and L.A. Radzikhovskii (1985: 54). Vygotsky's category of sign includes not only language, which is the most important mediating tool, but also other kinds of sign systems such as mathematical symbols etc. As the above characterisation by Davydov and Radzikhovskii shows, meanings always have a historical dimension, that is, they are always formed by their use in preceding situations.

In Vygotsky's main work *Myshlenie i rech'* (Thought and Language[34]) the developmental aspects of speech and thinking are considered from both phylogenetical and ontogenetical points of view. With regard to phylogenesis, Vygotsky's (1956: 131) position is the following. Firstly, he argues that the development of thinking and speech have different genetic origins. According to him (1956: 119), this hypothesis is supported by the results of Köhler's study on intelligence in chimpanzees in which it was shown that intelligence developed independently from language. Secondly, he argues that thinking and speech develop along different lines and that the relation between speech and thinking is not static, but, in contrast, changes in the process of development in both quantitatively and qualitatively. By this he means that there is no fixed correlation between the development of intellect and speech, on the contrary, phylogenesis must be seen as a dynamic interrelationship between intellect and speech (Kozulin 1990: 152-153). Thirdly, Vygotsky argues that it is possible to distinguish a preverbal phase in the development of thought, on the one hand, and a preintellectual phase in the development of speech, on the other.

Ontogenetically, the relation between speech and thinking is similar to that in phylogenesis: they have different origins and they develop along different lines besides which there exists preintellectual speech as well as preverbal thinking (Vygotsky 1956: 134). In the development of a child, however, the developmental lines of speaking and thinking become intertwined at a certain point as thinking becomes verbal and speech intellectual. Without going into

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[34] A more appropriate translation for Myshlenie i rech' would be Thinking and Speech. This is also noted by Emerson (1986).

details of this influential and pioneering work, I will discuss only the aspects that are the most relevant for the purpose of this article.

From the present point of view, Vygotsky's arguments against the Piagetian account of language development seem especially interesting. One of the main objects of critique presented by Vygotsky (1956) in his *Myshlenie i rech'* is the Piagetian account of egocentric speech. For Piaget, egocentric speech is only a mechanical accompaniment to autistic thought which is not addressed to anyone in particular. It is a stage between the phases of primary autism and socialisation period of the child (Emerson 1986: 29). Vygotsky, in turn, argues that early forms of speech must be regarded as immanently social. Vygotsky (1956: 86) makes his position clear when he states that the early speech of a child is purely *social*, and it would be wrong to name it *socialised*. By this he means that the use of the word 'socialised' in this context would presuppose something that was originally asocial and only later through development became social which is not the case with child language.

For Vygotsky early speech forms represent a child's attempt to communicate with his social environment (Kozulin 1990:173). The child's egocentric speech is dependent on his social environment, as was convincingly shown in the experiments reported in *Myshlenie i rech'*. Vygotsky (1956) showed that the amount of egocentric speech was radically reduced when a child was placed with deaf-mutes or in a noisy room. Thus, if the child assumed that his speech was not heard by anyone he had no reason to speak. This result, among others, convinced Vygotsky of the correctness of his hypotheses, that speech is social from the beginning.

According to Morson & Emerson (1990: 212), Vygotsky's attack against the Piagetian notion of egocentric speech can also be understood in a much broader sense, as a critique of the underlying assumption of the child's mind being originally autistic, and the view that it becomes socialised only under the pressure of the environment. This point is made explicit also by Vygotsky himself. In *Myshlenie i rech'* (1956: 89) he states that the developmental process of a child's thought does not proceed from individual to socialised, but that the actual direction of development is from social to individual. Thus, Vygotsky sees that the development of an individual

consciousness always occurs through the social, that is, the individual consciousness is both formed by and reflected in the social environment of the individual.

3   Voloshinov: Consciousness, Signs and Ideology

Although Voloshinov's main interest was to develop a Marxist philosophy of language, he was, among other things, concerned with questions of psychology as well (see Voloshinov 1976). This kind of eclecticism is characteristic not only of Voloshinov but also of Bakhtin and Vygotsky. They did not see various issues of psychology, language and culture as distinct from each other as it is customary to do nowadays. On the contrary, they all saw the various forms and products of human activity as closely interconnected.

From the present point of view, Voloshinov's approach to language seems especially important. Its basic ideas are presented in his *Marksizm i filosofiia iazyka* (Marxism and the Philosophy of Language) originally published in 1929. In his philosophy of language, Voloshinov attacks two lines of linguistic thought he calls *individual subjectivism* and *abstract objectivism*. He argues convincingly that language cannot be regarded either as a property of an individual psyche, as is supposed in individual subjectivism, or as an abstract invariant system, as is supposed in abstract objectivism. Although Voloshinov's critique of abstract objectivism is addressed against Saussurean linguistics, it can be regarded as an overall rejection of the so called Cartesian tradition of linguistics, that is, linguistic theories that regard language as a decontextualised, abstract and a timeless system. Thus, Voloshinov's work provides convincing arguments against the mainstream Western linguistic thought the culmination of which is Chomskyan linguistics. Unlike the Western linguistic tradition where the language system is categorically separated from its use, Voloshinov emphasises that it is impossible to study language apart from the social context of its use. Furthermore, Voloshinov's philosophy of language cannot be separated from his general view of the nature of human action and human psyche. He

sees the individual as being ultimately social, and communication as a form of social interaction.

Voloshinov's main work, *Marksizm i filosofiia iazyka*, does not only deal with language, but also examines interconnections that exist between language, psyche, and ideology. Hence, the concepts of *sign* and *ideology* play an important role in Voloshinov's philosophy of language. The main tenets of his approach to consciousness are as follows. Firstly, consciousness can be manifested and become real only in the material of sign (Voloshinov 1973: 11). Secondly, the logic of consciousness is always the logic of ideological interaction, and therefore, objective psychology can be based only on the science dealing with ideology (Voloshinov 1973: 13). Next, these tenets will be examined in more detail.

According to Voloshinov (1973: 25), objective psychology cannot be based on biology or physiology, because a subjective conscious psyche is ultimately a social and ideological fact. Although Voloshinov rejects the reduction of consciousness to purely physiological processes, he does not accept the subjective or intuitive approach to consciousness either. He maintains that the subjective inner experiences of an individual psyche, interpretable only in terms of social factors, must be given an objective definition. Voloshinov's solution is to define the reality of inner psyche as sign reality (1973: 26), which, according to him, means that every subjective mental experience is manifested to the individual in signs. Hence, in this respect, signs can be regarded as constitutive factors of consciousness, for outside the material of sign the psyche simply does not exist.

The concept of 'the material of sign' is, however, somewhat obscure. On the one hand, Voloshinov (1973: 29) emphasises the central role of the word (slovo) in inner experience and maintains that the most important form of the material of sign is *inner speech*. On the other hand, he says that the material of sign does not consist only of inner speech. According to Voloshinov (1973: 28-29), the material of sign is any organic activity or process of the human body, for example, body movements, breathing, articulation, in short, '*anything and everything occurring within the organism can become the material of experience,* since everything can acquire semiotic sig-

nificance'. One might see Voloshinov's line of thinking as follows. In order to reject the idealistic view of subjective consciousness, Voloshinov aims to show that consciousness can be given an objective definition. In other words, he argues that subjective experience has a material basis. On the other hand, in order to avoid crude physicalism, where subjective consciousness is reduced to biology and physiology, Voloshinov assigns semiotic function to organic activity. In this both/and solution, consciousness is viewed as *both* material *and* subjective, and therefore, it is defined objectively enough to meet the demands of Marxist science without denying the subjective dimension of consciousness.

For Voloshinov (1973: 26), who argues that any subjective psychic experience exists only in signs, the subjective psyche is an arena where the organism and the outer world meet in signs. Thus, he sees signs as an *intermediating* link between the inner experience and the outer world. He writes:

> Psychic experience is the semiotic expression of the contact between the organism and the outside environment. That is why *the inner psyche is not analyzable as a thing but can only be understood and interpreted as a sign.* (1973: 26)

> By its very existential nature, the subjective psyche is to be localized somewhere between the organism and the outside world, on the *borderline* separating these two spheres of reality. (1973: 26)

As the above quotations clearly show, Voloshinov maintains that subjective psyche must be kept apart from the physiological processes that take place in brain, because brain is located in the individual while his psyche is not. In this respect, it would not be fair to insist that my psyche is only mine, because it is formed through the interaction with the outside world and other psyches.

As noted above, Voloshinov maintains that in order for psychology to be an objective science, it must be based on the theory of *ideology*. The central role that Voloshinov assigns to ideology has recently been acknowledged in Western studies concerning the relationship between ideology and language (cf. Joseph & Taylor 1990, Simpson 1993). It is worth noting that Voloshinov's concept of ideology is different from the everyday interpretation of the term as

'false consciousness'. Voloshinov, however, does not provide a clear and explicit definition for ideology, although it plays such a central role in his philosophy of language and social interaction in general. According to Gardiner (1992: 13), who has examined the theory of ideology of the Bakhtin Circle, the term 'ideology' in Voloshinov's use refers to 'the process whereby meaning or 'value' is conferred on the natural and social worlds'. Laine (1990: 189) notes that, for Voloshinov, ideology means a level of socio-cultural activity which is the base of meanings and consciousness, existing through material signs. Thus, to put it less technically, ideology can be viewed as a pair of spectacles through which an individual observes and evaluates the outer world. However, ideology is not a property of an individual psyche. Ideology - which functions as a medium of social interaction - is located, as Voloshinov (1973: 12) argues, in social sign material between socially organised individuals.

The importance that Voloshinov assigns to ideology becomes understandable when one considers his assumption that psychic experience exists only in signs. In Voloshinov's thinking, a sign and ideology can be seen as mutually presupposing each other. Where sign is present the ideology is present as well, and where the sign is not present the ideology is also absent (Voloshinov 1973: 10). This means that every sign is necessarily ideological, and everything that is ideological is also semiotic in nature. This interconnection between the sign and the ideology also makes an individual consciousness an ideological fact. This becomes clear if we keep in mind that the individual subjective consciousness exists only in signs, and signs, in turn, are ideological in their nature. Or, as Voloshinov (1973: 11) puts it, consciousness becomes consciousness only when it becomes filled with ideological, that is, the material of sign in social interaction.

Thus, every sign is, at the same time, an ideological fact, and because of its ideological dimension a sign always shapes our idea of reality. This is made explicit by Voloshinov (1973: 10) when he states that

A sign does not simply exist as a part of a reality - it 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. (italics added)

In this respect, the individual psyche can also be viewed as an inherently social phenomenon. Our reality is formed and *refracted* by signs that, in turn, emerge in the social interaction between the individual and the others. In other words, the other is always present in the individual psyche, because the signs in which our psychic experiences are manifested and through which our idea of reality is formed are social in nature.

To sum up, Voloshinov regards the nature of an individual subjective psyche is regarded as immanently social and dialogical. Firstly, the individual psyche is social because of its location in an intermediate position between the individual and outer world. The subjective psyche is constantly interacting with the outer world, in other words, it is always in dialogical relationship with the events of the outer world. Secondly, the individual psyche is social because the sign material of the psyche has a social origin. Psychic experience by an individual is based on the interpretation of signs that, according to Voloshinov (1973: 21), are formed in the interaction process between people who are socially organised. This means that the meaning of a sign is never a property of an individual, but a result of social interaction, i.e., dialogue between the individual and others. Dialogicality can also be regarded as an internal property of an individual psyche or consciousness, because of the structure of inner speech that provides the sign material for the psyche. Voloshinov (1973: 38) argues that the structure of inner speech is dialogical, and thus its units are wholes that resemble the lines of a dialogue. Hence, in this respect, consciousness can be characterised as a place where different voices interact, to use a Bakhtinian metaphor.

4 Bakhtin: The Dialogic Self[35]

Bakhtin, whose ideas had a great influence on Voloshinov's thinking, is best known for his work on literature, or aesthetics of verbal creation in general as the title of his Russian collection *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva* (Aesthetics of Verbal Creation) suggests. In fact, Bakhtin's reputation or even fame in the West has been almost entirely based on his work on Dostoevsky and on theories of the novel. Bakhtin, however, was not only a literary critic and philosopher of language but also a versatile thinker interested in the various aspects of human life[36]. Especially in his early work - which until now has not been very well known in the West Bakhtin struggled towards a more general philosophical theory including the aesthetic, moral and ethical aspects of human action.

Already in his early manuscripts, written in 1919-1924, and later published under the titles 'K filosofii postupka' (1986) (Toward a Philosophy of the Act) and 'Avtor i geroi v esteticheskoi de-iatel'nosti' (1979a) (Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity), Bakhtin showed interest in problems of the self, which he continued to examine from different points of view, constantly reworking his concepts and terminology. What unites his theories of the self dating from different periods is that Bakhtin kept on stressing the immanent sociality and dialogicality of the self throughout his intellectual career. The most crucial point in Bakhtin's thinking is the assumption that an individual consciousness cannot be understood as a phenomenon apart from other consciousnesses and the social environment of the individual. The reason for this is that an individual consciousness develops and exist only through the social sphere. In this respect, an individual consciousness can be viewed as a (never complete) project of unfinalizable dialogues between the individual and his social environment. Moreover, Bakhtin, as noted by Morson & Emerson (1990:180), questions the traditional subject-object distinction, since for him there is no static self which could be opposed to a static given world. According to Bakhtin (1979a: 8), the world

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[35] The English translations for Russian terms are taken from Morson & Emerson (1990).
[36] See Clark & Holquist (1984), Holquist (1990) and Morson & Emerson (1990) for discussion of Bakhtin's life and ideas.

acquires its shape, structure, and determinacy only through our relationship to it. Thus Bakhtin sees the relationship between an individual consciousness and its social environment as essentially dynamic and interactive. Next, I will try to give an overall picture of Bakhtin's contribution to the dialogical modelling of the self.

In his theory of the self, developed in 'Avtor i geroi v es-teticheskoi deiatel'nosti', Bakhtin operates with three different aspects of the self. These aspects, or distinctions, are the following: *I-for-myself* (i.e. how my self appears to my own consciousness), *I-for-others* (i.e. how my self appears to others) and *the-other-for-me* (i.e. how other appears to me) (Bakhtin 1979a: 23, 35-36, cf. also Morson & Emerson 1990: 180). In Bakhtin's thinking, the self is clearly social as the above categorisation shows; the existence of any individual self necessarily presupposes other consciousness(es). What is relevant is that *I* (as well as reality in general) looks different from my own point of view than from the point of view of the other. Despite the fact that we mutually share the environment or 'sur-roundings' *(okruzheniia)* in which we act, our realities never completely match. We observe the outer world from different points of view, and, therefore, our *'fields of vision'* (krugozor) are never exactly identical. When I observe another person, however close to each other we might be, I always see something that he is not able to see, for example his face, body parts etc. Correspondingly, another person sees something that is outside my 'field of vision'. For this phenomenon Bakhtin (1979a: 23) uses the term *'surplus of vision'* (izby-tok videniia). The individuality of my *self* and the *other* is based on and guaranteed by this 'surplus of vision'. My idea of reality is always based on the observations that I make from my 'field of vision', that is, from my perspective to reality. Furthermore, the 'field of vision' of an individual is always defined by his or her unique location in time and space. Consequently, since it is impossible that the spatio-temporal co-ordinates of two or more individuals could ever be exactly the same, my self is always individual and unique[37]. Or as Clark and Holquist (1984: 78) put it, the difference between the self and the other 'is in the gap between a time, space, and evaluation

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[37] Holquist (1990: 22) argues that time and space are relative categories for Bakhtin and, therefore, can be characterised as Einsteinian notions.

that are appropriate to me and a time, space, and evaluation that are appropriate to others'.

It is quite obvious that for Bakhtin the relation between 'individual' and 'social' does not represent a binary opposition. On the contrary, it can be argued that for him these terms are complementary to each other. In this respect, Bakhtinian thought radically differs from Cartesian tradition in which the distinction between 'individual' and 'social' is seen as an essentially binary one. Bakhtin (1979b. 311) writes:

> I become conscious of myself and become myself only by opening myself for the other, through the other and with the help of the other. Most important acts, constituting self-consciousness, are defined by the relationship to other consciousness. (translation mine)

In this view, individual necessarily presupposes social and is dependent of it, because an individual self develops and exists only through social interaction. Individual consciousness is formed in the unfinalizable *dialogue* between the self of individual and other selves, all representing different perspectives to the world. Thus, for Bakhtin, consciousness is *both* an individual *and* a social phenomenon.

Later on, when language became more central to his thinking (see especially Bakhtin 1975, 1984), Bakhtin turned to what may be called metalinguistic aspects of self formation. He examined the self in terms of inner speech and *dialogue*, which, by then, had emerged as the main concept of his philosophy. In order to understand the role of language in the formation of consciousness, it is necessary to say few words about the Bakhtinian notion of language. Bakhtin argues that the notion of language as a unified system of forms is only an abstraction resulting from isolation of language from its ideological functions and its historical becoming. For Bakhtin (1975: 101), in contrast, language represents a diversity of concrete ideological and social 'fields of vision' (krugozor). For an individual consciousness surrounded by numerous heteroglot languages, a language is a concrete opinion of the world and is located on the border of the self and other. This means that the words of a language become one's own only when an individual populates words

with his or her intentions and, at the same time, commits himself or herself to the 'field of vision' represented by the language in question. Bakhtin (1975: 108) argues that, at each moment, an individual consciousness faces the necessity to choose between different languages representing different 'fields of vision'. In an individual consciousness, these different languages and 'fields of vision' are juxtaposed and regarded with each other's eyes, in other words, they are in dialogical relationship with each other.

Dialogue, however, is not only a metalinguistic concept. Bakhtin also sees it as a metaphilosophical principle, i.e., as an overall principle governing human life in its all varieties.

> Dialogic relationships are [...] an almost universal phenomenon, permeating all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life - in general, everything that has meaning and significance. (Bakhtin 1984: 40)

> Life is by its very nature dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. (Bakhtin 1984: 293)

As these quotations show, Bakhtin views life as a dialogue between the individual self and its social environment. Consequently, he sees the individual consciousness as emerging, acquiring its form, through this dialogical interaction. According to Morson & Emerson (1990: 218) Bakhtin started to imagine 'self as a conversation, often a struggle of discrepant voices [...] speaking from different positions and invested with different degrees and kinds of *authority*'. As the above characterisation shows, Bakhtin viewed consciousness as an essentially dialogical phenomenon (see also Radzikhovskii 1985), and therefore, he kept on constantly stressing that understanding the nature of the self necessarily presupposes understanding the nature of dialogue.

One important consequence of the dialogical understanding of the self is that it led Bakhtin to reject any clearcut categories including the Freudian dichotomy between the conscious and the unconscious (cf. also Morson & Emerson 1990: 192). This does not, how-

ever, mean that we would always be conscious of what happens inside us. In Bakhtin's view, consciousness consists of or, as one could say, is created by different *heteroglot* voices, some of which are louder than others. In other words, the relation between the conscious and the unconscious is not a binary opposition but rather a continuum. We are simply more conscious of some facts than of others. This means that our minds are not necessarily rule-governed machine-like constructs as is usually assumed in the Rationalist tradition. A good example of this line of thinking is the cognitivist approach to mind in which the mind is reduced to computer-like algorithms (cf. Still & Costal 1991 for a critique of cognitivism). In Bakhtinian thought, our minds can be seen as *multivoiced* and *interactive*, which means that the simultaneous presence of messy and contradictory competing beliefs in our mind is not only allowed but seen as its normal state. It is worth noting, however, that in spite of its apparent chaoticness and indifference to the rules of classical or Aristotelian logic, Bakhtinian mind is by no means illogical. Its logic is just dialogical.

The rejection of the *conscious/unconscious* distinction provides a good example of Bakhtin's attitude towards distinct and absolute categories which play a central role in the Western scientific tradition and philosophy of science. As early as in his article 'K filosofii postupka' he attacked the tradition of (natural) sciences - called by him *theoretism* - in which science is identified with an attempt to reduce particular events to general abstract rules or laws. Bakhtin (1986) writes:

> It is a sad misunderstanding, the legacy of rationalism, that truth can only be that sort of truth that is put together out of general moments, that the truth of a proposition is precisely what is repeatable and constant in it (p. 110, quoted from Morson & Emerson 1989: 7.)

> The will is actually creatively active in act, but by no means generates a norm [...] (p. 101, translation mine.)

> But from an act, not from its theoretical transcription, can its meaning content be revealed [...] (p. 91, translation mine.)

These statements by Bakhtin, as noted by Makhlin (1992: 16), are not directed against the possibility that there exists a genuine scientific philosophy but against the Rationalistic interpretation of the concept. Bakhtin struggles towards an objective theory of cognition but, at the same time, argues that this cannot be achieved by relying on the Rationalistic presuppositions. In certain respects, this position taken by Bakhtin resembles in an interesting manner that of William James made explicit in his *Pragmatics*:

> He [i.e. pragmatist] turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad a priori reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action, and towards power. [...] It means the open air and possibilities of nature, as against dogma, artificiality and the pretence of finality in truth. (1978: 31.)

Bakhtin (1986) argues that any actual, particular, human act is irreducible to an abstract rule because of its inherent *'eventness'* (so-bytiinost'). Transhistorical (timeless) objective laws cannot explain human action, because people always act in a concrete social context, in a certain place and time. To conclude, Bakhtin who has always emphasised the 'messiness' of the world[38], prefers the models that could be characterised as essentially uncategorical, nonsystemic and interactive, and of course, dialogic.

5 Conclusion

Vygotsky, Voloshinov and Bakhtin all emphasise the inherent sociality and dialogicality of consciousness. They all argue that an individual consciousness can develop only in relationship with other consciousnesses. Although there are striking similarities in thinking of these Russian scholars, their ideas also differ in some important respects. One essential difference in their approaches is their attitude towards the notion of system. While the idea of con-

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[38] Recently, Hopper (1988, 1994) has expressed similar thoughts in which he emphasises the emergent and nonsystemic nature of language.

sciousness as a system is alien for Bakhtin, for Vygotsky and Voloshinov psyche is a system. In their view, the psyche is a system that interacts with and is inseparable from sociological and organic systems. It must, however, be emphasised that for Vygotsky and Voloshinov, a system is not a stable construct the existence of which is postulated *a priori*. For them, the system of an individual consciousness emerges through social interaction between the individual and the outer world. Furthermore, this system is flexible, and its flexibility is regarded as a precondition for its development. In contrast, Bakhtin, who emphasises the messiness of the world, avoids the notion of a system. From his view, consciousness can be described in terms of an ever-lasting dialogue between different voices, that is, as an unfinalizable and open-ended *project.*

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