Subjectivity, individuality and singularity in children: a socially constituted subject / *Subjetividade, individualidade e singularidade na criança: um sujeito que se constitui socialmente*

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ABSTRACT

Considering the hypothesis that Bakhtin and his Circle's reflections can help us think about issues involving the field of Language Acquisition, in addition to the fact that there are only a few works developed within this perspective in Brazil, in this article, we intend to discuss the notions of "subject", "subjectivity", "individuality" and "singularity", drawing on Bakhtin's theory. Thus, in order to make this discussion clearer, we bring data from the speech of young children, from 1.8 to 3 years old, who were filmed in natural contexts interacting with their parents and relatives. From these data, we could verify, among other things, that children, as individuals who constitute themselves as subjects *in* and *through* language, bring marks to their discourse, revealing their subjectivity (through lexical, morphological, syntactic or genre choices).

KEYWORDS: Language acquisition; Subjectivity; Individuality; Singularity; Bakhtin Circle

RESUMO

Partindo da hipótese de que as reflexões propostas por Bakhtin e pelo Círculo podem ajudar-nos a refletir sobre as questões que se colocam no campo da Aquisição da Linguagem, e considerando que há poucos registros no Brasil de trabalhos desenvolvidos dentro dessa perspectiva, pretendemos, neste artigo, ao pensar a constituição da criança na linguagem, no período de aquisição, discutir as noções de "sujeito", "subjetividade", "individualidade" e "singularidade". A fim de visualizar melhor essa discussão, traremos os dados de fala de crianças pequenas, entre 1;8 e 3 anos, filmadas em contextos naturais de interação com pais e familiares. Com base neles, pudemos verificar, entre outras questões, que a criança, sujeito que se constitui na e pela língua(gem), imprime em suas produções marcas que revelam sua subjetividade (seja por escolhas lexicais, morfológicas, sintáticas, de gênero etc.).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Aquisição da linguagem; Subjetividade; Individualidade; Singularidade; Círculo de Bakhtin

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Introduction

Taking into account the recurrence of the terms subject", "subjectivity", "individuality" and "singularity" in research dealing with Language – and, consequently, Language Acquisition -, in this article, we intend to reflect on these concepts, with a view to acquisition studies, drawing on Bakhtin's theory (BAKHTIN, 1986, 1990, 1993; VOLOSHINOV, 1973, 1976). Our aim is to reflect on the child's constitution of subjectivity, in other words, the subject's constitution in language during language acquisition.

It is worth mentioning that this work is the result of a theoretical reflection that we started in the GEALin[1] (NALingua/CNPq)[2] research group at the end of 2008, and, due to the task complexity and the innumerous questions which were raised, it is under constant discussion in the monthly group meetings.

We should also mention, likewise, that we know the controversies that these notions raise within the theory; in other words, we are aware that in some moments these terms seem to be used by the authors of the Bakhtin[3] Circle as synonyms, while, in others, they mean different concepts, although intrinsically linked. We are also aware of the discussions related to the authorship of the work *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*[4] (sometimes credited to Bakhtin, sometimes to Voloshinov), as well as the implications of translations over the content of the original work. Therefore, what we present here is a reading, a point of view that is the basis for the group's initial thoughts, but with the objective of being shared and/or discussed by the scholars of the Bakhtinian approach.

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[1] GEALin is composed of 11 students from UNESP/FCLAr (3 students from IC, 5 graduate students and 3 Ph.D. students). The link that connects the work in GEALin is the theoretical approach, the attempt to understand the language acquisition process based on the thoughts proposed by Bakhtin and his Circle.

[2] The group NALingua comprises 11 professors, from different institutions (UNESP, UFRGS, UFAL, USP, UNICAMP, UNIFESP, UFPE) and theoretical background (cognitive, lacanian, generative and enunciative), all with a common interest in Acquisition and studies based on the same corpus: 5 children (0-7 years old), documented since birth, periodically, in natural circumstances, with their families or at school. (E., 12/16/2006; G., 01/13/2008; S., 04/19/2008; M., 09/15/2009, and B., 10/15/2009).

[3] Although the term Bakhtin Circle has not been adopted unanimously by the theory scholars, it will be used here to refer to the thoughts proposed by Bakhtin, Voloshinov and Medvedev.

[4] In this text we refer to both authors, Bakhtin and Voloshinov, based on the edition we have adopted.

1 Subjectivity, individuality, singularity: explaining the terms

The terms subjectivity, individuality and singularity occur quite frequently in the writings of the Bakhtin Circle. This fact – constantly reminded by the scholars that abide by these texts – that the Circle authors did not restrain themselves to closed concepts and that the terms used pointed one to another, "attracting themselves without accepting the condition of exclusive identity" (BRAIT, 2010, p.9), makes it slippery to set their limits. Nevertheless, once they are adopted in our research, they certainly stand out and raise an important question: what is it that we eventually want to name when using them?

This question becomes more incisive when we have to dislocate the terms to an area which, in principle, was not exactly the one they were proposed for: Language Acquisition. In the works of Bakhtin and the other authors of the Circle, there are very few references to the acquisition period; after all, these authors' main interest was to propose reflections about the language, and not to discourse on the acquisition process of the mother tongue. Thus, besides the challenge to understand/explain the terms, another – a greater - one presents itself: to reallocate them to a "strange" place; nevertheless, it is important to mention that it is not an "inadequate" place. This is because, in spite of not dealing specifically with acquisition, we believe that the thoughts about language, proposed by Bakhtin and his Circle, can help us reflect upon the questions raised in the Acquisition field.

We have to mention that explaining children's oral production in Brazil using Bakhtin's theory is fairly recent, with a few works on this theme, such as the ones by De Lemos (1994) and Komesu (2002), in which the authors bring some of Bakhtin's thoughts to the field of oral acquisition. There are some others works that can be found, but they do not present the point of view and the notions applied in our research.

Given this, our reflections here are based upon the works of Salazar-Orvig (2010a, 2010b, 1999), researcher in the Language Acquisition field (DIAREF/ANR-09-ENFT-055[5]), and of François (1994, 2004, 2006), whose interdisciplinary schooling (Philosophy,

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[5] Project "L'acquisition en dialogue des expressions référentielles: approches multidimensionnelles", coordinated by Anne Salazar_Orvig, professor and researcher at Université Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3, in the fields of Language Acquisition and Discourse Analysis. http://www.univ-paris3.fr/salazar-orvig-anne-29869.kjsp.

Psychology and Linguistics) allowed her to establish the relationships between authors and theories related to the acquisition process, especially with the notions of Bakhtin's thoughts.

After these considerations, we will move on to the occurrences of the terms subjectivity, individuality and singularity in the Circle's texts. We emphasize that our intention is not to delimit them, as in several moments the Bakhtinian reflection leads us to understand them, as mentioned before, as synonyms[6]. Borges (2007, p.1466), for instance, makes an observation when dealing with subjectivity within the Bakhtinian theory about speech genres: what the author names as subjectivity appears, in Bakhtinian writings as individuality, and what she names as subject, Bakhtin - in the translation that she uses – designates as speaker. Nevertheless, we cannot say that this occurs homogeneously in all readings, as the excerpt below shows:

> The speaker's speech will is manifested primarily in the *choice of a particular speech genre*. This choice is determined by the specific nature of the given sphere of speech communication, semantic (thematic) considerations, the concrete situation of the speech communication, the personal composition of its participants, and so on. And when the speaker's speech plan with all its individuality and subjectivity is applied and adapted to a chosen genre, it is shaped and developed within a certain generic form (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.78).

In this excerpt, Bakhtin emphasizes the fact that each word carries a discursive intention, which, on the other hand, directs the choice of speech genre. Individuality manifests itself in the choices of the elements that comprise the utterance, which Bakhtin relates to style (BAKHTIN, 1986). These elements can be prone to expose the subject's individuality. Therefore, there are suitable genres to an individual style (specially, the literary genres) and others that comprise a general style. Nevertheless, the more knowledge the subject has of the genres engendered by more restricted social spheres, the more these genres, called secondary, will encircle the discursive intentions, and will be impregnated by subjectivity, acquiring a characteristically individual expressivity, such as, for example, the ironic intonation.

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[6] It is necessary, once more, to point out that translation can also be a factor that makes it difficult to explain each of the terms; nevertheless, this factor is not crucial for the reflection that we propose here.

> [...] But not all genres are equally conducive to reflecting the individuality of the speaker in the language of the utterance, that is, so an individual style. The most conducive genres are those of artistic literature: here the individual style enters directly into the very task of the utterance, and this is one of its main goals [...] The last favorable conditions for reflecting individuality in language obtain in speech genres that require a standard form, for example, many kinds of business documents, military commands, verbal signals in industry, and so on (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.63).

This can then lead us to think that the dialogic interaction is ruled by genres. Once again, the individuality emerges from the choices, and these only give orientation to the word in the interior of the discourse – the word surrounded by extra-linguistic elements, assumed, that contextualize it, ultimately, the word consumed with real sense, alive. There is no word said that is not articulated to a context, being somewhat immediate, and that does not carry with itself certain value (VOLOŠINOV, 1973).

When referring to the modifications of the cited discourse, Voloshinov (1973) indicates that the subject individuality can be expressed objectively or subjectively. The author names them *content-analyzing modification* and *texture-analyzing modification* and he explains the differences:

> For the first modification, the speaker's individuality is a factor only as it occupies some specific ideational position (epistemological, ethical, existential or behavioral), and beyond that position (which is transmitted in strictly referential terms) it has no existence for the reporter. There is no wherewithal here for the speaker's individuality to congeal into an image.
> The opposite is true of the second modification, in which the speaker's individuality is presented as subjective manner (individual or typological, as manner of thinking and speaking, involving the author's evaluation of that manner as well. Here the speaker's individuality congeals to the point of forming an image (VOLOŠINOV, 1973, p.132-133).

In relation to texture-analyzing modification, Voloshinov (1973, p.128) emphasizes that the subjectivity can be apprehended in the words and in the manner of speaking of the other, which, introduced specifically in the indirect construction, suffers an "estrangement", being, oftentimes, used with inverted commas. The indirect discourse modifications contemplate, the issue of the subject – one giving importance to "what" the other person says, the other revealing, yet, "how" someone says something.

Nevertheless, the two meanings of the word individuality have to be emphasized:

> To avoid misunderstandings, a rigorous distinction must always be made between the concept of the individual as natural specimen without reference to the social world (i.e., the individual as object of the biologist's knowledge and study), and the concept of individuality which has the status of an ideological-semiotic superstructure over the natural individual and which, therefore, is a social concept. These two meanings of the word "individual" (the natural specimen and the person) are commonly confused, with the result that the arguments of the most philosophers and psychologists constantly exhibit *quaternion terminorum:* now one concept is in force, now the other takes its place (VOLOŠINOV, 1973, p.34).

Voloshinov argues that consciousness, as well as ideology, is constituted by signs, called interior signs, and every sign (interior or exterior) has a social nature. This assumption makes the author refute the idea that the psyche is individual and that ideology is social – in other words, for Bakhtin, the psyche (the consciousness) is as social as ideology – all individual production is, in fact, a social product.

> Every ideological product bears the imprint of the individuality of its creator or creators, but even this imprint is just as social as are all the other properties and attributes of ideological phenomena.
> Thus every sign, even the sign of individuality, is social (VOLOŠINOV, 1973, p.34).

For the Bakhtin Circle, there is not a qualitative distinction between the interior content, (mental activity) and its exterior expression. The content to be expressed, as well as its external objectivation, are created from the same material: a semiotic expression. The author goes beyond when he says that

> [...] the location of the organizing and formative center is not within (i.e., not in the material of inner signs) but outside. It is not experience that organizes expression, but the other way around – *expression organizes experience.* Expression is what first gives experience its form and specificity of direction (VOLOŠINOV, 1973, p.85).

Thus, each utterance is determined by the real conditions of enunciation. The subjectivity manifests "itself in singular acts", that the Circle calls "event", i.e., in the

discourse integrated to a real situation, a consequence of the dialogues of the social voices which echo in the words of every subject.

It is interesting to point out that the term singularity does not appear not even once in the 2006 translation to Portuguese of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, but we can find it several times in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (BAKHTIN, 1993), translated by Carlos Alberto Faraco and Cristovão Tezza. For us, it is clear that singularity is linked to an expressed materiality, to a positioning of the subject in a determined socio-historical moment, to the discourse directly inscribed in space and time, and, thus, unrepeatable, unique.

> I occupy a place in once-occurrent Being that is unique and never-repeatable, a place that cannot be taken by anyone else and is impenetrable for anyone else. In the given once-occurrent point where I am now located, no one else has ever been located in the once-occurent time and once-occurrent space of once-occurent Being. And it is around this once-occurrent point that all once-occurrent Being is arranged in a once-occurrent and never-repeatable manner. That which can be done by me can never be done by anyone else. The uniqueness or singularity of present-on-hand Being is compelently obligatory (BAKHTIN, 1993, p.40).

Let us say then that each "singular act" – each manifestation in the form of language, of dialogue, of discourse – is marked by the speaker's subjectivity, revealing a subjects who enunciates himself/herself, who manifests himself/herself, who takes a stand when confronted to other discourses. The manifestation of subjectivity happens, then, in the singularity of the act. Nevertheless, the traces left by the speaker in his/her discourse do not reveal all that constitutes him/her while a subject – they could not do it, due to the fact that the utterance is inserted in a determined time and space, as an answer to another utterance.

However, subjectivity is not accessible unless it is materialized in language, a signic production, and, therefore, also ideological. And, yet, this materialization does not allow the expression, or the understanding of this subject as a whole. This is so because he/she cannot be understood as a finished "whole", as in the moment that he/she produces language, by interacting with other subjects who are immediately present or not, his/her subjectivity is, once more, being constituted – or, in other words, there is a mutual

constitution movement between the *self* and the *other*. Thus, this constitutive subjectivity of the subject is, by excellence, social, and is built socially, in the relationships with the other.

2 Subjectivity and alterity

The Circle's texts develop a crucial concept for this discussion: alterity. As we have already mentioned, there is a *double* movement between the *self* and the *other,* which constitute themselves mutually. Nevertheless, what the *self* observes about the *other* is its exterior image, which can be taken as an object when inserted in a certain historical moment, in a certain context (time and space). Thus, the *self* can only be seen as an object from a certain distance (exotopy): the *self,* as the self sees it, is always unfinished (it is the other that gives the self a certain completion, even if it is not exhausted, but temporary). In Bakhtin's words: "In other words, the outward image of a human being can be experienced as consummating and exhausting the *other*, but I do not experience it as consummating and exhausting *myself*" (BAKHTIN, 1990, p.39).

And yet:

> […] In this sense, one can speak of a human being's absolute need for the other's seeing, remembering, gathering, and unifying self-activity - the only self-activity capable of producing his outwardly finished personality. This outward personality could not exist, if the other did not create it: aesthetic memory is *productive* - it gives birth, for the first time, to the *outward* human being on a new plane of being (BAKHTIN, 1990, p.36).

Voloshinov still emphasizes that, in the verbal communication stream, the word exists as the word of the other, "which belongs to another person and is filled with echoes of the other's utterance" (VOLOŠINOV, 1973, p.88), or as my word; in other words, impregnated with my expressivity, marked by individuality and by the subjectivity that emerge from it. Thus, subjectivity stands out and can be perceived, for example, when quoting other people's words, as this quote, oftentimes, integrates the specificities of the choices and the manner of speaking of the subject.

An important discussion proposed by Bakhtin (1986) is the distinction between the clause – as language unit – and utterance – as real unit of verbal communication. The words

of the language in active verbal communication, in the interior of the live discourse, acquire expressivity and evaluative load. This expressivity does not belong to the word per se, because, according to Voloshinov (1973), the word is not just the purest sign, it is a neutral sign – it does not belong to anyone, it does not restrict itself to any specific ideological function, although it can fulfill any ideological function in any social sphere.

The answer to alterity, in this case, is given only in the realm of the utterance, as the clause, while language unit, can be understood from a linguistic point of view, and its role in discourse can, indeed, be minimally anticipated, but it does not evoke an answer, as it does not mean a subject who enunciates nor a subject to whom the utterance is directed.

3 The subject's immersion in the verbal communication flow and the constitution of subjectivity: when we look at children

Reflecting upon the concepts developed by the Bakhtin Circle and explained throughout this text, some important questions arise: how can we think about, then, the notion of subjectivity in a subject who is being constituted - the child? Can the construction of subjectivity (clues, traces of subjectivity in the early stages of his/her constitution) be apprehended in the child's utterances?

Drawing on a Bakhtinian perspective, it is possible to consider that children use the interlocutor's discourse to formulate his/her own discourse. In this sense, we believe, agreeing with Salazar Orvig (2010b), that children's productions are mainly anchored in a inter-subjective space shared through dialogue. Inter-subjectivity can be considered

> […] an idea that makes it impossible to think the human being outside his/her relationships with the other. Consequently, it challenges the precedence of the individual and assertions that language, before being for communication, is for elaboration. In the inter-subjectivity perspective, elaboration is only possible when mediated by communication (FARACO, 2001, p.06).

It is known that the child's language differs, in many aspects, from the one used by the adult in verbal communication. Therefore, not all the elements present in adult's

discourse will be observed in child's discourse. However, which elements – linguistic and non-linguistic – will explain the subjectivation process?

Nevertheless, according to Voloshinov (1973), the child does not acquire language, but he/she penetrates in the verbal communication stream and, immersed in it, his/her consciousness emerges.

> [...] Individuals do not receive a ready-made language at all, rather, they enter upon the stream of verbal communication; indeed, only in this stream does their consciousness first begin to operate. Only in learning a foreign language does a fully prepared consciousness – fully prepared thanks to one's native language – confront a fully prepared language which it need only accept. People do not "accept" their native language – it is in their native language that they first reach awareness (VOLOŠINOV, 1973, p.81).

As we have seen, consciousness can only be conceived in its social nature – it is filled with signs that are, quintessentially, social. Likewise, individuality can only be understood in its social nature – the other individualizes me. Subjectivity is, then, like an interior image that is constantly opaque for the other (although it is constituted by him/her), once this other can only glimpse an exterior image to which he/she gives certain finish because it is inserted in a spatial/temporal context. This exterior image, however, does not include the *self* – subjective being – in its totality. In this sense, we can say that this process (which is uninterrupted) of subjective constitution starts with consciousness awakening and it develops with it and through it.

If the psychic material is composed of signs, consciousness is then formed by language. Thus, the first linguistic experiences of the child, through interaction, provide the *start* for the subjective constitution of the subject and his/her consciousness awakening. It is also in language that this subjectivity, even if being constituted, can be apprehended. By all means, we know that we are not dealing with a constituted subject. Nevertheless, we can ask ourselves: is it possible to conceive a constituted subject, drawing on Bakhtin's theory as a starting point? Wouldn't it be, then, an exterior image of the subject as well, framed in certain space/time, and, thus, not the subject in his/her totality?

It is possible that this search for the small child's "self" (subjective), in the beginning of the language acquisition period, is hampered by the diffuse limits between

others' words and *my words,* because it is from the interaction situations with the others that the child develops linguistically speaking. Our words are grounded on the "word of the other" (BAKHTIN, 1973), and, this is how children take over the first words taught by their parents: they transform themselves dialogically to become "personal-foreign word", with the help of other words from other people, and later on, personal word. This is exactly what will be shown, in number 4, with the data that we brought to reflect on this and other questions. We also know that these "boundaries" are not necessarily clear in the production of adult subjects, and by far, less explicit in child's speech. In this sense, to search for the utterance expressivity becomes more relevant than to search for its appropriateness in a strictly linguistic sense.

4 The child's language: stage for subjective representations

As mentioned before, the terms that instigate us to pursue on our reflection become tangible and are outlined when used in our studies about language acquisition. If all discourse leaves marks that reveal the person who enunciates, it would not be different in children's productions. Either considering the linguistic material (morphological, syntactic, intonation structures, etc.), either by the extra-linguistic elements (signic and non-signic), either by the choices implied in the speech genre or topic, it is possible to rescue, in children's productions, a subject who enunciates, who positions himself/herself, who participates in a responsive/active manner of the uninterrupted stream of communication. This becomes clear, for example, in the excerpt[7] transcribed below. This is the dialogue between I., a Brazilian girl, bilingual (Portuguese as spoken in Brazil/English) with her mother (M.), English, who has lived in Brazil for 13 years.

> *Example 1*
> M: Let me see your dog. ((filming the stuffed dog))
> M: (unintelligible)
> I: Doing the batizado. ((tidying up some toys near the dog's bed))
> M: You're doing the baptism. And who is the priest?
> I: A. ((laughs))
> M: And what... are you getting the dog to do downstairs?

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[7] Excerpt taken from the Master's thesis "Language socialization and cultural aspects in a bilingual child", by Vanzo (2011).

I: Hã?
M: Are you getting something for the dog to do downstairs?
I: No. He's going to the veterinário.
M: Ah, to the vet.
I: (unintelligible)
M: Is he going to the vet or to the baptism?
I: No, I go to Portuguese. Eu vou arrumar ele no veterinário pra ele ficar limpinho pro batismo.

As the dialogue between I. and M. mixes the two languages, we provide an English translation below[8].

In this excerpt, we can see that the mother corrects the child in a subtle manner, suggesting the word *vet* instead of veterinary (the only term in Portuguese in the utterance *He's going to the veterinário.*). What specially calls our attention is I.'s last utterance. In it, the answer to an objective question made by the mother, said in English (*Is he going to the vet or to the baptism?*), is, firstly, a justification about the language choice that the girl would use in her answer.

Some clarifications that can help us compose the scenery in which these utterances were made become important here. The girl, who lives in Brazil with her parents, prefers to speak in Portuguese many times, even when she is interacting with her mother (an English native speaker). M., on the other hand, in spite of addressing her daughters in English, understands Portuguese. We believe that the reason why I. uses more Portuguese to explain certain scenes is related to her position and social reality, once the Portuguese language is used by I. in all social contexts that she belongs to. In this sense, even if I. can speak and express herself fairly well in English (as she is bilingual), the context in which she is inserted interferes in the manner she will answer.

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[8] M: Let me see your dog. ((filming the stuffed dog))
M: (unintelligible)
I: Doing the baptism. ((tidying up some toys near the dog's bed))
M: You're doing the baptism. And who is the priest?
I: A. ((laughs))
M: And what... are you getting the dog to do downstairs?
I: Hã?
M: Are you getting something for the dog to do downstairs?
I: No. He's going to the veterinary.
M: Ah, to the vet.
I: (unintelligible)
M: Is he going to the vet or to the baptism?
I: No, I go to Portuguese. I'm going to groom him at the veterinary so that he is clean for the baptism.

Bearing this in mind and with more information about the girl provided by the researcher who collected the data[9], we believe that this choice can reveal in I.'s discourse, on the one hand, her ability to communicate in both languages, and, on the other, her preference to use Portuguese to talk about this topic. In other words, the language choice reveals, in the discourse, a subject who enunciates himself/herself and, also, who takes a stand. It is, therefore, a clue, a trace of subjectivity that distinguishes I.'s discourse in her dialogue with her mother.

The next excerpt[10] brings examples of a child's subjective inscriptions in the organization of the language, in relation to the use of the plural morpheme. Here, A. (monolingual of Portuguese as spoken in Brazil, 2.2.14) plays with her mother (D.) counting the elements (ears, hands, feet) of a stuffed rabbit.

Example 2
D: no… count one…
A: one ((points to one the rabbit's ears))
D: two…
A: two… ((points to the other rabbit's ear))
D: two ears.
A: two ears. ((shows two fingers))
A: and the hand mom?
D: how many hands?
A: two… ((points to one of the rabbit's paws))
D: one…
A: one… ((points to one of the rabbit's paws))
A: t/two. ((A. points to the other rabbit's paws))
A: two.
D: two.
A: and…
A: and the foot? ((holds the rabbit by its feet))
D: one…
A: one… ((points to one of the rabbit's foot))
D: two.
A: two. ((points to the other rabbit's foot))
D: two, two feet.
A: two feet.
D: and two hands.
A: and the eyes? ((points to the rabbit's eyes))[11]

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[9] For more information about the data and recordings, refer to Vanzo (2011).
[10] Excerpt extracted from the Master's qualification report "The plural mark in a child's speech: subjectivity marks", by Hilário (2010).
[11] D: não... conta uma ...
A: uma... ((aponta para uma das orelhas do coelho))
D: duas...
A: duas... ((aponta para a outra orelha do coelho))

The format of a linguistic game, directly related to a reality which is concretely observed by the child, articulates the link of the utterances, so that A. uses the plural morpheme in her answers, also used in the mother's utterances. Nevertheless, two interesting facts can be observed: the first one is related to the distinct production of the numerals when linked to a noun in the child's utterances. This production could be unnoticed, however, when compared to the question A. formulates in the last utterance of this excerpt ("*e o(s) olhos?")(and the eyes?*), we can notice that in *"dua(s) mãos" (two hands)* and *"doi(s) pés" (two feet),* the /s/ is erased, which is similar to what happens in the syntagma *"o(s) olhos" (the eyes)*, but in this case, the morpheme {-s} is suppressed in the determiner. It is as if the numerals "duas/dois" (two) were marked by the morpheme {-s}, and this mark was dislocated to the end of the syntagma – a linguistic behavior commonly observed in the productions of small children, as found by Hilário (2010). This 'regularity', however, makes the child's production singular, unique, different when compared to the productions of the adult interlocutor.

The contact with small children's productions raises important questions: considering that the subject's "manners of sayings" are revealed in the discourse, would it be possible to think that the subjectivity is expressed by the materialization of an individuality? Considering that, according to Bakhtin (1986, p.63), the speech genres that require a pattern form are

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D: duas orelhas.
A: dua(s) orelhas. ((mostra dois dedos))
A: e a mão mãe?
D: quantas mãos?
A: dois... ((aponta para uma das mãos do coelhinho))
D: uma...
A: uma... ((aponta para um das mãos do coelho))
D: du/duas. ((A. aponta para a outra mão do coelho))
A: duas.
D: duas.
A: e...
A: e o pé? ((segura o coelhinho pelos pés))
D: um...
A: um... ((aponta para um dos pés do coelhinho))
D: dois.
A: dois. ((aponta para o outro pé do coelhinho))
D: dois, dois pés.
A: doi(s) pés.
D: e duas mãos.
A: e o(s) olhos? ((aponta para os olhos do coelhinho))

less favorable to express individuality and "[…] here one can reflect only the most superficial, almost biological aspects of individuality", can we think about degrees of expression of the subject's individuality in language?

On this subject, we refer to the data collected by Grecco (2012), analyzed in her Master's thesis. The data show how this subjectivity manifests itself in school texts – re-written and texts with a "free" theme, chosen by the researcher as *corpus*. The re-written ones, assigned by the teacher right after the reading of a book, show, frequently, changes made by the students, as we can see in the case of the book *Maria-vai-com-as-outras*[12]. One of the students, for example, chooses a tone closer to popular talk by introducing the term "jump from the bridge" in the passage in which, originally, the sheep jumps from the Corcovado. Another student writes "eat feijoada" instead of "eat shrimp", in this way, changing the end of the story. In another re-written text (*O coelhinho que não era de páscoa*[13]), one of the students explains the relationship school/work, widespread in the discourses in circulation, by adding to the rabbit's speech the statement: "Mom, I was not only playing, I was learning how to make Easter eggs with my friends". Besides, the texts employ adjectives frequently – some of which are also in the original texts – that qualify the characters (*fluffy rabbit, naughty boy, yummy vegetables*), as well as punctuation signs (oftentimes used inappropriately, as the researcher points out in relation to the use of dashes), among others. However, when the teacher asks the students to write a "free" text about the weekend, what can be observed is a list of activities done by the students. Grecco (2012) states that, contrary to the common thought, in spontaneous writing, the manifestation of a students' valorative position in language is smaller than when there is a "support" for this writing, in other words, a previous text in which the student finds support.

Many other examples can be extracted from the children's productions. Some children make it clear to the interlocutor: "I speak in my own way!"[14], which could reveal the difference that somehow the child perceives between his/her speech (or his/her manner of saying) and that of the other – even if, in reality, he/she would find it difficult to

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[12] ORTHOF, S. Maria vai com as outras. São Paulo: Editora Ática, 2002.
[13] ROCHA, R. O coelhinho que não era de páscoa. São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1994.
[14] A frequent utterance in the speech of S. (3.2 years old), who is being filmed since birth, with the objective of composing a longitudinal *corpus* to be used in future analyses.

express himself/herself like him/her. The fact is that, while the child constitutes himself/herself as subject, *in* and *through* language, slowly his/her speech – his/her utterances – dislocate themselves from the utterances of the adult interlocutor[15], and his/her productions start being marked by choices (lexical, morphological, syntactic, genre, and even, as we have seen, language spoken) that reflect a positioning in the dialogue.

Final considerations

We hope that the thoughts we have offered in this article have at least indicated the potentialities of Bakhtin's notions in relation to observing the child's speech. It was not our intent to offer the "best" definition of these concepts, even because, as stated before, the lack of a consensual translation would make this work difficult. And even after many discussions we might come to the conclusion that there are no stable concepts…

Besides, as this is an ongoing discussion within our group, we have decided to give priority to some themes, in detriment of others, so as to be able to deal with the objectives outlined. But, certainly, there are others which deserve to be studied.

Finally, contrary to the answers that are expected from a work like this one, what we were able to find, certainly, is that our initial questions generated new questions about the constitution of subjectivity in a child – and its manifestation in the early stages of acquisition. To these questions, we can add the question of identity and identity displacement, especially in the case of data collected in bilingual contexts or in situations of foreign language learning (FALASCA, 2012)[16]. Nevertheless, considering the constraints of works like these, we leave these questions pendent and invite our reader to reflect with us, in future researches, about the "old" and the new questions proposed.

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[15] De Lemos (2001) points out that the child's first productions are answers to speech fragments of adults (with whom he/she interacts).

[16] These are, as well, objects of analysis of the other researchers of the GEALin group.

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