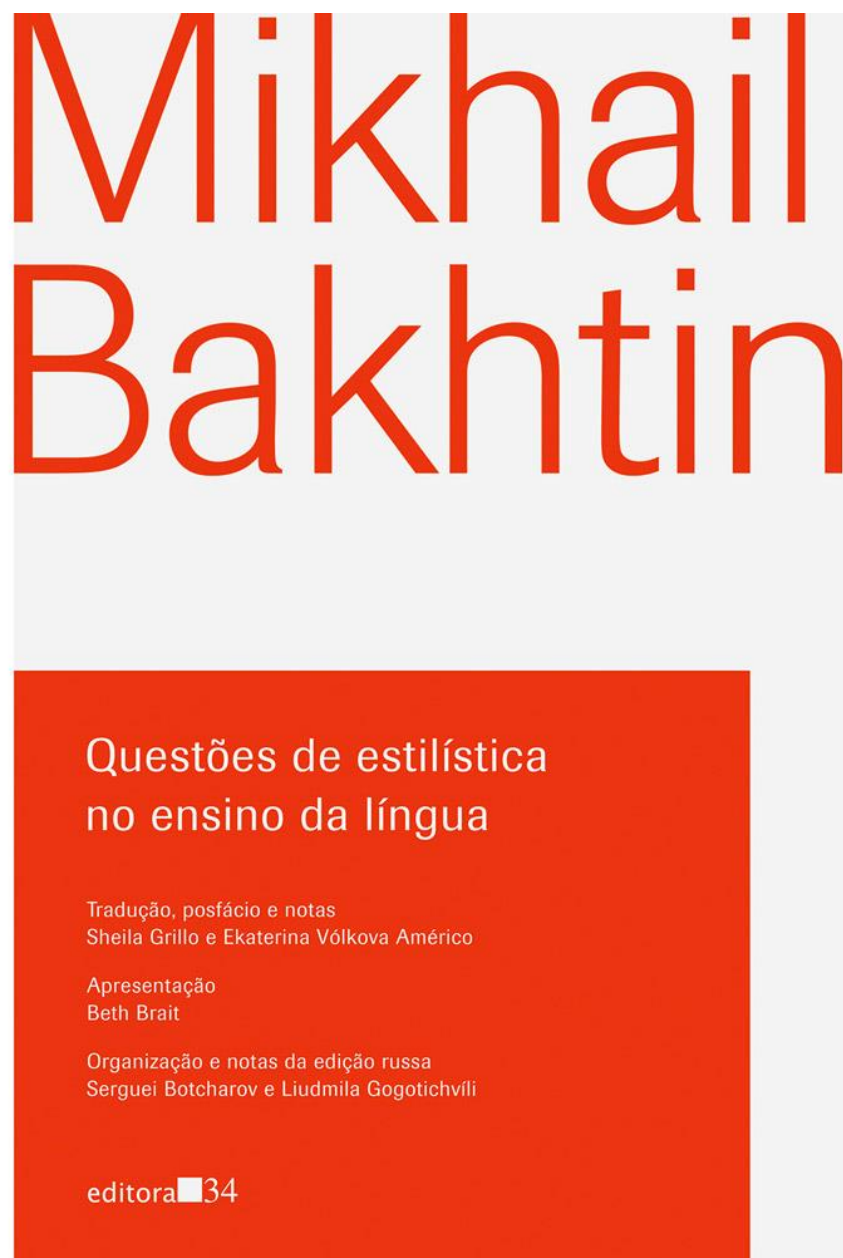


BAKHTIN, Mikhail. *Questões de estilística no ensino da língua.* [Stylistics in teaching Russian language in Secondary school] Tradução, posfácio e notas de Sheila Grillo e Ekaterina Vólkova Américo. São Paulo: Editora 34, 2013. 120 p.

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The translation of the article *Stylistics in teaching Russian language in Secondary school*, signed by Mikhail M. Bakhtin with notes by Liudmila Gogotichvíli with the assistance of Svetlana Savtchuk, constitute the core of this book. Bakhtin's text was translated from Russian by Sheilla Grillo and Ekaterina Vólkova Américo.

When the translators realized how relevant Bakhtin's work is to language studies, they decided to create the Brazilian version of the article *Stylistics in teaching Russian language in Secondary school*. Thus, they provided the academic community with another relevant work by Bakhtin, enabling readers to come to know the Russian author's less known facet, i.e., his teaching practice, which does not only include his discussion on teaching strategies or on content development, but above all his role as a professor/researcher who observes his students' performance, analyzes their production, and, based on theoretical notions, turns his daily practice into what one may name *praxis*: a creative and self-critical education in which one produces (creates) and transforms knowledge into real learning. This is the teacher one can observe in this article, which represents Bakhtin's direct intervention in two rural high schools in Russia between 1937 and 1945.

Thus, this is a text which is essential not only for Language and Linguistics researchers but also for middle school and high school teachers who are aware of a Linguistics education which goes through the same issues discussed by Bakhtin.

Some relevant issues arose from the reading of this article. The first one deals directly with the universe of meanings with which this published work provides the reader. It is possible to clearly identify the concept of dialogy, which was defended by Bakhtin and the Circle, for it is present throughout the article and in the structure of the work *per se* by means of the intertwining of Grillo's, Américo's, Faraco's, Brait's and Gogotichvíli's voices.

Another relevant aspect to point out is that this article is *sui generis* due to the fact that it is not formally organized into chapters as we normally have in books and book collections. In fact, some scholars reflect upon Bakhtin's article and offer, even in short notes, some important contributions which complement our understanding of this work. All the parts of this book – the end-flaps, the presentation, the article itself, the notes from the Russian edition and the translators' afterword – are in fine tune and

complement each other so that the reader may come to know the different nuances of the philosopher/language professor's work.

If this article, which is the core of the reflections present in every part of this book, is impressive due to the level of discussion which is very close to our contemporary world, the other texts offer different voices which open the reader's eyes and ears to understand the importance Bakhtin has given to Stylistics in language teaching.

Thus, this review, which does not follow the sequence present in the book, aims to offer some reflections that point out the quality of this work. The purpose here is to unite the voices which speak about Bakhtin's article in a kaleidoscopic image, enabling the language teacher to *experience* one possible way of teaching which creates two equally important paths for the teaching of languages: observing real changes in students' textual expressiveness and knowing (besides developing) strategies which may offer means by which students may efficiently read and write texts, having, as its starting point, the teaching of Grammar that takes the living language into account.

With that in mind, in the book's flaps, Faraco highlights that the Russian author's focus when writing this article was not on a theoretical discussion, but on the pedagogical practice of the teacher who should help students love different stylistic effects in texts according to what they convey in each text production. In his article, from a methodological articulation, Bakhtin shows how to observe meaning effects in subordinate sentences which are not connected by conjunctions and chooses (in order to follow a certain path) his dialogues with his students, as Faraco points out, which prevents him from having bookish and, therefore, impersonal conversations with his students.

In the afterword, *Bakhtin, Vinogradov and Stylistics*, the translators let the readers know not only the circumstances in which they met Serguei Gueórguevitch Botcharov in order to ask his formal permission to translate Bakhtin's article but also his prompt response after his knowing that the Russian author is a reference in official documents related to the Brazilian educational system. After that, they discuss on stylistics, showing that Bakhtin wanted to demonstrate how important it is to a language stylistics which is concerned not only with the characterization of authors and literary trends but also with a discourse stylistics. In order to do that, the translators go back to what

Vinográdov wrote on language (structure and discourse) stylistics as different language use acts. They also clarify that language stylistics focuses on “the inter-relations and interactions of great styles of a language in connection with its interactive, communicative and persuasive function” (p. 103) in order to further reflect on its discourse function, showing how important Vinográdov’s discussion on the topic is. Grillo and Américo get back to the concepts of Style and Stylistics and remind the reader that in Russia, despite the constant influence of the European Stylistics, the reflections/discussions achieve a certain level of particularity. They, thusly, give this statement some historical context in order to show its nuances and stress the importance of Bakhtin’s interlocution with Viktor Vinográdov, who, although being Bakhtin’s constant opponent, was cited in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s poetics* many times.

In the book’s presentation, *Lições de gramática do professor Mikhail M. Bakhtin (Grammar lessons from Professor Mikhail M. Bakhtin)*, Brait writes about the importance of discussing on mother language teaching and emphasizes that Bakhtin’s article points to the long lasting concern for a quality Linguistic Education, which, for the philosopher/professor, was an issue to be dealt with. Such issue, with no signs of improvement, is present in Brazil and can be noticed in the results of the broadly announced national exams. What seems to be fundamental is that the authors of the Circle were concerned with relating teaching/learning methodology practices to Grammar, reading, meaning production and authorship. Brait states that her presentation does not aim to rob the reader of the pleasure of reading an astounding and gratifying book; however, it would be possible that without her input the context of this work might lose an important voice to the understanding of what is to be stressed, that is, Bakhtin’s attention to the school context, for, if there has been a crisis in language teaching since the beginning of the 20th century, it becomes necessary to continue looking for new ways to change such situation.

This work plays such role, that is, it proposes a way through which Grammar teaching may be revisited. In this sense, in Bakhtin’s article, it is possible to find some guidelines on teaching practices, which create a teacher/student interaction, which promotes real learning based on issues related to text production supported by Stylistics.

Besides the aforementioned notes, the reader also finds the notes which were in the Russian edition, *Sobre o texto de Bakhtin (On Bakhtin’s text)*, by Liudmila

Gogotichvíli. In this part of the book, a series of very relevant comments to the understanding of this text by the professor/language philosopher is found. The discussion on the inter-relation between Grammar and Stylistics in the school context traverses theoretical aspects raised by the Circle, such as the notion of speech genres, which will help the reader achieve the Bakhtinian understanding of the relation between Grammar and Stylistics. Some authors - among whom are some European writers - who discuss this issue are mentioned in the notes. Many other topics could be pointed out here; however, for this review not to be too long, it is important to highlight that, despite the scientific/methodological changes regulating the teaching of Russian – especially related to the separation of Grammar from other aspects of language – which occurred between 1921 and 1922, Bakhtin states that such proposition were wrong, for the theoretician understood that while Grammar was able to lead students to know about language, Stylistics would lead them to its practice.

This article presents how this thinker saw language teaching and shows his great concern with what was being done in Russia. Being coherent with his dialogical concept of language, Bakhtin, in this text, supports the need for a study in which a dialogue between the formal aspects of a language and its semantic and stylistic aspects is done. That is not an easy task, for, as the author himself alerts, rarely do teachers create or know how to create such dialogue.

In order to give an example for the reader to better understand the proposal of this article, it is possible to think of grammar exercises that ask students to change an adjective clause into an adjective phrase. This type of exercise is frequently done, but students usually do not understand its purpose. That is due basically to the grammatical aspect of the exercise, which is totally dissociated from stylistics and does not offer students clear reasons for such change. According to Bakhtin's examples *The news that I heard today interested me very much* and *The news heard by me today interested me very much*, “[...] when we replace an adjectival clause with an adjectival phrase, we attenuate the verbal force of this clause and emphasize the extent to which the action expressed by the verb ‘heard’ is incidental, as well as diminishing the importance of the adjunct ‘today.’ On the other hand, when we make this substitution we have focused the sentence’s meaning and emphasis on the ‘hero’ of this sentence, that is, the word ‘news,’ at the same time producing a more succinct sentence” (BAKHTIN, 2004, p.

14).¹ In this sense, it is clear that grammatical changes may produce different meaning effects, pointing to the importance of working Grammar and Stylistics together. This is the reason why the article as a whole focuses on this perspective.

Without any doubt, one must congratulate Grillo and Américo on their initiative to translate this article and the group of researchers whose work in Brazil focuses on the so-called *Dialogic Discourse Analysis*. The importance of reading this article is reaffirmed both to researchers who are dedicated to the study of language(s) and to teachers in different educational levels, for this work brings the Linguistic Education world fundamental reflections for the conscientious teaching practice.

It is still important to point out that this review did not aim to propose a reading path of this work. Each reader should find his own way and dialogue with the professionals who were dedicated to the book's translation and creation and with the discussions presented in it.

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¹ TN. Citation according to the English version of this article, translated by Lydia Razran Stone and published in the *Journal of Russian and European Psychology*, vol. 42, no. 6, November-December 2004, pp. 12-49.