

Dialogical Views on Language Acquisition / *Olhares dialógicos sobre a aquisição da linguagem*

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The preparation of this *Bakhtiniana's* issue was marked by the sad circumstance of the death of Frédéric François (1935 – 2020), who dedicated much of his work to the study of child language and discourse. Frédéric François was one of the first linguists to understand the extent to which Bakhtinian dialogism could provide new and powerful insights on child language and on the process of language acquisition (FRANÇOIS 1990, 1993; FRANÇOIS *et al.* 1977, 1984). Since the late 1970's, his concerns shifted from the study of child syntax to the study of discourse and dialogue. In line with the dialogical perspective, he considered the individual languages (in French *les langues*)¹ as the result of the speakers' discursive experience, and not the other way around. Rather than seeking for the formal features of discourse, he focused on the central role of discursive moves: children (and adults) build on their utterance both on the basis on the other's utterances and in dialogue with them. Therefore, heterogeneity and unexpectedness of discourse events appear as more relevant than structural regularities. Moreover, he shed light on the power of dialogue that makes children (and other speakers, of course) produce discourse they could not have achieved on their own. He was also fully Bakhtinian in his epistemological standpoint, considering his own position as a dialogue with the discourses and texts he studied (FRANÇOIS, 2009). Several articles in this issue echo one or the other of those aspects of his thought,

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¹ Where English has only one term, *language*, French as other romance languages (e.g. Portuguese or Spanish) differentiate the systems, with *langue*, *língua*, *lengua*, and both the general faculty and the use of language, with *langage*, *linguagem*, *lenguaje*.

revealing the dialogical movement of the encounter of one's own word with the word of the other.

As his disciples, we had the opportunity in France and Brazil to attend to his rich and inspiring reflections. As his disciples, we are honored to disseminate, even if in a modest way, some of his dialogue with the Bakhtinian thought and his own contributions. For all these reasons, we dedicate this issue to his memory and intellectual legacy. By hosting a thematic issue dedicated to Language Acquisition, *Bakhtiniana* promotes a dialogical encounter between Bakhtin's and the Circle's theory and the field of child's language. Whereas these authors did not overtly address children's discourse, we can find some evidence of Bakhtin's reflection about the dialogical position of children in his texts:

The child receives all initial determinations of himself and of his body from his mother's lips and from the lips of those who are close to him. It is from their lips, in the emotional-volitional tones of their love, that the child hears and begins to acknowledge his own *proper name* and the names of all the features pertaining to his body and to his inner states and experiences. The words of a loving human being are the first and the most authoritative words about him; they are the words that for the first time determine his personality *from outside*, the words that come to meet his indistinct inner sensation of himself, giving it a form and a name in which, for the first time, he finds himself and becomes aware of himself as a *something* (BAKHTIN, 1990, pp.49-50; italics in the original).²

Indeed, one of the strengths of Bakhtinian dialogism is to lay the foundations of an ontology (MARKOVÁ, 2016; TODOROV, 1981). As an ontology, dialogism considers human beings (and therefore children) as defined by their relation to others.

The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a *thou* [...]) The very being of man (both external and internal) is the *deepest communion*. *To be* means *to communicate*. [...] To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself. A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary;

² BAKHTIN, M. Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity (ca. 1920-1923). In: M. BAKHTIN *Art and Answerability*. Translated by Vadim Liapunov. Austin: Texas University Press, 1990. pp.4-256.

looking inside himself, he looks *into the eyes of another* or *with the eyes of another* (BAKHTIN, 1984 p.287; italics in the original).³

This ontological positioning converges and resonates with interactionist perspectives that think children's cognitive and linguistic development within the realm of the relations to others, in social and cultural contexts (see Bruner, 1983, 1990; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Nelson, 2007; Tomasello, 1999 *inter alia*). The dialogical perspective contributes to this general framework with its focus on actual discourse, recalling what is at stake in each individual encounter. Dialogism involves an epistemological positioning which diverges from structural or formalist approaches by the recognition of the primary character of dialogue in human experience and its inclusion in society and culture, penetrating the conception of language and language use. Not only did dialogical approaches consider a language, any language, as the product of dialogic exchanges in cultural contexts in society, but also, and overall, they thought language acquisition as a cultural process which leads children from discourse (and speech genres) to words and structures.

Even though most Bakhtinian studies focus on adult's discourse, this is the reason why dialogism provides a robust basis to the study of language acquisition. Moreover, at the same time, to address the child's language, as François (2006) pointed out, is to address human language. It is a matter of looking at the genesis, where the child, in and through language, becomes a subject. Thus, "wearing Bakhtinian glasses" as we look at the child's language does not mean

[...] starting from a theory of language and then studying the way in which it is acquired and developed in the child. At least partially the reverse is true. The child enters language in different ways, and this shows us the difficulty in speaking about *the* language (FRANÇOIS, 2006, p.198; our translation; italics in the original).⁴

The dialogical positioning converges with the socio-pragmatic and interactionist perspectives, which consider the impact of the input and of the discourse directed to the

³ BAKHTIN, M. Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book. In: M. BAKHTIN, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Translated by Caryl Emerson Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1984 [1961]. pp.283-304.

⁴ In original: "[...] partir de uma teoria da linguagem para estudar em seguida a maneira pela qual ela é adquirida e se desenvolve na criança. Pelo menos parcialmente acontece o inverso. A criança entra na linguagem de maneiras diferentes, e isso nos mostra a dificuldade para se falar *da* linguagem."

child as main factors in the acquisition process. The dialogue with children starts even before their first words. Parents, cousins, researchers etc. address the child as their interlocutor, by attributing values, meanings to gestures or any enunciative manifestations that are apparently incomplete and using a particular way to speak (syntactic and semantic simplification, prosodic changes etc.). Meanwhile, the child's word is dialogically taken up by the parents, as a *word of the other* and inserted in other contexts (see Abaurre; Fiad; Mayrink-Sabinson, 1997). Whether through the language geared to the child, or through the word considered by the parents as a word of the other, children are, from the onset, immersed in various ways of being in the language and various dialogical moves and specific “ways of linking our utterances to our own discourse and to that of the others” (FRANÇOIS, 2006, p.194; our translation).⁵

This *Bakhtiniana* issue has the ambition to show the relevance of Bakhtinian theoretical contributions when considering child language and language acquisition issues. In the various papers the authors addressed several and contrasted facets of dialogism. Whether by adopting a pure dialogical approach or by bringing together related theoretical frameworks, such as interactionism, Acquisition Linguistics, constructivism, or enunciative theory, the authors contribute to draw up a rich panorama of current lines of research and to open up prospects for future research.

In the article which opens this thematic issue, Del Ré (Universidade Estadual Paulista “Júlio de Mesquita Filho” – UNESP, Faculdade de Ciências e Letras - FCLAr, Araraquara-SP, Brazil), Hilário (Grupo GEALIN/NALíngua, Universidade Estadual Paulista “Júlio de Mesquita Filho” – UNESP/FCLAr, Araraquara-SP, Brazil) and Vieira (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul – UFRGS, Instituto de Letras, Porto Alegre-RS, Brazil) provide an overview of the emergence and development of the dialogical approach of language acquisition in Brazil, and its relations with the dialogical, enunciative and interactionist frameworks developed in France. In the first place the paper resumes the guidelines from the various authors that have grounded the theoretical and methodological choices of the GEALin-FCLAr research group (Study Group on Language Acquisition, College of Letters and Sciences at UNESP, Araraquara/NALíngua-CNPq). This theoretical filiation went along with a sustained collaboration. Moreover, the authors highlight various theoretical challenges which

⁵ In original: “*maneiras particulares de encadear em si e em outrem.*”

need to be addressed when dealing with child language, such as the multidimensional implications of the context and the other in language. They also display the theoretical implications of some Bakhtinian notions (such as speech genres and the other's words) and present the methodological choices which are particularly relevant in the area. As a whole this paper illustrates the main concerns of dialogical studies of language acquisition in Brazil.

Then, from the connection between the notions of enunciation and expressive intonation proposed by the Circle, Vasconcelos (Universidade Federal de Alagoas-UFAL, Instituto de Psicologia, Maceió, Alagoas, Brazil), Vieira (Universidade Federal de Alagoas-Ufal, Instituto de Psicologia, Maceió, Alagoas, Brazil) and Scarpa (Universidade Estadual de Campinas-Unicamp, Instituto de Estudos da Linguagem, Campinas, São-Paulo, Brazil) argue that prosodic aspects in early life have a linguistic function in the dialogues between adults and babies, allowing the child to transform the word of the other into their own word. This discussion is based on the analysis of data from a Brazilian and a French child, comparing variations in the intonational curve of the utterances of adults with the babies' vocalizations. The authors were able to observe that prosodic aspects are extremely valuable resources for enunciation in early life.

The paper written by Morgenstern (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Institut du Monde Anglophone, Paris, France) addresses another facet of dialogism, that of the way other's voices shape subjectivity and its expressions. This study, which especially underscores the importance of working on natural data, addresses the acquisition of self-reference. Bakhtin's insights on dialogicality provide a complementary and relevant framework to the functional and enunciative approaches usually invoked to study the way children progressively achieve the expression of self-reference as contrasted with reference to the addressee and to entities. Through a selection of sequences drawn from a longitudinal data base of parent-child interactions, Morgenstern's study brings out the heteroglossic nature of early family dialogues, showing the strength of the Bakhtinian assumption that we assimilate language through the other's words.

Bertin and Masson (both from Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris, France) propose to examine the joint contribution of an interactionist approach, Acquisition Linguistics (LENTIN, 2009), and Bakhtinian dialogism. They focus on the acquisition of morpho-syntactic and lexical aspects of language and on the process of interaction

which support and favor language production in children. They address the dialogical features of repeats and recasts in interactions between adults and children aged between 2 and 4 years old, with typical and atypical developments and more specifically the interdiscursive phenomena observed in scaffolding exchanges. Their analysis highlights the dialogical implications for adult's discourse when being in a child's Zone of Proximal Development (VYGOTSKY, 1978), thus succeeding in bringing interactionist and dialogical approaches into dialogue.

Delamotte (Université de Rouen Normandie, Rouen, France) explores another dimension of the dialogical nature of utterances in verbal interaction, paying a double tribute to François and to Bakhtin. Relying on the difference between dialogal and dialogical, she addresses two notions, that of discursive move (FRANÇOIS, 1990, 2005) and that of responsiveness (BAKHTIN, 1986).⁶ In her analysis of dialogues involving young children, Delamotte shows various facets of the way interdiscursive and intradiscursive responsiveness – the “dialogical combat” – contribute to meaning construction.

Stemming on the Bakhtinian conceptions of voice and novel as a complex, heteroglossic genre, Veneziano (Université de Paris & CNRS, Paris, France) explores the polyphonic dimension of children's narratives. French speaking children (ages 5 to 8) were asked to tell a story first after looking at a five-picture sequence and then after a conversational intervention. In her study, Veneziano shows the great variety of voices in children's (polyphonic) narratives. Children may position themselves as narrators and give voice to the characters, through reported speech and the expression of inner states. The study also examines the evolution due to age and the impact of the conversational intervention. On the basis of her results, Veneziano establishes a dialogue between the Bakhtinian concepts and the interactional and the Piagetian concepts, thus demonstrating the richness of Bakhtinian dialogism when confronted with the domain of language acquisition.

The article written by Salazar Orvig (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris, France), De Weck (Université de Neuchâtel, Neuchâtel, Suisse) and Hassan (Université de Lille 3, Lille, France) presents some results of the DIAREF project (Acquisition of

⁶ BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of Speech Genres. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee and Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press. 1986 [1979]. pp.60-101.

Referential Expressions in dialogue: multimodal approach), which aimed at providing a dialogical account of the sensitivity of children (ages 1; 7 to 7;5) to the accessibility of referents and their position in the referential chain in both family and school environments. This approach shows how socio-discursive contexts influence the choice of referential expressions, as well as how their functions are constructed. Moreover, through this study, the authors propose a conception of the language acquisition process which is consistent with the methodological proposals by Vološinov and Bakhtin: children first experience language (and therefore units and structures) in different types of interactions, activities and discourse genres.

In the work by Calil (Universidade Federal de Alagoas – UFAL, Centro de Educação, Maceió, Alagoas, Brazil), we find another possibility of dialogue with the process of language acquisition, this time with writing. In order to understand the creative process of titles in stories invented by two eight-year-old Portuguese pupils, the author establishes a dialogue between Textual Genetics' linguistic-enunciative approach and a Bakhtinian gaze at what is dialogically, socio-historically and contextually constructed. A qualitative and microgenetic analysis showed the way in which children's ideas and linguistic elements children articulate, revealing associative networks by sound and semantic resemblance (homonymy, alliteration, meanings) in the production of titles for the story that was under construction.

Thus, the articles published in this issue provide an overview of the numerous possibilities for dialogues between the different languages and cultures that took part in this issue, opening this space for a privileged locus of dialogue between Bakhtin's Circle and the Language Acquisition field. We hope that these dialogues can spur other desires for new encounters between words –one's own and others'. Lastly, we thank *Bakhtiniana: Revista de Estudos do Discurso* for the opportunity to allow for these speeches to echo one another.

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