

Bakhtin and Linguistics: A Dialogue Settled in the Beginning of the 20's / *Bakhtin e a Linguística: um diálogo iniciado nos anos 1920*

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ABSTRACT

In several works by the Circle (Bakhtin, Vološinov, Medvedev), the reference to Saussure and/or the specificities of Linguistics, as a science of language, can be found in a dialogue, more or less controversial, between thinkers and epistemological, theoretical and methodological trends that propose different approaches to the complexity represented by human language and, consequently, to its study. In this article, the objective is to circumscribe and discuss the presence of Linguistics, as a science of language established by Saussure, in the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin. After an introduction, the text is organized into three sections, which deal with (1) Saussure's strong presence in the

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Circle's writings; (2) Bakhtin's dialogue with science in the unity of culture; (3) the dialogue with the linguistic science of the Geneva school in "PCMF"; and, finally, of inconclusive but necessary considerations. Important key moments of reflection stand out in texts signed by Bakhtin, in which Saussure (although not named, but designated by the science he established) deserves to be highlighted, as a necessary scientific-philosophical counterpoint for the constitution of another possibility of understanding and study of language: the dialogical perspective. As a result, it is expected to demonstrate that, since the 1920s, the Bakhtin/Saussure dialogue has been established to distinguish and qualify two complementary ways of understanding language and the place of science in the unity of culture.

KEYWORDS: Bakhtin; Saussure; Linguistics; Dialogue

RESUMO

Em diversas obras do Círculo (Bakhtin, Volóchinov, Medviédev), a referência a Saussure e/ou às especificidades da Linguística, enquanto ciência da língua, pode ser encontrada em diálogo, mais ou menos polêmico, entre pensadores e tendências epistemológicas, teóricas e metodológicas que propõem diferentes abordagens para a complexidade representada pela linguagem humana e, conseqüentemente, para seu estudo. Neste artigo, o objetivo é circunscrever e discutir a presença da Linguística, enquanto ciência da língua instaurada por Saussure, nos escritos de Mikhail Bakhtin. Após uma introdução, o texto se organiza em três seções, que tratam (1) de uma forte presença de Saussure nos escritos do Círculo; (2) do diálogo de Bakhtin com a ciência na unidade da cultura; (3) do diálogo com a ciência linguística da escola de Genebra em "O problema do conteúdo, do material e da forma"; e, finalmente, de considerações inconclusas, mas necessárias. Destacam-se importantes momentos-chave de reflexão em textos assinados por Bakhtin, em que Saussure (ainda que não nomeado, mas designado pela ciência por ele estabelecida) merece destaque, como contraponto científico-filosófico necessário para a constituição de outra possibilidade de compreensão e estudo da linguagem: a perspectiva dialógica. Como resultado, espera-se demonstrar que, desde os anos 1920, o diálogo Bakhtin/Saussure se estabelece, para distinguir e qualificar duas formas complementares de compreensão da linguagem e do lugar da ciência na unidade da cultura.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Bakhtin; Saussure; Linguística; Diálogo

Midway, There Was (a Very Welcome, Though) Dialogue with Saussure

It is possible to understand the significance of the word for cognition, for artistic creation [...], only after having understood its purely verbal, linguistic nature [...].

Mikhail Bakhtin

The Research Group *Linguagem, Identidade e Memória* [Language, Identity and Memoir] (PGLIM-CNPq/PUC-SP)¹ settled in the year 2000, sheltered in *Programa de Pós-Graduação* [Program of Post-Graduate Studies] – in *Linguística Aplicada e Estudos da Linguagem* [Applied Linguistics and Language Studies] – LAEL at *Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo* [Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo] - PUC-SP, gathers researchers from various Brazilian and foreign Higher Education Institutions (IES). The participants systematically articulate themselves around Bakhtinian Studies, Dialogical Discourse Analysis (DDA) and Verbal and Visual Analysis, considering ways of meaning making and identity construction in diverse areas: work, literature, arts, education, teaching, textbooks analysis and production, translation, scientific popularization, media, among others.

In 2021, part of this group set out to compare several translations of the essay “The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Literary Creation” (hereafter referred to as “PCMF”²),³ published in 1924 by Mikhail Bakhtin. The guidelines for this meticulous work arose from the specificities of the text’s reception in the Portuguese language. Notably, there is no subsequent translation of this essay after the publication of Bakhtin’s *Collected Works*⁴ in Russia, as is the case with other works by the Russian thinker. Over the past two decades, new translations and publications of various works by Bakhtin and Vološinov have emerged in Brazil. However, the only Portuguese publication of the essay “PCMF” is found in the collection “*Questões de literatura e de estética: a teoria do romance*” (hereafter *QLE*),⁵ which was first published in Brazil in 1988.⁶

Even recognizing the importance of the work carried out by the translators who contributed to the Brazilian edition of *QLE*,⁷ the mentioned subgroup within GPLIM had already encountered some challenges with the complex text. Their study led them to

¹ Herein GPLIM. See: <https://dgp.cnpq.br/dgp/espelhogrupos/23694>. Access on March 9, 2024.

² When possible, abbreviations will be adopted.

³ BAKHTIN, M. Supplement: The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art. In: *Art and Answerability. Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Translated by Kenneth Brostrom (notes by Michael Holquist, including material from the editor of the Russian edition, S. G. Bocharov). Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990. pp. 257-325.

⁴ The publication was the result of a project led by the holders of the Bakhtinian booty, which began in the 1990s and ended in 2015 (Grillo, 2009).

⁵ For equivalence in the English language, see footnote 3.

⁶ In English, the edition is from 1990.

⁷ See footnote 3.

recognize the need for comparison with editions in other languages. Thus, a project emerged to engage in dialogue across readings of the “same” text in different translations: Italian, French, Spanish, and English.

The slow work, still ongoing, is based on a comparative reading, paragraph by paragraph, of “PCMF” in those various translations, with the Portuguese translation from 1993 serving as the guiding thread. The study has already identified some inaccuracies in the Brazilian translation, including, among other examples: the choice of the term “*tamanho*” [size] (Bakhtin, 1993a, p. 19) [“form” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 264)⁸] in a passage where other languages use “form”; the use of “*ato estético*” (Bakhtin, 1993a, p. 34) [“ethical action” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 280)⁹] in a section that undoubtedly refers to the powerful concept of “ethical act”; and a likely typographical error that leads the Portuguese edition to use “*objeto estático*” (Bakhtin, 1993a, p. 50) [“aesthetic object” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 296)¹⁰] instead of the universally understood “aesthetic object.”

In this initial publication derived from collaborative work, however, the focus is not on considering a possible new annotated edition of the text in Portuguese. The slow and persistent reading of the text ended up revealing Saussure’s presence in Bakhtin’s discussions. What triggered this relevant discussion in “PCMF” was the meticulous reading of the following paragraph:

Linguistics is a science only to the extent that it masters its object, language. The language of linguistics is determined by purely linguistic thinking. A single, concrete utterance is always given in a value-and-meaning cultural context, whether it be scientific, artistic, political, etc., or in the context of a situation from everyday personal life (...) —there are no neutral utterances, nor can there be. But linguistics sees in them only a *phenomenon of language*, and it *relates them only to the unity of language*, and not at all to the unity of a concept, of practical life, of history, of the character of a person, etc. (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 292; italics in the original).¹¹

To achieve the proposed objectives, specifically to delimit and discuss the presence of Linguistics—as the science of language established by Saussure—in the

⁸ See footnote 3.

⁹ See footnote 3.

¹⁰ See footnote 3.

¹¹ See footnote 3.

writings of Mikhail Bakhtin, with a focus on the essay “PCMF,” and considering this presence in Valentin Vološinov as well, this article presents, in addition to this introduction, three more sections: 1) Saussure and Linguistics: A Strong Presence in the Writings of the Circle; 2) Bakhtin’s Dialogue with Science in Cultural Unity; 3) Dialogue with Linguistic Science from the Geneva School (Ferdinand Saussure) in the 1920s. The article also includes the section titled “Inconclusive but Necessary Considerations.”

1 Saussure and Linguistics: A Strong Presence in the Writings of the Circle

The composition of an overview of Saussure’s presence in the writings of the Circle was one of the chosen approaches by the authors in this article to establish the nature of the relationships between a dialogical perspective of language and its dialogue with Linguistics as the science of language (*parole*). Notably, they focused on the essay “PCMF” (Bakhtin, 1990 [1924]).¹² It is common knowledge that Mikhail Bakhtin and the other members of the so-called Circle positioned Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) as a privileged interlocutor. This allowed them to construct their own epistemological, theoretical, and methodological conception of language, along with new possibilities for its study—a vital philosophical-scientific issue, especially between the 1920s and 1930s. This perspective persisted even after Bakhtin’s return from exile, as evidenced in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1984 [1963]),¹³ specifically in Chapter 5, “Discourse in Dostoevsky.”

In fact, Soviet linguists discovered Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* (hereafter referred to as *CGL*)¹⁴ in its French versions from 1916 and 1922. This event was accompanied by reviews produced in two major centers: Moscow and Leningrad. Saussure’s text, *CGL*, which would only be translated into Russian in 1933, arrives during a moment of crisis in Soviet linguistics—a time of openness to transformations. It was received, according to the work of various thinkers of language

¹² See footnote 3.

¹³ BAKHTIN, M. *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. 8th printing. Translated by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

¹⁴ SAUSSURE, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. Edited and annotated by Rou Harris. London: Bloomsbury, 1983.

and linguistic ideas, including Natalia Sljusareva, Inna Ageeva, Irina Ivanova, Patrick Sériot, Ekaterina Velmezova, Valéry Kouznetsov, and others, with heated debates both in favor and against.¹⁵

Although it is impossible to pinpoint exactly when the thinkers of the Circle first read Saussure, different works from various periods reveal this potent interlocution. According to a note by Vološinov in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (hereinafter *MPL*) (1973, p. 59, note 23),¹⁶ the reading of *Course in General Linguistics* (*CGL*) predates its translation into Russian. References to the Genevan master begin to appear in works from the first half of the 1920s. These references are not sporadic or merely contentious. Saussure is taken by Vološinov, and even by Bakhtin, as one of their most important interlocutors. He joins the ranks of Russian formalists, classical stylistics, orthodox Marxism, and even psychoanalysis. Certainly, this was one of the strategies through which a new conception of language and its study emerged from this broad, controversial, yet undoubtedly productive dialogue, answering to that moment of crisis in linguistic studies.

The presence of Saussure in the works of the Circle has been explored, generally with an emphasis on Vološinov, as can be observed in some of the important studies¹⁷ produced in Brazil and abroad.

Language and Dialogue: The Linguistic Ideas from the Bakhtin Circle (2003) e “Vološinov: a Humboldtian Heart?” (2006), by Carlos Alberto Faraco; “From Saussure’s Critique by Vološinov e Jakubinsky” (2006), de Mika Lähteenmäki; “Saussure and Vološinov: a Troubled Relationship” (2008), by Sandra Cristina Porsche; “*Recherches saussuriennes en Russie*” [Saussurean Researches in Russia] (2013), by Valery Kouznetsov; “Bakhtin and Saussure: Convergencies and Divergencies” (2002), by Valdir Flores (Brait, 2016, p. 95).¹⁸

¹⁵ For more information, see Brait (2015).

¹⁶ VOLOŠINOV, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Trad. Ladislav Matejka and R. Titunik. Translator’s Preface. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973.

¹⁷ At least two articles have been published in *Bakhtiniana* that deal with the relationship between Bakhtin and Saussure. This was done under specific points of views: Batista; Henriques (2022); e Gomes (2023).

¹⁸ In Portuguese: “*Linguagem e diálogo: as ideias linguísticas do Círculo de Bakhtin* (2003) e “Voloshinov: um coração humboldtinia?” (2006), de Carlos Alberto Faraco; “Da crítica de Saussure por Voloshinov e Jakubinski” (2006), de Mika Lähteenmäki; “Saussure e Volochínov: uma relação conturbada” (2008), de Sandra Cristina Porsche; “*Recherches saussuriennes en Russie*” (2013), de Valery Kouznetsov; “Bakhtin e Saussure: convergências e divergências (2002)”, de Valdir Flores (Brait, 2016, p. 95).”

In relation to the connections established between Bakhtin and the science of language (*parole*), the object of this article, it is possible to trace back to foundational works, such as *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (hereafter referred to as *TPA*) (1993 [Early 1920s]),¹⁹ *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity* (1990 [1920-1924]),²⁰ and *The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art* (1990 [1924]),²¹ as well as in later works such as “Discourse in the Novel” (1981 [1934]),²² and pinpoint specific concepts from the Genevan master serve as necessary epistemological counterpoints to Bakhtin’s argumentation.

Specifically situating the issue in *TPA*, we highlight a central axis of this work, centered around the oppositions between *life and culture, concrete and abstract, unity and uniqueness, art and life, possible and real; universal and singular; repeatable and irrepeatable; law and event; indifferent and valued* (non-indifferent).

The gaze upon this ensemble immediately reveals the strong clash between *theoreticism, abstract thinking, and the world of abstraction*, which would encompass philosophy and science on one side, and *lived, unrepeatable existence* on the other. However, these oppositions do not occur in an exclusive binary manner. In fact, they are presented in a Bakhtinian, dialogic way. That is to say, coexisting in tension, at the thresholds, on the frontiers of philosophical and scientific thought. This becomes evident in this work and others when Bakhtin raises the question without denying the validity of abstract thinking, of abstraction. He is focused on a polemical epistemological dialogue, constitutive of his time, in a way that reconsiders Linguistics established by Saussure, the science of language (*parole*), based on the pillars of abstraction, theoreticism, without necessarily invoking the name of *Saussure* (the thinker) or specifically referring to linguistic science.

¹⁹ BAKHTIN, M. M. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Translation & notes by Vadim Liapunov. Edited by Vadim Liapunov & Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993.

²⁰ BAKHTIN, M. Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity (ca. 1920-1923). In: BAKHTIN, M. *Art and Answerability. Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Translated by Vadim Liapunov. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990. pp. 4-256.

²¹ BAKHTIN, M. Supplement: The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art. In: *Art and Answerability. Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Translated by Keneth Brostrom (notes by Michael Holquist, including material from the editor of the Russian edition, S. G. Bocharov). Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990. pp. 257-325.

²² BAKHTIN, M. M. Discourse in the Novel. In: *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. pp. 259-422

It is in this sense that Saussure and his Linguistics are evoked by Bakhtin in *TPA*: as epistemologically necessary interlocutors for constructing the outline of his moral philosophy, delineating the pillars of his dialogic architecture, and shaping the constructs that govern his aesthetic-philosophical thought. These elements are present, in various ways, throughout his subsequent works.

In the same vein, and to corroborate this hypothesis, another work will be highlighted: “Discourse in the Novel,” specifically in its section titled “Modern Stylistics and the Novel” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 260).²³ Here, while discussing the issue of heterodiscourse [pluridiscourse/plurilingualism],²⁴ the Russian thinker introduces the limitations of what he terms “traditional stylistics,” particularly the “combining of languages and styles into a higher unity” (1981, p. 263). If the discussion occurs from an epistemological perspective, as it does, *mutatis mutandis*, in *TPA*, it is in a footnote in the Brazilian edition of “*Discourse in the Novel*” that we find the explicit statement of the problem:

The reduction of the stylistic phenomenon to the individualization of the linguistic phenomenon is equally characteristic of the two major linguistic schools today: the Geneva School of Ferdinand de Saussure (Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye) and the school of Karl Vossler (Leo Spitzer, Georg Loesch, and others), despite the significant differences between these schools in their conception of the linguistic phenomenon itself and their methods of concrete stylistic analysis (Bakhtin, 2015, p. 31).²⁵

The presence of Saussure, beyond the footnote in the Brazilian edition, resides within the body of the text. For instance, in the words “[...] stylistics is transformed either

²³ See footnote 22.

²⁴ Bezerra (2015, pp. 12-13), “In Brazil, the term ‘heteroglossia’ was consagrated as the translation of the Russian word *raznoréchie* [...], which means ‘diversity of discourses’ or ‘heterodiscourse’, my translation option. The Russian term was also translated as ‘plurilingualism’, which might be more palatable to a Brazilian reader, but this term differs from the meaning Bakhtin attributed to it originally” [In Portuguese: “No Brasil consagrou-se o termo ‘heteroglossia’ como tradução da palavra russa *raznoréchie* [...], que significa ‘diversidade de discursos’ ou ‘heterodiscurso’, minha opção ao traduzir. O termo russo também foi traduzido como ‘plurilinguismo’, que é mais palatável ao leitor brasileiro, porém difere do original russo e do sentido que Bakhtin lhe atribui”].

²⁵ In Portuguese: “A redução do fenômeno estilístico à individualização do fenômeno linguístico é igualmente característica das duas maiores escolas linguísticas da atualidade: da Escola de Genebra de Ferdinand de Saussure (Charles Bally e Albert Sechehaye) e da escola de Karl Vossler (Leo Spitzer, Georg Loesch e outros), por maiores que sejam as diferenças entre essas escolas na concepção do próprio fenômeno linguístico e dos métodos de análise estilística concreta.”

into a curious kind of linguistics treating individual languages, or into a linguistics of the utterance” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 264).²⁶ The reference to linguistics of the utterance (linguistics of enunciation) is absolutely necessary for Bakhtin to argue toward a discourse stylistics—one that must encompass a sociological dimension, including the question of genres. If we seek to establish a connection with *TPA* in terms of the argumentative framework, the Russian thinker revisits the axes governed by the binomials of *life and culture, concrete and abstract*. These elements will pave the way for a notion of *style, of stylistic unity*, within a discursive, sociological-dialogic perspective.

This new *stylistic* approach, thoughtfully conceived as a theoretical and methodological framework, essentially rests on another duality: the perspective of language unity, unification, and linguistic stratification as an expression of *centripetal forces* on one side, and, on the other, plurilingualism (or heterodiscourse), the *centrifugal forces* that operate towards *decentralization*. According to Bakhtin (1981, p. 272):

Every utterance participates in the “unitary of the language” (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces). The authentic environment of an utterance, the environment in which it lives and takes shape, is dialogized heteroglossia, anonymous and social as language, but simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accented as an individual utterance.²⁷

The presence of Saussure in the work “Discourse in the Novel,” therefore, points to the need for a dialogic stylistics, a stylistics of discourse. It seems that by emphasizing the concepts of *centripetal* and *centrifugal forces* that shape language, it revisits binomials as a way to construct new knowledge about language within the tension, infusing *life* into *theory*, which necessarily exists as abstraction.

And if in “The Discourse in the Novel” Bakhtin takes the genre of the novel, literary prose, as the point to be worked on, summoning Saussure as an essential counterpoint, this will also happen in “The Problem of Speech Genres” (1986),²⁸ a study

²⁶ See footnote 22.

²⁷ See footnote 22. According to footnote 24, “heteroglossia” can be interchanged by “plurilingualism,” “pluridiscourse.”

²⁸ BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of Speech Genres. In: *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee and Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986. pp. 60-102.

dated from 1952-1953. It is the same underlying issues, here called epistemological, theoretical, methodological, gathered in the philosophical-ethical-aesthetic reflection woven in *TPA*, that seem to move Bakhtin to deepen a construct, which goes through all the thinkers of the Circle: the concept of genres of discourse and their role in the dialogic architectonics. Once again, Bakhtin chooses Saussure as an interlocutor representing *culture, theoreticism*, a linguistic perspective that was inaugural and unprecedented at that moment.

In Section I, titled “Statement of the Problem and Definition of Speech Genres” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 60),²⁹ we encounter an initial statement that reinforces the idea that the national unity of a language is not dismissed. Bakhtin invokes this unity to compose the binomial of unity/uniqueness, which governs his reflection and allows him to develop arguments in favor of the genre of discourse: “Quite understandably, the nature and forms of this use are just as diverse as the human activity. This, of course, in no way *disaffirms the national unity of language*” (emphasis added).

This being said, Bakhtin begins reflecting that “Language is realized in the form of individual concrete utterances (oral or written) by participants in the various areas of human activity” (1986, p. 60).³⁰ Viewing at making it true and defending the concept of speech genres, Bakhtin calls to the table some thinkers that, in way, treated this matter, including Saussure:

[...] everyday speech genres have been studied (mainly rejoinders in everyday dialogue), and from a general linguistic standpoint (in the school of Saussure and among his later followers – the Structuralists, the American behaviorists, and, on a completely different linguistic basis, the Vosslerians). By this line of inquiry could not lead to a correct determination of the general linguistics nature of the utterance either, since it was limited to eh specific features of everyday oral speech [...] (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 61).³¹

Therefore, it is in this initial moment when the issue of genre is raised, including the utterance, that Saussure is invoked. The final assertion in this section highlights the idea, advocated here, that the Russian thinker does not dismiss the importance of language

²⁹ See footnote 28.

³⁰ See footnote 28.

³¹ See footnote 28.

units in his proposal. It anticipates that the study of genres will further assist in examining the units of the system: “It seems to us that a study of the nature of the utterance and of speech genres is of fundamental importance for overcoming those simplistic notions about speech life, about the so-called speech flow, about communication and so forth” [...] (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 67).³²

Therefore, it is in this initial moment when the issue of genre is raised, including the statement, that Saussure is invoked. The final assertion in this section underscores the idea, advocated here, that the Russian thinker does not dismiss the importance of language units in his proposal. It anticipates that the study of genres will further assist in examining the units of the system.

In section 2, “The Utterance as a Unit of Speech Communication: The Difference between This Unit and Units of Language (Words and Sentences),” two observations can be made regarding Saussure’s presence. Firstly, when mentioning the existing courses in General Linguistics in Russia at that time, which presented highly simplified schemes regarding the speaker/listener relationship, Bakhtin asserts that this view on linguistics is found in many works “even in serious ones as Saussure’s” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 68).³³ This distinction is important to consider the significance of the Genevan master, his conception of language as a system, in Bakhtin’s reflections. Once again, Saussure serves as a qualified counterpoint, pointing toward a stylistics of discourse that includes genres.

The second observation is found in the statement: “One cannot say that these diagrams are false or that they do not correspond to certain aspects of reality. But when they are put forth as the actual whole of speech communication, they become a scientific fiction” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 68).³⁴ Here, we see reiterated the respect that Bakhtin accords to linguistic studies, with particular emphasis on those of Saussure. This highlights the scientific importance of Linguistics, contrasting, for example, Saussure’s concept of *parole*, a product of coherent thought, with the concept of *discourse*, forged within the collective conception of language by the Circle, based on the relationship between self and other.

³² See footnote 28.

³³ See footnote 28.

³⁴ See footnote 28.

The distinction between the concept of *sentence* (a unit of language) and the concept of *utterance* (a unit of discursive communication), essential for defining the concept of genre, appears to have the explicit goal of defining the utterance more precisely. This reiterates the argumentative dialogue with Linguistics and affirms the existing boundaries between these units belonging to different dimensions of language.

Bakhtin still specifically delves into language in his “Stylistics in Teaching Russian Language in Secondary School” (2004 [1945]).³⁵ In this text, which Liudmila Gogotichvíli attributes, along with other texts discussed in this section, to a “linguistic cycle” in the Bakhtinian sense, for the author identifies two presumed readers—one of whom is “a linguist, although the ‘linguistic reading’ of the article is obviously less transparent and clear”³⁶ (Gogotichvíli, 2013, p. 49). Here, too, Bakhtin raises points related to a dialogic theory of discourse for the study and teaching of the Russian language—but, according to Sheila Grillo e Ekaterina Vólkova Américo (2013, p. 94), this theory is “relevant not only for teaching Russian but also for any native language, including Portuguese.”³⁷

In the “polemical dialogue [by Bakhtin] with the existing methods of teaching native language in Russia at that time” (Brait, 2013, p. 9),³⁸ Bakhtin laments the absence, even if minimal, of recent linguistic studies. He asserts that “the trouble is that our literature in instructional methodology does not provide even a slightly systematic treatment of the stylistics of individual grammatical. *The question itself, as thus formulated, has almost never been posed in our literature and is not being posed today.*” (Bakhtin, 2004, p. 13; emphasis added).³⁹

Regarding this passage, in footnote (b) (Bakhtin, 2004, p. 13),⁴⁰ the author nominally invokes Saussure and representatives of a stylistic grammar: “Stylistic grammar (and the field on which it is based—linguistic stylistics) has been developed

³⁵ BAKHTIN, Mikhail M. Stylistics in Teaching Russian Language in Secondary School. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, vol. 42, no. 6, November–December 2004, pp. 12–49.

³⁶ In Portuguese: “ciclo linguístico”; “um linguista, embora a ‘leitura linguística’ do artigo seja obviamente menos transparente e clara.”

³⁷ In Portuguese: “é relevante não apenas para o ensino da língua russa, mas também para qualquer língua materna, inclusive para o português.”

³⁸ In Portuguese: “diálogo polêmico [de Bakhtin] com os métodos de ensino de língua materna existentes na Rússia naquele momento.”

³⁹ See footnote 35.

⁴⁰ See footnote 35.

most successfully in France. The scientific foundations of this science were laid by the school of Ferdinand de Saussure [...].” Bakhtin’s appreciative tone toward Saussurean stylistics is not insignificant, especially in a text where strong words are directed at other currents of stylistics. For instance, Chernyshev’s approach is criticized in footnote (a) as being “unsuccessful and has almost nothing to offer today’s instructors” (Bakhtin, 2004, p. 12),⁴¹ Potebnia’s analyses “although very profound, can far from always be applied to the practical questions he needs to answer” (Bakhtin, 2004, p. 13);⁴² and Barkhudarov’s textbooks and the related instructional materials he edited “do not provide any help at all to the instructor in this area.” (Bakhtin, 2004, p. 13).⁴³

In the same vein, Bakhtin’s deference to Saussurean linguistic stylistics does not absolve the presumed linguist reader from the veiled polemical dialogue with the theory of the Genevan author. So much so that Gogotishvili (2013, p. 56) emphasizes that “Bakhtin indeed problematizes the fundamental postulates of linguistics, particularly those criteria traditionally seen as the foundation for grammatical classification of linguistic phenomena.”⁴⁴ Bakhtin’s dialogic proposal for teaching native language places “grammatical stylistics [...] at the center of MMB’s theoretical concern in the field of linguistics” (Gogotishvili, 2013, p. 50),⁴⁵ thus opposing the “monologic” orientation of theoretical linguistics. Even in a domain that many might consider—still consider—sterile in terms of dialogic relations, such as normative grammar, Bakhtin asserts and reaffirms the indispensability of dialogic relationships in learning and applying linguistic knowledge

To conclude this non-exhaustive overview of the various ways in which Saussurean linguistics, as a science of language, is present in Bakhtinian reflections, a work whose first edition occurred in 1929, *Problemas da obra de Dostoiévski* [Problems of Dostoevsky’s Creative Art] (2022), and had its second edition published some years

⁴¹ See footnote 35.

⁴² See footnote 35.

⁴³ See footnote 35.

⁴⁴ In Portuguese: “Bakhtin de fato problematiza os postulados fundamentais da linguística e, em particular, aqueles critérios que tradicionalmente são vistos como fundamento da classificação gramatical dos fenômenos linguísticos.”

⁴⁵ In Portuguese: “estilística gramatical [...] no epicentro da preocupação teórica de MMB na área da linguística.”

after the publication of “The Problem of Speech Genres,”⁴⁶ that is, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1984 [1963]),⁴⁷ will be referenced here in its fourth Brazilian edition, published in 2008.

This work, a powerful example of studying a type of speech genre—in this case, the genre of polyphonic novels—presented by Bakhtin based on Dostoevsky’s entire body of work, was expanded in the 1963 edition with Chapter 5, titled “Discourse in Dostoevsky.” Here, we present the initial excerpt from that chapter, once again emphasizing Bakhtin’s perspective on Saussurean linguistics, which focuses on language as its object and its relationship with metalinguistics—a set of disciplines whose object is discourse. Bakhtin introduces this concept for the first time in this very chapter:

A few preliminary remarks on methodology.
We have entitled our chapter “Discourse in Dostoevsky,” for we have in mind discourse, that is, language in its concrete living totality, and not language as the specific object of linguistics, something arrived at through a completely legitimate and necessary abstraction from various aspects of the concrete life of the word. But precisely those aspects in the life of the word that linguistics makes abstract are, for our purposes, of primary importance. Therefore the analyses that follow are not linguistic in the strict sense of the term. They belong rather to metalinguistics, if we understand by that term the study of those aspects in the life of the word, not yet shaped into separate and specific disciplines, that exceed and completely legitimately the boundaries of linguistics. Of course, metalinguistic research cannot ignore linguistics and must make use of its results. Linguistics and metalinguistics study one and the same concrete, highly complex, and multi-faceted phenomenon, namely, the word—but they study it from various sides and various points of view. They must complement one another, but they must not be confused. In practice, the boundaries between them are very often violated (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 181).⁴⁸

This passage clarifies the theoretical-methodological perspective adopted by Bakhtin to address the object of study designated as “discourse.” It is precisely the moment when he explicitly articulates something that had been repeatedly announced since *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*⁴⁹ and throughout the other works discussed here: the distinction between the specific object of linguistics, *obtained through entirely*

⁴⁶ See footnote 28.

⁴⁷ See footnote 13.

⁴⁸ See footnote 13.

⁴⁹ See footnote 19.

legitimate abstraction, and the object of metalinguistics—*the language in its concrete entirety*. Bakhtin emphasizes that it is *the viewpoint regarding the object* that distinguishes *linguistics*, a science driven by Saussure and grounded in the paradigm of theoretical-epistemological *abstraction*, from *metalinguistics*—a science still in the process of being constructed at that time—which assumes the object *from the paradigm of concrete integrity*. This Bakhtinian stance toward the constitution of an object of study in science undoubtedly echoes Saussure’s assertion that “the object is not given in advance of the viewpoint: far from it. Rather, one might say that it is the viewpoint adopted which creates the object.” (Saussure, 2013 [1916], p. 50).⁵⁰ Moreover, it reaffirms, especially for the purposes of this work, the reflection based on the binomial—previously defined in *TPA*—*centered on culture-life, abstract-concrete*.

Na segunda seção deste artigo, veremos como se dá, especificamente, o diálogo de Bakhtin com a ciência na unidade da cultura, especialmente na década de 1920, considerando essa última em suas dimensões ética, estética e cognitiva.

2 The Dialogue between Bakhtin and Science in the Unity of Human Culture

The relationship between Bakhtinian thought and Saussurean propositions is part of a broader issue, which concerns their connection to linguistic science, especially, and science in general. Bakhtin’s way of conceiving linguistics and the role it plays in constructing the dialogical theory of language has been discussed earlier. Now, let’s consider his view on the place of science within culture and its relationship with other cultural domains, namely, the ethical and the aesthetic, based on three texts from the 1920s.

In the essay “PCMF,”⁵¹ the overarching aesthetics being constructed presupposes a relationship with science. At the outset of the essay, Bakhtin posits that to arrive at a “confident and exact self-determination, it needs to determine itself in mutual relation to other domains within the unity of human culture” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 269).⁵² However, he cautions that science cannot serve as a refuge against subjectivism arising from a

⁵⁰ See footnote 14.

⁵¹ See footnote 3.

⁵² See footnote 3.

particular aesthetic approach. As Bakhtin puts it, “just as in the past (and sometimes now as well) art study has clung for the same reasons to *psychology* and even *physiology*. But this escape is fictitious” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 273; emphasis added).⁵³

Indeed, although necessarily related within the unity of culture, the ethical, the aesthetic, and the cognitive distinguish themselves in their way of participating in culture, and Bakhtin will seek to establish these differences. About science, Bakhtin states:

Every cultural phenomenon is concretely systematic; that is, it occupies some essential position in relation to the already given reality of other cultural standpoints and thereby participates in the to-be-achieved unity of culture. But the relations of cognition, action, and artistic creation to the reality they find to be on hand differ profoundly from one another. Cognition does not accept the ethical evaluatedness and the aesthetic formedness of being, but thrusts itself away from them (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 276).⁵⁴

Throughout the text, for each aspect of the aesthetic object – content, material, and form – Bakhtin demonstrates the necessity of specifying their relationship with science and action. First and foremost, concerning content, this relationship is fundamental: “Outside the relationship to content, that is, to the world and its constituent moments, to the world as the object of cognition and ethical action, form cannot be aesthetically valid; it cannot fulfill its basic functions” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 281).⁵⁵ In other words, “the aesthetically valid form is the expression of an essential relationship to the world of cognition and action” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 281).⁵⁶ However, even though scientific knowledge carries more weight within the content of the aesthetic, it does not hold an autonomous or primary position:

Content cannot be purely cognitive, completely devoid of an ethical constituent. Even more, one can say that the ethical has essential primacy in content. Artistic form cannot realize itself in relation to pure conceptualization and pure judgment [...]. It would be utterly wrong to conceive of content as a cognitive, theoretical whole, as a thought, an idea (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 285).⁵⁷

⁵³ See footnote 3.

⁵⁴ See footnote 3.

⁵⁵ See footnote 3.

⁵⁶ See footnote 3.

⁵⁷ See footnote 3.

The absence of this primary place does not diminish the importance of cognition/knowledge, as it illuminates, as it were, “the aesthetic object from within” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 287).⁵⁸ However, “[...] what is cognitively true becomes a constituent of ethical performance or accomplishment” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 288).⁵⁹

This idea presents an equivalence with what is formulated in *TPA*, a contemporary text to “PCMF.” There, Bakhtin shows us that science and theoretical conceptual knowledge adhere to the criterion of a general or universal truth, specific to a given system of possibilities – an idea confirmed in “PCMF”: “Reality, as it enters science, casts of all its axiological garments in order to become the naked and pure reality of cognition, where only the unity of truth is sovereign.” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 277).⁶⁰ It is essential to emphasize that the relationship with values differs between science and art. Bakhtin asserts that the “aesthetic being is closer to the actual unity of Being-as-life than the theoretical world is” in *TPA* (1993, p. 18).⁶¹

In Bakhtinian thought, there is no doubt that the axiological dimension predominates and defines the place of knowledge within the aesthetic object. There is nothing that justifies relativistic interpretations. As the Russian philosopher asserts in “PCMF,” “in emphasizing the bond between the cognitive moment and the ethical, one ought to note, however, that the ethical event does not relativize the judgments that enter into it, and it is not indifferent to their *purely cognitive* depth, breadth, and truthfulness”⁶² (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 288; emphasis added).⁶³

After addressing the aspect of the content of the aesthetic object, Bakhtin turns his attention to the material aspect of the same object. At this juncture, Bakhtin’s considerations delve into the realm of literary creation, particularly poetry. Naturally, this exploration leads him to contemplate the field of linguistics, which he will discuss in more detail later. However, there are moments when he broadens his reflection to encompass other sciences, engaging in dialogue between the linguist’s work and that of

⁵⁸ See footnote 3.

⁵⁹ See footnote 3.

⁶⁰ See footnote 3.

⁶¹ See footnote 19.

⁶² See footnote 3.

⁶³ According to *PFA* (1993, p. 8 [see footnote 19]), in the excerpt in which Bakhtin believes in the necessity of being blunt about this matter.

professionals from diverse fields, including psychologists and physicists. Throughout, Bakhtin consistently weaves connections between the ethical, the aesthetic, and the cognitive aspects

[...] the aesthetic object, as the content of artistic vision and its architectonics, is a completely new ontic formation that is not of a *natural-scientific* order (nor of a *psychological* order, of course) and not of a linguistic order: it is a distinctive aesthetic existent, which arises on the boundaries of a work by way of overcoming its material-extra-aesthetic-determinateness as a thing. (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 297; emphasis added).⁶⁴

Finally, regarding the aspect of form in the aesthetic object, for Bakhtin, it is that which liberates creation from the cognitive element and ethical event. While the cognitive and ethical aspects constitute the pre-existing reality with which each aesthetic object relates, this reality is transcended and isolated in the process of creation. The artist becomes a creator of reality without being a direct participant in it. In other words, the artist does not directly engage with reality; otherwise, they would be immersed in it and unable to give it completion. As Bakhtin states: “[...] unity is created not by logical thought, but by the feeling of a valuational activity” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 312).⁶⁵ From the artist-creator’s perspective, this sentiment shapes the creative act.

All syntactic verbal connections, in order to become compositional connections that realize form in the artistic object, must be permeated by the unity of the feeling of connecting activity, which is directed toward the unity (realized through compositional components) of object-related and meaning-related connections of a cognitive or ethical character, that is, by the unity of the feeling of tension and form-giving encompassing from outside of cognitive-ethical content (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 313).⁶⁶

Bakhtin continues his reflection on the aesthetic object and concludes that “true, this is not a creation from nothing, for it presupposes the reality of cognition and action, which it only transfigures and shapes” (Bakhtin, 1990, pp. 316-7).⁶⁷ Once again, it can be

⁶⁴ See footnote 3.

⁶⁵ See footnote 3.

⁶⁶ See footnote 3.

⁶⁷ See footnote 3.

said that, much like in *TPA*, the central thesis lies in the necessary interplay among the three domains that constitute the unity of culture. Furthermore, albeit in different ways, the considerations regarding the essential relationship between the cultural domains of aesthetics, ethics, and science apply to the creator, the contemplator, and the researcher (the aesthetician or aesthetic analyst).

This conception of the unity of human culture, as we have seen in *TPA* and “PMCF,” is still evident in a text preceding *TPA*, titled “Art and Answerability” (Bakhtin, 1990, [1919], p. 1).⁶⁸ The second paragraph begins as follows: “The three domains of human culture – science, art, and life – gain unity only in the individual person who integrates them into his own unity.”⁶⁹

In any case, what is always at stake is the interplay of different spheres, leading us to consider that this is indeed Bakhtin’s major philosophical concern. Perhaps one could say that there is a guiding principle to respect when contemplating the articulation of the three cultural domains: it pertains to the notions of totality and completion. Without delving into excessive detail here, it is understood that both in science and in life, in the cognitive as well as the ethical realm, incompleteness is inherent: “there is a unitary world of science, a unitary reality of cognition, outside which nothing can become cognitively valid. This reality of cognition is not consummated and always open” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 277).⁷⁰ To treat them as totalities would be to constrain them, preventing us from fully grasping what they have to offer. Only in art, within the aesthetic object, is totality both possible and necessary: the aesthetic gesture encompasses and, in doing so, creates totalities precisely by considering and freeing itself from the cognitive and the ethical aspects.

In concluding our reflections on Bakhtin’s relationship with science, it is unfounded to interpret Bakhtin as an anti-science thinker. Such an interpretation would disregard the admirable work undertaken in “PCMF” – as well as in the other two texts

⁶⁸ BAKHTIN, M. Art and Answerability (1919). In: BAKHTIN, M. *Art and Answerability. Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Translated by Vadim Liapunov (including material from the editors of the Russian edition, S. S. Averintsev and S. G. Bocharov). Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990. pp. 1-3.

⁶⁹ See footnote 68.

⁷⁰ See footnote 3.

mentioned in this section – where Bakhtin defines the place of science within a seemingly distant universe from the domain of art.

In the next section, we will delve into reflections specifically centered around the role of language science, particularly the linguistic theories of Ferdinand Saussure's school, in shaping the method of aesthetic analysis in Bakhtin's writings from the 1920s.

3 The Dialogue with Linguistic Science of Geneva School (Ferdinand de Saussure) in "PCMF"

In the limits of this section, we are primarily interested in the contribution of General Linguistics developed by Saussure to the methodological guidance of an art science within the work of Russian formalists. Additionally, we consider the limitations that this scientific approach imposes on the relationship between a formalist-based poetics and a systematic and general aesthetic philosophy capable of scientifically comprehending the uniqueness of a work of art and other aesthetic phenomena.

In this regard, Bakhtin (1990, pp. 260-1; author's emphasis)⁷¹ asserts that:

The absence of a systematic philosophical, general aesthetic orientation, the absence of a constant, methodically thought- through regard for the other arts, for the *unity of art – as a domain of unified human culture* – leads contemporary Russian poetics to extreme simplification of its scientific task, to superficiality and incompleteness in encompassing the object under study [...].

The relationship with Saussurean linguistics, therefore, does not occur from an anti-linguistic perspective, but rather in the understanding of the boundaries of each science. This is especially relevant when, without a defined philosophical orientation, linguistic terms are taken by formalists as one of the most important foundations for their poetics. This is what Bakhtin refers to, as a working hypothesis, as *material aesthetics*:

[...] *poetics clings to linguistics*, fearing to move more than one step away (the majority of the formalists and V. M. Zhirmunsky) and sometimes striving to become simply a branch of linguistics (V. V. Vinogradov) (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 261; author's emphasis).⁷²

⁷¹ See footnote 3.

⁷² See footnote 3.

Perhaps we can consider, as a working hypothesis for this article, Bakhtin's argument (1990, p. 265)⁷³ that, based on the principles of material aesthetics, shows us that "[...]; the situation simply becomes somewhat more complex and less obviously absurd at first glance – especially, of course, when the material is constituted by the word, the object studied by a human science – linguistics."

In Bakhtin's perspective, the first task of aesthetics is to "[...] *understand the aesthetic object in its purely artistic distinctiveness and to understand its structure*, which we shall call henceforth the architectonics of the aesthetic object" (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 267; author's emphasis).⁷⁴ The aesthetic analysis of a literary work can also be carried out independently of the aesthetic object [...] "as a phenomenon of language, i.e., purely from the standpoint of linguistics, without any regard for the aesthetic object it actualizes, solely within the bounds of those scientific regularities which govern its material." (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 267).⁷⁵ This constitutes the second task of aesthetics, the only one that, according to Bakhtin, can be accomplished by material aesthetics or by the aesthetics of Russian formalists, which he describes as "[...] not yet properly the aesthetic study of the nature of a work, but the study of a work as an object of natural science or of *linguistics*." (1990, p. 268; our emphasis).⁷⁶

Bakhtin's critique to Russian formal method, but not to linguistics, refers to "[...] dissolve architectonic forms in compositional forms" (1990, p. 271).⁷⁷ To the Russian philosopher:

An extreme expression of this tendency can be seen in the Russian Formal Method, where compositional and genre forms seek to swallow up the entire aesthetic object, and where, in addition, no rigorous distinction is drawn between compositional and linguistic forms (1990, p. 271).⁷⁸

⁷³ See footnote 3.

⁷⁴ See footnote 3.

⁷⁵ See footnote 3.

⁷⁶ See footnote 3.

⁷⁷ See footnote 3.

⁷⁸ See footnote 3.

Thus, Linguistics, as a scientific discipline that masters its material — the linguistic word — appears as a “refuge” for the material aesthetics of literary art. When it ventures beyond the boundaries of linguistic science, there are implications for formalist art theory when it is subjected to the critique of the general philosophical aesthetics proposed by Bakhtin.

In the third part of the essay under our collective reflection, “The Problem of Material,” we can delve deeper into Bakhtin’s understanding of linguistics, notably Saussurean linguistics, as the science of language. It is this set of issues related to this understanding that we will now explore, comparing linguistic analysis with aesthetic analysis alongside Bakhtin, and describing the objects and principles of the former—specifically, the material as linguistic word.

According to Bakhtin, “[...] by dissolving logic and aesthetics or even just poetics in linguistics, we destroy the distinctiveness not only of the logical and the aesthetic, but, to an equal degree, that of linguistics as well” (1990, p. 292).⁷⁹ E qual é a originalidade do campo linguístico?

In a reflective reading of *CGL*,⁸⁰ Bakhtin considers that

[...] Linguistics is not indifferent, of course, to the peculiarities of scientific, artistic, or religious language, but for it these are purely linguistic peculiarities of the language itself [...]. Linguistics is a science only to the extent that it masters its object, language. The language of linguistics is determined by purely linguistic thinking (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 292).⁸¹

The understanding of the purely verbal and linguistic nature of the word, or the linguistic sign, as Saussure systematizes in *CGL*, will intersect with another concept very dear to Bakhtin and the Circle, which will be present throughout the entire body of work by Bakhtin, Vološinov, and Medvedev: the utterance.

A single, *concrete utterance* is always given in a value-and-meaning cultural context, whether it be scientific, artistic, political, etc., or in the context of a situation from everyday personal life. Each separate utterance is alive and has meaning only within these contexts: it is true

⁷⁹ See footnote 3.

⁸⁰ See footnote 14.

⁸¹ See footnote 3.

or false, beautiful or ugly, sincere or deceitful, frank, cynical, authoritative, etc. – there are no neutral utterances, nor can there be. But linguistics sees in them only a *phenomenon of language*, and it relates them only to the unity of language, and not at all to the unity of a concept, of practical life, of history, of the character of a person, etc. (1990, p. 292; emphasis added).

It is important to highlight the precise definition given to language (*parole*) by Bakhtin as object of linguistics and its system of language signs in the distinction between *langue* and *parole*:

Only in this way, by isolating and liberating the *purely verbal* constituent of the word and by creating *a new verbal unity* with its concrete subdivisions, does linguistics master methodologically its object-language *indifferent* to extralinguistic values (or, if one prefers, it creates a new, purely linguistic value to which it relates every utterance) (Bakhtin, 1990, pp. 292-3; author's emphasis).⁸²

As for Bakhtin, the scientific viewpoint, that is, as a human science,

Only in consistently freeing itself from metaphysical bias (from substantialization and real objectivization of the word), from an overinvestment in logic, from psychologism, and from aestheticism does linguistics work its way through toward its object, posit it methodologically, and thereby become for the first time a scientific discipline (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 293).⁸³

From this place, linguistics as a science, Bakhtin points to complementary paths that have not yet been developed by linguistics, whether in the field of syntax (which was not well-developed until 1924) or in the field of semantics or semiology, as seen in the *CGL* (Course in General Linguistics) in “Languages and Their Place in Human Affairs. Semiology” (Saussure, 1983, p. 57 [1916]).⁸⁴ Bakhtin observes that there is still a need for linguistics to systematically master its object more uniformly: “[...] long utterances from everyday life, dialogue, speech, treatise, novel, and so on – for these utterances as well can be and must be defined and studied in purely linguistic terms, as verbal phenomena.” (1990, p. 293).

⁸² See footnote 3.

⁸³ See footnote 3.

⁸⁴ See footnote 14.

The construction of the viewpoint in linguistic analysis continues in the argumentation regarding the study of syntax in large verbal sets (composition as part of linguistics). This distinction becomes clearer in the essay “The Problem of Speech Genres” (Bakhtin, 1986),⁸⁵ specifically between linguistic clause and utterance.:

[...] The complex sentence is the most extended phenomenon of language that has been scientifically examined by linguistics [1924]: one gets the impression that the methodically pure language of linguistics suddenly comes to an end at this point, and what begins at once is science, poetry, and so on, and yet the purely linguistic analysis can be continued further, no matter how difficult it is and how tempting it may be to introduce here points of view that are alien to linguistics. (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 193).⁸⁶

Refining his conception of linguistic science, its objects, and limits up to 1924, Bakhtin begins to formulate questions about the contribution of the linguistic object—the language—to the analysis of the aesthetic object: “What significance, then, does language conceived in a strictly linguistic sense have for the aesthetic object of poetry?” (1990, p. 294; author’s emphasis).⁸⁷ We can speculate that precisely this question contributed to Bakhtin’s antilinguistic view (as seen in various current writings), due to an understanding of the aesthetic nature of the question. In other words,

[...] the significance of the language of linguistics in its entirety as material for poetry [...]. Language for poetry, just as for cognition and for an ethical action (and its objectification in law, in the state, etc.), is merely a technical moment. (1990, p. 294; author’s emphasis).⁸⁸

Based on the premise that “*Language in its linguistic determinateness does not enter into the aesthetic object of verbal art*” (1990, p. 294; author’s emphasis),⁸⁹ Bakhtin lists how, within the domain of culture, poetry requires language in its entirety:

[...] But in placing such demands on language, poetry *nevertheless overcomes it as language, as a linguistically determinate entity*. Poetry is no exception to the general proposition concerning all the arts: *artistic*

⁸⁵ See footnote 28.

⁸⁶ See footnote 3.

⁸⁷ See footnote 3.

⁸⁸ See footnote 3.

⁸⁹ See footnote 3.

creation, determined in relation to its material, constitutes an overcoming of that material (1990, p. 294; author's emphasis).⁹⁰

The thinker believes that it is in poetry that “language reveals all of its possibilities [...]. [It] does not need the complex distinctiveness of the word's phonic dimension in its qualitative and quantitative aspects; it does not need the diversity of possible intonations; it does not need the feeling of the movement of the articulatory organs; etc.” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 294).⁹¹ This is the task of both the artist and the aesthete in their secondary work process - the analysis of the extra-aesthetic nature of the material.

The aesthetic object created through artistic contemplation, “that is, into aesthetic being as such, into the ultimate goal of creativity,” constitutes what Bakhtin refers to as “primary aesthetic contemplation” (1990a, p. 295).⁹² This technical work “is removed at the moment of artistic apprehension, just as the scaffolding is removed when a building is completed.” (1990, p. 294).⁹³ Bakhtin adds a caveat in a footnote (1999, p. 295),⁹⁴ noting that the aesthetic object does not exist prior to the production of the aesthetic work, independently of it, in any other place or form. According to him, the aesthetic object is constructed discursively and dialogically.

But it is important to avoid misunderstandings, especially among those who perceive in Bakhtin an antilanguage perspective, not understanding the technical role of linguistics in literary art:

[...] by the technical moment in art, we mean everything that is absolutely necessary for the creation of a work of art in its natural-scientific or linguistic determinateness (this includes the entire makeup of a finished work of art as a thing), but that does not enter immediately into the aesthetic object – is not a component of the artistic whole. Technical moments are factors of the artistic impression, but they are not aesthetically valid components of the content of that impression, i.e., of the aesthetic object (1990, p. 295).⁹⁵

⁹⁰ See footnote 3.

⁹¹ See footnote 3.

⁹² See footnote 3.

⁹³ See footnote 3.

⁹⁴ See footnote 3.

⁹⁵ See footnote 3.

Within the debate in which the essay is situated—a critique of Russian formalism or material aesthetics and its dependence on linguistics—Bakhtin contributes a set of relevant questions that differentiate linguistic analysis, from a scientific perspective, from linguistic science, in proposing a science of literary art:

Must we perceive or feel the word in the artistic object precisely as the word in its linguistic determinateness? Must we feel the word's morphological form precisely as morphological? - the syntactic as syntactic? - the semantic order as semantic? Must we apprehend the poetic whole in artistic contemplation as a verbal whole, and not as the consummated whole of an event, of a certain striving, of an inner tension, etc.? (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 295).⁹⁶

Non-Finalized, but Necessary Considerations

It is necessary to reiterate that this is the first outcome of collective monthly discussions and systematic studies around “PCMF,” comparing different translations, as we initially explained. However, reading Bakhtin’s 1924 essay, particularly the passage we highlighted in the first section of this article (1990, p. 292),⁹⁷ motivated us to respond to the thematic call of *Bakhtiniana*, inviting authors to reflect on possible dialogues between Bakhtin and Saussure (Émile Benveniste, also mentioned in the call, falls beyond the scope of this text).

An article that engages in dialogue with the discussions of various people researching the works of the Russian master could not, without betraying itself, confine the discussions to a single work by Bakhtin. In fact, the stumbling block that made us aware of Saussure’s presence in “PCMF”⁹⁸ invited us to bring other works into the debate. The dialogue with linguistics is evident in several of the mentioned works and is implicit in Bakhtin’s discussions on general aesthetics and science as a whole, both in the cited texts and throughout his body of work.

⁹⁶ See footnote 3.

⁹⁷ See footnote 3

⁹⁸ See footnote 3.

Therefore, we revisit other texts from the 1920s: “Art and Answerability” [1919]⁹⁹ and *TPA* [early 1920s];¹⁰⁰ from the 1930s, “Discourse in the Novel”;¹⁰¹ and more recent texts, “The Problem of Speech Genres” [1952-1953]¹⁰² and *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* [1963].¹⁰³ Next, in an effort to deepen our understanding of Mikhail Bakhtin’s relationship with the science of language, we turn to how the Russian philosopher conceives of science alongside art and life, within the unity of human culture (in section 2). It is in the third section that we revisit “PCMF,”¹⁰⁴ addressing more explicitly Bakhtin’s dialogue with the linguistic science of the Geneva school in that text.

And so, we can observe that the stance of Bakhtin’s early texts remains consistent and is reiterated throughout the *entirety of the Russian philosopher’s work*: literary creation, the primary focus of the essay, is seen not only as a verbal whole composed of morphological, syntactic, and semantic units—the object of linguistics—but more than that, *as the complete ensemble of any event, any aspiration, any inner tension, etc.* It is viewed as “discourse,” as he will later describe in *PDP*;¹⁰⁵ discourse that bridges linguistics—not discarded and also important for analyzing concrete utterances—with what he terms metalinguistics. Ultimately, according to him, both complement each other without merging.

With this initial article, we aim to contribute counterarguments to the debate surrounding a position that insists on viewing Bakhtin as antilanguage, as anti-Saussurean. *Linguistics* and *metalinguistics* [the dialogic analysis/theory of discourse], along with the concepts encompassed by the tension between binomials such as *unity and uniqueness, abstract and concrete, linguistic units and discursive units*, can, as projected in *TPA*,¹⁰⁶ confer an *inclusive* and non-exclusionary *status* for linguistics and one of its most important proponents: Ferdinand de Saussure. This alignment perfectly resonates with an aesthetic-philosophical thought guided by *dialogism*.

⁹⁹ See footnote 68.

¹⁰⁰ See footnote 19.

¹⁰¹ See footnote 22.

¹⁰² See footnote 28.

¹⁰³ See footnote 13.

¹⁰⁴ See footnote 3.

¹⁰⁵ See footnote 13.

¹⁰⁶ See footnote 19.

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Statement of Author’s Contribution

The conception and design of the article were led by Beth Brait. Contributions to the delimitation, analysis, interpretation of the corpus, and writing were made by Beth Brait, Geraldo Tadeu Souza, Marília Amorim, Adrina Pucci Penteadó de Faria e Silva, Carlos Gontijo Rosa, and Maria Helena Cruz Pistori. Critical review and formatting were conducted by Maria Helena Cruz Pistori and Adriana Pucci Penteadó de Faria e Silva. Specific reviews were made by Letícia Jovelina Storto. All authors have read and approved the final version of the text and are responsible for all aspects of the work, including Paulo Rogério Stella, who translated it into English.

Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.

Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana*. Revista de Estudos do Discurso [*Bakhtiniana*. Journal of Discourse Studies] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

Review I

I am in favor of publishing the article. The title corresponds to the content of the text. The objective is explicitly stated and consistently developed throughout the article. The bibliography is entirely relevant, up-to-date, and well utilized to support the text. Although the Bakhtin/Saussure relationship is a recurring theme in Bakhtinian studies, the article offers an interesting approach by focusing the discussion on what is found in “Problems of Content, Material, and Form”¹⁰⁷ (an article that awaits a new translation into Portuguese to correct the numerous flaws in the initial translation, a topic addressed by the authors of the analyzed text). Therefore, it contributes to the field. Lastly, the text is clear, well-organized, and written in appropriate language. ACCEPTED

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¹⁰⁷ See footnote 3.

Review II

The text under examination, in its general lines, is correct (the title is appropriate, the linguistic formulation is accurate, the parts are technically well-defined—Abstract, Introduction, arguments, conclusions (inconclusive but necessary)—and the bibliography is very well presented). From a general perspective, the text meets all the requirements for publication in a scientific journal. That said, it is worth commenting on the originality of the developed reflection and its contribution to the field of knowledge to which it subscribes. In this regard, it should be noted that the article presents a solid and original line of reasoning. I would even say that its considerations have broad heuristic value, which may have implications not only for understanding the epistemological relationships between other authors but also between Bakhtin and Saussure—the central theme of the evaluated article. Allow me to explain: the thesis that Saussure is an epistemological interlocutor necessary for Bakhtin to construct his theorization is brilliant and deserves to be disseminated. This thesis becomes evident in passages such as “Saussure and his Linguistics are evoked by Bakhtin in *TPA*:¹⁰⁸ as epistemologically necessary interlocutors for constructing the outline of his moral philosophy, delineating the pillars of his dialogic architecture, and shaping the constructs that govern his aesthetic-philosophical thought. These elements are present, in various ways, throughout his subsequent works” (p. 7). It is also evident in passages like “The presence of Saussure in the work “Discourse in the Novel,”¹⁰⁹ therefore, points to the need for a dialogic stylistics, a stylistics of discourse. It seems that by emphasizing the concepts of *centripetal* and *centrifugal forces* that shape language, it revisits binomials as a way to construct new knowledge about language within the tension, infusing *life* into *theory*, which necessarily exists as abstraction” (p. 8). In this sense, I see that the idea of “necessary epistemological interlocution,” in an excellent shift toward the field of the science of Bakhtin’s dialogic reflections, can serve as an instrument for epistemological analysis among other thinkers (a contribution of the text to the field of knowledge to which it subscribes). In this direction, if there is a recommendation to further qualify the reasoning presented in the article, it would be to emphasize—perhaps in the abstract—this idea, a true tool for epistemological reading derived from Bakhtin’s conception of language. It is true that in the abstract, we read: “Saussure (although not named, but designated by the science he established) deserves attention as a necessary scientific-philosophical counterpoint for the constitution of another possibility of understanding and studying language: the dialogic perspective.” However, it is not explicitly stated there that this “counterpoint” is a major category of epistemological analysis developed based on Bakhtin’s theory. I suggest highlighting this. I am in favor of publishing the text. ACCEPTED

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¹⁰⁸ See footnote 19.

¹⁰⁹ See footnote 3.