Vološinov and Expressive Intonation: Between Tragedy and Triumph /
Valentin N. Volóchinov e a entonação expressiva: entre a tragédia e a glória

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ABSTRACT
This work thematizes the thought of Valentin N. Vološinov regarding the evaluative nature of language, with emphasis on the concept of *expressive intonation*. In the first section, the text briefly recovers the status of expressiveness in Vološinov's time; in the second section, this text presents an exposition of the author's main considerations, alongside notes from Medvedev and Bakhtin; in the third section, the present text highlights the implications of expressive intonation, especially considering written practices. This work argues that if, on the one hand, expressive intonation seems to indicate the lake of fixed parameters for validating an interpretation—which could be seen as a *methodological tragedy*, as it undermines positivist predictability—, on the other hand, expressive intonation seems to indicate the impossibility of limiting the heterogeneity of interpretations—which proves to be an *epistemological triumph*, as it protects the discursive act from any positivist attack.
KEYWORDS: Vološinov; Utterance; Social Evaluation; Expressive Intonation

RESUMO
Este trabalho tematiza o pensamento de Valentin N. Volóchinov a respeito do caráter valorativo da linguagem, com destaque para o conceito de entonação expressiva. *Na primeira seção, o texto recupera, brevemente, o estatuto da expressividade nos tempos de Volóchinov; na segunda, empreende uma exposição das principais ponderações do autor, ao lado dos apontamentos de Medviédev e de Bakhtin; na terceira, evidencia as implicações da entonação expressiva, tendo em vista, especialmente, as práticas escritas. Este trabalho defende que se, por um lado, a entonação expressiva parece indicar a inexistência de parâmetros fixos para a validação de uma interpretação – o que poderia ser visto como uma* tragédia metodológica, *por comprometer a previsibilidade positivista –, por outro lado, a entonação expressiva parece indicar a impossibilidade de se tolher a heterogeneidade das interpretações – o que se revela uma* glória epistemológica, *por colocar o trabalho com o ato discursivo ao abrigo de toda investida positivista.*
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Volóchinov; Enunciado; Avaliação social; Entonação expressiva

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The rigor and exactness of the natural sciences are impossible within the domain of ideological study due to the very nature of what it studies.
Valentin N. Vološinov

Preliminary Considerations[1]

In my work *Valentin Volóchinov:* a vindicação do axiológico [*Valentin Volóchinov:* the vindication of the axiological], I put forward my understanding that, in the thought of the Russian linguist Valentin N. Vološinov (1895–1936), there is a vindication of the axiological—that is, an assertion that the evaluative nature must hold a central place in the comprehension of language and its functioning (Gomes, 2023b). Subsequently, in another study, aiming to integrate theoretical reflection with analysis, I sought to clarify what Vološinov (1973, p. 95)[2] defines as "the methodologically based order of study of language," as well as to "explore the prominent status he assigns to expressive intonation, which he regards as the fullest realization of social evaluation" (Gomes, 2024, p. 2).[3]

Building on these two previous works, I now revisit Vološinov's reflections on the evaluative nature of language, with particular emphasis on the concept encapsulated in the term "expressive intonation." Through a concise reconsideration of the status of expressivity in Vološinov's time and a brief presentation of his key insights, I aim to highlight some of the implications of expressive intonation. More specifically, I argue that, on the one hand, expressive intonation appears to signify the absence of fixed parameters for validating an interpretation. This fact could be perceived as a

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[2] VOLOŠINOV, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Translated by L. Matejka and I. R. Titunik. New York: Seminar Press, 1973.
[3] In Portuguese: "explorar o lugar de destaque que o autor confere à entonação expressiva, assumida como a mais plena realização da avaliação social."

methodological tragedy, as it disrupts the predictability sought by positivism. On the other hand, expressive intonation suggests the impossibility of suppressing the heterogeneity of interpretations—a perspective which, from my point of view, constitutes an *epistemological triumph*, as it safeguards the study of the discursive act, whose product is the utterance, from any positivist attack.

1 Expressive Function of Language and Evaluative Nature: Vološinov at the Universal Symposium

Between 1927 and 1928, Vološinov drafted several guiding principles for his *magnum opus*, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (hereinafter *MPL*), first published in 1929. In this preliminary outline, the Russian scholar recorded an observation that, for this discussion, must be revisited in full:

> At the present time linguistics has adopted a distinction between the *functions of language*; these functions are usually numbered at five (some linguists identify more functions, some fewer): the *communicative* function, the *expressive*, the *nominative*, the *aesthetic* and the *cognitive* (language as the becoming of thought). This idea of the functions of language needs to be thoroughly reworked on a new methodological basis. It is methodologically quite unacceptable to place the *communicative function* of language *alongside* its other functions (expressive, nominative etc.) The communicative function is not one of the functions of the language at all, but expresses its very *essence*: *where there is language there is communication*. All functions of language develop on the basis of communication, are merely nuances of it. There is no expression of emotions or affects outside their *communication*: to *express* oneself in the word means to *communicate* oneself. Furthermore, appellation (nomination) does not exist outside communication. Nor is there any becoming of thought outside of communication and discursive interaction. Thought becomes, is differentiated, is made more precise, is enriched only in the process of the becoming, differentiation and expansion of intercourse. Every concrete utterance (communicative in its essence) ordinarily fulfils several functions, and we may speak only of the dominance of one of them. Moreover, the ideia of the functions of the utterance must be elaborated concretely and in detail in close in connection with the particularities of the utterance's social situations (Vološinov, 2004, pp. 248-249).[4]

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[4] VOLOSHINOV, V. N. Archival Materials. [1927-1928]. *In*: BRANDIST, C.; SHEPHERD, D.; TIHANOV, G. (Eds.). *The Bakhtin Circle*: In the Master's Absence. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004. pp. 223-250.

In my view, the passage above remains highly significant despite its curious absence from the final text of *MPL*. Among the various reasons underscoring its importance, one particularly stands out: Vološinov's explicit reference to an expressive function of language.[5]

Indeed, in the texts that the Russian linguist published, the term "expressive function of language" does not appear frequently. This omission is undoubtedly connected to the fact that, in Vološinov's time, this terminology was predominantly associated with perspectives that, in addressing expressiveness as a dimension of language concerned with the speaker's positioning, tended to emphasize its individual aspects. In this regard, it is worth recalling Vološinov's reflections in the essay "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art: Concerning Sociological Poetics" (hereinafter *DLDA*), initially published in 1926:

> A point that must constantly be kept in mind (something that psychological aesthetics often forgets to do) is this: *Intonation and gesture are active and objective by tendency.* They not only express the passive mental state of the speaker but also always have embedded in them a living, forceful relation with the external world and with the social milieu—enemies, friends, allies. When a person intones and gesticulates, he assumes an active social position with respect to certain specific values, and this position is conditioned by the very bases of his social being. It is precisely this objective and sociological, and not subjective and psychological, aspect of intonation and gesture that should interest theorists of the various relevant arts, inasmuch as it is here that reside forces in the arts that are responsible for aesthetic creativity and that devise and organize artistic form (Vološinov, 1976, p. 104).[6]

As observed, while psychologizing perspectives tended to emphasize the individual dimension of expressiveness, Vološinov sought to carve out space for a more sociological orientation. Hence, his choice of terminology—"social value," "social

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[5] Beyond this, several additional aspects reinforce the relevance of this excerpt: (i) it demonstrates that discussions on the functions of language were already underway in Vološinov's time; (ii) it highlights, as noted in Gomes (2023b, p. 16 and 88), that from a methodological standpoint, the process of axiologization fundamentally depends on discursive interaction.

[6] VOLOŠINOV, V. N. Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art: Concerning Sociological Poetics. (Appendix I). *In*: VOLOŠINOV, V. N. *Freudianism*. Translated by I. R. Titunik. Edited in collaboration with N. H. Bruss. New York: Academic Press, 1976. pp. 93-116.

accents," "live social accents" among other terms (see Vološinov, 1973; 1976)[7]—underscores that even expressiveness must be explained in social terms.

Regardless, what remains evident is that, whether framed through an individualizing or sociologizing lens, the central concern was expressiveness. In this regard, as inferred from the aforementioned excerpt from *DLDA*, it becomes clear that Vološinov was not initiating something unprecedented. Instead, he was participating in a universal symposium.

Within this universal symposium, one pivotal figure was the philosopher Wilhelm Windelband (1848-1915), widely acknowledged as the father of the Baden Neo-Kantian school. In his lecture "Was ist Philosophie?" ["What is Philosophy?"], delivered in 1882—later published in the first volume of the collection: *Präludien:* Aufsätze und Reden zur Philosophie und ihrer Geschichte [*Preludes:* Essays and Discourses on Philosophy and Its History]—Windelband introduces a distinction between *judgment* [*Urteil*] and *appreciation* [Beurteilung]. As the philosopher writes,

> All sentences in which we express our insights differ, despite their apparent grammatical equality, into two precisely distinguishable classes: *judgments* and *evaluations. In the former, the connection between two contents of representation is expressed; in the latter, a relationship of the evaluating consciousness to the presented object is articulated.* There is a fundamental difference between the two sentences: ‚this thing is white' and ‚this thing is good,' although the grammatical form of these two sentences is exactly the same. In both cases, a subject is — according to the grammatical form — attributed a predicate: but this predicate is, in one case — as a judgment predicate — a self-contained determination drawn from the content of what is objectively presented; in the other case — as an evaluation predicate — it is a relationship that indicates a purpose-oriented consciousness (Windelband, 2021, p. 33; emphasis added).[8]

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[7] For reference, see footnote 3 and 7.

[8] In the original: "Alle Sätze, in denen wir unsere Einsichten zum Ausdruck bringen, unterscheiden sich trotz der scheinbaren grammatischen Gleichheit in zwei genau voneinander zu sondernde Klassen: die *Urteile* und die *Beurteilungen. In den ersteren wird die Zusammengehörigkeit zweier Vorstellungsinhalte, in den letzteren wird ein Verhältnis des beurteilenden Bewusstseins zu dem vorgestellten Gegenstande ausgesprochen.* Es ist ein fundamentaler Unterschied zwischen den beiden Sätzen: 'dieses Ding ist weiß' und 'dieses Ding ist gut', obwohl die grammatische Form dieser beiden Sätze ganz dieselbe ist. Einem Subjekte wird — der grammatischen Form nach — in beiden Fällen ein Prädikat zugesprochen: aber dies Prädikat ist in dem einen Falle — als Urteilsprädikat — eine in sich fertige, dem Inhalt des objektiv Vorgestellten entnommene Bestimmung; es ist im anderen Falle — als Beurteilungsprädikat — eine auf ein zwecksetzendes Bewusstsein hinweisende Beziehung."

In other words, Windelband conceives of two categories of utterances: those *representing the world* and those that *evaluate the represented world*. Here, rather than delving further into the reflections of the Baden philosopher, what is most relevant is recognizing how his ideas call to mind the words of Vološinov (1973, p. 10): "a sign does not simply exist as a part of a reality—it reflects and refracts another reality. Therefore, it may distort that reality or be true to it, or may perceive it from a special point of view, and so forth."[9]

From an even broader perspective, it is worth recalling Gottlob Frege's (1848-1925) reflections in his seminal 1892 work, "On Sense and Reference," which also brings expressiveness back into focus. There, in a passage of singular importance, the German mathematician and philosopher asserts:

> We can now recognize three levels of difference between words, expressions, or whole sentences. The difference may concern at most the ideas, or the sense but not the reference, or, finally, the reference as well. With respect to the first level, it is to be noted that, on account of the uncertain connexion of ideas with words, a difference may hold for one person, which another does not find. The difference between a translation and the original text should properly not overstep the first level. To the possible differences here belong also the *colouring* and *shading* which poetic eloquence seeks to give to the sense. Such *colouring* and *shading* are not objective, and must be evoked by each hearer or reader according to the hints of the poet or the speaker (Frege, 1993, p. 27; emphasis added).[10]

This passage from "On Sense and Reference" is followed by several other instances where the German scholar elaborates on the subject (see, e.g., Frege, 2002 [1918–1919], pp. 17-19). More importantly, however, this excerpt strongly evokes the notion of the "emotional-volitional tone" as discussed by Mikhail M. Bakhtin in the manuscript *Toward a Philosophy of the Act,* as well as "expressive intonation," a concept that Vološinov had been developing at least since *DLDA*.

Beyond Windelband and Frege—who, as far as we know, were never cited by Vološinov—the discussion on expressiveness emerged in the works of numerous other scholars. Notably, we can refer to thinkers explicitly mentioned by Vološinov, such as

the Dutch linguist Jac. van Ginneken (1877–1945), author of *Principes de linguistique psychologique:* essai de synthèse [*Principles of Psychological Linguistics:* An Essay on Synthesis, 1907]; the Austro-Swiss philosopher Anton Marty (1847–1914), author of *Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der allgemeinen Grammatik und Sprachphilosophie* [*Investigations on the Foundations of General Grammar and the Philosophy of Language*, 1908]; and the Swiss linguist Charles Bally (1865–1947), author of *Traité de stylistique française* [*Treatise on French Stylistics*, 1909] and *Le langage et la vie* [*Language and Life*, 1913]. Admittedly, the terminology was not always consistent.[11] However, when examined closely, the various terms used across these works invariably indicate that, insofar as human beings are evaluative creatures, speakers tend to mobilize language—or, in more direct terms, *to express through language*—a range of emotions, feelings, and attitudes, whether concerning themselves, their utterances, their interlocutors, or the world at large.

As previously outlined in Vološinov's published works, this expressive function is closely linked to the concept designated by the term "social evaluation," which can be understood as the inter-individually constructed attribution of evaluative weight to events, phenomena, and objects in the world. In this regard, in addition to the remarks found in *DLDA* (1926) and *Freudianism:* A Marxist Critique (1927) (see Gomes, 2023a; 2023b), Vološinov explicitly develops his perspective throughout *MPL*, with particular emphasis on the fourth and final chapter of the second part, titled "Theme and Meaning in Language." There, the Russian scholar argues that there is no utterance without social evaluation and contends that attempting to approach the meaning of an utterance without acknowledging that it also entails evaluation is equivalent to ontologizing meaning—that is, stripping it of its inherent historicity (see Vološinov, 1973, p. 105ff).[12]

As discussed in Gomes (2023b), for Vološinov, social evaluation is critical because it enables the socialization of language's creative dimension, which had previously been approached in an idealistic manner by Wilhelm von Humboldt—who theorized about the "inner form of language"—and by Karl Vossler—who spoke of "linguistic taste." Moreover, one of the recurring and central themes in Vološinov's

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[11]The challenges surrounding terminology are so significant that even within a single work, or within the thought of a specific author, terminological and conceptual ambiguities frequently arise (see, e.g., Curea, 2008).

[12] For reference, see footnote 3.

reflections on social evaluation is his assertion that the fullest expression of social evaluation is expressive intonation. It is on this matter that I proceed to make some comments.

2 The Issue of Expressive Intonation

One does not need to be a linguist to recognize that, when we speak orally, we imbue our utterance with a specific *prosodic outline*—which, without delving into technical terminology, we might also refer to as a "melodic curve." Undoubtedly, the most widely recognized examples—albeit somewhat reductive concerning the complexity of linguistic phenomena—are the rising intonation in interrogative statements and the falling intonation in declarative statements. Regardless, the prosodic outline is essential. After all, it is one of the mechanisms we employ to establish the *structural framing of our utterance*—whether we are producing an *assertive utterance* (e.g., an affirmation, a negation), an *imperative utterance* (e.g., a command, a request, a plea), an *interrogative utterance* (e.g., a question), or an *exclamatory utterance* (e.g., a greeting, an expression of deference, an insult).[13]

In *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship:* A Critical Introduction to a Sociological Poetics (1928), the Russian scholar Pavel N. Medvedev—a close associate of Vološinov—seems to treat prosodic outline as *syntactic intonation*, which he distinguishes from *expressive intonation*. For Medvedev, syntactic intonation is more stable than expressive intonation, which he regards as non-obligatory in an utterance. In his own words:

> As distinct from the more stable syntactic intonation, expressive intonation, which colors every word of the utterance, reflects its historical uniqueness. Expression is not determined by the logical scheme of meaning, but by its individual fullness and integrity and whole concrete historical situation. Expressive intonation colors meaning and sound equally, bringing them intimately near another in the unique unity of the utterance. Of course, expressive intonation is not

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[13]As far as I am aware, a definitive classification of framing types has not been firmly established in linguistic literature. This may be due to the fact that, beyond prosodic outline, the structural framing of an utterance or discourse is also determined by other linguistic features, such as morphosyntactic and syntactic properties.

obligatory, but it is the most distinct expression of social evaluation when it does occur (Medvedev, 1985, p. 122).[14]

It appears that Mikhail M. Bakhtin, another close associate of Vološinov—and already mentioned here—held a view somewhat similar to that of Medvedev. In the archival text "The Problem of Speech Genres," written between 1952 and 1953, Bakhtin also seems to conceptualize the melodic curve, prosodic outline, as a form of syntactic intonation—or, in his terminology, *grammatical intonation*. By asserting that grammatical intonation applies only to the sentence and that as a sentence transforms into an utterance, it also acquires expressive intonation, Bakhtin differentiates between grammatical intonation and expressive intonation, as well as from *generic intonation*— that is, intonation associated with discourse genre. As he writes:

> The sentence as a unit of language has a special grammatical intonation, but no expressive intonation at all. Special grammatical intonations include: the intonation of finalization; explanatory, distributive, enumerative intonations, and so forth. Storytelling, interrogatory, explanatory, and imperative intonations occupy a special position. It is as though grammatical intonation crosses with generic intonation here (but not with expressive intonation in the precise sense of this word). The sentence acquires expressive intonation only in the whole utterance (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 90).[15]

Due to chronological constraints, Vološinov was able to engage textually only with Medvedev in the discussion on different types of intonation—expressive, generic, and syntactic (or grammatical).[16] In the essay "On the Borders of Poetics and Linguistics," initially published in 1930, Vološinov challenges his colleague, arguing against the very existence of syntactic intonation. As he contends:

> Above all, *any intonation is expressive*, that is, it is a social evaluation embodied in a sound material.
> This collapses the hypothesis of the possibility of an absence of "expressive" intonation, since there is no discourse without evaluation in nature. Next, if we talk about "syntactic" *intonation*, why can't we

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[14] MEDVEDEV, P. N. *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship:* A Critical Introduction to a Sociological Poetics. Translated by A. J. Wehrle. Cambridge: Havard University Press, 1985.
[15] BAKHTIN, M. M. The Problem of Speech Genres. *In*: BAKHTIN, M. M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Translated by V. W. McGee. Edited by C. Emerson and M. Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986. pp. 60-102.
[16] Let us also recall that Bakhtin's text was written between 1952 and 1953, well after Vološinov's death in 1936.

talk about "graphic" or "lexical" intonation? The graphic symbolization of sound and the union of sounds into significant (semantic) sets, as well as the combinations of these sound sets into entire utterances endowed with meaning, are equally *material linguistic conditions for the intonation of any utterance read or heard*. Deprived of this material basis, intonation will hardly exist, if, of course, we do not consider speech 'simple as a moo'.

Of course, we understand Medvedev's thinking. It is as if there were a lower limit to expressive intonation, after which another field begins, that of grammar and its formal categories. However, equating the concepts of *expressive* and *syntactic* intonation is a *lapsus terminologiae* (Volóchinov, 2019d, p. 228, emphasis added).[17]

The excerpt above appears to be sufficiently clear: for Vološinov, when considering the prosodic outline of an utterance—that is, the melodic curve that Medvedev refers to as "syntactic intonation" and Bakhtin as "grammatical intonation"— what is at stake is not an indication of the evaluative stance of the speaker, but rather a material requirement for the production of the utterance. Thus, when reflecting on the prosodic outline of an utterance, it is inappropriate to speak of "intonation"—whether qualified as "syntactic" or "grammatical." According to Vološinov, if we truly wish to discuss "intonation," we must recognize that it is always expressive. This means intonation occurs only within a concrete utterance, where the speaker can manifest social evaluations.

Faced with this distinction, an elementary question emerges: What, precisely, does Vološinov mean by "expressive intonation"?

Gomes (2023b) emphasized that expressive intonation is particularly useful when analyzing utterances within contexts rooted in longstanding oral traditions. In this regard, it is worth noting that, despite the conceptual fragility of the 1930 essay "What is Language?," it is within this work that, in a supplementary note, Owen (1983, p. 112)[18]

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[17] In Portuguese: "acima de tudo, *qualquer entonação é expressiva*, isto é, é uma avaliação social encarnada em um material sonoro. Com isso, desmorona a hipótese da possibilidade de ausência de entonação "expressiva", uma vez que não existe nenhum discurso sem avaliação na natureza. Em seguida, se falamos de *entonação* "sintática", por que não podemos falar de entonação "gráfica" ou "lexical"? A simbolização gráfica do som e a união dos sons em conjuntos significantes (semânticos), bem como as combinações desses conjuntos sonoros em enunciados inteiros dotados de sentido, são igualmente *condições linguísticas materiais da entonação de qualquer enunciado lido ou ouvido*. Privada dessa base material, a entonação dificilmente irá existir, se, é claro, não considerarmos o discurso 'simples como um mugido'. É claro que entendemos o pensamento de Medviédev. É como se existisse um limite inferior da entonação expressiva, depois do qual já começa um outro campo, o da gramática e de suas categorias formais. No entanto, equiparar os conceitos de entonação *expressiva* e *sintática* é um *lapsus terminologiae*."

[18] OWEN, Noel. What is Language? In: SHUKMAN, Ann (Ed.). Bakhtin Schoolpapers. *Russian Poetics in Translation*, no. 10, 1983.

explicitly acknowledges the centrality of orality in his definition of "intonation": "intonation is the increase or decrease in the volume of the voice, which expresses our relationship with the object of the utterance (joy, sadness, surprise, questioning, etc.)."

Despite this strong foundation in orality, it is essential to remember that, on various occasions, Vološinov also turned to written utterances to illustrate expressive intonation. This is evident, for instance, in *MPL*, where, in the fourth chapter of the third part, the Russian thinker analyzes different intonations applied to the same word in a passage from *A Writer's Diary* by the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky (see Vološinov, 1973, pp. 103-104).[19] A similar approach can be observed in the 1930 essay "The Construction of the Utterance" (hereinafter CU), where, at a certain point in the sixth section, Vološinov reflects on expressive intonation in selected passages from *Dead Souls* by Nikolai Gogol (Owen, 1983, p. 117).[20]

Considering these two examples—and exercising caution not to attribute ideas to Vološinov that were not his own—one can infer that, in his theoretical framework, expressive intonation operates upon the words within an utterance, that is, upon the lexical units chosen to construct the utterance. This is why, in *MPL*, the author states that: "we have a habit of expressing our feelings by imparting expressive and meaningful intonation to some word that crops up in our mind by chance, often a vacuous interjection or adverb" (Vološinov, 1973, p. 104),[21] which is consistent with a statement found in CU, namely, the assertion that: "every intonation pattern demands a corresponding 'appropriate' word and indicates or allocates to that word a particular place in the cause, likewise to the cluse within the sentence, and to the sentence within the whole utterance" (Owen, 1983, pp. 128).[22]

This idea—that expressive intonation operates upon the words of an utterance— carries a vital consequence: within a single utterance, multiple expressive intonations can coexist. Moreover, the longer the utterance—consider, for instance, an utterance structured as an opinion article—the greater the likelihood of encountering a diversity of intonations.

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[19] For reference, see footnote 3.
[20] OWEN, Noel. The Construction of Utterance. *In:* SHUKMAN, Ann (ed.). Bakhtin Schoolpapers. *Russian Poetics in Translation*, no. 10, 1983.
[21] For reference, see footnote 3.
[22] For reference, see footnote 21.

With this in mind, it now seems appropriate to reflect on the explicitness of expressive intonation, whether in oral or written practices. In oral practices, expressive intonation is typically made explicit through multiple resources, including Prosodic properties (e.g., intensity and syllabic elongation), Body movements, Gestures, and Facial expressions. When it comes to the explicitness of expressive intonation within written practices, the path forward appears far more complex. After all, while word choice and word arrangement can undoubtedly assist in conveying expressive intonation, it would be naïve to assume that they are sufficient to exhibit it fully. This is not to suggest, as Medvedev (1985, p. 122)[23] argues, that "expressive intonation is not obligatory," but rather to acknowledge that obligation and explicitness are not the same thing.

In any case, before proceeding to a more in-depth discussion on expressive intonation in written practices, it is helpful to provide a summary: On one hand, when considering the *material requirement—particularly linguistics—for the production of the utterance*, one can assert that an utterance must be realized assertively, imperatively, interrogatively, or exclamatively (see Volóchinov, 2019d, p. 228). On the other hand, when considering *expressive intonation*—especially concerning word choice, word arrangement, bodily movements, gestures, and facial expressions—one can determine that the word, the lexical unit, as a part of the utterance, is comic or serious, admiring or contemptuous, resigned or rebellious, joyful or sorrowful, and so on (see Vološinov, 1973, pp. 93, 121; Volóchinov, 2019c, pp. 287, 292).

3 Expressive Intonation in Written Utterances: When Tragedy Becomes Triumph

Given all that has been discussed, one fundamental question arises concerning reading practices: How can we determine the expressive intonation of a written utterance? Put differently: What is the primary clue that allows us to discern whether a written utterance conveys humor or gravity, admiration or contempt, resignation or defiance?

Before attempting an answer, it is helpful to examine a concrete case that illustrates, with greater clarity, the complexity involved in determining expressive intonation in written utterances. Observe:

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[23] For reference, see footnote 15.
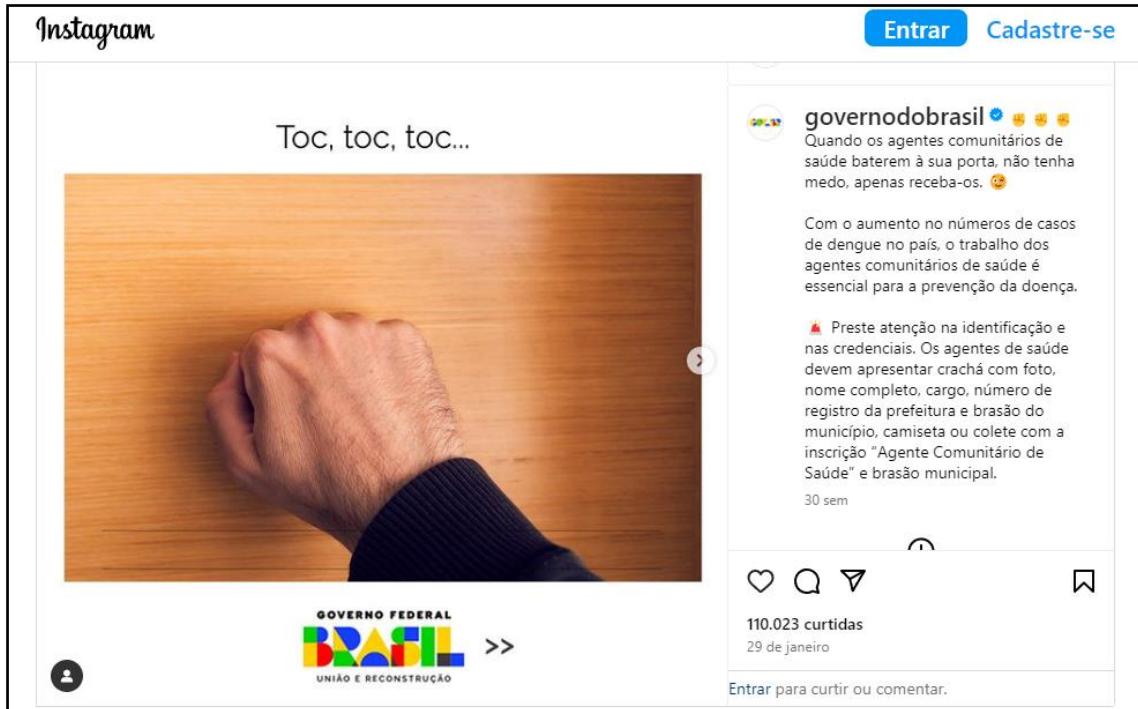
Source: Personal archive.

At first glance, the utterance displayed in Image 1 appears relatively straightforward: we are dealing with a government social media post intended to raise public awareness about an issue directly related to public policy—in this case, health policy. As such, one could reasonably assume that the onomatopoeic expression "toc-toc-toc" (knock-knock-knock) conveys an *expressive intonation of seriousness, softened by a tone of solidarity*.

However, for some readers, the expressive intonation evoked by "toc-toc-toc" seemed to be something else entirely. This became evident later that same day when, during an interview on *TV Cultura*'s [Culture TV] program, *Roda Viva* [Living Circle], journalist Eugenio Bucci, the evening guest, was asked about the post in question. His response was: "there was a certain irony, a supposed sense of humor in official channels" (Bucci, 2024).[24] Thus, it can be inferred that Eugenio Bucci—and many others, as implied by journalist Katia Brembatti's question—interpreted the expressive intonation quite differently, as a *provocation softened by humor*.

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[24] In Portuguese: "houve a presença de uma certa ironia, de um suposto senso de humor em canais oficiais."

This example alone would demonstrate the complexity of determining expressive intonation in writing. After all, what precisely justifies interpreting an utterance's intonation in a particular way?

However, to avoid the impression that this issue is exclusive to social media discourse—as was the focus in Gomes (2024)—it is worth presenting another, more historically distant example.

Within the biblical corpus known as the New Testament, all four evangelists—namely, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—record a shared historical event: At the moment of Jesus Christ's crucifixion, a sign was placed above his head, inscribed with the words: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews" (Mt 27. 37; Mk 15. 25; Lk 23. 38; Jn 19. 19).[25] Although there is no significant disagreement regarding what was written on the tablet, the accounts of the evangelists suggest that, at the time, different expressive intonations were applied to the inscription.

On the one hand, the first three evangelists present a narrative that guides the reader toward interpreting the tablet's inscription as carrying an *expressive intonation of mockery*. This can be observed in passages such as the following:

> 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,
> 29 and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and *mocked* him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said.
> Matthew 27:41:
> 41 In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders *mocked* him (Mt 27. 28, 29 and 41; emphasis added).
>
> 17 And they clothed him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his head.
> 18 And began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews!
> 31Likewise also the chief priests *mocking* said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save (Mk 15. 17, 18 and 31; emphasis added).
>
> 35 And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them *derided* him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.
> 36 And the soldiers also *mocked* him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar,

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[25] HOLY BIBLE. *King James Bible*. King James Version. Available in: https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/search.php?hs=1&q=mocked+him. Access on 27 Apr. 2025.

37 And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself (Lk 23. 35-37; emphasis added).[26]

On the other hand, the last evangelist, the apostle John, provides a series of observations that lead the reader to conclude that, from the perspective of Pontius Pilate, the prefect who authorized the crucifixion, the inscription on the tablet did not carry an expressive intonation of mockery, but rather an *expressive intonation of respect*. This is evident, first, in the absence of any mention of the mockery inflicted upon Jesus in John's Gospel and second, in the following passage:

21 Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews.
22 Pilate answered, What I have written I have written (Jn 19. 21-22).[27]

This second example, though brief, further underscores the complexity of expressive intonation in writing. Together with the previous example, it allows us to address the question previously posed more adequately: how can we determine the expressive intonation of a written utterance?

In a direct response, I would argue that the primary clue for discerning whether an utterance conveys humor or gravity, admiration or contempt, resignation or defiance lies in its extraverbal components. As previously noted, expressive intonation, which guides the choice and arrangement of words, is fundamentally shaped by the elements of the extraverbal context—namely, the audience and the situation, which includes the spatiotemporal reality, the thematic focus of the utterance, and the evaluative relationship.

In relation to the utterance presented in Image 1, two key aspects must be considered, Firstly, the choice of the onomatopoeic expression "knock-knock-knock." This phrase does not appear to be random or incidental; instead, it seems motivated by a previous event that helps contextualize the spatiotemporal reality, the thematic focus, and the evaluative relationship involved. Specifically, it recalls a statement made by then federal deputy Joice Hasselmann (PSDB-SP) in a speech delivered in the Chamber of Deputies on June 22, 2022—a moment that quickly went viral on social media, mainly due to the following excerpt: "Knock. Knock. Knock. Three knocks on the door. And

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[26] For reference, see footnote 26.
[27] For reference, see footnote 26.

then, those inside ask: 'Who is it?' And the answer is: 'It's the Federal Police'" (Joice, 2022).[28] Secondly, it is essential to note that, hours before the federal government's social media post on January 29, 2024, politically engaged Brazilians were already aware of the Federal Police operation launched against the office of then-Rio de Janeiro city councilor Carlos Bolsonaro. Not only is he the son of the defeated candidate in the 2022 presidential elections, but—more significantly—he is widely recognized as one of the chief masterminds of digital communication strategies grounded in alarmism, disinformation, and hostility toward both progressive individuals and progressive policies—the very people and policies with which the then-federal government (2023–2026) was aligned. Thus, it is precisely due to these extraverbal elements—particularly the spatiotemporal reality and the evaluative relationship toward the topic of the utterance—that we can agree with Eugenio Bucci's interpretation: the expressive intonation of the utterance presented in Image 1 was one of provocation softened by humor or, more succinctly, irony.

Similarly, in the case of Jesus' crucifixion, it is also through the extraverbal context that we can understand the differences in expressive intonation between the first three evangelists and the last evangelist. The first three evangelists emphasize the expressive intonation employed by those who historically opposed Jesus' words and actions (see Mt 12. 14 and Jn 11. 53). The last evangelist highlights the expressive intonation employed by a governor who, in addition to finding no valid grounds for Jesus' condemnation and subsequent crucifixion (see Lk 23. 13-16 and Jn 19. 4), had already been warned by his wife to be cautious in dealing with the man being handed over for crucifixion (see Mt 27. 19). Thus, it becomes reasonably clear that the extraverbal elements—especially the speaker's evaluative relationship with the theme of his utterance—help explain the distinction in the way the expressive intonation of the inscription on the cross is conceived.

Just as important as identifying the clues that must be followed to determine the expressive intonation of a given written utterance is recognizing that establishing expressive intonation is not an objective of Vološinov's sociological method. The reason is simple: if we were to predetermine a fixed list of specific linguistic markers, each exclusively tied to a particular expressive intonation, allowing us always to consult this

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[28] In Portuguese: "Toc. Toc. Toc. Três batidinhas na porta. E aí, quem tá do lado de dentro pergunta: 'quem é?'. E a resposta é: 'é a Polícia Federal'."

list to determine intonation in a given case, we would end up reifying expressive intonation—that is, assigning it the status of a self-existing entity with a fixed and permanent nature. This, of course, would mischaracterize the concept of expressive intonation, not only because it would contradict Vološinov's assertion that "this [evaluative] accent is least amenable to reification" (Vološinov, 1973, p. 81),[29] but above all because it would disregard the understanding that a concrete utterance—the one in which words receive expressive intonation—is not structured upon pre-established logical schemes, but instead emerges from life in its concreteness.

Thus, it would not be unreasonable to say that, although extraverbal elements are fundamental in determining a given expressive intonation, the fact remains that precisely due to its function in writing, the concept of expressive intonation reveals itself as both the tragedy and the triumph of Valentin Vološinov's theoretical reflection. It is at once a methodological tragedy and an epistemological triumph. Let me explain.

In broad terms, expressive intonation constitutes a *methodological tragedy* because it upholds the absence of fixed parameters for validating an interpretation of the speaker's evaluative position. In other words, when properly understood, the concept of expressive intonation emphasizes that, despite the significance of linguistic devices, even they cannot be regarded *a priori* as fixed parameters that determine the emphasis placed on a specific word within a concrete utterance. This does not imply that elements such as word choice and word arrangement are insignificant. Rather, it means that even before expressive intonation influences the selection and arrangement of words, expressive intonation itself is already shaped by the situation and the audience—extraverbal elements that are not mathematically quantifiable. As a result, the concept of expressive intonation poses serious challenges to any project that aims to establish a positivist scientific approach to studying utterances.

However, precisely for this reason, one may also speak of an *epistemological triumph*—because Vološinov's thought was never committed to any project of positivist scientificity. In fact, by asserting the absence of fixed parameters for validating an interpretation of the speaker's evaluative position, the concept of expressive intonation ultimately affirms the impossibility of restricting interpretive heterogeneity. Put differently, if there are no fixed parameters to validate an interpretation of the emphasis

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[29] For reference, see footnote 3.

placed on a particular word in a concrete utterance, it follows that, *a priori*, no interpretation can be automatically dismissed. This does not suggest that any interpretation of an utterance's expressive emphasis is necessarily justifiable. Rather, it reaffirms that within the realm of the human sciences—or, to use Vološinov's terms, within the "study of ideologies"—positivist predictability is unattainable. In any case, the consequence of all this is clear: the concept of expressive intonation shields the study of utterances from any positivist imposition.

Final Considerations

I find it essential to state that, in my view, reflection on social evaluation—with a particular focus on the concept of expressive intonation—can substantially contribute to the advancement of linguistic studies across various topics. These range from the recent proliferation of emojis, *GIFs*, and stickers in everyday written interactions to disinformation.

Equally significant is the realization that everything discussed here invites us to understand expressive intonation as a concept that is particularly relevant to didactic practices, as it underscores the Aristotelian idea that not all forms of rationality are apodictic—that is, not all rationality is based on experiments and demonstrations. A dialectical rationality exists grounded in the debate of perspectives. This rationality emerges from what Bakhtin (1981, p. 273)[30] refers to as "dialogized heteroglossia." This rationality is rooted in what Faraco (2020) aptly and didactically describes as the "controversial circulation of social discourses."

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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 Analysis] to Open Science, this journal Only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

Review I

The article "Valentin N. Vološinov and expressive intonation: between tragedy and triumph" presents originality in discussing aspects that still require reflection in the context of dialogic studies: the (non-fixed) parameters for the analysis of expressive intonation, especially that which emerges in written utterances, as discussed in the third section. The text therefore brings contributions to the field of knowledge. The title is appropriate, thought-provoking and creative. The theoretical framework is consistent, up-to-date and well used in the foundation of the text. The development is consistent with the established objective. Without considering the article to be inadequate, I suggest that the author revise the final considerations in order to point out/summarize the implications of expressive intonation, including the answer to the question posed in section three: how to determine the expressive intonation of a written utterance? I also consider it pertinent to clarify to the reader the relationship between dialectical rationality and dialogized heteroglossia, mentioned in the final part, and the theme and discussion undertaken in the text. Finally, the article is clear, well organized and written in appropriate language. I congratulate the author for the excellence of the production. ACCEPTED.

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