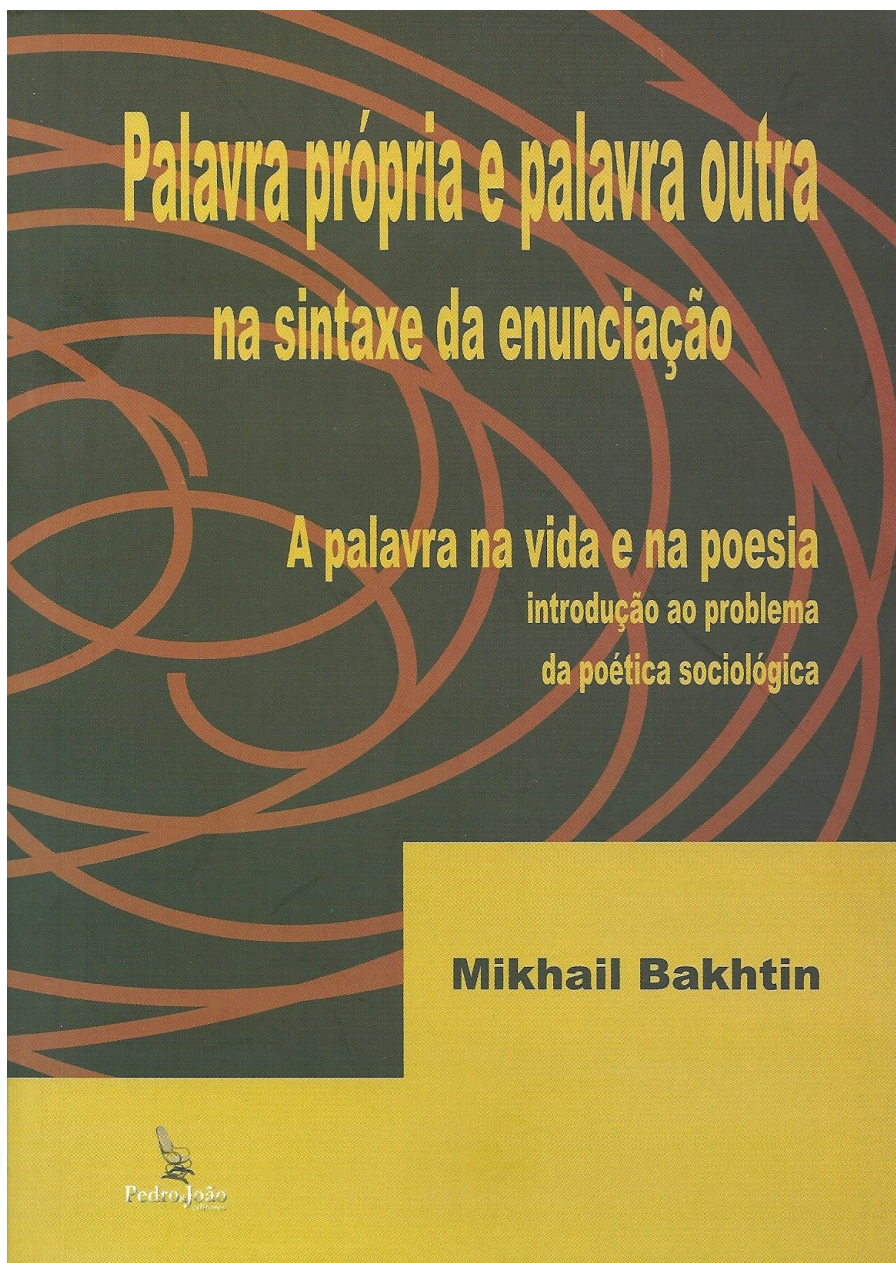


BAKHTIN, M. Toward a History of Forms of Utterance in Language Constructions (Study in the Applications of the Sociological Method to Problems of Syntax); Discourse in life and discourse in art – concerning sociological poetics / *Palavra própria e palavra outra na sintaxe da enunciação. A palavra na vida e na poesia: introdução ao problema da poética sociológica.* São Carlos: Pedro & João Editores, 2011. 184p.

Gilberto de Castro*



* Professor at Universidade Federal do Paraná - UFPR, Curitiba, Paraná, Brasil;
castrog@ufpr.br

Of all chapters in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*¹, first published in Brazil in 1986, the least read to the present day are surely the last four, whose central theme are the processes of speech reporting (the reported speech) within the literary narrative. A number of readers, mainly those just getting acquainted with the Bakhtinian work, state to have found these last four chapters a bit strange and it is common to hear from these readers that they have only read the book until Chapter 7. In a sense, and at first sight, it seems that those chapters should not be part of *MPL*. However, I believe such an opinion might only be the impression of a reader who is not yet a specialist on the Bakhtinian thought, since a horizontal reading of the Russian thinkers' works soon shows us that, within the works of the Bakhtin Circle, the meeting of voices is central to the construction of all their theoretical framework on language and culture, of all their alteritarian worldview.

The reported speech, i.e. *speech within speech, word within word, voice within voice* is a recurrent subject in the Bakhtinian work. Bakhtin talks about it in his discussion on Dostoyevsky, in his exquisite theory of the novel and also in some parts of his text on speech genres. Despite its constant presence in the works of the Russian authors, I do not think it would be an overstatement to say that speech reporting is not yet the flagship subject in academic curiosity and researches in Brazil. Among so many themes, researchers have preferred well-worn ones, as demonstrated by the excessive bibliographic stress given to the discussion on speech genres.

In this sense, the publication of *Palavra própria e palavra outra na sintaxe da enunciação*² (2011) by Pedro & João Editores is very welcome. It is worth noting that this publishing house, which has been distinguished by its editorial effort in translating and publishing works on the Bakhtinian universe, has also translated *Towards a Philosophy of the Act*³, a text that took a long time before it was translated into Portuguese. The book that has been published now contains two chapters, the second, lending its title to the book, is a new translation of *MPL*'s last four chapters. The first chapter presents a never-before-published text by Augusto Ponzio and also, as an appendix and in its first official version in Brazilian Portuguese, the never-before-published text by Voloshinov entitled *Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry*:

¹ This will be referred to as *MPL*.

² T.N.: In English rendered as *One's Own Word and the Word of the Other in Syntax of Utterance*.

³ In Portuguese entitled *Para uma filosofia do ato responsável* (2010)

*Questions of Sociological Poetics*⁴ – which, by the way, appears on the book cover as a kind of title.

The publishing of Voloshinov's text is also a very good initiative. In this fundamental text in the Bakhtinian framework, the author, intending to delimitate a sociological method for literary studies, makes an intellectual effort to demonstrate the intrinsically sociological roots of the literary work, both in its form and content. In order to do so, Voloshinov uses an extremely simple event in the everyday life of two interlocutors (for those who know it already, the quite anthological example about two people looking through the window as it began to snow) to discuss the dynamics of the socioverbal interaction, showing how language can only exist in its intrinsic relation to the extraverbal milieu. This example brings about the considerations on the fact that the literary text, considering its proportions and complexities, contains the typical elements of any interlocutive act, which contemplates an event, a hero, an interlocutor along the lines of 'everyday utterances'. It was about time this text had been rendered in Portuguese because, in addition to presenting a daring and simple approach on literary construction and a clear-cut reappraisal of Bakhtinian themes, it makes the intense dialogue established between Bakhtin and Voloshinov on language and literature quite obvious.

The first chapter of the book (*Problemas de sintaxe para uma linguística da escuta*⁵) by Augusto Ponzio also reflects upon the meeting of voices within the Bakhtinian works, which sets a special tone to the book and singles this edition out considering the relevance of the Bakhtinian debate on problems related to the meeting of voices. Ponzio, who certainly stands as one of the most lucid and impressive scholars of the Bakhtinian thought in the world, brings together Bakhtin's discussions about discourse in Dostoevsky, and Voloshinov's reflections upon reported speech, paying particular attention to an approach to *quasi-direct discourse*. In his argumentation, Ponzio makes a particularly interesting reproduction of what Pasolini says about quasi-direct discourse, to whom this kind of speech reporting would be like "*the spy of an ideology*" (p.39). As a bonus, at the end of the text Ponzio presents a just analysis of the meaning of the terms 'Bakhtinian' and 'Bakhtin Circle' through a reappraisal of the biobibliographical information of the Circle. He highlights the "intense, harmonious,

⁴ In Portuguese entitled *A palavra na vida e na poesia. Introdução aos problemas da poética sociológica*.

⁵ T.N.: In English rendered as *Problems of Syntax towards a Linguistics of Listening*.

friendly collaboration in shared research topics, arisen from a variety of interests and competencies,” (p.46) that took place between Bakhtin and his closest interlocutors such as Medvedev and Voloshinov, reminding us that, “alongside Bakhtin”, they would stand as “*the voices* [...] in an ‘egalitarian’ way.” (p.49)

As to the new translation of Voloshinov’s text, previously published at the end of *M&P* and that now lends its title to the book by Pedro & João Editores, there are a couple of considerations worth making. First of all, this new translation was made from a version in Italian which, in turn, was based on the original text in Russian. If compared to the previous translation published in *M&P*, which was basically grounded in the French version, these versions do not present any verbal coincidence. In spite of this, one can clearly see that the new version features the same text, the same ideas and the same propositions as the previous one, and it presents the exact same difficulties in its reading as imposed by the previous translation, which are, by the way, due mainly to the innovation and the nature of the subject in question than for any other reason. In spite of this, both translations are clearly the same text, which comprises the same ideas, propositions, and presents the exact same difficulties in its reading as imposed by the previous translation, which are, by the way, due mainly to the innovation in and the nature of the subject in question than for any other reason. In short, the comparison of both translations has its pedagogical benefits for it exposes the reader to a variety of forms of stating and constructing meanings. In this sense, one cannot say that the textual content of any one translation is better than the other, not even when focusing on the comparison of smaller parts, since they lean positively toward the older translation at times and toward the newest one at others.

However, the new translation of Voloshinov’s text goes beyond the previous one when it comes to the way the text itself is presented. Besides presenting a detailed table of contents of the text, which greatly helps the reader when searching for a certain topic and/or discussion, the text was enriched with footnotes. In them, the translator and/or editor have supplemented the text with new and important data on the mentioned authors as well as on the ideas discussed in the text. But, unlike the previous translation, the present version does not translate all the quotes of literary excerpts, which might make the reading difficult for some readers.

As I have highlighted before, although it is extremely positive to have Voloshinov’s work reedited and accompanied by Ponzio’s text in another book in which

reported speech becomes a central point, I believe this new conformation of the text has some disadvantages. What I am talking about here is basically the fact that, although some readers find it difficult to think of the last four chapters of *M&P* as a part of that book, the whole of those chapters' theoretical underpinning is developed in the first chapters of *M&P*, which at obviously does not happen in the present edition. To make up for that loss, the text relies on some footnotes. But when Voloshinov *discusses quasi-direct discourse in French, German and Russian* in the last chapter of his text, as he makes allusion to the scholars who have discussed the subject theoretically, he links them to the two great strands in language studies (abstract objectivism and idealistic subjectivism) that were studied and criticized in chapters 4, 5 and 6 of *M&P*. As the nominations employed by Voloshinov encompass a dense and complex critical and theoretical view on language, it is essential to know what he is talking about so one can have a fuller comprehension of the criticism he makes of the specialists in quasi-direct discourse, who have based themselves on abstract objectivism at times and on idealistic subjectivism at others.

Another aspect that might come up as more readings arise, and which I believe still needs to be further evaluated in this new translation, regards the change in the terminology employed to describe what we had known so far as “reported speech”. Generally – and even irrespective of the introduction of the Bakhtinian thought in Brazil; although, I believe, intensified by it as seen in the increasing emphasis given to the topic – our culture of linguistic studies has established a certain nomenclature as regards speech reporting. We have widely and recurrently used the term “*reported speech*”, and the word “*discourse*” in each of the generic denominations used to describe reported speech known as “direct discourse”, “indirect discourse” and “quasi-direct discourse”. This, however, has not been the nomenclature of choice for the translators of the new text. Thus, the reader should be mindful of the fact that, wherever “*reported speech*” appears in the last chapters of *M&P*, in the new translation “*the word of the other*” has been used instead. I suppose that the choices made by the translators echo the choices made by Ponzio in the text that opens the book. However, when it comes to translation, in which the consolidation of a cultural meaning and its resonance on concrete readers carries some weight, I am not sure whether the choice made was the best possible. But, if it is any consolation to the reader, another good

thing in the new translation is that a dirty word has been suppressed: “*outrem*”⁶, which was barely used in Brazil, has finally been wiped off the map in the present translation.

One last point to be taken into consideration regards the fact that only Mikhail Bakhtin’s name appears on the cover of the book. It is strange that Voloshinov’s name does not appear on the cover of the book that presents two texts whose authorship is attributed to him, especially after all that has been speculated on and is known about the authorship of the Bakhtin Circle’s texts. And that sounds even stranger considering the fact that Ponzio’s reflection within this work goes in the direction of the Russian authors being all impacted by the intensity of a friendly and speculative dialogue, though preserving their theoretical and authorial individualities.

In short, translating is always risky and is a consideration of meanings towards interlocution. There are always many voices who speak at the same time, indicating and reclaiming their meanings. The options in language are almost limitless and choosing a meaning is not always easy. I reiterate that what stands out to me, out of the entirety of the work presented in this new translation, is the ideological and theoretical weight of the initiative, which is very helpful in foregrounding the topic ‘the meeting of voices’ in the Bakhtin Circle. This, in my opinion, even outshines the choices of meaning that might occasionally ruffle a few feathers.

Translated by Leticia L. Martins – ondemand2112@gmail.com

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⁶ T.N: In Portuguese “someone else”, “another person”.