A bakhtinian perspective of language and autism: a case study

Um olhar bakhtiniano sobre a linguagem e o autismo: um estudo de caso

Una mirada bakhtiniana sobre el lenguaje y el autismo: un estudio de caso

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Abstract

Introduction: Autism, currently referred to as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a condition that has intrigued scholars and researchers since its earliest reports by Kanner and Asperger in the 1940s. Given that one of its main traits is related to difficulties with interaction, this study begins with an analysis of a clinical case of an autistic subject in order to understand the unique way in which he and his interlocutor locate themselves in dialogic interaction. **Methods:** The research subject is a 7-year-old boy who has had a diagnosis of mild autism since the age of two, in attendance at the Speech, Language and Hearing Welfare Centre at the Federal University of Bahia (*Centro Docente Assistencial de Fonoaudiologia da Universidade Federal da Bahia*). The dialogue excerpts present in his attendance chart were analyzed from a Bakhtinian theoretical perspective, which addresses the, always historically located, utterance as a unit of analysis. **Discussion:** Based on our data analysis, it was possible to see a child who, within the limits of his condition, assumes the role of a subject, understanding that he is totally immersed in language and that he, therefore, mobilizes different linguistic resources in order to achieve his discursive intention. **Conclusion:** Finally, this study proposes a repositioning of the way in which Speech, Language and Hearing Services have traditionally viewed autistic subjects, moving from the given or ready-made, towards the singular, full of possibilities and potential.

Keywords: Autism; Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences; Language

Resumo

Introdução: O Autismo, atualmente denominado como Transtorno do Espectro Autista (TEA), é uma condição que intriga diversos estudiosos e pesquisadores, desde os primeiros relatos realizados por

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Kanner e Asperger na década de 40. Considerando que uma das principais características recaem sobre a dificuldade de interação, este estudo parte da análise de um caso clínico de um sujeito autista como objetivo de compreender o modo singular como o sujeito e seu interlocutor se situam na interação dialógica. **Métodos:** O sujeito da pesquisa é um garoto de 7 anos de idade que teve diagnóstico de autismo leve aos dois anos de idade, e esteve em atendimento no Centro Docente Assistencial da Universidade Federal da Bahia. Os recortes dialógicos presentes no prontuário de atendimento foram estudados a partir de uma perspectiva teórica de caráter bakhtiniano que elege o enunciado, sempre situado historicamente, como unidade de análise. **Discussão:** A partir da análise dos dados foi possível ver uma criança que, dentro de suas condições, assume o papel de sujeito, entendendo que este está totalmente imerso na linguagem e que, portanto, mobiliza diferentes recursos linguísticos para atingir seu intuito discursivo. **Conclusão:** Por fim, este estudo propõe um reposicionamento na forma como a Fonoaudiologia tem tradicionalmente olhado sobre sujeito autista, não como dado ou pronto, mas singular, pleno de possibilidades e potencialidades.

Palavras-chave: Autismo; Fonoaudiologia; Linguagem

Resumen

Introducción: Autismo, actualmente conocida como Trastorno del Espectro Autista (TEA) es una condición que intriga a muchos académicos e investigadores, ya que los primeros informes realizados por Kanner y Asperger en los años 40. Dado que las principales carácter caen en la dificultad de interacción, este estudio es El análisis de un caso clínico de un sujeto autista tuvo como objetivo comprender la forma única en el sujeto y su partido están en la interacción dialógica. **Métodos:** El tema de investigación es un niño de 7 años de edad que tiene diagnóstico de autismo leve desde dos años, que se reunieron em la asistencia a "Centro Docente Assistencial de Fonoaudiologia en la Universidade Federal da Bahia". Hendiduras dialógicas presentes en la asistencia de registros médicos fueron estudiados desde una perspectiva teórica de carácter Bajtín que elige a la declaración, siempre situado históricamente como la unidad de análisis. **Discusión:** Del análisis de los datos fue posible ver a un niño que, en su condición, asume el papel de sujeto, entendiendo que éste está totalmente inmerso en el lenguaje y por lo tanto moviliza diferentes recursos del lenguaje para lograr su orden discursivo. **Conclusión:** Por último, este documento propone un reposicionamiento en los ojos de la Fonoaudiología en sujetos autistas, no como dado o hecho, pero singular, lleno de posibilidades y potencial.

Palabras claves: Autismo; Fonoaudiología; Lenguaje

Introduction

Autism is a clinical condition that has intrigued scholars and researchers since its earliest reports by Kanner and Asperger in the 1940s. Its definition, diagnosis and classification have been modified over the years and its current denomination in the DSM-V diagnosis manual is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Autism Spectrum Disorder encompasses disorders which, prior to DSM-V, were named as early infantile autism, infantile autism, Kanner's syndrome, high functioning autism, atypical autism, pervasive development disorder not otherwise specified, childhood disintegrative disorder and Asperger's disorder[1]. Currently, distinctions are made according to the level of severity in terms of interaction and communication. This has shifted from the distinct descriptions listed above to a single description divided into three levels of severity. The gradations of severity are described thus: 1. Requiring support; 2. Requiring substantial support and 3. Requiring very substantial support[1].

Over the last decade, infantile autism has been one of the most frequently studied early childhood pathologies, due to the important losses in social life arising from this disorder[2]. It is historically characterized by the following triad described in the diagnostic manuals: social isolation, verbal and non-verbal communication disorder and repetition of movements and speech starting from early childhood[2].

The exact nature of language problems in autism is poorly understood and the huge variation in manifestations has hindered clinical categorization. In general, it is described as marked by: pronoun reversal, echolalia and difficulties in the functional use of language. In autism, the individuals present themselves through language marked by mistakes, mutism and stereotyped language, someone who emerges as a subject, but is not perceived as such [3].

Fernandes[4] asserts that echolalia is the repetition of previously-heard words or expressions. In an autistic child, this repetition may be immediate or late, literal or mitigated, intonation may or may not be reproduced and may occur in a way that is more, or less, related to specific contexts[4].

According to Delfrate et al[5], since grammatical structures may be immature, the use of stereotypes and repetitions often constitutes metaphorical language. The authors also provide evidence of modifications to the structure of discourse, inappropriate use of prosody, deviations from grammatical norms and difficulties remaining on topic. According to the authors, children with autism may also present difficulties in the use of functional language, their utterances may not be continuous and they may have difficulty engaging in conversation, providing information and, principally, expressing their ideas.

Thus far, we have described signs which, within the specialised literature on this theme, characterize autism as a nosological entity. Is it possible to see autistic subjects only through the characteristics that define them, without looking at those that make them unique? By following an autistic child longitudinally, Bordin[6] reveals that it is only by going beyond previously established and expected characteristics that it becomes possible to get to know a "linguistically functioning subject and no longer a symptom or pathology"[6]. For this reason, the author asserts the need to view these subjects and their speech differently, attributing meanings to them which are also different.

Given the above, it essential to consider the singularities, possibilities and potential of these subjects, starting from the assumption that autistic subjects, just as others, are constituted by and in language, through dialogic and social practices.

Although autism may be seen as a pathological condition, it must also be viewed as a complete mode of being, a profoundly different form of identity[7]. This means that, although there are numerous similar clinical manifestations in each case, these signs are constituted within a unique and singular dynamic, connected to a mode of being peculiar to each subject. This also means that the same autistic subject may manifest in different ways in relation to the world, language and the other. However, the traditional organicist and biologizing view that underlies diagnostic protocols about autism limits the vast majority of families and professionals who live or work with an autistic individual.

In the same way that Bordin[6] provides a counterpoint to the traditional organicist and pathologizing[1] view, heavily characterized by difficulties and through which an autistic child does not manage to achieve, this study proposes an understanding of the particular language functioning of an autistic subject and an examination of how this subject mobilizes the expressive resources of language in historically situated locations for the effective use of language, seeking to understand the differentiated nature of his positioning in the world.

This article, therefore, begins with other fundamental methodological and theoretical assumptions in order to locate our analyses and discussion of data, based on certain authors, in line with the cultural and historical perspective and with an emphasis on Bakhtinian thinking. For the Bakhtin Circle[2], language may not be taken in an abstract manner, a position which the author calls abstract objectivism, nor in a holistic one, which he calls idealist subjectivism. The concept of language

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1. Bordin's[6] work falls within Discursive Neurolinguistics (ND) studies. According to the author, "The objects of Discursive Neurolinguistics are studies dedicated to linguistic processes (phonological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic) with the discursive taken to be the way in which language presents itself, in other words: undetermined, heterogeneous, historical, socially constructed and lived. It is interesting for ND to study, in both the child and the adult, the relationship between langue, language, brain/mind, praxes/body, perception, thinking, memory and contexts of normality and pathology, understanding what characterizes one or the other. The interlocution between subjects, the reversibility of discursive roles, the dialogic relationship, all shape the space in which the clinical practice of ND takes place.

2. We are aware of the intense discussions about the authorship of the works, even about the existence of a "Bakhtin" circle itself. In general, our position is to value the existence of a Circle, while still respecting the singularities and interests of each member. We may justify the fact that the Circle is considered "Bakhtin" by the fact that the group met regularly for more than ten years and that, according to Faraco[10], the name was attributed to it *a posteriori*. The choice of Bakhtin is justifiable given that "of them all it was he who, undoubtedly, produced the greatest work."

expressed by the circle is profoundly influenced by discussions about the historical moment they lived in, which consisted of proposing a philosophical language that dialogues with another dialogic perspective.

This perspective considers the subject to always be located in a specific socio-historical moment within the culture of which he or she is part. In this way, we can no longer consider the subject as given or ready-made, but rather as a subject in continuity, unfinished. In line with this thinking, according to Geraldi[8]:

> In this sense, the subject is social, since language is not the work of an artisan, but his or her and others' social and historical work and it is constituted for the other and with the other. There is also no given, ready-made, subject who enters the interaction, but a subject completing and constructing itself in its speech[8].

The same author refers to langue[3] thus:

> It is not ready-made, provided as a system which the subject appropriates from, to use according to their specific needs at the point of interaction, but it is through the activity of language that the interlocution process itself is reconstructed every time[8].

To arrive at this conclusion about the relationship between langue and language Geraldi[8] adopts the concept of language as described by Carlos Franchi[9]:

> There is nothing inherent in language except its creating and constitutive force, although certain methodological "cut offs" and restrictions may demonstrate a stable and constituted picture. There is nothing universal, except the process – the form, the structure of this activity. Language, thus, is not a given or a result; but a work which provides form to the content of our experiences, a work of construction, of rectification of the "lived", which at the same time constitutes the symbolic system through which it works on reality and constitutes reality as a system of references in which it becomes significant[9].

Thus, by considering language to be a joint work, dialogic in nature, which assumes the existence of an "other", we give relevance to the creating force of language, which can only exist within the system which bears it and which is therefore not an end in itself. Supported by Bakhtin[11], we have elected as our unit of analysis the *utterance* in which the langue inextricably participates in effective dialogic situations. By understanding that the utterance is defined by alternation, be that immediate or not, we are also working with the concept of dialogue, which traditionally equates to conversational exchange, as a situation for the concrete use of language. This does not mean that the concept of dialogue is only restricted to the face to face moment, the notion of dialogue does not end at the meeting of interlocutors, but opens up a discursive chain which goes beyond the present moment:

> The object of an interlocutor's discourse, whatever it is, is not the object of the discourse at the first moment of this utterance, and this interlocutor is not the first to speak of it. The object, so to speak, is already spoken, contested, clarified and judged in various ways, it is the place in which different points of view, visions of the world and trends cross paths, encounter and separate. An interlocutor is not the biblical Adam in front of virgin, not yet designated, objects, which he is the first to name[11].

In the same way, dialogue should not be interpreted here in the common sense, as some sort of appeasement, or "agreement between parties", but also occurs at moments of adjustment, negotiations.

Another way of widening the scope of what we consider to be dialogue is by noting that, according to Del Ré et al.[12], dialogic relationships between subjects are constituted by the child's subjectivity, a subjectivity produced in language activities[1]. It is within this concept of language, as a place of the subject's constitution, of possibilities and singularities, that we mobilize Bakhtinian concepts[4] which contribute to the denaturation of the pathologizing view of autism.

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3. In line with Saussure and others, here we take *langue* to mean the structure and organization of the socially shared language system.

4. The approximation of Bakhtinian thinking to questions related to language functioning and the relationship between the normal and the pathological, specifically in aphasias, may be found in the works of Novaes Pinto13. Although this work does not address aphasia, it is strongly influenced by the author in its approximation to the responsible act endorsed by the Bakhtin Circle.

In line with the above, this study aims to describe the particular way in which the subject and his interlocutor (in this case the SLH intern who ran the case) are located in dialogic interaction.

Method

The study is based on analysis of a specific clinical case report of an autistic subject chosen as a result of the dialogic analysis possibilities observed by the authors.

Data was extracted from a total of 17 sessions, each of approximately 40 minutes duration, recorded in audio. The compiled data were systematically observed and converted into hierarchically organized work notes. Based on these work notes, the data were recompiled, transcribed and selected according to its representativeness and relevance to the theoretically addressed concepts. Consistent with this approach, the data were submitted to microgenetic analysis[5].

The work was referred to and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Health Sciences at the Universidade Federal da Bahia through approval number: 1.809.383. The research subject was a child identified as Z.

Z is a boy who has had a mild autism diagnosis since the age of two and was in attendance at the Speech, Language and Hearing Welfare Centre at Universidade Federal da Bahia from January to June 2016, a period that encompasses one academic semester at the clinical school. Our source of data was the child's clinical report. Data collection took place through a reading of the report's records, which contained the initial interview, evaluation reports, recordings and transcriptions of evaluation and SLH therapy sessions. Dialogue excerpts were selected according to the study's methodological approach, through which, following a reading of all the data, we selected those considered most relevant to the text from the above-mentioned period. All the data transcribed in the report were analysed in audio and again transcribed by the authors.

Z began SLH treatment when he was 7 years and 10 months old, remaining for only 5 months,

due to particular family circumstances. On the date of the last session he was 8 years and 3 months old. The sessions took place once a week and were both individual and in a group with other children of the same age with various language impairments.

At the time of his treatment, only the child's father was working; his mother had left work to dedicate herself to her son's care. According to data in the report, Z's mother noted that he was wanted and planned, and the couple's only child. She also reported having had an easy pregnancy, with no complications, and undergoing all the prenatal tests. However, the pregnancy was prolonged, she did not enter labour naturally and a caesarean was performed at 43 weeks.

Z is described as a child who likes electronic devices, such as tablets and mobile phones, loves surfing the internet and likes books, music (he liked listening to some music in English) and taking photos. According to his parents, as recorded in the report, Z likes playing, but often prefers to play alone. However, during the group sessions, Z interacted and played with the other children.

In January 2015, Z initially passed through the reception process[6], during which his parents discussed their concern that he hardly ever talked, only saying isolated words, noting that they considered him to be a vulnerable child, with behaviour inappropriate for his age. They said that the child had a mild Autism diagnosis, which had been made by the doctor who referred him to the service. His parents also described him as "playful", although with difficulties relating to others and expressing himself. During the period in which he undertook SLH therapy, Z was studying in the first year of primary school at an inclusive school and was in the process of acquiring written language.

According to data collected from his report, during the reception process the child was diagnosed with developmental language delay and his language was described as:

> Presents orality, however with vocabulary deficient for his age; difficulty in structuring sentences and

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5. This is an analysis that allows utterative-discursive processes to be revealed. The analysis is not micro in terms of the duration of the events, but rather due to the attention to inducible minutiae – clues, signs of aspects relevant to situations that may be typical or atypical (rather than merely prototypical)[14].

6. The reception process is the gateway to the service. During this process, initial interviews and brief evaluations are made with the patient aimed at finding out more about the case, identifying whether the subject requires the service, as well as providing the required referrals and guidance. Following the reception process, the subject is placed on a waiting list for the best supervised practice to meet their needs and begins SLH therapy when a slot opens up.

reporting facts and lived events; truncated narrative accompanied by gestures and unintelligible speech in some situations; presents with a comprehension level above that of his production, while his productions are made up of repetition of other people's speech, however with a different intonation; speech composed of short phrases, using nouns, verbs and adjectives inconsistently, no use of pronouns, conjunctions or prepositions; without phonetic/ phonological changes.

When he was called for the initial sessions in January 2016, a SLH language evaluation was conducted with the child and, according to data from his report, this demonstrated that:

> The child has difficulty interacting and being with others; he usually says isolated words or short phrases, however, within the context of play; he needs to be invited to speak, in other words, during the treatment sessions he very rarely initiates his turn in conversations; he immediately repeats other people's speech, but using different intonation.

According to the records of the intern responsible for Z's treatment sessions, during this period he was a quiet, calm child who, despite difficulty interacting, loved playing with toy animals and a puppet theatre during the sessions. The child allowed the intern to enter into more symbolic play and when toys representing animals were given to him he used onomatopoeia with each of them. He used gestures as a significant and effective resource, at some points he stood up and moved several times around the treatment room, principally when he concluded an activity that he had started. One striking feature the intern noted referred to maintaining eye contact, which was almost non-existent when his treatment sessions started, but became more frequent during them.

Sessions at the clinical school may involve different professionals, with different views and theoretical perspectives, which are not always explicit in the reports. In this case, we were able to perceive, for example, some distance between the reception and the treatment that took place over the period relevant to this work. This work does not aim to compare or contrast the treatment perspectives in question; however, the use of transcribed dialogic excerpts present in the patient's treatment report led us to different therapeutic perspectives, which we believe to be an important point of reflection for clinical SLH therapy.

Discussion

As we have seen above, taking dialogue as the place for the constitution of the subject has fundamental implications for clinical SLH therapy. We will now turn to an analysis of a dialogic excerpt between the intern (represented as I) and Z (represented as P), which directly involves these issues.

Table 1. Dialogic Excerpt 1 - 17/02/2016

Line	Interlocutor	Transcription	Conditions of utterance production
		**Utterative scene:** Z enters the treatment room, is interested in the animals in the bucket, begins to take them out and put them on the table, the intern invites him to sit on the floor.	
27	I	What does this look like? It's a tiger, isn't it?	She shows the child the toy animal.
28	P	( )	(Silence) Z does not respond and plays alone.
29	I	...	The intern carries on trying to interact with the child, talking about the animals.
30	P	Woof, woof, woof	The child picks up a dog and uses onomatopoeia.
31	I	Is that what you're doing? Is that a dog?	
32	P	Woof, woof, woof	Produces the onomatopoeia of a dog.
33	I	Ah it's a dog! And the cat? Isn't there a cat here?	With an air of surprise
34	P	( )	(Silence) Z does not respond and plays alone.
35	I	...	The intern continues trying to interact with the child, talking about the animals and showing him them.
36	P	( )	(Silence) Z does not respond and continues to play alone.
37	I	Oh, a sheep.	She shows the animal to the child.
38	P	Baaaaa	Produces the onomatopoeia of a sheep.
39	I	That's it young man! A sheep.	
40	P	( )	(Silence) Z does not respond and plays alone.
41	I	...	The intern continues trying to interact with the child, talking about the animals.
42	P		Makes a gesture with his hands, to show he's hot.
43	I	It's hot, isn't it? Take your hat off. Sit here. You can sit down.	The intern takes off the child's hat
44	P	Roar, roar, roar	Referring to the lion he is holding.
45	I	Hmmmmmmm	Referring to the fact that she is going to pick up a toy
46	P	No, no, no	
47	I	Ah, we're going to sit together? I didn't know we were going to sit together.	
48	P	( )	(Silence) Z does not respond and continues to play alone.
49	I	Can I sit next to you here?	
50	P	Baaaaa, baaaaa	Making reference to the sound of the goat he is holding in his hands.
51	I	...	The intern continues trying to interact with the child, talking about the animals.
52	I	Roar, roar	Picks up the lion to 'attack' the goat.
53	P	Baaaaa	Producing the onomatopoeia of a goat.
54	I	...	The intern continues trying to interact with the child, talking about the animals.
55	I	That's your ranch here, isn't it?	
56	P	US	Z produces an unintelligible segment.

In the excerpt presented above, in response to the intern's requests, Z proposes a form of interaction producing onomatopoeia. This dynamic between patient and intern is loaded with assumptions that relate to both the present time of utterance and their shared knowledge of the game.

For example, at turn number 30, instead of naming the animals, Z proposes another type of interaction. On perceiving that Z is giving voice to the toy animals, the intern immediately adjusts herself to Z's turns and at turn 37 she announces that she has found a sheep. In response, Z produces the corresponding onomatopoeia and at the following turn the intern confirms that this is, in fact, the sound of a sheep.

From the Bakhtinian perspective, choosing the utterance as the unit of analysis is essential for this type of analysis, given that it also applies to expressions which do not correspond to traditional language units. The concept of the *utterance* overcomes the problems inherent in units disconnected from the *real* nature of language, given that the utterance cannot exist outside a concrete situation and is based on the alternation of talking subjects even when these are in dialogue with previous utterances or responses prior to the utterance's present moment[13]. For Novaes Pinto, the concept of utterances is intimately related to that of the finished, given that the alternation of subjects within a specific dialogue means that each replication sets up the possibility of the interlocutor's response and it is this that guides the totality of an utterance.

In this case, the imitation of animal sounds, together with the intensity and prolongation of sounds, provides meaning to the dialogue. As a game of sounds is established, the patient makes it clear that he does not like the intern picking up one of the animals, using the repetition "no, no, no" as a mark of intensity, which leads the intern to try another form of approximation.

Talking of repetition in autism refers us directly to echolalia; however we cannot simply view repetition as a pathological symptom, as if it does not form part of the utterative possibilities of language. The presence of Z's repetitions is notable in the data below, although it is not the mere repetition of an utterance outside the context or with no intention to interact, as we will see.

Table 2. Dialogic excerpt 2 - 11/05/2016

Utterative scene: With Z, the intern begins to create a scene with the puppets .			
Line	**Interlocutor**	**Transcription**	**Conditions of utterance production**
29	I	I'm going to tell you a story and you're going to tell me what happens in the end! Once upon a time, a girl went into the forest to look for her dog, but when she got there she couldn't find him. What do you think happened to her dog?	
30	P	Her dog.	
31	I	What happened to her dog?	
32	P	Her dog.	
33	I	Her dog? I don't understand, what happened?	
34	P	That's, that's, that's, that's, that's.	
35	I	That's? What?	
36	P	What?	
37	I	No…	Z interrupts
38	P	Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing.	Z is holding the puppet with five different animals.
39	I	Ah, you five all speak together?	The intern notices that the speech refers to the puppets.
40	P	That's, that's, that's, that's, that's.	With a stronger intonation.
41	I	Wow! How interesting, you all speak together! Tell me, what's your name?	
42	P	Man, man, man, man, man.	
43	I	They are all men?	
44	P	That's it.	
45	I	Aaaaaah (with an air of surprise) my gosh, what an unusual name. 'Man', what are you doing here?	With an air of surprise
46	P	Nothing, US.	Z produces an unintelligible segment.

In the data here, the repetition of the intern's last words (lines 30, 32 and 36) initially leads to an impasse, given that Z's response does not appear to fit with the question asked. However, when we look at the continuation of the dialogue, we can see that the repetition also occupies another place within it. We perceive the singular presence of repetition in lines 38, 40 and 42, although these are not immediate repetitions of what the other says, they are also not reproduced discontinuously from the dialogue, because the intern understands them and attributes meaning to them within the discursive chain. According to the intern's description, in this utterative scene, the child uses a glove puppet which contains five different animals. Based on the intern's interpretations, we note that the repetitions represent the speeches of the puppet's five characters, in line 38 and in lines 40 and 42. There is a possibility that turn number 38 represents these characters' response to the questions the intern asked in turn 29 and reiterated by the intern in the other turn. However, the way in which this

answer is uttered surprises the intern, as we can see in turn number 39.

As Bordin[6] points out, this data demonstrates that not every repetition signifies a new request, and characteristics said to be pathological are as mutable as language. For the author, characteristics described classically in the literature may vary according to the autistic subject, since there is enormous heterogeneity in the manifestation of autism, corroborating the currently assumed notion of the *spectrum*. Furthermore, we know that, even when dealing with the same subject, these characteristics are not always present. According to the author, "there is diversity in the language functioning of the same autistic child that the diagnostic manuals are not able to describe"[6].

In this case, the repetition serves as a way of giving voice to the personalities, while meaning and reframing the singular utterances falls to the intern, taking into account the context in which the dialogue takes place. Ignoring the situational context, as occurs within theories that take language

as a uniquely abstract system, could lead one to believe that these repetitions are meaningless or even pathological.

The nature of the discursive movements and their dimensions characterize language as a place not only of the expected, but also of surprise and conflict, of the singular, of discontinuity and differences. The meaning originates from the series of linguistic exchanges and the way in which these modify the situation[15].

It is important to consider the clinical bias present in this interaction. This provides the proper and qualified listening that supports the continuity of dialogue. Within the Bakhtinian perspective, according to Ponzio[16], listening is the art of the word, of the possibilities of understanding beyond meanings, of actual semantic content. The art of listening does not occur outside the word, in the sense that each word contains within itself the different positions assumed by the interlocutor.

In the dialogic excerpt below, the importance of otherness as constitutive of the dialogue is evident, particularly when considering gestures, repetitions and silences as significant and in maintaining a posture of attributing meaning and reframing the subject's utterances (I: intern and P: patient/child)

At the beginning of this excerpt, the intern initiates the dialogue by presenting a jigsaw containing a story about Joao and Maria. However, in the following turns, the patient shifts the position traditionally taken by the intern, that of the one who asks questions. This passage of dialogue is asymmetrical, but directed by Z, who repeats the questions in the following five turns (what's that?) similar to what might happen when applying figure naming tests.

In this passage and in others in this dialogue, we can see that, from a clinical perspective, it is not always possible to attribute an ending to the discursive turns of an autistic subject, in totality or at the conclusion of a previous turn, given that the very possibility of finishing by the autistic subject provides continuity to the dialogue. In this case, the continuity is caused by the subject pointing to different scenes in the jigsaw, which generates several responses from the intern. In the previous turns this relationship is somewhat reversed, principally following the introduction of the witch's character to the story. At most of these times, Z assumes a posture of silence. Based on the analysis of different data and as illustrated above (lines 32, 36 and 38), we see that at certain points of verbal interaction Z remains quiet in response to the intern's utterances. In most cases, these moments demonstrate that silence cannot be equated with the absence of sound, or worse, of dialogue, given that the absence of sound is marked by constant interpretations by the other.

Here, we remember the Bakhtin circle's critiques of verbal interaction schemes that position the interlocutor as active in the interaction and the receiver as passive. For Bakhtin[17], when the listener perceives the meaning of the discourse during verbal interaction, he occupies an active responsive position which can never be overlooked.

In the case of this dialogic excerpt, the moments of Z's silence and when he produces partially unintelligible utterances (40, 42, 44) invite several interpretations. We can relate these moments to the concept of *responsive comprehension*.

For Bakhtin[11], a comprehension of lived speech always requires a responsive attitude, given that *all comprehension is pregnant with answers*. For the author, even if this response is not phonic and immediate, responsive comprehension may succeed through an action or even by remaining mute for a certain amount of time. For him, therefore, responsive comprehension is the preparatory phase of a response, however it is delivered.

We argue here that, although Z remains quiet, he is not oblivious to the utterances directed at him by the intern; his silence is responsive insofar as the intern's utterances are interpreted and moved. We note that this movement culminates in turn number 42, when he once again takes up the theme of the witch's story presented by the intern and finally produces his own narrative about the story.

Table 3. Dialogic excerpt 3 - 24/02/2016

Line	Interlocutor	Transcription	Conditions of utterance production
Utterative scene: Z and the intern are putting together a jigsaw which contains three stories. Z asks several questions about the jigsaw's images**.**			
21	I	Here are Joao and Maria.	
22	P	What are they doing there?	Points to the image on the jigsaw.
23	I	What are they doing? They want to go into a house made of sweets. Can't you see all the lollipops here?	
24	P	What's that?	Points to the image on the jigsaw.
25	I	Here's a donut. That's the little donut that we eat. (pause). Here's a lollipop.	
26	P	What's that?	Points to the image on the jigsaw.
27	I	This is a marshmallow.	
28	P	What's that?	Points to the image on the jigsaw.
29	I	This here is an umbrella, a lollipop umbrella, which looks like a walking stick... It's a sweetie.	
30	P	What's that?	Points to the image on the jigsaw.
31	I	This is a door, can't you see? Here is a chocolate, look, a chocolate bar.	Points to the image on the jigsaw.
32	P	( )	Silence.
33	I	This here... They want to go into the house of sweets. Do you know what's inside here? In this house? A witch! The witch wants to take Joao and Maria. Did you know that?	
34	P	Did you know that?	
35	I	Did you or didn't you know that?	
36	P	( )	Silence.
37	I	I didn't know. I only found out just now.	
38	P	( )	Silence.
39	I	This is a tree... flowers... Do you like the jigsaw?	
40	P	( ) US	Z is silent for a moment and there follows an unintelligible segment.
41	I	What?	
42	P	US	
42	I	What? What do we have here?	Z begins to tell a short story related to the image of Joao and Maria on the jigsaw (at this moment the child talks very quietly and also produces unintelligible segments which made the transcription of this passage difficult).
43	P	US	Z produces an unintelligible segment.
44	I	What did the witch eat?!	Air of surprise
	P	US	Z continues to tell the story of Joao and Maria (the child talks very quietly and also produces unintelligible segments which made the transcription of this passage difficult).
45	I	What is the witch going to do to them? Is she going to eat him? What is she going to eat? Sweeties?	
46	P	No, not sweeties.	

Table 4. Transcription key.

Signs	Explanation
I	Intern.
P	Patient.
( )	Silence.
…	Indication of partial transcription or deletion. The use of ellipses at the beginning and the end of a transcription indicates that only one passage has been transcribed.
US	Unintelligible segment.

Conclusion

We have sought in this work to analyse the particular way in which a child and his interlocutor locate themselves in dialogic interaction and to analyse, within the theoretical and methodological proposal we have outlined, the expressive resources mobilized within these dialogues. This has been achieved by applying another view, one focused not on the limitations imposed by Autism Spectrum Disorder, but rather on Z's singularities and potential, seeking to understand how this subject situates himself in relation to the world, language and the other, although, due to the very nature of the article, in a highly incipient manner. This is an initial article, which merely seeks to introduce certain questions and reflections underpinned by the Bakhtinian perspective and which require further examination.

Many people who coexist with autistic individuals already have prior conceptions about what to expect of them. For many, it is natural for these subjects only to express themselves in ways described in diagnostic manuals; they are not expected to present anything beyond that which has already been described. This naturalization prevents a perception of their ability to express themselves in a way different from this prediction, leaving them devoid of singularity.

For this reason, there is a need to question the way in which the autistic subject is traditionally seen by SLH Sciences (and by health in general) and to reposition this in terms of his evaluation and treatment, responding to what has been described in diagnostic manuals about language, which is normally equivalent to language at the level of description, and to the subject's communicative behaviour. Such a repositioning of the SLH professional's view is only possible based on another conception of language, allied to the conception of the subject, one which is naturally unfinished, and which we have tried to indicate throughout this article.

It is worth noting that we have not forgotten that we are dealing with a subject who has a particular and special way of positioning himself in relation to the world, language and the other, one which is different from expectations and which led to the autism diagnosis. This is not to overlook issues that arise from ASD or not to value the specificities which may impact the lives of these subjects, but rather to emphasize that the unfinished nature with which we characterize the subject also provides a way of valuing his potential, of seeing his horizon of possibilities.

Here we have seen a child who assumes the role of the subject, who asks, responds, tells stories, etc. We understand that this is a subject who is totally present in language and who, for this reason, mobilizes different linguistic resources to achieve his discursive intention, some of which are not valued in daily life, principally because we live in an essentially logocentric world[18]. By adopting the utterance as a unit of analysis, we have sought to give visibility to the composition of dialogue based on both non-verbal and verbal elements, such as gestures, silence, expressions, choices of terms used, pauses, intonation, etc.

Traditional clinics working with the language of autistic individuals consider them to be finished subjects and, based on a clinical perspective founded on the language present in therapeutic manuals, establish this as an official view. When dealing with a logocentric society such as ours, thinking of another clinical perspective presupposes that we consider otherness when working with the lived and ambivalent word[19].

In this sense, the SLH language clinic plays a fundamental role in the social (re)inclusion of the autistic subject, by addressing aspects which

are related to the subject's own constitution and relationship with the world. As we have attempted to demonstrate throughout this study, language is not only a place of the predictable, but also of the unpredictable and the singular. We have seen that the meaning of singular utterances depends on the context in which dialogue takes place, on a series of linguistic exchanges and how these remodel the situation.

We note that echolalic speech, repetitive gestures and even silence are traditionally seen and interpreted as symptomatic when talking of autistic children. However, we understand that these "symptoms" must be seen as parts of a language that needs to be heard, since they demonstrate that these subjects do not present as autistic all the time.

Based on these reflections and conclusions, we have tried to at least indicate how Bakhtinian theoretical contributions may lead to changes in the evaluation and therapeutic practices related to the language of subjects with ASD. This change distances us from previously established limitations, as we look towards the potential within language and in dialogic and social practices.

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