# Bakhtin's Dialogism and Vossler's Stylistics / *Dialogismo bakhtiniano e a estilística vossleriana*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to discuss the possible relationships between two theoretical trends of the early 20th century: Bakhtin's dialogism and Vossler's stylistics. Despite not mentioning Vossler's theory in his grammar teaching notes, Bakhtin does include it in his classroom practice with some variations, which is a result of the dialogue between the two. Thus, this article aims to analyze Vossler's theory so as to observe how Bakhtin interacts with Vossler's concepts of grammar and style and to consider the extent to which some of these concepts are used in his classroom notes.

KEYWORDS: Dialogism; Grammar; Stylistics; Bakhtin; Vossler

*RESUMO*

*O objetivo deste artigo é discutir as relações possíveis entre duas vertentes teóricas do início do século XX: o dialogismo bakhtiniano e a estilística de Vossler. Embora na demonstração de sua prática pedagógica em sala de aula Bakhtin não mencione essa teoria de base, ela ali está presente com algumas variantes que resultam do diálogo tenso com ela estabelecido. Este trabalho objetiva analisar a teoria de Vossler, com o intuito de observar como Bakhtin dialoga com os conceitos vosslerianos no que diz respeito à concepção de língua, gramática e estilo e em que medida se apropria de alguns conceitos em suas anotações de aula.*

*PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Dialogismo; Gramática; Estilo; Bakhtin; Vossler*

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**Introduction**

The early 20th century is characterized by a profound transformation in the field of knowledge stemming from the scientific theories of the late 19th century, such as the linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). His *Cours de Linguistique Générale* (1916), published by former students Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, in collaboration with A. Ridlinger, is one such theory that applies a scientific model to language analysis, which highlights its objective features.

Set against this context, which led to a formulation of specific laws in favor of research objects as opposed to a focus on the human being, many intellectuals in the field of philosophy and language set out to bring back the human life that had been frozen out by scientific experimentalism.

Bakhtin and the Circle initiated a dialogue with these theories, attempting to analyze language in the communication and interaction between human beings.

Intellectuals from various disciplines took part in this epistemological debate and a theory was developed over time with the purpose of rescuing the communicative process specific to the living nature of humans. Among the various theories with which Bakhtin and the Circle engaged, Linguistics and German Stylistics stood out: on the one hand, Linguistics, resulting from scientific abstraction, and on the other, from a reverse process, Stylistics, resulting from an investigation of language as an expression of subjective creativity, thus opposed to the notion of language from a scientific perspective.

To understand the importance of this debate, it needs to be positioned in the turbulent social context of the Bolshevik Revolution in early 20th century Russia. The critical position of this group of intellectuals, which included Bakhtin, Voloshinov and Medvedev, amongst others, opposed the authoritarian posture of the 1917 Revolution, whose method was indirectly questioned. Language as a system was one of the questions discussed within this group, known as the Circle. Thus, speech, as opposed to language, became the central theme of this debate, which sought to escape from the impositions of one language on every social group, each of which was heterogeneous in its context. As described by Clark and Holquist (2004, p.49), Bakhtin was born in Orel in southern Moscow and spent his childhood in Vilnius (Lithuania, to where his family moved) with various ethnic groups and cultures, such as Judaism, Orthodox Catholicism, amongst

others. This allowed him to observe their cultural and linguistic differences. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that led him to discuss the imposition of a single language on all social groups.

Thus, Bakhtin and the members of the Circle discussed the limits that the scientific theories of the time imposed on life; they did this by laying out data, analyzing human acts from abstract and scientific perspectives. These included Saussure's linguistics, determinist psychology, structural Marxism and even the reductionism of stylistics to the isolation of the speaking subject from his or her social context.

However, it is essential to place this debate in its historical context: Voloshinov, Bakhtin and the other members of the Circle were repressed by the Russian regime. They were persecuted, imprisoned and punished for presenting themselves as questioning intellectuals, discussing problems that were not sympathetic to the ideals of the Revolution. As his biographers and the historians of that time point out, Bakhtin was sentenced to prison and exiled in Kazakhstan (CLARK; HOLQUIST, 1984; SERIOT, 2015).

Aside from this curtailment of freedom of speech, revolutionary Russia had proposed to establish a standardized language, ignoring the social and cultural variants of different ethnic groups. Given this context, the debates introduced by these intellectuals proposed discussions on stimulating topics, which were not always aligned with the vision of the revolutionary system. Sériot (2015) states that, in Nevel, the group gathered around Matvei Kagan (1889-1937), who had recently arrived from Germany, from where he had brought the concepts of Kant and the neo-Kantian, which were disseminated by Herman Cohen (1842-1918). Kagan was a teacher in Jewish schools in Nevel and had a philosophical motto: "The world is not a simple given but a given to be elaborated upon."

This philosophical principle seemed to guide the discussion around language and speech that became the object of research and discussion in the search for a less reductive theory of language, whose results still stimulate current research. In this regard, an abstract analysis of language might lead to the distancing of human beings, both researchers and enunciators, distancing them from the immediate social problems. This is an important issue when considering the revolutionary context experienced in Russia and the curtailment of individual freedom of expression. It is no coincidence that

Saussure's theory prevailed in Russia at that time to the detriment of Vossler's Stylistics, as Volosinov (1986) points out.

In an attempt to delve deeper into the less explicit relations in the group's debates, many current theorists have been investigating this dialogue between the Russian researchers and the various theories prevailing at the time. Among them, Craig Brandist's essay Mikhail Bakhtin and the Early Soviet Sociolinguistics (2004) provides an insightful investigation into this dialogue. In this text, Brandist demonstrates the affinity between the dialogical concept of language and the reflections of Jakubinsky[1] and Zhirmunsky, two Russian researchers that studied language and social dialects.

Bakhtin and the Circle return to a discussion already initiated by other intellectuals in Russia and develop it by opening other lines of research, conceptualizing categories of analysis of utterances in general communication. By doing so, they link language to social context, thereby demonstrating how any linguistic expression stems from a process that reflects the past and refracts in the present as a result of social changes and progress. This perspective is present in Bakhtin's grammar teaching proposal. On the one hand, grammar is presented as an unquestionable norm, whose predominant method is the memorization of rules, exempting the learners from their commitment to the constitutive values of their utterance. In a way, such a form of expression contributes to the exemption from responsibility of the subject that speaks. On the other hand, grammar is used as an expressive resource, allowing the articulation of individual values that are socially situated and that respond to the immediate context. This approach to dealing with the linguistic expression enables a social dialogue between different groups and cultures and is what seems to guide Bakhtin and the Circle's discussion on the concepts of language (in the Saussurian sense of *langue*) and speech (*langage*).

Based on Bakhtin's initial reflections, in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*,[2] written between 1919-1921, we can note the degree of concern towards the responsibility of the individual as a social being whose actions are translated into language.

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[1] Jakubinsky's text *Sobre a fala dialogal* [On the Dialogical Speech] was translated into Portuguese from the French edition by Dóris Cunha and Suzana Cortez, and was published by Parábola in 2015.
[2] BAKHTIN, M. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Translation and notes by Vadim Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1993.

All of Bakhtin and the Circle's critiques of their present-day theories aimed to awaken the sense of ethics and responsibility of the individual in society. In this regard, Vossler's theory, despite the limitations indicated by Voloshinov and Bakhtin, seems a closer match than the scientist theories. Vossler studied the historical evolution of languages. He established relations with the context, although very generally, in an attempt to find period styles, the evolution of languages or a writer's style in the expressiveness of the language, Stylistics would still be closer to the human being than Saussure's linguistic theory.

Therefore, despite the criticism of Vossler's method, as pointed by Vološinov (1986),[3] Bakhtin and the Circle foresaw the concern with a living entity, with the individual, even if confined to his idealized subjectivity and distanced from the immediate context.

In this sense, the priority for stylistics stems from the individualized employment of grammatical forms as an expressive resource from a subject distanced from the context, and not from a psychological nature of the subject socially situated. This is the focal point from which Bakhtin and the Circle come to observe language in effective communication practices, shifting the focus from language in itself to language as an interactive process. In the discussions that emerged from this group of intellectuals, we find a movement of tension between the centripetal and centrifugal forces that guide the educational activities of Bakhtin, the teacher, as described in his essay translated into Portuguese as *Questões de estilística no ensino de gramática* (2013).[4] [5]

The dialogue with the different theoretical perspectives that Bakhtin and the Circle established is the object of many research papers, such as those written by Craig Brandist (2012), Ana Zandwais (2009), Serguei Tchougonnikov (2012), Carlos Alberto

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[3] The spelling used in this article (Vološinov) follows the 1986 English publication of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, which also does not include Bakhtin's name as co-author, as appears in the Portuguese version.

[4] TN. The English version of this work was entitled Stylistics in Teaching Russian Language in Secondary School. It was translated by Lydia Razran Stone and published in the *Journal of Russian and European Psychology*, v.42, n.6, pp.12-49, 2004.

[5] Following the publication in Brazil of Bakhtin's lecture notes, translated by Sheila Grillo and Ekaterina V. Américo, *Questões de estilística no ensino de língua* (2013) [Teaching Russian Language in Secondary School], many theoretical questions can be discussed, from the dialogue that Bakhtin maintains with the Circle to the dialogue with other theoretical trends, such as Stylistics.

Faraco (2006; 2009),[6] all of whom seek to shed light on important aspects of this dialogue. Moving away from this discussion, the aim here is to look at how stylistics plays an important role in Bakhtin's work as a teacher, teaching grammar and seeking to adapt it to his dialogical perspective of language. Hence, at first, Vossler's theory is discussed. Then, a connection is established with the Circle and with Bakhtin's grammar teaching as a classroom experience.

## 1 The Concept of Language in Vossler's Perspective

Style is one means of approaching literary works that has always been of concern to critics. In the classical period, as literature obeyed predetermined stylistic models, such concerns only considered the fidelity of the author in relation to these models. However, from the Romantic era, the artist broke with the paradigms established by Classicism. From this period onwards, creativity and individual originality came to be valued and became a measure for the aesthetic judgment of the arts. Although the sciences started to underpin new forms of artistic valuation, the appreciation of originality remained, which was more objective and more committed to social criticism as is the case in Realism and Naturalism.

Positivism and Determinism, which inspired this kind of literature, also served to guide research in the Human Sciences in the late 19th century. It is in this context that Saussure stands out. His main objective was to make linguistic theory more impersonal, that is, based on concrete evidence and opposing the philological and historical studies that predominated in literature and language research. A descriptive linguistic science that aimed to understand the structural process of its nature emerged from this proposal. Saussure's research and description of linguistic phenomena is one such attempt to frame

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[6] Carlos Alberto Faraco (2006) deals with the theoretical relations to language that Voloshinov established with Humboldt's theory, which considers language as activity, though giving it an essentially social character. According to Faraco, "Voloshinov, as the Humboldtians, in general, finds it difficult to situate the specifically grammatical question in his theoretical framework," which, for him, Bakhtin seems to resolve when he makes the distinction between sentence and utterance. (cf. FARACO, C. Voloshinov: um coração humboldtiano?, in FARACO,C. A.; TEZZA, C.; CASTRO, G. (Eds) *Vinte ensaios sobre Mikhail Bakhtin*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2006, p.130.) Citation in Portuguese: "Volochínov, como os Humboldtianos, em geral, tem dificuldades para situar em seu quadro teórico a questão especificamente gramatical."

linguistics in the field of scientific research, thus opposing the philological and comparatist studies of the nineteenth century.

Conflicting theories coexisted at that time: on the one hand, the scientific and abstract theoretical proposal of language (*langue*), and on the other, the philological and comparatist vision that sought to understand the evolution of language and literature. In this sense, language and literature have always been side by side. Therefore, there was a scientific, descriptive and abstract vision on the one hand, and conversely, on the other, an individualistic vision that continued to value the individual as the original source of his or her work from a perspective that comes close to that of Romanticism.

It is from this latter vision that Stylistics emerged with the Germans in the early 20th century. Karl Vossler (1872-1949), a researcher of this line of thinking, engaged with linguistic studies from a spiritual perspective, opposing the dominant Determinism and Positivism. Vossler was in line with Bakhtin and the Circle's criticism. For him, Saussurean linguistics had a more scientific character and distanced itself from language as a communicative activity.

This was the critical aspect that motivated the work of both the German researchers, including Vossler, and the Russians, including Bakhtin and the Circle, in the early 20th century. As with the Russian theoreticians, Vossler took the recent work of the Geneva Group, mainly that of one of Saussure's disciples, Bally, from which he set his theoretical vision against. Vossler presented the concepts both positively and negatively proposing his theoretical framework on the subject without undermining Bally's perspective.

For Vossler (1968), language is an expression of the spirit and therefore is both simultaneously general and specific in nature. It is general in that it is shared by the community of speakers and specific because of the individual and subjective practice of each member of that community. Hence, it cannot be seen merely through a descriptive prism as proposed by Bally, for whom language is functional in nature and thus can be described by its functions. As Vossler states, this functionalist perspective discards the whole historical course of linguistic evolution. Instead, language should be studied as a function of the human spirit and society. In this sense, language as function would be abstract, emptied of its social nature. In this regard, Vossler criticizes Bally's theory arguing that if the linguist wanted to understand a language as a function of spirit,

biologically, he should forget the relationships that bond this language to its past, ignoring all the cultural references of its production, such as literature and everything that makes it a vital expression of the past. According to Vossler, it is this descriptive characteristic that is already the task performed by grammarians, as is expressed in his writings when he states that a science concerned only with words, detached from its cultural references, would be a useless, indifferent and meaningless task. (VOSSLER, 1968).

For Vossler (1968), even Bally's sociological perspective is limited because, from his positivist vision, sociology is also a science of precise laws that dispenses with history. In this sense, studying language would have to ignore all its past and cultural values.

Vossler (1968) also points out that, in *Traité de stylistique française* [A treaty of French stylistics] (1909), Bally recognizes the vital aspect of language as subjective expression. However, as a disciple of Saussure, he soon dismisses this possibility as he considers creative individuality an obstacle to the scientific treatment of language as a research object. From this perspective, the idiosyncrasy of style would be an impediment to the necessary objective generalizations, characteristic of science whose laws must strive for description and objectivity.

Opposing the tendency of science to abstract generalization, Vossler does not forgo the relationship between the word and its past. Thus, this reality cannot be ignored by only considering language's present actualization descriptively.

Many affinities to Bakhtin and the Circle's criticism on the linguistic theory of the late 19th and early 20th century can be seen in Vossler's comments.

## 2 Grammar and Style

From Vossler's perspective, as well as that of Bakhtin and the Circle, language as a system is seen as an abstract notion, which has been tacitly constructed by members of a linguistic community. This is the fundamental point at which these theoretical perspectives converge. However, such convergence is limited to the question of spirituality, which is key to Vosslerian linguistics. According to his followers, when something is spiritually elaborated and fulfilled, we can find human language, which precedes and prepares this realization, reflecting on it, and even censoring it. For Vossler, a spiritual action cannot be considered in isolation because it would be disassociated from

the word that expresses it, thus separating radically from it. Conversely, when the word is reduced to its own form, it eliminates the entire process of its spiritual conception. Therefore, he believes that the thinker, the researcher, the teacher, and even the orator and the poet, who only elaborate words, are not true thinkers, researchers or poets (VOSSLER, 1968, p.89).

For the author, if the words are taken at face value they do not express any spiritual activity, for all the more important action lies behind them. If they refer to something of greater significance, it is because of their reference to something that distances them from themselves. In this respect, Vossler criticizes the mechanistic view of language and the use of grammatical forms applied indiscriminately to any utterance.

Vossler onsiders that the essential object of grammar is language disconnected from all activity and all spiritual life. This is evident in his essay The formal method:

> [...] And as in strict abstraction there cannot be a spiritual becoming and making, the only things left are a natural becoming and a despiritualized, automatic and mechanical making. And, indeed, all the idiomatic life, as the grammatical method conceives it, is reduced to these processes, to the mechanisms of Physis and Psyche (VOSSLER, 1968, p.91).[7]

The more linguistics is concerned with grammatical orientation, the more it distances itself from cultural expressions and all the individual forms that manifest themselves in the language in focus. As can be seen, there is an aspect of convergence with the Circle's critique of the gulf between the linguistic and grammatical research on language in its dynamic vitality. But the limits of this convergence are marked by other questions.

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[7] Translated from Spanish: "[…] Y como para una abstracción estricta no puede haber un suceder y un obrar espirituales, sólo queda un suceder natural y un hacer desespiritualizado, automático, mecánico. Y efectivamente, a estos procesos, a mecanismos de la Physis y a mecanismos de la Psyque se reduce toda la vida idiomática tal como la entiende el método gramatical."

## 3 Vossler and the Circle

In the early works of Bakhtin and the Circle, considerations on the difference between language (*langue*) and speech (*langage*) are emphasized in order to stake out a different theoretical space. Both *Marxism and the Philosophy of the Language* ([1929] 1986)[8] and *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (2007), especially in two essays: The Problem of Speech Genres (1951-1953)[9] and The problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis (1959-1961)[10] demonstrate a concern with establishing differences between language as a system and as a living language, and with theories guided by observation limited only to the text in its concrete materiality.

In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1986),[11] the tense dialogue with these theories highlights the basis from which the dialogic theory was conceived. The most significant implications for the establishment of the Circle's theoretical conceptualization are discussed by means of contrast. One of the most important contrasting aspects is the question of speech acts, which were abandoned by Saussure in his attempt to observe language as a scientific research object. The peculiarity of individual language as a means of expression is valued by stylistics and is taken up by the Circle, not exclusively as isolated idiosyncratic acts, as Vossler suggests, but as a communicative activity that relates the subject that speaks and social context to which he or she responds. Stylistics values the speech act, but sees it as something separate from the immediate context of production and as individually produced, even if linked to culture and historical evolution. In this sense, despite the differences in the theoretical approach adopted by the two sides, expressivity is a relevant convergent point between both. However, it is understood differently by the Circle.

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[8] VOLOŠINOV, V. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Translated by Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.
[9] BAKHTIN, M.  The Problem of Speech Genres . In: _____. *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986, pp.60-102.
[10] BAKHTIN, M.  The problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis . In: _____. *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986, pp.103-131.
[11] For reference, see footnote 8.

The opposing perspective of Vosslerian theory in relation to a vision of language as an abstract system distant from vital human drive is also a positive aspect of convergence with the Circle, albeit with many restrictions. As Vološinov states in the second part of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, *Toward a Marxist Philosophy of Language*:

> The Vossler school is defined first and foremost by its decisive and theoretically grounded *rejection of linguistic positivism* with its inability to see anything beyond the linguistic form (primarily, the phonetic form as the most "positive" kind) and the elementary psychophysiological act of its generation. In connection with this, the *meaningful ideological* factor in language has been advanced to the fore. The main impetus to linguistic creativity is said to be "linguistic taste", a special variety of artistic taste. Linguistic taste is that linguistic truth by which language lives and which the linguistic must ascertain in every manifestation of language in order genuinely to understand and explain the manifestation in question (1986, p.50; emphasis in original).[12]

In this regard, Voloshinov highlights the aesthetic principle, which is essential to the concept of the artistic utterance that guides Vossler. It is also a principle widely discussed by Bakhtin as well as the Circle, though the analysis of the utterance is not limited only to that Šaspect. It is important to note that to extract theoretical categories about language and its active expression, literature is taken as the privileged object of investigation by this group of thinkers. Language expressed in an artistic production resonates with everyday language as a means of human expression in the social context. As mentioned by Voloshinov, Vossler's stylistics seeks to join the science of language and the science of literature in order to respond to a moment of confusion between linguistics and poetics from a Marxist perspective (2015, pp.213-214).[13]

Returning to the idea that language is a form of spiritual expression, Vossler proposes to associate the history of language development with art history, arguing that

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[12] For reference, see footnote 8.

[13] The referred essay Sobre as fronteiras entre poética e linguística [On the Boundaries between Poetics and Linguistics], published in Portuguese in the volume *A Construção da enunciação e outros ensaios* (2015, pp.213-214), does not appear in the book *Bakhtin School Papers* (1988), and an English translation of the essay was not found in other volumes. Therefore, the Portuguese translation reference has been maintained, which was compiled by João Wanderley Geraldi from Italian versions directly translated from the Russian: Nicoletta Marcialis's *Il linguaggio come pratica sociale* and Luciano Ponzio's *Linguaggio e escritura*.

art would be the linguistic and spiritual expression of the artist. In this regard, examining the linguistic forms of literary works could lead more broadly to the style of the period. As a comparatist, Vossler seeks the common resources used in language in the individual style of the author. In his research, he demonstrates how language is explored individually by the artist and what common traits it presents.

For Bakhtin and the Circle, literature is also a fertile field of language investigation, in which one can extract analytical categories from a concrete perspective. In this sense, grammar is understood as the material realization of utterances; not as a set of absolute rules, rather, as each utterance is unique and cannot be repeated, the valuative significance will always be different even if the utterances contain the same features. This is because of the production context as well as the communicative proposal of the author and the presumed reader to which the author responds. Therefore, there is a shift in viewpoint from a stylistics centered on the subject to a stylistics constituted by the dialogic principle, which is the opposite of Vossler's development. Each utterance is analyzed by investigating several variables, and the language that materializes it is also seen in a very specific way: as a response to a particular moment in time in relation to the whole social context of production. Thus, the utterance is characterized by the valuative position of the enunciator and not as an expression of abstract spirituality, as Vossler understood.

From this point of view and guided by the concepts of aesthetics and ethics, Bakhtin and the Circle distance themselves from other approaches which they oppose, including Stylistics.

The language that materializes the utterance, whether artistic or not, is malleable and adapts to the expressive needs of the enunciator in his or her socio-historical context. Thus states Voloshinov in *The Construction of the Utterance* (1988), an essay published in the volume *Bakhtin School Papers* (1983), so as to establish the distinction between language understood from a scientific perspective and in social practice:

> Above all we must not forget that language is not something static, given once and all, with strictly determined grammatical 'rules' and 'exceptions'. Language is most certainly not a dead, frozen product of social life: it is in constant flux, its development following that social life. This forward movement in language is realized in the process of human communication, not only in connection with production, but

also in the course of *speech communication* (1983, p.114; emphasis in original).[14]

The viewpoint adopted in this passage indicates the approach to observing language as a social practice. It opposes both the rigidity of the rules imposed by grammar and the abstraction of the linguistic theory removed from the expressive vivacity of language in its practical reality. Thus, the straitjacket imposed by the rules is discarded by the situation of communication, the interlocutors and the immediate situation, hence the dialogic relations. For this reason, Bakhtin questions the form of mechanistic education, which prevents the enunciator from making a choice from the rich permutations that language affords in order to make the utterance an act that is consistent with the context and with the author's communication proposal. Therefore, in line with Brait (2014), it can be argued that the dialogical principle which guides this theory is that which distances it from German Stylistics.

As Bakhtin noted in his language and grammar classes, and also what motivated his teaching, was the fact that all students had the same syntactic structure in their utterances. For him, this meant a real ignorance of the possible suitable alternatives to the communication proposal of each utterance, as an expression of valuative positions before the immediate moment of production. Mastery of this linguistic wealth is what would transform the enunciators into true authors.

Considering this, questions of aesthetics and authorship are crucial to Bakhtin and the Circle. But the aesthetic vision for these researchers is not limited to the concept of beauty in literary texts, as is revealed in several essays, including *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* ([1919] 1999).[15] For Bakhtin, the utterance is an event that stems from the communication proposal of the enunciator. This event, both in art and in life, marks a position of responsibility for the individual for what he or she utters in relation to the social context and to his or her interlocutors. In Bakhtin's words:

> Thus knowledge *of* [*znanie*] the content of the object-in-itself becomes a knowledge of it *for me* – becomes a *cognition* [*uznanie*] *that*

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[14] VOLOSHINOV, V. The Construction of Utterance. Translated by Noel Owen. In: SHUKMAN, A. (Ed.). *Bakhtin School Papers*: Russian Poetics Translations. Essex: Printing Centre at Essex University, 1983, pp.114-138.

[15] For reference, see footnote 2.

> *answerability obligates me*. Abstracting from myself is a technical device which finds its justification when I approach it form my actual once-occurrent place in Being, where I, the knower, have become answerable and subject to the ought for my cognition [*uznanie*] (1993, p.49; emphasis in original).[16]

Although Bakhtin uses literary works as references to demonstrate the theory and responsibility of the author to his work, this vision of the individual committed to his enunciating expression is more comprehensive, as can be seen in his comments on discursive genres. By defining the valuative character of every form of expression by the tone that prevails in any generic utterance, Bakhtin implies the degree of responsibility that the enunciator has with his or her utterance. And it is this characteristic that gives us a glimpse into Bakhtin's practical activities in the classroom. It shows that by reversing the order, by employing cohesive elements or not, and by choosing these elements, there is a change in the meaning effect proposed by the author in his communicative proposal, by the reader or presumed listener as well as by the social context.

In this respect, the linguistic materiality that constitutes the style becomes essential, hence the convergence with Vosslerian stylistics, despite the limitations that will emerge over the course of grammar teaching in Bakhtin's classroom practice. Below, the greatest credit to stylistics as well as its limits is evidenced:

> Individualistic subjectivism is *correct* in that individual utterances are what constitute the actual, concrete reality of language, and in that they *do have* creative value in language.
> But individualistic subjectivism is *wrong* in ignoring and failing to understand the social nature of the utterance and in attempting to derive the utterance from the speaker's inner world as an expression of the inner world. The structure of the utterance and of the very experience being expressed is a social *structure* (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.93; emphasis in original).[17]

Thus, there is a significant shift from Vossler's perspective on style, with the emphasis on the immediate situation and on the participants that determine the form and style of the utterance (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.118).[18]

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[16] For reference, see footnote 2.
[17] For reference, see footnote 8.
[18] For reference, see footnote 8.

In this regard, the organizing metaphor of the thinking of Bakhtin and the Circle becomes evident: Juno, the goddess of the threshold, of entries and borders, whose gaze turns simultaneously to the inside and the outside (HAYNES, 1995 p.XIV).

Thus, the limits established with stylistics, which give the author the autonomous responsibility of his art and maintain a romantic perspective, based on the spiritual vision of subjective inspiration, become clearer. For Bakhtin and the Circle, the nerve center of Vosslerian stylistics is the lack of perception of the dialogical nature of language. It values culture, but does not consider it intrinsic to artistic production, because the other is ignored in this process. This is an issue that is closely related to the concept of ideological sign, widely discussed in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1986).[19] In this perspective, the word as a sign reflects and refracts meanings. The word is not a mere repetition of the meaning that circulates in the social context, but it transforms itself into other meanings depending on the dialogic relations that the speaker has with the internalized other, to whom he or she reacts according to valuative and ideological positions before this other. Thus, both the word and the syntactic structure of the utterance express this duality. Grammar, treated mechanically, would prevent refraction by the automatic repetition of established models.

Hence, grammar is a necessary parameter to maintain linguistic comprehension between the people of a community. However, it is also a relative parameter that endures the pressure of evolution and active progress in daily life. Individuals are confronted with the heteroglossia present in society. In the essay *Discourse in the Novel*, written in the period 1934-1935, which is part of the book *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), Bakhtin writes:

> Linguistics and Stylistics and the Philosophy of language that are born and shaped by the current of centralizing tendencies in the life of language have ignored this dialogized heteroglossia in which is embodied the centrifugal forces in the life of language. For this very reason they could make no provision for the dialogic nature of language, which was a struggle between socio-linguistic points of view,

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[19] For reference, see footnote 8.

not an intra-language struggle between individual wills or logical contradictions (1981, p.273).[20]

With these words, Bakhtin highlights the distance between the two theories and the Circle's dialogism, whose understanding of language and discourse takes into account the heteroglossia, specific to the social context, not reductive to mere differences in pronunciation and vocabulary, but as an expression of values constitutive of social groups.

In addition to this common distinction between the vision of language adopted by the Circle and the two theories it opposes, Bakhtin establishes a difference between grammatical vision and stylistics in the essay *The Problem of Speech Genres*, part of the volume *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (1986, p.66):

> One might say that grammar and stylistics converge and diverge in any concrete language phenomenon, but if considered only in the language system, it is a grammatical phenomenon, but if considered in the whole of the individual utterance or in a speech genre, it is a stylistic phenomenon.[21]

In this essay, Bakhtin comments on the peculiarities of style in the composition of utterances, distinguishing it from Vosslerian stylistics because this strand ignores the third element of the relationship. For the Circle, communication is established by a triadic relationship, that is, by the external context that acts on the utterance.

For Bakhtin, every utterance is an event for which the author cannot evade responsibility (1993).[22] Hence, the commitment launched by the author's word, which is both responsive and responsible, inexorably casts him or her into the immediate context of production and to the culture that pervade the word. One cannot ignore this peculiarity in the production of the utterance. Given this theoretical position, Bakhtin chooses examples of the immediate context with which to educate his students about the variations in the syntactic structure of the informative utterances and the changes in meaning of each

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[20] BAKHTIN, M. Discourse in the Novel. In: _____. *The Dialogic Imagination*: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981, pp.259-422.
[21] For reference, see footnote 9.
[22] For reference, see footnote 2.

of these variations for different utterance proposals. Seen in this light, style escapes the Vosslerian notion of the subject as an expression of his or her individuality reduced to his or her psychological nature. In the essay *Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry* ([1926] 1983),[23] Voloshinov rejects the concept that style is the individual: "style is at least two people, or rather, it is the individual and his social group in the person of its authoritative representative, the listener, the ever-present participant in an individual's internal and external speech" (VOLOSHINOV [BAKHTIN], 1983, p.27).[24] Therefore, from this perspective, style is related to ideology, to the social values that constitute the other to whom the enunciator responds. Voloshinov emphasizes the relation of the word to the social context indirectly illuminating the question of style: "The word is a social event, it is not sufficient in itself, like an abstract linguistic constant is; it cannot be psychologically drawn out of the subjective consciousness of the speaker taken in isolation" (VOLOSHINOV [BAKHTIN], 1988, p.17).[25]

While, for Vossler, the author innovatively creates from the norm purely as a creator, for Voloshinov and Bakhtin, the enunciator should create because of his or her relationship with the other, the presumed reader, the production context and his or her enunciation proposal, amongst other factors that concretely act in the production of an utterance.

## Conclusion

Despite the criticism that Bakhtin/Voloshinov express towards the idealistic view of Stylistics view, there are points of convergence that ought to be highlighted. The most important aspect is that style provides the expression of the enunciator's individuality and his or her valuative positioning in the social context. An expression hardened by the reproduction of existing models would not allow that. This is what Bakhtin's classroom work on style constituted. Bakhtin demonstrates in practice how flexibility in the choices

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[23] VOLOSHINOV, V. Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry. Translated by John Richmond. In: SHUKMAN, A. (Ed.). *Bakhtin School Papers*: Russian Poetics Translations. Essex: Printing Centre at Essex University, 1983, pp.5-30.
[24] For reference, see footnote 23.
[25] For reference, see footnote 23.

of syntactical structure, punctuation and conjunctions can create different effects of meaning. At the same time, he demonstrates how the style of an author is related to his or her communicative proposal situated in time and space, as is the case of the poems of Pushkin and Gogol. Bakhtin shifts the aesthetic vision of stylistics so as to relate the utterance to the production context, thereby allowing the expressiveness of the utterance to oppose the dictatorship of a unified language in the interests of the artificial leveling of human beings.

Under these conditions, the enunciating subject has space to adopt an effective position, expressing his or her values in a responsive and responsible manner. From the dialogical perspective, stylistics would be linked to the subject situated in time and space. Such a subject would not only reflect but also refract values and ideology in his or her linguistic expression. This would not be possible in the mechanical repetition of homogenizing formulas of a hardened language.

This is the result of Bakhtin's work as a teacher, when he observes that, in his students' later essays, they began to improve their use of subordinate clauses without conjunctions (the focus of his classes). He highlights thus the transformation of young writers, who were previously mere reproducers but then became true authors (BAKHTIN, 2004). In practice Bakhtin is in tune with the perspective of Voloshinov (1983, p.27),[26] according to whom no coherent speech act "can take place without internal speech, without words and intonation – without evaluations, and it follows, that it is a social act, an act of intercourse." Hence, when printing the interpretive intention of syntactic structures selected for discussion in class, Bakhtin sought to highlight this valuative relationship that permeates these utterances. Indirectly, he makes room for less rigid syntactical constructions, closer to the vivacity of language as a form of real communication. In her interpretation of Bakhtin's theory in relation to the concept of style, Brait states:

> It is evident, therefore, that the question of the style will no longer be considered from a production taken in its individuality, its autonomy, as idiosyncrasy of an enunciator, or as a product of the unique engendering of a self-contained text. This question will be dealt with from aspects that, later, Bakhtinian thought will study in detail, that is,

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[26] For reference, see footnote 23.

the language thought as an activity within specific and concrete activities. This change will motivate the inclusion of the concept of sphere of production and consequently of circulation and reception, as well as the relationship between enunciation and interaction, genre and use, themes, architectural and compositional form (2006, p.59).[27]

Such concern is evident in the activities discussed in the classroom. The imposition of the leveling of a unified language would prevent the free movement of an indomitable living language, whose expressiveness would reveal valuative positions, social places not always in tune with a centralized system that restricts the responsive and responsible expression of their enunciators.

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[27] Text in Portuguese: "Fica evidente, portanto, que a questão do estilo vai deixar de ser pensada a partir de uma produção tomada na sua individualidade, na sua autonomia, enquanto idiossincrasia de um enunciador ou enquanto produto do engendramento exclusivo de um texto auto-suficiente, para ser tratada a partir de aspectos que um pouco mais tarde o pensamento bakhtiniano vai trabalhar em detalhes, ou seja a linguagem pensada como atividade, dentro de atividades específicas e concretas, o que vai motivar a inclusão do conceito de esfera de produção e, consequentemente, de circulação e recepção e, ainda, a relação entre enunciação e interação, gênero e uso, temas, forma arquitetônica e composicional."

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