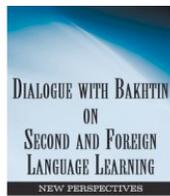


Dialogue with Bakhtin on Second and Foreign Language Learning: New Perspectives

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Mikhail Bakhtin's work on language theory in the form of utterance, speech genres, and, especially, dialogue is at the core of the compilation *Dialogue with Bakhtin on Second and Foreign Language Learning: New Perspectives*. This collection is the first to approach the specific problems associated with second and foreign language learning through Bakhtin's ideas about language. In Chapter 1, the introduction, the editors take from existing Bakhtinian scholarship two guiding pedagogical strategies. The first is that language is a "living tool" which shapes the worlds in which we live while also allowing each of us to locate our individual places within these worlds. The second advocates a non-formalist approach to language which "locates learning in social interaction rather than in the head of the individual learner" (p. 3). Each chapter in *Dialogue with Bakhtin* solidly and successfully proposes Bakhtin's theories as learning tools for second and foreign language students.

Part I of this collection groups together seven chapters which focus on empirical studies of effective classroom and other, real-world settings for the teaching and learning of languages. In Chapter 2, Karen Braxley applies Bakhtin's ideas to international graduate students who struggle with written academic English when studying in American universities. Braxley's research study proposes that such students greatly benefit from interaction with the academic sphere to improve their writing. Through open-ended interviews with five Asian graduate students, Braxley isolates fundamental problems non-native speakers face in American universities, including writing authoritatively in

their academic field and limits to mastering the genres within, and if necessary, outside that field. Focusing on Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and speech genres, Braxley suggests that dialogue is key to learning proper academic writing in a foreign language and observes in her interviews three types of dialogue: the kind with friends, with tutors and instructors, and with the text. The author concludes the chapter by addressing her study's implications for language learning.

In Chapter 3, Ana Christina DaSilva Iddings, John Haught, and Ruth Devlin apply Bakhtin's views on dialogism, meaning-making, and sign-making, along with Vygotsky's ideas of meaning-making as "*a precondition for language-making*" (p. 36; emphasis in original) to second language learning in elementary school. Using both verbal and non-verbal tools and signs, two third-graders learn to communicate with each other while learning English. With the help of multimodal forms of communication such as drawings and building blocks, the two children are able to integrate with the class environment and begin to learn English. Iddings et al. conclude that the children's relationship was heteroglossic because "it affected and ultimately transformed the classroom community as a whole" (p. 51).

The following chapter is a study on Bakhtin's utterance concept through popular culture's place in teenagers' lives. Jeffery Lee Orr investigates how cars' bumper stickers work as utterances of English-language culture for students in a high school ESOL composition class. This study is particularly interesting because it explores everyday, non-academic signs, in this case bumper stickers, as instances of utterances subject to different interpretations by ESL students with various backgrounds. The students' understandings of the stickers correspond to their own cultural pools of knowledge. Gradually, through their own cognitive processes, conversations with their peers, and letters to the owners of the cars with the bumper stickers, the students are able to comprehend "that utterances, others' and their own, are epistemologically informed, ideologically based, politically situated, culturally bound, behaviorally induced and inducing, and affectively perceived" (p. 73).

In Chapter 5, Angel M. Y. Lin and Jasmine C. M. Luk apply the concepts of globalization, post- and neo-colonialism, and the worldwide prevalence of English in discussing the benefit of adapting Bakhtin's carnival laughter, i.e., the idea of undoing ideological certainties through human innovation to achieve freedom of consciousness (p. 78), to teaching English to foreign language speakers. The authors compare two different second language teaching methods used in two different Hong Kong schools, each producing different results. Their experiment's outcome led them to conclude that operations-oriented learning systems lead to a mechanical parroting of English by students. However, less stringent and more open learning methods allowing for students to include elements of their native tongues, in the example case "through creating 'indecent' English dialogues within the school walls" (p. 89), are a more fruitful way to learn a new language. The students' spontaneous laughter, viewed as an example of Bakhtin's carnival variety, provided a creative gateway to communication among

students and between class and teacher. This compelling chapter convincingly argues for the benefits of using both creativity and existing language tools in EFL classrooms.

Chapter 6 by Hannele Dufva and Riikka Alanen is a study on metalinguistic awareness in children through Bakhtinian and Vygotskian frameworks. Studying a group of Finnish schoolchildren using both Finnish and English, the authors discover that, contrary to traditional understandings, children's metalinguistic awareness is not based simply within cognitive frameworks. Instead Dufva and Alanen argue that it is a product of social and individual development as well as cognitive processing. They note, significantly, that "many earlier studies have regarded metalinguistic awareness as a capacity to analyze the form and structure of language only and have ignored children's abilities to observe the meaningful aspects of language" (p. 110). Dufva and Alanen draw the useful conclusion that metalinguistic awareness develops as a function of social interaction and dialogue in a polyphonic environment.

In Chapter 7, Elizabeth Platt, using Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, conducts a study analyzing how early second language learners perform in a two-way information task. Platt focuses on "how the two novices . . . achieved intersubjectivity and constructed meaning in their incipient knowledge of Swahili" (p. 120). Because of the participants' different language and ethnic backgrounds, they approach language-learning according to the varying principles of their own cultural experiences and must therefore use dialogue to create meaning and self when learning rudimentary Swahili. However, differing preferences and expectations are still in play among second language learners, a salient factor Platt acknowledges. A particularly rewarding feature of this chapter is one student's realization that, contrary to what she initially believed of herself, she is indeed a good language learner.

In the next chapter, Vitanova explores the universal question of self-authoring agency for new immigrants. She relies upon Bakhtin's subjectivity framework, "which is embedded in unique answerability and has underlying emotional-volitional tones" (p. 166). The study's participants are five immigrants to the United States from Eastern Europe who must navigate the difficulties that arise in daily communications with native speakers. The result Vitanova draws from her study is that the participants must adopt language forms with which they are most comfortable; they re-create themselves to suit their new language's requirements. This chapter's emphasis on second language learners' need to interact with and adapt to the voices of those around them provides a valuable insight in the field.

While Part I presents specific case studies, Part II of *Dialogue with Bakhtin* comprises three chapters of more general discussion on second language learning via Bakhtin's ideas. Chapter 9 finds Marchenkova comparing/connecting Bakhtin's and Vygotsky's varying theories. Although she acknowledges their dissimilar theoretical backgrounds, Marchenkova argues for "build[ing] parallels between Bakhtin's theory of dialogue and Vygotsky's psychological theory" (p. 173). She examines the two theorists' views on (1)

language and the dialogic, (2) culture and intercultural understanding, and (3) the formation of the self and the role of the other. The chapter concludes with Marchenkova reaffirming the relevance of connecting Bakhtin and Vygotsky, at least within the domain of second language learning.

In Chapter 10, Alex Kostogriz applies the same Bakhtinian ideas highlighted in the previous chapter-language, culture, the self and the other-to a multicultural classroom. In this setting, second language learning is best approached, according to Kostogriz, through the Bakhtinian lens of dialogue and authority. A practical implication of this argument is the need for a Thirdspace approach in ESL education, which Kostogriz, referencing Gee, explains as "a perspective [which] originates from a sociocultural view of literacy as literacies, that is, different ways with texts within different sociocultural practices" (p. 202). This view of second language acquisition presupposes an acceptance of multiplicity in sources of knowledge as well as in power and change.

The final chapter shows us how a niche form of dialogue, Japanese business telephone conversations, can be applied to second language learners of Japanese. Using Bakhtin's notions of speech genres and addressivity of the utterance, Lindsay Amthor Yotsukura analyzes examples of these phone conversations, paying special attention to their structures and styles. Her study stresses the interaction between the participants, such as how they negotiate the conversational space between themselves. Yotsukura concludes by suggesting teachers apply her findings to their Japanese-language learners by having them examine such phone conversations as an effective method of immersing themselves in authentic Japanese dialogue.

Dialogue with Bakhtin is an excellent resource for both teachers and scholars of second and foreign language acquisition. Its strength lies in the contributors' empirical studies providing concrete supporting evidence for their claims. Paired with dialogic theory, these studies become testaments to pragmatic solutions for language problems non-native speakers face from elementary school on through to the workplace. Furthermore, the sheer variety the studies encompass, from children's drawings to popular-culture signs to business telephone conversations, makes *Dialogue with Bakhtin* even more pertinent and convincing. This text underlines the continued importance of Bakhtin's theories in current academic research and succeeds in extending them to a new area, non-native language learning.

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