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A Gramscian reading of language in Bakhtin and Voloshinov

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ABSTRACT

Both Bakhtin and Voloshinov were very keen to show that language is socially stratified and that this stratification corresponds in form to the stratification between social groups or classes. Through a comparative analysis of their concepts such as 'speech genres'/'behavioural genres', 'heteroglossia'/'multiaccentuality', 'refraction' etc, this paper will aim to show how both of the authors offer a convincing theoretical framework for a social and historical approach to language which stresses its class character. It is exclusively through such an approach that a coherent 'Marxist' account of language can be developed, both contrary to vulgar Marxism which sees language as a simple 'reflection' of reality and to the mainstream linguistics which tends to abstract from these social aspects of language. However, it will be argued that Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's works also have their limitations, and that, in order to develop a coherent and rigorous Marxist account of language, it is necessary to move beyond them towards authors which link language to politics, such as, to a certain extent, Marx himself, or, to a much greater extent, Antonio Gramsci.

1. Introduction

If one wishes to discuss the relation of Marx and his legacy to language, Valentin Voloshinov and Mikhail Bakhtin are authors whose ideas should surely be thoroughly discussed. And while it is the case that Bakhtin's relationship to Marxism was ambivalent, it is unquestionable he was influenced by its ideas, not merely because of the social context in which Bakthin lived (revolutionary and post-revolutionary Russia), but also because several of the members of his intellectual circle (now commonly referred to as the Bakthin Circle) engaged themselves with Marxist ideas quite actively and vividly (Voloshinov being just one of them).[1] The main insight of Bakhtin and Voloshinov, as will be shown below, is that social differences – of all the various types and ranges one can imagine, be it gender, age, vocation or, most importantly, class – appear in language as well in similar patterns and forms. In short, social stratification always determines the existence of linguistic stratification, or, coming from the other direction, the forms and peculiarities of linguistic stratification can always be traced back to social stratification.

However, at the same time, it will be shown that neither, to a lesser extent, Voloshinov nor, to a greater extent, Bakhtin have drawn out all the conclusions of their own insight. Instead, they stopped dead precisely at the moment when they should have made one final link to the question of the *institutional,* or, in other words, *political* sources of class differences in language. If there exists a relation of domination and subordination in language which reflects a similar relation in society at

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[1] On this, see Brandist 2002, particularly Chapter 3, pp. 53–87.

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large, then the final question for a "Marxist philosophy of language" – if our goal is to formulate one – is how and where this relation is produced. This does not mean, however, that one should reject Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's insights. On the contrary, if one is aware of the sources of their theoretical shortcomings, their concepts can be utilised in a productive way in order to arrive at a more coherent and elaborated Marxist approach to language.

It is Antonio Gramsci's thoughts on language in particular that allow one to move beyond the limitations of both Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's work on language, while still moving in the direction they set a path for. The reason for this is that Gramsci *primarily* (but not exclusively) discusses langauge as a politician and revolutionary, since he treats language not only as a social *but also* as a political phenomenon. For him, language is not just the linguistic expression of social being, but also a vivid and changing reflection of political relations. Gramsci's thoughts on language are thus inseperable from his analysis of contemporary society at large, from the state and class relations to consciousness and individuality. It is precisely such a wider theoretical perspective which comprises what could in our view be described as a Marxist approach to language.

Voloshinov and Bakhtin saw language as pertaining to social divisions within society, and they developed a range of key concepts in an attempt to account for and explain that fact.[2] In examining them here, we shall not only review their strengths and their theoretical novelty, but we shall also attempt to bring into relation the approaches of both Bakhtin and Voloshinov with that of Gramsci. While Bakhtin and Voloshinov perhaps emphasized different aspects of linguistic or social phenomena in their work on language, they arrived at concepts which attempted to describe similar issues or phenomena and which therefore have obvious commonalities.[3]

2. Heteroglossia and speech genres

The notion of linguistic stratification, although definitely one of the central concepts of Bakhtin's works, was not a completely original one at the time. "While Bakhtin's idea of the social stratification of language has often been invoked to suggest his exceptional insight and innovative thinking about language, the idea of social stratification of language was widely discussed in Russia by the late 1920s and early 1930s".[4] That being said, the notion of linguistic stratification opens the path towards linking language to wider social phenomena. Bakhtin arrives at the concept not by analyzing language *per se*, but by analyzing the novel as a specific literary genre, linked to specific social and historical circumstances. In his essay "Discourse in the Novel", he writes how

> [t]he internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases) – this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre.[5]

Leaving the question of the novel aside, we can see from this passage that linguistic stratification, for Bakhtin, is something immanent in every language, irrespective of history or society. The consequence of this internal stratification is that "language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word […] but also – and for us, this is the essential point – into languages that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, 'professional' and 'generic' languages, languages of generations and so forth".[6] We are already acquainted with this from Voloshinov's assertion of the ideological character of language. But now, for Bakhtin, this becomes an internal characteristic of language: a certain division between "variants" of a language. This is what Bakhtin terms *heteroglossia*, the existence of simultaneous dialects and versions of a language within every language, each of them belonging to a specific social group or historic time. "[L]anguage is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given bodily form".[7] There are obviously different underlying "principles" of every language of heteroglossia, and while that is a point of divergence between them, there is also a point of convergence: "all languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making them unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each

[2] While I shall not be discussing other authors of the Bakhtin Circle here, I feel it is fair to note that the ideas of Voloshinov and Bakhtin were heavily influenced by others within the circle (sometimes reworked from their original versions or even directly "borrowed" without changes). The other members of the Bakhtin Circle were, at various times, Mariia Iudina, Matvei Kagain, Ivan Kanaev, Pavel Medvedev, Lev Pumpianskii, Ivan Solertinskii and Konstantin Vaginov. Cf. Brandist 2002; Brandist, Shepherd and Tihanov (eds.) 2004.

[3] The order in which we discuss Bakhtin's concepts is not chronological, i.e. as they appeared in his published works, but logical, pertaining to what seems the most coherent sequence so as to both elaborate and reevaluate Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's views on language. Furthermore, I must note that I was unable to access and thus incorporate additional literature which left certain gaps in the discussion (most notably: Ken Hirschkop's *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy*, Oxford University Press 1999 and Galin Tikhanov's *The Master and the Slave*, Oxford University Press 2002).

[4] Brandist and Lähteenmäki (2011, p. 74).

[5] Bakhtin (2008, pp. 262–263).

[6] Bakhtin (2008, pp. 271–272).

[7] Bakhtin (2008, p. 291).

characterized by its own objects, meanings and values".[8] This way, Bakhtin affirms the concept of language as world-view, but, more importantly, he links the various world-views of the languages of heteroglossia to the existence of various social groups.

But what about the "underlying principles" of these languages which are the basis of their uniqueness, what are they exactly and how do they appear in real language? Bakhtin writes that each of the languages "is grounded in a completely different principle for marking differences and for establishing units"[9] within speech. Obviously, this formulation is very vague, and we can merely suppose that this principle is related to the formation of utterances ("establishing units"). Fortunately, Bakhtin later wrote a text on this issue. In his essay "The Problem of Speech Genres", Bakhtin coins the term "speech genres", which essentially stands for this "underlying principle" in the earlier essay in "Discourse in the Novel". All utterances, claims Bakhtin, both oral and written, are realized within "various areas of human activity". Each of these areas of activity "develops its own *relatively stable types*" of utterances, which "we may call *speech genres*".[10] Thus, speech genres are specific patterns (or principles) of formation of utterances which emerged and are used within their corresponding areas of human activity. Merchants on a flea market, soldiers in an army, gardeners, politicians, miners, teachers – they all have their specific speech genres which utilize the national language in a unique way, distinguishing them from other people by the fact that they "belong" to their particular social group by virtue of the "private" linguistic skills they all share. Of course, this also means that "[t]he wealth and diversity of speech genres are boundless because the various possibilities of human activity are inexhaustible, and because each sphere of activity contains an entire repertoire of speech genres that differentiate and grow as the particular sphere develops and becomes more complex".[11]

However, although it might seem so at first glance, speech genres are not forms of speech typical only of specialized professions. Bakhtin's point is not that *some* activities develop speech genres, but that *all* activities have their corresponding speech genres. The way we speak with our family at home, the way we speak in the school or on the playground as a child – all of these are speech genres, which we master and whose internal rules we uphold unconsciously just as we do with our mother-tongue. "We speak only in definite speech genres, that is, all our utterances have definite and relatively stable typical forms of construction of the whole. Our repertoire of oral (and written) speech genres is rich. We use them confidently and skilfully in practice, and it is quite possible for us not even to suspect their existence in theory".[12] Furthermore, it is not merely that we always speak in certain speech genres, but we also learn our mother-tongue in the framework of speech genres.

> We know our native language – its lexical composition and grammatical structure – not from dictionaries and grammars but from concrete utterances that we hear and that we ourselves reproduce in live speech communication with people around us. We assimilate forms of language only in forms of utterances and in conjunction with these forms. The forms of language and the typical forms of utterances, that is, speech genres, enter our experience and our consciousness together, and in close connection with one another. To learn to speak means to learn to construct utterances […].[13]

And, obviously, to learn to construct utterances means to learn to do so according to various speech genres.

We can summarize Bakhtin's understanding as follows: really existing social stratification (into groups of all sorts – be it on the basis of class, gender, age, race, geographical origin or any other existing category of division within societies) manifests itself in language as heteroglossia – the coexistence of various socio-ideological languages of social groups. These languages acquire their own uniqueness by developing speech genres, which are specific principles for the formation of utterances within specific social activities. In a sense, speech genres are the *differentia specifica* of the languages of heteroglossia. Understood in this way, the languages of heteroglossia are often also counterposed to each other, sometimes latently, sometimes manifestly, as is always the case, for example, with political groups at opposite ends of the political spectrum. The reason for this is that each language of heteroglossia embodies a certain world-view. As these conflicts play out on the ideological battlefield, these languages change, adapt and evolve according to the outcomes of these battles; if victorious, they acquire a quasi-"divine" social status and enjoy significant power, or, if defeated, they disappear outright. Thus, for Bakhtin, heteroglossia "is not only a static invariant of linguistic life, but also what ensures its dynamics";[14] it is a cause of movement which never stops as long as society exists.

However, from a Gramscian viewpoint, Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia obfuscates nearly as much as it elucidates. If the internal stratification of language is "present in *every* language at *any* given moment of its historical existence",[15] then the concept of heteroglossia in itself does not capture the history of the development of language in relation to the structure of society, but merely records - in striking detail and with blinding insight - the extent and state of socio-linguistic

[8] Bakhtin (2008, pp. 291–292).
[9] Bakhtin (2008, p. 291).
[10] Bakhtin (1986, p. 60).
[11] Bakhtin (1986).
[12] Bakhtin (1986, p. 78).
[13] Bakhtin (1986).
[14] Bakhtin (2008, p. 272).
[15] Bakhtin (2008, p. 263).

differentiation without regard for the social/linguistic processes by which such states are generated. In other words, while differences between 'speech genres' may be identified and described the question of the possible social, and political, roots of these differences is left out of account.

The most interesting question regarding language for Gramsci – *how* these differences in languages are formed and *why* those specific differences and not some others? – stems from the simple observation that language changes historically although not mechanically and linearly - in accordance with – social changes. For Gramsci, understanding language is then a way of retracing history and better understanding contemporaneity in a living, changing phenomenon. So if we are discussing a language at the start of the 20th or the 21st century, we cannot neglect its historical context, the social relations which (re) create the language at hand. Voloshinov managed to move further in that direction and solved some of the problems in Bakhtin mentioned here, so we shall leave a thorough critique of Bakhtin for later.

3. Multiaccentuality and refracturing

Voloshinov came to a very similar conceptual framework for the expression of social diversity as Bakhtin in language in his book *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. As we know today, thanks to the research in "Bakhtin Studies", this similarity is not a mere coincidence, but is proof of the influence the members of the Bakhtin Circle had on each other: their concepts were formed as a result of an exchange of ideas and long discussions within the Circle. The similarity with Bakhtin is most evident in Voloshinov's understanding of the socially contextual determination of utterances. Like Bakhtin, Voloshinov finds a common denominator of all social practices in the fact that they each produce their own type of social "etiquette", that is, a specific form of behaviour, which he terms *behavioural genres*.[16]

> Each situation, fixed and sustained by social custom, commands a particular kind of organization of audience and, hence, a particular repertoire of little behavioral genres. The behavioral genre fits everywhere into the channel of social intercourse assigned to it and functions as an ideological reflection of its type, structure, goal, and social composition. The behavioral genre is a fact of the social milieu: of holiday, leisure time, and of social contact in the parlor, the workshop, etc. It meshes with that milieu and is delimited and defined by it in all its internal aspects.[17]

Of course, these behavioural genres also include a certain form of speech, termed "behavioural speech". The structure of this speech is determined by the particular social situation in which it is evoked, as well as by its audience.[18]

> So, for instance, an entirely special type of structure has been worked out for the genre of the light and casual causerie of the drawing room where everyone "feels at home" and where the basic differentiation within the gathering (the audience) is that between men and women. Here we find devised special forms of insinuation, half-sayings, allusions to little tales of an intentionally nonserious character, and so on. A different type of structure is worked out in the case of conversation between husband and wife, brother and sister, etc. In the case where a random assortment of people gathers – while waiting in a line or conducting some business – statements and exchanges of words will start and finish and be constructed in another, completely different way. Village sewing circles, urban carouses, workers' lunchtime chats, etc., will all have their own types.[19]

Thus, like Bakhtin's speech genres, Voloshinov's behavioural genres imply a specific principle for the formation of utterances. The difference is that Bakhtin emphasizes how this is linked to various *social groups*, while Voloshinov's emphasis is more on the *social context* of the utterance.

However, this does not mean that Voloshinov neglects the aspect of social groups in language. On the contrary, he is much more emphatic than Bakhtin in showing how linguistic difference is also a question of *class conflict* rather than a relatively simple question of various social groups having their own languages. What makes these variations of a national language unique are not only their belonging to different speech genres, but also, and maybe even more so, the fact that they ascribe different, and sometimes completely opposite, meanings to the same words. David McNally summarizes Voloshinov's view:

> [d]ifferent social groups and classes use the same signs, the same words, the same language system, Voloshinov notes. Since a single language or sign system is used by groups with radically different circumstances and life activities, signs become inflected with different and competing meanings as these groups struggle to express their life situations, their outlooks, their aspirations. Conflicts between groups and classes thus interpolate every sign.[20]

[16] As Brandist notes, the English translation is quite problematic. Although Brandist is talking about the translation of "behavioral ideology" in the quote that will follow, this equally pertains to the translation of "behavioral genres". "The English translation of Voloshinov's term 'zhiteiskaia ideologiia' (life-ideology) as 'behavioural ideology' is a good example of the problems uninformed translations have brought about in understanding the work of the Bakhtin Circle. This completely obscures the connection with life-philosophy and makes its place within the work of the Circle as a whole unclear. Both types of ideology for Voloshinov have a verbal embodiment, but life-ideology is 'in some respects more sensitive, responsive, nervous and mobile' than 'official' ideology" (Brandist, 2002, p. 61).

[17] Voloshinov (1986, p. 97).

[18] Voloshinov (1986, p. 96).

[19] Voloshinov (1986, p. 97).

[20] McNally (2001, p. 114).

This was an aspect that was implicitly glimpsed in Bakhtin but which was not clearly formulated as it is here in Voloshinov. Granted, Bakhtin clearly stated that the languages of heteroglossia each represent a unique world-view, but there is more at stake than just that. The consequence of this "heteroglotic" situation is that various classes will ascribe quite incompatible meanings to the same word: for one, "justice" or "freedom" will be equated with the concept of the free market, while for another group, these two words might be equated with the social state. These various *accents* that social classes ascribe to the same words led Voloshinov to coin the term *multiaccentuality*, which stands for this intersecting of various socio-ideological accents within every sign, and thus every word.

Multiaccentuality also enabled Voloshinov to join the polemic against vulgar materialism. If words are intersected by multiple accents, that necessarily means that language cannot simply *reflect* reality, as in a mirror, since a word would have to have a definite, stable and undisputed meaning to be able to reflect reality in such a simple way. Instead, Voloshinov claims that a sign *refracts* reality, that is, "it may distort that reality or be true to it, or may perceive it from a special point of view",[21] the difference between mere reflection and refraction being that "[r]eflection is non-distorting, whereas refraction is perception from a particular standpoint (i.e., distortion)".[22] (This way, Voloshinov dealt a blow both to the theory of reflection,[23] as well as to the deterministic interpretations of the base-superstructure metaphor in Marxism.) Every class will strive to assert its own accents as the dominant ones or the only acceptable ones, so as to achieve a *social dominance* over other classes, by holding a monopoly over the production of meaning. Thus, refraction is determined "[b]y an intersecting of differently oriented social interests within one and the same sign community, i.e., *by the class struggle*".[24]

The word "capitalism" does not have the same meaning for the ruling classes embodied in the centrist parliamentary parties of Europe as it does for the groups that wish to abolish capitalism. However, since the former are the dominant forces within modern society, they are the ones that *lead* in imposing the dominant meaning of that word. To quote McNally again:

> Voloshinov sees meanings as connected to the activity of "organized social groups" struggling to accent signs in ways conducive to their organization and self-expression. Ruling classes and dominant groups attempt to impose uni-accentual signs, a single set of meanings that reflect and refract a dominant set of interests. Oppressed groups, on the other hand, struggle to accent signs differently and, in so doing, express a distinct (and often oppositional) set of interests and meanings.[25]

For example, the word "communism" is generally quite a controversial word, and is never used in mainstream media or by the representatives of the ruling classes positively. In the West, and especially in the USA, it primarily functions as a means of denunciation of political opponents, signifying the abolition of the "fundamental freedoms" of Western democracy. The social state or social welfare is also often depicted as only a source of extreme taxes, an obstacle to entrepreneurs and a way for the lazy to live without work. These are examples of ruling classes imposing extremely uniform accents to certain words which are in fact full of oppositional and radically alternative meanings to current social reality – but it is precisely because of this that it is important for the ruling classes to ensure the negative uniaccentuality of such signs. As Voloshinov writes, "[i]n the ordinary conditions of life, the contradiction embedded in every ideological sign cannot emerge fully because the ideological sign in an established dominant ideology is always somewhat reactionary and tries, as it were, to stabilize the preceding factor in the dialectical flux of the social generative process".[26]

Refraction and multiaccentuality go beyond Bakhtin, therefore, because they do not simply express social stratification in a form of linguistic stratification. They embody *class conflict within language* and show that language is a part of this constant ideological and political struggle. "What signs reflect and refract […] is not a singular socioeconomic fact, but a dynamic process of social interaction between groups and classes whose possibilities are multiple. […] In this spirit, [Voloshinov's] notion of the *multiaccentuality* of the sign is designed to capture the dynamics of complex structured social processes".[27]

4. A Gramscian critique: initial remarks

Antonio Gramsci's writings on language come both as a critical reassessment and a synthesis of Bakhtin and Voloshinov, while also going beyond them and offering significantly more insights, particularly in regard to conceptualizing social institutions and the social structure in general. As Peter Ives writes, "Gramsci's overcoming of the errors of both the idealist and positivist approaches to language yields a theory of language as a historical institution that changes continuously".[28] To continue where we left, the similarities between Gramsci's point of view and that of Bakhtin and Voloshinov are immediately evident. In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci writes: "[o]ne might say that every social group has a 'language' of its own".[29] This is clearly a class position, one that we are, by now, familiar with. If we add to that Gramsci's claim that language also contains "a

[21] Voloshinov (1986, p. 10).
[22] Ives (2004, p. 80).
[23] Whose most notable representative was Georgi Plekhanov.
[24] Voloshinov (1986, p. 23).
[25] McNally (2001, p. 116).
[26] Voloshinov (1986, pp. 23–24).
[27] McNally (2001, p. 114). As we shall see later, Voloshinov shares numerous points with Gramsci in this regard.
[28] Ives (2004, p. 23).
[29] Gramsci (2012a, p. 120).

specific conception of the world",[30] we are obviously witnessing an approach to language very similar to that in Bakhtin and Voloshinov: the fact that various social groups (classes) speak differently is inextricably connected to their specific world view (Bakhtin), i.e., their class position (Voloshinov, Gramsci).

But every discussion of language in Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* is immediately, at the same time, a discussion of social and political issues which the former reflect or are an essential part of.[31] The reason Gramsci seems to be most potent in this task is precisely because of the fact that he always discusses language primarily as a politician, not as a linguist. Each notebook pertaining to language always leads back to Gramsci's profoundly political concepts, such as hegemony, the integral state (civil and political society), or common sense (and good sense).[32] This political dimension is not something Gramsci forces onto language, but a natural conclusion from linguistic research. That is, if "the way one speaks indicates not only the way one thinks and feels, but also the way one expresses oneself, the way one makes others understand and feel",[33] then this means that language offers a glimpse of the dialectical connection between individual consciousness and society which Marx spoke of on a number of occasions. Recognising that linguistic stratification is a reflection and indicator of social stratification is then only the first, and easiest, step to make. The more important question should be: how does language participate in the reproduction of this social structure?

Hence, we are able to reach a number of conclusions about the conceptual framework of Bakhtin and Voloshinov if we allow ourselves to be led by Gramsci's direction of research on language. Heteroglossia and speech/behavioural genres, while describing the evident stratification of language based on social groups and their activities, stem not from an inherent richness of each language or from the social diversity of each community, but from the fact that society is divided into classes based on the specific way in which it organises and divides tasks pertaining to labour and production. As has been shown, Voloshinov was much more aware of this than Bakhtin, as can be seen from their different approaches to linguistic stratification. As for Voloshinov's concepts of multiaccentuality and refracturing, we can say the following. While it is definitely true that various classes will use words differently and ascribe different and opposing meanings to them, it would not be enough merely to conclude this is a sign of class struggle in language. To grasp the full significance of Voloshinov's insight, Gramsci would say, it is also necessary to think about the result of this class struggle in language, because it does not simply play out without producing any specific ideological effects. In other words, if we focus on which semantic "accents" or meanings of words are dominant, what we see is that a specific way of thinking is being produced, a specific world-view which, incidentally, benefits the dominant classes to the detriment of the subordinate classes. It creates what Gramsci terms "common sense": an uncritical, incoherent and fragmented world-view. For example, it is the words and meanings of shauvinism, racism, sexism and xenophobia which best represent this, and which direct the subordinate classes' frustration away from the real causes of their misery and towards each-other.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony, a political process of creating consent among the subaltern classes for existing social relations, embraces this linguistically mediated generation of common sense. Gramscian hegemony fully utilises what Christine Buci-Glucksmann called '*the gnoseology of politics*', which is contained in the fact that 'philosophical positions have their effects in all practices, and … all practices contain knowledge effects – a dual dialectic, in other words'.[34] By utilising the hegemonic apparatus in civil society, the bourgeoisie *leads* the subaltern classes into certain practices (or the lack thereof) and beliefs (or disbeliefs), whereby, as an effect, the subaltern classes not only consent to the existing class structure of society, but often contribute to maintaining it with their own practice (or the lack thereof). This is why Gramsci describes hegemony as 'intellectual and moral leadership',[35] and why hegemony is not a matter of 'false consciousness', as if the subaltern classes would lack the intellectual capacity to comprehend a certain social truth, but a matter of the subaltern classes being *led to believe* something or *to act* in a certain way, a matter of *ideological* power exercised through social institutions which comprise the materiality of the ideological. This materiality is implicit when Gramsci writes that 'ideas and opinions are not spontaneously "born" in each individual brain: they have had a centre of formation, of irradiation, of dissemination, of persuasion – a group of men, or a single individual even, which has developed them and presented them in the political form of current reality'.[36] This is precisely where one should look for the hegemonic apparatus: people disseminating specific ideas and practices in a political form corresponding to current social reality – in a sense, the only 'adequate' form of disseminating ideas and practices. This adequate form cannot be achieved without the use of a plethora of social institutions.

[30] Gramsci (2012b, p. 323).

[31] There are several other authors one could potentially indirectly utilise for a Marxist-inspired critique of Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's limits. There are several noteworthy endeavours, just to name a few, from authors such as: Rossi-Landi 1983; Tran 1984; Vygotsky 1986, and, perhaps most recently, an excellent book from Lecercle (2009).

[32] For an excellent overview of Gramsci's core concepts, as well as his approach to language, see: Thomas (2010).

[33] Gramsci (2012a, p. 129).

[34] Buci-Glucksmann (1980, p. 349). This is related to Gramsci's concept of 'translatability', which Gramsci uses precisely to describe not only how, in the literal sense, different languages can be translated into each other, but also how a 'language' – now understood in Gramsci's broad meaning of a conception of a world – can become 'history' when most social groups adopt it and start living and acting in accordance to it (just as, one might say, the language of Lenin and the Bolsheviks became history after the October Revolution). This is essentially a matter of the relation between theory and practice in Gramsci, and for limitations of space, I cannot go into further discussion on this interesting topic here, but will direct the reader to Ives and Lacorte 2010.

[35] Gramsci (2012b, p. 57).

[36] Gramsci 2012b, pp. 192–93).

> A class's hegemonic apparatus is the wide-ranging series of articulated institutions (understood in the broadest sense) and practices – from newspapers to educational organisations to political parties – by means of which a class and its allies engage their opponents in a struggle for political power. …. The hegemonic apparatus is the means by which a class's forces in civil society are translated into power in political society.[37]

That is why ideology in Gramsci consists not only of ideas, but also of social practices, which, within the Gramscian framework, contain the notion of social institutions within them, simply because they would be inconceivable without them. Therefore, the materiality of the ideological – the state itself – has to be taken into account when discussing hegemony or any phenomenon pertaining to it. But for now, let us first consider some other pertinent concepts in Bakhtin which come closer to the political sphere.

5. Concepts of social intra-dynamics

Both Bakhtin and Voloshinov take the same starting point – the involvement of language in social divisions, which it in part expresses and in part perpetuates – from which Voloshinov's multiaccentuality is a more refined and developed version of Bakhtin's heteroglossia. However, Bakhtin attempts to broaden heteroglossia by developing several mechanisms whose goal is to account for this dynamics "of complex structured social processes" in more detail. He focuses primarily on mechanisms within language, which we shall discuss here, but he also has some insights in relation to the dynamics between national languages, which we shall discuss in the next section of this chapter.

5.1. Centrifugal/centripetal forces

For Bakhtin, there always exist in language two opposing forces, fundamental in the sense in which heteroglossia is fundamental: they are *immanent* to language at any historical moment. The forces that tend to produce "verbal-ideological centralization and unification" are called *centripetal*, while the forces that work in the opposite direction of "decentralization and disunification"[38] are called *centrifugal forces*. The centripetal forces correspond to the formation of a unitary (national, standard) language; national language "constitutes the theoretical expression of the historical processes of linguistic unification and centralization".[39] But these forces are not merely linguistic, but also socio-ideological, and they thus correspond to particular groups: the ruling classes whose goal is to maintain the established social order and either win over to their side or completely defeat the opposing social forces. Consequently, the centrifugal forces correspond to the multiplicity of dialects within a language which maintain heteroglossia and are in opposition to any kind of linguistic unification. Furthermore, the centrifugal forces are characteristic of oppositional, marginalized and subversive social groups which oppose the existing social relations.

But this dichotomy is not rigid, and does not imply that utterances evoked from the ruling classes are always only centripetal, unifying and centralizing in nature, and that the ones evoked from the subordinated groups are always only centrifugal, disunifying and decentralizing. "Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance". Because every utterance participates in some form of a unitary language, it possesses centripetal elements, but because it is always unique, it possesses centrifugal elements and participates in heteroglossia. That is why the utterance is "a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language".[40]

It is through the prism of this dichotomy then that Bakhtin conceptualizes a national language as a product of the centripetal forces. A national language is, for him, regressive by nature, since it always possesses a tendency against heteroglossia and strives to impose a one-dimensional verbal-ideological unity upon a nation and the richness of its languages of heteroglossia (dialects) and corresponding world-views.

> A unitary language is not something given [*dan*] but is always in essence posited [*zadan*] – and at every moment of its linguistic life it is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia. But at the same time it makes its real presence felt as a force for overcoming this heteroglossia, imposing specific limits to it, guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding and crystalizing into a real, although still relative, unity – the unity of the reigning conversational (everyday) and literary language, 'correct language'. A common unitary language is a system of linguistic norms.
>
> But these norms do not constitute an abstract imperative; they are rather the generative forces of linguistic life, forces that struggle to overcome the heteroglossia of language, forces that unite and centralize verbal-ideological thought, creating within a heteroglot national language the firm, stable linguistic nucleus of an officially recognized literary language, or else defending an already formed language from the pressure of growing heteroglossia.[41]

[37] Thomas (2010, p. 226).
[38] Bakhtin (2008, p. 272).
[39] Bakhtin (2008, p. 270).
[40] Bakhtin (2008, p. 272).
[41] Bakhtin (2008, pp. 270–271).

Thus, for Bakhtin, the function of a national language is not to ensure that people of various social and geographical backgrounds understand each other, but to create a "monoglossia", a uniform world-view which would be universally valid for all people. However, the centripetal forces represented in a national language can never succeed in their goal to completely unify a language. Complete unification simply is not possible; it may be a goal to which the centripetal forces eternally strive, but they can never achieve it. "Language […] is never unitary. It is unitary only as an abstract grammatical system of normative forms, taken in isolation from the concrete, ideological conceptualizations that fill it, and in isolation from the uninterrupted process of historical becoming that is a characteristic of all living language".[42]

Bakhtin's famous "case-study" of the relationship between centripetal and centrifugal forces is his *Rabelais and His World*, where he discusses the phenomenon of carnival as a sort of concentrated material manifestation of centrifugal forces at work, where parody, irony and laughter are used against everything sacred and established. He chooses Rabelais as his "role-model" of the carnivalesque because he is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, representatives of the (French) literary Renaissance, and because "the Renaissance in general and the French Renaissance in particular was marked in the literary sphere first of all by the fact that the highest potentials of folk humor had attained the level of great literature and had fertilized it".[43] In short, it was an era when the popular penetrated high culture, an event whose mouthpiece was Rabelais. Bakhtin's "point is that before the renaissance, there was ideological struggle between 'official culture' and 'unofficial culture'. But such interactions were fragmentary and ineffectual and left both sides basically unchanged. With Rabelais's novels and the social changes that made them possible, the real confrontation, interaction, and interchange among the various aspects of these two worlds occur".[44] And so, through Rabelais, Bakhtin attempts to show that carnival is a symbolic dethroning of the ruling order and everything related to it by a plethora of social practices which use irony, humour, laughter and parody to ridicule everything sacred and noble. The carnival sets the world upside-down and for a brief moment allows the people to materialize a utopia created by them, on their terms and according to their desires. Dolls of kings and popes are burned, a symbolical dethroning of both figures; the corporeal aspect of human existence is liberated both from the shame and asceticism of the nobility and the clergy: bodies are unrestrained and spontaneous, people fart, burp, urinate, defecate, smell and have sex, and they eat and drink as much as they can, which depicts the abundance of the future utopian society; death and birth are both simultaneously glorified as two sides of the same coin, whereby the old dies and the new is born. In short, for Bakhtin, the carnivalesque subverts the existing social relations and sources of power, and it is in Rabelais that one can find evidence of this embodied in literary form. Carnival is a festival of centrifugal social forces, a popular oasis which often lasted for weeks, even months, to which the representatives of the centripetal forces had no access.

5.2. *Authoritative/internally persuasive discourse*

Just like Voloshinov, Bakhtin too considers the formation of consciousness a profoundly "linguistic" process, in that language functions as the form in which ideological content is being internalized. "The ideological becoming of a human being […] is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others".[45] How these words are selected is determined by two fundamental types of discourse: *authoritative* and *internally persuasive*. In Bakhtin's conception of this dichotomy, these discourses are not merely sources of information, direction, rules and models, but they determine a person's world-view and practice. Although a word can possess characteristics of both discourses, this is rarely the case.

> Both the authority of discourse and its internal persuasiveness may be united in a single word […] despite the profound differences between these two categories of alien discourse. But such unity is rarely a given – it happens more frequently that an individual's becoming, an ideological process, is characterized precisely by a sharp gap between these two categories: in one, the authoritative word (religious, political, moral; the word of a father, of adults and of teachers, etc.) that does not know internal persuasiveness, in the other internally persuasive word that is denied all privilege, backed up by no authority at all, and is frequently not even acknowledged in society […].[46]

The individual consciousness then becomes an arena of a continuous struggle between these two discourses, the state of which determines its development. "The struggle and dialogic interrelationship of these categories of ideological discourse are what usually determine the history of an individual ideological consciousness".[47]

The two discourses themselves truly are fundamentally different in nature. It is not merely a matter of their origin, that is, if they come from a genuine social authority (as Bakhtin mentioned, a father, a teacher – or in that line – a priest, etc.) or not, but in how they approach the person, with what "attitude", so to say. "The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter

[42] Bakhtin 2008, p. 288. The not so subtle critique of Saussure here indicates one of the primary reasons why Saussure's linguistics fails to account for *living* language: language is never a static, unitary system, because it is the "uninterrupted process of historical becoming" that makes it what it is.
[43] Bakhtin (1984, p. 136).
[44] Ives (2004, p. 92).
[45] Bakhtin (2008, p. 341).
[46] Bakhtin (2008, p. 342).
[47] Bakhtin (2008).

it with its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher".[48] Authoritative discourse *asserts itself* on the basis of its already acknowledged authority of the past – a matter of tradition, not of choice. "It is, so to speak, the word of the father".[49] Furthermore, it is not the word itself that authoritative discourse centres on; its goal is achieving a subordinate, disciplined and unquestioning "state of mind" in the person's consciousness, a complete submissiveness.

> It is not a free appropriation and assimilation of the word itself that authoritative discourse seeks to elicit from us; rather, it demands our unconditional allegiance. Therefore, authoritative discourse permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants on it. It enters our verbal consciousness as a compact and indivisible mass; one must either totally affirm it, or totally reject it. It is indissolubly fused with its authority – with political power, an institution, a person – and it stands and falls together with that authority.[50]

Such a discourse is, Bakhtin continues, obviously extremely rigid and completely inflexible: "its semantic structure is static and dead, for it is fully complete, it has but a single meaning, the letter is fully sufficient to the sense and calcifies it".[51]

Internally persuasive discourse approaches the person in a completely opposite manner, as expected. It demands nothing from her, it has no hidden motives or agendas. It becomes a discourse at all precisely because the person acknowledges it as such *by herself*, and because she finds something stimulating in its words. The words of internally persuasive discourse appear as words long sought after that express the person, her thoughts or feelings, her world-view, in ways which she did not know possible. These words trigger an interplay of further questions and ideas, they themselves become objects of rigorous scrutiny and critique, whereby they encounter words of other internally persuasive discourses.

> In the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions, it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts. More than that, it enters into an intense interaction, a *struggle* with other internally persuasive discourses. Our ideological development is just such an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values. The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is *not finite*, it is *open*; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever newer *ways to mean*.[52]

Thus, the dichotomy of authoritative and internally persuasive discourse opens yet another field of struggle within language, which happen within individual consciousness itself. It is a struggle "between one's own and another's word",[53] a struggle for domination between various world-views, which manifests itself in every utterance of a person.[54] That is also how language should be analyzed – within the framework of the socio-ideological struggle of competing world-views, which is in fact a struggle between various social groups, i.e. a class struggle.

> When we seek to understand a word, what matters is not the direct meaning the word gives to objects and emotions – this is the false front of the word; what matters is rather the actual and always self-interested *use* to which this meaning is put and the way it is expressed by the speaker, a use determined by the speaker's position (profession, social class, etc.) and by the concrete situation. *Who* speaks and under what conditions he speaks: this is what determines the words actual meaning.[55]

6. A Gramscian critique: ethics instead of social theory[56]

Some of Bakhtin's most important concepts are in fact dichotomies representing ethical principles, which are strictly separated into "good" ones and "bad" ones, and then, in one form or another, ontologised. The first such dichotomy we are introduced to in Bakhtin's work is the one between monologic and dialogic principles in Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.[57]

> From this point onwards we are presented with a contrast between two compositional *methods* or, more exactly, two *logics* which underlie culture. In a rather typical move for a neo-Kantian of the Marburg type, these principles are

[48] Bakhtin (2008, p. 342).
[49] Bakhtin (2008).
[50] Bakhtin (2008, p. 343).
[51] Bakhtin (2008).
[52] Bakhtin (2008, pp. 345–346).
[53] Bakhtin (2008, p. 354).
[54] In counterdistinction to the various approaches in mainstream linguistics, "[t]he utterance so conceived is a considerably more complex and dynamic organism than it appears when construed simply as a thing that articulates the intention of the person uttering it, which is to see the utterance as a direct, single-voiced vehicle for expression" (Bakhtin, 2008, pp. 354–355).
[55] Bakhtin (2008, p. 401).
[56] This section is largely based on the points made in regards to the Bakhtin Circle's theoretical influences in: Brandist 2002, pp. 15–26.
[57] Bakhtin (1999).

> abstracted as methodological principles that exist outside historical time: mono*logic* and dia*logic* principles. The former is a logic of causality and determination, the latter is a logic of unrepeatability and freedom.[58]

Dostoevsky is, for Bakhtin, a representative of the dialogic principle, just as the novel as literary form is its best expression or cultural manifestation. The difference between monologic and dialogic principles, aside from the essential one described above, is that the author of a monologic work "implicitly claims to have direct access to the extradiscursive world, and this is reflected in the structure of the work. The work does not attempt to present a plurality of fully valid perspectives with which the authorial perspective engages as an equal", as is the case in dialogic works, but is dominated by the author's world-view. "In the monologic work the author's ideas are not represented, but either govern representation, illuminating a represented object, or are expressed directly without any phenomenological distance".[59] The author of the monologic work, by contrast, does not involve himself/herself in the work in such a manner, but instead, he expresses with the diversity and richness of its characters, who think, act and develop freely of the author's world-view, and by that translates the fundamental plurality of consciousness existing in reality into the literary form of the novel – which Bakhtin calls "polyphony". These concepts announce Bakhtin's future ideas of heteroglossia and speech genres, but they also show that these ideas are, from the very beginning, placed into the Procrustean bed of a strict good/bad duality, i.e. of a primarily ethical-epistomological horizon.

The same goes for Bakhtin's concept of linguistic stratification and the corresponding dichotomy of the centripetal and the centrifugal forces in language. For Bakhtin, these phenomena are ethical, in the sense that the centrifugal forces, which maintain the internal stratification, and thus the heteroglossia of a language, are always opposed to the centripetal forces, which strive towards a centralised, uniform linguistic and ideological unity. The only moment when these forces are linked to any social structures is when they are ascribed to the subaltern classes in the case of the former, and the ruling classes in the case of the latter. Social relations and institutions "remain 'bracketed out' of Bakhtin's account of discursive stratification. What are actually institutional questions relating to economic and political structures now acquire an ethical significance that renders the relations between forms of social organisation and modes of discursive interaction unclear. Decentralising forces are always ethical and centralising forces unethical".[60]

Likewise, the notion of "speech genres", which are both proof and a manifestation of heteroglossia, functions in a similar manner. Speech genres are, expressed in Simmelian terms, a bridge between subjective and objective culture, between "the unrepeatable context of utterance and the impersonal, or supra-personal realm of objective culture".[61] Hence, the underlying logic by which these genres are selected in concrete situations is bound to the individual's capability to evaluate the social context, to recognize the corresponding speech genre pertaining to it, and to know how to use this speech genre effectively. "Bakhtin is not, however, concerned with institutional factors. Instead, the notion of discursive *genres* allows him to remain firmly within the realms of aesthetics and ethics where social factors are limited to questions of intersubjectivity".[62] The questions of social institutions, social power, authority, etc., are again left out.

The central concept of Bakhtin's approach to language, dialogue, is also seriously flawed. For Bakhtin, dialogue is not merely a starting point from which to conceive of language as social practice, and which would then lead to other social phenomena related to language. "Bakhtin relies heavily on 'dialogue' as a primary element in literature, first and foremost, but also as a metaphor for ethical behaviour, as an epistemological premise, and ultimately as human ontology".[63] But what is worse, this ontology is based on an underlying principle of a free linguistic "marketplace". This is evident in the case of internally persuasive discourse, which is what determines our ideological formation. However, Bakhtin never actually clarifies what it is that decides which internally persuasive discourse achieves dominance in a person's consciousness and by what factors this internal struggle between such discourses is determined in the first place. Nowhere is it stated that, for example, an internally persuasive discourse becomes dominant because it possesses more "truth" or is, in some way, more "convincing" compared to other discourses. What Bakhtin instead does is that he

> provides a utopian model of a 'marketplace' of discourses in which discursive 'proprietors' are free to act and enter into exchange. The market provides the conditions for 'equity' (*Gerechtigkeit*) in that speakers are equal as (discursive) commodity owners and must be recognised as such. In the market no-one is supposedly forced to buy or sell, but each does so freely, the better bargain ultimately winning out. Through the unrestrained exchange of discursive 'commodities' there arises a relational logic, dialogism, which on the one hand is descriptive, but on the other is a standard of objective judgement. This becomes a sort of immanent legality of social relations, which guides ideological becoming, rather as Adam Smith's 'hidden hand' guides the development of a market economy in a progressive direction.[64]

Bakhtin reduces dialogue to an ideal speech situation,[65] which means it is abstracted from private interests and relations of power (among other things) which are always inscribed in every speech situation. It is as if all participants in dialogue always

[58] Brandist (2002, p. 94).
[59] Brandist (2002, p. 99).
[60] Brandist (2002, p. 114).
[61] Brandist (2002, p. 162).
[62] Brandist (2002, p. 163).
[63] Ives (2004, p. 74).
[64] Brandist (2002, p. 186).
[65] The same naive procedure adopted by Jürgen Habermas in his communicative theory of language, the only difference being that Habermas states this explicitly, while Bakhtin does not.

act according to some form of morality and/or rationality and abstract from their social and material conditions of life whenever they engage in speech practices. Therefore, Bakhtin grants "to the structures of norms and morality a questionably large degree of autonomy from the social conditions of particular forms of political rule".[66]

The issue of the market as a metaphor for linguistic phenomena or language in general is something worth further discussing, as it sheds more light on the problems implicit in Bakhtin's concepts. "One of the many reasons the market is a bad model for democratic freedom is that the consumer choices of subordinate classes reflect their economic subordination",[67] just as, we might add, the consumer choices of the ruling classes reflect their economic domination. The reason the subordinate classes' general material conditions of life are very often bad, sometimes tremendously so, is simply that they cannot afford anything better. The not so rare cynical "comment" directed towards the poor – "get a job!" – fails to see that getting a job (especially a good job) is, in most cases, not a matter of personal choice (or the will to do so), but a matter of external conditions which are not under the person's control, but which nonetheless determine her life.

> Similarly, workers regularly vote for governments opposed to their own interests not so much because they simply accept the 'mono-logic' of their rulers and believe in the legitimacy of the status quo as because they are intellectually subordinate. This is a matter not of interests (*Willkür*) clouding reason (*Wille*), but of a fragmentation of social consciousness that prevents the development of a coherent perspective on society as a whole. The result is an inability on the part of subordinate classes to recognise and articulate their own interests, leading them to affirm those ideas that exercise social prestige.[68]

Accordingly, the same applies to language. It is not simply a matter of choosing an adequate, or appropriate, or most beautiful, or most coherent discourse, but a matter of not knowing of or not having access to a better "choice". The point is, then, that there often is no real "choice" of how a person speaks or thinks at all, or at least, that this choice is reduced to a minimum. By privileging such a 'market model', "Bakhtin was to regard questions of linguistic and wider cultural centralisation as ethical rather than political questions by treating the institutional structure of society as the expression of ethical principles".[69] The root causes of this lie in the theoretical influences of the Bakhtin Circle already examined, which locked them into a framework not intended for the issues which they dealt with:

> While deeply sociological, the Circle's work is constructed on the basis of a philosophy that was designed to deal with forms of individual interaction with the result that when the various members of the Circle moved on to the discursive interaction of social groups, they were stretching categories not designed for such an application. This leads [to] the effacement of institutional factors in favour of a subtle analysis of forms of discursive relations: dialogue. Dialogue, in turn, becomes a term that is given an almost impossible load to bear.[70]

Therefore, the limits of Bakhtin (and Voloshinov) is precisely the domain of a wider social-theoretical analysis which a historical-materialist approach to language would imply.

7. A Gramscian critique: concluding remarks

Although Bakhtin's insights about language definitely offer a very intriguing and valuable perspective on linguistic stratification, we would be ill advised to simply adopt his concepts uncritically and without further adjustment. As Craig Brandist notes, "[t]he fundamentally idealist nature of Bakhtin's critique must be recognised if his work is to be developed and applied productively".[71] In that light, let us now offer the final part of our critique and a first reworked concept which will lead us to the wider social questions related to language which Bakhtin did not adequately solve (or even pose).

The dichotomy of authoritative and internally persuasive discourse Bakhtin develops offers a very promising framework with which to approach the dissemination of traditional knowledge (of the church, of the state, of the authority of any kind, of "experts", etc.) and the development of original knowledge (which is not imposed, but is freely accepted and embraced).[72] Furthermore, this dichotomy is directly related, as we saw, to the formation of consciousness. If authoritative discourse is dominant in a person's consciousness, she is likely to be a "good subordinate", so to say, while the person whose consciousness is formed through internally persuasive discourse is a lot more likely to think critically and coherently about the world in which she lives. In short, authoritative and internally persuasive discourse are the forms by which specific worldviews are transmitted and consciousnesses are formed. But Brandist proposes that "[w]hat is being described" with the term 'authoritative discourse' "is not a type of discourse, but a hierarchical relation between discourses", i.e. "a relation of subjugation of one discourse to another", whereby internally persuasive discourse describes "a liberation [of thought/

[66] Brandist (2002).
[67] Brandist (2002, p. 187).
[68] Brandist (2002).
[69] Brandist (2002, p. 115).
[70] Brandist (2002, p. 176).
[71] Brandist (2002, p. 155).
[72] I term the second type of knowledge "original" because, although internally persuasive discourse is someone else's at the beginning, the central point of it is that it stimulates the formation of the person's own ideas and thoughts, not expressed or found in internally persuasive discourse at the moment of its assimilation.

consciousness] through structuration".[73] The two discourses, as Bakhtin described their interrelation, are in constant struggle for dominance, which essentially signifies that they are form part of a class struggle and that, consequently, they themselves are of a class character, with the authoritative discourse pertaining to the ruling classes. But, as Brandist shows, this leads us to further implications that go beyond Bakhtin, in particular the necessity to reformule the two concepts in a way which liberates them from their primarily ethical character and enables us to apply them to a much wider set of social phenomena.

> If each discourse articulates a world-view and discourses struggle to establish their superiority as a necessary corollary of the class struggle, then a discourse becomes hegemonic when one social class's world-view is accepted as kindred by other social classes. This does not mean the struggle for hegemony consists merely of a conflict between two preformed ideologies but a conflict of *hegemonic principles*. Discourses seek to bind other discourses to themselves according to two basic principles: either by establishing a relation of authority between the enclosing and target discourses [authoritative discourse] or by facilitating the further advancement of the target discourse through the enclosing discourse [internally persuasive discourse].[74]

By such a reformulation, the explanatory potential of the concepts is broadened, and they begin to have relevance for *hegemony*: social domination, social power, and, even more importantly, the political mechanisms of achieving and maintaining hegemony, all of which leads us to Gramsci: "In Gramsci's prison writings the above divergent hegemonic principles coincide with the exercise of hegemony by the bourgeoisie and proletariat".[75] Thus, we are brought to an understanding of language which sees it not only as an expression of class struggle, but as directly involved in the struggle for power in capitalist society.

It is, therefore, with the concepts of centrifugal/centripetal forces and authoritative/internally-persuasive discourse that Bakhtin came perhaps closest to addressing the set of issues which Gramsci's concept of hegemony encompasses. That is to say, if we agree with the points Gramsci makes, we then have to ask how this process of linguistic domination functions and what can be done to stop or alter it. Similarly, the centrifugal and centripetal forces Bakhtin talks about are not something inherent in every language, but primarily something historically specific to a class-divided language within a class-divided society. What Bakhtin termed "centripetal forces", seen as a regressive phenomenon which strives to extinguish the existing heteroglossia in a language, are actually the social and linguistic effects of the actions of specific *classes* with their specific *political interests*.

This is then not a matter of a "good-bad" dichotomy, but a matter of politics. A national language is not *inherently bad*; it is such only in capitalism, where it implies ideological and cultural unification, which is what Bakhtin aims to criticize. As the bourgeois class becomes hegemonic over the subaltern classes, so the national language becomes hegemonic over other national dialects. When a national language becomes dominant, and since its reproduction is based in the hegemonic apparatus of the ruling classes, what the national language effectively reproduces is the dominant ideology. If this means that the national language, through its use in media, the educational system, the institutions of political and civil society, reinforces the dominant world-view embodied in a contradictory, incoherent and uncritical fashion in what Gramsci terms "common sense", it does not mean that the national language cannot be used for other purposes, or that it cannot become something else. The reason for this is precisely because language is not a static structure; it is not, as Gramsci wrote, a totality "of words grammatically devoid of content",[76] but a changing social process rich with traces of social history.

That is the reason why it would be politically naive to criticise a national language *as such* for what it *currently* is, for that would essentially represent an ahistorical perspective. Likewise, idealising dialects would be equally naive:

> Gramsci rejects the conception of dialect as expression of uncontaminated popular genuineness that is typical of romantic and populist ideology. He thinks that popular masses – to the extent that they organize themselves to become the hegemonic class – must overcome every sectarianism of dialects in order to gain a more powerful communicative instrument, capable of expressing the new culture and of exercising new hegemony. For Gramsci, this does not mean that one has to negate the realities of dialects: he has never argued that dialects must disappear ... .[77]

Dialects have their value, not only in an aesthetic sense, but also in a practical sense of representing one specific world-view, however provincial that world-view might be.[78] A national language is indeed necessary in Gramsci's view for a revolutionary hegemonic project, but obviously, it could not simply be used in its current form. Any national language in its current form was historically imposed upon the people (with the formation of nationalism in Europe in the 19th century), and its content is of an ideological character, meaning that it functions to efface and mystify existing social contradictions; the

[73] Brandist (2002, p. 185).
[74] Brandist (1996, p. 103).
[75] Brandist (1996, p. 104).
[76] Gramsci (2012b, p. 323).
[77] Rosiello (2010, p. 40).
[78] This is best shown in Gramsci's letter to his sister Teresina, on the 26th of March 1927: "It was a mistake, in my opinion, not to allow Edmea [Gramsci's niece] to speak freely in Sardinian as a little girl. It harmed her intellectual development and put her imagination in a straitjacket. You mustn't make this mistake with your children. For one thing, Sardinian is not a dialect, but a language in itself, even though it does not have a great literature, and it is a good thing for children to learn several languages, if it is possible. Besides, the Italian that you will teach them will be a poor, mutilated language made up of only the few sentences and words of your conversations with him, purely childish; he will not have any contact with a general environment and will end up learning two jargons and no language; an Italian jargon for official conversation with you and a Sardinian jargon learned piecemeal to speak with the other children and the people he meets in the street or piazza". Gramsci 1994, Volume I, p. 89.

national language of a revolutionary hegemonic project should be the result of a somewhat more spontaneous process and should serve to develop a critical world-view, which Gramsci terms "good sense". Thus, while linguistic unification is necessary, "imposed unification is only an exterior form of integration, and does not bring about the progressive political potential of real unification".[79] Real linguistic unification should be an essential part of a wider revolutionary project of political, cultural and social unification. That is to say, it needs to be fundamentally democratic, taking the subaltern masses and all the existing national dialects into account. The language that appears through this process would then be 'organic' in Gramsci's sense of the term: it would stem from the masses and speak for the masses. "Instead of trying to impose a normative grammar on people, … it would be more ethical and more pragmatic to develop a normative grammar that did not have to manage these various frictions but instead was itself the product of their resolution".[80]

Of course, as with social revolution itself, there can be no 'recipe' for such a linguistic revolution; besides, it is only one element of a social revolutionary process. No 'predictions' are to be expected, nor should they be. Gramsci's understanding of prediction[81] equally applies to revolutionary linguistic change as to any practice: we can predict only in the sense that we act in the direction of hoping to achieve certain outcomes. It is impossible to foresee all the complex social variables and forces at work in the determination of revolutionary linguistic unification. Since this process

> occurs through a whole complex of molecular processes, it helps to be aware of the entire process as a whole in order to be able to intervene actively in it with the best possible results. One need not consider this intervention as 'decisive' and imagine that the ends proposed will be all reached in detail, i.e. that one will obtain a specific unified language. One will obtain a unified language, if it is a necessity, and the organized intervention will speed up the already existing process. What this language will be, one cannot foresee or establish: in any case, if this intervention is 'rational', it will be organically tied to tradition, and this is of no small importance in the economy of culture.[82]

Thus, once more, language is bound to politics: changing the current linguistic state of affairs and the hegemonic role of a national language implies a process of linguistic unification which is only an element of a much wider hegemonic project of political, social and cultural unification of the subaltern masses.

Unlike Bakhtin, "Gramsci is not simply equating spontaneous grammar with the grammar of subaltern languages and suggesting that it must be freed from the oppressive normative grammar of the leading social group. Quite the contrary – just as the history of the subaltern social groups is by definition fragmentary, so too is spontaneous grammar. The act of unifying it, of creating a normative grammar, is that of becoming a 'state'".[83] The task then is to leave the sphere of culture and enter the sphere of politics, and, as Gramsci has attempted, to understand what type of *hegemonic principles* are used by the ruling classes and which ones could be used by the subaltern classes in order to oppose existing social relations and to work towards forming not only a new form of society, but also – and this is an essential part of this process if a Marxist approach to language can teach us anything – a new form of national language, *pace* Bakhtin, which captures this political, cultural and intellectual unification in linguistic form. This is where Marx's theoretical legacy in regards to language should lead, and towards which Bakhtin and Voloshinov made crucial steps, but stopped so short of.

To conclude, I believe that a Gramscian reading of Bakhtin and Voloshinov enables us to move beyond them by conducting concrete political analyses of specific national languages. Bakhtin and Voloshinov give us conceptual tools for such an endeavour, but in order to achieve such a goal, a Gramscian politically practical push is needed. In other words, the novelty a Gramscian approach to Bakhtin and Voloshinov gives to current scholarship on the topic is that it places an emphasis on the *practical* value of their insights. If Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's conceptualizations of language can also be shown, while still remaining on a general theoretical level, to be linked to the much broader concept of hegemony, then this insight immediately raises the question of what a political analysis of, for example, modern Italian would look like and what such an analysis could tell us about the *class relations* in Italian capitalism. Through a comparative study of Italian dialects, their popularity and prestige, one could try to determine to what extent the gulf between the North and the South of Italy has disappeared or persists, which can then be linked to the socioeconomic status of the two major regions and its inhabitants. One could analyse the state of current standardised Italian through dictionaries or in the media to determine how specific values and meanings are ascribed to certain words, such as "socialism", "revolution", "leftist", or simply "immigrant", "peasant" or "worker". If certain dialects are disappearing, which is commonly the case for all national languages, then it would be invaluable to ask why and how this is happening, which, in turn, would offer a perspective on the changing *economic* and *political living conditions* of peoples. I have merely sketched out a few examples here, but I believe it is clear there is an endless number of research topics one could come up with, *for each national language*. The insights such research could provide would prove to be extremely valuable for any leftist politics, whether in the sense of fighting racism or xenophobia, or in the sense of disseminating progressive ideas, concepts and forms of social organization through discussing and questioning the domination of standardised national language.

[79] Carlucci 2013, p. 162.
[80] Ives (2004, p. 51).
[81] Gramsci (2012b, pp. 170–1).
[82] Gramsci (2012a, p. 183).
[83] Ives (2004, p. 44).

In sum, the great value of such an analysis (and therefore of the Bakhtinian or Gramscian concepts it utilizes) is not simply in the novelty and interest of the theoretical insight itself, but in the political insight which follows from it, as Gramsci's life and work show. It is precisely this that would be an example of Marx's (in)famous switch from "interpreting" to "changing" the world: a Marxist theory of language should aim to become a Marxist *politics* of language.

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