Springer

On the Interpretation of Baxtin's Linguistic Ideas: The Problem of the Texts from the 1950-60s

Author(s): Mika Lähteenmäki

Source: *Russian Linguistics*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (2003), pp. 23-39
Published by: Springer
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/40160678
Accessed: 22-05-2019 01:03 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms

*Springer* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Russian Linguistics*

JSTOR

This content downloaded from 146.111.194.19 on Wed, 22 May 2019 01:03:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

MIKA LÄHTEENMÄKI

# ON THE INTERPRETATION OF BAXTIN'S LINGUISTIC IDEAS: THE PROBLEM OF THE TEXTS FROM THE 1950–60S[1]

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As regards the appropriation of Baxtin's linguistic legacy, he has, as a rule, been interpreted as an "anti-linguist" according to whom the linguistic world is fundamentally unsystematic in nature and therefore implies "a systematic questioning and inverting of the basic premises and arguments of traditional linguistic theory" (Stewart 1986, 42). The same point has recently been made by Alexandar Mihailovic who maintains that the "idea of linguistic unity ... was one that Baxtin was particularly eager to attack" (Mihailovic 2001, 127). This view is clearly connected to the tendency to see Baxtin's overall philosophical programme as a "philosophy of messiness", as proposed by Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson (1990). They maintain that given Baxtin's specific emphasis on the "eventness" and "uniqueness" of human acts, he can be best characterised as an essentially anti-systemic thinker who attacks any form of theoretism according to which actual spatio-temporal acts could be reduced into and predicted by an ahistorical system of rules. Consequently his critique of the Saussurean approach and Russian structuralism, which posit the abstract language system as the object of study, can be seen as a prime example of his hostile attitude towards theoretism. Consequently, Baxtin has been celebrated as a spokesmen for the "messy view" of language whose works constitute a sound metatheoretical basis and justification for those fields of language studies which do not take the abstract pre-given system of signs as their starting point.

The appearance of the 5th volume of Baxtin's Collected Works (Собрание сочинений) in 1996 made available a substantial number of previously unpublished materials dealing with linguistically relevant issues. These included Baxtin's working notes for 'The Problem of Speech Genres' and the re-edited version of 'The Problem of the Text' written in 1951–53 and 1959–60 respectively. It appears that the editors of the 5th volume also subscribe to a view that Baxtin's attitude towards linguistics remained hostile throughout his intellectual career. This becomes evident from the fact that the editorial board decided not to publish the essay 'The Problem of Speech Genres' as well as the related working notes as they are but with "cuts" that include Baxtin's quotations from Iosif Stalin's well-known brochure 'Marxism and Questions of Linguistics'. Moreover, Ljudmila Gogotišvili – one of the editors of the 5th volume of Collected Works and

*Russian Linguistics* **27:** 23 – 39, 2003.
© 2003 *Kluwer Academic Publishers. Printed in the Netherlands.*

This content downloaded from 146.111.194.19 on Wed, 22 May 2019 01:03:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

the author of the meticulous commentaries on these texts – regards the later texts dealing with linguistic issues as unauthoritative in the sense that they do not express "genuinely Baxtinian meaning positions".

The aim of the present article is to argue against what can be called the "anti-linguistic" interpretation of Baxtin's linguistic ideas, and to demonstrate that it cannot be substantiated by a close reading of his texts. In what follows, I will discuss Baxtin's elaboration of the distinction between language as a system (*язык как система*) and speech communication (*речевое общение*) in the essays 'The Problem of Speech Genres' and 'The Problem of the Text' and compare these allegedly "deuterocanonical" texts with the texts which are generally considered to be "canonical". It will be argued that Baxtin's conventional structural terminology cannot be explained away by regarding it as a clever rhetorical manoeuvre, for it allows him to conceptualise the interrelationship between the given and created aspects of language in a way which was not fully developed in his earlier work.

## 2. LANGUAGE SYSTEM VERSUS SPEECH COMMUNICATION

In 'The Problem of Speech Genres' Baxtin (Бахтин 1996а) posits the distinction between language as a lexico-grammatical system and speech communication as dialogical interaction which manifests itself in the form of utterances. He argues that utterance (*высказывание*) is the real unit of speech communication[2] which must be rigorously distinguished from the units of language, such as word and sentence, for they are qualitatively different. He accuses many linguistic schools of failing to recognise this distinction and analysing "a kind of hybrid of sentence" which contains properties of both sentence and utterance (Baxtin 1986a, 75). Baxtin thus criticises those approaches which use the terms "language" and "speech" interchangeably and, consequently, end up with a vague idea of "language in general" reminiscent of Saussure's *langage*.

Baxtin envisions language system as a potential or meaning resource which becomes actualised in speech communication. He argues that a distinctive feature of language as a system is its neutrality. According to Baxtin,

1) language is neutral respective to diametrically diverging points of view,
2) the contrast is determined by the attitude of the utterance to objective actuality (scientific, aesthetic or aesthetically perceived),
3) language is neutral towards the argument and struggle between speakers, it is equally useful to one or another side in the argument (Бахтин 1996г, 261).

For Baxtin, the neutrality of language as a lexico-grammatical system is reflected in the fact that the same elements of language can be used to express diametrically opposed points of view. In Baxtin's view, dialogical relationships

This content downloaded from 146.111.194.19 on Wed, 22 May 2019 01:03:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

between different points of view, which include agreement, disagreement and so forth, are determined not by the relation between linguistic elements and reality but by the relation between actual utterances and reality. In Baxtin's view, only utterances – real units of speech communication – express meaning positions and can enter into dialogical relationships, while the language system is neutral with respect to various positions it can be used to express. Language is a neutral tool or potentiality that can be used to construct utterances expressing various meaning positions that then enter into dialogical relationships with each other.

In 'The Problem of the Text', Baxtin restates the position he takes in the essay on speech genres according to which the existence of a shared language is a necessary condition for communication and mutual understanding. In his view, every utterance and text has basically two dimensions. On the one hand, Baxtin thinks that an utterance or text presupposes language by which he refers to a system of signs mutually shared by the members of a community (Бахтин 1996д, 308). For him, it is the existence of a conventionalised system of signs that demarcates the distinction between the objects of human and natural sciences (Бахтин 1996д, 308). On the other hand, every utterance is characterised by its spatio-temporal uniqueness which means that it also has an individual dimension. For Baxtin, an utterance is a unique and answerable expression of a particular meaning position, and therefore, the meaning which manifests itself in a particular social context is essentially novel and unrepeatable.

Despite the fact that Baxtin insists on the distinction between language and speech communication and on the corresponding distinction between sentences and utterances, these notions have been subject to frequent misunderstandings in Baxtin Studies. For instance, in a recent article Mihailovic claims that

> the analyzable units of language ... consist of "speech genres", which are not genres in the narrowly defined sense but rather are different kinds of speech acts. The sentence and the individual word, for example, are precisely such units and are analogous to one another ... Both types of speech are different manifestations of the utterance. In comparing these two speech genres, Bakhtin effectively exposes the internal dynamics of the utterance (Mihailovic 2001, 136).

In this rather cryptic passage, Mihailovic blurs some of the basic conceptual distinctions underlying Baxtin's conception of language. First, speech genres are not "the analyzable units of language" but relatively stable types of utterances which, in turn, are units of speech communication. Second, sentences and individual words are not speech genres, as Mihailovic claims, but units of the language system as opposed to utterances, the units of speech communication. Third, sentences and individual words can hardly be characterised as "types of speech" and regarded as manifestations of the utterance. On the contrary, for Baxtin, concrete utterances are unique spatio-temporal manifestations of language the units of which sentences and words are.

This content downloaded from 146.111.194.19 on Wed, 22 May 2019 01:03:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

In addition to "language" and "speech communication" Baxtin also uses the term "speech" (*речь*) in his working notes for the essay on speech genres. Baxtin characterises the relationship between language system and speech as follows:

> The inadmissibility of opposing language to speech. Speech is language in actu. Both language and speech are equally social. ... Speech is the realisation of language in a concrete utterance (Бахтин 1996б, 207; 1996г, 258).

The above passage makes it clear that Baxtin conceives of the distinction between language and speech in terms of a distinction between potential and actual. For him, the language system is a potential that becomes realised in concrete utterances which utilise the meaning resources of a language. Moreover, Baxtin does not disregard the relevance of conceptual distinction between language and speech as such, but argues that both language and speech are inherently social and therefore cannot be opposed to each other by referring to the distinction between social and individual.

Notwithstanding his critique of the approaches which fail to distinguish between language and speech Baxtin himself is inconsistent in his use of the terms "speech" and "speech communication" in the texts from 1950–60s. In 'The Problem of Speech Genres' and in related working notes written in the beginning of the 1950s there is no clear-cut distinction between the terms "speech" and "speech communication" but Baxtin seems to be using them interchangeably. For instance, in the essay on speech genres Baxtin defines utterance as the unit of speech communication, while in the related working notes he asserts that "the unit of speech is utterance" (Бахтин 1996в, 212). Similarly, elsewhere in the working notes we find Baxtin arguing that "in addition to forms of language, speech also has other forms, forms of utterance" (Бахтин 1996в, 207). Thus, here "speech" is akin to Saussure's *langage*[3], for it is an overall category which comprises both linguistic forms and forms of utterances.

However, by the end of the 1950s when Baxtin was writing 'The Problem of the Text' the notions "speech" and "speech communication" had already acquired separate meanings. In this text, Baxtin is consistent in distinguishing between these two notions and the difference between them lies in that

> language and speech can be identified with one another, for in speech the borders between utterances are rubbed off. But language and speech communication (as a dialogical exchange of utterances) can never be identified with one another (Бахтин 1996д, 311).

Here, the distinction between "speech communication" and "speech" is conceived of in terms of process and product. While "speech communication" designates a form of social interaction which manifests itself in the form of utterances, "speech" is understood as a totality of textual or semiotic material devoid of dialogical relationships[4].

This content downloaded from 146.111.194.19 on Wed, 22 May 2019 01:03:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Thus, although Baxtin finds the Saussurean distinction between *langue* and *parole* unacceptable, he nevertheless posits a conceptual distinction between language as an underlying potential and its spatio-temporal realisations. For him, both the language system and actual language use are equally social. Given the fact that in Baxtin's view normativeness permeates not only language system but also speech communication, it is somewhat paradoxical that he has been interpreted as a thinker who conceives of language in terms of "messiness" (see e. g., Stewart 1986; Morson & Emerson 1990).

### 3. ON THE ALLEGED DOUBLE-VOICEDNESS OF THE LATER TEXTS

The manuscript of the essay 'The Problem of Speech Genres', which Baxtin never completed, was apparently written in 1953–54. Baxtin had reportedly submitted it for publication, but it was not approved as presented and appeared only posthumously. The editors of Baxtin's Collected Works argue that the fact that Baxtin took on the task of writing an essay on speech genres dealing with linguistically relevant topics was primarily dictated by the characteristics of the contemporary political and intellectual context and, therefore, it can be seen as a "commissioned work". Gogotišvili maintains that the primary external cause for writing 'The Problem of Speech Genres' was the aftermath of the campaign Iosif Stalin mounted against Nikolaj Marr's "new doctrine of language" in 1950. This is supported by the fact that the original manuscript, as the editorial commentary reveals, contained extensive quotations from Stalin's 'Marxism and Questions of Linguistics' accompanied with Baxtin's comments on Stalin's linguistic views[5]. However, the editors, who assure that they were strictly following the author's request, excised these passages from the published version of the essay. Thus, once again Baxtin scholarship has to face the fact that our understanding of Baxtin is still dependent on and formed by the interests of those, who have the access to his archives, and the copyright holders of his texts.

The status of 'The Problem of Speech Genres' is far from being uncontroversial in Baxtin Studies. For Gogotišvili, the fact that his discussions of language dating from the 1950–1960s are cast in conventional linguistic terminology signifies a major departure from "genuinely Baxtinian" positions and can be explained by external circumstances. It seems that, for Gogotišvili, the "alien" character of these texts becomes most clearly expressed in the conceptual distinction Baxtin makes between language as a system and speech communication. She maintains that this distinction can be seen as a mere rhetorical strategy and terminological window-dressing which implies no actual commitment to it on a conceptual level. In this view, in 'The Problem of Speech Genres' Baxtin was simply trying to adapt his terminology to the situation in Russian linguistics of the beginning of

This content downloaded from 146.111.194.19 on Wed, 22 May 2019 01:03:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

the 1950s in order to make his ideas accessible for a wider linguistic audience (Гоготишвили 1996г, 620).

In the working notes published as 'The Problem of the Text' Baxtin also endorses conventional linguistic terminology reminiscent of the various structural approaches of that time. These notes were written in 1959–60 when the ideas of structural linguistics had become increasingly popular in Soviet linguistics. We also find here the argument that the overt linguistic terminology is to be seen as a "logico-rhetorical decoration" which should not be taken at face value. According to Gogotišvili's commentary, 'The Problem of the Text' reflects Baxtin's attempt to "adapt his linguistic and general-philosophical positions, which were formed already in the 1920s to the concrete situation in Russian (*отечественной*) linguistics of *the end* of the 1950s" (Гоготишвили 1996г, 620). Thus, if 'The Problem of Speech Genres' mainly involves a hidden polemic with Stalin's critique of Marrism, then in 'The Problem of the Text', as Gogotišvili maintains, Baxtin is primarily engaged in a critical dialogue with the representatives of contemporary Soviet structuralism. Thus, the fundamental assumption that underlies both the commentaries to Baxtin's texts and, more importantly, the concrete editorial decisions is that the terminological shift in Baxtin's later texts does not reflect a change in his views on language, but is to be seen as a mere textual disguise imposed by the external circumstances.

The first years of the 1950s, when Baxtin was preparing his essay on speech genres, were a crucial period in the history of Soviet linguistics which had been dominated by Marr's "new doctrine on language" since the end of the 1920s[6]. In 1950 Stalin launched his famous campaign against Marr and his followers which practically ended the theoretical and institutional primacy of Marrism as the only official form of Marxist linguistics in the Soviet Union. The first move in this fierce attack was made by Arnol'd Čikobava, the prominent Georgian linguist and specialist in Caucasian languages, who wrote his article on Stalin's special request (see Чикобава 2001). The final blow was dealt by the "coryphaeus of all sciences" himself whose article 'Concerning Marxism in Linguistics' appeared in June 20[7]. Stalin attacks Marr's ideas and asserts that despite his overt use of Marxist terminology, Marr's central tenets have little or nothing to do with Marxism (Сталин 2001, 403). According to him, Marr's idea that language is a part of superstructure and develops through rapid changes reflecting the changes in the base is profoundly mistaken. He also argues that the comparative-historical method is superior to Marr's four-element analysis which he characterised as a form of linguistic idealism involving "reading coffee grounds around the notorious four elements" (Сталин 2001, 404).

In his article, Stalin called for a rather old-fashioned view of linguistics based on a positivistic methodology and recommended that Soviet linguistics should return to the roots of neo-grammarian movement and comparative-historical

This content downloaded from 146.111.194.19 on Wed, 22 May 2019 01:03:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

method which Marr had attacked as idealistic and bourgeois approaches to language. As Alpatov (2000, 185) points out, what Stalin had in mind was not the rehabilitation of the ideas discussed by formalists in the 1920s, but pre-Revolutionary Russian linguistic tradition. Thus, despite the fact that Stalin denounced Marr and his followers, the attitude towards structuralism remained rather hostile in Soviet linguistics in the beginning of the 1950s. It was as late as in the second half of the 1950s when the ideas of Western structural linguistics began to enter to Soviet linguistics.

The fact that the manuscript of 'The Problem of Speech Genres' contains copious references to Stalin's 'Marxism and Questions of Linguistics' has lead Gogotišvili to argue that the main body of the text is to be read as alien or double-voiced discourse. To give just one example, she (Гоготишвили 1996a, 542) argues that the passage in which Baxtin asserts that the diversity of different speech genres "in no way disaffirms the national unity of language (*общенародное единство языка*) (Baxtin 1986a, 60) echoes Stalin's attack on Marr's idea of class languages. Also Alpatov (Алпатов 2001, 131) suggests that the expression "national language" (*общенародный язык*) may come from Stalin's article. According to Stalin (Сталин 2001, 390), different social groups tend to use language for their own specific purposes and create their own lexicon and expressions typical to that particular social group. However, these jargons and dialects cannot be regarded as languages in the proper sense of the word, for they do not possess their own lexico-grammatical system and their use is limited to particular spheres of communication. On the contrary, for Stalin (Сталин 2001, 391), the language forms of different social groups are to be seen as branches (*ответвления*) of the unitary national language.

It may well be the case that Baxtin's use of the "national unity of language" actually derives from Stalin's linguistic works and is thus conditioned by the "external" circumstances, as Gogotišvili maintains. However, it should also be pointed out that already in 'Discourse in the Novel', written in 1934–35, Baxtin himself used the expressions "a unitary language" (*единый язык*) and "a common unitary language" (*общий единый язык*) in his discussion of the interplay between centripetal and centrifugal forces within a language[8]. According to Baxtin, a common unitary language "is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia" and creates "within a heteroglot national language the firm, stable linguistic nucleus of an officially recognized literary language" (Baxtin 1981, 270–271). Thus, despite the fact that in 'Discourse in the Novel' Baxtin conceives of language in terms of heteroglossia, he nevertheless does not deny the existence of relative linguistic unity within a language which is based on the existence of the shared "stable, linguistic nucleus".

One should certainly not underestimate the role of the actual political and intellectual context in the formation of Baxtin's conception of language. As

This content downloaded from 146.111.194.19 on Wed, 22 May 2019 01:03:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Alpatov (Алпатов 2001, 126) points out, as a result of Stalin's interference in linguistics at the beginning of the 1950s not only linguists but also researchers working in other disciplines within the Humanities were encouraged to relate their research to Stalin's linguistic works. Thus, this could be one reason why Baxtin, who was the head of the department of literature in The State Pedagogical Institute of Mordvinia in Saransk at that time, started to write an essay dealing with specifically linguistic issues. However, as Ken Hirschkop (1999, 187) points out, the emergence of linguistic terminology in 'The Problem of Speech Genres' and 'The Problem of the Text' can hardly be taken as a mere superficial response to historical circumstances. And even if it were the case that Baxtin actually started to work on the essay only because as a head of the literature department in a provincial institute he was expected to connect his own work to the linguistic writings of the Soviet leader, it can still be seen as an original contribution. This is because in the later texts Baxtin deals with several important topics which were ignored or only touched upon in his earlier works. In this respect, Gogotišvili's tendency to explain away all the thematic and terminological novelties present in the later texts by referring to external circumstances and coining them a rhetorical disguise for ideas developed by Baxtin already in the 1920s is rather problematic.

The way in which the editors of the 5th volume of Collected Works deal with the terminological differences between texts dating from different periods raises several questions. To start with, as Alpatov (Алпатов 2001, 124) rightly points out, the editors of the 5th volume do not envision Baxtin as seeking the truth but possessing it from the very beginning of his intellectual career. This becomes evident from Gogotišvili's commentaries in which she argues that "none of the "tactical" changes in the "terminological cover" of Baxtin's texts from different years affected the internal essential "nucleus" of his linguistic-philosophical position ... the fundamental parameters of which remained stable from the 1920s right up to the 1970s" (Гоготишвили 1996г, 620). Thus, the underlying assumption is that Baxtin, a spokesman for the dialogical nature of thinking, developed his fundamental conceptions in an intellectual vacuum by the end of the 1920s, after which he simply kept restating them unaffected by the changes and developments taking place in the respective disciplines. Also the assumption that there is a clear-cut distinction between "canonical" and "deuterocanonical" texts is dubious, for it eventually makes it possible to dispose of any passages that would seem to threaten the canonised interpretation of Baxtin by simply coining them "logico-rhetorical decoration" or "double-voiced discourse".

The crucial question which inevitably arises from this line of thinking is that if 'The Problem of Speech Genres' and 'The Problem of the Text' discuss language from an "alien" perspective and distort the genuinely Baxtinian conception of language, then which texts, if any, represent the genuinely Baxtinian conception of language? It seems that the only texts in which Baxtin discusses the dialogical

This content downloaded from 146.111.194.19 on Wed, 22 May 2019 01:03:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

notion of language in some detail are 'Discourse in the Novel' and the chapter five of Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. The editors of the 5th volume of Collected Works ascribe the authorship of 'Marxism and the Philosophy of Language' published under the name of Valentin Vološinov to Baxtin and consider it as an important source of Baxtin's views on language. Although it seems increasingly unlikely that Baxtin is the author of 'Marxism and the Philosophy of Language', it will, for the sake of argument, be included in our discussion.

## 4. RE-READING BAXTIN AND VOLOŠINOV

### *4.1. Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*

The only book-length study by the members of the Baxtin Circle devoted exclusively to the questions of linguistics and philosophy of language is 'Marxism and the Philosophy of Language'. Although there is no conclusive evidence that would resolve the "damned question" of authorship, the existing evidence strongly suggests that Vološinov actually wrote the book. Even if it were co-authored by Vološinov and Baxtin, there are no grounds to play down the significance and originality of Vološinov's contribution. Vološinov, unlike Baxtin, was actually trained in philology and worked as a doctoral student and salaried researcher at ILJaZV (The Institute for the Comparative History of Eastern and Western Literatures and Languages) in St. Petersburg during the second half of the 1920s. The university records also reveal that Vološinov was considered as a talented young scholar whose work was highly respected by his supervisors and colleagues, among them the outstanding linguist Lev Jakubinskij (see Волошинов 1995б).

Vološinov's 'Marxism and the Philosophy of Language' is generally seen as a prime example of the hostile attitude towards linguistics that allegedly underlies the dialogical approach to language. There is some evidence for this contention. Unlike Baxtin in his later texts, Vološinov takes an extremely critical attitude towards what he calls Saussure's abstract objectivism. He criticises the Saussurean notion of *langue* as a self-identical system of linguistic norms and argues that *langue* is not an ontologically real concept, but an abstraction created by a linguist who distances himself from the actual reality of language (see also Lähteenmäki 1998, 57). Vološinov (1973, 66) argues that language represents a dynamic phenomenon which is in the historical process of becoming. For him, the theoretical descriptions presented by the representatives of the pre-1930s structuralist and formalist schools are, at their best, useful abstractions which cannot capture the "immediate givenness" of language. According to Vološinov, the actual reality or immediate givenness of language lies neither in the abstract system of linguistic forms nor in the psycho-physiological process of speech

This content downloaded from 146.111.194.19 on Wed, 22 May 2019 01:03:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

production, but in the actual instances of social interaction which are manifested by utterances (Волошинов 1995a, 312).

Although Vološinov rejects the idea of *langue* as a supraindividual system of linguistic forms and insists that actual utterances which manifest themselves in space and time constitute "the immediate givenness" of language, he nevertheless does not subscribe to a view according to which language is "pure actuality" or *energeia* to use Humboldt's term. While he opposes the idea of "language as a system of normatively identical forms", he does not deny the very fact that language also has a normative dimension. On the contrary, Vološinov does not repudiate the idea of language as a system of social norms as such, but only argues that this system cannot be characterised as an incontestable system of self-identical forms. He stresses that in an ideal communicative situation interlocutors experience language as an "aggregate of possible contexts of usage for a particular linguistic form" (Vološinov 1973, 70), that is, as a tool for doing different things as opposed to the abstract system of linguistic forms. The normative dimension of language only surfaces and becomes explicit in the situations in which mutual understanding becomes disturbed for one reason or another. Vološinov mentions foreign language learning and various types of conflict as instances in which interlocutors typically pay explicit attention to linguistic forms and norms.

Vološinov does not offer an explicit and fully developed account of the interrelationship between language as a system of social norms and what he calls "the immediate givenness" of language. Nevertheless, his position can be extrapolated from his discussion of the notion of meaning in which he makes the distinction between two types of meaning, namely meaning (*значение*) and theme (*тема*). Vološinov seems to think that although a linguistic expression cannot have exactly the same theme across different contexts, the theme of an utterance is not constructed in situations *in toto* but based on the social conventions given to the members of a particular speech community. In his discussion of the interrelationship between the given and created aspects of meaning, Vološinov asserts that

> meaning – an abstract, self-identical element – is subsumed under the theme and torn apart by theme's living contradictions so as to return in the shape of a new meaning with a fixity and self-identity only for a while, just as it had before (Vološinov 1973, 106).

Thus, actual utterances utilise the reproducible meaning resources provided by language but are not determined by them. Given the uniqueness of situational contexts, utterances, by definition, stretch or even break the conventionalised meaning potentials of a language. Every use of a linguistic expression gives rise to a unique meaning which reflects back on the expression's future possibilities to mean. In other words, the actual theme of this or that linguistic expression, which

This content downloaded from 146.111.194.19 on Wed, 22 May 2019 01:03:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

reflects the characteristics of the different ideological spheres and situational contexts, becomes accumulated and sedimented in the meaning of the expression.

Vološinov thus addresses the problem of the relationship between given and created aspects of meaning and by no means claims that language exists on the level of its spatio-temporal manifestations only. In fact, Vološinov finds one-sided approaches to the study of meaning concentrating exclusively either on the "historical unreproducibility" of concrete utterances or on the meaning of a linguistic expression within the language system unsatisfying. According to Vološinov (1973, 102), the adequate understanding of the complex interrelationship between meaning and theme is a prerequisite for the science of meaning.

### *4.2. 'Discourse in the Novel'*

In the essay 'Discourse in the Novel', written in 1934–35, Baxtin argues against the idea of language as a monolithic whole and emphasises its heteroglot and dynamic nature. Baxtin (1981, 271) asserts that he is not interested in language as a system of grammatical categories but as an ideologically saturated phenomenon. When approached from this "sociolinguistic" point of view, language can be characterised as a heteroglot collection of various struggling sub-languages – including social, regional, professional and so forth languages – associated with certain, often competing, social and ideological points of view.

In this text, Baxtin also uses the notion of "a common unitary language" which can be characterised as the product of centralising forces and decontextualising practices found in all linguistic communities. However, in spite of its positedness, the category of unitary language cannot be seen as a mere abstraction created by linguists. According to Baxtin, "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 ..." (Baxtin 1981, 270). Thus, while Baxtin argues that a unitary language is normative in nature, he also stresses that language as a system of linguistic norms is not an abstract obligation for a speaker. In other words, he holds that the speaker of a language experiences language as a stratified social and ideological concreteness which represents heteroglot opinions about the world, but at the same time he also makes it explicit that language necessarily has a normative moment which can be understood as the basis or resource for the individual linguistic creativity. Here we find a striking similarity between Baxtin's line of argumentation and the position taken by Vološinov in Marxism and the Philosophy of Language. Vološinov's point is that language can be seen as involving social norms provided that linguistic norms are not regarded as an incontestable system.

It should be emphasised that the idea of social stratification of language that Baxtin endorses in 'Discourse in the Novel' was by no means novel in Soviet

This content downloaded from 146.111.194.19 on Wed, 22 May 2019 01:03:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

linguistics in the beginning of the 1930s. On the contrary, it was widely discussed, for instance, by Jakubinskij (Якубинский 1931) who worked in ILJaZV during the 1920s and 1930s. On the one hand, the emergence of the "sociolinguistic" point of view in Soviet linguistics can be explained by the existing political and ideological circumstances, which called for a new Marxist approach to linguistics. One the other hand, the study of the social variation of language also has its roots in the strong dialectological tradition of Russian linguistics which was concerned with the regional variation of the Russian language. This becomes evident, for instance, in Boris Larin's (Ларин 1977) work on linguistic variation in towns which he discusses in a paper delivered in 1926. Moreover, the interconnectedness of language and society was a central topic in the work of Marr who mistakenly assumed that the structural features of a particular language actually derive from the current developmental stage of the society.

Baxtin, however, was not interested in how languages vary according to certain formal linguistic features but identified heteroglossia with the diversity of world-views. In his discussion of the social and ideological stratification of languages, Baxtin was apparently following Jakubinskij (Якубинский 1931) who had before him explicitly argued that different language forms (e. g. professional languages, class languages) represent different ideological points of view. This all suggests that Baxtin's linguistic views, as discussed in 'Discourse in the Novel', cannot be regarded as highly original or "genuinely Baxtinian", for they clearly owe much to the work carried out by his contemporary scholars in ILJaZV. In this respect, the originality of 'Discourse in the Novel' has little to do with Baxtin's conception of language but is to be found in the implementation of the idea of socio-ideological stratification of language in his analysis of the novel.

At first sight, it may seem that Baxtin's later texts – in which the term "language" refers to language as a neutral lexico-grammatical system which is totally independent of existing social and ideological points of view – contradict the earlier idea of language as a dynamic and heteroglot system of struggling ideological languages governed by various centripetal and centrifugal forces. In his later texts, Baxtin stresses that language system does not express agreement, disagreement or any other dialogical relationship, only utterances do. Ideology and dialogical relationships exist at the level of utterances, while language system is neutral respective to different ideological points of view. However, if we take a closer look to his texts, it becomes obvious that this is not the case. It can be argued that the notion of language filled with ideology Baxtin discusses in 'Discourse in the Novel' roughly corresponds to the notion of speech communication discussed by him in the later texts, for both notions refer to language as a historical and spatio-temporal phenomenon which is inseparable from various ideological positions.

This content downloaded from 146.111.194.19 on Wed, 22 May 2019 01:03:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

In 'Discourse in the Novel' Baxtin uses the notion of "common unitary language" but fails to specify its theoretical status and ends up treating it as a kind of "intermediary category". On the one hand, he sees it as a general system of linguistic symbols "guaranteeing a *minimum* level of comprehension in practical communication" within heteroglossia (Baxtin 1981, 271). On the other hand, he characterises it as a linguistic nucleus of a literary language which, in turn, is one of the particular heteroglot languages. His ontological position concerning the interrelationship between the given and created aspects of language becomes more explicit in the essays 'The Problem of Speech Genres' and 'The Problem of the Text' in which he adopts the distinction between language system and speech communication. In these texts, he posits a "second order" level of abstraction, namely that of language as a neutral system of linguistic forms which is qualitatively different from various actual language-forms.

### *4.3. Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*

The second edition of the Dostoevsky book, published as Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, appeared in 1963. Unlike the original 1929 edition, the revised edition contains the chapter 'Discourse in Dostoevsky' in which Baxtin discusses what he calls metalinguistics. Metalinguistics refers to "the study of those aspects in the life of the word, not yet shaped into separate and specific disciplines, that exceed – and completely legitimately – the boundaries of linguistics" (Baxtin 1984, 181). Baxtin makes it clear from the start that it is different from and goes beyond the scope of traditional linguistics represented by contemporary structuralism. On the one hand, Baxtin insists on the categorical distinction between linguistic and metalinguistic facts, but, on the other hand, he also argues that linguistics and metalinguistics study the same complex phenomenon from complementary points of view. Linguistics studies language as an abstract system or neutral code separated from its actual use whereas metalinguistics studies dialogical relationships which emerge between utterances when language or any other system of signs is used to express certain points of view. Linguistics and metalinguistics represent different points of view on language and can be seen as two complementary methodological approaches the units of which, however, must be kept separate.

Baxtin does not want to replace linguistics with metalinguistics, but attempts to provide an account of those aspects of language which are ignored, or abstracted away, in purely linguistic accounts of language. In this respect, his position is akin to that of Alan Gardiner (1932) and Karl Bühler (1934) who also made an attempt to supplement linguistics of language with linguistics of speech (Алпатов 2001, 129). Baxtin only argues that linguistics has a limited scope and those who do linguistics should also acknowledge this. In this respect, his

This content downloaded from 146.111.194.19 on Wed, 22 May 2019 01:03:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

critique of structuralism does by no means constitute its antithesis according to which language should be studied from the point of view of its unique spatio-temporal realisations only as opposed to the abstract language system. Baxtin's methodological considerations do not refute linguistic approaches to the study of language, but only imply that people engaged in research should be aware of whether they are doing linguistics or metalinguistics and not to confuse the concepts of these two separate disciplines.

It can be argued that the notion of metalinguistics as discussed by Baxtin in the 1963 Dostoevsky book is based on the conceptual distinction between language system and speech communication developed by him in 'The Problem of Speech Genres' and 'The Problem of the Text' written in 1953–54 and 1959–60 respectively. Also the fact that the term "metalinguistics" appeared for a first time already in 'The Problem of the Text' suggests that there is certain continuity between the ideas discussed in the texts from the 1950–60s and in the Dostoevsky book. The argument Baxtin makes in 'Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics' that linguistic and metalinguistic facts are fundamentally different and should be studied within separate disciplines can be seen as a restatement of the point he made ten years earlier in the essay 'The Problem of Speech Genres'. It is in this text where Baxtin originally introduces the distinction between the qualitatively different units of analysis and also argues that the utterance "the real unit of speech communication" must be kept separate from the sentence, the unit of language system. Thus, the conceptual distinction between language system and speech communication which Gogotišvili sees as mere logico-rhetorical decoration actually underlies the methodological solution Baxtin proposes in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Our discussion of Baxtin's later texts suggests that the assumption according to which the appearance of specifically linguistic topics and conventional linguistic terminology were exclusively determined by external causes is mistaken. Baxtin was not just paying lip-service to the contemporary heated debate on Marrism or addressing the representatives of the various structural approaches. On the contrary, the reason why he adopted a linguistic terminology reminiscent of that of contemporary structuralism is indeed an internal one, for it provided him with a conceptual tool that allowed him to formulate his understanding of the interrelationship between the given and the created aspects of language. As argued above, in 'Discourse in the Novel' the status of the category of "common unified language" remains rather ambivalent. Baxtin characterises it as both a general linguistic system shared by all the languages of heteroglossia and a linguistic nucleus of a literary language which is one par-

This content downloaded from 146.111.194.19 on Wed, 22 May 2019 01:03:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

ticular heteroglot language. However, in his texts from the 1950–60s, he posits the distinction between language as a system and speech communication which he conceives in terms of potential versus actual. The validity of this conceptual distinction is then taken for granted in his discussion of metalinguistics in 'Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics'. In this respect, the terminological shift can be regarded as genuine, for it signifies a change in the way Baxtin conceptualises language.

To conclude, the very assumption that in Baxtin's legacy there can be found a core of virginal ideas developed by Baxtin in a complete intellectual void cannot withstand close scrutiny. Although 'Discourse in the Novel' is generally considered as representing a genuinely Baxtinian conception of language, our discussion demonstrates that there can be found significant parallels between this essay and the writings by Jakubinskij and Larin dating from the 1920–30s. This suggests that the idea of heteroglossia and social stratification of language elaborated by Baxtin in 'Discourse in the Novel' in 1934–1935 also have their sources. In this respect, the texts from the 1950–60s are not an exception and cannot be opposed to his earlier texts dealing with linguistic issues, for in both cases the way in which Baxtin articulated his views on language exhibits sensitivity to recent developments in contemporary Soviet linguistics.

## NOTES

[1] The present article is based on research carried out in the Bakhtin Centre at the University of Sheffield with the support of a grant from the Academy of Finland.

[2] According to Gogotišvili (Гоготишвили 1996а, 543), the term *речевое общение*, which can be translated into English as speech communication or verbal intercourse, may derive from L. P. Jakubinskij (Якубинский 1923).

[3] Here the use of the term "speech" corresponds to Vološinov's terminological solution in Marxism and the Philosophy of Language where *язык* refers to Saussure's *langue*, *высказывание* to *parole* and *речь* to *langage*. In 'The Problem of Speech Genres' and in the related working notes Baxtin (Бахтин 1996г, 183–184, 275–276) also uses *высказывание* for *parole*, although *речь* had become the established translation of *parole* after the appearance of the first Russian translation of "Cours" in 1933 (see also Алпатов 2001, 126, 132).

[4] In the working notes from 1952 Baxtin (Бахтин 1996в, 212) asserts that "Speech is dialogical" which illustrates the terminological inconsistency.

[5] Baxtin's working notes also contain his plan for the paper 'Problems of Dialogical Speech on the Basis of I. V. Stalin's Doctrine on Language as a Means of Communication' the writing of which was required from him by the Academic Council of the State Pedagogical Institute of Mordvinia (see Гоготишвили 1996б, 560).

[6] For a discussion of Marrism, see Alpatov (Алпатов 1991) and Thomas (1957).

[7] After the appearance of 'Concerning Marxism in Linguistics' Stalin wrote four replies to the readers' questions. These writings are generally known as 'Marxism and Questions of Linguistics'.

[8] In Russia, the terms centripetal (*центростремительные*) and centrifugal (*центробежные*) forces were already used by Aleksej Šaxmatov (Шахматовъ 1915) in his discussion of the formation of language and culture of Slavic tribes (see Безлепкин 2001, 132).

This content downloaded from 146.111.194.19 on Wed, 22 May 2019 01:03:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

## REFERENCES


Alpatov, V. M.: 2000, 'What is Marxism in linguistics?', Brandist, C. and Tihanov, G. (eds.), *Materializing Bakhtin: The Bakhtin Circle and Social Theory*, London, 173–193.

Baxtin, M. M.: 1981, 'Discourse in the novel', *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. by Holquist, M., trans. by Emerson, C. and Holquist, M., Austin, 259–422.

Baxtin, M. M.: 1984, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Emerson, C., Minneapolis.

Baxtin, M. M.: 1986a, 'The problem of speech genres', *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. by Emerson, C. & Holquist, M., trans. by McGee, V. W., Austin, 60–102.

Baxtin, M. M.: 1986b, 'Notes from 1961', *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. by Emerson, C. & Holquist, M., trans. by McGee, V. W., Austin, 118–128.

Bühler, K.: 1934, *Sprachtheorie: Die Darstellungsfunktion der Sprache*, Stuttgart.

Gardiner, A.: 1932, *The Theory of Speech and Language*, Oxford.

Hirschkop, K.: 1999, *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy*, Oxford.

Lähteenmäki, M.: 1998, 'On dynamics and stability: Saussure, Voloshinov, and Bakhtin', Lähteenmäki, M. and Dufva, H. (eds.), *Dialogues on Bakhtin: Interdisciplinary Readings*, Jyväskylä, 51–69.

Mihailovic, A.: 2001, 'Bakhtin's dialogue with Russian Orthodoxy and critique of linguistic universalism', Felch, S. M. and Contino, P. J. (eds.), *Bakhtin and Religion: A Feeling for Faith*, Evanston, III, 121–149.

Morson, G. S., Emerson, C.: 1990, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, Stanford.

Stewart, S.: 1986, 'Shouts on the street: Bakhtin's anti-linguistics', Morson, G. S. (ed.), *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work*, Chicago, 41–57.

Thomas, L.: 1957, *The Linguistic Theories of N. Ja. Marr*, Berkeley and Los Angeles.

Vološinov, V. N.: 1973, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. by Matejka, L., Titunik, L. and I. R., New York & London.

Алпатов, В. М.: 1991, *История одного мифа*, Москва.

Алпатов, В. М.: 2001, 'Вопросы лингвистики в работах М. М. Бахтина 40–60-х годов', *Вопросы языкознания*, вып. 6, 123–137.

Бахтин, М. М.: 1996а, 'Проблема речевых жанров', *Собрание сочинений, т. 5, Работы 1940-х–начала 1960-х годов*, Москва, 159–206.

Бахтин, М. М.: 1996б, 'Диалог', *Собрание сочинений, т. 5, Работы 1940-х–начала 1960-х годов*, Москва, 207–209.

Бахтин, М. М.: 1996в, 'Диалог I, Проблема диалогической речи', *Собрание сочинений, т. 5, Работы 1940-х–начала 1960-х годов*, Москва, 209–218.

Бахтин, М. М.: 1996г, '<Подготовительные материалы>', *Собрание сочинений, т. 5, Работы 1940-х–начала 1960-х годов*, Москва, 240–286.

Бахтин, М. М.: 1996д, 'Проблема текста', *Собрание сочинений, т. 5, Работы 1940-х–начала 1960-х годов*, Москва, 306–326.

Безлепкин, Н. И.: 2001, *Философия языка в России: к истории русской лингвофилософии*, Санкт-Петербург.

Волошинов, В. Н.: 1995а, 'Марксизм и философия языка', *Философия и социология гуманитарных наук*, Санкт-Петербург, 216–380.

Волошинов, В. Н.: 1995б, 'Личное дело В. Н. Волошинова', *Диалог. Карнавал. Хронотоп* **2**, 70–99.

Гоготишвили, Л. А.: 1996а, Комментарий к тексту 'Проблема речевых жанров', Бахтин, М. М., *Собрание сочинений, т. 5, Работы 1940-х–начала 1960-х годов*, Москва, 535–555.

Гоготишвили, Л. А.: 1996б, Комментарий к тексту 'Диалог', Бахтин, М. М., *Собрание сочинений, т. 5, Работы 1940-х–начала 1960-х годов*, Москва, 560–563.

Гоготишвили, Л. А.: 1996в, Комментарий к тексту 'Диалог I. Проблема диалогической речи', Бахтин, М. М., *Собрание сочинений, т. 5, Работы 1940-х–начала 1960-х годов*, Москва, 563–569.


This content downloaded from 146.111.194.19 on Wed, 22 May 2019 01:03:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Гоготишвили, Л. А.: 1996г, Комментарий к тексту 'Проблема текста', Бахтин, М. М., *Собрание сочинений, т. 5, Работы 1940-х–начала 1960-х годов*, Москва, 618–647.
Ларин, Б. А.: 1977, *История русского языка и общее языкознание* (Избранные работы), Москва, 175–189.
Сталин, И. В.: 2001, 'Относительно марксизма в языкознании', Нерознак, В. П. (изд.), *Сумерки лингвистики: из истории отечественного языкознания*, Москва, 385–404.
Чикобава, А. С.: 2001, 'Когда и как это было', Нерознак, В. П. (изд.), *Сумерки лингвистики: из истории отечественного языкознания*, Москва, 507–512.
Шахматовъ, А. А.: 1915, *Очеркъ древнейшаго періода исторіи русскаго языка*, Петроградъ.
Якубинский, Л. П.: 1923, 'О диалогической речи', *Русская речь*, Петербург, 96–194.
Якубинский, Л. П.: 1931, 'Классовый состав современного русского языка', *Литературная учеба* **7**, 22–33.

*Department of Languages*
*University of Jyväskylä*
milahtee@cc.jyu.fi

This content downloaded from 146.111.194.19 on Wed, 22 May 2019 01:03:18 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms