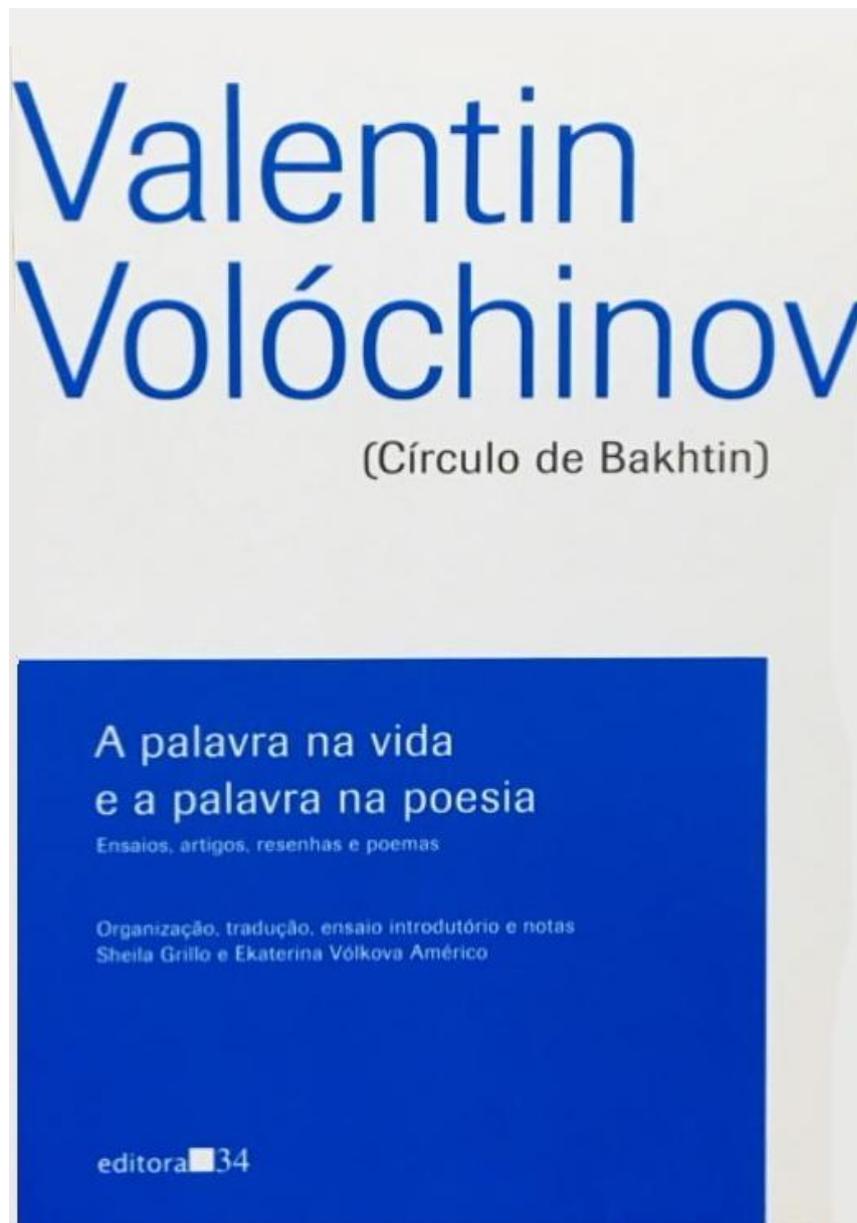


VOLÓCHINOV, Valentin. *A palavra na vida e a palavra na poesia: ensaios, artigos, resenhas e poemas* [The Word in Life and the Word in Poetry: Essays, Articles, Reviews and Poems]. Organização, tradução, ensaio introdutório e notas de Sheila Grillo e Ekaterina Vólkova Américo. São Paulo:Editora 34, 2019. 399 p.

*Heber de Oliveira Costa e Silva**



* PhD Letras/Linguística and translator at Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (UFPE), Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9090-3155>; heber1979@gmail.com

Brazilian dialogism researchers are certainly familiarized with some of the texts collected in *A palavra na vida e a palavra na poesia: ensaios, artigos, resenhas e poemas* [The Word in Life and the Word in Poetry: Essays, Articles, Reviews and Poems] [(2019)]. However, the contact with such texts for those who live in Brazil has always been indirect and sparse. The title essay, for example, has been circulating for a long time in the form of a translation by Faraco & Tezza (from the English version by I. R. Titunik) under the title *O discurso na vida e o discurso na arte (sobre poética sociológica)*,¹ though it was never actually published.² The Spanish translation of another text present in this new collection is also well-known in Brazil: *¿Que es el lenguaje?* [What is language?],³ originally published in the book *Bajtín y Vigotski*, organized by Silvestri & Blanck (1993). A third essay, whose title in this new translation is *A construção do enunciado* [The Construction of the Utterance],⁴ has also been translated informally (for didactic purposes), probably from French, by Ana Vaz, but titled *Estrutura do enunciado* instead. In addition, there is a book that collects several of these texts: *A construção da enunciação e outros ensaios* [The Construction of the Utterance and Other Essays] (2013), organized by Geraldini and including translations by himself, as well as other scholars, from Italian, English, and Spanish.

These efforts undoubtedly helped Brazilian researchers to apprehend Vološinov's ideas, but a more encompassing, homogeneous treatment of his work was long due. The first great step towards this ideal was the translation of *Marxism and the philosophy of*

¹ V. N. VOLOSHINOV. *Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art – Concerning Sociological Poetics*. In: V. N. VOLOSHINOV. *Freudism: A Marxist Critique*. Translated by I. R. Titunik. New York: Academic Press, 1976.

² Editor's note: There is also a publication of this same essay in Portuguese as an Appendix in *Palavra própria e palavra outra na sintaxe da enunciação*, da Pedro & João Editores (2011). It is comprised by the third part of *Marxism and Philosophy of Language* (Vološinov, 1986), *Toward a History of Forms of Utterance in Language Constructions (Study in the Application of the Sociological Method to Problems of Syntax)*, and the Appendix added by the editors "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art – Concerning Sociological Poetics" (VOLOSHINOV, 1976). The authorship is ambiguous in the mentioned edition: Valentin Volochinov (1926); (M. M. Bakhtin). And, there is no information about the translation of this particular essay. There is only general information on the title page of the edition, where one can read that the organization [of the work is] in the care of Valdemir Miotello and a list of the components of the translation and proofreading team. The full reference of MPL in English: VOLOŠINOV, V. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Translated by Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Tutunik. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1986.

³ VOLOSHINOV [M. M. BAKHTIN]. *What is Language?* Translated by Noel Owen. In: *Bakhtin Papers*. Russian Poetics in Translation. Edited by Ann Shukman. Routledge: Oxon Publishing. pp.93–113.

⁴ VOLOSHINOV [M. M. BAKHTIN]. *The Construction of the Utterance*. Translated by Noel Owen. In: *Bakhtin Papers*. Russian Poetics in Translation. Edited by Ann Shukman. Routledge: Oxon Publishing. pp.114-138.

language (MPL), directly from Russian in 2018, by Sheila Grillo & Ekaterina Vólkova Américo. In 2019, another direct translation came to light. It involved extensive research work in the historical files of the former Institute for the Comparative History of the Literatures and Languages of the West and East (ILlAZV), in Saint Petersburg, where Vološinov used to carry out research and teach. In their opening essay, filled with references and documentation, the translators write that “in this first stage of Vološinov’s bibliographical production, we find elements [...] that are present in his later works” (2019, p.9). The first of these elements is the “rejection of psychologization,” which is the focus of the opening essay.

Beyond the Social: On Freudianism (1925) includes a large amount of the content that would eventually be published in the book *Freudianism: A Marxist critique* (1927).⁵ One noticeable difference between the Brazilian edition of the book and the essay is the absence of the chapter A Critique of Marxist Apologias of Freudianism,⁶ in which the author argues against B. Bikhovski, A. Luria, B. Fridman, and A. Zalkind. Returning to the essay, Vološinov starts off by discussing the “biological philosophy” feature of Freudianism, criticizing the excessive focus on organic processes. Although Vološinov admits that Freudianism is based on “some irrefutable facts from the scientific point of view and some empirical observations,” he understands that this empirical core “dissolves itself in a sea of weak subjective philosophy” (2019, p.64). It should be noted that there is a certain degree of duality in Vološinov’s approach: on the one hand, he criticizes Freud’s biological and scientific pretension; on the other hand, he champions the quest for a Marxist psychology based on science (objective, but not abstract). This is the reason why he speaks highly of the “scientific merits” of Freud’s research about drives (2019, p.70).

In the 1925 essay, Vološinov makes a broad explanation of Freud’s ideas, inscribing the Austrian neurologist within the subjective psychology tradition. He concentrates his efforts on the critique of the Freudian *unconscious*, contending against the division of conscience, which would push the unconscious to the non-verbal zone.

⁵ VOLOŠINOV, V.N. *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*. Translated by I.R.Titunik. Academic Press, New York, 1976.

⁶ This chapter was not included in the English version of the book published in 1976. It came out in a scientific journal in 1985 (BAKHTIN, M. A Critique of Marxist Apologias of Freudianism. *Soviet Psychology*. v. 23, n. 3, pp.5-27, 1985.). It was included, however, in the 2001 Brazilian edition.

Freud's concept would go against the idea of man as a material and integral being. Furthermore, individuation (deemed something out of the philosophy of the bourgeoisie) would also be incompatible with the fundamentally social view of Marxism. Vološinov then reaches the conclusion that there is a tendency to “oppose social history to the psychologized biological organism [deemed] as an asocial, self-sufficient macrocosm” (2019, pp.96-97). Above all, he stands against any isolationist or non-materialist approach of ideology. According to Vološinov (2019, p.103), “an ideological construct is, first and foremost, social.”

Paulo Bezerra, the Brazilian translator of *Freudianism*,⁷ sees the book as “an endorsement of the Marxist thesis that psychism has social origins” (2007, p.XV). He also reminds us that, at the time, the Soviet thinking considered human social behavior to be dictated “exclusively by class structure” (p.XI). Grillo (2017, p.72) also understands that Vološinov's posture against Freudian theory seems guided by “institutional dogmatism” and Marxism's indisputable hegemony in the 1920's USSR. She argues that “there are affinities among these two theories” (p.72) and that the socio-ideological conception of conscience by Vološinov could contribute to enrich Freud's view of the unconscious. To back this assertion, Grillo presents several feasible paths within the boundaries of Marxist studies.

In *Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art*⁸ (1926),⁹ the title itself is already a testament to the fact that, in the institute where Vološinov used to work, “the concepts and the research methodology make use of an integrated approach between language and literature” (GRILLO; AMÉRICO, 2019, p.21). When Geraldi (2013, p.19) comments on this 1926 text, he points out that Vološinov's view was that “to comprehend language outside art is crucial to comprehend the way it works artistically.” Indeed, Vološinov states that he intends to examine theoretical poetics. He begins by questioning attempts to analyze art intrinsically, i.e., ignoring the sociological point of view - “art is inherently social,” he says (2019, p.13). Vološinov wanted to develop a method that could encompass art in its wholeness. Therefore, he condemns two approaches that he calls “erroneous opinions” in art studies: fetishizing (examining the work of art in isolation)

⁷ For reference, see footnote 5.

⁸ For reference, see footnote 1.

⁹ There is a debate on whether to translate *slovo* in this title as *discourse* or *word*. Grillo & Américo (2019, p.109) chose to translate it as *palavra* (*word*).

and Psychism (focusing on either the creator or the spectator). According to him (2019, p.115), the main problem in both was to try “to see the whole in a part.” These two streams (fetishizing/Psychism) can clearly be associated with the idealist and abstract perspectives aforementioned in *Beyond the Social*, which Vološinov would eventually dissect in *MPL*, particularly in chapters 6 and 7, whose content is very similar to the essay *Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art*.

One aspect of this essay that should be highlighted and that reveals a close consonance between Vološinov and Bakhtin is how important intonation is to both of them. Here, Vološinov sees intonation as “the sheer expression” of evaluation, since a “word comes in direct contact with life” by intonation (2019, p.123). Bakhtin (1999, p.84)¹⁰ defines intonation as “the speaker's subjective emotional evaluation of the referentially semantic content of his utterance.” However, the main point here is perhaps Vološinov's view (2019, p.129) that intonation pumps “energy from everyday life into the word, granting to the linguistically stable whole a historical, living movement, as well as the feature of unrepeatability.” This is the reason why Vološinov uses these concepts again to examine the work of art in the final section of *Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art*, taking some time to discuss the style and social nature of the work of art—which reveals his proposal of a sociological approach to the artistic structure of poetry.

The article *The Latest Trends in Linguistic Thought in the West* (1928),¹¹ by its turn, is basically comprised of the first chapters of *MPL*. This earlier version does not include, for example, either the part about *theme* and *meaning* or the discussion about the forms of reported speech that are present in the book. In this text, Vološinov exhibits his abundant scientific knowledge, as someone immersed in his time, being politically engaged, even harsh in some occasions, while his multiple references to Medvedev show a keen synergy between the two authors. In the 1928 text, Vološinov again examines the individualistic subjectivism and abstract objectivism trends. This is not the occasion for an in-depth discussion on what probably the author's most well-known text is, but it is

¹⁰ BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of Speech Genres. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999. pp.60-102.

¹¹ VOLOSHINOV [M. M. BAKHTIN]. *The Latest Trends in Linguistic Thought in The West*. Translated by Noel Owen. In: *Bakhtin Papers*. Russian Poetics in Translation. Edited by Ann Shukman. Routledge: Oxon Publishing. (pp.31-51)

worth proposing a study that could compare the 1928 article (as translated in 2019) and the *MPL* version published in 1929 (as translated in 2017). Some differences were already detected. Geraldini (2013, p.19), for instance, says that, in the 1928 text, objectivism “is presented as a perspective championed by Bally, with Saussure being listed among the linguists inscribed in this theoretical trend, something that was altered in the book in the following year.”

*Stylistics in Literary Discourse*¹² (1930) is an essay in three parts: *What is Language?*, *The Construction of Utterance*, and *The Word and Its Social Function*, published in the Russian journal *Literary Studies* (a self-formation journal), created to educate aspiring writers from popular strata. The interlocution with this audience becomes apparent in the extremely didactic tone of the articles, as well as in the straightforward style and in the basic concepts introduced by the author. In the first article, Vološinov starts off with the Japhetic theory for the origins of language, postulated by Nikolai Marr and widely accepted in the USSR as a foundation for a social perspective on language. Throughout the first section of *What is language?*,¹³ Vološinov seems to take the Japhetic theory for granted. He does not share the studies or evidence in which this theory is based with the reader; as a matter of fact, Vološinov himself introduces the theory as being “supposition by the academic N. Marr.” He also introduces the fundamental concept of *ideology*, defined as a “set of reflexes and refractions of the social and natural activity in the human brain, expressed and cemented by man in a word [...] or other sign-related forms” (2019, p.243), that is, the same definition used in *MPL*. Finally, he talks about *inner discourse* (which refers to psychism, as seen in the text on Freudism), a concept that is presented here categorically as something that determines outer artistic discourse (thus, creativity). It is possible to summarize the general theme of *What is language?* as the idea that every word emerges from life itself and, at the same time, refracts life through the lens of ideology.

The Construction of the Utterance,¹⁴ by its turn, begins with the notion of the living language and talks about the utterance as “a drop in the stream of discursive communication” (2019, p.267). Particularly important concepts, such as *audience*,

¹² VOLOSHINOV, V. N. [M. M. BAKHTIN] *Literary Stylistics*. In: SHUKMAN, A. (Ed.) *Bakhtin Papers*. Russian Poetics in Translation. Edited by Ann Shukman. Routledge: Oxon Publishing. pp.93–152.

¹³ For reference, see footnote 3.

¹⁴ For reference, see footnote 4.

responsive understanding, and *point of view*, are also present in that text. A great deal of space is dedicated to *sense*, while *meaning* is only mentioned in broad strokes. In this sense, authors such as Cereja (2008) and Faraco (2006) see *meaning* as one of the most troublesome issues of Vološinov's work. There is no debate that Vološinov's intention in his text is to overcome language-immanent semantics; nonetheless, the distinction between *theme/sense* and *meaning* that he draws in *MPL* is a noticeable absence here. Vološinov finishes his article asserting the social nature of utterance and highlighting the determinant role in stylistics of both the non-verbal situation and the audience.

It is in the third article that Vološinov lets his political vein appear the most. The text's main topics are class ideology and the word as an ideological sign—as the grounds where class struggles take place. Expressions such as “saboteur” and “swamp of outdated opinions and customs” identify the text with the post-revolutionary context of the 1930s. Two statements cannot go unnoticed: that the proletariat's subjective point of view is the one that is closer to “the objective logic of reality” and that it “coincides in the most complete fashion with the word's object-related and objective meaning” (2019, p.318). These unsubstantiated remarks cannot be found in other texts. Such ideas may be related to Vološinov's opinion (2019, p.320) that the sign has a reactionary bias, which translates to the dominant classes' aspiration of making the word eternal. The word's inner dialecticism would only reveal itself in times of social crisis or revolution. This Marxist inclination is often presented as something that separates Vološinov from Bakhtin. Having said that, it is worth remembering that Sériot (2010, pp.54-56) recounts the debate over *MPL* being a Marxist work or not, to which he adds the reasoning of authors from both sides of the aisle.

By now, it should be clear that all the essays collected in the reviewed book contain a common theme: a critique of individualistic subjectivism and abstract objectivism—theoretical trends that Vološinov at the same time rejects and attempts to synthesize in *MPL*. According to Faraco (2006, pp.126, 129), Vološinov did not succeed in reaching a synthesis of these trends because he inherited the same difficulties for dealing with language structure that afflicted Humboldt's tradition (language as a social activity), to which Vološinov was affiliated. Sériot (2010, p.61) also says that “it is

difficult to speak of ‘dialectic’ [synthesis],” since Vološinov “does not retain *anything*”¹⁵ of Saussure’s, pointing out the widespread anti-positivism among Russian authors in the early 20th century. As Sériot (p.61) sees it, *MPL* is marked by refusal: a refusal of Saussure (abstraction) and a refusal of Freud (unconscious).

Yet, by rejecting objectivist and subjectivist trends, Vološinov proposes a distinct and undoubtedly prolific theoretical path: a dialectic synthesis between *Humboldt’s idealism* and *historical materialism*, since Vološinov sees “conscience as materialized in signs and objectified in particular ideological systems,” being “on one hand, a part of existence, [...] and, on the other, capable of influencing, of transforming material existence” (GRILLO, 2017, p.60). To sum up, citing Sériot’s words (2010, p.62), Vološinov’s bold synthesis represents, in fact, a “materialist reading of idealism.”

The musicology articles and reviews included in the book add another layer of Vološinov’s profile for the reader, not simply for his acquaintance with art and other fields. For instance, Grillo & Américo (2019, pp.9-10) mention the fact that the term *architectonics* is already present in the article about Beethoven as a way of describing a musical piece structure; i.e., the method of analysis and the notions introduced here already use theoretical elements that would be elaborated later.

Lastly, I cannot speak highly enough of how well-crafted this Brazilian edition is. Above all, the incredibly well documented introductory essay provides Vološinov with a concreteness never felt before in Brazil. The translated text, polished and proofread almost to perfection, reflects the author’s shifts in style, unveiling an authorial, versatile Vološinov. The translator’s notes are abundant and informative, while always leaving room for contradictory voices that inhabit in every translation process. The translators never aim to be the last word on the author or his work, but they offer assurance to the reader and mark their positions through solid research.

It should be noted that every translation, direct or indirect, is always a *re-utterance*, that is, it is always infused by multiple voices, as it always establishes new dialogical relations in the target culture—therefore, it should not be perceived as the author’s literal words, but instead as one *point of view*. Previous translations (Italian, Spanish, English, French) offered perspectives that allowed us to peek into Vološinov’s

¹⁵ “Mais il est difficile de parler ici de “dialectique” dans la mesure où, de Saussure, [Vološinov] ne retient rien: le rejet est total.”

ideas. In the same manner, this new translation from Russian also offers a point of view for the reader to understand Vološinov's work, but this time an unprecedented, singular, substantiated point of view, nearer to the author's. It is not an exaggeration to say that the work done by Grillo & Américo provides us with a prism that allows us to finally see Vološinov not only as the author, but also as the historical and material man.

REFERENCES

BAKHTIN, M. Os gêneros do discurso. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Estética da criação verbal*. Introdução e tradução do russo de Paulo Bezerra. Prefácio à edição francesa de Tzvetan Todorov. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2010. p.261-306.

CEREJA, W. Significação e tema. In: BRAIT, B. (Org.). *Bakhtin: conceitos-chave*. 4. ed. São Paulo: Contexto, 2008. p.201-220.

FARACO, C. Voloshinov: um coração humboldtiano?. In: FARACO, C. TEZZA, C. CASTRO, G. (Orgs.). *Vinte ensaios sobre Mikhail Bakhtin*. Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 2006. p.125-132.

GERALDI, J. W. Introdução: o mundo não nos é dado, mas construído. In: VOLOCHÍNOV, V. *A construção da enunciação e outros ensaios*. São Carlos: Pedro & João Editores, 2013. p.7-27.

GRILLO, S. Marxismo, psicanálise e método sociológico: o diálogo de Volóchinov, marxistas soviéticos e europeus com Freud. *Bakhtiniana*, São Paulo, v. 12, n. 3, p.54-75, 2017. Disponível em <https://revistas.pucsp.br/bakhtiniana/article/view/32107/23565> Acesso em 15 de maio, 2020.

GRILLO, S.; AMÉRICO, E. V. Registros de Valentin Volóchinov nos arquivos do ILIAZV. In: VOLOCHINOV, V. *A palavra na vida e a palavra na poesia: ensaios, artigos, resenhas e poemas*. Organização, tradução, ensaio introdutório e notas de S. Grillo e E. V. Américo. 1. ed. São Paulo: Editora 34, 2019. p.7-56.

SÉRIOT, P. Préface. In: VOLOŠINOV, V. *Marxisme et philosophie du langage: les problèmes fondamentaux de la méthode sociologique dans la science du langage*. Édition bilingue traduite par Patrick Sériot et Inna Tylkowski-Ageeva. Limoges: Lambert-Lucas, 2010. p.13-109.

Translated by the review's author.

Received April 01, 2020

Accepted Jan. 30, 2021