

Analytical Potential of Speech Genres for Variation Studies / *Potencial analítico dos gêneros do discurso para os estudos variacionistas*

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ABSTRACT

This text aims to reflect on why speech genres are relevant to variation studies, especially for third wave studies, whose central issue is the notion of style. Through bibliographic research, we examine part of the literature of the third wave of variation studies and part of the literature of the Bakhtinian approach, focusing on the notion of style, to (i) highlight some connections between these approaches and to (ii) articulate them, in some other points. The results of this reflection indicate that speech genres are relevant to the interests of third wave studies because (i) linguistic style is a property of speech genres, upgradeable due to the aesthetic finalizations they receive; and (ii) an understanding of style requires an understanding of the (social and formal) constitution of the genres, in which categories of analysis that are of interest to the third wave of variation studies are indicated.

KEYWORDS: Third variation wave; Style; Discourse genres; Aesthetic finalization

RESUMO

Este texto objetiva refletir sobre por que os gêneros do discurso são relevantes para os estudos variacionistas, especialmente para os de terceira onda, que têm como questão central a noção de estilo. Por meio de pesquisa bibliográfica, examinam-se parte da literatura da terceira onda variacionista e parte da literatura da abordagem bakhtiniana, com foco na noção de estilo, para (i) indicar alguns pontos de contato entre essas abordagens e (ii) articulá-las, em alguns outros pontos. Os resultados dessa reflexão indicam que os gêneros do discurso são relevantes para os interesses dos estudos de terceira onda porque (i) o estilo linguístico é uma propriedade dos gêneros do discurso, atualizáveis pelo acabamento estético que recebem; e (ii) uma compreensão do estilo requer uma compreensão da constituição (social e formal) dos gêneros, estando neles indicadas categorias de análise que são caras à terceira onda variacionista.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Terceira onda variacionista; Estilo; Gêneros do discurso; Acabamento estético

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Initial Considerations

Variation studies have long flirted with speech genre theories and/or text genre theories, not always differentiating one from the other, in order to investigate how *different types of texts* (and their constitutive aspects) may condition the processes of variation/change.¹ Thus, many works have undeniably shown that genres are an important element for explaining variable usage, although there is much disagreement about how to approach them in variation research.²

Moreover, part of the literature associated with the *third wave of variation studies*,³ strongly dedicated to a re-dimensioning of linguistic variation, has referred, directly or indirectly, to a specific genre analysis approach (cf. Coupland, 2001; Irvine, 2001; Bauman, 2001, among others), namely the writings of The Bakhtin Circle, and has also considered the Russian philosopher “(...) a herald of modern sociolinguistics” (Bell, 2001, p.143). In Coupland’s (2001) terms, it is a discourse orientation that has led the variation field “to a reconsideration of Bakhtin/Vološinov’s theoretical writings” (Coupland, 2001, p.195). In this context, interested in third-wave studies (hereafter TWS), this paper aims to answer the following question: *why, after all, are speech genres relevant to variation studies, particularly to third-wave studies?* In our view, this topic is not yet clearly posed in the variation studies literature, so perhaps variation studies can be so far considered *tangential* to the analytical potential that speech genres provide.

In order to achieve the goal specified above, this text is organized as follows: the first section presents some concepts and assumptions of the TWS; the second section recalls the conception of style assumed by The Bakhtin Circle studies (henceforth BCS); the third section indicates connections between the approaches in question, and articulates

¹ A first version of this text, produced by the first two authors, is available at *Scielo Preprints Repository*: <https://preprints.scielo.org/index.php/scielo/preprint/view/5030/version/5332>

² An incomplete survey of these works makes us see that genres are taken: sometimes as an *independent variable* (Vieira, 2014; Tavares, 2020); sometimes as an *organizing element of samples* (Oliveira, 2006; Bragança, 2008); sometimes as an *instance* for studying variation (Lobato, 2009); sometimes they are reduced to textual typology (Silva, 1997; Fonseca, 2010); sometimes they are generically taken as indicative of modality (oral and written genres) (Malvar; Poplack, 2008; Strogenski, 2010); sometimes they are used for theoretical and methodological discussions (Görski; Valle, 2014; Berlinck; Biazolli; Balsalobre; 2014; Bragança, 2017; Biazolli; Berlinck, 2021).

³ This literature, also known as *Speaker Design* approaches, is organized not around a very well-defined theory, but around working themes. Hence it is announced in the plural (*approaches*).

them at a specific point, with the purpose of answering the question that guides this text; finally, some final considerations are made.⁴

1 The Third Wave of Variation Studies

In this section, we present a brief overview of the main concepts that permeate TWS, which are characterized by a clear convergence between some sociolinguistic and anthropological assumptions and a more subtle approximation with notions from the discourse field.

In general, variation sociolinguistics has its theoretical and methodological basis anchored in three dimensions that work together: linguistic, social, and stylistic.⁵ Throughout variation studies, these dimensions have been repositioning themselves in terms of centrality in the field and re-signifying themselves, supported by somewhat different conceptions of language, individual and society, which give rise to different perspectives on variation. This reconfiguration, taking social meaning as its axis, is systematized in what has been called the *three waves of sociolinguistic variation* (Eckert, 2016; 2018; 2012⁶), seen as phases that, although not excluding or categorically linear, follow a certain chronology.⁷

In TWS, there is a *strong rapprochement between sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists*, such as Eckert, Coupland, Irvine, Rickford, Zhang, among others, considered “the heart of the Third Wave” (Eckert, 2018, p.125), within which the following notions, among others, are elicited: *semiotic system, agentive subject, stylistic practice, identity/persona, stance, indexicality, distinctiveness, and ideology*.

In this variation phase, identified by Eckert (2005) as the *stylistic perspective*: (i) language integrates a “dynamic social semiotic system” (Eckert, 2016, p.13), in the sense that, besides structure, *language is social practice*, and should not be seen as separated

⁴ In the following exposition, we frequently use the italic typographic resource to emphasize excerpts that we consider important for the development of the argument presented.

⁵ The stylistic dimension of first-wave variation studies, occupying a secondary place in the discussions, is tied to the cognitive domain of degrees of attention to speech, which are reflected in different levels of formality of use. This perspective is quite different from that practiced in third wave studies, as presented in this text.

⁶ For reference, see footnote 8.

⁷ For a review on first and second wave studies, see Eckert (2016; 2018; 2012).

from society; (ii) the speaker, seen as an agentive and creative subject, attains protagonism in the social scenario, which is in turn constituted by *ideological and cultural systems* that intersect;⁸ (iii) *style is a practice*, being conceived as stylistic movement, therefore it is not something fixed (Eckert, 2005; 2016; 2012); it *originates in the content* and not in the form of manifestation, since “the social is eminently about the content of people’s lives,” so that “different ways of saying things are intended to signal different ways of being” (Eckert, 2018, p.146); (iv) the idea of semiotic system refers to the notion of a more general style that includes, in addition to language, gestures, postures, clothing, interest in certain consumer goods, certain leisure activities, certain discursive topics, among other elements, which function in stylistic practices as *co-occurring style patterns* indexicalizing social meanings; (v) it is in *stylistic practices*, which are *mediated by ideology*, that speakers construct and project *personas/identities* (Eckert, 2008, 2018); (vi) *linguistic variation* – assumed as *stylistic variation* – does not reflect social meaning, but (re)constructs social meaning, being considered “a social semiotic system capable of expressing the full range of a community’s social concerns” (Eckert, 2012, p.94);⁹ (vii) the social meanings of variables, accompanying the dynamics of social interests, are *constantly reinterpreted in stylistic practices*, when, in a process of bricolage, “a stylistic agent appropriates resources from a broad sociolinguistic landscape, recombining them to make a distinctive style” (Eckert, 2018, p.118) so that the component of individual identification of the new style has its origin in a broader landscape of meanings.

Reinforcing and expanding on the points listed above, we can say that *stylistic variation – motivated especially by the speaker’s point of view about their place in the world and their relation to other people* (Schilling, 2013), that is, by the “sense of place in the social world” (Eckert, 2005, p.17) – is used both to reinterpret social meanings and to (re)construct and project speakers’ identities/personas (social types), *either as individuals or as members of social groups* (Coupland, 2007; Kiesling, 2013).

The (re)construction of identities “represents a negotiation of the intersubjective meanings of social practices” so that “*identity is how individuals define, create, or think*

⁸ For this reason, we use the term *culture* and its derivatives in this text, understanding that, in its meaning, ideological issues are always implicated.

⁹ ECKERT, P. Three Waves of Variation Study: The Emergence of Meaning in the Study of Sociolinguistic Variation. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, v. 41, pp.87–100, jun 2012. Available at: <https://web.stanford.edu/~eckert/PDF/ThreeWaves.pdf>. Accessed: 30 March 2023.

of themselves in terms of their relationships with other individuals and groups, whether these others are real or imagined” (Kiesling, 2013, pp.449-450; emphasis in original). Such a definition, in addition to *shifting the focus from static individuals to the process of how speakers use language to create relations*, also captures the *individual and social nature of identity*. Identities, according to the author, are connected in three contextually dependent dimensions, which function as multi-layers that interconnect through variation: (i) major census groups (socioeconomic class, sex/gender, age, and race/ethnicity) and place/region; (ii) institutional and professional roles (mother, teacher, etc.); and (iii) *stances* in interaction (being friendly, authoritative, weak, etc.). These dimensions of identity are articulated through semiotic alignments of an ideological nature, so that “sociolinguistic variables get indexed not just to the identity but also to the ideologies and stereotypes surrounding that identity in a larger semiotic ideology” (Kiesling, 2013, p.463). It is from this conceptual framework that it can be inferred that, within TWS, the notion of discourse – ideological content that guides people’s lives or ideological positions/stances that one assumes/evokes in interactions – is present and central, although the term is not always evoked explicitly.

Specifically, linguistic variables constitute styles that are seen as indexical signs, and *it is at the level of style that variation connects significantly with the social*, becoming truly indexical, which reinforces the belief that *language and society should not be seen as separate* (Eckert, 2016). *Variables indexicalize identities/personas, characteristics/stances, and ideologies*, without, however, detaching themselves from macrosociological categories. It is through semiotic movements made in stylistic practices that variables are (re)combined and (re)interpreted, so that “their central property must be indexical mutability” (Eckert, 2012, p.94).¹⁰

Such mutability is explained according to the anthropological notion of indexical order (Silverstein, 2003): at some point, a given social group stands out and a feature of their speech, for example, draws attention, and may come to indexicalize belonging to that group. In this case, *the trait can be evoked to signal ideological stances*, stereotypes associated with the group, etc. Eckert (2018) points out that the occurrence of this trait in a new style changes not only the original meaning of the trait, but also the semiotic landscape. Repeated acts of indexicalization end up conventionalizing the new sign,

¹⁰ For reference, see footnote 8.

which becomes available for other indexical movements and so on. The indexical order is not linear, and can occur simultaneously in multiple directions, establishing an “indexical field,” defined as “a constellation of ideologically related meanings” (Eckert, 2008, p.454). In this sense, a linguistic variable does not have a static meaning, but a general meaning that is *specified in each context of occurrence, so a single variable can have a number of potential meanings at various levels, which are activated in use, being able to cause rearrangements in the field through new ideological connections. Thus understood, “variation constitutes an indexical system that embeds ideology in language and that is in turn part and parcel of the construction of ideology”* (Eckert, 2008, p.454; emphasis added).

According to Irvine (2001, pp.23-24), “styles in speaking involve the ways speakers, as agents in social (and sociolinguistic) space, negotiate their positions and goals within a system of distinctions and possibilities.” The perception of distinctions takes place through the *lens of ideology that links the linguistic and the social*, with the subjects’ prior experiences coming into play in this process (Eckert, 2018). As already mentioned, the meaning of a linguistic variable only becomes specified in the context of stylistic practices, associated with co-occurring style patterns, and it is the set of co-occurring stylistic resources that creates what Irvine (2001) calls “social distinctiveness,” signaling contrasts between styles (Eckert, 2016). Irvine, however, *relating the notion of style to that of aesthetics*, associates stylistic aesthetics “not only distinctiveness, but also the *consistency of the linguistic features constituting a style*” (Irvine, 2001, p.22; emphasis added) although she admits that aesthetic systems are also culturally variable.

In convergence with these TWS premises, Coupland (2007) suggests that the variation approach must engage in a discourse-theoretical framework in order to explain the quality of social interaction. According to the author, “most social situations will have a *pre-existing social architecture and a genre structure within which social meanings can be negotiated*” (Coupland, 2007, p.26; emphasis added) so that *in a stylistic analysis, the analyst must understand how these social contexts function*. As an example of this proposal, Bauman (2001) investigates the relationship between forms, functions, and variation based on the examination of speech genres typical of a Mexican public market, and advocates that *speech genres are the framework for understanding stylistic practice*.

From a third-wave approach, it is considered that: (i) “style is a complex multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be modelled in a single unidimensional theory” (Hernández-Campoy, 2019, p.12); (ii) finding statistical correlations is only the first step in establishing sociolinguistic patterns and understanding their functioning – *the next step is to “look closely at the historical and cultural backdrop of identities and more general semiotic ideologies in which those are involved”* and, in addition, to “look intently at the moment-to-moment use of variants in interactions that both draw from and accrete into these larger patterns” (Kiesling, 2013, p.465; emphasis added); (iii) the continuous modification and emergence of new identities/personalities are reflected in linguistic variation, and this, in addition to reflecting the social world, also plays a central role in the continuous change of the world through the construction of social types (Eckert, 2016). In this sense, the third wave, “which began with the simple question of what variables mean, in the end *raises fundamental questions about the nature of language*” (Eckert, 2016, p.14; emphasis added).

This seems to be, in general terms, the conceptual mosaic that underpins the TWS.

2 The Question of Style from a Bakhtinian Perspective

The aim of this section is to recall some theoretical-methodological aspects constitutive of BCS, to shed light on the notion of *style* practiced in them. Although style is defined as the “selection of the lexical, phraseological, and grammatical resources of the language” (Bakhtin, 1986a, p.60),¹¹ it is assumed that the Bakhtinian view on this resource involves many more elements than linguistic resources only.

For practical reasons, we will concentrate on some aspects that would constitute a *general philosophical aesthetics* for the study of aesthetic objects, since, in our understanding, this is how this perspective of genre analysis enters in direct dialogue with the research interests of TWS, especially because *one of the most important problems of aesthetics is the correct placement of the problem of style* (Bakhtin, 1990a).¹² In

¹¹ BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of Speech Genre. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist; translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986a. pp.60-102.

¹² BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art. Translated by Kenneth Brostrom. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin. Edited

discussing this topic, we also contemplate (i) the conception of language of the Bakhtinian approach; (ii) the notion of utterance/enunciation¹³ and speech genres; and (iii) specifically, the approach's conception of style.

BCS's philosophical point of view, strongly dedicated to the reflection of aesthetic activity,¹⁴ has promoted numerous contributions to the field of language, by also taking it as an aesthetic activity. Among them, and the one that interests us most directly, is the understanding that the form of an aesthetic object (AO) cannot be defined by the form of the material by which it is constituted, because it is not to it (to the material) that the aesthetic activity is directed; rather, the form created is a meaningful form of/for man¹⁵ and of/for his body; *it is man's capacity to express an axiological relationship,¹⁶ emotional and volitive, to something, therefore, beyond the material.*

Since the axiological moment determines the form of the material, the form of an AO is the form of the *intention of creation* – the relation of the aesthete to a marble or to linguistic elements, for example, is secondary, since it is not to them that the activity is directed.¹⁷ The analysis of an AO, therefore, outside the field of intentions, makes it, therefore, an isolated and extracultural object, and it is precisely against this that BCS resisted, since its authors could not agree with the idea that not even the most specific of art, the aesthetic-formal, necessarily exclude the social, the historical, the cultural (Faraco, 2011). Therefore, the Russians summoned precisely a cultural-historical basis from which language itself is rethought – and relocated on the “broad highway of unified human culture” (Bakhtin, 1990a, p.261).¹⁸

by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov; translated by Vadim Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990a. pp.257-325.

¹³ *Utterance* and *enunciation* are alternative terms, in Bakhtinian texts, to designate the concrete and real unit of communication.

¹⁴ Recall that the BCS's conception of aesthetics and aesthetic object departs from the formalist conception of these aspects.

¹⁵ The rejection of Bakhtinian texts to empiricist conceptions makes one see that “man” in these considerations “cannot and must not assume for us the determinateness of a person” (Bakhtin, 1990b, p.207), but as a *point of view that one* assumes. BAKHTIN, M. Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity. *In: BAKHTIN, M. Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin. Edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov; translated by Vadim Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990b. pp.4-256.

¹⁶ In this text, the terms *axiology* and *ideology* are used alternately to refer to the universe of social values that constitute the subjects - cf. Faraco (2009) and Acosta-Pereira and Rodrigues (2014).

¹⁷ Exceptions are made for artistic work about/through language.

¹⁸ For reference, see footnote 11.

Based on these reflections, language, in its effective use, is then seen by BCS as an AO, in the form of *enunciation*: (i) the real and concrete unit of communication; (ii) a product of the interaction between socioculturally organized subjects – therefore, a cultural product – and that, being impregnated with values¹⁹ (iii) can only be understood in the systematic unity of culture, that is, in correlation with the world in which it takes place.

As such, the enunciation cannot be understood or defined only by its linguistic (material) structure, because (remember:) form is actually the form of a content, which BCS calls *discourse*: a project or will/intention to say, that is, a *positioning assumed by the subject* when taking the word,²⁰ an aspect that points to the fact that the element that organizes all communication is the axiological/ideological orientation of the subjects²¹ (Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1991),²² since talking about any object of enunciation implies taking an evaluative attitude, an attitude of non-indifference in relation:

- (i) *to the object of enunciation*, because the attitude of non-indifference itself already results from the fact that the objects of enunciation relate, in some way, to the conditions of existence of a social group, having, therefore, acquired some relevance, because “we only see and conceptualize what interests or affects us in one way or another” (Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1991, p.127);²³
- (ii) *to other utterances*, because every utterance only occurs in response to other utterances,²⁴ since “our thought itself – philosophical, scientific, and artistic – is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others’ thought” (Bakhtin, 1986a, p.92);²⁵ hence, the Bakhtinian notion that every speaker is an *active respondent*, since “He is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe” (Bakhtin, 1986a, p.69)²⁶ and that every utterance

¹⁹ Because no cultural act is indifferent to values (Bakhtin, 1990). For reference, see footnote 31.

²⁰ This is the relationship between discourse and utterance: since “speech is always cast in the form of an utterance belonging to a particular speaking subject, and outside this form it cannot exist” (Bakhtin, 1986a, p.71). For reference, see footnote 10.

²¹ Rodrigues (2001) calls this orientation the *axiological horizon*.

²² BAKHTIN, M. M./MEDVEDEV, P. N. *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*. Translated by Albert J. Wehrle. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.

²³ For reference, see footnote 21.

²⁴ This is the principle of dialogism of the BCS.

²⁵ For reference, see footnote 10.

²⁶ For reference, see footnote 10.

“makes response to something and is calculated to be responded to in turn” (Vološinov, 1986, p.72);²⁷

(iii) *to the interlocutors*, because, for the construction of the utterance as a response to other utterances (said or intended), subjects evaluate their own (socio-hierarchical) relationship with the audience – with, indeed, the (evaluative) image they hold of the audience. According to Vološinov (1983, p.122), “this orientation towards ‘the other’ (...) inevitably assumes that account has been taken the *socio-hierarchical interrelationship that exists between speakers* (...) [because] *the form of the utterance changes* [...] *according to the social position of speaker and listener, and the whole social environment of the utterance*” (emphasis added).²⁸

The subjects, then, centered on the object to which they refer in the utterance, from the meanings they wish to construct, delimit both the semantic aspect of the utterance and its *stylistic-compositional finalization*, so that the “unity of form is the unity of the active axiological position” (Bakhtin, 1990a, p.315)²⁹ of the subject.

Note that this understanding culminates by *also relocating the question of the relationship between the linguistic and the exteriority*: the social situation that engenders an utterance cannot be seen as an *outline to* what can be referred to or not, but as constitutive of the utterance, since, just as *life is not only outside art, but also in it, inside it*, the effective use of language is constituted “of two elements: a *verbal* and one *non-verbal* part” (Vološinov, 1983, p.124; emphasis in original),³⁰ which “also pervade[s] the utterance from within” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.109).³¹ Hence, we find the Bakhtinian maxim that *language in its effective use indicates the specific conditions* (pragmatic and cultural-

²⁷ VOLOŠINOV, V. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Translated by Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.

²⁸ VOLOŠINOV, V. The Construction of the Utterance. Translated by Noel Owen. In: SHUKMAN, A. (ed.). *Bakhtin School Papers*. Oxford: RTP Publications, 1983a. pp.114-138.

²⁹ For reference, see footnote 11.

³⁰ For reference, see footnote 27.

³¹ BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986. pp.103-131.

historical)³² and the purposes of each cultural field to which it is connected, maintaining “a very intimate connection with it” (Vološinov, 1983b, p.10).³³

As each cultural domain signifies and *represents* experience in a given way, it “organizes the utterance *in its own way*, structures it *in its own way* and completes its grammatical and stylistic form, its *type-structure*” (Vološinov, 1983a, p.116; emphasis in original).³⁴ Here is what speech genres are: “*relatively stable types* of these utterances” (Bakhtin, 1986a, p.60; emphasis in original),³⁵ peculiar to specific cultural domains or “a specific kind of creative activity embodying a specific sense of experience” (Morson; Emerson, 1990, pp.282-283).³⁶ All this seems to point to two issues.

The first one is that *the construction of the utterance is not freely made* nor is it created by the subjects (but given to them), because it is guided by “devices of giving form to³⁷ and consummating” (Bakhtin, 1990b, p.201)³⁸ that are historically offered to them (such as the language system). Every *enunciative intention must therefore be adapted to a genre form*, since “[w]e speak only in definite speech genres, that is, all our utterances have definite and relatively stable *typical forms of construction of the whole*” (Bakhtin, 1986a, p.78; emphasis in original).³⁹ In other words,

[w]e learn to cast our speech in generic forms and, when hearing others’ speech, we guess its genre from the very first words; we predict a certain length (that is, the approximate length of the speech whole) and a certain compositional structure; we foresee the end; that is, from the very beginning we have a sense of the speech whole (...) (Bakhtin, 1986a, p.79).⁴⁰

³² The utterance “arises from the non-verbal real-life situation and maintains a very intimate connection with it” (Vološinov, 1983, p.10) [VOLOŠINOV, V. Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry: Questions of a Sociological Poetics. Translated by John Richmond. In: SHUKMAN, A. (ed.). *Bakhtin School Papers*. Oxford: RTP Publications, 1983. pp.5-30] and also reflects “the most remote social causes and factors underlying that particular speech communication” (Vološinov, 1983a, p.124). [For reference, see footnote 27].

³³ For reference, see footnote 31.

³⁴ For reference, see footnote 27.

³⁵ For reference, see footnote 10.

³⁶ MORSON, G. S.; EMERSON, C. *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.

³⁷ The idea of “giving form to” (and “consummating”) the utterance refers to the fact that it has limits and typical forms of structure (discourse genres) that allow the interlocutor to react-respond to it.

³⁸ For reference, see footnote 14.

³⁹ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁴⁰ For reference, see footnote 10.

The second is that since *speech genres evoke the same constitutive elements of enunciation*, they can only be seen as flexible, free and plastic (Bakhtin, 1986a),⁴¹ considering that “the reality of the genre is the social reality of its realization in the process of artistic intercourse” (Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1991, p.135).⁴²

*Genres, thus, bear regularities and singularities, social and historical uses, which serve as a beacon for the social saying, but also eccentric uses,*⁴³ *novelties, due both to particularities of each of the social interactions and to the agentivity of the subjects*, when they take a position, when they speak; and, in this way, the notion that genres are typical and normative forms does not contradict the notion that every utterance is singular, unique and unrepeatable, since the relative stability of genres is conquered (and not abstractly given) at each particular use.

Considering that genres organize and regulate themselves relatively around three dimensions – namely, *the thematic content, the verbal style and the composition*⁴⁴ –, one should keep in mind the relation that BCS establishes between the *whole of the enunciation (the architectural forms)* and *the parts that constitute it (the compositional forms)*, because this cannot be confused: the first ones are “forms of the inner and bodily value of aesthetic man [...]; forms of aesthetic being in its distinctiveness” (Bakhtin, 1990a, p.270);⁴⁵ and the second ones, the “compositional forms, organizing the material, have a teleological, implemental character” (Bakhtin, 1990a, p.270),⁴⁶ and only the latter, for example, can be analyzed from a purely technical perspective (linguistic, for example).

A correct understanding of these aspects, therefore, makes one see, according to Bakhtin, that *it is the architectonic forms that determine the choice of the compositional form, realizing those by these*.⁴⁷ And here we have a very important Bakhtinian consideration for the purposes of this text: “A correct formulation of *the problem of style* (one of the most important problems of aesthetics) is impossible without a rigorous

⁴¹ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁴² For reference, see footnote 21.

⁴³ The notion of *eventness*, in Bakhtinian texts, intends to rescue the notion of existence in event, hence the recurrence of expressions, in this literature, such as “event of being,” “being-event,” or “co-being of being.”

⁴⁴ We do not deal with thematic content and composition in this text.

⁴⁵ For reference, see footnote 11.

⁴⁶ For reference, see footnote 11.

⁴⁷ BCS cautions that one cannot think, however, that architectonic form exists somewhere (abstract?) outside of compositional structure.

distinction of architectonic and compositional forms” (Bakhtin, 1990a, p.271; emphasis in original),⁴⁸ from which it follows that *linguistic resources, as a material resource, cannot be analyzed outside the function that they exercise in the enunciation, namely: to be a technical apparatus for the realization of a discourse. In this sense, style is a resource of the composition of the enunciation and, as such, can only be properly understood if one does not lose sight of the entirety of the enunciation, which always points to a stance.*

Looking at it this way, even if an analyst were to focus on the aspects pertaining to style and genre composition, considered as “devices of giving form to and consummating” (Bakhtin, 1990b, p.201)⁴⁹ of the discourse objects, he would no longer have an analysis reduced to exclusively linguistic aspects, because style, in the BCS, goes beyond this level, since it is, primarily, “a style of seeing the world, and only after that – a style of working the material” (Bakhtin, 1990b, p.202).⁵⁰ Brait (2010, p.87, emphasis added) states that this means that style “*does not work with words, but with the components of the world, with the values of the world and of life (...)*,”⁵¹ being, therefore, “a device of giving form to and consummating” man himself and his world.

Moreover, although the BCS recognize, on the one hand, that there can be individual style – as a result of the very purpose of genres (such as those of the literary sphere), despite the fact that “not all genres are equally conducive to reflecting the individuality of the speaker in the language of the utterance, that is, to individual style” (Bakhtin, 1986a, p.63)⁵² –, they also highlight, on the other hand, that “*style is at least two people, or rather, it is the individual and his social group in the person of its authoritative representative, the listener, the ever-present participant in an individual’s internal and external speech*” (Vološinov, 1983b, p.27; emphasis added).⁵³

In any case, the emphasis here is on the fact that style is seen as an element of genre itself, because it is inscribed in historically situated uses (Brait, 2010), so that “*the study of styles can only be done in direct relation with the study of genres*” (Amorim,

⁴⁸ For reference, see footnote 11.

⁴⁹ For reference, see footnote 14.

⁵⁰ For reference, see footnote 14.

⁵¹ In the original: “*não trabalha com palavras, mas com os componentes do mundo, com os valores do mundo e da vida (...)*.”

⁵² For reference, see footnote 10.

⁵³ For reference, see footnote 31.

2004, p.111; emphasis added),⁵⁴ since “[w]here there is style there is genre” (Bakhtin, 1986a, p.66; emphasis added).⁵⁵ And this occurs because, in Bakhtin’s terms (1986a, p.81; emphasis in original), “[w]e select the type of sentence from the standpoint of the whole utterance”⁵⁶ so that it is the genre itself, as a relatively stable unit of realization of an utterance, which authorizes certain linguistic uses (and not others) to represent a given reality. Consequently, it is possible to understand why the elements of language “take on the specific flavor of a given genre: they knit together with specific points of view, specific approaches, forms of thinking, nuances and accents characteristic of the given genre” (Bakhtin, 1981, p.289).⁵⁷

Bragança (2017, pp.445-447), systematizing aspects that characterize the stylistic-compositional configuration of an utterance according to the BCS, points to the following aspects: (i) the *social spheres and their typical conditions of enunciation*; (ii) the *thematic aspect typical of each genre*; (iii) the *typical audience of each genre*; (iv) the *utterances (about the same object of discourse or not) with which one enters into a dialogical relation*; (v) the *expressive aspect of each genre, presupposing an evaluative attitude of the individual regarding (a) the object of discourse, (b) the audience, (c) the preceding utterances about the same object, (d) the responses he projects to receive from the addressees.*

Given the discursive conception of the approach itself, BCS therefore practice a *discursive stylistics*, focusing on the “*representational and expressive potential*” (Bakhtin, 2004, p.13; emphasis added)⁵⁸ of linguistic resources, so that stylistics and grammar merge, since “the demarcation of a strict borderline between grammar and style, between a grammatical pattern and its stylistic modification, is methodologically unproductive and in fact impossible (...) This borderline is fluid because of the very mode of existence of language (...)” (Vološinov, 1986b, p.126).⁵⁹

⁵⁴ In the original: “[o] estudo dos estilos só pode ser feito em relação direta com o estudo dos gêneros.”

⁵⁵ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁵⁶ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁵⁷ BAKHTIN, M. Discourse in the Novel. In: BAKHTIN, M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Edited by Michael Holquist; translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981. pp.259-422.

⁵⁸ BAKHTIN, M. Dialogic Origin and Dialogic Pedagogy of Grammar: Stylistics in Teaching Russian Language in Secondary School. *Journal of Russian & East European Psychology*, vol. 42, issue 6, pp.12-49, 2004.

⁵⁹ For reference, see footnote 30.

3 TWS and BCS: Connecting the Dots

Taking the previous discussions into consideration, in this section we will indicate some convergence points between TWS and BCS and propose an articulation between other points in order to, at the end, offer an answer to the question that motivates this text. It must be emphasized that, for the propositions of this section, *a perspective* on the approaches mentioned is presented, dealing, therefore, with the understanding that we have of them in this text. Here the main reflexive connection is the following: on the one hand, TWS is characterized as a stylistic perspective, which allows us to see that the issue of style is central to this variation phase; on the other hand, BCS, with which TWS enters into dialogue (sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly), assure that style is of speech genres; *if, to some extent, there are epistemological approximations between TWS and BCS, as we intend to point out below, then we can infer that speech genres are also central to TWS, because they are, according to Bauman (2001), the framework for understanding stylistic practice.*

In this sense, it is worth noting that it seems to be the anthropological-discursive turn of TWS, signaled both by the authors considered the *heart* of this phase, and by its most prominent theoretical concerns (social theory and style) (Eckert, 2018), the way to dialogue with BCS, since some TWS have also started to consider, for sociolinguistic analysis, variation in its “ecosystem of discursive meaning” (Coupland, 2007, p.9), which brings a number of consequences for the understanding of the very nature of language (Eckert, 2016), within the scope of variation studies.

Some of the most obvious points of contact between the approaches seem to be, for example: (i) the view that *language is a phenomenon*: (a) *distinctive*, because it is only constituted within a social frame of reference, in which different uses are in relation, a relation that is value-based, that is, it is ideological and correlates with other aspects of social behavior; and (b) *aesthetic*, because it is culturally variable, organized around principles that are locally relevant and that motivate a certain consistency, insofar as they participate in the speakers’ own understanding of the social world, and this can only be relative, since it is always made from a certain social position and a certain point of view. Therefore, language would always evoke the subjects’ position in face of a social framework, being, then, a work of *representation*, culturally situated, of reality; (ii) the

perspective of the agentive subject, because, within a system of distinctive possibilities, subjects need to assume/negotiate their positions; (iii) the *non-separation between the linguistic and its exteriority*, since the social dimension of interaction is seen as not only motivating but also constitutive of linguistic uses.

These shared points already bring important changes to the study of phenomena in variation. *The first* one derives from the understanding that linguistic resources are at the service of a discourse/positioning and, therefore, are related to agency in a given way, and not in another. As the discourse changes, agency also changes, and the whole form/function/social meaning relationship, so dear to variation studies, can be redrawn. In other words, *the driving force for stylistic variation would be discourse*, which is always constituted in relation to other discourses. This is why the practice of contrastive/comparative analysis seems to be so productive for TWS.⁶⁰

Thus, the projected ensemble of a positioning is about creative agency of *potentially co-occurring* items, the scenario in which they gain specificity. In Coupland's (2001, p.209) terms, this is the scenario that allows for "(...) ways of subtly activating multiple simultaneous dimensions of meaning potential" of linguistic resources. Hence the importance of TWS turning to language as a dynamic semiotic system: from the same linguistic forms, for example, one can derive different value indices that organize the sociolinguistic landscape.

The second change refers to the elements that should be taken into consideration for the explanation of variation, independently of the phenomenon, perhaps: since an aspect of the social dimension (that is, the stance one assumes when one speaks) is the organizing element of linguistic usages, and since these are also in (the closest possible) connection with the constitutive elements of the social situation that gives rise to them, the social dimension becomes a factor of analysis in the *foreground*, and thus no longer an *alternative to* primarily linguistic analyses, even when the latter are taken in a broad sense. Implicit in this seems to be the view that understanding the sociolinguistic landscape in TWS demands *engagement with social theories*: and so "sociolinguistics is

⁶⁰ It is worth noting at this point that contrastive analyses are also practiced within the first and second wave variation frameworks, although they are optional for the analyst. Within TWS, however, this kind of analysis seems to be very significant: (i) the different castes among Wolof speakers (IRVINE, 2001); (ii) the "call" and "spiel" speech genres (Bauman, 2001); (iii) foreign company professionals and state-owned company professionals (Zhang, 2005).

increasingly well positioned to engage with ideological debates in social theory” (Coupland, 2007, p.86).

From how language is understood, therefore, in TWS, there also seems to be reconfiguration in the methodological *design of the variation approach* – in line with what Kiesling (2013) considers a *next step* in understanding the operation of sociolinguistic patterns, beyond statistical correlations: investigation of the historical, cultural and pragmatic background of language uses. For Coupland (2007), this kind of analysis, more of an interpretive nature, considering that *social practice is messy, complex, and contingent*, is the strength and weakness of variation studies, but a path of no return for them, since, when delving into social interaction, it will have to deal with this level of complexity.

It is to develop analysis from this perspective, focusing on the quality of social interaction, that the TWS seem to benefit from a dialogue with the BCS’s discourse theoretical framework, and here comes our proposal for articulation, based, in this text (because of space), on only one intersection between the approaches: speech genres, according to the following reasoning.

If genres are one of the centers of discussion in Bakhtinian texts, in some TWS they are, explicitly, pointed out as the framework for the understanding of stylistic (linguistic) practice (Bauman, 2001; Coupland, 2001; 2007), because they are, each one of them, specific types of interaction activity, of framing, of adaptation of discourses, historically and culturally constructed, and that indicate all the aspects of the social dimension that engender their emergence. Everything one wants to know about a given interaction (the cultural field in which it takes place, the expected interlocutors and the hierarchy between them, the projected *persona*, the object of the utterance, other discourses with which it dialogues, the value relation it maintains with these, with the interlocutors, etc.), therefore, is indicated in the genre. For all these reasons, *a theory of speech genres seems to be foundational to some of the interests of TWS.*

It is in this sense that we are taking as productive, for the TWS, the theoretical recognition that *style is of the genre*, that is, of the linguistic activity in which are inscribed, concomitantly: (i) ideological stances, born within a cultural frame of references or from the dialogue with other stances, also indicated in genres; (ii) other

utterances;⁶¹ (iii) the interlocutors; (iv) the social situation (pragmatic and cultural-historical) of the interaction; (v) social (and more stable) and individual (and more eventful) modes of saying.

The reader, at this point, could ask if genres are, then, a “straitjacket” for the social saying and for the occurrence of variable phenomena. As we understand it, certainly not. Genres must be seen (we reiterate) as a *beacon* for the social saying, a *consistency of (also) linguistic features*, in the terms of Irvine (2001), because of a *pre-existing social architecture*, according to Coupland (2007), which, in theoretical terms, makes us see the relation between regularities and singularities of social life and subjects, in their verbal manifestations.

This question seems to be very well put, for example, in the following explanation by Bauman (2001). The author considers that every genre is a discourse style oriented to the production and perception of certain texts.⁶² But they (the genres) do not enjoy formal and functional autonomy, because the fit between a specific (particular) text and the generic model, *on the one hand*, is never perfect, since genres *do not provide means for discursive production and reception in a finished way*, since *contingent elements* (different connections with other discourses, with other texts, with ongoing social interaction, with broader social relations, with strategic goals, etc.) participate in the discursive process, causing the constitutive elements of the generic structure to be “variably mobilized, thus opening the way to generic reconfiguration” (Bauman, 2001, p.59).⁶³

On the other hand, some aspects of the stylistic-compositional form of genres are more salient and, therefore, are more recurrently mobilized, which minimizes the possible distance between text and genre, and maximizes the intelligibility of the utterances. It is,

⁶¹ Cf. in Zilles and Faraco (2002), for example, the relevance of *reported discourse* for the examination of variable phenomena.

⁶² By text, the author means “a bounded, formally regimented, internally cohesive stretch of discourse” (BAUMAN, 2001, p.58). For reference, see footnote 25.

⁶³ At this point, a caveat is in order: the view that there is a *fit between a specific (particular) text and the generic model* is not typical of BCS – because they do not work with the notion of “genre model” and “genre text.” For BCS, the point is that a genre, as a minimal unit of communication, as an interactional unit, can receive different *aesthetic finalizations*, within the framework of which different linguistic finishes are justified, for example, which would signal the eventfulness, the uniqueness of each usage. Moreover, unlike Bauman's conception (2001), BCS seem to operate with the perspective that genres, although they are not fixed, rigid, do provide means for production and reception. Even with these differences, we keep Bauman's perspective (2001) in this text, because it is an author referenced in the TWS literature.

therefore, in interaction that the gap between the emergent and the conventional, of genres, can be filled. And it is, therefore, within genres that linguistic resources have their meanings specified.

Thus, when saying that style is of the genre, it is stated that, when taking the floor, both speaker and interlocutor already have an expectation, *a sensation of the whole discourse*, in Bakhtinian terms, *although nothing prevents ruptures*⁶⁴ with the projected expectations and sensations either, since the filling of the gap between the regular and the emergence of genres is contingent, specific to each interactional activity, which receives its own aesthetic finalization.

From this explanation, we can infer that, for TWS, it is the potentially emergent face of genres that matters the most, because it is there that its constitutive elements – such as style – can receive different finalizations, through the variable mobilization of linguistic resources (aspect that interests us the most in this reflection). This means that, just as a genre cannot be seen as always identical to itself – because in each interaction there is a unique adjustment between text and genre, according to Bauman's (2001) view, or because the unit of interaction can receive different aesthetic finalizations, according to the BCS –, *style* (considered here as the selection of lexical, phraseological and grammatical resources of the language, in connection with all aspects of the content plane that we have referred to throughout the text), although it belongs *to genre*, *can receive different aesthetic finalization*, since it also depends on the circumstances of interaction to be constituted. *The aesthetic finalization of a genre can be seen, therefore, as expedient for examining that which interests TWS: the linguistic style.*

Differences in aesthetic finalization, in general, or differences in the use of variable resources, in particular, of the same genre, may then, for example, be indicative of differences in ideology, identity, the quality of the relationship between participants, the breakdown of expectations, certain goals, etc., and the examination of all this may make one see precisely what is central to TWS: projected *personas*, the agentivity of subjects in the construction of identities, the social meaning of variables being constituted locally, the indexical mutability of linguistic resources to project different discourses, etc.

⁶⁴ Note that breaches of expectations, which can, for example, be part of an utterance to create some effect – such as humor – only occur because there are social expectations, some more general and shared by large groups, and some more specific, shared by small groups.

Taking, therefore, genres as a discursive practice, in which the stylistic practice is inscribed, the study of style moves away from the concern with the formal examination of linguistic resources, to dedicate itself to the following question: “how does the generic organization of linguistic means serve as a resource for the accomplishment of social ends in the conduct of social life?” (Bauman, 2001, p.59).⁶⁵ *And this seems to be the interest of TWS, when turning to speech genres: to understand the dynamics of social life, to which the aesthetic finalization of genres seems fruitful.*

It is especially for this kind of understanding that speech genres have the potential to become a privileged instance for the analysis of language as a dynamic semiotic system, as a social activity that is partly structured and partly emergent; partly responding to pre-existing patterns and partly constructing novelties, the linguistic resources (and not only them, but all the elements of the genre as well) being, therefore, at the service of social dynamics.

Many of these considerations seem to be already indicated in the Brazilian literature on stylistic variation, regardless of the variation phase to which the work is aligned, as can be seen, for example, in the collection *Variação estilística* [Stylistic Variation] (Görski; Coelho; Nunes de Souza, 2014), with propositions and results of diverse research that follow different theoretical and methodological frameworks.⁶⁶

What seems to be missing in the variation literature is to admit that these aspects *point to speech genres*, not as an alternative element for analysis, in the form of an *explanatory outline* or independent variable, among many other approaches, but as the *central axis of analysis*: they are the whole of the parts that we see here and there.

In other words – and resuming the guiding question for these discussions – *after all, why are speech genres relevant to variation studies, particularly to third-wave ones?* Because, in order to account for the explanation of how variable phenomena constitute stylistic resources, linguistic/stylistic variation needs to be seen as a constitutive resource (/part) of the utterance, since it is *to the utterance that this resource of aesthetic completion turns*; understanding, therefore, the whole of the utterance (and its relatively stable types – speech genres), one also understands each of its parts, that is, its (performative) structure and meaning.

⁶⁵ For reference, see footnote 25.

⁶⁶ Cf. the systematization done by Bragança (2017, pp.569-570), about aspects of this discussion already indicated in the literature of variation studies.

Final Considerations

The purpose of this paper was to reflect on the potential of speech genres for variation studies, especially for TWS, considering that, within this phase, due to the centrality of the stylistic dimension, *a set of new notions became central*. The conceptual changes, rather than broadening the scope of concerns of the variation approach, seem to *reinstate fundamental questions about the very nature of language*, and this is what may have led the field to a rapprochement with the BCS.

Thus, considering some points of intersection between these two approaches and weaving some articulations between other points, we consider that, because both take language, in effective use, as an aesthetic object, both also take it as a performative/evidential/constitutive and stylistic activity, effect of the agentivity of subjects who, in part, follow social guidelines to be what they are, to say what they say and, in part, create novelties in order to project themselves in the sociocultural landscape, thus indicating, in each linguistic act, the historical, cultural and pragmatic conditions to which they are bound.

Finally, what is of more direct interest to the discussions proposed here is that if TWS has as its center the question of style and if part of the literature of TWS seeks in discourse theories, specifically in BCS, explanations on this point, thus practicing a *discursive stylistics*, then there are indications that the operation of the enunciation and its typical forms of construction and completion, the speech genres, are relevant to the study of style. *This is the analytical potential of speech genres for variation studies*.

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Statement of Contribution from each Author

The authors declare to be responsible for the manuscript in question, considering the following specifications: Marcela Langa Lacerda and Edair Maria Görski, for the conceptualization, writing and analysis; Sandra Mara Moraes Lima, for the relevant critical review of the intellectual content; the three authors, further, for the editing of the text.

Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.

Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana. Revista de Estudos do Discurso* [Bakhtiniana. Journal of Discourse Studies] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

Review I

The article proposes an articulation between the variationist studies of the third wave and Bakhtin's circle studies, around the concept of style, considering speech genres as an articulating category of the two theories. The presentation of each of the theories is made highlighting the most relevant aspects in relation to style and, then is made the articulation between them, showing the approximations. The argumentation is well developed, allowing the reader to see how the variation theory of the third wave has moved towards discourse. The text is well written, well organized in its sections, adequate to a scientific article. I consider that the article brings contributions to both variationist studies and the studies of Bakhtin's circle, by bringing a reading of both in their common aspects.
APPROVED

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Review II

The theoretical reflection on variationism proposed by the authors, based on the contributions of TWS and BCS, contributes to a rethinking of how to approach style and genre in sociolinguistics. The three sections of the text are adequate; in the first two, the

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two theoretical pillars are clearly addressed, with strong and solid arguments; and the detailed description of the contributions of TWS and BCS. On the other hand, the third section, where the articulation of the two theories is an important contribution to the area, as the authors highlight the convergences between the third wave of sociolinguistics and the Bakhtian circle, thus offering a new approach to the study of the phenomenon of variation. By demonstrating that two, perhaps distant, visions of language can be brought together to propose a new decomposition of the pieces that make up linguistic variation. I recommend that at the beginning of the section on the third wave, the authors already use the acronym TWS, presented above: “In this section, we present a brief overview of the main concepts that permeate the third wave studies.” On the other hand, just take care with the use of italics, because sometimes I was not able to understand their function. APPROVED

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