

JOURNEYING WITH BAKHTIN*

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This intervention has as its main goal to share personal thoughts and experiences, as developed for over a ten-year period of reading and working with Bakhtin's oeuvre. My journey has been anchored in the context of a double chronotope: a trip from Athens to Arizona back in the early nineties and a metaphorical trip from a more traditional linguistic anthropology to one that was progressively becoming less positivistic. The trip to Arizona was to meet and work with J. Hill who had pioneered in experimenting with Bakhtin's thought in the analysis of phenomena such as ideologies, narratives, code-switching, linguistic shift and the political economy of language. But in the meantime I had started formulating my own version of this intellectual space under the influence of her work.

One risk with the use of Bakhtin's work in the social sciences is its appeal to a diverse range of phenomena leading to a kind of overextension of its applicability. Another is its specific way of exciting our political sensitivities and sensibilities. We are accustomed, for example, to looking at his work and that of his cycle for emancipatory messages without always assessing critically the limitations of this tendency (see, as just one critical voice on the celebratory uses of the carnival, Stallybrass and White 1986). We are all familiar with the questionable and ambivalent antihegemonic forces that the carnival contains. A still further risk is to turn Bakhtin into something fashionable. Hobsbawm (1997: 288) congratulates an anthropological author for avoiding to cite Bakhtin, Foucault, Derrida etc. And Hobsbawm's point (that I read as an important critical intervention in a postmodernist discourse which frequently threatens to turn our lived experience into incommunicable fragments) should be seriously reckoned with and should give us pause. But why all these thinkers in one stroke? One can hardly claim that Foucault, Barthes, Derrida, or Bakhtin tell exactly the same narrative. And herein lies a potential danger. If a line of thinking becomes fashionable in certain academic quarters it tends to become non-fashionable in others, and, most significantly, adoptions and rejections are frequently dealt with in an en block manner. Those I like go together vis-à-vis those I don't agree with who also go together. Even though there is a grain of overgeneralization in my statement, there is admittedly something of what K. Burke (1974) in his «Rhetoric of Motives» calls identification here. We tend to identify with and stretch an arm of solidarity to the intellectual corners we like and take our distances from those we dislike; and this is not bad in itself as long as we do not treat thinkers as a block, at least not all the time.

And if we look at how things surface in discourses of national academies we obtain some sort of confirmation for the correctness of such an initial intuition. For example, Billig (1995) succinctly observes that in the case of the philosopher R. Rorty American academy liberated itself to some extent from the need to borrow Foucault or Derrida from continental thinking in order to do its postmodernist job. Or, at least, a locally constructed national voice is added to (by being at the same time dissociated from) the block of «go together» thinkers. Again the theme of contextualizing Bakhtin along with others shows up as a crucial component of the use of its thought in contemporary academic-research efforts.

There are grounds on which we can avoid approaching Bakhtin as someone whose thought can be read as fashionable. And the somewhat mechanistic element that my description just alluded to is not to be found simply in the citational concatenation of Bakhtin with other lines of theorizing, but, crucially, in attempts to read in his thought, even anachronistically (where is history here?), propositions that make him sound as telling the

same narrative as Derrida or Foucault or Baudrillard. For the needs of this discussion one can leave open the question of how far Bakhtin tells a similar story to the ones narrated by these other scholars. Here we'll definitely find differences as well as similarities. The crucial question, in my view, is how far Bakhtin has taken us in assessing critically our own political and academic agendas. I think that here we can propose as a starting point that of scope: how many levels of analysis are susceptible to a Bakhtinian point of view? Can we comfortably, and avoiding Procrustean beds, contextualize him in both micro- and macro-dimensions of social structure? What other analytical tools and disciplinary options come to support such an enterprise if viable? It must be stated right from the outset that no serious sociological or sociolinguistic work neglects these parameters. And not all of the crucial parameters can be brought into the space of this article. The question is how the specific Bakhtinian concepts are to answer such sociological queries. Notice that what I call sociological does not exclude the field of literary studies since Bakhtin addresses it right from the outset as a social field of voice conflict denying the viability of texts as free-floating items (Jameson 1981). And I would expect Hobsbawm to agree with this last statement.

Like R. Williams's «structures of feeling», where both the structure side and the feeling aspect have to be grasped in analysis (see Rampton, at press) so that we can bridge in a dynamic manner the previously experienced with the contingently emerging, the same with Bakhtin: we ought to consider both his appeal to macro-events of previously established social structures and the locally contingent actualities of the indexical anchoring of discourse. This distinction resembles Rampton's (at press) discussion of the polarity between discursive interactional analyses and cultural studies. Various works have focused more on the one or more on the other pole of the continuum. Thus, Bakhtin's thought has proved useful for the unraveling of the discursive continuities in chunks of narrative or conversational segments as well as for the study of broader structures related to the political economy of language, for example. Hill and Hill (1986), operationalizing the notion of Bakhtinian «voice» in the interactive context of code-switching, have profitably related this to the restructurings of Mexicano society in the direction of capitalist economy with significant consequences for the transfiguration of consciousness among the Nahuatl-Spanish speaking population. Bakhtin's scope here is broad enough covering the local and the global. In my own work (Tsitsipis 1991, 1998) a similar path has been followed but my emphasis has been on the micro-actualities of discourse, and more so in the earlier than in the later work. I have, for instance, elaborated on concepts such internally persuasive discourse and heteroglossia in order to speak to queries raised in interactive voice conflicts among speakers exhibiting various sociolinguistic profiles. More recently (Tsitsipis 2004) I have systematized a bit further the notions of authoritative and internally persuasive discourse to widen the scope of the concepts' application to encompass broader, historical sociolinguistic questions.

Bakhtin (1981: 163, 342) defines authoritative discourse as this kind of discourse that demands of its recipients an unqualified acknowledgment, it is the word of the ancestors, it comes to us with its authority already acknowledged in the past. In the horizon of this discourse others' voices become anonymous and consciousness is monologized. Looking at this kind of discourse from both a literary and a sociolinguistic angle we may take it to be the zero degree of idiocyncracy and creativity (Johnstone 1996). Bakhtin (1981: 348) juxtaposes to the authoritative word the word or discourse of tensions and contradictions, that is, the internally persuasive discourse. In the later case a conversation with the other's voice resists this voice but it simultaneously allows the other consciousness to penetrate the initial utterance. In my earlier research I had built implicitly on the concept of internally persuasive discourse in order to investigate what I call ideological contradictions as these surface in the metalinguistic and metapragmatic (speakers' rationalized, ideological pronouncements on language use and its perceived effects) statements by Arvanitika speakers, members of a

minority speech community in what is now the modern Greek nation state whose language is a threatened variety of southern Albanian origin (Tsitsipis 1998). I soon discovered though that the concept of contradiction in addition to having itself a complex and contradictory history, it is quite static, something is an A and its negation at the same time (for some of the problems involved here see Laclau and Mouffe 1985). On the contrary with the notion of internally persuasive discourse one has the sense that things are moving: you start somewhere, the tension, for example, between two opposed discourses, and you end up somewhere else, for instance, in accepting, partly at least, what you've been fighting against.

I have therefore used both concepts, the authoritative and the internally persuasive discourse in order to analyze some of my data. I can only give fragments of this analysis here. Looking at the history of the Greek-Albanian bilingual communities and supplementing this diachronic view with sociolinguistic investigation I discovered two kinds of authoritative discourse operative in the communities. The one stems from the traditional condition of the communities as read by the local social agents. This corresponds to a condition imagined as pure and uncontaminated by the trends of modernity in which everything is defined from within the traditional order and no other word is perceived as penetrating this totality. Arvanitika language stands as an index of the rest of the cultural activities and cultural and social habits function as a synecdoche of the Arvanitika language. I called this indexical totality believing now that this earlier term is inappropriate. I should have labeled it iconic totality since in speakers' ideological consciousness the linguistic part of the scheme is understood as an icon of the cultural and vice-versa [part of my analysis here as well as the fragments of the examples cited and discussed derive from a published piece, see Tsitsipis 2004]. Example (1) brings out very clearly this type of ideology, in which the authority of tradition reigns uninhibited by any heteroglossic interference. In Bakhtin's framework heteroglossia is the tense condition in which the one language is viewed through the eyes of the other, and thus voices (points of view on the world, language, and society) are in some sort of crossing each other relationship. The speaker of extract (1) (which is mainly in Arvanitika with Greek parts in boldface letters) is an octogenarian woman from a southern mainland, aggressively modernizing community of Greece (1):

Example 1:

- D.P.: 1. Neve kakoshkuame, neve ata vitera
we faced hardships those years
2. punonjem me sust me karene veim
we cultivated the soil we moved with a carriage
3. nek keim kje kakoshkojne kozmos
we did not have oxen people had a hard time
4. **ne ala dhoksa to theo omos**
yes but God is blessed
5. Arvanite Arvanite kuvendoin Arvanite
Arvanitika Arvanitika they spoke Arvanitika
6. Arvanite che kechenjem **horo** kendonjeme
we were dancing in the Arvanitika tune (quite) a **dance** we were singing
7. **tora dhen horevume dhen ganume**
now we don't dance we don't do things
8. skemi panijir neke ishte kozmi ai paleo che ish
we don't have the feast there are no people like the old ones that used to be
9. **leme ta Romeika leme kje t'Arvanitika**
we speak in Greek and we (also) speak in Arvanitika
10. **halase o kozmos tora** u-halas panijiri nani

the world has deteriorated now the feast has deteriorated now

In the above excerpt language and the earlier condition of life are perceived as almost consubstantial. The one serves as a mirror for the other and the whole consists of a chain of implicationally related basic ideas that depict a closed sociocultural universe. Even though the narrator perceives the breakdown of this totality (lines 7, 9 and concluding line 10), she understands the earlier situation as corresponding to a lingua-cultural reality in which each part is closely interlocked with all others in a mutual iconic relationship. The word of Arvanitika-dominant authority becomes thus quite conspicuous.

But the word of tradition is not the only kind of authoritative discourse that we encounter in the dynamic processes of the communities (again history is important). One should add here the authoritative discourse of the nation state that also demands acknowledgment and which has penetrated over time the local social consciousness, admittedly by degrees, and through various forms of symbolic domination (Bourdieu 1991). If I had enough space and a different focus I would explain how the one type of authoritative discourse succeeds the other and also say something about the significance of Bakhtin's eventing (as inextricably related with being) as a site for the discovery of the importance of historical views vs. evolutionary ones. It is quite obvious that Bakhtin opens up to our gaze the world of history and not the grand scheme of evolutionary thinking that is often accompanied by unwelcome deterministic scenarios.

But since we are dealing here with a not so smooth succession of one authoritative discourse, the traditionalist, by another, the state hegemonic, in between instances of internally persuasive discourse emerge, simply because the very dominance of the hegemonic discourse is fraught with contradictions. Thus, as example (2) shows quite frequently speakers embed in their narratives a clash or tension of voices such that they come to accept what they have resisted. Or to put it in a slightly different manner, they endorse a view quite the opposite to the one they had initially espoused. This struggle is brought about through both the content and the formal aspects of discourse. The speaker of (2) is an elderly man from a northern village in central mainland Greece and his narrative is entirely in Greek. Directly quoted speech is in italics.

Example 2:

- G.: 1. Emis spedhea ta theorume afu jenithikam sti mitrikji ghlosa
We consider (Arvanitika) important since we've been born with this as a native tongue
2. tromaksam na mathume ta Elinika
we had a hard time to learn Greek
3. sas proipa oti pao na miliso me sas kje anakatevome
I told you before that when I try to speak with you I get confused
4. dhe mboro na miliso kathara
I cannot speak clearly
5. mu to'hun pi kj'ali: *esi dhen ise ap'to Kiriaki*
others have also told me: *you don't come from Kiriaki*
6. ama miliso me enan dhikjighoro s'enan pu ine evropEOS i stin Athina
if I speak with an attorney, to somebody who is European or in Athens
7. lei: *esis dhen mjazeste ja Arvanites*
says: *you don't look like Arvanites*
8. ala I simberifora mu fenete me penevun
but my conduct seems to be such (that) they praise me

The narrative starts out at line 1 by praising Arvanitika and progresses with statements which describe the speaker's difficulties in dealing with a world in which the use of the minority language has become a negative symbol. The alien (official) word is both accepted and contradicted. At lines 5 and 6 his speech is rendered dysfluent. This occurs when the speaker embarks upon his first quotation. The conjunctive connection 'also, and' of line 5 with preceding line 4 shatters the mutual logical adjustment of the narrative's turns. One would expect here something like 'but'. But the power of the alien voice is such that disrupts the local view of Arvanitika. This is a case of internally persuasive discourse and formally belongs to what Voloshinov (1973: 135) calls *anticipated* and *disseminated reported speech*. The reporting frame anticipates the view of the reported interlocutors.

Billig's and others' project of discursive psychology following the basic premises of Voloshinov's (1973) ideas that ideology and consciousness do not spring in the mind independently of their discursive anchoring has offered a large-scope site for the application of Bakhtin's insights. Billig (1995) holds to this broad scope by talking about centripetal and centrifugal forces in the ideology of nationalism, without losing sight of the local use of creative indexes such as person, time, and place markers in the reproduction of subconsciously remembered banal nationalism and the return of the repressed (see also Stallybrass and White 1986, and Tsitsipis 2003). Thus, the Bakhtinian perspective can be profitably applied, if cautiously used, to the researching of the momentary production of communication in the here and now and to the implications of these unrepeatable moments for wider social, cultural, and economic conditions as embedded in relations of power. Bakhtin's (1986) notion of the genre, for example, (the set of thematic, stylistic, and compositional potentialities of language use) enters decisively into the study of the structure of our daily experiential worlds, either from the individual or the group perspective (Furniss 2004). And the examples can be multiplied, since my own listing here has been obviously selective by necessity.

What can we build out of this synthesis, and how? A clue comes from Coupland's (2001) study of the «relational self» and from Rampton's analyses of similar phenomena (see Rampton 1995, and at press). What strikes the reader of such works immediately is that these scholars combine Bakhtin with another major figure in the social sciences and the humanities. Coupland in an arresting critique of correlational-variationist sociolinguistics completes a missing gestalt, so to speak, in speakers' agency by stressing the need for the study of the totality of the contextual anchoring of speech production and reception frameworks. This is reminiscent of Urciuoli's (1998) proclamation that speakers hear voices not just phonemes. And for researching adequately style, stylization, and the surrounding heteroglossia Coupland has recourse to Giddens's (1991) sociological understanding of the self as a dynamic autobiography that enters decisively into late modernity through its deskilling, and empowerment. The combination of Bakhtin and Giddens carries in my view a very important message: Bakhtin has the intellectual endurance to speak to sociological concerns of late modernity. And this is not just a concatenation of scholarly figures of the kind I criticized above.

Rampton (at press) anchors his interpretation in efforts to combine Bakhtin's with Williams's thought. Starting from a critical stance towards modernist (I should add positivist-rationalist) sociolinguistics he analyzes data from adolescent school- aged interactions in which the inmixing of posh and Cockney exemplifies a complex process of Bakhtin's internally persuasive discourse. Rampton argues that class societal conditions, with a long history in Britain, are reflected and refracted in the discursive micro-politics of adolescent interactions through grotesque, gendered and other stylizations forming thus a classed subjectivity which cuts through the two interpretive extremes: that of searching for the

metaphysics of an individual psyche and that of completely denying subjectivity. A true «structure of feeling» with its multidimensional quality and loose boundaries emerges here. But, interestingly, the Bakhtin-Voloshinov project makes a similar claim: the self as an ideologue emerges in interaction outside the positivism of objectivism and the metaphysics of subjectivism (notice, not subjectivity). Here we have a good counterpoint to thinkers who would conclude that socioeconomic class is primarily a symbolic gesture, the general significance of their work notwithstanding (Hindess 1987), by the same token that nationalism is claimed to have been marginalized beyond recognition under an extreme postmodernist interpretation (see Billig 1995, for a cogent criticism). And also a good lesson for those who would react to Bakhtin as not a useful thinker for class analysis.

Let me conclude by briefly building on Jameson (1981). A quote or two from Jameson here are worth citing: «For Marxism...the very content of class ideology is relational, in the sense that its «values» are always actively in situation with respect to the opposing class, and defined against the latter: normally, a ruling class ideology will explore various strategies of the *legitimation* of its own power position, while an oppositional culture...will seek to contest ...the dominant «value system»... This is the sense in which we will say, following Mikhail Bakhtin, that within this horizon class discourse ... is essentially *dialogical* ... [and] it will be necessary to add the qualification that the normal form of the dialogical is essentially an *antagonistic* one...» (1981: 84, emphasis in the original). Notice the element of oppositionality so pervasive in Williams's analysis, and also in Bakhtin's contrapunctum. At a later point in the same work Jameson (pp.140-141) elaborates on what he calls formal *sedimentation*. This is an important point that I had once (in an unpublished paper on «The Bakhtinian Turn in Linguistic Anthropology», Tsitsipis u.m.) used for the analysis of generic tokens in speakers' discursive activity. Jameson, building on a theory owed to Husserl, observes that in its strong, emergent form a genre is a socio-symbolic message, that is, an ideology in its own right. When these forms are reappropriated, refashioned, and recontextualized in different social contexts the ideology of the form, by being sedimented, persists into the later structure. Now this points to a significant diachrony since Bakhtin-Voloshinov-Medvedev have made it a central concern of the sociology of genre and poetics that generic memory permeates various historically arrayed tokens, and the ethnography of performance speaks to the recontextualization potential of generic tokens. All this suggests an openness characterizing Bakhtin's thought, an openness that can match the openness of the disciplinary approaches that wish to recruit it to their investigative goals.

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1. Due to the electronic format of the paper some of the diacritics concerning phonological distinctions in the transcribed utterances of my examples, particularly of Arvanitika, are here omitted.

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