Review

Dialogue with Bakhtin on Second and Foreign Language Learning: new perspectives
Joan Kelly Hall, Gergana Vitanova and Ludmila Marchenkova (eds) (2005)

Mary H. Maguire

Dialogue with Bakhtin on Second and Foreign Language Learning is an excellent, timely, and very valuable volume that invites readers to push the boundaries of applied linguistics and language education and language studies. The editors elegantly explore Bakhtin's dialogic theory and its relevance to second and foreign language learning by addressing a range of contexts including elementary and university level English as a second language and foreign language classrooms and adult learning situations outside the formal classroom. With an impressive collection of articles, they artfully accomplish their aim to appeal to a broad range of scholars including teacher educators and language teachers. They claim this is the first formally edited volume that explores links between Bakhtin's dialogism and second and foreign language learning. However, many literacy scholars have also recently adopted and applied Bakhtinian perspectives in language and literacy learning (Ball and Freedman, 2004; Holland et al., 1998). For two decades, I have been attracted to the insights Bakhtinian theory offers to researchers and educators working in second language learning and primary school children writing in more than one language (Maguire and Graves, 2001). Thus, I welcome the opportunity to review this book.

Bakhtin's dialogic theory of discourse and emerging selfhood assumes a fusion of languages and social worlds in human consciousness. When indi-

Affiliation

Professor Mary H. Maguire, Department of Integrated Studies in Education, McGill University, Montreal, Canada
email: mary.maguire@mcgill.ca

equinoxonline

viduals speak or write, they appropriate the social languages and genres that are already in existence in the languages and cultural communities in which they participate or aspire to belong. They draw from the existing macro level discursive structures and meanings and negotiate them to create their own locally relevant positionings of self and ideological becoming (Maguire, 2005a, Maguire, 2005b). Ideological becoming refers to how they develop ways of viewing the world, their belief systems, positionings and values, and interacting and aligning with others. The editors explicitly acknowledge that they embrace a dialogic philosophical and pedagogical stance towards language learning that challenges formalistic approaches to mainstream linguistics, language education and research. This stance is shared by the contributors who all begin their chapters with epistemological assumptions that reflect the volume's key premise: 'learning other languages is about seeking out different experiences for the purposes of developing new ways of understanding ourselves and others and becoming involved in our worlds' (p. 4).

Organized in two sections, with chapter one serving as a coherent, excellent introduction to Bakhtin's dialogic theory, each chapter offers a theoretically sound starting point to consider the importance of his theory for language learning and then moves to a particular context or concept. However, it is the cumulative force of all ten chapters that makes this volume outstanding and distinctive. The editors very successfully orchestrate a wide range of ways Bakhtin's concepts may be applied as a theoretical frame for understanding second and foreign language learning. The orchestration works because of the high degree of intertextual references and key concepts in each chapter that become leitmotifs but are presented from different angles. Concepts such as dialogism, speech genres, utterances and human agency clearly presented in the introductory chapter are taken up in the subsequent chapters, thus providing readers with a sense of participating in a dynamic *conversation* that keeps expanding the theoretical and methodological framework of dialogic approaches to language learning and their potential. I particularly appreciate that the chapters do not have to be read in a linear fashion.

Educators and researchers will find very useful the seven chapters in Part 1: *Investigating into contexts of language learning and teaching*. For Bakhtin, language is inherently dialogical: 'language for the individual consciousness lies on the borderline between oneself and another. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention' (Bakhtin, 1981: 293–294). If every utterance is filled 'with echoes and reverberations of other utterances' (Bakhtin, 1986: 51), then utterances and texts are always dialogic because they are answerable to other's words and discourses. The 'coming together of diverse

voices' offers individuals new possibilities and spaces for understanding the world and ever 'newer ways to mean' (Bakhtin, 1984: 51) in their ideological becoming. The eight articles help readers understand that ideological becoming occurs within what Bakhtin calls 'the ideological environment' – 'contact zones' (Bakhtin, 1986: 14) that offer affordances or constraints for socializing and learning how to mean and act upon the world.

Part 1 opens with two very compelling, strong and valuable chapters. Braxley explores how five east and south east Asian international graduate students negotiate the complexities and challenges of writing academic English in a large American southwestern university. Using date collected through open ended interviews, she critically considers the salience of Baktin's concepts of dialogism, speech genres and addressivity as a theoretical frame to understand 'who is [actually] doing the talking' [writing]. Iddings, Haught and Devlin draw on Bakhtin and Vygotsky to provide an insightful examination of the mutual relations among signs, meanings and language learning that involve two second-language students in an English-dominant third-grade classroom. Drawing on a variety of intriguing data sets such as observations, students journals and drawings, they illustrate the 'intentional ways second language learners can expand their communication resources for meaning-making' (p. 51) by engaging in multimodal representations that facilitate their access to the social life in their classroom. Viewing Bakhtin's concept of utterance 'as particularly appropriate for composition instruction' (p. 56), Orr demonstrates how objects of popular culture such as bumper stickers function as utterances that carry ideological and cultural meanings. The five ESLO composition students' responses to bumper stickers provide evidence that language is not a neutral medium and illuminate the interactive nature of utterances as politically and socially situated. Lin and Luk use Bakthin's concept of the liberating power of laughter to address the issue of teaching English in post- and neocolonialist contexts. Through their discourse analyis of classroom interactions video recorded in two Hong Kong secondary schools, they demonstrate that English lessons may be 'uncreative parroting sessions for students'. They argue that Bakhtin's ideas can help teachers be more aware of the ideological nature of their own teaching practices and the potential liberatory power of human agency and local creativity in the face of 'absolute ideological domination'. More could have been made of the potential of Bakhtin's concept of carnival and the importance of parody and satire as a critical pedagogical tool of transgression. Noteworthy for all English language education researchers here is the provocative question the authors pose: How do English language teaching practices in Hong Kong both reflect and enact the ideological domination of English and labor production driven model of education?

The next two articles are equally interesting. However, there appears to be a disconnect between the dialogic theory the authors embrace and the traditional methods they use. Dufva and Alanen combine Bakthinian notions of dialogicality with neo-Vygotskian approaches to language learning in their work with a small group of Finnish school children. Their argument that a child's metalinguistic awareness is multivoiced, a heteroglossic phenomenon 'that bears traces of many contexts' (p. 99), should prompt language researchers and educators to rethink the concept and understand that metalinguistic awareness develops through socialization practices into the discourse of one's settings. Their first section is theoretically sound although the mixed methods used in their inquiry are methodologically weak if not contradictory to the epistemological assumptions they assert at the beginning. Platt focuses on two early language learners of Swahili as they establish intersubjectivity, construct meaning and reorganized their language learning in a problem solving task. The information gap task presented to the children seems more traditional, narrow and disconnected from the more expansive dialogic principles and sociocultural theory she embraces in the introductory sections. Vitanova concludes this section with a very strong article that explores how three adult eastern European immigrants act as agents in contexts and discourses alien to them and how agency is both individual and co-constructed. Through the participants' narrative discourse, she clearly illustrates how a Bakhtinian framework of subjectivity is necessarily embedded in a unique answerability and has underlying emotional-volitional tones.

Three chapters in Part 2 *Implications for theory and practices* locate the discussion of dialogic theory within larger discourses of language, self and third space pedagogy. Marchenkova argues that despite different disciplinary backgrounds, Bakhtin and Vygotsky provide complementary theoretical lenses to understand how language is conceptualized, the role of culture in intercultural understanding and the construction of self and other in the dialogic process. Kostogriz focuses on concepts of dialogue, culture and other in considering a third space pedagogy of ESL literacy in multicultural classrooms that can address issues of power, resistance and transformation. Drawing on Bakhtin's concept of speech genres, Yotsukura explores a specific genre, the Japanese business telephone conversation to show how it may be used for the development of language learners' pragmatic competence. The chapter seems oddly placed here in contrast to the other chapters which engage in more philosophical discussions. The editors artfully invite readers to dialogue with these contributors and their texts to consider the implications for theory and practice. Since classrooms are key socializing spaces and places, they are not just institutional and physical arrangements of the

material artefacts of communication. As ideological environments, they mediate learners' ideological becoming in ways the authors in Part 1 concretely illustrate. In these 'contact zones', indivduals negotiate and/or struggle against various kinds of discourses and degrees of authority. Thus, the texts in part one offer local moments of these negotiations and struggles. The authors in part two theorize the potential of a dialogic perspective; this perspective they argue assumes that through their utterances, individuals leave traces of their human consciousness and offer glimpses of how they are developing their ideologies, positioning themselves and establishing their points of reference as they appropriate or resist the prevailing discourses.

I read this book from different locations: as a qualitative and ethnographic researcher working with young children and their multiple literacies in heritage language contexts in Montreal, a cosmopolitan, urban city, in a unilingual French province and as a university professor who teaches graduate courses in qualitative, ethnographic research methods and multilingual literacies and foundations of second language education. Thus, I would like to have seen the authors discuss Bakhtin's concepts of *Authoritative and Internally Persuasive Discourse* and their relevance for the development of language learners' ideological becoming. Ideologies are constantly constructed and reconstructed in discursive interactions at the micro and macro levels. The ways discourses are assimilated and mediated shape individual and collective positionings *Authoritative discourse* refers to official discourses such as official government policy and legislation, the discourse of tradition, generally acknowledged beliefs and voices of authority. *Internally persuasive discourse* refers to every day discourse that constantly changes in social interactions; it is the discourse of personal beliefs, ideas that influence responses to the world and others. A critical discussion of this intersection of micro and macro contexts is blatantly missing in this volume. There are the micro level processes of identity construction, self reflexivity and creative potential for becoming that emerge when individuals differentiate locally between the two clusters of discourse or create for themselves as Bahktin puts it 'the language of the moment.' Since several authors draw on both Baktinian and neo-Vygotskian theories, more discussion could have been included about the array of mediational means, that is, the repertoire of discoursal resources to which individuals may or may not have access and perceive are at their disposal in different linguistic market places.

The contributors present convincing arguments that taking a dialogic view of language opens up various questions about schools and institutions as socializing spaces, places, ideological environments and contact zones. for second and foreign language learning. Third space pedagogy offers much

potential for understanding how utterances offer varying possibilities of 'otherness or varying degrees of "our-own-ness", varying degrees of awareness and attachment' (Bakhtin, 1981: 89). A dialogic view entails being responsive to the voices of others. From a Bakhtinian perspective, 'consciousness never gravitates towards itself but is always found in intense relationship with another consciousness' (1984: 32). The representation of self in any textual act of meaning is both individual and social with morally inbued relationships between self and others in particular contexts. This volume provides both solid theoretical and insightful applied perspectives for encouraging conversations about how textual acts of meaning may involve new ways of relating to the world and 'ever new ways to mean' and 'enriching' our ability to understand and participate in social life.

Book reviewed

Hall, J. K., Vitanova, G. and Marchenkova, L. (eds) (2005) *Dialogue with Bakhtin on Second and Foreign Language Learning*: *new perspectives*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 241 pages. ISBN 0–8058–5021-X (alk. paper)

References:

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination*: *four essays by M. M. Bakhtin.* Edited by M. Holquist, translated by C. Emerson and M. Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1984) *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*. Translated by C. Emerson. Minnepolis: University of Minnesoto.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1986) *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays.* Austin, TX: University of Texas Press. Translated by C. Emerson. Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1990) The problem of content, material and form in verbal art. *Art and Answerability* 257–325.

Bakhtin, M. M. and Voloshinov, V. N. (1986) Marxism and the Philosophy of Language. Translated by L. Matejka and I. R. Titunik. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ball, A. F. and Freedman, S. W. (eds) (2004) *Bakhtinian Perspectives on Language*, *Literacy and Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Holland, D., Lachicotte, W. Jr., Skinner, D. and Cain, C. (1998) *Agency and Identity in Cultural Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Maguire, M. H. and Graves, B. (2001) Speaking personalities in primary children's second language writing. *TESOL Quarterly* 35(4): 561–595.

Maguire, M. H. (2005a) Identity and agency in primary children's cultural worlds: third space and heritage languages. In J. Cohen, K. Mcalister, K. Ralstad and J. MacSwan (eds) *Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium on Bilingualism* 1423–1445. Sommerville, MA: Cascadella Press.

Maguire, M. H. (2005b) What if you talked to me? I could be interesting! Ethical research considerations in engaging with bilingual multilingual child participants in human inquiry [39 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozicalforschung/Forum*: *Qualitative Social Research* [online journal] 6(1): Art 4. Available at http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-teste/1–5/02–1-4e.htm