

Some Notes on the Use of Mikhail Bakhtin's Dialogism (Heteroglossia) as a Method in Media Text Analysis

Notas sobre el uso del dialogismo (heteroglosia) de Mikhail Bakhtin como método de análisis de textos de medios de comunicación

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Received: 13/11/2020 – Accepted: 2/12/2020

Abstract:

The method of literary text analysis, which was proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin, can also be used for media content analysis and helps compare and scientifically analyze media narratives on the same topic in different media, languages and countries. Often quoted explanations in media texts differ from the initial source of information. Factual mistakes are then often defined as a result of deliberately distorted interpretation or Fake News. To prevent such discrepancies, it is advisable to use Bakhtin's dialogic theory, which proposes respect of the "alien opinion" where a journalist references a piece of information and uses it in content of their narrative. The advantage of heteroglossia is that it allows one to look at any changes to the same report after it has been published in the media of various countries. The author follows here the issues of emergence and interpretation in 890 newspaper articles.

Keywords: Bakhtin, dialogism, heteroglossia, Assange, Fake News

Resumen:

El método de análisis de textos literarios propuesto por Mikhail Bakhtin puede utilizarse también para el análisis de contenido en los medios de comunicación y ayuda a comparar y analizar científicamente las narraciones de los medios de comunicación sobre un tema específico en diferentes medios, idiomas y países. Las citas utilizadas en los medios de comunicación a menudo difieren de la fuente original de información. Estos errores suelen entonces señalarse como el resultado de una interpretación deliberadamente distorsionada o como noticias falsas. Para evitar esas discrepancias es aconsejable utilizar la teoría dialógica de Bakhtin, que propone el respeto de la "opinión ajena" cuando un periodista hace referencia a una información y la utiliza en el contenido de su relato. La ventaja de la heteroglosia es que permite observar

cualquier cambio en el mismo texto después de que se haya publicado en los medios de comunicación de varios países. La autora rastrea aquí los aspectos que conciernen a la generación e interpretación de 890 artículos periodísticos.

Palabras clave: Bakhtin, dialogismo, heteroglosia, Assange, noticias falsas

1. Introduction

Can this theory - which was intended for novel dialogue analysis - also be used to study deformations in the information flow in connection with the practice of creating what has become known as 'fake news'? Yes, it's possible. This approach to communications process analysis seems valuable because Bakhtin's dialogue does not involve proving one truth where there is disagreement, but rather involves two or more opinions in the conversation by respecting the otherness of each participant in that conversation. It should be noted that 'other' or 'alien' may appear in the text if the author so wishes,¹ and it is not 'abnormal if the other participates in a textual conversation' (Jauss, 2010, p. 145). The entire history of humanity is 'not a display of peace and harmony but rather a process of representing differences' (Holqvist, 2010, p. 165). The need for one winning opinion or 'finding a common language is contradictory to the implementation of genuine polyphony' (Bakhtin, 2017, p. 26).

Bakhtin's theory was developed roughly one hundred years ago and his contemporaries were unaware of his discoveries at that time. Therefore, one may wonder why it is considered to be topical today. Western Europeans always found Bakhtin to be 'too Russian', whereas to post-Soviet scientists he was 'too European'; philosophers find him to be 'too much of a literary critic' while to literary theorists and critics he is 'too philosophical' (Mahlin, 2010, p. 18). Stalin's repressions and the time lost to imprisonment and deportation somewhat contributes to Bakhtin's incongruence both with the pleiad of reception theory researchers and in the area of semiotic and linguistic discoveries (in the 1960s). Stalin's authoritarian cult during the Soviet Union which led to Bakhtin's deportation to Siberia in the 1930s resulted in him being excluded from science for half a century.² The imprisonment denied him the opportunity to participate in the global development of science and largely prevents his legacy from being fully digested to this day. However, we are resorting to it again as we see the possibilities inherent in applying this theory to media text research.

Bakhtin studies a text that involves monologues, dialogues, and polyphonic conversations. His 'dialogism offers a broad spectrum of discursive practice in which one voice can establish itself in relations with another voice without capitulating or objectifying it' (Byalostotskiy, 2010, p. 141). Thanks to this, a dialogue or a polyphonic

¹ In Bakhtin's system, we are all aliens to one another by definition. Each of us has a language of our own, a point of view, a conceptual system that to all others is outlandish.

² Thanks to Anatoly Lunacharsky the location of the prison in the Siberian Gulag that was intended for Mikhail Bakhtin was replaced by Kostanay, after which in 1936 they moved him to Saransk (then in the Mordovian ASSR, now the republic of Mordovia) where he taught at the Mordovian Pedagogical Institute.

conversation is not a general or abstract form of communication between fictitious or documentary personal opinions via text. Instead of that, it is a process which results in the messenger establishing its own position as a response or a lack of response to an alien utterance which is communicating with us at the same time. When observing the dialogic method, Bakhtin indicates three substantial items: a) dialogue is possible only in the conditions of capitalism, when society is not under a dictatorship (Bakhtin 2015, p. 30); b) dialogue is not exclusive to linguistics, but relates more to the process of communication (Bakhtin, 2015, p. 274); c) for the text to be correct, it has to contain another point of view in such a way that does not parody this idea, expression or fact (Bakhtin, 2015, p. 284). Essentially, it is about the textual narrative form: monologic, dialogic, or polyphonic.

2. Background to the study

Bakhtin's methodology is quite broad. This research shall use only a part of it, which will help us understand how and why, for example, a media report becomes distorted in its content and gains an entirely different interpretation as a result of information reproduction and the process of communication. This occurs when the author, referring to a source (or quoting it in direct or indirect speech form), is unable or unwilling to skilfully embed it within their own text. It is worth noting, that Bakhtin's dialogue theory was created by analysing works of the Russian literary classic, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and is based on the fact that the famous writer created his texts like a journalist, for he had a substantial interest in journalism and newspaper publishing in contrast to his contemporaries, such as Ernst Hoffman, Gustave Flaubert and Arthur Schopenhauer, who did not consider newspapers to be worthy of research (Grossman, 1925, p. 176). Bakhtin considered Dostoevsky's writing akin to that of a journalist (Bakhtin, 2015, p. 47), for he employed a specific approach when quoting other speech. He called this technique the dialogical approach to presenting facts.

Therefore, to include an alien expression in the form of a citation or reference in your own text, two things are required: a) to understand the alien fact in essence, b) to allow it to be freely displayed within your own narrative (by not distorting it with your own interpretation). In this way the work of a journalist is akin to that of a composer – by providing polyphony of each voice (heteroglossia) to the recipient. If this rule is broken and the author interprets and localises the “alien expression”, then it turns into an ironic message, which in essence is far from the truth and performs the function of a parody. This means, that the presence of a polyphony of opinions is necessary, for Dostoevsky was researching specific events, facts and the causality of human action, just like a journalist would. This means, that facts and opinions must speak for themselves. At the same time, such an approach does not alienate the author's position (Bakhtin, 2015, p. 115). Bakhtin does not differentiate between ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’ discourse (Byalostotskiy, 2010, p. 129) as a dialogue cannot be good or bad. Either there is one or there is not. Dialogic conversation as opposed to the dialectic argumentation of opinion allows explanations and articulation of differences from all companions who have subjective accents, differences in intonation, and peculiarities of interpretation (Bakhtin, 2017, p. 27).

Bakhtin is convinced that language manifestations display expressions of world views. Therefore, the polyphony of utterances even displays incompatible opinions. Heteroglossia is what allows the reader to see more than a monologue does - currently the most common form of journalistic and literary texts. Additionally, he feels there is no need always to come to a shared opinion that is accepted by all readers, as 'a common language is contradictory to genuine polyphony' (Bakhtin, 2017, p. 26). Although media communications with the public still tends to 'strive for a common language' and 'a shared opinion', these attempts are futile as 'all languages stratify not only in linguistic dialects but also in social ideological strata, social group languages, professional, genre, generational and similar forms' that display the centripetal and centrifugal forces of opinion (Bakhtin, 2017, p. 27) instead of the right or wrong points of view. Therefore, the most important element of a narrative is a successive contrasting of utterances (Bakhtin, 2015, p. 67).

3. Methodology

Bakhtin's dialogism methodology is aggregated in his work: Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, 2010; Bakhtin, 1984; Bakhtin, 2017; Bakhtin, 2015; Bakhtin 2010; and Holquist, 1981. Therefore – according to Bakhtin, every author can express their thoughts in a linear monologue relatively well. Complications arise when "foreign speech" is present within the text and, therefore, must be quoted, retold or referred to in any other way. Usually the "I" (the author) tends to localize the "foreign voice" in the text, transposing it and the alien opinion automatically becomes a parody. Oscar Wilde, in his comments, has extensively described Dostoevsky's approach – "He does not explain his characters, for they exist within the text independently" (Bakhtin, 2015, p. 89). The concept – "living independently" in this case means that these other characters or facts are correctly quoted. Such an approach requires respect for the dialogue of opinions within the text on the basis of heteroglossia.

Bakhtin believes that 'language is ideologically saturated', as with 'ideology' he means one's world view (Bakhtin, 2017, p. 26). A journalist's position serves to shape, just as was defined by Bakhtin: 'it is an ideological construction that is formed on the basis of an abstraction of specific facts of social expression... and has a huge social power' (Voloshinov, 2010, p. 82). The moment the author's opinion fits into the scientific, artistic, moral, or justice system it becomes a genuine force that is ready to exert influence on life processes (Voloshinov, 2010). For the purpose of studying the applicability of this method to research, the author used secondary analysis of qualitative data: two scientific articles that were published earlier, and which analyse an interpretation of the same fact across 890 publications in six countries using Bakhtin's method as examples. The period of analysis covered eighteen months between January 2012 and the middle of 2013 (Veinberg, 2014; Veinberg, 2016). The "foreign speech", or "alien fact" in this research is a rather peculiar case, when Julian Assange was arrested in Sweden for committing rape. Reactions in the world media, diplomatic circles, and in the social domain to the WikiLeaks publications were varied. No doubt, this was the scoop of the global public domain; however, in different countries the Assange case was portrayed differently, with controversy and diametrically opposed to the factual chain of events. However, the interpretation of what had actually happened and whose fault it was differed significantly. This article makes use of Bakhtin's

dialogism in order to establish why the media of six countries interpreted the same event so differently.

4. Analysis, findings, and results

No word is ever neutral as it carries ideological saturation along with it (Bakhtin/Voloshinov,³ 2010, p. 16), which means that a word as a manifestation of ideology serves to comment upon all acts of communication in an evaluating manner. Initially the primary source of information on the Assange case for the world's media were the representatives of the Swedish media in the Swedish language. They expressed the content of utterance in the shape of their own or 'one' and 'own speech' ideology in a relatively uniform manner. Other, foreign media bodies tried to understand the Swedish 'alien media'⁴) reports for the purpose of establishing what had happened so that they could inform their own readers about the Assange case. This first dialogue already displays several defects in the communications process: a) a misunderstanding due to a faulty translation of the information from Swedish, b) a lack of understanding of legal decisions, and the actions of the courts and police. Legal processes are difficult to understand for foreign media due to the procedural and language barriers.

4.1. Utterance as a sign of ideology (accentuation and re-accentuation)

Before the author begins this analysis, it should be noted that the concepts 'Julian Assange' and his 'WikiLeaks' were already well known in the public domain. That means Julian Assange and his actions were not 'an alien' or strange concept for mass media audiences for many countries. Following the accusations of the attempted rape of two women in Sweden, part of society saw Assange as a modern-day Robin Hood while others saw him as a villainous publisher of classified American documents. Now this evaluation of being the 'good character' or 'bad character' is complemented by a new one: a man practising 'sexual abuse'. The Swedish media which initially was the 'own utterance' or 'one's language' (because they were the closest to what was happening) had a clearly negative evaluation of what was taking place. Although the situation is not simple and is certainly not fully clear, Julian Assange right away loses his Robin Hood fame with the Swedish media. He loses the glory and turns from: 'as popular as a rock star' (Barkman, 2012), 'internet activist' (Forsström, 2010), and 'fighter for freedom of information and the press' (De la Reguera, 2012) into a 'trigger of sexual abuse' (Förundersökning, 2010) as he has (allegedly) violently harassed two women without their consent.

The first re-accentuation of meaning has taken place in the Swedish media without considering the opposing argumentation of the 'alien' opinion. The evaluation of Assange becomes even more negative when the Australian flees to the UK and fails to fulfil his obligations towards the Swedish police. At this point double re-accentuation takes place in Swedish media reports and he is treated as someone who 'slanders the Swedish justice system for the sake of his own interests' (Wolodarsky, 2012), or 'he is a

³ Bakhtin was forced to publish his paper, 'Marxism and the philosophy of language', under someone else's name due to censorship. It was written in 1929 and was published under the name of his friend and student V Voloshinov (Bahtin & Voloshinov, 2010, p. 5).

⁴ 'Alien' or 'foreign speech' concepts are used by Bakhtin to describe unfamiliar, strange opinion

selfish coward who ignores women' (De la Reguera, 2012). Here the dominant (active) report flow takes place in the form of a monologue. Some media outlets question the prevalent position (Bergman, Calgren, 2012); however, the opposing, passive 'alien speech' exists on the periphery of the Swedish public domain as a monologue without giving rise to orchestration or polyglossia.

Rape is a serious crime, there is no doubt about it. The nuances of the legal procedures in this case were often so complex and incomprehensible to a foreigner, yet the country of the information source, Sweden, continued to report on the matter in the form of a monologue, ignoring the opinion of Assange as an alien opinion. Therefore, the Swedish reports on the case was basically an ideological monologue.

The next - or in this case the third - ideological monologue can be observed in foreign reports. Bakhtin's specific use of the concept of 'ideology' should be noted here. According to his theory, the conflict of ideologies refers to a clash of 'languages' or belief systems. Just as Bakhtin believes that 'bread can be turned into ideology because bread and wine are elements of ideology in church rituals' (Voloshilov, 2010, p. 212), Julian Assange and his WikiLeaks may be canonised as 'saints' in specific areas of ideology where the abuse of women is not judged or sexual abuse is not considered a crime. For example, for Russia, Assange's publications of classified US documents were politically advantageous and his offence was ethically acceptable. Therefore, Vladimir Putin's statements in the media in this period leads to a re-accentuation which shapes the third monologue. He stresses that Swedish claims 'seem to be a political act' (Putin, 2012) rather than an examination of the offence. His opinion is shared by Ecuadorian Foreign Minister Ricardo Patino who will try to persuade the UK to give the 41-year-old Assange safe passage out of the country' (Ricardo Patino, 2012). In this way the re-accentuation of Julian Assange's public reputation takes place. Therefore, by means of these statements, he is 'dragged' from being potentially guilty of actually committing a crime to the status of a persecuted hero. This also means that, according to these 'alien media', the alleged sexual abuse of two Swedish women is not a punishable crime and therefore 'authoritative discourse' (Holquist, 1982, p. 424) will fail and is not possible here. A monologue with similar argumentation is supported by the Russian media, which characterises Julian Assange as a 'the first enemy of the US security forces' (Ledi Gaga, 2012), and the Latvian media, where a total of 95 articles on the Assange case are predominated by: the 'opener of windows and doors to tomorrow' (WikiLeaks, 2012), 'rich and popular', 'charming', 'slender, erudite activist' (Mediji, 2012). Here one can observe the second and third monologues, which also ignore the alien opinion and do not even try to attribute polyphony to the newspaper text.

The fourth monologue in this distanced discussion is shaped by the Guardian newspaper, which ironically has distanced descriptions such as: Assange 'is a high-profile opponent of the British monarchy' ('Julian Assange to run', 2013); 'the silver haired Assange' (Adetunji & Davies, 2012); 'plays melodrama' (Addley & Woolf, 2012) and notices (in Bakhtin's words) a carnival-like attitude towards the developments. This fourth monologue is continued by the Malaysian and Japanese online media in English. Here, publications have been considerably influenced by the British coverage of the Assange case. They use the same expressions: 'the silver haired

Assange' (A Spotlight, 2010), 'high-profile opponent of Britain's monarchy' (Taylor, 2013).

The Japan Times examines the Assange case just as does the Malaysian newspapers: they reproduce English articles in full and tend to use sources only from the English language media. This means that the media coverage of the Assange case uses a parallel monologue instead of a dialogue. Further on we will look at how Bakhtin's dialogism is used as 'direct', 'indirect', and 'quasi-direct speech' in this process of parallel monologues (Holqvist, 1982, p. 425).

4.2. A direct, indirect, and picturesque style for transmitting someone else's (alien) speech

Our own speech, even in the form of a monologue, actually shapes itself as an echo of what can be termed 'alien speech', for all our thoughts, conclusions and opinions collide with other, alien expressions or opinions, which propagates response or reactions (Bakhtin, 2015). This means that the author either respects or disregards the utterances of 'alien languages' and opponents in their text.

Bakhtin differentiates between an active and passive reaction to alien speech. He divides the processing of alien speech into two stages: first we declare the content of the alien speech and then we comment upon it, evaluating it. 'Regardless of the nature of our text, whether it is literary fiction, polemic article, or barrister's defence speech, etc, we will notice these two trends clearly: text that comments and text that offers dialogue and polyphony of views. One of the two normally prevails' (Voloshinov, 2010, p. 105). If the author is unable to quote in such a way as to create a polyphony in both direct and indirect speech forms, then the alien opinion automatically becomes a parody (Bakhtin, 2015, p. 285) and the reader is forced to put up with a single interpretation of events.

In the common monologue version it is common practice to recount an alien speech in a linear and active manner. There is only the voice of the author heard, while other voices simply do not exist. In this case the Swedish press drew a dark picture of Assange. The use of 'direct speech' in statements could be observed as if the author himself had stood by and seen everything: 'he is really sick', 'he is a selfish coward who ignores women', 'he's a douchebag' ('Lagen', 2012). Likewise, the opposing position is expressed by the Ecuadorian media's coverage of the Assange case: 'Hugo Chavez supports Assange' (Ayala Lasslo, 2012), and Fidel Castro is in good health and is thinking the same thing' ('Unasur y ALBA', 2012). According to Bakhtin, such a linear style is dogmatic as it allows one to recount rather than to have a dialogue. Rationalistic dogmatism (Der lineare Stil) uses an assimilation of alien facts, a refraction of the belief system of the alien language, and a penetration of the text by facts or opinions in order to transmit alien speech. Here it should be noted, that Bakhtin's polyphony of voices and dialogue in journalism do not require the rejection of the author's position. No, not a single literary work, including newspaper publishing, is imaginable without the position of the author, yet every character can freely express their opinions and views within the text, therefore illuminating the problem under consideration (Bakhtin, 2015, p. 102). Specifically, in the portrayal of the "Assange Case" one could only observe parallel monologues, which ignored "foreign speech" and arguments.

Finally, the aforementioned Bakhtin effect, it should be stressed, which occurs when a journalist or a writer ignores the polyphony of alien voices, is the creation of a parody (Bakhtin, 2015, p. 285). Such a result could be observed in this research, for the third type of dialogism is a picturesque style of transmitting someone else's speech with elements of ironic carnival. It is widely used by the Guardian: 'the Assange /plays/ melodrama', is the protagonist in 'political thriller' /../ Greek tragedy /../ 'soap opera' (Greenwald, 2012); 'this is a man, after all, who has yet to be charged, let alone convicted, of anything', 'as far as the bulk of the press is concerned, Assange is nothing but a 'monstrous narcissist', a 'bail-jumping sex pest' and an 'exhibitionist maniac' (Milne, 2012); 'the cases remind us that all too often whistle-blowers suffer, while war criminals walk' (Goodman, 2012). This approach to 'conversation' with developments surrounding the Assange case all relate to Bakhtin's belief that ideologies can be different; however, with their attitude to 'alien speech' they either decline, illustrate, or use quasi-direct speech interpretation to make room for further reflection. This means, that the interpretation of the same event in various media is different, for a journalist and author approach the logic of the foreign source differently: with or without the use of dialogue in the presentation of facts and events.

5. Discussion and conclusions

1. Bakhtin's dialogism can be used in the comparative analysis of the content of media publications for the purpose of establishing the logic behind the shaping of various public opinions.
2. The analysis proves that the use of methods of dialogue and heteroglossia is practically not in use actively and the localisation of "foreign facts" is much broader than is believed.
3. Bakhtin insists that author's dialogic communication is a specific area of the life of a language. According to him, all kinds of literature and public texts are actually internal dialogues, as the truth has a dialogic nature too. Consequently, the composition of media texts should be created in the form of a dialogue.
4. The study proved that 'voices' of journalism (one's own and those that can be regarded as being alien) reject open dialogues. Instead they give preference to the internal dialogism of a narrative in the form of parallel monologues.
5. Coverage of the Assange case in publications across seven countries displayed *punctum contra punctum* in which the logic of views was mutually exclusive, and polyphony of voices was not possible.
6. Media utterances on the Assange case, where authors wished to establish the essence of the problem and find answers to questions, took the position of an active internal dialogue because was given opportunity to demonstrate foreign opinion or "alien speech".

7. Utterances by the media that did not want to have a dialogue with the existing facts caused the dialogue to die down and the message to turn into a linear monologue which bordering on one-sided propaganda.

8. The dialogic approach is valuable due to the fact that, in the polyphonic approach and under the circumstances of heteroglossia, recipients can decide which view to accept as correct.

9. Promoting dialogism in media texts could significantly improve the quality of the content of mass media information.

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Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest

HOW TO CITE (APA 7^a)

Veinberg, S. (2020). Some Notes on the Use of Mikhail Bakhtin's Dialogism (Heteroglossia) as a Method in Media Text Analysis. *Communication & Methods - Comunicación y Métodos*, 2(2), 35-45. <https://doi.org/10.35951/v2i2.95>