

# Das Ideologische und das Dialogische

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## Zusammenfassung

### *Das Ideologische und das Dialogische*

In diesem Beitrag setzen wir uns mit dem Konzept der Ideologie auseinander. Dabei verstehen wir Sprache als eine gemeinsame Grundlage des Sozialen und des Psychologischen. Um diese Betrachtung vorzunehmen stützen wir uns auf Bakhtins Diskurstheorie. Dies geschieht insbesondere weil Sprechakte in Bakhtins Theorie als Positionierungen verstanden werden, diese diskursiven Akte als Evaluationsprozesse verstanden werden können und jeder Sprechakt einen sozialen Hintergrund beinhaltet der die Positionierung in einer geschichtlichen Entwicklung von Sprechakten verortet. Besonders diesen dritten Aspekt untersuchen wir dann mit Bezug auf die Bedeutung für das Alltagsleben, das diskursiv geschaffen wird.

**Schlüsselwörter:** *Kommunikation und Denken, Bakhtin und Volloschinov, Dialogizität, Ideologie, Positioning, Sozialpsychologie politischer Einstellungen, Unbewusstes des Diskurses, Werte*

## Summary

In this paper we follow researchers on ideology in that one way of dealing with this problem is by conceiving language as a common ground between the social and the psychological, and then we focus on Bakhtin's theory of discourse to show how language practices can be regarded as the locus of ideology. We will approach the Bakhtinian concepts of discourse and utterance, showing the ideological nature of language practices in three steps. First, because language practices consist of position-taking movements in a social field. Second, because these acts

of discourse are evaluations, that is, value-laden positioning effort. And finally because any utterance involves a social background that roots the evaluative positioning movement in a history of language practices common among speaking subjects. Then we explore this third aspect in terms of the common social life that is discursively assumed in communication and thinking activity.

**Keywords:** *Assumptions in communication and thinking, Bakhtin and Voloshinov, Dialogic relations, Field of interlocution, Ideology, Positioning, Social psychology of political attitudes, Speech commitment, Unconscious side of discourse, Values*

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The word is the ideological phenomenon *par excellence* (Voloshinov 1986, 13)

## 1. Introduction

There is considerable evidence about the importance of the relationship between social conditions of life and ideology. For instance, Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford (1950) define ideology as a configuration of attitudes, values, and beliefs regarding the social order, and have shown that this psychological organization is associated with social factors. A specific organization of these elements, which is behind fascistic behaviors, called 'authoritarian personality', was

found to be more common in working class. This specific association has been studied for a long time, reaching some consensus in that people with lower income and lower educational level have higher levels in authoritarianism (Napier & Jost 2008; Schuman, Bobo, & Krysan 1992). The influential work by Lipset (Lipset 1960; Lipset & Raab 1978) about working class authoritarianism suggests that intolerance is concentrated especially among disadvantaged groups.

However, it is less clear how to explain this relationship between social conditions of life and ideology. On the one hand, most mainstream theories in psychology have found difficulties when integrating the cultural and societal components of ideology in their arguments, explaining ideology in terms of individual-level principles such as personality and cognitive needs, for instance in the theory of system justification (Jost & Banaji 1994). On the other, most social theories inspired in Marxism, accounting for ideology in terms of social structure, have failed to give a proper treatment to the psychological and microsocial dimensions of ideology. Examples are the theory of class consciousness in Lúkacs (1969), of hegemony in Gramsci (1971), and of the ideological state apparatuses in Althusser (1997).

In this context, conceptualization of ideology would benefit from a theoretical framework strongly centered on the inner relationships between the social and the psychological. In contrast to the theoretical strategies in mainstream social psychology, in this paper we first argue that one way of dealing with this problem is by conceiving language as a common ground between the social and the psychological, guided by the conjecture that the difficulty of both psychologizing and sociologizing theories of ideology to link conditions of life and subjective processes stems from an inappropriate concept of language. More precisely, in current social psychology, the problems in ideology research seem to be related with a biased view of language, regarded in particular as a psychological competence making possible social encounters, thus situating language at one pole of the theoretical spectrum of ideology, that is, the psychological processes explaining the subjective life of individuals. Then we focus on Bakhtin's theory of discourse to show how language practices – rather than subjective beliefs or social structure per se – can be regarded as the locus of ideology. 1.1 The social psychology of ideology

Theoretical developments that preserve the indissoluble relationship between ideology and social structure have predominated among Marxist writers. Along this tradition, ideology is understood as false consciousness, defined as social production of consciousness whose psychological performance allow people, under specific conditions, to hide the failures and contradictions inherent to the social process that engender this ideology, capitalism (Larraín 2007; Marx & Engels 1845/1974). Among central components of this notion of ideology, two aspects are emphasized. First, ideology can get a function of hiding social reality, and second, ideology is grounded in psychological mechanisms of representation and action. This approach to ideology poses the challenge of establishing a deep, inner relationship between psychological processes that underlie the constitution of ideological thinking, and social relationships that define the possibilities of human production.

In social psychology, the notion of ideology have been discussed from two different perspectives. One perspective, held for instance by Adorno, endorses Marx's general approach to false consciousness as outlined above (Adorno & Horkheimer 1969), and further looks for an operationalization of the concept enabling its empirical study through attitudes, values, and beliefs measurement (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford 1950). This perspective thus takes the challenge to face the problem of the formation of ideological attitudes as the psychological correlate of tangible and ordinary material conditions in which people live (Augoustinos 1999; Bonano & Jost 2006; Carvacho & Haye 2008; Haye, Carvacho, González, Manzi, & Segovia 2009).

Regarding the psychological grounds of ideology, Adorno and colleagues' *Authoritarian Personality* relies on an attempt to elaborate a Marxist psychology. Specifically, the Frankfurt School used some concepts developed by the Freudian psychological theory to explain the bases of capitalism and the origin of fascism (Adorno 1951; Fromm 1942). Alternative psychological approaches presumably prepared to cope with the challenge of linking social structure and subjective life were those proposed by Lev S. Vygotsky (1984), sometimes known as the socio-cultural school, and symbolic interactionism, initially formulated by George H. Mead (1934). The former presents a theory of the development of language as a product of the social life. The later suggests a concept of identity rooted on social interaction, ruling out the classic naturalization of individual minds. Although

both seem to be strong attempts toward a socially grounded psychological theory, follow ups giving a comprehensive notion of ideology or contributing to social psychological research on ideology have been rare.

The second perspective within social psychology is based on the distinction of two different concepts of ideology in Marx's writings (Jost, Nosek, & Gosling 2008). One concept corresponds to the young Marx, linked to philosophical texts, and referring to the sphere of ideas in society. The other concept corresponds to an old Marx, associated with economics writings, and referring to an interested distortion of reality in order to legitimize it. According to this distinction, the first concept of ideology would be neutral regarding the social conditions of life, and has been operationalized as belief system, characterized by its lower or higher stability, consistency, and cognitive sophistication (e.g. Allport 1962; Converse 1964; Gerring 1997). This concept has predominated in social science since the sixties. The second concept is meant to be critical, because in referring to the propagandistic component of political beliefs, explains people's orientation in favor of or against the social system. Specifically, ideology could be an illusion at the service of the status quo or, on the contrary, the ground for revolutionary activity (Elster 1982; Knight 2006). This second concept of ideology is supporting contemporary research on system justification ideologies, based on the idea of stereotyping as false consciousness (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek 2004; Jost & Hunyady 2002; 2005).

1.2 Problems of current social psychological research

This distinction between two concepts of ideology in Marx's writings has an important consequence for research in social psychology, because in splitting the problem of ideology into the side of ideas and the side of social interests, the direct relationship between material conditions and the formation of the ideology loose centrality, allowing the reduction of ideology to individual psychological aspects, for example attitudes (Jost, Glaser, Kruglansky, & Sulloway 2003a; 2003b) or personality factors (Carney, Jost, Gosling, & Potter 2008; Jost 2006). In fact, these attempts have been largely criticized (see for example Agoustinios 1999; Foster 1999).

First because of their individualistic bias. Most of the research in this area has based its development on the empirical findings regarding measurement of individual attitudes. Although the content of the stimulus used in this research includes social issues, the focus has been to distinguish the cognitive mechanism

underlying the responses of participants. There has been some attempts to include a wider approach, for example aggregating data at the group level (Stellmacher & Petzel 2005) or using measurements of status as predictors (Sidanius & Pratto 1999). Even though these attempts are very informative about the complex nature of this phenomenon, they are not able to link the individual production of ideological positioning and the social structure under a single activity. Ideological production is presented either as a non-individual phenomenon (group phenomenon) or an individual response to a social situation. A collective understanding of human activity which still involves individual psyche is needed. This problem has been also detected in Marxist theories. For instance, Michael Billig (1999b) redefines the concept of 'commodity fetishism' suggested by Marx in *Das Kapital*, in terms of the Freudian concept of repression. According to Billig, modern consumption is shown in capitalism in such a way that allows to hide the production conditions, in a kind of collective forgetting, which can be defined as repression on the social level. However, the Freudian concept of repression does not completely cover this notion due to its rootedness in intra-psyche processes in the individual unconscious. For that reason, Billig proposes the concept of 'dia-logical unconscious', pushing toward a non individual approach to the production of false consciousness.

Second, critics remark a psychological bias. Social identity theory (SIT) proposes that people favor in-groups over outgroups (Tajfel & Turner 1986). Social dominance theory (SDT) argues that dominant groups support the maintenance of social hierarchies, while dominated groups promote equality (Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin 2006; Sidanius & Pratto 1999). Even though SIT and SDT have openly tried to avoid this bias, most of the social psychological approaches present this problem. As mentioned before, there is a tendency to simplify into one psychological concept part of the process of ideological positioning. For example, the concepts of ingroup identity, stereotyping, social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism, ingroup self-esteem, and so on, refer to a psychological aspect that is presumably related with, but not constitutive of, the social environment. Within these theories, research on ideology is restricted to psychological mechanisms, such as justification or alienation, without linking them with the actual changes in the concrete life conditions.

To confront these critics, a strong link between ideology and discourse has been proposed (Foster 1999), matching Billig's suggestion of a dialogical approach to ideology (Magnusson 1999; Parker 1999). This would allow to find a compromise between the material existence of social relations structuring language practices and the psychological subjectivities involved in the construction of such practices. However, the elaboration of theories of discourse capable of dealing with the problem of ideology is an open project. In particular, most approaches offering a socially grounded concept of ideology are not theoretically clear or empirically powerful enough regarding the concept of language or discourse, and the specific relationships with the notion of ideology. Distinctively, Bakhtin's dialogical perspective on discourse is strong regarding this point. In our interpretation, Bakhtin's conception of culture and communication places discourse at the center, accounting from there to both social structure and individual subjectivity. Moreover, as it will be argued next, this conception involves a detailed elaboration of a tight link between language and ideology, thus potentially enabling contemporary researchers to overcome the theoretical weaknesses already described in the social psychology of ideology.

## **2. An interpretation of Bakhtin on discourse**

In what follows we discuss Bakhtin's concept of language practices, in opposition to language structure or system, as intrinsically ideological. In doing so, we will draw on some works of Voloshinov (1986 and 1976) and of Bakhtin (1981b; 1984; 1986a; 1986b). In this context, there is a debate about the authorship of texts that have been attributed to Voloshinov and to Bakhtin (Holborow 2006). For example, Clark & Holquist (1984) believe that it was really Bakhtin who wrote *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1986) and *Freudism*. Wertsch (1991), on the other hand, suggests that in the context of Bakhtin's emphasis on the dialogic and polyvocal nature of utterances, the real authorship passes to a second plane since both authors worked together on these ideas in the thirties. When referring to the bibliography, we will attribute authorship based on those used in the respective editions referred. However, when addressing ideas that seem to belong to both authors, we will frequently simplify by mentioning only Bakhtin, with the caution of assuming that the problem of authorship is not a matter of indicating an individual person (according to Bakhtin 1981a; 1986b).

Irrespective of the personal identity of the authors, their several pieces of intellectual work are considered here as different but consistent enough sources of a broad theoretical framework, offering a coherent insight into the relationship between language and ideology.

The very notion of ideology has been related to this issue about authorship, because of its strong link to Marxist literature and to Soviet scholarship within the immediate historical context of Bakhtin. Although Marxist concepts seem to be avoided in most of Bakhtin's texts, it is possible to argue that Bakhtin's theory of culture and communication should be regarded as a contestation to some meanings of ideology dominant at that time, specially those situating culture as a mechanistic effect of the economic structure (see Voloshinov 1986, first three chapters). More than a theoretical issue, for Bakhtin this was a political one. In our view, this contextual tension makes Bakhtin's contribution to the problem of ideology particularly interesting. The autonomy of art and literature from the material production system is asserted by means of a theory of culture and communication stressing creativity. At the core of this elaboration there is Bakhtin's attempt to conceptualize language not as a neutral tool for social coordination, but as a constitutive *milieu* of human form of life, including its institutional, historical, and psychological aspects. The ideas, conventions, and values populating the social life in a given epoch, or a given social situation, are regarded not as (truly or falsely) representing, at an »ideological« level, the way in which production practices are organized, but rather language practices are regarded as the source of stability and novelty in both material production and cultural creation.

Indeed, Bakhtin develops his concept of language practices from the study of written arts. Through studies on Dostoevsky (1984), Tolstoi (1981a), and Rabelais (Bakhtin 1993), among others, a distinct way of looking at communication, culture, and thinking is raised, where human existence is characterized as creative sign action. As in novelistic production, other language practices essentially involve an author taking an ideological position toward other discursive acts, by displaying all sorts of signs – verbal and non-verbal – in a singular, new, unrepeatable act of discourse. In science production, in psychological life, and in daily conversations, sign creation within a particular discourse genre is the fundamental movement, as in the arts. Thus, the historical formation of particular artistic genres – e.g. the novel, as a specific form of modern prose – may resemble,



criticize, or anticipate the particular ways of communicating and thinking within different discursive activities in a given epoch. In theorizing culture from the point of view of creation, Bakhtin elaborates a concept of language practices as living, open dialogue. In order to discuss the relationship between language and ideology, we will review some elements of this classically dialogical approach to discourse.

To be clear about the basic concepts involved in our discussion, let us specify some terminological distinctions from the outset, even if Bakhtin and Voloshinov do not stick to them as the unique terminology, and their texts are more flexible with words. Firstly, *language*. We use this term here to refer to semiotic structures distinctly involved in human communication; cultural systems of verbal or non verbal signs. Accordingly, we will also employ the expression *language system* to stress this meaning, in opposition to language practices, following Bakhtin's account of the general object of traditional linguistics as a stable structure underlying speech, rather than the living event of speech. Indeed, in focusing their theory on language practices, Bakhtin and Voloshinov employ the concepts of discourse and utterance. Discourse refers to the concrete life of sign use in cultural communication, as in daily conversations and in works of art. These authors use the term word (слово) with the same broad meaning, and maybe with a slightly theological nuance, as in 'The word in Dostoevsky', assuming that the whole human form of life is of the nature of the word: Culture is conceived in terms of discursive communication. Utterance designates singular acts of discourse, for instance a particular semiotic contribution of a speaker with a conversation, and a particular novel or part of a novel that can be conceived as a complete unit of communication. The term utterance is specially tricky here, because in contexts different from Bakhtin and Voloshinov, it means either the same as statement (assertion) or the locutionary act of formulating a sentence in overt speech. Despite these other misleading meanings, English translations of Bakhtin and Voloshinov opt for this term, because of its broad reference to a dynamic, contextualized, singular move within a chain of discursive communication.

### **3. A dialogical approach to language**

According to our understanding of Bakhtin and Voloshinov's ideas, this notion of utterance should be read as a *response* to the perspectives sustaining that lan-

guage is an objective system of signs that precedes particular utterances as far as speakers use it in order to speak. In this framework the meaning of the word is understood as the neutral meaning which does not belong to anybody but is a stable property of the word itself. Word is intimately related to the object or language reference, as a translucent means of representation of a state of affairs. On the contrary, Bakhtin argues that language is not an abstract and objective system that stands in itself in order to be employed by the speaker. Any linguistic sign is embedded with a concrete utterance, and any utterance occurs in a process of living discourse, as an occurrence whose being is determined by its dialogic relations to other such occurrences. These relations with other previous or virtual utterances make each actual utterance unrepeatable. The way of the word towards its object is interrupted by other words that have previously valued the same object. Within a given stream of discursive communication, the word relates to objects only indirectly, mediated by alien words without which no such object of discourse would take place. Likewise, the meaning of the word is understood as a creative move of the discursive subject relative to already known or anticipated words of others.

The linguistic significance of a given utterance is understood against the background of language, while its actual meaning is understood against the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme, a background made up of contradictory opinions, point of view and value judgments – that is, precisely that background that, as we see, complicates the path of any word toward its object. Only now in its contradictory environment of alien words is present to the speaker not in the object, but rather in the consciousness of the listener, as his aperceptive background, pregnant with responses and objections. And every utterance is oriented towards this aperceptive background of understanding, which is not a linguistic background but rather one composed of specific objects and emotional expressions. (Bakhtin 1981, 281)

From this quote, we emphasize three related but distinct points. First, to utter is not primarily to represent, but rather to stand in relation to a word that belongs to another speaker. Second, the utterance is responding to that alien word with

a new point of view regarding the object, that is to say, the utterance consists in proposing a new valuation of the social situation among speakers, as a response to the previous or alien valuation. Third, utterances occur against a *polyphonic* background: They are not only responses to actual or immediate positions or points of view regarding a thematic object, but to the constellation of points of view and valuations against which it is possible to take a new position. Let us elaborate on these points in order to approach, in three steps, a dialogical notion of ideology – at the same time that we discuss basic elements of Bakhtin's theory of discourse. 3.1 Discourse and contestability

In the social intercourse of speakers we never observe propositions, but utterances. We do not observe either sentences or even words, because these units, as well as phonemes and the like, are abstract distinctions made from the point of view of objectivistic linguistics, which breaks the whole of the semiotic structures observed with the aim of understanding how semiotic structures are composed. In their social intercourse, speakers are engaged in a discursive process, that is, in an ongoing chain of utterances wherein each one replies to previous and anticipated utterances performed by other or the same speaker. To avoid misunderstandings, note that here the utterance is not an instance of talk, of oral communication, but of verbal discourse in general, either written or articulated in private thought. Each utterance is the taking of a position of the speaker within a thematic field in which alternative positions are possible, opposing or complementing each other in different ways. Thus, utterances are characterized by their contestability (Bakhtin 1981). Signs that are not open to be answered, then, are not properly, or completely, discourse acts. It is from this essential *answerability* of utterances that stems the problem, for discursive subjects, of being responsible subjects (Bakhtin 1990).

The meaning of an utterance is the contestable position taken by a speaker in a given social situation. In this first sense, meaning is the ideological significance of an utterance as a response to other positions. In responding to previous or anticipated positions, each utterance entails a perspective, that is, a particular viewpoint from which the previous and anticipated utterances that furnish the discursive theme are addressed and appraised. This perspectivistic nature of utterances implies that each utterance is always a partial, even a biased positioning, never encompassing the totality of the object at issue. There are always alternative

perspectives, for perspectives are always partial points of view. Put in Bakhtin's words, this implies that there is neither a first word, nor a final word (1986b). Discourse is thus an endless chain of responsive positioning movements, where the actual utterance is an open, living event. Here we have in mind the relationship between Bakhtin's notions of the *answerability* of any utterance, situating the speaker as a responsible subject, and the *unfinalizability* of any discourse and of any discursive subject.

In each utterance, the speaker gets implicated in multiple argumentative encounters with the voices of others, ideological stands, discursive genres, perceived or imagined alien utterances, and also speaker's past utterances. A given utterance is a response to and an intervention into an ongoing dialogue. The question about the meaning of utterances is not whether they adaptively represent a given object, but *from which position* and *before whom* (present or absent), and eventually against what discourse, they are raised. Therefore, the ideological significance of utterances is rooted in the rhetorical structure of discourse, according to which utterances are essentially addressed to certain others. In Bakhtin's account of language practices, indeed, discourse is characterized by addressivity and contestability, that is, by dialogic relations constituting a social world, rather than by reference to a world of objects. Thus, the meaning of an utterance is not based directly on semantics but on the strategic relationships and actions giving form to the position-taking moves of speakers in interaction.

### 3.2 Discourse and commitment

The utterance, as the unit of human discursive communication, is always an active response, a contestable action. It is addressed to someone, and afterwards it becomes part of the constellation of points of views conditioning new utterances. Utterances are certainly articulated in semiotic devices (language), but any semiotic composition takes place within a constellation of previous positions, and as a rejoinder of them. Utterances as new positioning movements are responses to certain social situation that is conditioned by previous utterances, situation that is intelligible only because there is a constellation of previous utterances and a configuration of social relations among them. Each new utterance is a responsive positioning that enters in a given configuration with a particular interest and from a biased perspective, establishing particular alliances and confrontations with those previous utterances.

Moreover, utterances are re-configurations of the social situation. In entering a configuration of perspectives or voices historically given to the speaker, the new utterance becomes an active participant, adding a special force to some positions rather than others within the constellation of voices, thus pushing the social situation in some directions rather than others. Each new utterance potentially modifies the social situation to a certain extent and according to certain interests, changing or maintaining the correlation of forces given by the past history of configurations and re-configurations of evaluative positions populating the theme of discourse.

Utterances are not intrinsically evaluative only because they explicitly or implicitly operate as value judgments. Also a neutral description of a state of affairs is evaluative because it establishes different sorts of dialogic relations with multiple alien voices concerning the same discursive theme, raising either a value controversy or a value communion among discursive subjects in a historical horizon. But, more radically, the evaluative nature of discourse comes from the fact that in each actual utterance the speaker is taking a position, among other previous or anticipates alternatives, regarding what is good or bad, convenient or not, risky, just, true about the social situation as the speaker finds it at the currently last moment of an ongoing and endless social process. Even if void of evaluative or ideological connotations, scientific utterances allegedly neutral are efforts toward changing or reinforcing the current situation of their respective interlocution field. An utterance is essentially evaluative because it is a proposal to others about how to conduct shared social life.

The ideological dimension of discourse, again, is not to be found directly in the semantic content or the syntactic form of utterances. Certainly, utterances can include evaluative signs, such as positive or negative adjectives, even explicit value judgments, and these semiotic, logic, and rhetorical features are, indeed, to be taken as discursive marks within a discourse analysis attentive to ideology. What we argue here is that the ideological significance carried by the semiotic components of utterances *can* be regarded as a first layer of ideology; that a deeper analysis would need to go beyond the semiotic composition and to focus on pragmatics, thus rooting language practices on the (micro)politics of social interaction. In other words, utterances are evaluative positioning efforts not because

they may involve a valuation of an object, but because they consist in value-laden project concerning the social process among speakers.

To sum up: Discourse is more than language in the sense of semiotic composition (following rules of *langae*) and contextualized formulation (*parole*), because it also involves the political act of putting a given sign in relation to previous projects concerning the social situation of the speakers, and taking place as a new project – a proposal of how to conduct shared social life that provokes further new projects as a response. This commitment of a living utterance to its historical moment is what makes a signifier an ideological sign (Voloshinov 1986). Such is, in our reconstruction of Bakhtin's dialogical approach to language practices, the way in which ideology takes presence within any given utterance. Therefore, the position taken through a given utterance is a position toward and against other positions within the interlocution field, wherein the so-called 'social values' are only the ultimate forms in which social projects are justified and contested among interlocutors (Billig 1996). These values, the alleged grounds of value-laden discursive positions, are typically non explicit, are part of the non-said in a given utterance (Billig 1991).

### 3.3 Discourse and the non-said

So far we have argued that, according to Bakhtin, discourse is not the act of representation of the so-called »objective« world but an action modifying the »intersubjective« world. Discourse becomes the same as social process. Up to this point, Bakhtin's notion of discourse does not differ clearly from other pragmatic approaches to language. In order to give a notion of the distinctively critical properties of a dialogical approach to language, at this third step of our theoretical reconstruction we explore the role played by those aspects of utterances that are not articulated in language – the assumed. These phenomena have long been recognized and conceptualized in terms of common ground and tacit knowledge. With no aim of excluding these accounts, here we discuss these phenomena in terms of the ideological hidden commitments with shared social life involved in each utterance.

Where society and discursive communication become conceptually fused, what is the role played by the non-said in social life? Moreover, what is the specific function of verbal language in utterances? Voloshinov (1986) suggests a way to approach these problems that links the verbal expression to its ideological force

by means of the notion of *social enthymeme*, which we try to explain here in terms of the relationship between ideology and the non said.

One may think that Bakhtin's emphasis on the verbal is not consistent with emphasizing the non-said components of utterances. However, the notion of discursive background is constitutive of Bakhtin's non-positivistic account of verbal behavior. Moreover, despite the fact that here language is not reduced to verbal language, in Bakhtin's account verbal discourse plays a crucial role in re-configuring the actual social situation. According to Voloshinov (1986), verbal culture is different from other kinds of communication, and to any non-verbal language code, in that it always entails an evaluation, the taking of a position, making it a contestable sign or, to put it again in Voloshinov's terms, an 'ideological sign'. An utterance as a whole, even if semiotically composed by non-verbal signs which are not contestable by themselves, enters into an endless chain of replies that carry multiple cultural perspectives and social valuations, and inevitably takes place as a rejoinder of the evaluative struggle that shapes the object of discourse as meaningful to the current social situation. On the one hand, a single gesture, or a bodily attitude, counts as an instance of verbal discourse as far as it entails an appropriation of previous voices and a proposal about maintaining or changing the social situation. The verbal, then, is not restricted either to a specific semiotic system (verbal vs non-verbal) or to the explicit and overt aspects of discourse. On the other, Bakhtin argues that signs outside ideological communication could only have a linguistic, formal, static, and abstract meaning, and as such are not contestable, do not belong to someone, are not addressed to someone, and thus are not committed to defending or transforming the actual social situation of the speakers. According to our authors, after all, in cultural life we do not get to know verbal or non-verbal signs which are not participating in contestable utterances, so that the concept of such neutral signs is an abstract concept. In contrast to the notions of language deriving from formalism or structuralism, Bakhtin emphasizes the fact that each word is constituted by words that belong to someone, that have the »taste« of some profession, party, person, genre, generation. Each word has the »taste« of living and concrete processes that indicate some specific ideological backgrounds. At this step of our reconstruction, the ideological dimension of the utterance has to do with the social and historical reality that is involved in each positioning movement, not at the fore, i.e. not as

the distinctive cultural project or political orientation of the new utterance, but at the background of social interaction; that is, shared ideas and environments among present and past speakers allowing the actual speaker to *assume* a common ground. In other words, the *apperceptive background* of the quote above not only interferes the way of the utterance toward its social project, but at the same time enables the speaker to focus on the new project being created and to blur from discourse – even to hide, repress, or distort – the non-problematized social conditions that furnish the utterance from within. In what follows we further explore this third and last point, with the hypothesis that the deepest relationship between the ideology and language has to do with the non-said.

To take a position defines a value, a place in a hierarchy, and a distance with the previous utterances, attached to the content of a new utterance. Every new utterance is defined in its relationship with the previous utterances, as a response to them. Therefore, utterances are more than what is said; they involve several elements not included in the overt or manifest content. Taking a position involves verbal, semiotic, and linguistic components, as well as non manifest (tacit, implicit, or repressed) contents. Non-said aspects of an utterance define and shape the overt part of it. Those hidden, silent, but active, operating aspects of discourse is what we call 'the assumed' in the utterance. Certainly, in psychology there is a long tradition of scholars trying to understand hidden processes behind the production of speech, for instance using the concept of unconscious in psychoanalysis. Following Voloshinov's critic of the early Freudian theory of the unconscious (see Voloshinov 1976), we explore here an account of these hidden but active aspects of discourse on the basis of a dialogical concept of the utterance.

Schematically, consider that every utterance is defined by two parts, the manifest content and its assumptions. The manifest content is completely conditioned by directions given by assumptions. A position-taking movement strongly depends on what is at issue in those assumptions. Utterances have a sense only once assumptions are taken into account. In fact, daily life communication is not possible if the full background has not been assumed. For instance, understanding a joke depends on the ability of the audience to acknowledge the assumptions of the utterance; however, in case someone was not able to make sense of it, clarifications start, and these clarifications basically consist on making some of the assumptions explicit, by the way, loosing the wit of the joke. The role of the assumed



within the utterance is that of a background making possible the comprehension of the ideological significance of utterance on the basis of a guided understanding of its manifest components – words, gestures, attitude. Without the guide of the assumed, words and gestures could only be recognized against the background of a given semiotic code, but could not be understood as a whole semiotic composition performing a positioning movement within a historical background.

Following Voloshinov (1976), assumptions involve to take a position regarding the extra-verbal context of the utterance. This notion of the extra-verbal does not correspond to the non-verbal aspects of discourse; we have already stated above that those non-verbal components of language practices are semiotic aspects of any act of discursive communication. The notion of the extra-verbal, in contrast, refers to the social context of any discursive act. In *Discourse in life and discourse in art*, there is an attempt to develop a dialogical notion of context. The main argument emphasizes the fact that every utterance is not only composed by a definite semiotic composition, but rather by socio-historical aspects as well. Indeed, the idea is that the signs displayed in the utterance are sustained by the extra-verbal context. In order to illustrate these ideas, Voloshinov introduces an example of two people engaged in a daily conversation. This kind of example is not selected by chance but, according to Voloshinov's view, corresponds to a key mode of discourse, in terms of which other forms of discursive communication have to be understood. In the example given in the text, there are two people in a room, both silent and suddenly one of them says: «Well!» and the other does not answer. It is impossible to understand the meaning of that utterance by only taking into account the verbal aspect of the utterance: it is senseless for us. The only way to understand it is to consider what is not said but allows the mutual understanding of the participants. This common field is the spatial, ideational, and evaluative shared purview that interlocutors assume in order to understand.

Only what all of us speakers know, see, love, recognize – only those points on which we are all united can become the assumed part of an utterance. Furthermore, this fundamentally social phenomenon is completely objective: it consists, above all, of *the material unity of the world that enters in the speakers' purview* (in our example, the room, the snow outside the window and so on) and in *the unity of the real conditions of life* that generate a community of value judgments – the speakers' belonging to the same family, profession, class, or other social group,

and their belonging to the same time period (the speakers are, after all, contemporaries). (1976, 178, italics in original)

The common field influences and characterizes the semiotic articulation, and in doing so it becomes part of the structure of its meaning: it is the »hidden« part that is necessary for its comprehension. How verbal articulation through the field gets connected with social process? If the field is the extra-verbal situation as a whole, what is the social dimension of the field? According to the quote, the unity of real conditions of life determines a community of value judgments. Consequently the field is essentially social. It is constituted by concrete social actions, social value judgments and evaluations. Each verbal articulation says something about the social situation within which it occurs. That is why the field unifies not only discourse with life, but also bonds together two or more participants: In concrete life each utterance is a *password* recognized only by those who share the same field (Voloshinov 1976).

In speaking/understanding, then, the non-said component of the utterance plays the role of a background of shared life, in contrast to which the creative positioning effort is made. If, within any given utterance, ideology takes presence as the contestable commitment of a living utterance to promoting potential change and making a difference among interlocutors, the silent place of ideology, the hidden side of the iceberg, corresponds to the segments of the social process that are assumed as non problematic, as shared and thus uncontroversial. Such assumed, non-problematized tracts of the social process need not be only limited to the common ground regarding immediate tacit knowledge generated in local interactions, but may encompass more global assumptions of the given form of life. The metaphor of the iceberg may help us illustrate that any utterance is formed on top of social assumptions of different degrees of depth and inclusion.

However, the unified purview on which an utterance depends can expand in both space and time: *The assumed may be that of the family, clan, nation, class, and may encompass days or years or whole epochs*. The wider the overall purview and its correspondent social group, the more *constant* the assumed factors in an utterance become. When the assumed real purview is narrow, when, as in our example, it coincides with the actual purview of two people sitting in the same room and seeing the same thing, then even the most momentary change within that purview can become the assumed. (Voloshinov 1976, 101, italics in original)

The ideology involved in a given utterance may be reduced to the variable conditions of social interaction, connecting temporary and locally shared perspectives with the ever new positions advanced at each turn; but it also may be expanded to more constant and more inclusively shared voices underlying common evaluations among large groups or whole societies. Within this range, any utterance has its own »ideological point«, either giving for granted more contingent knowledge of the situation or disputing more global social values and cultural forms. In any case, the deep ideological dimension of the utterance consists in the social and historical reality that is involved in complex ways in each positioning movement as its background. To illustrate the complexity of this relationship between the positioning movement and its background of understanding, consider Bakhtin's ideological analysis of the *Carnivelesque* (1983; 1984), the Medieval culture of laughter (1983), and irony (1981b; 1983), whereby predominant social hierarchies are inverted and ridiculed by normally suppressed voices. Cultural phenomena such as these show that the schematic distinction between two »parts« of the utterance must remain as an introductory metaphor, because they assume a whole shared (conventional, official) form of life and at the same time creatively oppose to it the image of a radical change of hierarchies.

One may think that such a notion of ideology is useless as far as every utterance is ideological. We think it is the same with Bakhtin's notion of discourse: The problem is not that there is nothing specific about the concept if involved in every corner of human life, but to be able to distinguish and, in each case, identify the different levels of analysis and the multiple forms in which ideology and dialogicality take place. According to our theoretical interpretation, the ideological nature of discourse consists in the tension between the given and the new in each utterance, specifically between the social reality that is shared and remain unproblematic among speakers on the one hand, and the more or less creative reconfiguration or resolution of the social situation put forward in each utterance. To share with others and to differ from them, are two sides of discourse that have to be articulated in one way or another in every discursive act, and this articulation of the given and the new has in Bakhtin's theory an ideological dimension, among others. On the one hand, each utterance rests on an unproblematic shared reality, a reality that eventually can be problematized and open to controversy. On the other hand, each utterance performs a strategic move to-

ward potentially changing in some extent the social relations among speakers, relations that may also be reinforced by utterances oriented toward accepting shared reality. Even when challenging shared reality to a great extent, an utterance assumes a deeper background of understanding that sustains this utterance and that also is reproduced by it.

In conclusion, our reconstruction of the dialogical conception of the ideological sign leads us to a notion of ideology strongly linked to the evaluative dimension of every discursive act, but not just restricted to the evaluative connotation of utterances or to the valuation performed in each of these acts composing social life. To be precise, ideology has been conceptualized here as the particular tension, constitutive of each utterance, between the body of social values that the speaker shares with interlocutors, thus assuming them as unproblematic, and the specific contestable move that the speaker makes toward the interlocutors, thus opening a restricted portion of social reality to controversy and possible change. Therefore, the fact that this ideological dimension is present in every utterance does not imply that this notion of ideology loses the critical force involved in identifying false common assumptions, but situates this critical force as a matter of degree in every utterance.

#### **4. Discussion**

This interpretation of the Bakhtinian concepts of discourse and utterance show the ideological nature of language practices. This is not only because language practices consist of evaluative position-taking movements in a social field, but fundamentally because any utterance involves a social background that roots the evaluative positioning movement in a history of language practices common among speaking subjects. In other words, the ideological dimension of language is rooted in the common social life that is discursively assumed in a given utterance. How such a notion of the ideological nature of discourse can contribute to understanding the core problem of ideology research, that is, the relationship between social structure and individual subjectivity? On the one hand, in classic Marxist approaches the economic structure of society is said to determine the super-structure of words, styles, ideas, values, and norms; however, from a dialogical approach, the dominant account of this relationship, focused on material production without cultural creation, is far too mechanical. On the other hand,

in contemporary social psychological approaches, shared social attitudes sustaining the status quo are psychologically rooted in individual personality and cognitive style; but from a dialogical approach these explanations start from individual cognition without reaching the social dynamics of ideology. In contrast to both lines of theorization on ideology, Bakhtin's theory of culture and language practices offers a dialogical account of ideology, as essentially involved in discourse in terms of both the social structure assumed in each utterance and the personal difference put forward in each utterance. To illustrate the potential contribution of a dialogical theory of ideology, in what follows we briefly focus only on three specific issues important for contemporary research. 4.1 The assumed and the repressed

Ideology has to do with the evaluation involved in every utterance at the moment of the taking a position. Ideology is evaluating and defining the social order, determined by the unity of the field, in every single utterance. Taking a position is basically to shape the ideological content of the utterance. The evaluation and the evaluated object are one and the same in the utterance. However, the evaluation is not necessarily explicit. In fact, most of the time ideology or ideological positioning are produced when shaping the field. Thus, ideology is most of the time an assumption. As a consequence, every time someone is invited to take part in an activity, this person has to take a position, give an answer, which necessarily include the ideological component of it. The activity determines the conditions of interaction, and every participant is forced to accept or reject these conditions, which most of the time are assumed. The course of discourse is determined by the acceptance of ideological conditions allowing activities to carry on. Utterances unite subjects in an activity as participants who know, understand, and evaluate the activity in a shared way.

If the evaluation is thus part of the assumed, the criteria used for evaluating is not explicit but given for granted. The order shaped, the position taken in the utterance is not evident for an external observer. Ideologies are arbitrary evaluations of objects of the social world. The answer to a previous utterance most of the time accepts, reproduces, and recreates its assumptions, given for granted what can be otherwise problematized. Ideologies are produced and reproduced again and again in human activities, without being aware of it. And the reference to the 'real' makes ideologies a way of producing what was described in classical

terms as *false consciousness*, a distortion of the material conditions which reproduces this conditions in every-day life human activities. On the contrary, when asked about hidden evaluations, speakers typically engage in argumentation, disclosing the criteria used. In trying to make ideological positions explicit, speakers overtly define what has been presupposed in the course of their encounter. Usually speakers refer to shared social values and beliefs that enable them to justify their positioning movements on the basis of a background of understanding shared with addressees. In this kind of utterance, after being questioned about her assumptions, the speaker try to re-establish continuity with common assumptions, keeping them as unproblematic. In a different kind of utterances, though, the speaker may try to problematize that which has been assumed in the course of interaction. In these cases, speakers also try to make ideological positions explicit, overt to discussion. However, this is neither simply a matter of making explicit that which has been implicit, nor of putting tacit knowledge into verbal expressions. Whilst the concept of the implicit content, as that of implicature, refers only to the logical dimension of social assumptions, and the concept of tacit knowledge is employed to describe its cognitive dimension, the dialogical concept of the non-said outlined here refers to the real, material conditions of the utterance that remain unproblematic, to the social background making possible the taking of a new position within a shared field. We are not implying that most of socially shared reality is truly unproblematic; on the contrary, it is because the socio-historical background of any utterance is full of conflicts and thus potentially controversial (Billig 1996), that in each utterance the speaker needs to make the assumption that some points are not problematic in order to problematize other points, thus opening one possible controversy about common life. Therefore, in disclosing the assumed, speakers take a position of accepting or not the shared reality as a project for ongoing interaction.

The non-said that is assumed in an utterance is not just what has been not mentioned, forgotten or merely put aside for whichever reason – for instance, because it is implicitly contained in what has been said. The assumed is not said because it is not the focus of differentiation among speakers, because it remains – as it were – unproblematic for them. Even if some of the assumed is mentioned within the utterance, sometimes it is possible to argue that such is not the point of the utterance, that the positioning movement does not really open the assump-

tion to dispute. For example, taboo is what is forbidden to talk about; but even if talking (about) the taboo, the speakers might not be »touching« it, might not be problematizing it and thus opening the opportunity to changing it.

Billig's discussion of repression is insightful here (1999a). Problematic contents are avoided in the utterance precisely, according to this account, because they are conflicting in the context of the discursive activity. Billig compares repression, as described in clinical works of Freud, to a every-day phenomenon of discourse, namely, the change of topic. One way to understand this idea would imply that discourse is determined by the principle of pleasure: Conflicting contents would be taken away from discourse because they are annoying. However, we support another interpretation: The assumed is part of the non-said not just because of its conflicting content, but repressed from overt discourse because of its problematic potentialities or its inconvenience with respect to a dominant interest within the social situation. Thus, even if pleasure-seeking, socially problematic projects are hidden from open discussion. Conversely, in the case of ideology critique, distancing from shared assumptions might not be pleasure-seeking, but critically resisting to dominant interests. Indeed, uncovering the commonly assumed involves a change of topic, but neither in the sense of making explicit what was implicit, nor in the sense of changing the theme of discourse. In uncovering the assumed, an utterance brings something new – not necessarily desired – without moving to another theme but certainly changing the focus of discourse, because such critical utterance changes the orientation of the social situation. And this change is not semantic: The social situation is now thrown toward making difference out of the shared, making not shared anymore that which has been assumed to be shared.

To uncover the previously assumed is thus to make a social condition of existence problematic, in the sense of making it open to diversity of opinion, either actually or potentially. For instance, when suggesting that the common way to conceive an activity is not the only way to conceive it, by giving an alien experience or by showing the dependency of our common assumptions from dominant social interests. Nevertheless, even not opposing directly the dominant interests, ideology is fully at issue when describing the systemic or historical conditions supporting or reinforcing common projects, because such an utterance

opens itself to new and diverse perspectives that so far have been close for thinking, as the non-said of discourse. 4.2 Ideology from local interaction to global systems

Ideology research and ideology critique are typically focused on macro-social phenomena. One important implication of our discussion of ideology from a dialogical theory of the utterance, is that ideology can be analyzed also, and specially, at the level of single discursive acts within any language practice context. The problem of any micro-social approach, however, is how to account for stable social systems. We would like to suggest here that dialogical analyses of social structure are not only possible, but already sketched in many places in Bakhtin's work. Although having a merely analogical look, Bakhtin's ideological analyses in the relationships between artistic writing and forms of social power, seem to implement a general idea. At this point of our discussion, it is possible to argue that systemic formations in social relations, that is, the emergence of a social structure, depends on a simple but minimally organized set of principles or distinctions systematically and massively assumed by speakers in their interactions. Social systems would thus be rooted on daily utterances, specifically on the non-said of discourse.

If the field of activity is broad, then assumptions should be wider and more constant. For instance, in keeping an activity such as a nation going on, many participants should take positions regarding the same object permanently, silently accepting the assumed. A national state is then the permanent acceptance in speech of certain rules presented as assumptions of the every-day life of many people. If someone rejects a particular assumption, commonly receives a punishment derived from the same rules defining the activity (nation). Then, even in the act of rejecting an assumption this subject is under the more general assumptions of this activity. As a result, the activity (nation) remains stable across time. However, it is not possible to identify the criteria upon which the activity was founded. Its ideological content is again an assumption.

Similar processes may operate in position taking within different fields and with different assumptions. Depending on characteristics of each field, the assumed defines the social situation in the very event of the utterance. This event is different from the psychological moment or processes described in the mainstream theories in social psychology (see above, Introduction). Ideological attitudes are presented in these theories as psychological responses to internal motives or social



situations. From a dialogical concept of ideology, the social and the psychological are two sides of a single discursive activity. An utterance is a subjective response and the definition of the social field via ideological positioning/assuming. Social and psychological are not different things that may or may not be related to each other, but conceptual distinctions within one single act of discourse. In this way, a dialogical approach to discourse brings a conceptual protection against the psychological bias that has been identified in traditional social psychology, that departs from the theoretical idea that individuals have each an inner mind and interact with each other by means of their psychological competences of language representation.

Empirical research on ideology may take into account some implications of our discussion. Ideological attitudes are usually explored using conventional attitude scales to measure a certain level of an attitude, such as authoritarianism. Results are presented in terms of relations between variables; for instance, high levels of authoritarianism are associated to high levels of prejudice. From a dialogical approach to ideology it can be argued, to start with, that in responding a questionnaire participants are taking position, uttering. The method is valuable in order to provoke a response. However, interpretations of such a response need to be carefully done. At the moment of giving an answer, participants are defining the field in which the position is taken, and then the following answers might also be framed in the same field. In this case, the whole process of responding the questionnaire may be understood as a single utterance across answers. If so, relations between variables may be fictional distinctions within one single process of position taking. A single linguistic response to an item, for instance, is not necessarily a single utterance. To mention a different context: An act of discourse is not equivalent to a statement framed in an structured interview setting. Then, the simple description of association between variables would be problematic. In contrast, it is possible to understand those particular responses to items as partial movement tendencies within a wider discursive act. For instance, prejudice toward many different groups presented as one single element (Zick, et al 2008), describe one utterance composed by many micro-positioning unified by the assumed. The challenge is, therefore, to design research on the ideological nature of social life, aware of the assumed components of discourse, in which the social and the psychological is not artificially split. Moreover, following our discussion, ideolo-

gical attitudes as assessed in empirical research ought to be interpreted not as psychological possessions of individuals but as expressions of the socio-structural assumptions supporting representation and action on the part of individuals.

This does not mean that social structure is nothing more than the interplay between assumption and positioning in utterances, at the level of local social interaction. It means that ideology can also be studied at the level of local utterances, and not only at the level of standardized macro-social assumptions. Moreover, our discussion suggests that analysing the ideological dimension of discourse is not only one possibility among many others, but an important level of description because it is there, in single utterances, where ideology takes part in the processes of living discourse. Standardized macro-social assumptions can also be studied describing abstract systems of distinctions, but this account is of secondary importance from the point of view of a theory of language practices highlighting the living process of language rather than its dead forms. Systemic laws are indeed not reducible to what is at issue in singular utterances; but generalization and stabilization of assumptions in complex societies is not independent from the historical stratification of discourse within large groups of speakers and the differential organization of such groups, leading to abstract common assumptions at the level of societies as a whole, compared to more socially concrete assumptions in particular groups. Each single utterance, because of this, is a meeting point and a fighting arena among different voices coming from different groups, sharing abstract ideological social projects at the same time they generate novel perspectives on the basis of the tensions among voices. 4.3 A critical concept of language

Along this paper we have been suggesting that Bakhtin's dialogical theory of discourse and culture may contribute to address the notion of ideology from an interesting angle and that this may contribute to contemporary ideology research. However, it is also important to highlight that this may be so because Bakhtin offers a critical concept of language.

Discursive communication and thinking are not regarded as a superstructure through which the material unity of society or humanity is expressed in terms of a stable symbolic system. Such is the Stalinist view of language at the times of Bakhtin, in opposition to which he developed a dialogical approach to language practices. Discursive activity is, rather: a fundamental ingredient of human action, making possible both the creative spheres of culture and the productive systems,

and not just an instrument for economic production; a reality that is at the same time material and symbolic – it is real because it involves change or perpetuation of the form of life of speaking subjects, and it is meaningful because of its answerability; a moving reality, an ever changing process of position-taking moves by means of changes in language – whose mobility makes it impossible to understand language practices from the point of view of a stable code; and a diverse reality, an expression of the lack of unity of society – either in the form of the general emphasis on difference and singularity of the utterance and of the speaking subject, or in the form of the »centripetal forces« that push towards social unity by means of repressing voices that differ from hegemonic ideologies.

At this stage, only the last point deserves an additional comment. Bakhtin developed his dialogical approach to language practices in opposition to the totalitarian political and cultural project of Stalinism, specifically, the invention of a unitary and industrialized nation-state over the multiplicity of popular forms of life. According to Bakhtin, it is because discourse is essentially unfinalizable and contestable that there is neither first nor last word, and that human forms of life are characterized by polyphony. Any attempt to stabilize a hierarchy among voices and to set a unitary language and system of life is made against the nature of discursive activity, by means of homogenizing ideologies and of violence on creativity. In its struggle against political projects of unity, particularly nationalism, Bakhtin's critical theory of language highlights the subversive nature of the »centrifugal forces« (1981b) at work in language practices. Such »forces« are, for instance, popular cultures, where the importance of laughter and improper language goes in opposition to official and serious discourse genres of power; the grotesque, whose attention to body fragmentation goes in opposition to literary forms centered in the proportional and stable order of pure soul; and the novel, in opposition to monological discourse, because of the incorporation of popular forms in artistic writing and the polyphonic composition of social and subjective life (1984; 1993). Bakhtin's theory of language is critical in the sense that, in contrast to the notion of one stable language structure justifying the primacy of the shared or the consensual, enables us to conceptually guide opposition or resistance to authoritarian practices. This is why Bakhtin's concept of discourse offers a contribution to the problem of ideology.

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