

# Bakhtin and Wittgenstein on Dialogue as a Methodological Concept and Theme

Dorit Lemberger

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The concept of dialogue is a central element of Bakhtin's writings, whereas Wittgenstein's references to dialogue are generally in the negative vein. However, there does not seem to be another modern philosopher who has actually employed the dialogic method. But Wittgenstein's dialogic texts also include monologic aspects, such as sensation and private transition. Bakhtin, by contrast, sometimes blurs the boundaries between dialogue in language and dialogue as a criterion for literary value. The article shows how Wittgenstein helps clarify the role of the monological in Bakhtin's dialogic approach and how Bakhtin can facilitate a better understanding of the dialogicity in Wittgenstein.

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## Introduction

The increasing interest in Bakhtin's thought stems in part from the centrality of dialogue in his writings and from the ethical demand, explicit or implicit, associated with it. In the age of late postmodernism, whose main thinkers doubt the possibility of expressing an ethical demand, Bakhtin's thought is a refreshing and optimistic blast of fresh air, alongside Buber and Levinas.<sup>1</sup> Bakhtin is unique in his development of a linguistic and literary process that presents literature, and specifically the novel, as endowed with an ethical mission that can influence society and produce ideological and real change. But even though Bakhtin bases his theoretical discussions as a student of literature on the qualities of language, it is sometimes difficult to identify where he sees dialogue as stemming from an ethical choice and where he sees it as a function of the characteristics of language, which are neutral. In addition, there are also individual and monologic strands in Bakhtin, and they should be presented and studied vis-à-vis the dialogic characteristics.

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Dorit Lemberger is a senior lecturer at the Hermeneutics and Cultural Studies Programme, Bar Ilan University. She does research in Semantics, Psychoanalysis, literature and Pragmatics. Her current project is on the relationship between psychoanalytic thinkers, language and literature.

- 1 For a fascinating comparison of Bakhtin, Buber, and Levinas, see Eskin, Michael. *Ethics and Dialogue in the Works of Levinas, Bakhtin, Mandel'shtam and Celan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000. This article continues Eskin's work and adds Wittgenstein's important contribution to the topic.

For this purpose, the present discussion will draw on the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), who addressed the characteristics and various uses of language in great depth and breadth. The literature on Wittgenstein commonly distinguishes between his first book, the *Tractatus*, written as a series of cut-and-dried propositions, and the *Philosophical Investigations*, considered to be ‘dialogic.’<sup>2</sup> Although the *Investigations* is organised in sections, its discursive manner has many dialogic characteristics.<sup>3</sup> Still, Wittgenstein’s works also include discussions of monologic processes in language, such as the writing of a diary in a secret or private code (we will take this up later). These discussions offer claims both pro and con; even though the prevalent trend in Wittgenstein scholarship emphasises the impossibility of private use, he made a critical contribution to our understanding of monologic usages in language.

In addition, Wittgenstein’s books address many questions whose answers may be of use in discerning Bakhtin’s distinction between ‘ethical dialogicity’ and neutral dialogicity’: the former has a thematic and ontological character, whereas the latter is methodological and epistemological: it illuminates the mode in which language is used by clarifying the manner in which a person perceives the use of language in various contexts.

This article has two primary aims: The first is to use the works of Wittgenstein and Bakhtin to distinguish between the methodological and thematic characteristics of language, both monological and dialogical. The thematic characteristics belong to the essence of language, whereas the methodological characteristics pertain to the way in which language is performed and understood (that is, on the epistemological level). The second aim is thus to examine when the use of dialogicity represents an ethical choice and when it embodies the natural characteristics of language, with no causal link to the speaker’s intent and ethical decision.

The article has three sections. The first part addresses the differences between thematic and methodological dialogicity. The second and third parts look at two contexts in which a significant difference between dialogicity and monologicity in language can be observed: the discussion of the nature of a word and the nature of language; and the discussion of the individual and the ineffable.

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- 2 See, e.g., Heal, Jane, ‘Wittgenstein and Dialogue’, in Smiley, Timothy (ed.). *Philosophical Dialogues*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995; Savickey, Beth, *Wittgenstein’s Art of Investigation*. London: Routledge 1999.
  - 3 Wittgenstein addressed dialogue directly, primarily in a negative vein; his later writings are categorised throughout by dialogicity. For a broader discussion, see Lemberger, Dorit, ‘Dialogical Grammar: Variations of Dialogue in Wittgenstein’s Methodology’ in *Dialogic Pedagogy: An International Online Journal* 3 (2015): 158–174.

My assertion is that dialogicity alternates between the thematic and the methodological in the writings of both thinkers. Bakhtin contributes to the evaluation and critique of literary works, while Wittgenstein contributes to the evaluation and effective use of everyday language.<sup>4</sup> Hence a combined study of dialogicity in their writings can contribute to a broader understanding of the dialogic aspect of languages on its various levels.

## Thematic and Methodological Dialogicity

The original sense of the Greek word *dialogos* (*dia* = in and through; *logos* = language) already includes all that can be affected through language, both in monologue and in dialogue. Discourse in language can be performed by an individual alone, for example in the composition of a literary work, or in dialogue with another individual or group. Wittgenstein's and Bakhtin's common point of departure is that a dialogic process can be affected by an individual as well as by a group, because dialogicity means an encounter between points of view, states of consciousness, or separate consciousnesses. Such an encounter can occur inside one person's mind. On the other hand, people can speak to one another in a completely non-dialogical manner.

Monologicity and dialogicity can be expressed in thought, communication, or action. On this point we need to distinguish between the monologicity and dialogicity inherent to the language system itself and the monologicity and dialogicity that reflect a choice between multiple alternatives, and express a certain meaning. I will refer to the characteristics of language itself, without reference to a particular use, as 'methodological characteristics.' These characteristics are neutral because they can express various and contradictory meanings and do not impose any ethical decision. But the thematic use of dialogue or monologue to justify a particular ethical decision is also possible. This is how Wittgenstein demonstrates a key characteristic of dialogicity in language itself: 'When the answer cannot be put into words, neither can the question be put into words. The riddle does not exist. If a question can be framed at all, it is also possible to answer it' (Wittgenstein 1961, para. 6.5).

4 In the literature on Wittgenstein, much space has been dedicated to aesthetic judgment about works of literature and aesthetic judgment in general. In practice, though, Wittgenstein devoted relatively little space to the topic. Moreover, he emphasised the need to focus on understanding everyday language in his two main books. For example: 'In fact, all the propositions of our everyday language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order' (Wittgenstein 1961, para. 5.5563), and 'How is this sentence applied — that is, in our everyday language? For I got it from *there*, and nowhere else' (Wittgenstein 2009, para. 134. What was formerly called Part II of the book is now 'Philosophy of Psychology—a fragment' (PPF)). Thus, for our purposes, the distinction between dialogical and monological characteristics, the richest and most helpful discussions are located in his deliberations on everyday language.

The possibility of formulating a question also includes the possibility of formulating its answer. This fact does not depend on a particular context or some individual's choice, but rather belongs to the neutral methodological characteristics of language. It is worth noting that the subjects of a sentence are a question, a riddle, or an answer, and not a specific person or persons. So this dialogic characteristic of language is not dependent on a concrete performance but is inherent to language itself. Similarly, Bakhtin makes dialogicity a characteristic of a word and the formulation of discourse, independent of the person performing it or any context:

Every word is directed towards an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates. [...] Responsive understanding is a fundamental force, one that participates in the formulation of discourse, and it is moreover an *active* understanding, one that discourse senses as resistance or support enriching the discourse (Bakhtin 1981: 281; italics in original).

For Bakhtin, it is not a person who is the subject of the activity, but rather the word, understanding, or discourse that carries his propositions. Bakhtin, too, establishes a dependence between answer and question, even if his description is not neutral like Wittgenstein's but personified by adjectives like *responsive* and *active*. In another context, Bakhtin links the action of *answerability* with a person's self-constitution and makes the latter depend on the performance of the action: 'What guarantees the inner connection of the constituent elements of a person? Only the unity of answerability' (Bakhtin 1990:1).

Wittgenstein stated the interdependence between question and answer: if it is possible to ask a question, it is also possible to state its answer, and vice versa. Bakhtin continues this line of reasoning with his assertion that there is a dependent relationship among the component elements of the self, created by the unity of the response. This unity derives from the person's inner self and simultaneously asks and demands an answer. Bakhtin's shift from the dialogicity of language itself to the dialogicity that characterises a person's self-constitution led him to coin the term *dialogism* as part of his critique of the linguistics and literature of his time:

It is all the more remarkable that linguistics and the philosophy of discourse have been primarily oriented precisely toward this artificial, preconditioned status of the word, a word excised from dialogue and taken for the norm. [...] Dialogue is studied merely as a compositional form in the structuring of speech, but the internal dialogism of the word [...], the dialogism that penetrates its entire structure, all its semantic and expressive layers, is almost entirely ignored. But it is precisely this internal dialogism of the word, which does not assume any external compositional forms of dialogue, that cannot be isolated as an independent act, separate from the word's ability to form a concept of its object

[...], this internal dialogism that has such enormous power to shape style. The internal dialogism of the word finds expression in a series of peculiar features in semantics, syntax and stylistics that have remained up to the present time completely unstudied by linguistics and stylistics. (Bakhtin 1981: 279)

Bakhtin employs the term *dialogism* to critique the philological method and the study of discourse that examine a word in and of itself and ignore its innate dialogism. Dialogue, asserts Bakhtin, is inherent to a word and requires no external element to activate it. Bakhtin criticises the notion that dialogue is a mode of organisation rather than a feature of a word's essence. The fact that a word can generate a concept that refers to an object reflects that intrinsic dialogicity. Dialogicity permeates every element of the structure of the word and characterises its activity on all levels: semantics, grammar, and style. Bakhtin himself exemplifies thematic dialogicity: a word has a dialogic nature that is the source of its mode of use on the various levels of language.<sup>5</sup>

The problematic nature of Bakhtin's discussions of dialogicity is that dialogicity overpowers the point of view: language, literary criticism, and individual conduct are all examined in light of its functions. This is true even though we can find direct references in Bakhtin's writings to the monologic function of language and literature, (albeit only in the margins and sometimes even explicitly refuted). To sum up, Bakhtin's dialogicity rests on epistemological and thematic dialogicity, which is based on the assumption that meaning is constituted vis-à-vis some 'other,' whether abstract or concrete; but it also rests on a methodological dialogicity that includes the dialogical characteristics of language. To show where and how the monologic characteristics of language and thought merge, we will compare the nature of a word and language for Wittgenstein and Bakhtin.

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5 Bakhtin's view of dialogue as a natural component of language was expertly summarised by Pam Morris in a glossary of Bakhtin's writings: 'Dialogism is the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole-there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. Which will affect the other, how it will do so and in what degree is what is actually settled at the moment of utterance. This dialogic imperative, mandated by the pre-existence of the language world relative to any of its current inhabitants, ensures that there can be no actual monologue. One may, like a primitive tribe that knows only its own limits, be deluded into thinking there is one language, or one may, as grammarians, certain political figures and normative framers of "literary languages" do, seek in a sophisticated way to achieve a unitary language. In both cases the unitariness is relative to the overpower; using force of heteroglossia, and thus dialogism' (Morris, Pam, in Bakhtin, M. *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*. London: Hodder Arnold. p. 426.

## Monologicity and Dialogicity in Language Itself: The Nature of a Word and the Nature of Language

Both Wittgenstein and Bakhtin wrote about words and about language, and both men also addressed their monological and dialogical functions. But whereas Wittgenstein describes both functions in neutral terms, Bakhtin incorporates judgemental positions into his descriptions of the two (positive about dialogue and negative about monologue). The comparison between the two thinkers is especially interesting given their similarities, including their common assertion that language accompanies all human activities and can be understood only if one is familiar with the form of life in which it operates.<sup>6</sup> For example, in the following paragraph, which has become a milestone in the ‘linguistic turn,’ Wittgenstein describes the connections between language and all human activities:

But how many kinds of sentence are there? [...] There are *countless* kinds [...] And this diversity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten [...] The word ‘language-*game*’ is used here to emphasise the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life. Consider the variety of language-games in the following examples, and in others: [...] Describing an object by its appearance [...] Reporting an event [...] Making up a story; and reading one [...] Acting in a play, Singing rounds [...] Requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying. (Wittgenstein 2009, para. 23)

In this passage, Wittgenstein describes how language participates in all sorts of human activity and is therefore rich in modes of expression. Its nature is dialogical, since it permits the reflection and expression of an infinite variety of human needs: given the continuous interaction between language and action, it is impossible to distinguish between the linguistic aspects and those characteristics of the activity itself. The same manifest dialogicity is expressed in the following passage from Bakhtin:

The dialogic nature of consciousness, the dialogic nature of human life itself. The single adequate form for *verbally expressing* authentic human life is the *open-ended dialogue*. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium. (Bakhtin 1984: 292–293)

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6 Wittgenstein saw the ‘form of life’ in the world as a necessary condition for understanding language: ‘To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life’ (Wittgenstein 2009, para. 19).

Life by its very nature is dialogic. (Bakhtin 1981: 293)

Here Bakhtin, like Wittgenstein, emphasises the link between all human activities and linguistic performances, but there is a clear difference in their respective starting points. When Wittgenstein asks how many types of sentence there are, he begins from language itself, and his answer draws attention to the variety of human activities. Bakhtin's point of departure is essentialist: human consciousness is dialogical by nature, so dialogue is the linguistic mode best suited to it. In his list of human activities, Wittgenstein enumerates several that can be done and hence involve monologue, such as prayer or writing poetry (which may also involve the coining of new words). Bakhtin, though, emphasises that dialogue is the essence of life; it is only through dialogue that individuals can bring their lives to physical and practical fruition. In practice, Bakhtin leaves no room for activities that do not involve dialogue with some 'other,' and harshly criticises the use of 'pure' monologue in language, as seen in the following passage:

Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities. [...]. With a monologic approach [...] *another person* remains wholly and merely an *object* of consciousness, and not another consciousness. No response is expected from it that could change everything in the world of my consciousness. [...] Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the *ultimate word*. It closes down the represented world and represented person. (Bakhtin 1981: 292–293)

In this paragraph, Bakhtin enumerates several arguments against monologue in its pure form: (1) The ethical consideration: monologicity denies the existence of another consciousness with rights and responsibilities on a par with those of the monologic consciousness. (2) Radical monologicity prevents any change in consciousness because the other becomes an object and the entire world is reified. (3) Monologicity does not support a rich understanding of the representation of a person and world.

This contrast between the two thinkers allows me to illuminate the purpose of this article: Bakhtin combines the methodological and thematic aspects in his discussion of monologue, thereby avoiding the distinction between the dialogical aspects of language itself (which are neutral and methodological) and the dialogical aspects of human consciousness. It is important to stress that we cannot modify the characteristics of language but can choose whether to perform dialogue or monologue. Bakhtin's obscuring of the boundary between neutral aspects of language and human choice, which has an ethical significance because it is a choice between multiple alternatives, turns the ethical decision into an obligation instead of a choice. This blurring is evident again when Bakhtin describes the dialogic essence of the word:

The word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; The word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object. A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way. (Bakhtin 1981: 279)

According to Bakhtin here, a word is formed and shaped in a dialogical process; hence it operates in a dialogical manner when it conceptualises an object. This is how a word behaves in any living dialogue acts.<sup>7</sup> Bakhtin intensifies this assertion when he describes the speech process and claims that, in a certain way, the meaning of a statement is determined by the response, because the meaning is created by the act of understanding (Bakhtin 1981: 279). Bakhtin also recognises the existence of the word itself, although he does not allow the possibility that a word can function independently, even when it is accompanied by an intuition that reflects a certain intent.<sup>8</sup> The comparison to Wittgenstein is very interesting, because Wittgenstein, too, asserts that language functions only when it is understood and unambiguously defines the interdependence between language and comprehension:

A sentence is in a sense dead until it is understood. Before it is understood it is ink on paper. One might say it has meaning only for an understanding being. If there were no one to understand the signs we could not call the signs language. (Wittgenstein 1982: 43)

There is an interdependence between understanding language and the constitution of its meaning. However, this interdependence also exists within an individual's own mind, where it is impossible to distinguish between thought and language: 'That pure *thought* is conveyed by words and is something different from the words is a *superstition*' (Wittgenstein 1982: 54).

Moreover, even when we examine intent, which appears to be a mode of consciousness separate from language, we see that it is impossible to separate the intention from the language: 'It is only in a language that I can mean something by something' (Wittgenstein 2009, para. 35).

7 'The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation in any living dialogue' (Bakhtin 1981: 280).

8 'We select the word because of its meaning, which is not in itself expressive, but which can accommodate or not accommodate our expressive goals in combination with other words, that is, in combination with the whole of our utterance. The neutral meaning of the word applied to a particular actual reality under particular real conditions of speech communication creates a spark of expression' (Bakhtin 1986: 86).

Wittgenstein's and Bakhtin's ideas start to conflict when the former focuses on a person's individual choice of a particular use among several possible uses. He asserts that it is impossible to isolate and examine *the internal locus* of the transition from a person's inner world to verbal performance that can be understood with the help of some rule: 'I could not apply any rules to a *private* transition from what is seen to words' (Wittgenstein 2009, para. 35).

This statement illuminates once again Wittgenstein's remarks about the interdependence of thought, understanding, and language. Evidently Wittgenstein differentiates between the methodological impossibility of distinguishing language from mental consciousness, on the one hand, and the recognition that some internal processes that may be monologic, like the internal transition from a rule to a word, on the other hand. Moreover, even when rule is applied, interpretation does not determine meaning but hangs in the air, as it were, waiting for the speaker's possible, but not necessary, resolution thereof.<sup>9</sup> Thus meaning can be private or monologic, although it is usually public and dialogical, as Saul Kripke made so clear (Kripke 1982). Language also includes private and individual elements that cannot be formulated dialogically, as when someone proves unable to express his or her feelings: 'Sometimes there is an amorphous feeling which cannot be translated into a sentence.' (Wittgenstein 1982: 54)

An important question arises here: given that both Wittgenstein and Bakhtin described the correspondence between the various functions of language and the variety of human activities, what is it that sometimes obstructs the use of language? Wittgenstein's answer is that the connection between the rules of grammar, on the one hand, and the real world and use, on the other hand, is contingent and not causal, inasmuch as grammar is autonomous:

Grammar is not accountable to any reality. (Wittgenstein 1974: 184)

We cannot say of a grammatical rule that it conforms to or contradicts a fact.  
The rules of grammar are independent of the facts we describe in our language.  
(Wittgenstein 1982: 65)

The rules of grammar do not function in accordance with any particular reality, and thus cannot contradict it either. The independence of grammatical rules also releases them from values that turn into ethical criteria, such as dialogicity versus monologicity. Here Wittgenstein clearly distinguishes language itself, which does not depend on human resolution, from specific expressions in language, which we can

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9 'Every interpretation hangs in the air together with what it interprets and cannot give it any support. Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning' (Wittgenstein 2009, para. 198).

evaluate as desirable or appropriate for performing a particular activity.

Another aspect of the independence of language, according to Wittgenstein, is found in his discussion of the meaning of a word per se. In contrast with Bakhtin's description of the word as born in a dialogic manner and necessarily functioning as such, Wittgenstein illuminates its unique characteristics, with the focus on its physicality, and coins the term *meaning-body*. This passage is ambiguous, because Wittgenstein holds that the meaning-body contains meaning as a fact, but also sees it as a problematic metaphor:

One would like to speak of the function of a word in this sentence. As if the sentence were a mechanism in which the word had a particular function. But what does this function consist in? How does it come to light? For there isn't anything hidden—don't we see the whole sentence? The function must come out in operating with the word. (Meaning-body.) (Wittgenstein 2009, para. 559)

Wittgenstein distinguishes the word itself from the ways of using it. A word is understood on the basis of the link between it and its meaning-body. Wittgenstein offers several modes of understanding, including understanding the use, simultaneous perception, or a picture of meaning that dictates a certain use. He emphasises that we are aware of the different options of use and that each mode of understanding reflects one of many possibilities. Perception of a rule or of a body-meaning cannot dictate a use; instead, there is a choice between different uses of a word. In addition, a particular picture can be incorrect. For example, Wittgenstein criticises the use of a concept that he himself coined: body-meaning. He compares the picture drawn in our minds when we employ the term to the picture that our thoughts occur in a particular place, like the head, because this is how we have been taught to think.<sup>10</sup>

What does Wittgenstein mean by the term *meaning-body*? He states that any word can have several meanings that appear to inhere in it, in the body of the word. For example, it is possible to distinguish immediately between different uses of the word *is*:

What does it mean to say that the 'is' in 'The rose is red' has a different meaning from the 'is' in 'twice two is four'? Here we have one word but as it were different meaning-bodies with a single end surface: different possibilities

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10 'Isn't the inclination to think of a meaning-body like the inclination to think of a seat of thought? - Must everyone be inclined to say he thinks in his head? This expression is taught him as a child. [...] The inclination is then present. And so is the inclination to speak of a meaning-body (or the like) however it arose' (Wittgenstein 1980, vol. I, para. 349).

of constructing sentences. The comparison of the glass cubes. The rule for the arrangement of the red sides contains the possibilities, i.e. the geometry of the cube. The cube can also serve as a notation for the rule if it belongs to a system of propositions. (Wittgenstein 1974:7)

It is interesting to see that Bakhtin also focused on the physical and aural function of the word itself.<sup>11</sup> In the following passage, he describes this function as contrary to the general nature of the word, because it has an unambiguous element:

The whole of which is *yet-to-be* in respect of its meaning and justification – *like a word that seeks to become totally determined within a sentence we have not yet finished saying and thinking*. [...] So long as the word remained unsaid, it was possible to believe and to hope, for one could still look forward to the compelling fullness of meaning. But when the word *is* pronounced, it is completely *here* in all its ontically obstinate concreteness – *all* of it is here, and there is nothing else. The word that *has* been pronounced sounds hopeless in its already-pronouncedness; the uttered word is an embodiment of meaning in mortal flesh. (Bakhtin 1990: 133)

Bakhtin personifies the word and suggests that it is 'disappointed' when uttered, because the aural concreteness dictates that it have a particular meaning. The difference between Bakhtin's description and Wittgenstein's description is clear. Although both see the physical aspect of the word as dictating a particular meaning, Wittgenstein refers to this as a neutral aspect of the function of language, whereas for Bakhtin it is a disappointment. This difference is emphasised in Wittgenstein's description of the word as a face and of the sentence as a group picture:

While any word – one would like to say – may have a different character in different contexts, all the same there is one character – a face – that it always has. It looks at us. – For one might actually think that each word was a little face; the written sign might be a face. And one might also imagine that the whole proposition was a kind of group-picture, so that the gaze of the faces all together produced a relationship among them and so the whole made a significant group. (Wittgenstein 1980, para. 322)

Wittgenstein personifies the word differently than Bakhtin does. Before the word acts it has a face with a particular character; but this does not contradict the fact that the word can be interpreted in different ways in different contexts.<sup>12</sup> Here, Wittgenstein is extracting the essence: a word, *qua* language, has certain characteristics that precede

11 See the detailed list of physical images in Eskin 2000, p. 94 n. 49.

12 'Though one would like to say – every word can have a different character in different contexts, at the same time there is a single character it always has – a face. It looks at us, after all' (Wittgenstein 2009, para. 38).

its use. Wittgenstein mentions this characteristic of the word again in his discussion of ‘experiencing a meaning of a word.’<sup>13</sup> The face of the word participates in the constitution of the reader’s experience of meaning when the word observes him. The face has a fixed aspect as well as an aspect that changes depending on context. Ignoring the fixed aspect is what Wittgenstein calls ‘aspect blindness.’ In other words, it is a technical use of language that quite misses its richness.

We can take the ambiguity in Wittgenstein’s discussion of the word as an example of the monologic function versus the dialogic function: when it is the face of the word that dictates meaning, its function is monologic. But when the body of the word combines with its meaning in a particular context and is understood in that context, the function is dialogic. Monologicity and dialogicity stem from the characteristics of language: The faces of words exemplify the monologic function (we will examine additional monologic functions of language below); the ability of language to accompany activities in the form of life is the dialogic function. At this point, the question arises of the nature of the link between the monologic characteristics of language and its dialogic mode of functioning.

As a part of his critique of contemporary linguistics, Bakhtin homed in on the dual levels of the language act – both individual and public – but rejected the possibility of the monologic function on the public level:

All the diverse areas of human activities involve the use of language. Quite understandably, the nature and forms of this use are just as diverse as are the areas of human activity. This, of course, in no way disaffirms the national unity of language. Language is realized in the form of individual concrete utterances (oral and written) by participants in the various areas of human activity. These utterances reflect the specific conditions and goals of each such area [...] through [...] thematic content, style and compositional structure [...] inseparably linked to the *whole* of the utterance and are equally determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication. Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types* of these utterances. These we may call *speech genres*. (Bakhtin 1986: 60)

Again, Bakhtin’s starting point is human activity, not language. However, he proposes a reform of the linguistics that focused on the differences between types of speech.

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13 ‘Aspect-blindness will be *akin* to the lack of a “musical ear”. The importance of this concept lies in the connection between the concepts of seeing an aspect and of experiencing the meaning of a word. For we want to ask, “What would someone be missing if he did not *experience* the meaning of a word?”’ (Wittgenstein 2009, para. 260–261).

He instead proposes studying the shared linguistic basis of types of utterances. Bakhtin proposes an emphasis on the unitary nature of language, which is a common denominator of all speech, thereby becoming the main spokesperson of the linguistic turn that began with Frege and Wittgenstein. Bakhtin enumerates several features of the unitary nature of language: the individual character of each utterance; the organic connection between style and genre; and, finally, the nature of a genre as a reflection of the history of a society and language. Here it is important to point out that Bakhtin refers to the individual creator of the utterance but also emphasises that thematic content, style, and compositional structure cannot be created individually. Where and how, then, can individual elements be located?

## The Individual and the Ineffable

Bakhtin's view of individuality links with and even stems from the identification of the neutrality of a word and, later, with the dictionary meaning of words as well. This distinction is very important, because neutrality is not a characteristic of a dialogic process:

Neutral dictionary meanings of the words of a language ensure their common features and guarantee that all speakers of a given language will understand one another, but the use of words in live speech communication is always individual and contextual in nature. Therefore, one can say that any word exists for the speaker in three aspects: as a neutral word of a language, belonging to nobody; as an other's word, which belongs to another person and is filled with echoes of the other's utterance; and, finally, as my word. (Bakhtin 1986: 88)

According to Bakhtin, a word can indeed function in a neutral and individual (i.e., belonging to a particular speaker) manner, but also as some 'other's' word. There seems to be no way to escape the ambiguity here: on the one hand, Bakhtin is aware of individual characteristics, but insists that they can be identified only as part of a dialogue. This provokes three questions: Is it essential for every subject to express his or her individual characteristics only through dialogue? Is there content that cannot be expressed in words and thus remains trapped within the individual subject? How can we explain states of consciousness that prevent a particular speaker from using general language?

In the Classical Age, Bakhtin claims, every expression of internal life took place through an external utterance: this is the true nature of man (Bakhtin 1981: 134). He asserts unequivocally that 'there is no mute or invisible core to the individual himself: he is entirely visible and audible, all on the surface' (Bakhtin 1981: 135–136).

Bakhtin further asserts that it was only later that human beings began to feel a connection with the mute and unseen (mystical) spheres; their disengagement from

the real warped their character. According to Bakhtin, the imperative link between the individual and the real chronotope severely limits the possibility of tracing the course of monologic individuality. Is such a connection a theme that overpowers the methodological possibility of observing individual and monologic characteristics?

In these two areas Wittgenstein holds a position antithetical to Bakhtin's. At the end of the *Tractatus* he insists that the mystical and ineffable exists: 'There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest' (Wittgenstein 1961, para. 6.522). In addition, a person can speak to himself and even perform various linguistic acts in a monologic manner. What is more, sense impressions are personal, so there can sometimes be a contradiction between the conventional and public use of a word that identifies a sensation and a personal use thereof.<sup>14</sup> For example, the word 'red' may denote different sense impressions.<sup>15</sup>

Wittgenstein (2009, para. 305, 308) emphasises that language functions in many different ways; he even defines the paradox created by this multitude of possibilities. He sets no limit on the variety of language acts and proposes evading the paradox by accepting the fact that language functions in various and diverse ways (*ibid.*, para. 304) and proposes to hold this conscious knowledge, while at the same time choose a particular use in a concrete context, so that an utterance will have meaning (*ibid.*, para. 99). Sometimes, though, an individual may be prevented from making a particular use of language, and this inability demonstrates the need to distinguish individual characteristics:

Can there be a clash between picture and application? Well, they can clash in so far as the picture makes us expect a different use; because people in general apply *this* picture like *this*. (Wittgenstein 2009, para. 141)

Sometimes, a particular picture of consciousness establishes an inhibition that does not allow a person to use language. The concept of picture, for Wittgenstein,

14 Donald Davidson first formulated the term 'first person authority' in an organised way, based on Wittgenstein. See: Davidson, Donald. 'First person authority', in Donald Davidson, *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001: 3-13. Gareth Evans, based on Wittgenstein, formulated expressions such as 'immunity to error through misidentification.' See: Evans, Gareth. *The Varieties of Reference*, ed. John McDowell. New York: Oxford University Press 1982.

15 'The essential thing about private experience is really not that each person possesses his own specimen, but that nobody knows whether other people also have *this* or something else. The assumption would thus be possible – though unverifiable that one section of mankind had one visual impression of red, and another section another' (Wittgenstein 2009, para. 272).

is very rich.<sup>16</sup> I would propose that the concept of picture can also be applied to an unconscious picture that stems from organic characteristics (as in communication disorders), trauma, or transient emotional difficulties. These are three individual factors that may be linked to an external event but nevertheless occur internally, mute and invisible. If the speaker is unable to create a bridge between his inner experience and the use of language, there will be a clash, and he will not be able to express himself. However, if a bond between the inner experience and the use of language is created, what will emerge, as Bakhtin asserts, is a text: 'The event of the life of the text, that is, its true essence, always develops on the boundary between two consciousnesses, two subjects.' (Bakhtin 1986: 106)

Here Bakhtin is aware of the complexity of the use of language, which includes a conscious-individual and monologic aspect alongside the actual use, which is dialogic. Bakhtin employs the term *limit* in a very similar way to Wittgenstein: 'The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world.' (Wittgenstein 1961, para. 5.632)

If so, Bakhtin and Wittgenstein agree that the limit of the world is the location of the subject and where meaning is constituted. The distinction between subjects is maintained and not erased through the constitution of meaning, because if there is no individual subject there cannot be an encounter between two subjects. So the subject precedes the dialogue and is not only a function of social belligerence. Bakhtin even emphasises and amplifies the role of individuality in the first stage of the creation of a text:

Any truly creative text is always to some extent a free revelation of the personality, not predetermined by empirical necessity. Therefore, it [...] admits neither of causal explanation nor of scientific prediction.<sup>17</sup>

Textual creativity is thus an embodiment of individuality that cannot be empirically predicted or explained afterwards. It does not need dialogue in order to appear. Why, then, is Bakhtin (1986: 269) so fiercely critical of monologue, which would appear to

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16 For an overarching discussion of the concept of 'picture' in Wittgenstein's writings, see Egan, David. Pictures in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy, *Philosophical Investigations* 34, no. 1 (2011): 55–76.

17 As Michael Holquist (1990: 56) expertly summarised it: 'Bakhtin [...] conceives monologue as not only secondary in importance to dialogue, but as having a different ontological status. Dialogue is real, monologue is not; at worst, monologue is an illusion, as when it is uncritically taken for granted. Or at best, monologue is a logical construct necessary to understand the working of dialogue, [...] But the monologic utterance is, after all, already an abstraction....Any monologic utterance...is an inseparable element of verbal communication.'

be the actual expression of precisely that individual creativity?

In this article, 'Discourse in the Novel', Bakhtin criticises the philosophy of language, linguistics, and stylistics for their focus on a simple and unmediated relationship of the speaker 'to his unitary and singular 'own' language' (ibid.). The result of this focus is 'realization of this language in the monologic utterance of the individual' (ibid.). He criticises this focus because it activates forces that 'serve to unify and centralise the verbal-ideological world' (1986: 270).

His criticism is understandable if we examine it from an ethical point of view based on the importance of heteroglossia and dialogism as ethical values. As we have seen, Bakhtin in practice admits that the use of language has monologic characteristics; even if he believes that scholarship must not deal with them, they exist nevertheless. Nor does this negate the importance of understanding the function of the monologic characteristics, both in themselves (so as to understand an individual subject) and in order to enhance understanding of dialogism with the aid of the comparative method.

## **Conclusion**

This article has examined Bakhtin's and Wittgenstein's positions on the dialogic and monologic characteristics of language and has shown that it is possible to distinguish a methodology that examines these characteristics as ideas with a cultural-ethical basis from a neutral methodology. Bakhtin begins from a cultural and ethical critique, and later considers the dialogic characteristics of language. He is very much aware of the existence of the monologic aspects, but sometimes rejects their existence (as in the case of the ineffable), sometimes minimises their importance, and sometimes presents them as a contrast or point of departure for the ideal form of discourse. On the other hand, Wittgenstein presents the monologic aspects as options, sometimes neutral and sometimes indicative of a problem (as in a clash between states of consciousness); but he does not mix ethical judgement into his descriptions. Hence the comparison between the philosophers makes it possible to illuminate the Bakhtinian method in a way that supports a distinction between the thematic and the methodological in his important insights.

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