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# The Theories of Ferdinand de Saussure, Mikhail Bakhtin and Émile Benveniste: Potential Relations and Epistemological Legacies. Editorial

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**The Theories of Ferdinand de Saussure, Mikhail Bakhtin and Émile Benveniste: Potential Relations and Epistemological Legacies / *As teorias de Ferdinand de Saussure, Mikhail Bakhtin e Émile Benveniste: relações possíveis e heranças epistemológicas***

The reader will certainly notice a certain ambiguity in the title above, which summarizes the thematic proposal of this issue of *Bakhtiniana*. Is it necessarily a matter of coming up with relations between the three above-mentioned thinkers? Or is it possible to prioritize only one dyad? In the set of works that we present below, as we shall see, it is possible to find both interpretations. And we have purposely preserved the ambiguity, because our expectation – which was fortunately fulfilled – was that it would lead to a call for interpretation to our collaborators. We believed that the maintenance of this interpretative space would lead to the production of articles that would subsidize a reflective plurality around the concepts of “potential relations” and “epistemological legacies,” which actually happened. Let us spend a few moments discussing each one.

The concept of “potential relations,” when applied to systems of thought, can undoubtedly be a source of improprieties that verge on a sense of misunderstanding in theoretical and methodological terms. There is no shortage of works in which we can find, among theories, the affirmation of relations that have no epistemological support. This is a fact. But this same idea can be a driving force for the exploration of other ways of thinking. In other words, counterpoint readings can lead to the emergence of something new; and it is beneficial that a given field of knowledge makes room for the new to emerge. We invested in this second interpretation of “potential relations;” and we were successful.

Further on, the reader will find works that appropriately – and why not say creatively – explored points of contact between Saussure, Bakhtin and Benveniste to promote a gesture of innovation in language studies and solve problems other than those originally thought of by our authors. Now, what other way would we have to extend knowledge in a field that reflects on human language? What other mechanism would be

available to help us move away from mere repetition and head towards building something new?

The establishment of “potential relations” necessarily leads to evoking the past of the theories, that which has been widely shared. In this regard, it is worth bringing up the beautiful book *For What Tomorrow: A Dialogue* (2004),<sup>1</sup> which depicts a long dialogue between the psychoanalyst Elizabeth Roudinesco and the philosopher Jacques Derrida, in which, right in the very first chapter, we see the psychoanalyst defending, with regard to what she calls “sterile ostracism” (the recurrent attitude of simply rejecting the thinkers of the 1970s, marked by the structuralist conjuncture), that the important thing is to *choose one’s own legacy*, without having to consequently accept or reject everything, or *make a clean slate*. The psychoanalyst has a point.

In a way, reading and rereading theories, and consequently establishing possible dialogues between them – whether they are critical, unfavorable, favorable, whatever – is a way of keeping them alive, of making them speak, of preserving them as the retrospective basis for a consequential prospection.

The concept of “epistemological legacies” is configured, based on this approach, in the effect provided by the assumption of “possible relations.” This is supported by a courageous attitude by Henri Meschonnic who, regarding the Humboldt-Saussure-Benveniste relation, considers that “a thought from Humboldt can be recognized where an affiliation is not expressly claimed” (Meschonnic, 1995, p. 16; our translation).<sup>2</sup>

This attitude is certainly quite intriguing, as it provides the opportunity to propose relations between authors not only by the explicit content of their texts, but also by the fact that they address similar issues, of the same epistemological order. The works that make up this issue of *Bakhtiniana* explore exactly this aspect and show that an author can be aligned with another without necessarily needing a direct citation and without this implying a systematization of differences.

The *Journal* begins with two articles that emphasize the interpretative perspective that relates Saussure, Bakhtin, and Benveniste. Patrícia da Silva Valério’s work (UPF/RS)

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<sup>1</sup> DERRIDA, Jacques; ROUDINESCO, Elisabeth. *For What Tomorrow: A Dialogue*. Cultural Memory in the Present. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> In the original: “une pensée Humboldt peut se reconnaître là où une filiation n’est pas expressément revendiquée.”

– “Saussure, Bakhtin and Benveniste: The Legacy of Three Pillars in Language Teaching and Thought” proposes a truly original approach: it seeks to connect the authors using the classroom approach. All three were teachers and, from this point of view, they shared the 20th century, leaving a significant impact on the field of linguistic thought, whose legacy continues to influence debates. The article examines the authors’ biographies, highlighting both what brings them together and what sets them apart in terms of the teaching practice. In turn, the work by Marlete Sandra Diedrich, Gabriela Golembieski, and Marina de Oliveira (UPF/IHCEC/RS) – “Contributions of Ferdinand de Saussure, Mikhail Bakhtin and Émile Benveniste to Language Acquisition Studies in Brazil” invests in the same understanding of “potential relations,” involving the three thinkers in an unprecedented debate regarding language acquisition, a topic not directly developed by them. The article presents a summary table, with emphasis on Brazilian linguistics, focused on the acquisition-based studies that were influenced by the three authors: based on Saussurean assumptions, social-interactionist studies; from the Bakhtinian perspective, the dialogic-discursive approach; and from Benveniste’s outlook, the enunciative perspective.

Saussure-Bakhtin relations are addressed in two other works. In “Bakhtin and Linguistics: A Dialogue Settled in the Beginning of the 20’s,” the authors (GP Linguagem, Identidade e Memória [Research Group Language, Identity, and Memory] – PUC/SP, UFSCar, UFRJ, Universidade Paris VIII, UFBA, UFAC, UFAL, UENP) explore the reference to Saussure in Bakhtin’s work from three perspectives: based on Saussure’s presence in the Circle’s writings; from Bakhtin’s dialogue with science in the unity of culture; and from the dialogue with linguistic science, especially with the Geneva School in “The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art.”<sup>3</sup> The text is built on the concept of “scientific-philosophical counterpoint,” a theoretical move considered necessary for the constitution of Bakhtin’s dialogical theory, a concept that constitutes a true category of epistemological analysis whose effects can be extended to the study of other theoretical relations, among authors other than those discussed here. Then, in “How

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<sup>3</sup> BAKHTIN, M. Supplement: The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art. In: *Art and Answerability. Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Translated by Keneth Brostrom (notes by Michael Holquist, including material from the editor of the Russian edition, S. G. Bocharov). Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990, pp. 257-325.

Much Saussure Is There in Bakhtin's work? A Study Based on a Comment on the Translation of Rabelais into Russian," Valdir do Nascimento Flores (UFRGS) also turns to Saussure-Bakhtin to address a possible aspect of this relation, based on Henri Meschonnic's commentary on the translation of Bakhtin's work on François Rabelais into Russian, cited by Meschonnic in the context of an anti-structuralist reading of Saussure. The article concludes by discussing the relevance of addressing metalinguistic comments – such as comments on translations – which can be the focus of an enunciative-anthropological theorizing process.

The last two articles examine the relations – of affiliation, influence, opposition, etc. – between Saussure and Benveniste. The article by Sara Luiza Hoff (UFRGS) and Gabriela Barboza (FURG) – “Languages, Language, and Linguists: The Study of the Diversity of Languages According to Saussure and Benveniste” addresses aspects related to the treatment given to languages by both linguists. Selected works by the authors are examined, seeking to discuss, based on evidence, the role they grant to languages in their theorizing processes. The study points to the protagonism of language diversity as one of the points of convergence between the two linguists. The article by Eduardo Alves Rodrigues (UNICAMP) and Cármen Agustini (UFU), “Benveniste-Saussure: A Never-Ending Affiliation Relationship,” discusses the concept of affiliation in the theoretical-methodological framework of the Discourse Analysis, from which they analyze relations between Benveniste's and Saussure's thoughts. The analysis indicates that such an affiliation relationship can be seen as a dialogue, in which both a movement of approximation and displacement/detachment from the Benvenistian thought to the Saussurean thought can be noticed.

This issue of the Journal also includes two works of a different nature from the others. First, an interview with Professor Eduardo Guimarães, a well-known Brazilian linguist with significant institutional activity both in Brazil and abroad, and author of countless publications that have consolidated several studies in the field of Brazilian linguistics. This interview, carried out by Verli Petri (UFES) and Heitor Pereira Lima (PUC-Minas), documents an important journey; its publication is therefore timely. Finally, we have also included a review by Alena Ciulla (UFRGS) of the book *Saussure*

*e a Escola de Genebra* [Saussure and the Geneva School],<sup>4</sup> recently organized and published by Valdir do Nascimento Flores and Gabriel de Ávila Othéro. This is a collection of articles (one written by the organizers themselves and eight others translated from French to Portuguese) that provides an insight into the life and work of linguists who succeeded Saussure in his linguistic program – linguists belonging to the “Geneva School,” Albert Sechehaye in particular, but also Charles Bally and Henri Frei. As is well known, the “Geneva School” is repeatedly evoked by Bakhtin in some of his works. It is therefore a good idea to publish a review that helps to spread the material contained in the book.

As the reader will easily notice, this *Bakhtinian* edition brings together a set of important studies aimed at improving the background of Brazilian linguists and consolidating analytical perspectives and theoretical approaches. This alone makes it welcome among us. But there is more: it gives voice to the dialogue between different perspectives for understanding human language; this is beneficial and necessary in today's reality, which sees so much resistance to peaceful and fruitful debates.

A final acknowledgment goes out to the Journal's Editorial team: their confidence and competence, combined with their kindness and a true collaborative spirit, made this work a pleasure for all involved. With them, we thank the invaluable support, assistance and recognition from PUC-SP, through the *Plano de Incentivo à Pesquisa (PIPEq)/ publicação de periódicos em 2024 (PubPer-PUC-SP) – 2º semestre de 2023 EDITAL PIPEq 11956/2023, Solicitação 29157* [Incentive Research Plan (PIPEq)/ Academic Journal Publication (PubPer-PUCSP) – 2nd Semester of 2023 NOTICE PIPEq 11956/2023, Request 29157] and CNPq/CAPES, call CNPq/CAPES No. 30/2023 *Programa Editorial (Versão Republicada)* [Editorial Programa (Reprint Version)].

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<sup>4</sup> FLORES, Valdir do Nascimento; OTHERO, Gabriel (eds.). *Saussure e a Escola de Genebra*. São Paulo: Contexto, 2023. 208p.

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