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BAKHTIN, MARXISM AND SOCIOLOGIC METHOD ON LINGUISTICS

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ABSTRACT

Bakhtin is considered principally as a Formalist in the eye of critics and literary practitioners. However, through close diagnosis, Bakhtin stretches, in many cases, the study of language to the socio-economic and class based and its ideological nature. This essay, with a rather new trend in studying Bakhtin, is the pointed translation of Bakhtin's *Le Marxisme et la philosophie de langage* (1929)- translated as Marxism and philosophy of language- and translated into French in 1977, in which Bakhtin has lucidly expatiated about the socio-economic and ideological conditions and their explicit effect on language in which sense, he can be called a Marxist. This is an essay of application of sociologic method on linguistics. For further development of the discussion, the parts which are found suitable for argumentation, are analyzed and explicated in the light of principle expositors of Marxism such as Terry Eagleton, Raymond Williams and Louis Althusser to find out how close Bakhtin has manifested and shared with them. In addition, the rule of class conflicts, semiotics system of language underpinned by the clashes and the necessity of Marxist philosophy as well as ideology in intuitive philosophy of language are investigated and elaborated in how sociologic methods effect the very module of linguistics. It is further suggested that Bakhtin ought not be confined merely as a Formalist though a more disseminated Marxist critic of language and linguistics.

Keywords: Bakhtin, Marxism, Ideology, Class Conflicts, Philosophy of Language, Sociologic, Linguistics

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. MARXISM AND PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

In the light of my recent researches on linguistics from Saussure to Derridean trends, I have come up with some questions regarding Bakhtin's Marxist's ideas about linguistics. Bakhtin is mostly known as a Formalist who is concerned with the language and its nature. However, among his ideas about language from which some of the most elements are polyphonic, carnivalesque and dialogic nature of language, it is easy to find some Marxists' ideas of him in his texts especially in *The Object, Tasks, and Methods of Literary History* in which he points out to the ideological life of language which is a radical Marxist term. He states that "*literary history is concerned with the concrete life of literary work in the unity of generating literary environment, the literary environment in the generating ideological environment, and the latter, finally, in the generating socio-economic environment which permeates it*".

Bakhtin believes that social context equates with ideology i.e. society is under the direct influence of a superior ideology in which using the term ideological society is quite right and true. In the same essay, in some other parts, he explains that "*the individuality of a system (more precisely an environment) is based exclusively on the interaction of the system as a whole and in each of its elements with all the other systems in the unity of social life*". It is incontrovertibly, by no other means, referring by 'system' to the society and by 'the system as a whole', a society amalgamated with an ideology.

However, some think that Bakhtin, in this very essay, has just some general ideas which in one way or another connects linguistics to the social side and ideology like a pragmatic. But what is the essence of my essay is that I have shown that Bakhtin is also an orthodox Marxist in both his philosophy and method in linguistics and language. Bakhtin in his book "*Marxism and Philosophy of Language*", in which he has profusely talked about his Marxist's ideas about language and philosophy and to the necessity of Marxism. The original text is in French which I have had to take the its gist out in English and discuss further points.

In the preface of the book, Volochinov, Bakhtin's co-author, explains that there can be no question, of course, about the Marxist Bakhtin as the book is Marxist from beginning to the end. Bakhtin describes the necessity for a Marxist approach in philosophy in language; however, at the same time, it practically affects all domains of human sciences, among those cognitive psychology, ethnology, language pedagogy, communication, stylistics, literary criticism and asks them all through the foundation of modern semiotics. However, as the subtitle of '*Essay on application of sociologic method on linguistics*' in this regards reveals, it is a book about the language and society, under the sign of dialectic signs, as an effect of social structures.

1.2. BAKHTIN AND THEORY OF LANGUAGE

Something laudable about Bakhtin is that, at the same time that he speaks about linguistics as such, it should be noted that, in his critique of Saussure, the most eminent representative of what Bakhtin calls 'abstract objectivism', and the excess of nascent structuralism, it precedes about 50 years of modern linguistics. We will see that two sides meet. Now there may be a question raised which as *Marxism developed some many years later than formalism after time of Bakhtin, why nothing has been mentioned about Bakhtin in Marxism about the theory of language like those of Althusser and Piere Machery, Terry Eagleton and Raymond Williams?*

In his book, Bakhtin describes before everything else, the true point of linguistics and the true nature of facts of language. Language, like for Saussure, is a social construction whose existence is established based on the needs of communication. Unlike Saussure that emphasizes that linguistics is an abstract ideal, rejects the individual aspect of speech, though someone like Bakhtin believes that speech is linked to a social structure different from person to person, but sum total of individuals.

Saussure, in his linguistic model, mostly considers the general social side of the language when he develops the signs system of signified and signifiers. His rejection of individual side can equate to the rejection of language as a invention in Barthes' words. However, when Bakhtin talks about the dialogic nature of the language, he points out to the two sides of a dialogue, a speaker and a listener in which the role of an individual in establishment of a communication is vital. Bakhtin in his essay, *The Object, Tasks and Methods of Literary History*, says

"The base doesn't determine the literary work by 'calling it off to one side', as it were, 'in secret' from the rest of literature. Instead, it acts on all of literature and on the whole ideological environment. It acts on the individual work precisely as a literary work, i.e. as an element of the whole ideological environment which is inseparably joined to the total situation provided by literature."

This statement is multifaceted: First and foremost, its emphasis is on the contrary of what Saussure believed which was the rejection of the individual side of language, instead stressing on the individual work equated precisely on as literary work in which Bakhtin considers the role of each and every one of these individuals or voices in the construction of a whole. Second, through stating to the idea of ideological environment, he is perchance considering the Marxist side of language which relates not to the individual as such but to the linguistic structure of language taken shape from society. Here Bakhtin bears analogies with Terry Eagleton that has established himself as a leading expositor of Marxism within the emerging field of contemporary literary theory, most notably with *Criticism and Ideology: A study in Marxist Literary Theory* (1976), who argues in "The Rise of English" (1983) that "literature concerns not simply beauty and spiritual uplift, but the social control of the middle and working classes". Eagleton, as a radical Marxist, bluntly asserts that the discipline of literature like formal religion, is deeply involved in the reproduction of the dominant class. In this sense, Bakhtin also channels all roots (philosophy, language and ideology) –as will further be discussed- into the social milieu.

He further says in the book that "Language conflicts reflect class conflict and the system in which it belongs". It is once more, what exactly Marxists such as Althusser and Eagleton believed. Marxists believe in the class base of language which underpins its production and development. Language, as it implies, is in control of the dominant social class, ideologically speaking. Bakhtin in further explanation of the above mentioned continues that "Semiotics of the community and the social class don't overlap" i.e. there is one to one relationship between social class and linguistics in which procedure language or what it is meant here, semiotics of community, is the direct result of the social class, not simply as part of social class. Once again, in here, Bakhtin is putting emphasis on the social environment in production and modification as well as development of the language.

Somewhere else, Bakhtin explains that "verbal communication inseparable from the other forms of communication, implies conflicts, relations of domination and the resistance, adaptation or resistance to the hierarchies, use of language by the dominant class to reinforce their power". What is axiomatic in here is what Bakhtin calls 'dialogic nature of language' in which two forces and sides are permanently apparent and participating in a conversation, but heed must be taken that by conversation it does not necessarily mean a dialogue between two people, as much it implies the nature of language per se also. He points to the dominant class once again which makes it incontrovertible not to consider language as what Bakhtin thinks, as non-social or non-ideological. As it will further be discovered, his Marxist ideology is apparent.

Although, there exist differences between different classes, such as priest way of talking to educational system, Bakhtin focuses on the difference in speech in the same system. His matter of concern is speech and the essence of dialogic language. According to the dialogic language, Bakhtin says that there are always two parts participating in a speech which exists always in form of dialogue and their nature is based on the differences. Dialogic is a concept developed by Bakhtin that asserts that all language is a dialogue in which a speaker and a listener form a relationship. All language, argues Bakhtin, is the product of at least two people. He also introduces another term known as Dialogic Utterance, in which he asserts that each individual speech act is oriented toward a particular listener or audience and demonstrates the relationship that exists between the speaker and listener. Further, In his essay, "From Discourse in the Novel", Bakhtin applies his ideas directly to the novel. He believes that the novel is characterized by dialogized heteroglossia defined as a characteristic of the novel in which multiple worlds and a variety of experiences are continually dialoguing with each other, resulting in multiple interactions, some of which are real and others of which are imagined. In all his terminology, he emphasizes the double side of language which roots in society.

Regarding the social side, Bakhtin in his book, *Marxism and philosophy of language*, applies that every sign is ideological. Ideology is the reflection of social structure. Thus any modification in social ideology, exerts modification in language pro rata. Unlike Saussurean design of language, what Bakhtin believes is that, Language obeys dynamic positivism. Through positivism he means the visible parts of the language under the influence of social forces. He continues as saying that "any evolution in linguistic and language, obeys the laws of the nature of the society". The social part in which the language shapes is stressed in here. As it will further be discussed, the social side, as Bakhtin believes, is under the direct effect of infra-structures of Marxist society. He explains in the book that

"The sign and society are inextricably related. Every sign is ideological. Semiotic system is used to express the ideology and is indeed modeled by it. Thus, the word is the ideological form. It records the slightest variations in society and every new forms which the ideology constitutes".

Bakhtin's philosophy of language, to sum up, is developed as "language is learned through contextualized social interaction". (*Marxism and the Philosophy of Language p.67*). It lives "in a living impulse toward the object" (p 292), in a specific located social interaction. He specifies his terms as that consequently all language use is language use *from* a point of view, *in* a context, *to* an audience. There is no such thing as language use which is not dialogic (having and addressee, real or imagined), which is not contextual, and which is not (hence) ideological.

He, in *Dialogics*, discusses that any language has certain centripetal forces which work to render it *monoglossic*, a "unitary language" -- forces of regulation, of discipline; this includes the literary. Any language, however, as it is lived, socially, over a variety of social, professional, class and so forth positions, is really an interacting and at times contesting amalgam of different language uses. Hence every language instance is marked by centrifugal (heteroglossic, socially distinguishing) as well as centripetal (monoglossic, societally unifying) forces. (Warning: Bakhtin at times uses the term 'language' to refer to the use of a particular class of persons, sometimes to refer to the language as a whole.). He claims that each of these 'languages' embodies a distinct view of the world, its own sense of meanings, relations, intentions. People of different generations, classes, places, professions, have their own *dialects*, or *ideolects*; there are differences among genres, among activities, even from day to day. Hence in "Discourse and the Novel" he writes,

At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word (according to formal linguistic markers, especially phonetic), but are also -- and for us this is the essential point -- into languages that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, 'professional' and 'generic' languages, languages of generations and so forth. From this point of view, literary language is itself only one of these heteroglot languages -- and it in its turn is stratified into languages (generic, period-bound, and others). And this stratification and heteroglossia, one realized, is not only a static invariant of linguistic life, but also what insures its dynamics: stratification and heteroglossia widen and deepen as long as language is alive and developing. Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward. P. 135

These dialects contain within them traces and implications of values, perspectives, and experiences; hence any contestation of dialects is in fact a contestation of these embedded aspects. Language carries as part of its nature the viewpoints, assumptions, experiences of its speakers, and it does this because it is personally and socially situated, not an abstract system. Bakhtin sees the 'language' or ideolect of a class or social position, etc., as a potentially a prison-house, constructing its own set of understandings beyond which the person imaginatively cannot go -- a dogma, he says, "a sealed-off and impermeable monoglossia." It is clear, then, that Bakhtin believes that one can think only what one's language allows one to think.

Bakhtin, in *The Dialogic Imagination 1992*, at any given moment, languages of various epochs and periods of socio-ideological life cohabit with one another... Thus at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form... Therefore languages do not exclude each other, but rather intersect with each other in many different ways. (p. 291)

Bakhtin agrees that Saussure saying language is an activity of the mind. He continues that if language is determined by the ideology, consciousness, so thinking are also packages of the language, then they are shaped by ideology. "Psyche and ideology are in constant interaction of dialectic". Ideology as Bakhtin believes, stands on the counter side which is one side of the language shaping. Marxistically speaking, ideology is a Marxist term and form. Louis Althusser believes that "the dominant hegemony, or prevailing ideology, forms the attitudes of people through a process he calls interpellation or hailing the subject, which is ideology's power to give individuals identity by the structures and prevailing forces of society". In one way or another, what Bakhtin says is Marxist in essence.

1.3. LANGUAGE AND INFRA-SUPERSTRUCTURES

Bakhtin's core of speaking in his book, after introducing his Marxists' ideas, tries to show how infrastructures and superstructures determine the nature of language. Nicolas Marr emphasizes on the assimilation of Language and superstructure. Any evolution in the base corresponds to the sudden change in the language. But Bakhtin believes that ideology is a superstructure. "Social transformations in the base reflect in ideology, and language is the vehicle for ideology, then in language". Bakhtin, converse to what Marr says, never says that language is superstructure. Superstructure and base always interacts with each other. However what he affirms is that Language is never tantamount to an instrument of production. Other than that, Bakhtin defines language as the expression of social struggles and relations, it is the experiencing and conveying these struggles.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1. STUDY OF IDEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

Reymond Williams, another expositor of Marxism, shares the same ideas as what Eagleton believes saying in *"From Marxism and Literature"* (1977) which is about Williams' theoretical considerations of culture and society, that " *a culture is not only a body of intellectual and imaginative work; it is also a whole way of life*". What Williams considers, is that literature, in essence, language as such, is reflection of an ideology as in what he calls 'a whole way of life'. Bakhtin, in his book, is somehow explicating such point in details. He shares much with Williams and Eagleton in their Marxist ideas about the nature of language and literature. Marxists theories, are linked with the problems of philosophy of language. Bakhtin states in his book, that language has a social side which itself is a Marxist entity in the sense that base and superstructure determine its ideology and in a mutual relationship, ideology does the same.

Julian wolferys in *Critical Keywords in Literary And Cultural Theory (2004)*, remarks ideology in Marxist sense of the word that ideology always bears on material conditions of lived existence. He continues that the idea of ideology seems to indicate power and can be promoted as universal. What Wolfreys point is the ideology in sense of social environment since it can be universal. Etienne Balibar (1988) as quoted in *Critical Keywords*, construes ideology as a kind of 'symbolic capital' of the ruling class itself, "as the body of representations that expresses its own conditions and means of existence (for the bourgeoisie, for instance, commodity ownership, judicial equality, and political liberty), or at best as the expression of the relation of average members of ruling class to the conditions of domination common to their class". Balibar, as common point to Marxists, argues that ideology is through the ruling dominant social class. It seems there is no obligation in changing the taken for granted definition of ideology among either what Bakhtin believes in or what other Marxists have creed in. For instance, Terry Eagleton as Wolfreys expatiates, defines ideology as "ideas and beliefs which help to 'legitimate' the interests or a ruling group or class specifically by distortion and dissimulation". According to what Eagleton remarks, ideology is from the ruling class which is capable of permeating based on its law making power. Bakhtin also points repeatedly to the ideology surrounded by and confined to social power groups which manifests itself through language and law. Reymond Williams (1977), categories 'ideology' in three different concepts which all are common in Marxist writing. 1. A system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group 2. A system of illusionary beliefs – false ideas or false consciousness- which can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge 3. The general process of the production of meanings and ideas. What is common in all three taxonomy Williams counts, is that ideology is a production system coming from a productive system. Wolfreys continues in exposition of Williams that ideology is then a system of cultural assumptions, or the discursive concatenations, the connectedness of beliefs or values which uphold or oppose social order. Fredric Jameson (1981) defines ideology in a way which is a clarification of Marxist as saying "All class consciousness- or in other words, all ideology in the strongest sense, including the most exclusive forms or ruling-class consciousness just as much as that of oppositional or oppressed classes- is in its very nature Utopian". What Jameson remarks is

pointing to the social side of ideology which is a social construction and existing inseparably intricate with ruling class and dominant social milieu.

Bakhtin explains how language is a system of signs which are rooted deep in the environment. Louis Althusser in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (1994)* has a definition of ideology which proximate Bakhtin's definition of language rooted in society as stating that " ideology is the system of ideas [...] which dominate the mind of a man or a social group". Therefore, structurally speaking, as Bakhtin has previously stated, language makes the consciousness of a man which equates Althusser's 'domination of the mind of the man' i.e. language is the consciousness then language dominates the mind and the hierarchy of this chain of being, metaphorically speaking, from the mind of the ruling men, to the ideological laws dominating the society. Althusser then concludes that "ideology is tantamount to illusion" (1994: 122-3).

Considering these Marxists' definitions of ideology in mind, Bakhtin explains that "Language shapes through the signs, ideology protrudes some signs, but some tools can be given artistic form though are not per se sign. We are living in the universe of signs. Where we can see a sign, there is also ideology. Everything has an ideological semiotic value". In the light of the essence of ideology, Bakhtin, in this book, claims that "Every field of ideological creativity has its own mode and ways towards the reality. Every sign has not only an ideological reflection, a shadow of reality, but also is a fragment of that reality" (Marxism and philosophy of language).

Though, how does the ideology permeates into the language? Is it really that easy to say that ideology shapes the language? Through what process? Bakhtin seems to have been able to define the procedure of infiltration of ideology in the system of language in a more clear way than what Marxists claimed to explain. It might be a consensus, in my idea, to consider Marxists very vague in the process of expatiation of ideological language since what is so apparent in Marxists way of talking, is mostly calling into the ideology, hegemony and claiming that ideology shapes the base and superstructure in minor or major cases. However, this cannot be the very case as a practical explanation regarding this procedure of ideology shaping the language is vital. Bakhtin in his book, has taken it into a deep further exposition. He states clearly the procedure as

"A sign is a phenomenon from the outside world. By placing the ideology in consciousness, they transform studying of ideology with studying the consciousness and its laws. Individual consciousness is in fact socio-ideological. So it is impossible to construct an objective psychology or objective ideologies. Consciousness takes form and existence in the signs created by a group organized in social relationships. Society shapes the consciousness of individuals, on the other hand, the logic of consciousness is the logic of ideological communication, interaction of semiotics in a social group".

Thus, Bakhtin considers the semiotics as the representative of the ideology and whatever it may be, whether a socially accepted and agreed by the whole ideology or one which is partially believed in. Likewise, Eagleton in *"From Literary Theory: An Introduction"*(1996) remarks

"To speak of 'literature and ideology' as two separate phenomenon which can be interrelated ism as I hope to have shown, in one sense quite unnecessary. Literature, in the meaning of the word we have inherited, is an ideology. It has the most intimate relations to questions of social power".

Bakhtin also emphasizes on the social power as the base is the power and language, as orthodox Marxist such as Eagleton and Machery long believed, is in the control of this power. But in infra-super structural considerations (Marxism), what stage does ideology occupy as it is controversial in Marxist's among those who agree or disagree that base and superstructure affects on each other and so on. Bakhtin even tries to clarify the true place of the ideology saying "The ideological reality is a superstructure situated directly above the economic base. The only way to get the Marxist sociology to account for all the ideological structures is to leave the philosophy on language conceived as the philosophy of ideological sign". In this case it is Marxist.

2.2. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INFRASTRUCTURES AND SUPERSTRUCTURES

Bakhtin's main concern after definition of language underpinned by ideology, is the issue of how infra or super structures relate with each other regarding the philosophy of language. He explains that "Of the most problematic issues regarding the Marxism, is the philosophy of the language. Each time which has been said that how infra-structures determine the ideology, the answer has always been, causality. Under some really social dialectical evolution, infra takes the form of super". He points to the dynamism of infrastructures and superstructure in which here he seems to be the converse side of Marxists who believed in rigid base or superstructure. Marx argues that the economic means of production within a society- what he calls the base- both engenders and controls all human institutions and ideologies – the superstructure- including all social and legal institutions, all political and educational systems, all religions, and all art. What Marxists believe, is one way street which base determine superstructure, however, Bakhtin believes in dynamism between base and superstructure that interact pro rata. But what kind of relationship is there regarding to the language?

What Bakhtin calls a mutual relationship of infra and super structure, is also arguable in the way that there is a reciprocal relationship of super and infra. Bakhtin says "Any sign is the result of a social consensus between the individuals during some interactions". He defines these relationships in a series of essential points:

1. Don't separate ideology from the material reality of the sign
2. Don't cut the sign from the concrete forms of social communication
3. Don't cut the communication and forms from their material basis (infrastructure)

Accordingly, these points can result in this fact that ideology protrudes itself in the form of signs which have a communicable side of incontrovertible nature. He explains "Everything is essential to be linked to the socio-economic conditions. On the other words, we cannot enter the realm of ideology which has taken roots and forms from the social value". What Bakhtin points here, ideology is truly inherent in mind which metaphors itself in the form of signs and semiotics, which has a direct result and springboard in the form of a speech, voice or language. However, a note to be mentioned is that if ideology is inherent in social values then what can determine the refraction (break or fragmentation) in the ideological sign? "It is due to the class struggle" Bakhtin states; He says that the linguistic signs develop everlastingly between infra- to super- but encircled by the ideological phenomenon.

2.3. TOWARDS MARXIST PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

2.3.1. TWO ORIENTATIONS OF LINGUISTIC-PHILOSOPHIC THOUGHT

After determination of the nature of ideology and its relationship with language, Bakhtin goes further to the philosophy of language through asking three questions. 1. What are the elements of philosophy of language? 2. What methodology is adopted for studying it? 3. What is its concrete nature? Simply considering language as language of what it is, under influence of ideological semiotics, is not going to be of any help. Language shall not be regarded pragmatically. The philosophy of language is so much abstract and important when the notion of Marxism enters. Marxism has its own philosophical roots which directly affects -if Bakhtin considers Marxism and linguistics to underpinning each other- the philosophy of language and needs further exposition.

Bakhtin says "In the philosophy of language and methodological divisions corresponding the general linguistics, what is the solution for our problem is to isolate and define language as specific case of study". He separates language as an entity of its own existence. Bakhtin explains that the laws of creation of linguistics are essentially the individual-psychological laws which he wants to emphasize that language is an individual construction which they are in return affected by the class, and infra-super determine their ideology and language's inseparable part is ideology. Then, language underpins the social context. He continues that the most immediate social situation and social environment determine largely, even from inside, the structure of the utterance. He believes that social contexts are varied but has its own immediate modifications on the speech. Thus, in what sense, Bakhtin is called a Formalist if his core of his philosophical ideas are mostly based on definition of socio-economic effects on language? Since he focuses his attention towards 'the structure of the utterances' that's why he is called mostly as a Formalist.

3. CONCLUSION

Bakhtin in his book, *Le marxisme et la philosophie du langage* (1929), explains that in sociologic method of studying linguistics, socio-economic conditions has ideological base which affects on the semiotics of language as the dynamic part of it. Language, in his idea, is underpinned by the social class struggles if there is any difference seen in a language is seemingly a whole society with the same socio-economic elements. Due to the social context, the language is a mentality of not me, but us and his/her. But it is rather impossible to discover these socio-economic activities of the mind. (it is permeated in its nature).

Bakhtin expatiates some points such as the social milieu in which language shapes, underpinned through infrastructures and superstructures which are all under direct impression of socio-economic conditions in Marxist sense of word. Bakhtin shares a bulk with main expositors of Marxism such as Terry Eagleton, Raymond Williams and Louis Althusser specially in the common creed about the ideology, power and class. In about Theory of language, Bakhtin concludes that the laws of creation of linguistics are essentially the individual-psychological laws which he wants to emphasize that language is an individual construction which they are in return affected by the class, and infra-super determine their ideology and language's inseparable part is ideology. In this sense, Bakhtin can be considered mainly as a Marxist against what is generally believed about him as a Formalist.

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