

# Comparative Analysis of Bakhtin's and Saussure's Approaches in the Context of Structuralism and Poststructuralism

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The authors prove that Bakhtin's works are basically connected with the structural approach. The philosopher analysed this methodology, especially ideas of Saussure, Russian formalism and others. He defined both its advantages and weak sides. The authors examine the specifics of Bakhtin's methodology which were effectively used in the creation of an original humanistic philosophy of act. In the article the causes of popularity of Bakhtin's works in the West philosophy discourse are revealed. The authors are making an accent on Bakhtin's criticism, which was directed against the de-humanized tendencies of structuralism. This criticism is adequately used in modern times, because it helps to establish new humanism as well as to focus on the existence of man in the world.

**Keywords:** act, humanism, dialogism, poststructuralism, structuralism

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## INTRODUCTION

The predominant paradigm in the Humanities is largely related to the poststructuralism which is a methodological foundation of postmodernism. This paradigm also experienced a significant influence of structuralism which is classified as one of the directions of modern formalism and rationalism. In his works Bakhtin produced the constructive criticism of formalism prevailing in Russia in the 1920s, and also considered advantages and disadvantages of structuralism, offered new approaches to the language, text and the prospects of development of the Humanities. Bakhtin envisaged the trends of postmodernism that in the course of their development inevitably led to negative results in cognition and social practices. All this becomes popular under conditions of the crisis of the existing paradigm of humanitarian cognition. The deep scientific interest in Bakhtin's work was shown by the international forums dedicated to his research that took place in the 20th century (Brazil 2003, Finland 2005, Canada 2008, Italy 2011, Sweden 2014) (Vasiliev 2014: 81–84) and also recent publications in authoritative magazines (Vassoler 2018: e 34612; Guseynov 2017: 5–15; Simas et al. 2018: 123–142). The intellectuals of the Western world emphasize the relations between the works by Bakhtin and poststructuralism, they highly appreciate the ideas of the Russian scholar regarding the crisis of traditional metaphysics foundations. Detailed theoretical considerations of this issue are presented in Makhlin's work

'Bakhtin and the Western World (Experience of Review Orientation)' (Makhlin 1998). Some Western scholars conduct a comparative analysis of a set of statements by Bakhtin and Derrida, Foucault, Barthes, Lacan, Levinas, etc. (Kristeva 1967: 438–465; Patterson 1967; Shepherd 2005: 32–51). French scholar Kristeva examines Bakhtin's ideas in the context of poststructuralism principles (Kristeva 2000: 427–457; Kristeva 1967: 438–465). The scholars from Slavonic countries, Avtonomova (Avtonomova 2008), Gogotishvili (Gogotishvili 2008: 85–110), Kasavin (Kasavin 2007: 27–47), Koshmilo (Koshmilo 2006: 147–175), Povtoreva (Povtoreva 2010) and others, in their researches draw parallels between a number of key statements by Bakhtin and the concepts of some representatives of structuralism, poststructuralism and postmodernism. At the same time it is a broad topic that requires a specific analysis. Its actuality is justified by the fact that the interrelationship and opposition of the methodological foundations of postmodernism and Bakhtin's discourse clearly reflect the process of changes in the paradigms of cognition and thinking taking place in the modern world.

### BAKHTIN ON STRUCTURAL LINGUISTICS BY SAUSSURE

First of all, it is necessary to analyse the statements where Bakhtin views the theory by the founder of structural linguistics, Saussure. Philosophical and methodological foundations of both structuralism and poststructuralism originate from the works of this Swiss linguist, which accounts for genetic relationship of the directions in question and contradictions in a number of their methodological foundations. The ideas of 'Course in General Linguistics' by Saussure do not go beyond the boundaries of the traditional western rationalism and, in general, are guided by its ideals. It is this orientation that is set in structuralism. On the other hand, his work 'The Anagrams' is based on that area where rational things do not work, lose their potential. This aspect is further developed in the philosophy of poststructuralism (Povtoreva 2010: 70–96, 286–288).

Bakhtin considered Saussure to be a serious scholar; he was of the high opinion about his ideas and contribution into linguistics: 'Currently the best expression of the abstract objectivism is the so-called 'Geneva School' of *Ferdinand de Saussure*... Representatives of this school, in particular, *Charles Bally* are the outstanding scholars of our times. F. de Saussure made all the ideas remarkably clear and articulate. His formulations of the key linguistic ideas can be considered classic. Apart from this, Saussure was not afraid of finalizing his thoughts...' (Voloshinov (Bakhtin) 1993: 65). However, every statement by Bakhtin about Saussure contains critical elements. Still approaches of Saussure were not the only object of the critical analysis by Bakhtin. He was the opponent of a number of his predecessors, contemporaries and those who developed philosophical ideas after him, namely, representatives of poststructuralism. Still this criticism does not diminish the opponent, but can transform the points criticized from the viewpoints of the future, in other words, using the expressions by Bakhtin, from the viewpoints of 'incompleteness' and 'renaissance celebration' (Makhlin 1998: 537). Paying high tribute to the study of Saussure about the speech communication processes, Bakhtin refused to recognize the universal nature of some statements by the Swiss linguist, stressing that they are fragmentary and schematic. He called a fiction the concepts of Saussure's linguistic theory about the 'addressee' and 'the understanding person' as the partners of the 'addresser', about the 'unified speech flow'. Bakhtin thinks that the schematic depiction of two communication partners does not describe certain aspects of reality. 'When they are called the true whole of the speech communication, they become academic fiction', they distort "understanding about complex and multi-laterally active process of speech communication"' (Bakhtin 1986: 260).

For Bakhtin the object of humanitarian cognition was the text as the primary foundation of the Humanities. At the same time the text goes beyond its own boundaries, it denies itself. Being the universal form of knowledge of a person about himself, the text at the same time is not only a linguistic phenomenon, it is any cultural phenomenon. The Russian scholar thought that the text analysis should be viewed in the context, within its relationship, within the dialogue. One of the original statements by Bakhtin on the text, which differs from that of many other linguists, was that he viewed the text as an utterance.

In his notes to the work 'Problem of Speech Genres' Bakhtin provides the definition of the utterance by Saussure as an individual act of will and understanding, 'where one should distinguish: 1) combinations which help the speaker use the language code to express his personal thoughts, and 2) psychophysical mechanism that allows him to do objective these combinations' (Bakhtin 1986: 274). It was the ground for the Swiss scholar to exclude speech (and utterance as its element) from the subject of linguistics as a scientific discipline. 'One can talk about the law, – states Saussure, – only in case when the whole combination of phenomena is subject to one and the same rule, while diachronic events in reality are always of accidental and private nature, despite obvious exceptions to this' (Saussure, 1977: 126). Bakhtin does not agree with the strict differentiation between language and speech, synchronic and diachronic linguistics, which is one of the fundamental ideas of the Geneva School. He also highlights the inconsistency of Saussure's position on utterance: 'Individual speech act – an utterance that was left far beyond the boundaries of linguistics, however, is coming back as a necessary factor in the history of a language' (Voloshinov (Bakhtin) 1993: 68). Resting on the position of Saussure that '...all that is diachronic in a language is diachronic only because of speech' (Saussure 1977: 130), Bakhtin stresses that speech is still recognized by Saussure as part of the subject of linguistics, at least, that of its history.

Bakhtin noted that Saussure ignored the fact that apart from language forms there are also *types of combinations* of these forms, i.e. speech genres (Bakhtin 1986: 274). The Russian linguist, similarly to Saussure, did not consider that utterance was only the act of will of the individual, his arbitrary action, he did not see in the utterance 'only individual combination of the purely linguistic (lexical, grammar) forms' (Bakhtin 1986: 274).

Describing speech genres as more flexible, changeable and plastic in comparison with language forms, at the same time Bakhtin stressed their normative character that means that they are given to the speaker and not created by his arbitrary act of will. Therefore, a single utterance with all its individual features and creative nature cannot be considered a totally free combination of the language forms. According to Bakhtin, the stand of Saussure, as well as a number of other linguists following his ideas leads to the situation when they put an utterance as an individual act in opposition to the system of the language (a purely social phenomenon which is forced on the individual). Thus, they come to the false understanding about the complete arbitrariness of the speech will of the speaker, about the ungoverned 'speech flow'.

Criticizing these ideas Bakhtin advocates the systemic nature of an utterance, considers that each sentence is formed by us not in the arbitrary way, but as an element of the system, taking into account the whole and in harmony with it. 'When we choose a certain type of a sentence, notes Bakhtin, we select the sentence type from the viewpoint of the whole utterance which appears in our speech imagination and which defines our choice ...The selected genre prompts us their types and their compositional relations' (Bakhtin 1986: 274–275).

Unlike Saussure, who in his works paid more attention to the synchronic aspect of the language, Bakhtin pays a particular attention to diachronic, dialogic and dialecticism as features

of speech activity. He does not set language against speech as a stable opposition, but considers them in constantly changing interrelations. 'Any concrete utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication of a particular sphere. The very boundaries of the utterance are determined by a change of speech subjects (speakers), but within these boundaries the utterance, like Leibniz monad, reflects speech process, other utterances, and, first and foremost, preceding chain links...' (Bakhtin 1986: 288–289).

Understanding language and speech as a dialogue, Bakhtin pinpoints the uninterrupted and boundless nature of the dialogic context where there are no either first or last words and there are no boundaries in any direction – neither in the past nor in the future. 'Bakhtin's approach to the dialogic principle of text organization, stresses Yandl', differs from the structuralist's narrative theory in the fact that changeability of instances in question is preserved, and the system is always open for introduction of the new levels. This openness should be considered not only as inconsistency of the method but also as the engine that is necessary to move it' (Yandl' 2014: 115). For Bakhtin there are no stable, complete and final meanings. The meanings of the utterances that emerged in dialogic relations of the past tenses are always capable of changes and will change, be renewed, reborn in future dialogues, in continuous development, in that real process of the change of epochs, which was called great time by Bakhtin. 'Nothing is absolutely dead, – stresses the philosopher, – every meaning will have its homecoming festival' (Bakhtin 1986: 393).

## BAKHTIN AND STRUCTURALISM

Dissemination of the ideas of Saussure and other linguists into different cognitive fields led to the fact that language phenomenon in the 20th century has become one of the most interesting subjects of philosophy and Humanities. There is a certain linguistic reductionism, i.e. the tendency to view life of an individual and that of the society through the prism of linguistic law or even wider – from the viewpoint of semiotics.

According to some modern philosophers (Foucault, Kristeva and others), structural linguistics plays the role of a methodological leader in the modern science. Its categories (diachronic–synchronic, signified–signifier, paradigm, language and speech, structure, etc.) have entered the terminological apparatus of the Humanities. It gave a new meaning to the traditional philosophical categories (subject, object, creativity, unity, identity, etc.) making Philosophy more modern. Ideas, related to the structural linguistics, have significantly changed the key points in understanding the ontological status of the language and speech peculiar to the European thinking, as well as key pillars of the whole European philosophical discourse. There is a turn from the position of language structure stability, the primary spiritual basis of the language and thinking to the conclusions on relativity, changeability, chaotic and accidental character as the ontological basis not only of the language and speech, but also the life of the individual and society. Due to this the model of structural linguistics has acquired the status of the paradigm of modern humanitarian cognition (Povtoreva 2010: 286–288).

Bakhtin managed to feel this tendency and made a critical insight into it. He foresaw the invasion of some semiotic totalitarianism. Stressing a positive impact of the Russian formalism and considering structuralism to be in relation to it, Bakhtin qualified them as consequent formalization and depersonalization when all 'the relations are of logic (in a broad meaning of this word) character' (Bakhtin 2002: 434). The scholar most sharply criticized what he considered to be the most unacceptable in structuralism: concentration on the text. In such structuralism categories as 'opposition' and 'change of codes', characterized by him as mechanic, he saw threats

of formalization and depersonalization when all the relations are interpreted in the spirit of logicism (Bakhtin 1986: 393). The outstanding Italian scholar, a representative of poststructuralism Eco in his book 'Absent Structure' writes the following about structuralism he was interested in for some time and got over that interest: 'Going from simplification to simplification a representative of structuralism is dreaming about discovering the Code of Codes, a certain Pre-Code which would allow to reveal latent rhythms (elementary structures) that govern any behaviour, both cultural and biological ones. This code should reproduce the structure of the human brain which is similar to the mechanism of organic process' (Eco 2006: 82). What is criticized here is the concept of the founder of structuralism, Lévi-Strauss, who thought that he had discovered such a code. This code created on the analogy of computer operations and linguistic models of 'binary opposition' operates with two elements, connected by the relation of opposition or contrast, for example: raw-cooked, male-female, nature-culture (Eco 2006: 714).

In polemics with the Russian formalists of the 1920s – Shklovsky, Eichenbaum, Tynianov and later with structuralism Bakhtin blames his opponents for not thinking through the true meaning of their theoretical constructions. Bakhtin also does not accept formalistic approaches within which a text or any work of art is fully self-sufficient and actually does not need such a notion as 'author'. 'However, Bakhtin's analysis, – stresses Peshkov, – convincingly shows that approaching art as a device, a set of devices to process a certain material from which a work of art is made, inevitably leads to the foregrounding of the author-master with full ignorance of the character of the work' (Peshkov 2016: 24). Nowadays this Bakhtin criticism is rather topical as structuralist 'codes', 'models' and 'semiotic system', unlike early Russian formalism, do not introduce anything principally new. At the same time the formalistic method, having exhausted itself in the USSR, as Bakhtin noted, till the end of 1920s fell in the fertile ground in the Western world. Formalistic theories in Literary Studies and Aesthetics have acquired an academic status and in the basic trends represent a certain return to the early Russian Formalism.

In the context of discussion with Structuralism Bakhtin paid a particular attention to the role of the text in the Humanities. He thought that the complicated interaction of the text and thinking, opposing, questioning context created on the basis of the text is the most important condition for the humanitarian cognition. Studying this cognition as a dialogue of a special type Bakhtin wrote: 'This is the meeting of two texts – of the ready-made and the reactive text being created – and, consequently, the meeting of two subjects and two authors' (Bakhtin 1986: 301). Substantiating his idea, the scholar emphasized that a person 'always creates a text (at least potential)' (Bakhtin 1986: 301). It is the text activity that is an inseparable feature of a person, a specific way for his self-expression. And such fields of human knowledge as anatomy, physiology, etc. which focus on a person 'are beyond the text and independent on the text, these are not Human disciplines' (Bakhtin 1986: 301).

In the opinion of Bakhtin, it is only the text that ensures unity and the basic point for differentiating human sciences. Being a primary reality the text serves as a point of origin for philology, linguistics, literary studies, science studies and other sciences that later go in different directions. They have different meaning-based and causal relations and create a conglomerate of various knowledge and methods which is called humanitarian cognition and its structure. According to Bakhtin, structuralism in this hierarchy is a movement towards such field of humanity knowledge as science on the language of languages, metalinguistics (Bakhtin 1986: 308). The scholar was positive about such a project. But at the same time he saw danger of dehumanization tendencies in structuralism. In the opinion of Bakhtin, a subject can never be a notion as the real situation; the life context is a dialogue. The scholar advocated the idea that 'meaning

is personality; it always includes a question, an address, and the anticipation of a response, it always includes two (as a dialogic minimum)' (Bakhtin 1986: 393).

A famous expert in structural methodology, Avtonomova, stresses that the Russian scholar critically did not accept the semiotic position of structuralism (Avtonomova 2008: 552). She refers to the fragment from Bakhtin's work 'On the Methodology of the Humanities Sciences', where he set his understanding of the speech communication against the structuralist's abstraction that makes the live speech process dead. It goes about the statement by Bakhtin: 'I hear *voices* and dialogic relations between them in everything' (Bakhtin 1986: 393). Avtonomova also doubts that Bakhtin is the forerunner of the French discourse theories, which is the opinion of some poststructuralists. According to Avtonomova, the notion 'discourse' is not used in Bakhtin's works (Avtonomova 2008: 552). However, Bakhtin's ideas are not unequivocal and straightforward; they are ambivalent and sometimes seem to be contradictory. He criticized 'scientificity', 'theoreticism', 'systematicity', but not always. However, 'just his researches nowadays become the true and genuine strict science – and even something different' (Makhlin 1998: 538). There are different opinions on the issue whether Bakhtin is a forerunner of the discourse theory. Kristeva in her research 'Bakhtin, Word, Dialogue and Novel' gives a positive answer to this question (Kristeva 2000: 427–457). Makhlin is of the same opinion, thinking that discourse and discourse practices in the Western world are similar to what Bakhtin in the 1920s has already marked by the notion 'utterance', 'word', including into it the act of speech consciousness and speech thinking (Makhlin 1998: 541–542).

### **BAKHTIN, POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND NEW HUMANISM**

Considering interrelations of Bakhtin with Post-structuralism one should focus on the fact that a number of Structuralism concepts significantly correlate with Bakhtin's ideas. Modern Humanitarian sciences often use such notions as 'posthumanism', 'transhumanism', 'postman' and 'postmankind'. This may be one of the reasons for the unusual interest of the Western scholars in the works of the Russian scholar.

Criticizing a specific concentration on the text, rationalism and logicism of the structuralism and stressing that there is only one subject in structuralism and this subject is the subject of the very researcher, Bakhtin argued that in real life there are always two subjects, questioning, address, and anticipation of the answer. 'There is neither a first nor a last word - stated the Russian scholar, – and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and boundless future)' (Bakhtin 2002: 434). According to Makhlin, 'the term "intertextuality", popular in the Western world, to a significant degree is already a reception-translation of Bakhtin dialogue theory into the language and languages of the Western poststructuralism and postmodernism' (Makhlin 1998: 549).

Kristeva thinks that Bakhtin is a forerunner of the poststructuralism concept of intertextuality. In her opinion, Bakhtin's discovery in the field of literary theory is that any text is built as citation mosaic; it absorbs and transforms any other text. It means that 'the notion of inter-subjectivity is replaced with the notion of intertextuality, and it turns out that poetic language is subject to at least double interpretation' (Kristeva 2000: 429).

Bakhtin's creative heritage occupies a particular place in the highly debatable discussion what followed poststructuralism. From the very beginning of his intellectual activity the Russian scholar opposed dehumanization in aesthetics, philosophy and politics, was in opposition to the attempts to formalistically renew the culture, to replace the author with certain constructions, simulacra of truth, indifferent, as was aptly noted by Foucault, to all the other opinions. It was in

one of his first works 'On the Philosophy of the Act' that Bakhtin substantiated answerability as the main category of the new ontology which should replace the traditional system of the Western metaphysics. The philosopher sets a link between answerability and a unique place every individual occupies in objective reality, a unique character of an action which is understood as the entire life of an individual. 'Every thought of mine, along with its content, – notes Bakhtin, – is an act or deed that I perform – my own individually answerable act or deed. It is one of all those acts which make up my whole once occurring life as an uninterrupted performing of acts. For my entire life as a whole can be considered as a single complex act or deed that I perform: I act, i.e., perform acts, with my whole life, and every particular act and lived-experience is a constituent moment of my life – of the continuous performing of acts' (Bakhtin 1994: 12).

Globalization processes in the modern world and development of information technology require reconsideration of the classical humanistic paradigm. Evidence of changing traditional conceptions of humanism is often using the notions 'posthumanism', 'transhumanism', 'postman' and 'postmankind' in the Humanities (Murphy 1991; Mahon 2017). New Humanism as a wide movement for the humanistic values may be considered as one of the possible variants of the answer to the contemporary world challenges. In the upcoming epoch of New Humanism that overcomes drawbacks of the concepts of 'death of an individual', 'death of an author', 'death of a subject', etc. (according to Bakhtin 'humanists without a human'), but at the same time preserves the achievements of the traditional culture as well as novelties of Structuralism and Post-structuralism, the creative works by Bakhtin with his peculiar language appear not only as his personal opinion, but also as the stand of the most responsible humanists in the campaign for human aspects in culture (Makhlin 1998: 550–551).

## CONCLUSIONS

Summing up the aforementioned one can come to the following conclusions:

1. Being of the positive opinion about the works of the founder of structural linguistics, Saussure, and simultaneously taking a critical approach to the Saussure's idea of an arbitrary nature of the utterance Bakhtin advocates a systemic nature of the utterance and considers that each sentence is formed by us as an element of the system, taking into account the whole and in harmony with it. Unlike Saussure, who in his works focused on a synchronic aspect of the language, Bakhtin puts an emphasis on diachronic, dialogistic and dialecticism of linguistic activity.

2. Bakhtin made a number of critical remarks on early Russian formalism and later on structuralism without making a significant differentiation between them. Under his most severe criticism were dehumanizing tendencies of these directions. This criticism is topical in our times as well contributing to the establishment of new humanism and orientation to the human existence in the world.

3. Representatives of poststructuralism, which replaced structuralism, highly appreciate the ideas of Bakhtin, recognize priority ranking and advantages of a number of ideas of his theory over similar concepts of the Western world. There are special works dedicated to his researches which draw analogies between his ideas and the concepts of poststructuralism.

Received 1 March 2018

Accepted 15 June 2018

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## **Palyginamoji M. Bakhtino ir F. de Saussure'o požiūrių analizė struktūralizmo ir poststruktūralizmo kontekste**

### *Santrauka*

Straipsnyje teigiama, kad M. Bakhtino veikalai iš esmės susiję struktūralistiniu požiūriu. Filosofas analizavo šią metodologiją, ypač Saussure'o idėjas, rusų formalizmą ir kt. Jis apibrėžė tiek jos privalumus, tiek silpnybes. Pateikiamas Bakhtino metodologijos tyrimas, kuris buvo veiksmingai panaudotas kuriant originalią humanistinę akto filosofiją. Straipsnyje atskleidžiamos Bakhtino darbų populiarumo Vakarų filosofiniame diskurse priežastys. Pabrėžiamas Bakhtino kritiškumas, nukreiptas prieš struktūralizmą nužmoginančias tendencijas. Šis kritiškumas adekvačiai taikomas dabar, nes jis padeda steigti naują humanizmą ir sutelkti dėmesį į žmogaus buvimą pasaulyje.

**Raktažodžiai:** aktas, humanizmas, dialogas, poststruktūralizmas, struktūralizmas