MIKHAIL BAKHTIN, LANGSTON HUGHES AND THE POETIC UTTERANCE

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MIKHAIL BAKHTIN, LANGSTON HUGUES EO ENUNCIADO POÉTICO

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Abstract

A critical pragmatics finds good grounding in Bakhtin and Voloshinov's theory of the Utterance in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929). In this essay I explore and extend the notion of 'reaccenting' with that of 'retexting' and call attention to the role of textualities in the performance and deformance of written language. Critical pragmatic moves beyond stylistics and proposes a more critical linguistic approach to literary texts. I use critical pragmatics informed by Bakhtin's theory of the utterance to read Langston Hughes's dialogic lyrics in *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951) and poetic retexting as a literate and critical practice.

Resumo

Uma pragmática crítica encontra boa base na teoria da expressão de Bakhtin e Voloshinov em Marxismo e Filosofia da Linguagem (1929). Neste ensaio, exploro e amplio a noção de "reacentuação" com a de "retextualização" e chamo a atenção para o papel das textualidades na performance e deformação [*deformance*, no original] da linguagem escrita. A pragmatica crítica se move para além da estilística e propõe uma abordagem linguística mais crítica para textos literários. Sirvo-me da pragmática crítica orientada pela teoria do enunciado de Bakhtin para ler a lírica dialógica de Langston Hughes em *Montagem de um sonho adiado* (1951) e a retextualização poética como uma prática literária e crítica.

Entradas para indexação

Texto integral

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the Utterance as a mobile signifier and fluid discursive practice within a sociolinguistic system is one of his most important and still most provocative insights. Bakhtin developed his theory of the Utterance as a sociolinguistic practice in several texts but especially in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, probably co-authored with Valentin N. Voloshinov, and then in later writing collected in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*.[1] In these texts, Bakhtin describes the 'Utterance' as language practice which can be analysed as a distinct element at different levels, from individual sounds in a linguistic context to entire texts or dominant discourses.[2] At all levels, the Utterance is a 'linguistic [or verbal] whole', but the notion of wholeness is always provisional and contextual. What constitutes the shape of the Utterance depends on the kind of linguistic analysis, language processing or genre relevance we undertake as analyzers of social discourse or as participants in spoken or written exchanges. For Bakhtin, Utterances are primarily units of Inner Speech, which may or may not be 'grammaticalized', and as such, are expressed or internalized as key components for constructions of selves as social beings. Utterances are also identifiable linguistic units in exteriorized speech and writing, although marked with different kinds of signifiers (e.g. standard or nonstandard forms, genre prototypes, sound shape vs. spelling) and authority (based on the power and prestige of the speaker or relevance to situation).

One of the more radical aspects of Bakhtin's theory of the Utterance when *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* was first published in 1929 was its

emphasis on syntax rather than phonology or morphology as the model for language practice and linguistic analysis. According to Bakhtin, 'In point of fact, of all the forms of language, *the syntactic forms are the ones closest to the concrete forms of utterance*, to forms of concrete speech performances . . . and are more closely associated with the real forms of discourse'.[3] After Chomsky's intervention in linguistic discourse in the late 1950s, this emphasis on syntax may seem less radical to many linguists and literary critics, but the differences between formal and cognitive or pragmatic approaches to syntax are deep. Stylistics and narratology have adopted the analysis of reported speech and *Erlebte Rede* to describe and interpret mostly narrative texts, but they only begin to scratch the surface of syntax. I think Bakhtin's theory of the Utterance remains underdeveloped in linguistic and especially pragmatic approaches to literature. Moreover, as I will argue later, Bakhtin's theory of the Utterance opens an important path to critical pragmatics and a more socially and materially grounded relation between linguistics and literary study.

Bakhtin's concept of 'reaccenting' is central to his theory of the Utterance in the context of critical linguistics, or as he refers to it, 'translinguistics'. 'Reaccenting' (*pereaktsentuatsiya*, 'reaccentuation', 'revoicing') applies to all levels of linguistic interpretation or analysis, sound, form and syntax.[4] As a critical concept, reaccenting identifies how a perceived linguistic unit of utterance is appropriated by a listener or reader and then repeated or reused, not just neutrally reported, in a related, contiguous or different context. This repetition with a difference, a different 'accent', produces a new utterance, whose relation to prior utterances will again be received, interpreted and reused. Bakhtinian reaccenting is a deformative practice, unlike the neutral usage of 'reaccenting' in many language teaching contexts. Bakhtin's connection between dialogism and reaccenting relies on nodes or sites of repetition or resistance within a social matrix. However, Bakhtin's theory of the Utterance and reaccenting also depends on a fundamentally open system of semiosis, not unlike C. S. Peirce's theory of 'unlimited semiosis'.[5] Interestingly, both C. S. Peirce and Bakhtin retain a subtheme of Kantian epistemology in their semiotic theorizing, a philosophical orientation which seems nonetheless to enable both theorists to imagine open semiosis as a condition of human experience. There is no end to chains of reaccenting and semiotic recombination, except when imposed by force, silence, conformity or assimilation.

According to Bakhtin, utterances and reaccenting are linguistically displacing: 'Every word, as we know, is a little arena for the clash and criss-crossing of differently oriented social accents. A word in the mouth of a particular individual person is a product of the living interaction of social forces'[6] Moreover, the special type of utterance known as 'reported speech' thematizes utterances and foregrounds their concreteness so as to expose their presuppositions, claims or expectations.[7] Direct, indirect and free indirect (Bakhtin calls it 'quais-direct') discourse called attention to the way dialogic discourse destabilizes the presumed autonomy or self-sufficiency of individual utterances. In so far as people are 'made up' as individual subjects at the intersections of external material reality and inner experience, we reaccent the speech of others, not as idiosyncratic, a priori speaking

subjects but as speakers within a socio-material, linguistic environment. We all speak others' words in different registers. Reaccenting emphasises discourse as practice, on the move, and can be authoritative or regulated (compliant), resistant or socially remaking.

However, one of the problems with Bakhtin's theory of the Utterance for linguistic approaches to literature is that his model for all utterances and reaccenting is not just syntax but specifically spoken syntax. Despite his close attention to heterglossia and genre mixing, Bakhtin maintains a strong orientation toward speech as the primary mode of language. When Bakhtin refers to 'reaccenting', then, he conceives of the activity primarily as spoken discourse or in the case of novelistic discourse the 'free indirect speech' of the narrator(s). Moreover, despite his fierce and energizing exposure of the complexity of narrative discourses, Bakhtin remained relatively inattentive to the linguistic and textual experiments of modernist montage, collage, parody and mixed voicing, especially in poetry.

In this essay I want to expand on Bakhtin's theory of the utterance in linguistic, pragmatic and textual ways and propose a literate theory of 'retexting' as an answering call to reaccenting. By 'retexting', I mean the way texts, written or multimodal constructions of discourse which invite, demand or displace interpretation, encode and reshape other writing and speech to construct potentially displacing, deconstructive, transgressive and resistant practices. Retexting, then, is both compositional and reading practice which reframes or reuses the writing, speech and authoritative discourses of others to produce new texts. As practice, retexting creates hyperliterate networks of connected but not derivative texts situated within structures of power, agency and ideologies. For theoretically-enriched literary criticism, retexting proposes an explicitly critical pragmatics on written or visual literacies. Within hyperliteracy, instead of textual voices or versions, we have retexts. Retextual fluidity responds to the mobile, Lyotardian *differend* politics and heteroglossic agencies within textual practices. All texts are retexts, just as all speech is reaccenting with the hyperliterate network. There is no absolute, *a priori* original speech. *Retexting* names discursive practices -- overwriting, rewriting, cross writing, double writing, deleting, language mixing – which are often repressed when texts are treated as discrete objects. Thinking about textuality as retexting focuses on the semiosis and practices within chains of signifying. Retext marks textual and intertextual strategies within hyperliteracy and emphasises how those strategies motivate both dividing practices, e.g. language ideology, and transgressive appropriations, e.g. 'signifying', 'mimcry' and 'jiving' in African-American discourses. Reaccenting and retexting theorize speech and literacies as practice.

To draw the theoretical relations more explicitly among reaccenting, poetic retexting and language ideology, I will foreground some of the complex interactions between speech and writing in the lyric, a genre which Bakhtin myopically refers to as 'monologic'. To develop this notion of reaccenting and retexting as part of a critical pragmatics, I will read several poems by the African-American Langston Hughes and show how his poetic experiments and

heteroglossic lyric discourse critique, retext aspects of dominant language ideology through repetition and displacement. As politically-motivated discursive practices, critical pragmatics and retexting abandon the foreground/background or text/context dyads of literary criticism and historicism, and instead put poetic practice into political and semiotic play.

Before doing so, I want to say something about one feature of Bakhtinian reaccenting which goes unacknowledged, 'grammaticality', and its relation to language ideology. As a precondition of reaccenting and retexting in linguistic terms, grammaticality is more complex and rhizomic than grammar per se. Grammaticality is more of a relation than a linguistic structure or set of features. Moving from Bakhtin's too often binary dialogism to a more mobile dialogism – something like Barthesian 'text' -- we can think of grammaticality as an unruly set of intersecting continuums. Individual utterances are located on several axes, from uniformly grammatical (accepted by all speakers in a discourse community) to uniformly ungrammatical (as judged by all speakers in a discourse community), from more prestigious to less prestigious, from mostly spoken to mostly written or visual, and so on. As practice, all the action, so to speak, of usage, intention, creation and ideological formation is in the middle, where different speakers, writers and readers perform and judge utterances differently as to their grammaticality and social function, and where discourse subgroups differ as to whether certain kinds of utterances are grammatical or ungrammatical and which situations, contexts or genres structure or activate those differences. As Bakhtin has shown, and Austin, Fish and Derrida have amplified, the 'special cases', which in formal linguistics and literary criticism are frequently dumped into a separate category labelled 'poetry' or 'pragmatics', are in fact more frequent and more constitutive of majority and subgroup identities than dominant language ideology will imagine or acknowledge. Moreover, these 'special cases' occur across discursive fields, not just in poetry or linguistic experimentation but also in so-called ordinary contexts and genres.

On the grammaticality continuum, grammar as correctness, elite usage or ordered discourse is not opposed to or prior to pragmatics but in fact is a principal component of pragmatics. Early on in the history of transformational grammar, Chomsky tried to save the Universal Grammar appearances by distinguishing between *grammaticality* and *acceptability* ('Knock, knock. Who's there? It's Me','Cultural Studies is . . .', 7-Up, the Uncola', 'The data shows . . .'). Chomsky's distinction is explanatorily important, but he only displaced the complex relation between grammar and pragmatics elsewhere.[8] Grammaticality remained a principle of abstract judgment, whereas acceptability was a practice of users. Bakhtin's theory of reaccenting and the dialogism of the linguistic sign had already offered a different approach to questions of structure and usage, one which some recent linguists and discourse analysts have been fruitfully investigating. Critical pragmatics and hyperliterate retexting expand the linguistic community and field to include textual practices, including the way written texts regulate or expand or contract a language system.

Questions regarding grammar and grammaticality in linguistic practice are bound up with questions of social construction of knowledge, subjectivity and power. Many linguists claim to be 'objectivist' scientists committed to an artificially neutral theory of grammar, but their views are always located within a heterogeneous field of discourses regarding language and usage. Public and educational ideas about grammar and grammaticality are political from top to bottom, as the 1970s Ann Arbor, Michigan (USA) school case and the mid-1990s Ebonics controversy over language use in the Oakland, California (USA) school district made explicit.[9] Moreover, 'public' attitudes regarding 'proper' language and grammaticality and 'proper language' are themselves not monologic, but heterogeneous and part of different social subgroups. The continuing USA controversy over AAE and other nonstandard varieties, struggles over standard English or Spanish usage in former colonies and the debates as to which English 'standard' to teach in ESL classrooms worldwide reproduce and retain traditional contests over Latin and vernaculars ('vulgaria') in European contexts. Some literary texts exploit these controversies by performing and exposing the dominant language ideology and resistant practices within textual dialogism. Usage as part of language ideology and language practice cannot be restricted to discrete verbal forms and units. Linguistic usage, like linguistic meaning, is always situated, and therefore it can be resituated, reaccented. As I will argue in more detail, reaccenting is a practice of not only sociolinguistic minorities but of various textual subgroups. The poems of Langston Hughes provide us with concrete reaccentings and retextings of dominant language ideology from the point of view of African-Americans mediated through the lyric genre.

I turn now to the retexting of written and spoken performativities and language ideologies embedded in the poems of the African-American writer Langston Hughes (1902-67). Hughes' poems construct critical heteroglossias of spoken, musical and written utterances. Hughes was born in Joplin (MO**)**, lived in Kansas, Illinois and Mexico, attended high school in Cleveland (OH) and enrolled in Columbia University (NY) in 1921 but did not graduate. While at Columbia, Hughes first encountered Harlem as a lively artistic and political world, a concrete, predominantly African-American place he was drawn to all his life and where he was eventually able to live fulltime after 1950.

In the collection *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951), Hughes compiled a dialogic series of interrelated poems which dramatize in filmic juxtapositions (montage) the hopes, dreams, tensions, lived experiences, voices, accents and political contexts of African-Americans in the early twentieth-century USA. Before World War II, Hughes had been affiliated with the Communist Party in the United States and even travelled to the Soviet Union with other African Americans. In the late 1940s and 1950s, however, the Cold War ideology in the United States and the actions of the US government were making it difficult for left-leaning or progressive people and especially artists and political figures to sustain any kind of public position which suggested noncompliance with the dominant anti-Communist ideology. In the hostile environment of the HUAAC investigations, Hughes played down his associations in the 1920s and 30s with the Communist Party and radical newspapers.[10] Nonetheless, Hughes continued to write poetry,

essays and plays which addressed social, political and economic inequality and racial difference, although he rejected some of his earlier views on proletarian language and African-American musical forms.

Read against the growing anti-Communist socio-political environment in the US, the poems collected in *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951) are bold and startling as modernist experimental texts and as politically-motivated lyrics. Many of the poems combine on the page spoken and written discourses and ruminations on lived experience among African Americans, notably in urban contexts. Many also deform and retext written notation (letters, syllables) into scores which encode within linguistic units the rhythms and cadences of African-American musical forms, notably the blues and 1930s and 40s boogie woogie, be-bop and ragged beat.[11] That is, Hughes' poems not only represent experience and affects as linguistic utterances but also as musical utterances. For example, read aloud or silently, the syllables and phonetic relations in the following passage reproduce the eight-bar boogie woogie musical rhythm associated with the poem's title,

'Dream Boogie':

Good morning, daddy!
Ain't you heard
The boogie-woogie rumble
Of a dream deferred?
Listen closely:
You'll hear their feet
Beating out and Beating out a --
You think
It's a happy beat?
Listen to it closely:
Ain't you heard
something underneath
like a -- . . . (ll. 1-13) [12]

From the point of view of language ideology, evokes rather than transcribes African-American English by using just a few conventional and fairly widespread English colloquialisms ('ain't') and 1930s African-American jive talk ('Daddy'). Otherwise, the poem's lexical and phonological elements correlate with Standard English. It is the sequence of words, the *syntaxis*, which overwrites meaningful word order with musical cadence and reproduces a kind of poetic line which displaces the conventions of English language iambic pentameter or tetrameter. The rhythm of boogie woogie gives shape to the poetic lines and spacings on the page. Lines 1 and 2 are ended-stopped and discrete units musically and linguistically. Line 3 runs on to line 4 and together the two lines more directly reproduce the fluid boogie woogie musical line. In Hughes' poem, the immediate 'Utterance' of English syllables is both linguistic and musical. After line 7, the *syntaxis* becomes more ragged yet still approximates boogie woogie cadence.

The poem's alignment of musical rhythm and verbal content also calls attention to the *difference* between boogie woogie rhythms and house party

dancing and the possible motivations for those musical activities – 'a dream deferred'. The phrase recurs throughout Hughes' collection (notably, in 'Harlem') as a kind of transtextual refrain, marking a minority's hopes and aspirations which remain to be realized within a dominant Anglo white culture.

The speaker of the poem, reporting on the musical action and commenting to an observer, questions the imagined or implied observer's assumption, and therefore the implied reader/listener's, that boogie woogie music and dancing are necessarily expressions of joy. The speaker demands that the reader pay closer attention to the sounds, the rhythms and their significations:

> You think
> It's a happy beat?
> Listen to it closely:
> Ain't you heard
> something underneath . . . (ll. 8-12)

The poem's imagined reader, always already different from actual readers, is indefinite, perhaps an imagined white pleasure-seeker coming to Harlem ('You think / It's a happy beat?'), or perhaps a less-politically conscious African-American or some more generic reader. In any case, the imagined reader is dialogically positioned as at least misunderstanding and possibly naively racist. The implied speaker challenges the observer/reader to *listen* more closely to and look more deeply into the social and psychological contexts for African-American experiences and dreams, starting with the boogie woogie rhythms of the poetic line.

This juxtaposition of forms and expectations, speech and rhythms, constructing a dialogue of musical and verbal utterances is characteristic of many of the poems in Hughes' *Montage.* Some of the poems are more explicit about motives, presuppositions and forms. Whereas 'Dream Boogie' gently challenges the racism of the implied reader while politely coopting the reader as a 'cool cat' ('Daddy'), other poems in *Montage* represent African-American discourses within more explicit dialogic socio-political contexts which name and resist systemic racism in American society through reaccenting and retexting.

In 'Theme for English B', for example, Hughes constructs a conventional African-American narrator/speaker, drawn partly, but only partly, from his own life experiences, to dramatize the contest between dominant and minority speech and writing in the university writing course. The speaker of the poem mediates between two sociolinguistic communities, the African-American student, the only black man in his class, and the white writing teacher, whose professional role always already reproduces dominant language ideology as a presupposition of the teaching position he or she occupies. Exactly how the teacher and the student play out or reimagine their respective presupposed roles within the institution reproduces or reaccents and retexts the ideologies of race, class and language which inform the institution.

Significantly, the poem begins with the speaker's report of the writing teacher's speech as an assignment, marked on the page in indented, italicised written language:

'The instructor said,
Go home and write
a page tonight.
And let that page come out of you—
Then, it will be true.' (ll. 1-5)

The assignment, typical of many in language or writing classrooms, includes a command, an exhortation and a prediction or promise. The teacher's reported speech also identifies the written page with the writer's inner self; that is, the assignment presupposes truth to be grounded in the personal expression of selfhood. The teacher's assignment also reproduces a fundamental misrecognition of the politics of language and language ideology.

However, like the speaker of 'Dream Boogie', the speaker of 'Theme', the lyric initiator of the textual dialogue, the producer of a retexted dialogue from a monologue, questions the teacher's presupposition and challenges some of the racialized and literate assumptions about truth and personhood in multi-racial America: 'I wonder if it's that simple?' (l. 6). The first-person utterance is startling for its syntactic simplicity and the force of its pragmatic interruption. By hedging and reaccenting his question, the student speaker challenges the presuppositions of the writing assignment and the more general ideological relation between expression and identity prominent in many forms of ethnological linguistics and authorial- and identity-based literary criticism.

As in 'Dream Boogie', the speaker of 'Theme' evokes a difference from Standard English usage with a few colloquial constructions characteristic of spoken language, notably contractions, staggered syntax and junctures to mark phrase and clause boundaries. None of the poem's lexical or phonological elements directly reproduce African-American English as eye dialect. Moreover, most of the poem's features of spoken English are situated within the 'theme for English B', the written text embedded within the poem. The 'page' the speaker produces in the narrative discourse of the poem includes colloquialisms and features of spoken language and poetic form. These spoken features are retexted as writing practice and as aspects of the writing which is the 'page' within the 'poem'. At the same time, these features are part of how the speaker questions the assumptions of the writing teacher's assignment and retexts those assumptions in textualized responses injected into the English writing classroom from the perspective of a minority student. The Columbia University writing classroom is not an alternative educational space, but the student's composition, a response to an assignment, interrupts the conventions of that institutional space by asking questions about its presuppositions and expectations. What we don't read in 'Theme' is the writing teacher's response to or uptake of the student's written text.

In 'The Ballad of the Landlord' we do read about various characters' uptake or response to a direct minority intervention in dominant society's presuppositions and practices. In fact, the entire poem is structured around a series of pragmatic uptakes to utterances in a social dialogue. The poem narrates the story of a tenant/landlord dispute which escalates to the point that the African-American tenant lands in jail. The textual sequence is a narrative montage of

reported spoken dialogues and texts in multiple social and discursive contexts: landlord-tenant relations, law, public news media and interracial relations.

Focusing on the underclass exploited by more powerful propertied and legally sanctioned individuals, the poem evokes the ballad ethos more than the ballad form. Nonetheless, verses 1-5 deploy the ballad trope of incremental repetition to narrate an increasingly tense dialogue between the tenant and the landlord. Verses 1 and 2 each begin with the tenant's repetitious call-out, 'Landlord, landlord' (ll. 1, 5), a typical form of address in traditional ballads. Verses 1-2 represent the tenant's polite requests that the landlord make needed repairs to the rented home. The tenant's speech is more specifically identified with African-American English, although with just a few conventional elements. Then, starting in verse 3, the tenant reports the landlord's portion of the dialogue by repeating the landlord's statements as questions: 'Ten Bucks you say I owe you? / Ten Bucks you say is due?' (ll. 9-10). Repeating and reporting the landlord's statements as questions, the tenant pragmatically shifts the *syntaxis* and implicates his challenge to the landlord's counterdemands. Verse 5 narrates the climax of the dialogue, as the frustrated tenant shifts back to statements and offers a conditional threat, in pragmatic terms, to the landlord for not maintaining the property in a safe condition.

Verse 6 changes the narrative focus (point of view) again by reporting the landlord's speech directly in the poem's diegesis, again using the traditional ballad's form of address: 'Police! Police! / Come and get this man!' (ll. 21-22). The tenant's escalation of the conflict is trumped by the landlord's escalation of the conflict into a national political crisis, recited in Standard English: 'He's trying to ruin the government / And overturn the land!' (ll. 23-24). This is the same 'national crisis' strategy adopted by opponents of multidialectal education during the USA Ebonics Controversy in 1996. The rhythm of the line, if read with some colloquial elision, is in 8/6 ballad metre. The landlord reads the dialogic conflict as an attack on the systemic power which privileges property and ownership in the hands of mostly white men, thus overriding the tenant's pursuit of adequate housing. Significantly, the landlord's call for legal action is represented in a more conventional Standard English, albeit with a colloquial contraction.

Although the tenant acts heroically from a progressive point of view, fighting for tenant rights and fair housing, he lands in jail for talking back and threatening violence. The last section of the poem represents the legal narrative as a montage of objects and places whose sequence implicates a narrative of arrest, sentencing and jail time. The poem ends with the 'official' written report of the events in newspaper 'screamer' headlines: 'MAN THREATENS LANDLORD / TENANT HELD NO BAIL /JUDGE GIVES NEGRO 90 DAYS IN COUNTY JAIL!' (ll. 31-33). The capital letters visually suggest the hysterical response the tenant's speech and actions have triggered as well as the alliance between the landlord's call for police backup and the court's decision supporting the landlord. The only concrete action reported and named in the newspaper headline is the tenant's 'conditional threat' in lines 19-20. The landlord's failure to respond to the tenant's requests and then demands and the landlord's own threats and actions, as reported in the poem, go unreported in the monologic newspaper text. The poem embeds and retexts the

newspaper text within a more encompassîng dialogic discourse of economic and racial inequality.

Significantly, the tenant's racial identity is only marked in the last line of the poem. Readers might have inferred that racial identity from the textual representation of the tenant's speech or the housing situation, but the poetic diegesis withholds that explicit information until it is announced/reported by the newspaper headline. More to the point, the tenant's racial identity is not necessary to the socio-economic narrative of fair housing. The collocation of 'threat' and 'Negro' in the headline and the elimination of any other aspect of the housing conflict thus manifests a dominant racial ideological discourse and implicates the newspaper's collaboration with and enforcement of that ideology which supported and continues to support systemic white and propertied power in the USA. Speech acts are socially and ideologically coded. Only unruly tenants threaten, whereas the landlord's 'threat' to evict the tenant for withholding rent is implicated as a neutral speech act.

Hughes' title, 'Ballad of the Landlord', can be read ironically. Often, traditional ballad titles name the hero ('Tam Lin') or betrayed lover ('Lord Randall') or the underdog hero. However, in Hughes' poem, the narrative represents in dialogue, reported speech, diegetic montage and embedded text the triumph of the landlord over the tenant. The underdog or disempowered character is done in by the powerful antagonist supported by lawful racial inequality. Of course, it's possible to imagine that the landlord is also African-American, but that racial position is erased in the narrative and explicitly in the newspaper text in favour of the landlord's political and economic status. 'Landlord vs Tenant' is a different ideological and linguistic narrative from 'Landlord vs Negro'.

Like 'Theme for English B', 'Ballad of the Landlord' combines and retexts spoken and written reported discourses in Standard and African-American Englishes from the 1930s. Unlike some other early twentieth-century African-American writers, notably Paul Laurence Dunbar and Zora Neale Hurston, Hughes is more interested to evoke African-American English with a few gestural elements rather than represent or transcribe the dialect on the page. But like Dunbar and Hurston, Hughes is interested in discursive power and language ideologies. In both 'Theme' and 'Ballad', reported authoritative discourse is attached to an empowered figure within an institution (university classroom, property owner). The primary speakers in the poems, student and tenant African-American, challenge the actions and expectations of power but in different ways. The student's challenge is represented as an embedded 'poetic' essay, which examines the objects, activities and ideas of racialized identities in the USA and argues for a multicultural 'America' where people's share in the national experience are implicated in one another:

'So will my page be colored that I write?

Being me, it will not be white.
But it will be
a part of you, instructor.

> You are white—
> yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.
> That's American.' (ll. 27-33)

The explicit retexting of Whitmanesque lyric lines – 'yet a part of me, as I am a part of you' -- constitutes a poetics inter/subtext which pressures the question of literacy and education in relation to social equality and inequality.

The student's poetic essay is represented in Standard English, but the references to personal preferences draw together a wide range of cultural experiences: 'I like a pipe for a Christmas present, / or records—Bessie, bop, or Bach' (ll. 23-26). Represented ambiguously as both Inner Speech and Written Essay, the embedded text for the writing assignment also foregrounds racial identifies and differences and acknowledges the difficulties of co-located, co-operative and co-dependent racialized people in a multilingual and multicultural imagined national community.

'Ballad of the Landlord' is much more confrontational, both in the narrative and in the textual diegesis. Unlike the student's essayistic mode of personal opinion and rumination, 'Ballad' juxtaposes various texts and reported dialogues to construct a retexting montage which interrupts but finally does not overturn the monologic authoritative discourse of property and white privilege. Hughes' poem is representational and critical, but not utopian except by ideological dreams. In this respect, 'Theme for English B' with its somewhat melancholy rumination on American race relations nonetheless implicates a more positive representation of multicultural nationalism. In all these poems, varieties of English are politicized and mostly racialized. As Bakhtin reminds us, 'Every word, as we know, is a little arena for the clash and criss-crossing of differently oriented social accents. A word in the mouth of a particular individual person is a product of the living interaction of social forces'.[13] Answering 'reaccenting', Hughes' poetics of retexting riffs on Bakhtin's open semiosis of the Utterance. Adopting Modernist compositional strategies of montage and collage, Hughes' poems link spoken and written discourses, authoritative and resistant speech, in heteroglossic *and hyperliterate* dialogues of power, identity and textual performativity. Hughes' poems focus on class as much as race relations and so expand the linguistic register of 'African-American' utterances to engage with other socially disadvantaged or oppressed groups. 'Authentic speech' is politicized as much as racialized.

Retexting describes critical reading and poetic composition as related, even complementary practices. From the point of view of critical pragmatics, one of the interesting things about Langston Hughes' poetry is that it is distinctly African American in its orientation, address and thematics, even though the vast majority of Hughes' language usages is drawn from Standard English. But it is not only subject matter which identifies Hughes' poems as reflecting and reflecting on African American experiences within broader social and national contexts. Hughes' dialogic poetics opens lyric spaces for appropriating, reaccenting and retexting utterances from dominant and subordinate groups. Dialogic poetics as practice interrogates how these group-defined discourses intersect on the page and in the world. The poems evoke, repeat and renotate the syntax and rhythms of spoken

and written discourses as they regulate and are retexted in the African American community and poetic practice. Hughes' lyrics are dialogic through and through, artful and deformative, politically and progressively motivated. Critical pragmatics as deep reading can learn a good deal from critical pragmatics as poetic practice.

Notas

[1] *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986; Russian text first published 1929); *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986). It is of course entirely possible that, as some believe, Volshinov was the sole author of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, in which case we must refer to 'Bakhtin' and the 'Bakhtin Circle' in the same way we refer to 'Roman Jakobson' and the 'Russian Formalists' or the 'Prague Linguistic Circle'.

[2] *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, pp. 107-13.

[3] *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 110.

[4] See Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, pp. 87, 91; *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov*, ed. Pam Morris (London: Arnold, 1994), pp. 251-52.

[5] On 'unlimited semiosis', see: C. S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, 8 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931-58), I:339; II:303.
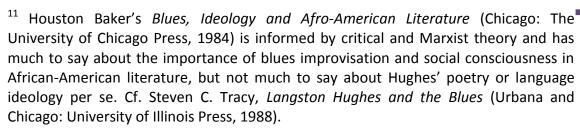
[6] *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, pp. 40-41.

[7] *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 115.

[8] For an early example, see Noam Chomsky, see 'Grammaticality', *Word*, 17 (1961): 1-10. Disputing prescriptivist approaches, Chomsky argued in that article and in *Syntactic Structures* (The Hague: Mouton, 1957) that what is 'grammatical' is what native speakers 'accept'. However, the question remains important and open in linguistics as the 'grammar vs usage' debates drag on. Moreover, nothing in the distinction between grammaticality and acceptability addresses the critical question of WHO are considered native speakers and WHICH native speakers determine what usage is acceptable.

[9] On the Ebonics controversy and language ideology in relation to African-American English (AVE) more generally, see: Rosina Lippi-Green, *English with an Accent: Language, ideology and discrimination in the United States,* 2nd rev. ed. (NY and London: Routledge, 2011); John Baugh, *Beyond Ebonics: Linguistic pride and racial prejudice* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2000); John Rickford and Russell R. Rickford, *Spoken Soul: The story of Black English* (NY: John Wiley, 2000); Walt Wolfram, 'Language Ideology and Dialect: Understanding the Ebonics Controversy', *Journal of English Linguistics*, 26 (1998):108-21.

[10] See the detailed narrative and analysis of Hughes' pre-WWII political and literary activities in Anthony Dawahare, 'Langston Hughes's Radical Poetry and the "End of Race', *MELUS*, 23 (1998): 21-41.

[11] Houston Baker's *Blues, Ideology and Afro-American Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984) is informed by critical and Marxist theory and has much to say about the importance of blues improvisation and social consciousness in African-American literature, but not much to say about Hughes' poetry or language ideology per se. Cf. Steven C. Tracy, *Langston Hughes and the Blues* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

[12] All quotations from Hughes' poetry are from: *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad (NY: Knopf Doubleday, 1995). Line numbers are cited in the text.

[13] *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, pp. 40-41.

Referências

Ver Notas.

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