WHAT IS DIALOGISM?

Aspects and elements of a dialogical approach to language, communication and cognition

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What is dialogism? Aspects and elements of a dialogical approach to language, communication and cognition

The purpose of this text is to summarise in a concise manner some aspects and elements of a ”dialogical” or ”dialogist” approach to language, communication and cognition.

1. A first approximation: Dialogism is not one coherent school, or theory, not even anything that "dialogists" of different extractions would agree upon. Nevertheless, I shall treat it here as a fairly coherent theoretical framework. Only towards the end, in sections 11 and 12, shall I dwell upon some of its internal controversies, dilemmas and challenges.

”Dialogism” is a name for a bundle, or combination, of *theoretical and epistemological assumptions about human action, communication and cognition*. There are different opinions about exactly which these assumptions should be, but I would go for the following abstract points (§ 1.1-3, but see also § 1.4 and below).

1.1. *Interactionism*: Communication and cognition always involves interaction with others (other persons, other systems, other dimensions of one´s self etc)[1]. Such interactions involve interdependencies that cannot be reduced to outer cause-effect relations. The basic constituents of discourse are interactions (exchanges, inter-acts), rather than speech acts or utterances by autonomous speakers (authors, communicators). (Cf. § 4 below, on the role of the other; co-authorship of situated meaning.)

1.2. *Contextualism*: Situated discourse is interdependent with contexts. One cannot make sense of discourse outside of its relevant contexts, and, at the same time, these contexts would not be what they are in the absence of the (particular) discourse that takes place within them. Contexts include co-texts (also with non-verbal aspects), situations, activity types, interlocutors´ interactional biographies and cultural knowledge (the latter including language, encyclopedia, discourses on a Foucaultian sense).

1.3. *Communicative constructionism*: The meaning of discourse and texts is (partly) accomplished in and through active sense-making of the linguistic and communicative

[1] A difference between communication and cognition is that the former, by definition, involves interaction, especially interpersonal interaction. However, there is empirical evidence (I think), that cognition, roughly to be defined as intelligent (non-random) coping with the world (in perception, cognition etc.), also involves interaction with the world, albeit not always (i.e. not in each and every moment) with other human beings. Thus, it turns out that communication and cognition are dialogically intertwined (Linell, 1998: 36).

processes themselves (*dialogos* ”in and through words”); communication is not a transfer of ready-made thoughts. Knowledge is largely communicatively constructed, in the sociohistorical genesis of knowledge, language, communicative genres (routines) etc.

Note, however, that dialogism, as I understand it, while emphasising the linguistic, communicative and cognitive construction involved in the *dialogical appropriation* and recognition of the world, does not deny the reality of things (the body, nature, space, social constraints etc.). Meaning is dialogically constituted, made in dialogue (cognition and communication), with reference to the world and against the background of the world, which is then dialogically appropriated and dialogically recognised. Relationism – that we are bound to perspectivise the world, apprehend and respond to it in different ways, depending on e.g. cultural traditions, commitments and concerns etc. – does not imply relativism. Talking about the world as if it was ”all social constructs” is loose and sloppy thinking, amounting to a kind of acontextual constructionism that is alien to dialogism (Linell, 1996). As Steiner (1978: 44) observes, laying out what he takes to be Heidegger´s position, perceptions and cognitions vary ”according to individual vision, social points of view, angles of interest and historical convention”, but this is not to deny that the world is ”there” to be appropriated and understood, a `thereness´ which ”wholly antecede[s] any particular or general act of cognition” . On the other hand, human beings can of course also construct, in and through language and communication, ”out-there-ness” (Potter, 1996), making things appear as if they were real (when they really aren´t), but this is different from appropriating (thereby giving form to, i.e. constructing in a less radical sense) what is already real.

To summarise, interaction, contexts, and linguistic-communicative construction are key-words of dialogism.

Contexts include both situations (with their situated interactions) and sociohistorical praxis. This can be formulated as a fourth point:

1.4. *Double dialogicality* (if you will, the combination of interactionism and social constructionism, cf. Nystrand, 1992): in and through communicative and cognitive activities, there is dialogue within both situations and traditions, i.e. situated interaction and sociocultural praxis (Malinowski´s, 1972, contexts of situation and culture). Dialogues takes place not only in interpersonal dialogue (situated interaction) but also at the level of sociocultural practices, communities, institutions, etc. (praxis). In Bühler´s

terms (1934), signs are defined both in a Zeigfeld (situated, referential field) and a Symbolfeld (network of linguistic meanings)[2].

At both planes of situation and sociocultural praxis, interaction with others (and their communicative products) is pertinent and incessant. On the one hand, we can talk about (asymmetrically distributed) *co-authorship of situated meaning* in situations (all parties to an interaction contribute in some way or another, but typically to different extents (asymmetrically), to sense-making), on the other hand, we have the (socially distributed) *shareholding in a common language* (sedimentations of aspects of co-authorships in participants´ biographies), i.e. as members of cultural communities, in the sociohistorically sustained conmtinuity of praxis, we partially share meanings (Rommetveit, 2001: cf. 4b below).

Dialogism uses *talk-in-interaction* (dialogue in a concrete sense, Swedish: *samtal*) *as a model and metaphor* for human communication and cognition[3]. However, with suitable accommodations of the dialogue metaphor, dialogical analysis can be applied also to written texts (their production as well as consumption), Internet-and-computer-mediated communication, use of artefacts (e.g. in work activities, learning situations) by both individuals and in teams, distributed cognition, individual cognition ("solitary thinking"), as well as to public discourse in society and culture on a particular issue/domain over long periods (from, say, a few days to several centuries[4]). Dialogism is an epistemological framework for sociocultural (human) phenomena: semiosis, cognition, communication, discourse, consciousness, i.e. for the social, cultural and human(istic) sciences (and arts) ("meaning and mind, not matter"), not primarily for the natural sciences (but cf. the practices of doing natural sciences).

More comprehensive perspectives on dialogism is to be found in Linell (1998) (although that book deals primarily with talk-in-interaction) and Marková (2002). Dialogism is often seen as a general *epistemology*, ways of appropriating (knowledge

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[2] Note Bühler´s contextual, i.e. gestalt-psychological, terms ”field”.

[3] This, however, raises the question what ”dialogue” or ”conversation” means when it is used metaphorically at this level. What is crucial is arguably a number of abstract conditions (exactly which may be disputed), such as:
(a) meaning is produced in a dynamic interaction between parties to communication and in their use of contextual resources; thus, communication is situated interaction;
(b) communication is mediated through language or other symbolic resources;
(c) communicative practices are socioculturally produced and reproduced;
(d) communication is not symmetrical between parties, but rather asymmetrical; it is made possible when parties complement each other (`complementarity´ , Linell 1998a: 14).
These are conditions which are made visible in talk-in-interaction.

[4] E.g. Kroon (2001) on public debates in the media, Linell (2002a: ch. 6) on the ”conversation” between ideas in the history of linguistics.

about) the world, especially the world of meaning (as opposed to matter) (culture as opposed to nature). Marková (op.cit.), however, even regards dialogism in ontological terms; *ontology* is not then taken in metaphysical terms, but as a theory of the mind, and through this the world, as consisting of cognitions (ideas, thoughts), communicative processes and meaningful actions, all of which are located in a sociocultural and physical world.

2. A terminological note: The terms ”dialogue", "dialogism" and "dialogicality" are closely related and sometimes used almost interchangeably. However, they should preferably be employed with different references: "dialogue" refers to actual interactions between or within individuals in situations and/or within sociocultural practices; "dialogism" refers to a general epistemological framework (cf. § 1 above), and "dialogicality" refers to ”dialogical” properties (roughly pertaining to interaction and contexts) of language, discourse and cognition.

A predisposition for dialogicality, taken as the ability to indulge in dialogue, is a human (innate) property; infants do it (Trevarthen, Bråten). Man is a semiotic animal (animal symbolicum /Cassirer/). Dialogicality is more fundamental than, or at least as fundamental as, language. (Here, as well as on so many other points, dialogism takes a stance very different from Chomskyan linguistics and many mainstream traditions in the language sciences; Linell, 2002a).

3. Dialogism as an alternative to monologism: "Dialogism" is defined, and must be understood, in contrast to an alternative (as a *counter-theory* to*): "monologism*" (Heen Wold, 1992). The constituent theories of monologism are the information processing model of cognition, the transfer model of communication, and the code model of language.

The constituent theories of monologism are clearly interrelated, and they go far back in history. For example, Aristotle launched a theory that the real world is structured in terms of substances and accidences. Such ideas, things and categories have linguistic names (a theory known as ”nomenclaturism”). The medieval modists argued that the modes in which the world exists (”modi essendi”) are reflected in categories of thought (”modi intelligendi), which in turn are reflected in their linguistic labellings (”modi significandi”). Such ideas have been legion in virtually all traditional grammars and many schools of linguistic philosophy. In addition, many presupposed that the categories of language are best represented in written language. Monologism is also part of a `written language bias´ (Linell, 2002a), and a literate, scholarly, philosophical culture (`scholasticism´; Bourdieu, 2000).

It is noticeable that there is no place for constructive processes of communication in monologism. Cognition precedes communication, and ideas (”thoughts”) (and possibly ”emotions”) are represented and transmitted in communication. For example, in a study of over 40 traditional grammars of the Swedish language from the late 17th to late 20th century, Haapamäki (2002) notices that the overwhelming majority of authors regard language as a medium for representing thought. When interpersonal communication is indeed given priority (mainly by some late 19th century linguists and onwards), it is characteristic that for them, language in communication is still taken simply to *express* ideas and thoughts, i.e. (in modern terms:) products of cognition. Thus, we have a transfer model of communication, in which cognition is the only fundamental phenomenon, and language is a code ancillary to this. Dialogism would of course hardly deny that we communicate ideas and thoughts. However, the traditional conception shows no recognition of the dialogical idea that meaning is, at least partly, communicatively constructed (rather than simply cognitively constructed prior to communicative processes); language contributes to assigning meaning to what is said in situated interaction, to achieving sense-making.

Monologism is part of a major tradition in Western philosophy and science, which has tried to reduce the world to rational subjects, on the one hand, and verifiable objects, on the other. According to dialogism, this is not all there is; in particular, there are the relationships between the individual subject and the other(s), and between the individual and the world (these relations are primary, rather than merely derived) (see below, § 4 etc.). *Relationism* is basic to dialogism (§ 1.3).

Monologism seeks to construct language and knowledge (of language, of the world, moral systems etc) as independent of (single) subjects (objectivism). While single subjects (actors) holding intentions, knowledge etc. are the sense-making organisms, these individuals are often mistaken in their actual performance; they do not always live up to the requirements of the supra-individual system (language, culture). (Hence the attitude to language ”performance” as full of errors.) Dialogism, by contrast, looks upon knowledge as necessarily constructed, negotiated, and (re)contextualised (a) in situ and in socio-cultural traditions, and (b) in dialogue with others (individuals are never completely autonomous). The normative, ”fault-finding” perspective is tuned down.

4. The other: In §1, an attempt was made to formulate some fundamentals of dialogism in the most abstract, general terms. The picture will be given some more substance in the following sections. I will start with a point, which many would take as definitional of dialogism, namely, the role of *the other*.

4.1. Intersubjectivity and alterity. Other-orientedness (or alterity) has two sides, commonality and difference. On the one hand, there is (the strive for) *intersubjectivity* (as in the work of (social) psychologists like Baldwin, Mead, Vygotsky), rather than subjectivity and/or objectivity. Intersubjectivity is a defining property of communication; there must always be intersubjectivity at some level; some common assumptions, norms and commitments (Clark, 1996: ”common ground”). In addition, this "intersubjectivity [at some level] must be taken for granted in order [for intersubjectivity at other levels] to be achieved" (Rommetveit, 1974).

On the other hand, there is a somewhat opposed strand of *alterity* (Marková, 2002: ch. 4): dialogical tensions and differences between people and traditions, boundaries between communities (and reaching across boundaries), knowledge, norms and expectations ar variance. If you will, otherness introduces strangeness (Bakhtin: "estrangement", Ru. ostranenie), in the form of oppositions, disagreements, different evaluations and accounts. It is the disruptive influences of the other which introduces tensions; the other brings in extra ("surplus") knowledge other than you had before or you had expected to encounter; she may see things from points of view that are so far strange or unfamiliar to self. Thought is not ready-made, before the communicative acts, but is conceived (accomplished, completed) when, in a dialogue, another mind transgresses the boundaries of your own (Merleau-Ponty). Within limits, however, the individual may gradually acquire an ability to develop an internal dialogue, to introduce ”virtual others” in his or her argumentative thinking (Billig, 1987)[5].

Communication is oriented towards shared knowledge (intersubjectivity), but there would be no point in communication if there were no differences and asymmetries of knowledge (cf. alterity). The dialogical interplay involves taking the perspective of the other (Mead, Vygotsky), but also interpreting (the other) by responding (or preparing a response) on one´s own terms: imposing one´s own meaning (according to Marková, 2002: 129, more of Bakhtin´s position) (cf. intersubjectivity vs. alterity as discussed above).

4.2. `I´, `you´, `it´, `we´. But communication is not only about ”you” and ”me”, nor about ”it” and ”me” (the mainstream alternative of objects and subjects). (Nor is dialogism only about ”I” and ”thou”; cf. Marková, 2002: 103, on Rosenzweig.) We may

[5] The role of the other is thus constitutive of social construction. The consideration of the estrangement introduced by others is comparatively absent in the theories of ”individual constructivists” like Piaget; despite being dynamic, his developmental psychology founded on processes of accommodation and assimilation is very much geared towards ”equilibrium”.

talk about four co-ordinates of communication: ”I, it, you (thou), we”: Behind this, there are three stages of conceptual development. The classic contrast is that between subjectivism and objectivism (Rommetveit, 2003: psychology of ”the first person” (”I”) and ”the third person” (”it”). Indeed, radical objectivism may even construct the relation of language to the world as one between two ”third person”-like entities, i.e. a linguistic representation (the constellation of symbols) and the organisation of the world; this is a theory cleansed from subjectivism (objectivism supported by scholasticism, cf. Bourdieu, 2000). The next step is to introduce ”you” (Rommetveit, 2002: psychology of ”the second person”; thus, we have a triad of ”I”, ”you” and the world (Bühler, 1934; Marková, 2002). The third step, implied by the double dialogicality (cf. § 1.4 above), is to distinguish between the concrete other (”thou, you”) and the generalised other (= ”we”) (cf. Linell, 2002b). Communicative acts are addressed to ”you”, in a world of sociocultural, conceptual webs woven together with others (by ”us”).

4.3. Relations in an ”inter-world”. As was already pointed out, we can conceive of the role of the cultural collectivity in relation to individuals at two levels (e.g. Rommetveit, 2002): the (socially distributed) shareholding in a common language (languages, social representations etc.), and the co-authorship (or co-construction) of situated meaning. At both planes, understanding is mediated by dialogue; understandings accomplished must be thought of as partial and partially shared (§ 7.6). (For those who are familiar with Rommetveit´s work, cf. his exemplary stories about ”the man who was ignorant of carburettors” and ”Mr. Smith who is mowing his lawn”; Linell, 2002b.)

Meaning resides in the *interface* between the culturally embedded subject and the culture itself (which contains other individuals embedded in the culture) (Rommetveit, 1998). Similar formulations about the human mind can be found in Bakhtin (1984: 287ff.). Another concept of the same kind is Merleau-Ponty´s (1955) ”intermonde” (inter-world) between subjects and the world. (Buber, 1962, has, according to Marková, 2002: 102, ”the sphere in between”.)

Dialogism tries to transcend the dichotomies between objectivism and subjectivism, and between extreme empiricism and idealism-cum-rationalism, by stressing intersubjectivity in a real (material and social) world.

5. The role of dynamics: The human world, as scientifically conceived, contains not only stable structures and general mechanisms (and firm or certain knowledge) (Descartes, Newton), not only elements and categories but also essential (constitutive) dimensions of antinomies (oppositions; Marková, 2002), tensions, interdependencies,

potentialities (in addition to actualities).[6] Thus, an important characteristic of dialogism is its insistence on *dynamics*, change, tensions, and evolution. Dialogue is discussed in terms of "becoming", "in the making", rather than "being"; processes and actions are more fundamental rather than products. The genetic perspectives in dialogism include phylogenesis, ontogenesis, sociocultural genesis (sociogenesis), and microgenesis (Vygotsky, Marková, Wertsch). The emphasis on evolution, relativity, and interdependence exhibits similarities with the ideas and theories of e.g. Darwin, Einstein, Heisenberg, Bohr, Bateson. For a modern neurophysiological account, see Damasio (1994).

It is important that dynamics and change apply to both situated interaction and sociocultural (situation-transgressing) practices (praxis), although the latter are long-term developments with relatively more of stability and robustness (toughness, viscosity, inertia). The nature of praxis has often been overlooked or mistreated in monologism, with its often quite rigid dichotomies like structure vs. agency in sociology and system vs. use (langue vs. parole, etc.) in linguistics. Even dialogists can reflect traditional dichotomies, as when Bakhtin (1986: 134) argues that elements of speech are experienced in two ways: through the repeatability of the language and the unrepeatability (uniquesness) of the utterance. But language is also dynamically changeable (though usually quite slowly), and utterances too display some recurrent features; stability and change are attributes at both levels.

6. Time and historicity. The previous point focused on the dynamics in the sociohistorical development of language, communicative genres, cultural activities, work etc. Thus, for example, language is not simply a system outside of the flow of social history, linguistic structures are not atemporal, abstract, spiritual or mental, but organised in time and embodied.

The temporal structure is absolutely crucial to situated interaction; talk exchanges are organised in terms of *sequences*. Contributions derive parts of their meaning and significance from their sequential positions. This is a point which has been a corner-stone of theorising within Conversation Analysis.

A dialogical outlook on language and mind draws attention to the *historicity*, *temporality*, and *embodiment* (corporeality) of (spoken) language.

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6 To use a distinction from Aristotle!

7. There are numerous other fundamental *aspects and elements* of a dialogical approach that deserve special emphasis. I state some ot hem here in short sections.

7.1. Action and meaning: *Action in the world* is a more basic semantic-pragmatic function of language and communication than is representation of the world. Language is not primarily a language of representation; rather, representing something can be reanalysed as a kind of action.
Basic to action is *interaction*. The constituent actions (communicative acts) of a conversation are (social) inter-acts[7], rather than (individual) speech acts in Searle´s (1969) sense. Turn-taking is a fundamental phenomenon. Social other-orientation permeates also the content/substance of basic action.

7.2. The mind : body and culture: The mind is "something alive" (Marková, ms: ch1: 20), not a set of mechanisms. It is characterised by both embodiment (cf. Merleau-Ponty) and cultural embeddedness, not primarily by abstract, universal ideas. The body is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for meaning and consciousness; only individuals have bodies (there are no spirits without bodies, no collective souls). But the mind, though embodied, is a relational phenomenon, and works as interaction between systems:
- between different neurological systems (engaging different structures; not only representations; parallel distributed processing: Damasio, 1994)
- between individuals
- generating meaning in the interface between individual and culture

7.3. Activity types: Action, communication and cognition are subordinated to or organised in terms of more comprehensive activities (activity types, e.g. Levinson, 1979, cf. Wittgenstein´s notion of language games). Activities are subject to habit (routines, norms, rules), physical and social constraints and impositions, intentions (e.g. conscious decision-making), and chance. They differ with respect to e.g. degree of ritualisation, interactivity, dependence on artefacts, built and written environments etc.

7.4. Knowledge: The body is a prerequisite for consciousness, and (some degree of) consciousness is necessary for knowledge. Consciousness has a sociodialogical basis[8],

[7] This term is a back-formation from ”interaction” and is intended to stress than also the elementary contribution to a dialogue, e.g. an utterance by a single speaker, is permeated by social, sequential and interactional interdependencies. The term has been used by Halliday (1994:68), Linell & Marková (1993).
[8] Consciousness involves reflecting on one´s own position, and this is dependent on experiences of alterity, on the realisation that others understand you and the world in specific and sometimes divergent ways.

and the same applies to knowledge; knowledge is of a *social* nature, and is closely related to communication and action (some prefer terms like `(social) understanding´to `knowledge´). That which is social is dependent on relations (communication) between individuals for its genesis, evolution and maintenance (and disappearance!); socially generated, socially sustained, socially negotiated, transformed, confirmed and censured, socially distributed.[9]
Dialogism (as I understand it) rejects Descartes´s general claim that there can be absolutely certain knowledge of the world, but maintains that we can have *reasonably* certain knowledge, on the basis of empirical and reflective evidence (Peirce).

7.5. The architecture of interaction: An interactive sequence involves responses, initiatives (responsive and projective aspects) and reciprocity of contributions:
- responses display candidate understandings and stances with respect to prior contributions to a dialogue;
- initiatives foresee, anticipate and project possible next contributions (actions) to the dialogue;
- reciprocity is interdependency between contributions to dialogue.

Communicative acts are sequentially ordered. Communicative acts (contributions to dialogue) have both responsive and initiatory (projective) aspects simultaneously (Linell, 1998: 175ff.). Related theories are those of the three-aspectual of the utterance or contribution to dialogue (retrospection, substance, projection), and the three-step model of the minimal communicative interaction.

Each action or utterance has a situated meaning of its own, interdependent with the particular matrix of contexts in which it occurs. Actions and utterances are not simply instantiations of units belonging to the language. For example, a *repetition* does not repeat the original but constitutes a new action and a new version of that which is done or talked about. This is so partly by the action´s being sequentially positioned after a similar instance (”original”).

7.6. Meaning and understanding exhibit still other characteristics, and explanations of the processes involved make use of concepts like:
* perspectivity: the sociocultural nature and historicity of meaning (Vico) implies that knowledge is subjected to perspectives (e.g. Nietzsche); the same data or topics could

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[9] `Social´ is a better term than `collective´: `social´ connotes asymmetrical distribution and avoids some of the unfortunate loadings of `collective´ (e.g. actions carried out by collectives (rather than individuals in interaction), consciousness associated with a collectivity (collective representations, Volkseele)).

have been conceptualised otherwise (against universalism). Nietzsche stressed the indeterminacy of interpretations and multiplicity of perspectives (Nehamas, 1985: 100). The ways in which the world appears to us, the versions and visions of the world, are dependent on positions, perspectives and interests. It does not follow from perspectivity, however, that all the versions are worth the same (or ”true” or ”false” to the same extent).

* thinking in oppositions (in addition to categories; talking about X makes non-X relevant) and aspects (in addition to entities); figure - background; relationism rather than relativism (cf. # 8)
* meaning potentials, polysemy, vagueness, ambiguity, multiple perspectives, multiple interpretations, redundancy
* explicit meaning vs background, presuppositions, implicitness, preconceptual structures (e.g. experiencing `blue´, feeling attraction or disgust involve bodily reactions and non- or pre-linguistic perceptions; ”the mind arises out of an organism, not a disembodied brain”, Damasio, 1994: 229)
* understandings are partial and fragmentary, dialogically constituted and only partially shared (Rommetveit), understanding for current (practical) purposes (Garfinkel) (rather than "complete understanding")
* meaning is mediated by artefacts (e.g. cognitive artefacts, inscriptions, tools, instruments, language);
* sense-making is a never ending process; meaning is never finished (Bakhtin), but may be provisionally finalised at a given point in interaction (we cannot go on for ever).

7.7. Polyvocality: Texts and utterances are not the speaker/writer´s own products; they typically contain (explicit or implicit) elements from other sources (Anward, 2002), traces of others´ texts and utterances (other ”voices”) (intertextuality). Genres, or activity types, may also borrow from other genres (activity types) (interdiscursivity) (Bakhtin, 1984; Morson & Emerson, 1990) (but cf. fn. 7). Expressions, ideas, messages etc often travel between texts and contexts (”recontextualisations”, Linell, 1998: 140ff.).

7.8. Dynamics and tensions are essential in communication and can be discussed in terms like:

* asymmetries, power, domination
* boundaries between cultural communities, and the transgression of boundaries (of genres, activity types, communities)
* dynamics (as against states of knowledge, representations), cognition as communicative (dialogical) activities, ongoing processes with a moving focus. A conversation is a form of distributed cognition (Linell, 1998: 224).

- background (respond to, understand, reinterpret and recontextualise the prior) - present (one´s own initiative) - horizon (project into the future); cf. the three-aspectual model of the contribution to dialogue (§ 6.5).

7.9. The role of monologue: There are both "monological" vs "dialogical" texts and discourses; ”monological” texts can be seen as the products of *monologising practices*. (Here, the terms ”monological” and "dialogical" are used at another level; Morson & Emerson, 1990).[10] Note that such ”situated but decontextualising” practices have an established position also in a dialogically conceived and constituted world. These monologising practices may include, for example, attempts at coding dialogue itself (e.g. so-called Initiative-Response Analysis, cf. Linell, 1998: 178f).

In general, ”monological” phenomena are to be reanalysed as the products of (monologising) activities. For example, (allegedly) ”fixed” meanings (e.g. of lexical items) are the products of fixation activities (e.g. in people´s compiling dictionaries, defining scientific terms).

7.10. Sequentiality, joint construction and act-activity interdependence have been formulated as three reflexive ”dialogical principles” (Linell, 1998: 85ff.), especially with reference to talk-in-interaction. They can serve as a summary of basic dialogical claims. Situated interpretations of utterances (or acts) are partially dependent on their positions in sequences of actions. Meanings are the products of the interaction between subjects (co-authorship). Acts and overarching activities co-constitute each other (interdependence[11]).

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[10] According to Bakhtin (cf. Morson & Emerson, 1990), an utterance have dialogical, and possibly monological, properties, but at different levels.
At one level, *all* utterances and texts are *dialogical* in the following respects:
1. responsivity: each and every utterance is a response to a situation or to somebody else´s utterance (usually, the other´s words or meanings are taken up and responded to, sometimes re-used and reaccentuated)
2. addressivity: each and every utterance is addressed to somebody who has to do something with it (understand it, respond to it)
3. genre-belongingness: each and every utterance belongs to, or can be associated with, some activity type or genre.
At another level, utterances and texts may be *more or less monological* or dialogical:
4. multi-voicedness: The utterance can contain several perspectives, opinions, stances, voices (the one-voiced utterance is systematically monoperspectival)
5. openness: An utterance can invite different sorts of responses or answers (or it can try to impose a particular kind of response). (The various responses can in turn give rise to different kinds of responses, which can in turn…, etc. (the unfinalisability of dialogue /Bakhtin/).
In other words, a monological text is monological in two respects:
a) one single perspective (voice) is systematically hegemonic
b) one type of response or interpretation is imposed on the recipients.

[11] Sometimes, the (Bakhtinian) term ”interpenetration” is preferred to ”interdependence”, since the latter may syggest that the entities that are interdependent exist as autonomous units, and depend on each other from that point of departure (Putnam, 1995: 57f).

8. Against Cartesian dichotomies: As an introduction to a bit of historical background (§ 9), let me go back to the fact that dialogism must be seen as a ”counter-theory” to monologism (§ 3).

Dialogism assumes that concepts are interdependent, and interrelated through intrinsic (rather than extrinsic or contingent) relations. This applies, *a fortiori*, to oppositions (dichotomies, antinomies) like:

mind - body
subject – object
knowing - acting
knower - known
cognition - communication
cognition - emotion
system - practice
speaker - listener
self - other
individual - collectivity
discourse - context
biology (nature) - culture (nurture)
rest – movement
abstract – concrete
mental work – manual work
micro - macro
stability – change
potentiality - actuality[12]
etc.

Making distinctions (classificatory definitions such as those mentioned here) is of course necessary for the purpose of keeping phenomena *analytically* apart. This is something which one does for methodological or analytic purposes. But methodology is easily transformed into ontology, and the different categories become erroneously interpreted as independent (autonomous) objects; in most Western mainstream disciplines, from Aristotle onwards, dichotomies (X vs. Y) become *Cartesian* in a more pregnant sense: X, Y are seen as (different) *entities*; X is logically and physically (locationally) distinct from Y, and X is even causally prior to Y.

[12] This particular, somewhat more scholarly dichotomy is due to Aristotle. It corresponds to a rather basic notion in dialogistic thinking. However, the Aristotelian tradition has interpreted it in rather Cartesian terms. See Marková (2002) for extensive discussion.

According to dialogism, we have dualities instead of distinctions between entities: X and Y are *aspects* of partly the same phenomena (Wittgenstein); they are mutually co-constituted and logically interdependent. One cannot talk about one of the terms without presupposing (thereby implicitly talking about) the other.

On monological vs. dialogical understanding of ”antinomies”, see Marková (2002).

9. A very brief history of ideas

9.1. Schematically, we can distinguish monological from dialogical traditions as follows:

Plato, Aristotle	Herakleitos (pre-Socratics)
Descartes	Vico
enlightenment	romanticism
modernism	postmodernism
intellectualism	emotion, corporeality
Saussure	Nietzsche
Habermas	Volosinov, Bakhtin

In more general terms:

rationality	rationalities of different kinds, interests, passions
unitary science	distinction natural vs cultural sciences
universalism	historicism, constructivism
individualism	other-oriented theory

Placing scholars and schools in either of two coarse categories, in two columns as of above, amounts to some unacceptable simplifications. For example, putting Plato and Aristotle in the same cell is partly unjustified. Aristotle was certainly monological in devising his system of categories, but in being more empirically oriented, he was less monological than Plato with his abstract ideas (a model for a strong cognitive tradition in Western thinking). With due modifications, scholars who are more or less monological, can be divided into a more typically and a less typically monological line of thinking. For example, as Furberg (1998) points out, one could divide British philosophy of language of the 20th century as follows:

Cambridge	Oxford

Russell	Moore
Wittgenstein I	Wittgenstein II[13]
Dummett	Ryle
Quine	Austin
	Strawson

The former entertain more of an objective observers´perspective (language and language users regarded as 3. person), the latter more of a subjective actors´ perspectives (language in terms of actions by 1.persons). As we argued above, dialogism would add a 2. person perspective (§ 4.2).

Monologism stems from a scholastic, philosophical tradition with a strong impact on Western sciences. It works with idealisations which are detached from social conditions. Common goals and assumptions include:
* autonomy (of science, theories)
* universal (rather than socio-historically specific) theories
* abstract ideas (invariants, concepts) mediating in communication, cognition and perception
* individual subject as origo in the human sciences
* precision, and freedom from ambiguity
* purity, elegance, economy.

One might dub this a Cartesian tradition (which includes, apart from Descartes, among so many others: Plato, Aristotle and later Kant, as well as Humboldt (with some reservations), Husserl, Bergson, and to some extent even Sartre, although some of these are also partly ”dialogistic” in some respects):
* the individual subject as the self-evident, absolute point of departure
* disconnecting the subject from his world
* Cartesian dichotomies (cf. above),

Dialogism denies these stances their privileged status. It fosters a scepticism towards the postulation of abstract types and underlying structures, thus being against the tradition in formal linguistics related to Platonic ideas (Plato > Descartes > Chomsky).

Cartesianism strives for ordered, rational discussion with coherence, logic, and often normativity, *without* considerations of ”irrelevant” human interests and commitments, power, illusion, collusion, human errors and shortcomings. The dialogical alternative

[13] Though Wittgenstein was of course never associated with Oxford.

(classified by Marková, 1982, as Hegelian) also acknowledges the actual sociocultural realities in the human world(s): Changing foci, stream of varying topics, channelled through different textual, intertextual, contextual factors, different participants (§ 5-6).

9.2. Monologism is the dominant tradition in Western philosophy and science. However, there have been *precursors of dialogism*, for example (see Marková, 2002):
Vico
Hamann, Hegel (in some respects), Humboldt, Herder etc,
neo-kantian philosophers (Cohen, Natorp, Cassirer) (”Marburg school”) and dialogue philosophers (Rosenzweig, Buber), preparing the ground for Bakhtin.

In addition, Linell (1998), and others, suggest that dialogism inherited elements from (some variants of) phenomenology (e.g. perspectivity, multiple realities, human interestedness),
pragmatism (e.g. embeddedness in practical action, vagueness and the gradual emergence of meaning), social behaviorism and symbolic interactionism (Mead; the three-step model of (minimal) interaction), cultural semiotics and activity theory (cognition, communication and work as mediated by language and culture) . Heidegger is, in some respects, quite dialogistic (Steiner, 1978) (being-in-the world, involvement, the role of the other, etc.) There are also French existentialism and dialectic philosophy: Marcel, Kojève, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre: human existence as praxis in social, historical and linguistic contexts: engagement, embodiment, relation to the other. But these deviate from dialogism on several points: more macro-oriented (no (empirical) focus on situated interaction), less attention to language and talk-in-interaction (communication), point of departure still in the individual subject.

9.3. While most of the ”schools” mentioned above are ”philosophical”, there are also some 20th century *empirical approaches*, which are, in part or even in large part, dialogistic in orientation. My contention (Linell, 1998) is that these vast research traditions have provided important empirical evidence for the fruitfulness of a dialogical approach, in particular as regards spoken language and talk-in-interaction. These traditions include ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis, ethnographic and context-based discourse analysis, Firth/Halliday tradition in linguistics, social pragmatics, Critical Discourse Analysis, symbolic interactionism (Goffman), interactionist social psychology (Clark), discursive psychology (Potter), social-constructionist versions of social representations theory (Moscovici), socio-cultural semiotics and cultural psychology (Wertsch), and interdisciplinary dialogue analysis (Rommetveit, Marková, et al.).

10. Dialogism in language studies: What could be the concrete, theoretical *consequences for linguistics* of adopting dialogism? These are some examples:
* linguistic theory is a theory of *praxis*, rather than a system of abstract units (and rules), and praxis comprises the duality of *situated interaction* and *situation-transcending practices;*
* one must one´s point of departure in *interaction* (cf. `interactional linguistics´, Ochs et al., 1996; Linell, 2001, 2002c): inter-acts (rather than speech acts; § 7.1), sequences, activities and larger units; structural units are emergent abstractions from utterances (which implies an empirical approach to spoken language and interaction, rather than one primarily based on intuitions about structures);
* linguistic units as *potent(ialitie)s*[14]: (linguistic) meanings of lexical items as meaning potentials (Halliday 1994, Rommetveit 1974, Lähteenmäki, 2001), grammatical constructions as having functional potentials;
* situated meaning cannot be entirely derived from inherent lexical (and grammatical) meanings; rather, linguistic meanings are potentials to combine with various contextual (co-textual, situational or activity-related) factors to produce situated interpretations[15];
* grammatical constructions have *responsive and projective* properties (”outer syntax”; cf. above three aspects of the utterance: retrospection, substance, projection) and are often loosely coupled to communicative activities; the grammatical construction is a linguistic means of transforming one micro-situation of contextual understanding to another; it s a method for assigning linguistic form to (parts of) an utterance and to contribute to accomplishing a local communicative project (Linell, 2002b);
* in phonology, one might talk about *gestures*, rather than segments, supra-segments or units.

11. Some controversies and dilemmas: Dialogism is of a fairly wide applicability; one could compare, in this respect, the narrative paradigm (with which it overlaps): personal narrative, sociocultural narrative, meta-narrative (Somers & Gibson, 1994). Some would undoubtedly prefer a narrower interpretation.

Accordingly, different "dialogists" do not agree on all that has been said above. Some of the *controversial points* are:

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14 `Potentials´, as a characteristic of units of the linguistic system (as opposed to the `actualities´ of language use), is a notion related to the notion of `energeia´ proposed by Aristotle and taken up by, among others, Humboldt.

15 For example, not all emotive words are inherently emotive; some are (more) neutral and derive their (contextual) emotiveness from contexts (Holmberg, 2002).

a) should dialogism be seen as a general (philosophical, epistemological) framework or as a more precise theory ("dialogue theory")? Is it an epistemology or rather an ontology (§ 1)?
b) should ”dialogue” be taken in the abstract sense (all forms of knowledge, cognition, communication can be analysed in dialogical terms) or only in the concrete sense as "interactive communication through symbols between two or more individuals who are mutually co-present"?
c) is dialogue to be understood in a normative sense (Habermas, who is hardly a dialogist!) or in an empirical sense, as a set of concepts to describe and explain all actually occurring forms of discourse, text (use), communication, cognition and meaningful (inter)action? Should dialogism deal with an idealised kind of symmetrical (open etc.) communication[16], or should (as I argue) all asymmetries and tensions of communication (cf. § 4a) be included[17]? Should we (cf. § 9a) aim for a homogeneous ”theory” or a framework replete with tensions (Linell, 2002a)?

Other (related) differences of opinion with respect to dialogism include:
* dialogue is something which can promote thinking, consciousness and reflexivity of all kinds (including immoral and malevolent ones), vs. dialogism as a kind of moralism (Buber; theological variants (mysticists like Böhme etc.; Bakhtin?)
* dialogue as concerned with individual responsibility, or as something the essence of which is its social genesis/construction (cf. different interpretations of Bakhtin; Steinglass, 1998).

12. Avoiding some extremes: The previous section alluded to some possible problems and dilemmas. In order to avoid some reductions into absurdity, I believe that a viable dialogism must involve positionings which some people might experience as compromises. This includes points like the following:

We must avoid the extremes of postmodernism. This stance involves (a) avoiding the extremes of the "linguistic" or "discursive" turns in the social sciences; note that I advocate a certain kind of ”realism” as compatible with dialogism, (b) promoting a *contextual* social constructionism, rather than a radical constructionism (the latter implying post-modern relativism, which amounts to a kind of extremely abstract thinking, negating the body and nature, space, social conditions, etc.) (Linell, 1996), (c)

[16] Dialogue characterised by liberty, equality, fraternity (or freedom to take individual initiatives, symmetry of participation, mutual responsibility and responsivity)?
[17] Dialogism, using talk-in-interaction (”conversation”) as a model and metaphor, will easily be misinterpreted, if we assign too much importance to two rather sociohistorically quite specific communicative genres, i.e. argumentative (”Socratic”) dialogue (argumentation) and sociable (phatic) ”conversation” (polite leisurely talk) (Marková, 2002: 86).

recognising science as a particular type of activity (Bourdieu, 2000: 109ff), and (d) in general seeking a mediating position between modernism and postmodernism, i.e. neither objectivism nor relativism (Bourdieu, op.cit.: 120). Relationism does not imply relativism.

We must also avoid extreme anti-individualism ("the subject as nothing but a nexus of social relations and dependencies") (and extreme individualism: ”the subject is absolutely free”). Rather, the subject is both socially embedded and subjected to bodily constraints, *and* is a conscious, rational individual with a will and an ability to indulge in emancipatory action.

We must acknowledge monologue and monologism too: there are monologistic (or monologising) practices in the world (§ 7.8). Finally, there is a certain paradox involved in proposing dialogism as the (only) general framework; it may be argued that on the meta-level, this amounts to adopting monoperspectivism, which is arguably typical of monologism (Bourdieu, 2000: 50, 93).

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