

CHAPTER 1

CONCEPTUAL AND TERMINOLOGICAL PRELIMINARIES

Dialogue, Dialogism, Dialogicality

1.1 DIALOGOS

The term ‘dialogue’¹ has a rich and diversified meaning (or ‘meaning potential’²) in most European languages. Let us start our exploration with a small etymological exercise. The Greek word *dialogos* is derived from the verb *dialegesthai* ‘to conduct a conversation’, which in turn is related to *legein*, meaning ‘to speak, to talk’ but also (originally) ‘to assemble’. This origin in a concept expressed by a verb may remind us that ‘dialogue’ is a process or practice, rather than an abstract thing.

However, there are at least two other time-honored associations with, and quasi-etymologizations of, the word *dialogos* ‘dialogue’. In common usage, ‘dialogue’ means ‘conversation, or verbal interaction, between two or more participants’.³ This definition ties up with the meaning of ‘interaction in contexts’, which will be central in my exploration of dialogicality. However, the explication of the term ‘dialogue/dialogos’ has sometimes been associated with and supported by a false etymology, namely, that *dia-* is related to *dya-* (*duas*) ‘two’ (as in *dyad*). This interpretation has of course

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been strongly reinforced by the contrast to ‘monologue’, ‘discourse by *one* speaker/writer’. However, *dia-* in *dialogos* is the prefix meaning ‘through’ or ‘by’. Therefore, *dialogos* could be analyzed as *dia* ‘in and through’ *logos*. The latter word is notoriously ambiguous in Greek, at least from our anachronistic point-of-view; it can mean, e.g., ‘word(s), discourse, talk, thought, reason, knowledge, theory’.

I will be interested in a rather broad sense of ‘dialogue’ (§ 1.2), which does not involve the limitation to dyadic interaction. I will also avoid the term ‘polylogue’ (or ‘multi-logue’) (“interaction between three or more participants”), since it strengthens the contrast to a notion of ‘dialogue’ as “interaction between two.” If we want to focus on the number of participants, terms like ‘dyadic’ (‘two-party’), ‘triadic’ (‘three-party’) and ‘multi-party’ should be preferred.

The second etymological account, which stands up better to historical scrutiny and is therefore somewhat closer to “truth,” picks up another important aspect of ‘dialogue’. We are faced with meaning-making activities that are *mediated in and through language*, words, signs, symbols or concepts; it is not just (semiotically unmediated) behavior or practical action. The aspect of semiotic mediation will be highlighted in the following as one of the basic properties of dialogical activities, alongside with the three mentioned above: other-orientedness, interaction and context-interdependence.

In the following sections, I will follow up on these meanings of ‘dialogue’. I will also add a more abstract interpretation, which is in fact the most relevant one for dialogical theories and for this treatise.

1.2 THREE SENSES OF ‘DIALOGUE’

The most down-to-earth meaning of ‘dialogue’ is what might be called the *concrete, empirical sense*. It is also an ‘externalist’ sense, because it refers to observable (external) sociodialogue. According to this definition, a dialogue is a direct interactive encounter between two or more, mutually co-present individuals who interact by means of some semiotic resources, such as spoken language and its accompanying body language (Luckmann, 1990). Here, ‘dialogue’ comes close to ‘face-to-face interaction in and through talk’. This concrete sense could easily be extended in basically two different steps. First, we may include also interaction via telephone, radio, television and computer-borne communication in real time. A second extension would involve the inclusion of delayed interaction, as when responses are normally not given immediately, in real time (e.g., e-mail, chat systems, SMS, etc.).

What has here been called the empirical sense of dialogue is of course closely linked to everyday language usage. In everyday language, the words ‘monologue’ and ‘dialogue’ are often used by reference simply to ‘speech

or discourse (in a lengthy turn) by a single speaker' and 'verbal interaction with (relatively frequent) turn-taking by two or more participants'. These extensional, rather physicalistic meanings are different from the abstract, theoretical sense to be introduced below (the third sense of 'dialogue' that is linked to dialogism). Before coming to this, however, I will note another (second) sense of the term 'dialogue'.

Empirically attested, concrete interactions of the kinds referred to in the first paragraph vary in terms of asymmetry-symmetry, exercise of social power, degree of interaction, occurrence of monologizing practices etc. However, there is also a *normative sense* of 'dialogue', which is quite common in mundane language, in social philosophy, and in society at large. It involves the idea that a "true" or "ideal" dialogue must be some kind of "high-quality interaction" (§ 8.6) aiming at a high degree of mutual empathy and/or open interaction characterized by symmetry and cooperation, with equal opportunities for participants to take turns and develop topics, and without coercion from any party. In other words, "dialogue" would simply mean benevolent communication among equals. In recent years, this rationalist view of the 'ideal dialogue' has been theorized particularly by Jürgen Habermas (1981, 1999), although it seems to be implicit in many other approaches to communication (e.g., Grice, 1975).

While the notion of 'ideal dialogue' might be useful in some contexts, it cannot serve as the basis for an empirical, dialogical theory. Real interactions between mortal human beings vary along many dimensions. The normative theories of 'dialogue' stress clarity, symmetry, egalitarianism, mutuality, harmony, empathy, openness, consensus, and agreement. At the same time, they suppress or ignore phenomena like aggression and the 'Machiavellian self' (Marková, 1987, p. 198), power, domination, the struggles for social recognition, concealment (non-disclosure), as well as conflicting interests, opposition, misunderstandings, fragmentation of knowledge and participation, multivoicedness, vagueness, ambiguities, and negotiations of meaning, all of which are amply represented in real social life. One and the same conversation can exhibit both "positive" and "negative" aspects. Bråten (2000, p.148) points out that a symmetrical and well-meaning communicative exchange often involves a cognitive dominance from the party that has or is assigned the authoritative knowledge of or relevant perspective on topics talked about, and a communicative situation ceases to be "ideal" in Habermasian terms if these mechanisms remain unattended to and no measures are taken to remedy the situation.⁴

This book is about dialogism, that is, 'dialogical' or 'dialogist' theories, which means that we will be concerned with a more *abstract* and comprehensive *sense* of 'dialogue'. This third sense of the term would refer to *any* kind of human sense-making, semiotic practice, action, interaction, thinking or communication, as long as these phenomena are 'dialogically' (or

‘dialogistically’) understood. There is nothing extraordinary in this; this interpretation of ‘dialogue’ (and ‘dialogicality’) is similar to the broad “anthropological” conception of (socio-)culture, which is different from the everyday understanding of culture as “high” (literate) culture.

With the broader, more abstract notion of dialogue we may talk about ‘internal dialogue within the self’ (§ 6.2, 6.7) or ‘dialogue between I-positions’ (§ 6.3), ‘dialogue between ideas’ (Marková et al., 2007, ch. 6) or ‘paradigms’ (Linell, 2005a: ch. 6), ‘dialogue with artifacts’ (Chapter 16), and the ‘dialogical exploration of the environment’ (§ 7.2), as well as, of course, about overt interaction between two or more persons (‘sociodialogue’). There are at least two ways of looking at these meaning extensions, either as metaphorical extensions from the concrete core meaning (‘Grundbedeutung’) of situated ‘sociodialogue’ or as an abstract basic meaning (‘Gesamtbedeutung’). The latter abstract meaning potential has a wide extension (in terms of situated applications) but a limited intension (due to its abstractness).

When we are concerned with the general theoretical framework or paradigm (our subject matter in this book), we may wish to prefer terms like ‘dialogical theory (or theories)’, or ‘dialogism’. However, the term ‘dialogue’ is often deployed in this abstract sense too, and this usage can hardly be completely avoided here. For example, we sometimes speak about ‘internal dialogue’ within a single individual, or ‘the dialogue’ between ideas or discourses.

The terminological usage is compromised by the fact that ‘dialogue’ and ‘dialogism’ share the same adjective ‘dialogical’, unless, of course, one prefers the somewhat pedantic ‘dialogist(ic)’ for ‘related to dialogism’. What dialogism involves is something which I will devote most of the subsequent chapters to.

1.3 ‘DIALOGUE THEORY’ VERSUS ‘DIALOGICAL THEORY (DIALOGISM)’

Many scholars in, particularly in linguistics and computer sciences (e.g., Pickering & Garrod, 2004), use the term ‘dialogue’ basically in the first-mentioned empirical, ‘extensional’ sense. For them, ‘dialogue theory’ is a theory which deals with concrete interactions between (two) individuals who are mutually co-present in real time. Possibly, the definition can be extended to cover also polyadic interactions, interactions with delayed responding, and interaction via other channels, including also written texts (and computer-supported “dialogues”), in which the contributions of two or more (mutually co-present) participants can be clearly discerned (cf. § 1.2). The meaning of ‘dialogue’ here is therefore rather close to the ev-

eryday meaning of the word. However, such a ‘dialogue theory’ need not be ‘dialogistic’ to any significant degree; indeed, theories in computational linguistics are often quite monologicistic (cf. Chapter 3) (although Pickering & Garrod and similar approaches are in part exceptions).

In this book, I deal with dialogism in the more abstract and comprehensive senses, referring to the abstract, epistemological and (meta-)theoretical framework which is generally applicable to human sense-making. I will avoid the term ‘dialogue theory’ (with the noun *dialogue*), when I refer to dialogism.⁵ Instead, I will sometimes adopt the term ‘dialogical theory (or theories)’ (with the adjective *dialogical*). It is only in the abstract sense above that ‘dialogical theory’/dialogism can be taken as an integrating framework of a kind that will be further explored in the text to follow. This is not to deny that the concrete, empirical sense of ‘sociodialogue’ is somehow present in dialogism too (e.g., § 2.11), although one can dispute how basic this notion is (§ 12.12).

1.4 DIALOGISM AND DIALOGICALITY

Words like ‘dialogue’ and ‘dialogical’ are frequently used about both ‘dialogism’ and ‘dialogicality’, often in a confusing manner. In my view, these two latter terms are not equivalent or synonymous. *Dialogism* is an epistemological (or even ontological) framework; it concerns the most general (“metaphysical”) categories in terms of which ‘dialogically’ (or with a more pedantic term: ‘dialogistically’) minded researchers think about human action, cognition and communication. In other words, such an ‘epistemology’ is, roughly, a general (meta-)theoretical framework for how we—in different capacities and at different levels: as ordinary human beings and as researchers—acquire knowledge about the world and ascribe meaning to the world. As we will see, this framework highlights the role of interaction and contexts, as well as language and the contribution of ‘the other’.

The term *dialogicality* (sometimes appearing in the form of ‘dialogicity’), on the other hand, refers to some essences of the human condition, notably that our being in the world is thoroughly interdependent with the existence of others. More concretely, one can often point to the dialogicality of specific discourses. So, if dialogicality is a property of the subject matter of the human and cultural sciences, then dialogism is an epistemological framework that takes dialogicality systematically into consideration. While ‘dialogism’ is mainly epistemological in orientation, ‘dialogicality’ is more ontological (§ 2.12.1). But the two are closely related. I hope to tease out some of the interpenetrations in the following,⁶ so I hope the reader will have some patience.

1.5 THE DIVERSITIES OF DIALOGISM

If ‘dialogue’ has many meanings, ‘dialogism’ is more precise. But this term too can be used in many ways. Some scholars use it in a rather narrow sense, referring, first, to the philosophy of human relations (‘dialogue philosophy’) in the work of Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, and others in early 20th century Germany, and secondly and above all, to the work of the Russian literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin (cf. Holquist, 1990) and the so-called Bakhtin Circle (Brandist et al., 2004).⁷ While Bakhtin, and especially Bakhtinian concepts, will obviously play a salient role in my account here, my topic is dialogism, rather than Bakhtin studies.⁸

I will join those who use ‘dialogical theory’ or ‘dialogism’ in a broader, much more comprehensive and *ecumenical* way, referring to several mutually related (or sometimes not so very much related) approaches to language, communication and cognition. Some of the adherents of these approaches refer to the Bakhtin circle, and others do not. Yet, I argue that they share many understandings of the activities and processes of sense-making, albeit not always exactly the same set of understandings. Among the approaches to language and mind that I will sometimes refer to are phenomenology, pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, and sociocultural theory.⁹ By the very least, we must include the work of such interactionally oriented scholars as Lev Vygotsky,¹⁰ George Herbert Mead, William James, Erving Goffman and several others whose names will appear recurrently in this text. I will also argue that many approaches to cognition and action that look upon these as socially situated and embodied have important contributions to make, and share features with other dialogical theories. Hence, names like Maurice Merleau-Ponty and James Gibson will also appear, even if they did not focus on social interaction.

Among relevant present-day empirical approaches to discourse are Conversation Analysis, ethnomethodology, discursive psychology, contextual discourse analysis, social pragmatics, sociocultural semiotics and neo-vygotskian activity theory, social representations theory, and interdisciplinary dialogue analysis (Linell, 1998a, pp. 40–54). I will claim that ‘dialogism’, or ‘dialogical theories’, in a wide sense has become strongly *empirically* substantiated. An extensive body of research, largely about ‘sociodialogue’, has shown that dialogism has a robust empirical validation; it is not merely a ‘philosophy’. At the same time, this means that ‘dialogism’ is not one coherent school or theory, not even something that ‘dialogists’ of different persuasions would necessarily agree upon. However, what the various ‘dialogistic’ approaches have more or less in common is their opposition to another paradigm, nearly as comprehensive, which I will call ‘monologism’ (see Chapter 3).

It follows already from this introduction that it would be a misguided and gratuitous endeavor to try to classify thinkers into groups of more or less ‘dialogical’ scholars, let alone into just two distinct classes: those who are ‘dialogical’ and those who are not. What we are faced with are a number of ‘dialogical’ ideas which the scholars mentioned below endorse to varying extents, sometimes very much, in some cases to quite a limited extent. There might be among them some individuals for whom one might dispute their ‘dialogism’ altogether. Nevertheless, I will treat dialogism as a fairly coherent theoretical framework, because arguably, the ideas do exhibit clear family resemblances. Only toward the end, in Chapters 19 and 20, shall I dwell systematically upon some of the internal controversies, dilemmas and challenges.

NOTES

1. In this book I shall use so-called inverted commas (‘ ’) to mark the use of a term in a technical sense, especially when it is mentioned for the first time in a section. Double quotation marks (“ ”) are used for direct quotations, as well as when a word is used in a metaphorical sense, or a sense not adopted by myself.
2. On meaning potentials, see Chapter 15.
3. As we will see, the term ‘dialogue’ has sometimes become restricted to “good” dialogue.
4. Bråten speaks about such dominant perspectives in terms of ‘model monopoly’ (§ 8.5.1). Indeed, many of Socrates’ dialogues lean strongly toward such a unilateral perspective-setting by Socrates himself.
5. Some French scholars, notably Roulet et al. (1985), have proposed a terminological distinction in French, between the adjectives *dialogal* ‘pertaining to a dialogue between two (or more) co-present interlocutors’ and *dialogique* ‘having to do with dialogism or dialogicality in the more abstract senses’. There is of course a corresponding distinction between *monological* and *monologique*. See Salazar Orvig (2005, p. 4, n.5).
While ‘*dialogal*’ is obviously used with reference to external dialogue (talk-in-interaction), the term *dialogique* may be used also about internal dialogue (§ 6.7), something which presupposes an extended, abstract concept of ‘dialogue’.
6. It should be mentioned that some scholars use the term ‘dialogism’ very much like how others, including myself, use ‘dialogicality’. For example, they may talk about the ‘dialogism’ of a particular utterance.
7. See also Table 2 in § 19.8.
8. There is a huge, and rapidly growing, scholarly literature on Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle. A comprehensive account of Bakhtin’s life and work is Clark and Holquist (1984). See also Emerson (1997) on Bakhtin (mainly) as a literary scholar. Among the many introductory textbooks are Holquist (1990) and Vice (1997). Essays on Bakhtin’s importance outside of literary studies can be

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found in Bell and Gardiner (1998). On the Bakhtin circle, see, e.g., Brandist (2004).

9. Just to take one single example: one overview of different approaches to language and languages that does not explicitly refer to Bakhtin (except for a few scattered details) but has a great deal in common with some of the approaches I include as fairly ‘dialogical’, is *The Material Word* by Silverman and Torode (1980). This was published before the advent of Bakhtinian dialogism to the Anglophone world.
10. Vygotsky shared many ideas with Bakhtin. They worked in the Soviet Union partly during the same time (although Vygotsky died 40 years before Bakhtin), but they may have been unaware of one another, and they never made references to the other’s work (Wertsch, 1990, p. 71). On their relationship, see Morson and Emerson (1990, pp. 205–214).