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TIAGO FERREIRA, JOÃO SALGADO, CARLA CUNHA,  
LILIANA MEIRA, AND AGNIESZKA KONOPKA

9

### Talking about Voices: A Critical Reflection about Levels of Analysis on the Dialogical Self

#### Introduction

During the last few decades, the social-cultural and intellectual context, led social and human sciences to the revision of its foundational philosophical and scientific traditional assumptions. Two of the main features of this global movement are a "linguistic turn" and an emphasis on relational constitution of meanings. It is now underlined that to be human, in some sense, is to share polysemic and multiple meanings, grounded in some particular context. Consequently, relation and communication are becoming theoretical objects, and explanatory frameworks in its own right across this intellectual background (Mendes, 2001).

As a participant in this context, psychology arrived at the critique of the solipsistic Cartesian I, and many authors from different theoretical backgrounds assume that psychological space and processes have a relational basis. Therefore, notions like relationship (e.g., Gergen, 1994), intersubjectivity (e.g., Coelho, Jr. & Figueiredo, 2003) and multiplicity (e.g., Hermans, 2004), for instance, became appealing and quite widespread in psychological literature over the last decades. Nowadays, there seems to be a large agreement that they represent fruitful and invaluable formulas for the understanding of human psychological phenomena, which may involve significant changes on the foundations of psychological science. However, like every comprehensive concept in psychology, concepts such as relationship or dialogism may also be misleading because of their polysemic nature. This ambiguity has not passed unnoticed to Ivana Marková (2003a) who argues that those different conceptions of relationship, intersubjectivity and communication are rooted in different ontological conceptions underlying each theoretical position.

Following this reasoning, it is an open possibility that some relational conceptions of the self may not be completely dialogical. What is becoming clear to some authors (e.g., Marková, 2003b) is that a dialogical ontology (and, therefore, the abandonment of traditional ontometaphysical and foundational frameworks) will be needed in order to address subjectivity from a relational perspective. In other words, it can be said that a dialogical framework allows

psychology to move beyond present dualism between realism and social constructionism since it reconciles a conception of a subjective world in each person, while maintaining the relational basis of the psychological realm (Salgado & Ferreira, 2004).

### The Dialogical Self Framework

Hubert Hermans was one of the first authors to understand this intellectual *zeitgeist*, and his foundational contribution on the dialogical self theory opened the space for different kinds of questions and answers on self structure and functioning. At that time, though not addressing ontological issues, Hermans (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans, Kempen & van Loon, 1992) relied on Bakhtin's framework for dialogicality, integrating it with Sarbin's narrative reformulation of William James's thought. Following his proposals, self can finally be conceived as a social and relational process.

The dialogical self theory opens and decentres the solipsistic Cartesian I: the human is now built as a dramaturgical space where different characters move, dialogue and establish differential relations between them. Identity is now considered as an intrinsically social movement of positioning and repositioning of the I in face of actual or potential audiences in very dynamic processes. This not only creates space for contradiction; more than that, opposition and contradiction may be the basis for selfhood dynamics. Metaphorically, the individual appears as *D. Quixote*, as someone who has the authorial responsibility of constantly reviewing his life project within the landscape of multiplicity, uncertainty and even fantasy.

All these proposals are strongly based on Bakhtin's work (e.g., 1981, 1984), creating a strong framework for the understanding of a relationally constituted self. Within it, dialogical self became indexed to notions like voices, I-positions, audience, multiplicity or dialogical relations (all concepts derived from Bakhtin), which are being used as metaphorical tools in the elaboration of a new context for reflection over human psychological phenomena. In this context, several conceptions, formulations and methods of mapping such a multiplicity have emerged from different lines of thought and so we can perceive differences more or less noticed in the literature included in the dialogical framework (Salgado, 2004).

As a consequence, the clarification of these different approaches is a relevant necessity for the future of the field, since it struggles at this time with the polysemic and ambiguous nature of those notions. Also, there are several fundamental questions that have not yet been directly and clearly addressed: for example, questions like "what is a dialogical relation?", or "what is a voice?" or "what is an audience?" remain unanswered. We will try to contribute with some clarification on these matters.

### Multiple Voices about Multiple Voices: Monological and Dialogical Concepts of Voice

The concept of *dialogical self* has been used by multiple authors and investigators who give a common emphasis to the notion of *voice* as a metaphor. Since there is a multiplicity of voices talking about voices, we are interested in the meanings that have been assigned to this metaphor. For example, Stiles (1997) argues that voice is somehow equivalent to the concepts of automatic thoughts, reciprocal roles, or internal objects. This bridge between different streams of thought is interesting, but at the same time it can create a sense of dispersion. And so, it is important to ask, what are we talking about when we talk about voices? Are all of them "dialogical voices"?

We can identify two different frameworks in which several authors position themselves regarding multiplicity of the self: the monological and the dialogical perspectives. In our view, a dialogical perspective of voice is quite dependent on the notion of a relationship between an I-position and a specific audience. For instance, the concept of voice introduced by Hermans (Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans, Kempen & Hermans, 1996) is always associated to an I-position that establishes a dialogical articulation with different I-positions. In other words, voice is considered the tool by which I-positions entertain dialogical articulation: "The I has the capacity to imaginatively endow each position with a voice so that dialogical relations between positions can be established. The voices function like interacting characters in a story" (Hermans, Kempen & van Loon, 1992, p. 28).

Some of the main advocates of a dialogical perspective follow this reasoning (e.g., Holquist, 1990; Marková, 2003b). For them, "voice" is the element that relates a centre (I) and a periphery (the Others), while expressing and referring to different objects of the world. Therefore, "voice" seems a volatile experience, something that happens, by which the person specifies her/his experience of relating with. We can only know a person by "hearing" his or her voice, which reveals the specific positioning of that person. In conclusion, in dialogical terms, the key element seems to be the notion of *positioning*, and not so much the notion of voice.

However, not all the authors and researchers share this dialogical perspective while talking about voices. Some do not take into account the notion of audience and consequently of positioning (e.g., Elliot & Greenberg, 1997; Fonagy, 1997), while others do (e.g., Hermans, Kempen & vanLoon, 1992; Leiman, 2002). The difference between these perspectives is that the dialogical perspective demands the existence of a peripheral and simultaneous audience as the receptor of a voiced message from a central I-position. The monological reference frame does not take into account in a substantive way the mediating function of that notion of voice in psychological processes. In other words,

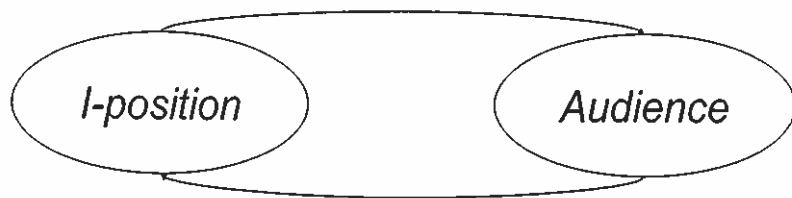
these approaches talk about multiple voices without acknowledging the otherness, quality and addressivity of human experience.

#### Levels of analysis on the dialogical self

Following Bakhtin and the dialogical self theory, every utterance has an addressee. It is always addressed to an explicit or implicit audience, which restricts and orients the content of the utterance. On this approach, subjectivity has been implicitly described as a process based on a basic dyadic structure, constituted by two simultaneous elements in relation. In our view, this dyadic scheme generally formats dialogical self models. Nevertheless, we find differences in levels and units of analysis chosen by authors, which lead them to different kinds of approaches. This is a topic that has not been clearly addressed, but it seems a sensitive one. Our argument is that it is possible to differentiate distinct levels of analysis with increasing complexity.

An elemental level of analysis (see Figure 1) relates a given I-position to its audience, implied in the notions of positioning and addressivity. The main idea of a dialogical self, in fact, is this exchange of utterances or signs, which defines the most fundamental and relational quality of human life. This level is the most basic and important one, since it necessarily implies the presence of an audience. As Bakhtin recognised, even in a single utterance, the other is always present, creating an "hidden dialogicality": "The second speaker is invisibly present, his words are not there, but the deep traces left by these words have a determining influence on all the present and visible words of the first speaker" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 197).

Figure 1. First level of analysis on the dialogical self



Probably, one of the major challenges for the dialogical self theory is precisely the study of this audience. Most authors refer to this constitutive addressivity when talking about dialogical self (e.g., Georgaca, 2001; Hermans, Kempen & vanLoon, 1992; Raggatt, 2000; Shotter, 1993; Wortham, 2001). However, it seems that in literature it is usually hard to find a clear reference and explanation of what this audience is.

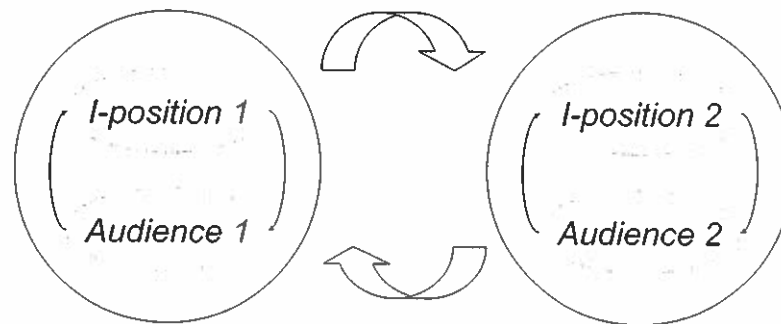
Probably Leiman (2002; see also Leiman, 1992) has presented the most elaborated reflections on these matters. In his words:

*[...] a person's position reveals his or hers subjective stance with regard to the addressee. The addressee, be it another person, a referential object of utterance or an 'invisible third', is always seen to adopt a reciprocal stance – a reciprocal position. Thus, instead of a dialogue between an I-position (a voice) and another, each I-position has dialogical relationships to its addressee(s). Obviously, another aspect of self (another I-position) can be the addressee, but this is only a specific instance of the more general idea that all our mental activities are addressed (Leiman, 2002, p. 232).*

However, his answer is not yet completely satisfactory. Methodologically, Leiman (1997; Leiman & Stiles, 2001) associates a self-state with a "dialogical pattern" of position and reciprocal position, which are conceived as pairs of logical opposites such as blaming / guilty or demanding / striving. Noticeably, the question of audience remains unsolved. From a dialogical point of view, it is not possible to reduce dialogicality to logical oppositions (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). We cannot see any particular reason to assume that "another person", a "referential object", or an "invisible third" must be reciprocal opposites.

Nevertheless, Leiman brings to the foreground one of the most important issues in dialogical self framework: the relation as the constitutive basis for subjectivity. Following the dialogical assumption that relation is logically and ontologically prior, an ontology of processes is implied instead of the traditional ontology of substances. In other words, given the dialogical principle, an I-position does not exist outside the relation with a specific audience. With this in mind we are led to the conclusion that the audience should indeed, as Leiman seems to argue, be conceptualized as part of the internal structure of an I-position.

Figure 2. Second level of analysis of the dialogical relations in the self



In literature, it seems to be widely accepted that an audience can be another I-position, which leads us to a second level of analysis (see Figure 2). Maintaining himself close to a bakhtinian analysis of Dostoevsky's literary work, Hermans (2004) emphasizes the multiplicity of I-positions and their role as anchor points in the organization of a configuration of the multiple self at a given point in time. Following this, Hermans (2004) proposes that selfhood is defined by juxtaposition and dynamics of I-positions in an imaginal landscape. In that sense, selfhood is described as an interplay between I-positions. As an example, we can cite the case described by Hermans and Hermans-Jansen (1995) of *"Mary and the Witch"* where two I-positions address each other in an opposing and conflicting way. In fact, there is a tendency to think about personal problems as conflicts between two I-positions. This is also present in the voice formulation of Stiles' (Honos-Webb & Stiles, 1998) assimilation model.

Again, what seems to be lacking in this second level is the prior dialogical dynamics constitutive of each I-position. As can be seen in the following quotation, it seems that the origin of I-positions remains the individual instead of the dialogical dynamics: *"Hermans and Kempen (1993) amplified the notion of voices by suggesting that the self is essentially dialogical, meaning that voices within the self relate to each other through dialogue"* (Honos-Webb & Stiles, 1998, p. 23). In this formulation, the basic relational features of dialogicality are not completely acknowledged. Ontologically and developmentally, before addressing other I-positions, a person addresses real others. Thus, each I-position is embedded in a historical relationship with others. The diversity of this kind of experiences with others creates a differentiation within the self – a multiplicity of I-positions – each one with its specific audiences. These different I-positions may entertain dialogical relationships between them. Nevertheless, dialogical relationships between I-positions do not exhaust dialogical relationships within the self. To fully recognize that we need to take into account the actual or potential audiences of each I-position.

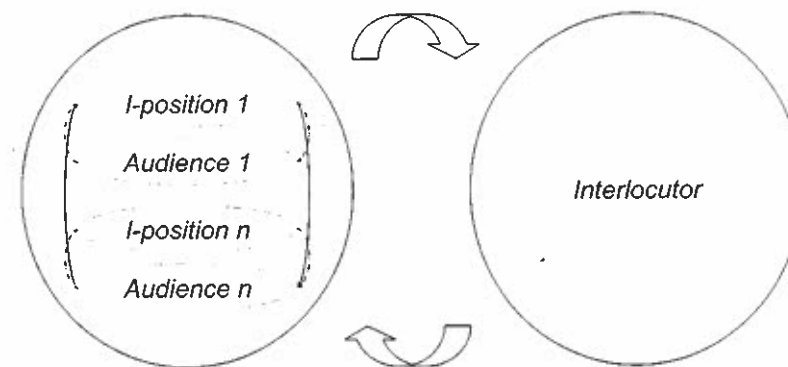
At this point, we can clearly recognize the difficulty of surpassing the traditional assumption of the original nature of consciousness intentionality, in order to create a complete model based on the assumption of the constitutive character of radical and insoluble asymmetry between an I and an Other. Hermans (2004) recognizes this need in stating: *"the other person, or another 'object', are not simply known as objectified realities or internalized objects, but can only be known as far as they are allowed to speak from their own perspectives"* (p. 21).

It is precisely the otherness qualities of the "other-in-the-self" which make it possible for the I and the Other to acquire psychological existence. But how can the Other not be me in my self? In fact, this is perhaps the most difficult and puzzling question in the dialogical self theory. The answer seems to lie once

again in a more dialogical adequate elaboration of the presence and participation of the audience in psychological space and time.

Finally we have a third level of analysis (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Third level of analysis on the dialogical self



The last level is present whenever researchers refer to concrete dialogues between two people. In an intersubjective experience of this kind, the dynamic is even more complex, since this "real Other", the interlocutor, works probably as a different kind of audience, while other internal audiences are being addressed. For example, if someone looks outside the window and says to an interlocutor "It seems that it will rain today", the person is addressing not only the other, but also an internal audience with specific plans, purposes, affects, and so on. At the same time, there is mutual coordination between these two people, probably trying to get a mutual understanding of the situation. Consequently, at this level what is at hands is the intersubjective and mutual construction of meaning.

Leiman and Stiles (2001) bring forward, by means of *"Dialogical Sequence Analysis"*, how joint communication between client and therapist may introduce signs that work as developmental tools if placed in the zone of proximal development built in client / therapist intersubjective movements. Accordingly, the clients may reorganize the relationship between conflicting I-positions towards an integration of those differences.

Wortham (2001) makes use of a similar framework, where the relational and narrative dimension of the self is highlighted. In his proposal, self is, at least, partially conceived as a performative and social act of relating with someone else. So, whenever someone starts to tell a self-narrative to someone else, she or he presents herself or himself in a way that creates a specific mode of relationship.

Nevertheless, even in this last and more comprehensive level, it is possible to detect some conceptual difficulties. As an example, we have the usual confusion between "dialogue" and "dialogicality". Two people talking and interacting are in a process of "dialogue"; nevertheless, it is possible to describe and analyse a dialogue in a monological way. Sometimes, some researchers do not take into account this distinction, thus merging both notions. In our view, this distinction is a necessary step, towards clarifying this domain.

#### Keeping the dialogicality of the dialogical self

As we saw the contemporary intellectual context in social and human sciences moves psychology to search for a relational account of subjectivity. Although not extensively elaborated we argued that a dialogical ontology is the suitable framework for this undertaking. However, at present time, dialogical self and the metaphor of voice may become umbrella-like concepts (Valsiner, 2000), which aggregate underneath themselves several formulations that do not share the dialogical assumptions, and do not create the innovation previously foreseen. Simultaneously, even in dialogical oriented accounts of the self, basic notions of I-position and audience, for instance, remain polysemic as different levels and units of analysis coexist. Furthermore, in its current state of development, dialogical formulations seem unable to give a fully dialogical account of self structure and functioning. As an example of this, which we tried to highlight in this work, is the role of audience that seems neglected and underdeveloped in relevant literature. An important consequence of this is the re-entrance of Cartesian elements in dialogical conceptions.

Concluding, it is important to underline that dialogical self theory sometimes maintains subsumed individual consciousness as necessary and assumes that, because in a communicational act two people are involved, relational subjective structures are also dyadic. However, as some authors (e.g., Jacques, 1991; Marcos, 2001) in philosophy and communicational studies argued, in a dialogical framework the departing point should be a communicational one, relating communicational agencies and not egos, people or consciousness. From this point on, these authors arrive at the assumption that, although the communicational act has a dyadic structure, the internal communicational structure is triadic: the I as a communicational agency "really occupies the threefold position of representing the one who speaks, the one who is spoken, and the one who is spoken to" (Jacques, 1991, p. 12). Therefore, it is possible to change current conceptions on dialogical self by assuming that the subjective space simultaneously include the I as centre of experience, the "other-in-the-self", and internal audiences, thus surpassing some of the problems pointed previously in this paper.

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## Temporality and Spatiality in Dialogue

The concepts of semiotics and dialogue have brought new empirical and analytic tools to study the relations between functional and communicational aspects of self. Both concepts work with sign— that is, the conversational or dialogical perception of meaning and the functionality or pragmatics of expression. However, different assumptions concerning temporality and spatiality underlie both semiotic and dialogical perspectives of self. The dialogical self theoretical framework (Hermans, 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Hermans & Kempen, 1993) noted the importance of spatiality in dialogue, whereas the semiotic self theoretical framework (Pickering, 1999, and particularly, Wiley, 1994) focused on temporality.

In order to provide an alternative view that encompasses both of these theories and establish the necessity of differentiating between self and identity, this chapter will describe different positions or voices in dialogue. The chapter is divided into two parts. Part one is an eidetic discussion defining and analyzing the concepts of dialogical self and semiotic self. Part two is a description of empirical evidence obtained by two different instruments, the Inner Speech Method – ISM (Bertheau, 1999) and the Personal Position Repertoire – PPR (Hermans, 2001b) to support these concepts. The conceptual discussion establishes the ontological relevance of defining the implications of time and space for a basic and general understanding of self as both a working process and identity. The empirical evidence supports this new account of the self, differentiating it, respectively, as working process and identity.

### Part One: Concepts and Definitions

#### Dialogical and Semiotic Perspectives of Self

The dialogical and the semiotic perspectives agree concerning the assumption of the self as a sign. The semiotic perspective states that human selfhood is

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