The Ethics of Knowledge Organization and Representation from a Bakhtinian Perspective

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Abstract: This paper arises from the possibility of a theoretical dialogue between the socio-cognitive perspectives of knowledge organization and the Bakhtinian concepts on conscience, "responsible act," "responsive understanding," and polyphony as attitudes that motivate the dialogism that is inherent to language. Those questions allow us to recognize the professional that organizes and represents knowledge as someone who has an intersubjective conscience, a product composed by two axes that are indeed deeply connected: the "self" and the "other." Therefore, the acts of representing and organizing knowledge are deeply affected by external discourses and by internal discourses. Those different discourses come together at the moment of representing the knowledge and act as a response to the dialogues between the external and the internal discourses. As a consequence, the indexing/classification codes, terms or signs assume a dialogical and dynamic representativeness in order to correspond not only to the contents of the documents but also to dialogue with a diverse user community, by the recognition of the alterity/otherness of the social actors and the social situations. Finally, it is important to point out the need of an ethical and democratic attitude of the indexer/classifier, in order to represent the social pluralism and show an equipollence of social voices.

1.0 Introduction

In the last two decades, authors in the field of KO (Beghtol 2002; 2005; Berman 1993; Frohmann 1990; 1994; 2001; 2008; García Gutiérrez 2002, 2014; García Gutiérrez and Martínez-Ávila, 2014; Guimarães et al., 2008; Hjørland 2002; 2008a; 2008b; Hudon 1997; Olson 2001; 2002; Olson and Schlegl, 2001) have sought to understand the impact of social and cultural processes on activities of knowledge organization and representation (KOR). We assume that this search is based on a socio-cognitive perspective, since we have observed a gradual abandonment of the hegemonic position of the subject oriented to a rationalistic and idealistic perspective, which in the KO domain, unfolds in traditional positions of subject-user, subject-author and subject-classifier/indexer. From this new approach, these subjects are also seen as members of a specific community of knowledge production, organization and use. And, just as each subject has his/her own peculiarities, each community also does; hence, the relations subject-context and community-context can be considered unfinished products as they are embedded in social and historically located environments.

This paper presents a theoretical dialogue between socio-cognitive perspectives of KO and the Bakhtinian concepts of consciousness, responsible act, responsive understanding, and polyphony as elements and attitudes that motivate dialogism in language and, consequently, in knowledge. Thus, we refer, not only to Bakhtin's studies, but also to Voloshinov's, one of the most important members of the group The Bakhtin Circle.

We employ the dialogism concept proposed by the Circle discussing the process of conscience formation as reflections of collective experience. Dialogism presupposes the exchange between people based on the continuous process of (re)construction of thought, memory and knowledge. Such process is particularly observable in the otherness of language, since sign and word undergo changes to keep up with social changes. Thus, sign and language are treated as ideological elements, as they result from clashes and consensuses occurred in the collective sphere during the taking of position by the subject in the midst of social relationships.

The concept of dialogism pervades the entire work of the Circle, because for its members, nothing is generated individually, i.e., the "self" only exists in relation with the "other," in the same way that the "other" exists only because he/she relates to other "selves." This intersubjective relationship takes place in the same way orally, in written or symbolic language, from the language used in daily life to more elaborate languages, such as those practiced in the scientific, academic or artistic fields.

From this perspective, it is possible to recognize the subject who organizes and represents knowledge in a particular context as someone with an intersubjective consciousness, constantly shaped by social relations. This consciousness becomes an unfinished socio-cognitive product, consisting of two inextricably linked axes: the "self" and the "other." In this duality, images of the "other" are imposed on the "self" in an active and imperative way, seeking for an understanding, an answer. However, the "self" does not receive such images of the "other" passively, even because his/her conscience is already populated with the relations constituted by his/her environment. Moreover, the signs that constitute such external images must agree with the signs that inhabit his/her conscience, in such a way that the external signs can make sense for the "self" to absorb them as his/hers, in his/her own way.

In this scenario, KOR activities are seen as mediators of discourses in which the role of the professional is evidenced by a set of self-other dialogues that operate in two dimensions: the "other-author of the content" and "other-member of the community." This context necessarily leads to a non-neutrality of the "self" of whoever organizes/represents, whose action transcends the limits of rationality so one can reach a sensible and ethical action that considers the polyphony of different social voices, including his/her own voice as a manifestation of consciousness.

2.0 Consciousness as Social-ideological Fact

Consciousness, according to Voloshinov (1973), is consolidated from signs captured by the subjects during their interaction with others. It consists of signs that take shape and value collectively defined, following the ideological options adopted during the process of compromising among the subjects that compose a social group. Consciousness, therefore, only becomes conscience when permeated by ideological content (under a semiotic view), and this can only take place during the process of social interaction. Because consciousness is a social-ideological fact, the author claims that the psychic phenomena must be understood from social factors that interfere with real life. Thus, he postulates that philosophy of language and sociology are more suitable fields of knowledge to study language than linguistics, psychology or biology.

In this sense, Bakhtin (1993) criticizes the attempt to include the theoretical cognition world that believes in a unique existence, assuming it as a psychic entity. The psychic is an abstract product built by thought from which one seeks to understands the action-act of living thought, taking a "broad theoretical world" (sciences, all theoretical cognition) for a moment of the "small theoretical world" (psychic).

In the study that criticizes Freudianism, especially because he turns exclusively to the individual psyche, Voloshinov (2013) argues for the socialization of psychology, as he understands that the stimuli produced amid the social conditions drive the subjects. Indeed, the study of stimuli and their responses should not be limited only to the understanding of the physical/physiological component. Human acts must be understood socially by a type of psychology that refer to objective methods to materially understand human behavior in natural and social environments. For Voloshinov, the main problem of psychoanalysis to is the lack of understanding on the sociological essence of psychic phenomena. The content of thought or even of dreams are, as exemplified by the author, highly ideological manifestations and not the result of individual organic creation.

Regarding the conscious/unconscious dichotomy, Voloshinov (2013) points out that introspection is a fully conscious activity, for consciousness reproduces the struggles between official and unofficial ideologies that occur during social experience. The author cites censorship—a concept pointed out by Freud as of an unconscious origin—as a mechanism that reveals ideological

competence and produces a tridimensional selection: logical, ethical and aesthetical. Such selection cannot be considered compatible with an unconscious, mechanical structure.

The Freudian "censorship" expresses the ideology of the "petty-bourgeois everyday point of view" (Voloshinov 2013), therefore, it is not possible to say that the "unconscious" is a universal problem, for discourse and other representations are derived from an exterior "self" that is internalized and not the opposite. The emergence of consciousness and discourse are conditioned to their configuration whith reality by "material incarnation into signs" (Voloshinov 1973). Both the subject's uttered discourse and thought of discourse are the result of dialogue with other subjects' discourses. The substance of this process does not emerge in the individual mind, but in society. This society negotiates, assigns form and value to the words and signs in a given semiotic community, because the transmission takes into consideration the figure of a third person.

In apprehending discourse, the ideological relevance interacts with the inner discourse of the subject (Voloshinov 1973). The one who apprehends the external discourse cannot be considered mute; he/she is a being filled with inner words. So, mental activity is mediated by inner discourse which meets the discourse externally apprehended, in such a way that it becomes impossible to bear them isolatedly. Even thoughts cannot be called monologues, once consciousness is seen as a set of articulated signs by thinking, and these signs are always imported from the exterior via perception, and then accepted by the subject during his/her contact with the social environment. At this point, the concept of dialogism of language takes place, because thought, even the unexpressed one, is considered a subject's act of understanding the world. This context leads to the reflection upon responsible acts and responsive understanding.

3.0 Responsible Acts and Responsive Understanding

Any act, even thinking, feeling, desire, speech, action is, to Bakhtin (1993), intentional as it carries the subject's actively responsible will, manifested through an emotional-volitional position in relation to a certain experienced situation. No one acts without expecting a response from the other, since no act occurs in a condition of total isolation from the real world. Therefore, utterances, as acts, respond to what has been said while constantly germinating new answers. Every act is characterized by uniqueness, because it is practiced by a subject and, accordingly, it is exclusive because it emerges from a unique subject, constantly shaped by social relations. Thus, the subject acts in a unique and irreplaceable way from the only place

he/she occupies, but without being indifferent to others, because he/she tirelessly seeks, by understanding and communicating, to provoke the act of others. Thus, thought, understanding, and communication are participatory processes because they interfere in the real world as there are no excuses for not acting or not existing—intrinsic condition for all subjects.

The act to which Bakhtin refers is simultaneously responsible and responsive, for on the one hand it is related to a responsibility that a subject takes before the others and, on the other hand he/she always seeks responsiveness, an understanding and communicative attitude from the other to complete his/her own act; the other, therefore, also expects a response from others and so on infinitely. Thus, it is possible to state that this dual concept is permeated by dialogism because the act requires a response within an unfinished and intersubjective dialogue. Dialogism, in turn, presupposes otherness of the subject as a result of the otherness of the social situations he/she participates. Constantly and consciously, the subject transcends his/her identity in search of a new point of view based on the necessary interference of others in his/her life, then, to the other it is possible to see what the subject himself/herself cannot see in relation to himself/herself. This is the principle of exotopy postulated by Bakhtin, based on the surplus of seeing/knowledge of a subject in relation to the other. Such excess is conditioned by the unique place each individual occupies in the world. Thus, an individual interacts with others to identify himself/herself with others and see the world through his/her own system of values (Bakhtin 1981; 1986; 1993).

Exotopy, otherness and dialogism are only possible through acts of understanding that each subject performs, taking into consideration the other because of his/her surplus of seeing. It reveals the duplicity in the subject: the social situations in which he/she takes part causes the subject to axiologically choose or not for a transformation of the "self." This "self" always exists in relation to "others" so inseparably that it is not possible to outline him/her completely. In the novel *The Double*, Dostoyevsky (2014) illustrates the presence of the "other" in the subject and its relation to the "self." According to the novelist, the more harmonious the relationship with the self-other inwardly, the better for the subject, while the attempt to detach these two axes causes imbalance, as for Dostoevsky, the fact that the "self" only exists because of the "other" is undenied.

According to Bakhtin, the self-other relationship does not take place passively or casually; on the contrary, it happens actively and imperatively. The self-other relationship is, at the same time present and future, as unique events that make up real and collective life. This does not mean that the author believes in a pure empathy between

subjects, even because it would imply in losing the only own place to exist and, thus, loss of consciousness.

The act, therefore, is characterized by its ambivalence, in which one direction turns to social life and the other to the uniqueness of the subject. Thus, the act must reflect both its contents, which the author calls special responsibility, and its existence, a moral responsibility. As a consequence, the integration of these axes, under a more rationalistic approach, is intended in order to overcome the separation and mutual impenetrability between culture and life (Bahktin 1993).

Bakhtin (1993) does not deny abstraction, he even considers it necessary for the development of thought and knowledge. However, the author criticizes the distance from everyday life justified by the pursuit of pure, objective, and neutral knowledge, because every act is based on non-indifferent position towards the world. Therefore, it is not possible to separate appraisals of ethical, aesthetic and theoretical nature. Neutrality is also considered useless, because science−to intervene beneficially in the world−must emerge as real as possible, once the concepts are representations of reality, embedded with judgments. As a consequence, concepts are established both through rational and axiological patterns.

Based on the argument of subjectivity, Bakhtin (1993) does not accept scientific effort so that uniqueness, singularity and unrepeatability of the act, be relegated to the private sphere, alienated from the official, formal, and cultural spheres. Scientific knowledge traditionally overlooks the subject and his/her unique and unrepeatable responsibility, assuming only one generic and universal self in the name of an alleged neutrality in the process of knowledge production. Thus, science inevitably deals with a world integrated to the singular and unique event of existence in a real act−action because singularity cannot be thought, it can only be experienced and felt in a participatory manner, not indifferent to the emotional-volitional aspect (Bakhtin 1993).

In this sense, language has been developed to serve the acts of understanding and participant communication, for the fullness of a word occurs only by the expression of act as a unique existing event, and in its content-sense and intonation (Bakhtin 1993). He argues, therefore, that this living, full, and single word is significant because it can represent the "truth of a given moment," even with all its subjectivity. The interlocutor's response is always permeated by an appreciative value, since it is part of an axiological judgment. Therefore, words change their meaning, they are always re-evaluated considering their displacement of an appreciative context to another, making it impossible to isolate the significance of appreciation (Voloshinov 1973). Moreover, such an evaluation must always take into consideration the figure of the

other in a polyphonic attitude, seeking to respect social plurality.

4.0 Polyphony

To develop the concept of polyphony, Bakhtin (1984) refers to the literary universe, especially to the works of Dostoevsky, as he believes that the novelist, not only managed to voice their characters, but also gave them relations of equality among each other and a relative autonomy in relation to their creator.

The term polyphony was borrowed from the field of music, where in symphony orchestras each instrument has a distinct sound and each one participates in its own way by integrating the set of musical performances (Bakhtin 1990). The author of the novel, therefore, is seen as a conductor of the voices of their characters just as the conductor conducts the orchestra. And these voices are also social voices, since the novel reflects the perception that its creator has on the world. Because polyphony relates to equipollent voices, it necessarily leads to the existing dialogism in language. Social voices, because of the worldviews that compose them, assign different meanings to words, giving language a semiotic dynamics.

In opposition to polyphony, monologism denies equality between consciousnesses, conceiving them as something finished, closed, systemic. Therefore, Voloshinov (1973) denounces the objectification of man that emerges with the society of classes and reaches the limit with capitalism, reducing the subject to the condition of object, just as the characters in the monologic novel. The search for a polyphonic attitude, both in literature and in life, is equivalent to the release of that individual, who, from a mute slave of a hegemonic consciousness begins to build his/her own conscience.

As in dialogical relations, polyphony also demands a performance guided by the principle of exotopy. There is no polyphony if the "self" (e.g. classifier/indexer) from its unique position, does not see the "other" (e.g. author and user) and vice versa. A polyphonic attitude seeks to reduce the difference of horizons of the subjects, without eliminating it completely, since the existence of singularity depends on this diversity. However, even though the subject is unique and singular, for Bakhtin, he/she is not isolable.

This polyphonic world conceived by Bakhtin is characterized by respect for the pluralism of social voices, where everyone can find a place to manifest in a way no voice overlaps the other. How could this exist in a world populated by various constantly clashing ideologies? What matters for the author is the possibility of dialogue and that does not always mean consensus; it can also mean controversy, parody, criticism, partial or total oppo-

328

Knowl. Org. 42(2015)No.5
A. E. Arboit, J. A. Chaves Guimarães. The Ethics of Knowledge Organization and Representation from a Bakhtinian Perspective

sition. Indeed, what Bakhtin claims is, above all, respect among individuals with different ideological positions, even because such positions are never absolute and finished, as the conscience of a subject can be the stage for social tensions.

5.0 Impossibility of Neutrality in Knowledge Organization and Representation Activities

KOR activities can be seen as responsible acts, as they are based on judgments of spatial values and are temporally located. The choices of one or more signs to represent a document or a concept is always carried out through appreciation; otherwise, these would be mechanical, automatic actions that could be easily performed by machines. The same appreciation takes place in the construction of KO tools, methods and systems; all of them are made from value judgments assigned consciously by those who build them, as shown by Berman (1993), Olson (2001) and Olson & Schlegl (2001). These activities and products demand, not only aspects related to rationality, but also those related to ethics and aesthetic appreciation (e.g. representation of works of art and/or literary content) since they are a result of specific interpretation of reality.

In the early 1990s, Frohmann (1990) questioned the mentalist approach to indexing, which reduces this activity into an essentially cognitive operation. This conception, according to the author, finds its foundation on the belief that concepts are generated solely within the individual mind. In contrast, the author emphasizes the need to build consistent and explicit rules for indexing from a conscious and socially contextualized interpretation of the indexer in his/her dialogue with the content expressed in documents. Therefore, the social context of production and use of information should be observed, since the characteristics of this environment are determined by socially established rules and consequently vary from context to context.

Based on a sociological concept, neutrality becomes impossible in the domain of KO, as any sign is always linked to its context. Thus, during knowledge organization and representation activities, the classifier/indexer cannot be required to ignore his/her worldview or that he/she simulates the momentary absence or "shutdown" of his/her consciousness. Organizing and representing knowledge are acts of responsive understanding which, in turn, are influenced by external discourses (author's discourse, users' discourse, etc.) and internal discourses (the ideological and social voices that compose the conscience of the classifier/indexer) both correlated to each other. Consequently, the result of the acts of KOR is also about a response to these external and internal discourses.

Such discursive relations are more noticeable, for example, in social sciences and humanities. However, that does not mean the ideological discourse is completely absent in natural and exact sciences; what differs in this case is the degree of intensity and approach to everyday life, which is higher in social sciences and humanities. No knowledge production process is neutral, as it depends specifically on perception, description and appraisal, initially from a scientist and later from a group of them, who despite the expertise, are subjects with their own consciousnesses, expressing through their own voices.

Considering the discussions on subjectivity present in KOR activities, Hjørland (2008a) questions: is KO a neutral activity? Can it ever be? Should it be? According to the author, these questions are traditionally treated passively, for knowledge is still regarded as the "mirror of nature." Such questions, according to the author, should be answered from a pragmatic and critical perspective. Typically, the concepts, for instance, have been considered as results of an isolated logical-cognitive process occurring within the consciousness of the subject when he/she, through language, qualifies a certain substance. Such qualification, mostly based on an Aristotelian tradition, assigns inherent characteristics of the substance and, at the same time reveals its essence, differing it from others.

Based on this view of the world, related to substance univocal, Dahlberg (1993; 2006) and based on Wüster's (1979) theory about terminology developed the concept theory and the general theory of terminology, respectively. Knowledge, language, and linguistic sign tend to be characterized as abstract objects, autonomous and apart from social practice and the ideological character that permeate them. The conception of language and knowledge as natural and, in a certain way, "neutral," is believed to occur without the necessary interference of collective relationships. Neutrality, according to Hjørland (2008a), is not possible in any description of reality, since such a representation is made from a functional appraisal in a certain context.

Non-neutrality leads to the discussion of subjectivity under an informational ethics approach. Frohmann (2008) argues that ethics is always involved in moral decisions that occur during the relations between subjects. Subjectivity, therefore, is seen as the core of ethics, especially in the information field. In this sense, the author proposes a discourse analysis as a method of teaching and research because it is an initiative that favors an analytical, critical view and therefore not neutral because the information production and use processes can be seen as socially constructed discourses (Frohmann 1994; 2001).

Those discourses involve value judgments which are inexorably linked to any responsive act, especially those related to KOR activities. These acts are not indifferent to

social voices that are affected by them. However, instead of a neutralizing effort, it is claimed to make the involved social voices participate in the entire process, through a "transcultural ethics of mediation", as postulated by García Gutiérrez (2002). To this end, the classifier/indexer cannot privilege a voice over another, nor ignore any of them, including those that inhabit his/her own conscience, seeking the exercise of polyphony (internal and external discourses) while performing the acts of KOR.

The KO professional would change from a silent collaborator of an "hegemonic ideology," often hidden behind the "mask of neutrality," to a participant agent and collaborator to a democratic process that does not supplant nor ignores any ideological position involved, including his/her own. In addition to actively participate in the process, taking an ideological position, he/she acts as a conductor of other social voices, especially those related to the production and use of the represented and organized contents. Therefore, the professional is required to practice the principle of exotopy to approach as much as possible from the other, in order to understand his/her interests and needs.

Obviously, it is impossible to see the world as the other sees it, but the surplus of seeing that the "self" has in relation to the "other" enables him/her to simulate the other, to better understand and respect him/her. In this context, it is fundamental to consider temporal and spatial aspects, because the "other" and the "self," as mentioned above, are also products of a particular time and place.

Therefore, ethic and democratic attitudes of the professional, in line with the social pluralism, are necessary in order to seek the exercise of polyphony, i.e., an equipollence of social voices in a given context. This position, which requires the professional to make decisions on the KOR processes, results from the powers conferred to the classifier/indexer by society, when the dynamic nature of knowledge is verified. During the exercise of this task, the professional is granted with the "power to name" (Olson 2002). This power is conferred to the professional by society in order to create surrogates of knowledge. Thus, the professional assumes social legitimacy and representativeness for KOR. However, holding this power is not enough; as an orchestra conductor, the professional, through constant dialogue with the community he/she serves, should be able to articulate the representative signs of all involved voices on behalf of that community who elected him/her as representative.

Allying to this socio-cultural conception, we must mention Beghtol's concerns (2002; 2005) on the need for indexing languages to be imbued of effective cultural warrant, finding ballast in social reality to which they refer, once the knowledge representation tools rely on language as a social-cultural product. Hence, it should represent the

cultural context of this reality, as observed, for instance, in the multilingual indexing languages such as in Canada, described by Hudon (1997).

Although the KO domain counts on dissenting voices, we identify a lack of an ethical position sensitive to the needs of knowledge from different social voices, from a performance that respects logical and cultural pluralism and diversity. Such a state is evidenced by the limited development of methods, techniques and existing tools for organizing knowledge in all its plurality. As García Gutiérrez (2014) argues, this is due in part to the massive and uncritical incorporation of artifacts arising from new information technologies and the belief that the mere application of these technologies could solve problems of production, organization, and access to knowledge.

In this sense, guided by the search for solutions aimed at a pragmatic context, the author presents the following proposals: the adoption of an open and unfinished theory of concepts, well-grounded practice of "declassification" through the establishment of two operators that complement each other: the complex operator, which works to ensure equitable expression of all positions and worldviews about a theme; and the cross-cultural operator which decides and democratically runs, from a scalable consensus, a compulsory and periodically revised, cross-cultural synthesis based on the survey conducted by the complex operator (García Gutiérrez 2014; García Gutiérrez and Martínez-Ávila, 2014). The cross-cultural operator is, according to the authors, the antidote to the relativism the complex operator could be accused of, and the complex operator, on the other hand, would represent the democratic and hermeneutical balance the cross-cultural operator seeks support.

6.0 Conclusions

The language used and recorded in a knowledge domain over time can incorporate and reveal the most prevalent philosophical concepts in the constitution of its own knowledge. Such an interpretation is based on the Bakhtinian ideas about the dialogic process of language and the ideological character of the linguistic sign. The term, for instance, is seen as representative of the most widely accepted ideology at the time and in the social environment of its constitution, acceptance and use. In other words, the term, concept, class, category, documentary genre, descriptor are, above all, signs endowed with value and form, intersubjectively constituted. As a result, we argue that the Bakhtinian notions of sign, statement, speech, style and gender are taken into consideration both in the study and practice of KO, as an alternative to break with the positions excessively focused to a broadly alleged objectivity and neutrality.

These issues lead to the conclusion that the acts of KOR are influenced by external and internal discourses that especially emerge at the time of representation. Such representation can be considered as a response to whom participates in the knowledge production process and use, and therefore, also participates in the existing conflicts between them.

In this conception, terms, codes and other signs that compose KOR systems assume a dialogic and dynamic representation because they must match the content of the documents and be able to dialogue with the user community, in a dialogism of language that assumes the otherness of the subject as a result of the otherness in social situations. This context leads the classifier/index to the need to transcend his/her identity in search of a new point of view based on the necessary interference of others in his/her life, revealing the Bakhtinian principle of exotopy, which is characterized by the surplus of seeing that a subject has in relation to the other.

This also causes the professional to recognize the impossibility of neutrality in the activities of KOR, as the he/she always brings his/her own conceptions without the possibility to be unconscious or reject the fact that signs are already loaded with ideologies. The classifier/indexer is a subject endowed with an intersubjective consciousness resulting from a socio-cognitive process, which necessarily acts in the world. Because of this, he/she takes the responsibility to design systems and perform KOR activities in a responsive, dialogic, and polyphonic manner.

Therefore, we consider as an ethical need to admit the non-neutrality of the subject, language, and knowledge. Once the myth of neutrality is disregarded, the classifier/indexer will become able to identify his/her positions as a unique and irreplaceable subject, and moreover, acknowledge his/her positions as a subject representative of a particular community of knowledge production and use. To this end, the classifier/indexer must continuously proceed to the "simulation of the other"−the other-authors, other-users, etc.−by making use of his/her surplus of seeing acquired from engaging in the environment where these social voices reside as a condition to represent them as well and polyphonically as possible.

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