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A Dialogic Consideration of World Reactions to Syrian Regime Change: A Pragmatic Exploration of Bakhtin's Theory

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Abstract

In all discourses, people are not talking to themselves but rather interacting with others. This is referred to as dialogic, which is the essence of pragmatics in narratology. Making someone understand what you are communicating is the concern of pragmatics, as it deals with language in context by specifying the motivation of discourse at a given moment. These must involve some linguistic and pragmatic activities to help the hearer/reader comprehend the meaning of the narratives represented in "languages" and direct authorial discourse organized in the form of a conglomeration of heterogeneous linguistic and stylistic forms in a real sense of style. Trying to elicit these features from this communication whether being written or oral is the essence of this research. This study draws upon a set of foundational concepts in the thought of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) which will be systematically employed to explicate the theoretical and applied dimension of the subject under investigation as dialogism, polyphony, heteroglossia, and chronotope and their relatedness with areas of pragmatics. The analysis utilizes 35 corpuses of online data gathered from various debates at the UN Security Council Meeting and other sources, such as online media outlets reporting on world reactions to the Syrian regime change. The

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results explore how narrative techniques shape meaning, speaker intent and listener interpretation within a specific context and dealing with the Bakhtin's oeuvre is not only an illustration of what a dialogic world looks like with its strong philosophical keystones, but also providing us with sharp analytical tools to detect and create dialogical texts.

Keywords: context, dialogism, heteroglossia, narratology, narrative pragmatics, polyphony

تناول حواري لردود الفعل العالمية تجاه تغيير النظام السوري: استكشاف تداولي لنظرية باختين

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المستخلص

في جميع الخطابات، لا يتحدث الناس مع أنفسهم بل يتفاعلون مع الاخرين. يشار الى هذا بالمفهوم الحواري وهو جوهر التداولية في علم السرد. جعل الشخص يفهم ما تريد ايصاله هو من اهتمامات علم التداولية/البراغماتية لانها تدرس اللغة كما تستخدم في سياقها وذلك من خلال تحديد دافع الخطاب في تلك اللحظة. وهذه تتضمن بعض الخصائص اللغوية والتداولية لتساعد السامع أو القارئ على فهم المعاني التي تحملها السرديات التي تعبر عنها "اللغات" والخطاب المباشر للمؤلف المنظم في شكل تجمع متنوع من الاشكال اللغوية والاسلوبية بالمفهوم الحقيقي للأسلوب. إن محاولة استنباط هذه الخصائص من هذا التواصل سواء كان مكتوباً او شفهياً هي جوهر هذا البحث. تستند هذه الدراسة إلى مجموعة من المفاهيم الأساسية في فكر ميخائيل باختين (1981) والتي سيتم توظيفها بشكل منهجي لتوضيح البعد النظري والتطبيقي للموضوع قيد الدراسة، مثل: الحوارية، تعدد الأصوات، التعدد اللغوي، س والزمان والمكان وعلاقتها بمجالات التداولية. يستخدم التحليل خمس وثلاثون متناً لغوياً من البيانات الكترونية جمعت من مناقشات مختلفة في اجتماع مجلس الامن التابع للامم المتحدة ومصادر اخرى مثل المنافذ الاعلامية عبر الانترنت التي تتناول ردود الفعل العالمية تجاه تغيير النظام السوري. وتستكشف النتائج كيف تؤثر التقنيات السردية في تشكيل المعنى، ونية المتحدث، وتفسير المستمع ضمن سياق محدد والتعامل مع أعمال باختين لا يُعدّ مجرد توضيحٍ لما يبدو عليه العالم الحواري مع ركائزه الفلسفية العميقة بل يزوّدنا بأدوات تحليلية دقيقة لاكتشاف وابتكار نصوص حوارية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السياق، الحوارية، التعدد اللغوي، السردية، التداولية السردية، تعدد الاصوات

1.Introduction

The Syrian conflict that began in 2011 and subsequent fall of Bashar Assad regime in 2024 have generated diverse international reactions. As Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism offers a powerful lens to x-ray complex communicative phenomena, the present study intends to interrogate the development in Syria which was greeted with celebration and joy by some international actors while to others, the development has raised doubt as to whether there would be a peace and stability in the country. These mix reactions are the object of analysis in this paper in order explore and discuss how meaning and interest are

interplaying in the competing discourses in international and diplomatic space. Bakhtin (1984; 1986) asserts that dialogue is not as an exchange of messages but as a fundamental mode of human engagement in which utterances anticipate and respond to the other, embedding meaning in context. The theory indicates that all form of narratives represented "languages" and direct authorial discourse in form of a conglomeration of heterogeneous linguistic and stylistic forms in a real sense of style. His notion of 'heteroglossia' points to the simultaneous presence of diverse ideological languages within any discourse (1981).

In this regard, the present study employs the dialogical analysis and methodological approach informed by Bakhtin's theoretical insights to examine the world reactions on the Syrian regime change to highlight its discursive complexities from broader socio-historical contexts that marked by negotiations, tensions, and contestations of meaning (Linell, 2009).

This paper utilizes the Bakhtinian dialogism to interrogate some of the selected world reactions to the Syrian conflict aiming to illuminate how voices interact dialogically or antagonistically, and at same time showcasing how such interactions shape meaning-making in international discourse. It tries to map the dialogic relations through identifying how public figures respond to, align or oppose with other positions in their opinions regarding Syria. It helps to shed lights on the main pragmatic features as speech acts, politeness, and stance taking to persuade, challenge or justify positions. It can also explore how functionaries give voice to opposition groups, civilians and Syrian government. Finally, it can evaluate the significance of the combination between pragmatics and dialogism through the study of diplomatic and institutional communication. The paper tries to answer the following research questions:

1. How do public figures align or engage with each other's discourse in the debates of the Syrian conflict?

2. What are the pragmatic strategies used by officials to defend or challenge positions?

3. How are different voices represented in the responses regarding Syrian conflict?

4. How can pragmatics and dialogism boost our perception of diplomatic discourse of the conflict debates?

2. Literature Review

The Syrian struggle which began in 2011 triggered a vast array of discourses in social, political and media platforms as well as international diplomatic arena. The development in Syria is not only vehicles for information, but it encompasses some dynamic sites of identity negotiation and political positioning. Two linguistic approaches namely dialogism and pragmatics offer powerful interpretive tools to explore meaning- making in such discourse filled with various shades of interest.

Bakhtin's theory of dialogism (1981) posits that language is intrinsically dialogic, in a sense being formed by social interaction and disclose a multitude of perspectives and voices rather than an authoritative one. Language is a dialogic due to its ability to integrate different individual voices, social dialects, and various worldviews. Bakhtin (1986, p.125) analyses the dialogism of the utterance as "responsive understanding". He emphasizes the dialogical nature of texts, focusing their inherent connection either to other texts or the social context in which they are interpreted and produced. As related to responsive understanding, the meaning is always congruent with response. Meaning always responds to a particular question "anything that does not respond to something seems meaningless to us; it is removed from dialogue" (Szávai, 2017, p.97).

In post-structuralism and the literary theories, Horváth (2004) states that two essential notions from Bakhtin's work gained particular eminence. The first is dialogue which is understood as an intersubjective exchange achieving mutual understanding and the other one is the crucial doubling of meaning and intention. These ideas are termed by Bakhtin as "double-voiced discourse," already implied in spoken language but fully realized in the language of the novel.

In the Syrian context, dialogism helps interpret how competing narratives of the opposition groups, UNs members, international actors, and civilians struggle for legitimacy. These voices are not only oppositional but are often quoting, responding, and interwoven to each other consciously or unconsciously. Dialogism highlights interdiscursivity and voice plurality, while pragmatics provides the tools to analyze the intention and function behind those voices.

3. Theoretical framework and method of analysis

This study adopts an eclectic framework that integrates Bakhtin's concepts of narratology and pragmatic principles to examine the discursive practices of United Nations members concerning the Syrian conflict and regime change in the country. The incorporation of pragmatic principles in form of multilayered analysis is aimed at explaining how meaning is derived from situational use of language and social factors or relationships while Bakhtin's theory emphasizes how narrative meaning is influenced by dialogue, interaction and social context. What follows is a presentation of several core

concepts of Bakhtin's theory that the present study intends to utilize to critically examine and analyze the data in this research:

3.1. Dialogism

The principle of dialogism is a constitutive element of human language. All communication is dialogic. It arises out of interacting and responding with each other. Dialogism is shaped by power structures, situational contexts and social norms. It emphasizes the interactive and dynamic process of communication (Bakhtin, 1984). For example, a person's speech acts like commands, requests or assertions are not just statements but ongoing social exchanges that depend on context.

In this sense, Dialogic discourse refers to a form of communication that is transactional rather than monologous. This means that feedback is at the heart of dialogue. Littlejohn and Foss (2008), state that dialogue is used to build relationships. It therefore suffices that dialogic discourse is a form of communication intended to build and sustain human relationships.

Based on Bakhtin's typology of discursive relations, there are three main types of discourse in human communication: 1) unmediated, direct discourse; 2) objectified discourse; and 3) double-voiced discourse. The first type is oriented towards the referential object only, and not towards the speech of others. The second and third type both have a twofold direction: "it is both directed toward the referential object [...], and toward another's discourse, toward someone else's speech (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 185).

Objectified discourse (type two) is most typically to be found as the direct speech of the characters. The person being quoted is oriented toward the referential object, whereas the author representing his speech uses his words as an object in order to characterize him individually or as part of a social group. There is a twofold direction in the discourse of the author, but the author does not relate to the speech of the other person as live discourse representing another subject. As such it is not a dialogic relation; "The relation to the thing (in its pure thingness) cannot be dialogic (i.e. there can be no conversation, argument, agreement, and so forth)", Bakhtin says (Bakhtin 1986, p. 121). Dialogic relations are possible only between subjects, not between subject and objects.

According to Hays (2005, p. 7), "monologic discourse is a discourse in which only one point of view is represented, however diverse the means of representation" while for Bakhtin (1984) dialogue is a kind of speech which leads to the competition of voices. Different consciousnesses form each other, putting the stage for ongoing self-awareness and the nonstop process of becoming.

In dialogism there is always a scope for arguing since statements show everyone's point of view rather than the common truth. Everyone likes to confront, challenge, resist and

make personal meaning out of social interactions. It stresses the individual personality inside every cultural group instead of searching for united agreement.

Petrilli (2016, p.337) highlights Bakhtin's notion of absolute responsibility "life is not mere representation or technical performance but requires genuine, personal response to the singular other". She assets that dialogue is the moral, ontological, and artistic condition for the true meaning. It is about embracing a willingness to engage with, and responding responsibly.

3.2. Polyphony

In polyphonic narratives, there is no single authoritative voice but all perspectives interact or even conflict. Polyphony mirrors how different individuals or social groups use language in different ways based on their roles, intentions, and backgrounds. The concept of polyphony originates from the novel a literary genre. To Bakhtin, Voice is defined by its ideological position, with authorial and other voices always involving in conversation.

Bakhtin's insights on the dialogicality of language and thought have shed some light on the classroom discourse analyses. Hall (2005) interprets Bakhtin's concepts in the following way: "Authoritative discourse is language or discourse imposed on a person—but for one to really accept, acquire and own a language or discourse, it has to become an internally persuasive discourse, hybridized and populated with one's own voices, styles, meanings, and intentions" (p. 93).

Style is grounded not on the unity of a normative shared knowledge but on the diversity of types of speech (Bakhtin, 1981). Style arises not from a uniform linguistic code but from the coexistence of varied speech forms. These forms, influenced by distinct social and ideological backgrounds, interact within a dialogic context, making style a product of diversity rather than conformity. Self -conscious writing is a result of the existence of different voices and styles in a cultural context since it is considered as a kind of extreme stylization and polyphonic writing. Polyphony is a term used to describe situations in which many voices can be heard.

3.3. Heteroglossia

Heteroglossia refers to the coexistence of multiple voices within a text. These different speech genres reveal the multiplicity of ideologies and social diversity that exist within society. In pragmatics, people shift between different dialects or speech genres based on their audiences, relationships, and situations.

Heteroglossia is a special type of double-voices speech. It expresses the intention of the author 'indirectly' and the narrator 'directly' (Bakhtin, 1981). The same way can be applied to the speech of anyone i.e. if any piece of speech is said, it can express the inner

feeling or intention of talker but also invites interpretation by the listener, thus engaging both sides in a dialogic exchange.

For instance, in English language classrooms, Bucholtz & Hall (2005) assert that there is a need for forming "heteroglossia" so that the students will have a chance to internalize the language and utilize it as a tool for "constructing their own preferred worlds, preferred identities and preferred voices". This need can only be fulfilled by creating a space for internally persuasive dialogue. Mercer & Dawes (2008) mention that there is a need for adjusting some of the typical "ground rules" in order to create a more "symmetrical" classroom discourse in which the students' role is more eminent.

Nesari (2015) mentions that "every meaning presented inside a speech or a text arises in a social context in which a number of opposing meanings are present and develops its social meaning from its relationships with those alternative meanings". For instance, the usage of the modal 'maybe' or 'I think' indicates uncertainty while under the perspective of heteroglossia the meaning is open for negotiation for a different view based on the context and social relations between the audience and the speaker. As observed with the case of a smile, that may indicate a state of happiness or as a politeness marker between relatives or friends passing the corridor as an indication of acknowledgement or recognition. The meaning of an utterance depends on contextual cues and social relationships.

Heteroglossia relates to the idea that language is formed by society and history, consisting of many different forms influenced by social class, beliefs, profession, and age. No voice can stand alone but always refers and vie with other voices (Eigler, 1995). This result multi voiced narrative that may undermine or challenge authoritarian language both within and outside the text. Yet, the dialogic language with its critical power is not completely the result of the speaker's intention but the product of heteroglossia, i.e. the languages that constitute the author's specific social and historical context.

3.4. Chronotope:

From a pragmatic perspective, the chronotope can be seen as an essential part of how time, and place affect the way people communicate and act. For example, the meaning which is derived from situations changes depending on the context in which the conversation occurs including the historical, cultural, and spatial circumstances. Ideas are constantly influenced by life and life frequently faces the temporal and spatial upheavals of history and culture (Bakhtin, 1990).

The field of chronotope is powwowed. Some scholars viewed it as *fixed represented world* or as *dynamic emergent constructs* shaped through interaction. However, both agree chronotope is not static. Those affirming emergence focus on how chronotope is created

and circulated, while others concentrating classification and interpretation (De Fina, 2022).

Blommaert (2015) refuses the view of regarding chronotope as just a representation of time and space in stories. Instead, he sees it as "invokable histories" frames where space, time, and human actions collaborate to create meaning and value. According to him, chronotope is an active force that shapes social interactions. It means that chronotope does not only describe a background setting but they actually shape the interaction itself.

4. Source of data

It is fact Syrian crisis was one of the international issues that attracted huge debates among the member nations of the United Nations (UN). The research extracted its data from various debates at the UN Security Council Meeting on the fall of Bashar Assad regime in Syria in 2024 as primary source of data and other sources of data include various online media outlets that disseminated world reactions on the regime change in Syria. The paper deploys qualitative method to explore and analyse the related pragmatic and dialogic patterns of the member nation presentations on the regime change in Syria from thirty-five online corpuses selected through purposive sample method. The qualitative method helps to evaluate their pragmatic cues of their assertions on the fall of Bashar Assad regime in Syria. The goal here is to examine the different ways in which their narratives of observe pragmatic patterns in delivering their positions. In doing so, the deployment of the qualitative method is not for presenting but describing and discussing the range of pragmatic features and the existence of different voices on Syrian issue at the UN Security Council.

5. Data analysis

Bakhtin's work calls to focus on the social, cultural, and historical dimensions of language use in narratives which are all central concerns of pragmatics. The main unit of analysis is 'the utterance' which is understood as a Bakhtinian dialogic move and a pragmatic act. Each speech act (an assertion, question, promise, etc.) is influenced by people's relationship and social roles or factors as power, politeness and context (Yule, 1996).

From Bakhtin's perspective, even diplomatic discourse is open to different perspectives, allowing the participants to become aware of any differences in points of view. In diplomatic discourse as a form of dialogic discourse, there is always the attempt to acknowledge and understand the perspective of others. Through dialogic discourse, the committee of nations attends to the others' points of view as well as to the goals of UN charters, views and principles. In the Syrian conflict, different speech acts such as threats, promises, declarations, and apologies are used by different people (e.g., opposition figures, or international mediators as UNs members).

In each narrative, some voices or characters may dominate others much as pragmatics reveals how social hierarchies impact language use and interpretation. For example, the difference between formal vs. informal speech. An essential aspect of pragmatics is how context shapes the interpretation of language. The meaning of a statement is co-constructed by the speaker, listener, and the shared context.

Any sentence or even a word has a finality of grammatical form and meaning but concerning the finality of meaning it is abstract. It is the finality of an element but not of the whole. As a unit of language, the sentence or even the word has no author it can be expressed or said by anyone. Only by referring to a whole utterance or a concrete utterance, then it becomes the idea or expression of an individual speaker in an actual situation of speech communication. The sentence lacks expression when being without a context or an author.

It is the nature of linguistic utterance to recurrently frame another utterance and be framed by it, to borrow and displace alien signification. When analyzing an individual sentence in isolation from its context, essential elements as 'addressivity' in a sense the orientation of the speech towards an audience, dialogical response from prior utterance, the influence of anticipated responses, and shift in speech subjects are erased or lost. These elements are connected to the utterance as a whole that is embedded in a situational context. They are foreign to the sentence as a linguistic unit and when the utterance is reduced to isolated sentences, it will disappear from the analyst's view. This emphasizes the importance of considering the full dialogic and polyphonic context in linguistic analysis. Below are some of World reaction to end of Assad rule in Syria which are going to be analysed according to the integration of both approaches of pragmatics and Bakhtin's concepts:

a. European Commission President Ursula von Der Leyen

"The cruel Assad dictatorship has collapsed. This historic change in the region offers opportunities but is not without risks. Europe is ready to support safeguarding national unity and rebuilding a Syrian state that protects all minorities."

In the above excerpt, the speech act of European commission president denotes a promise to people of Syria which is clarified by the usage of '*ready* to support……….'. The chronotope of this occasion refers to the time of collapse of the Syrian regime and consequences of many historic changes will occur as a consequence of this event that took place in Syria.

b. U.S. President Joe Biden

"President Biden and his team are closely monitoring the extraordinary events in Syria and staying in constant touch with regional partners," the White House said in a statement.

The direct meaning of this speech is that Biden and his team are observing and monitoring the evolution in Syria and by stating 'staying in constant touch' shows the dialogic nature of this speech to maintain contact with regional partners. The intended meaning of the statement is assertive by asserting that the white house is engaged and aware. The political context of this excepts is performing an act of stance taking.

Regarding Bakhtin's theory, intertextuality is clear here as it echoes discourse of U.S on crises of middle east reproducing the heteroglossia of political rhetoric where 'monitoring' represents restricted involvement.

c. **UAE diplomatic adviser** Anwar Gargash stated "Unfolding events in Syria are also a clear indication of political failure and the destructive nature of conflict and chaos,". He stressed that "non-state actors should not be allowed to exploit the situation".

The implied meaning of the statement is a directive warning by using 'should not be allowed'. He urged other to protect the situation and prevent worsen it and at the same it is indirect blame for the previous government by using 'political failure' for not doing their duties and the sequence is the conflict and chaos. This speech holds many perspectives 'warning and a diagnosis for the situation as a chaos' and as if it interacts dialogically with prior voices 'Syrian government or even opposition' putting itself within an ongoing debate which is polyphonic.

d. Iraqi government spokesperson

Bassem Al-Awadi said "Iraq was closely following developments and reaffirmed the importance of not interfering in the internal affairs of Syria or supporting one party in favor of another".

Intertextuality reflects how speakers draw on existing cultural and social knowledge to respond and interpret language in a given context (Thamer & Bedu, 2019). It is clear from the usage of 'reaffirmed' that Iraq government has already a stance of not interfering with other's issues. At the same time, the illocutionary speech act of the statement is 'assertive' which is clearly shown by the word 'reaffirmed'.

e. Jordan's King Abdullah

King Abdullah said "Jordan respected the choices of the Syrian people. He urged the avoidance of any conflict in Syria that might lead to chaos and stressed the need to protect the security of his country's northern neighbor, according to a statement published by the Royal Hashemite Court".

Regarding polyphony, there is no single authoritative voice but all perspectives interact or even conflict. Here the perspective is equal or shared by People of Jordan since they

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have the same idea of preferring avoiding conflict in Syria that may affect their security by the shared statement of the royal Hashemite Court that represent them.

f. Qatar

Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that "We emphasize the necessity of preserving national institutions and the unity of the state to prevent it from descending into chaos."

This statement holds the same idea which is explained above. It is clarified by the pronoun 'we' i, e. they share the same perspective. It is an assertion to a commitment they had previously took. The intertextuality of an idea mentioned earlier.

All these countries have the same perspective of supporting Syria to prevent it descending in chaos. They don't have an authoritative but they share the voice. As mentioned, chronotope is an active force that shapes social interactions. It does not only describe a background setting but they actually shape the interaction itself.

6. Conclusion

The integration of pragmatics and narratology shows how pragmatic actions are formed by dialogic relations. By combining Bakhtin's perceptions with pragmatics, a deeper understanding of how narratives function as complex sites of social exchange can be gained, where meaning is formed by interaction, context, and power. It also reveals that discourse goes with their potential content and rhetoric which is the art of argument and "heuristics" explore nature of language user position on the existing discourse.

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