Mind, Culture, and Activity

Dialogical Tensions: On Rommetveitian Themes of Minds, Meanings, Monologues, and Languages

Per Linell [a]

[a] Communication Studies, Linköping University.

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Dialogical Tensions: On Rommetveitian Themes of Minds, Meanings, Monologues, and Languages

Per Linell

Communication Studies
Linköping University

INTRODUCTION

A persistent theme[1] in most of Ragnar Rommetveit's writings has been his wish for a "social–cognitive" integration of different approaches to human action, cognition, and communication—on the one hand, more cognitively oriented, representational–computational approaches to human cognition and communication, and, on the other hand, a hermeneutic-dialogical paradigm that stresses the dynamic and interactive nature of the individual mind as embedded within a cultural collectivity (e.g., Rommetveit, 1983, 1992, 1998). To a large part, these two epistemologies represent natural science explanation and humanistic understanding of man, respectively (Rommetveit, 1998, p. 215). If there is a desire for integration or reconciliation between these perspectives, there is also, in Rommetveit's work, a clear preference for the latter perspective, that is, a dialogically based approach to language and mind (Rommetveit 1990, 1992, 1998), something that may seem to exclude the integration desired. If all this, taken together, represents a tension or oscillation between two different stances, it is rather typical for dialogism more generally (Linell, 1998; Marková, in press; Heen Wold, 1992a, 1992b); the tension between, on the one hand, dialogism as the only overall epistemological framework, and, on the other hand, the acknowledgment of monologues and dialogues as both existing (and interacting) in a dialogically constituted world. In this essay, I elaborate on this as the "big" tension in dialogism, but I also discuss some other ambivalences in the work of Rommetveit and other dialogists.[2]

In the course of my journey across some Rommetveitian themes, stories, tropes, and metonymies, I comment on four issues in particular: (a) the so-called *double dialogicality* as applied to the partial sharedness of meaning, (b) double dialogicality in relation to the roles of the concrete other and the generalized other, (c) the place of praxis in relation to the situational versus sociocultural dimensions of sense making, and (d) the place of monologue and monologism within dialogism. My approach is thoroughly dependent on Rommetveit's insights (and the same

---

Requests for reprints should be sent to Per Linell, Department of Communication Studies, Linköping University, Sweden. E-mail: linell@tema.liu.se

[1] I am grateful to Ivana Marková and Ragnar Rommetveit for valuable comments on a draft of this article. However, nobody but myself is responsible for what I have finally chosen to say.

[2] Compare also Rommetveit (this issue), who discusses the tension between looking at language as a social system and seeing it as individual competence or dialogical interaction. He explores the consequences of thinking disjunctively about individual sense making and meanings in the collectivity.

holds for a wide circle of researchers on language and communication; see Wertsch's introduction to this journal issue).

DIALOGISM

Before proceeding to my main topics, let me just briefly define what I mean by *dialogism*. Dialogism is not one coherent school, or theory, not even anything that "dialogists" of different extractions would agree upon. Even though the term dialogism is often associated with the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (e.g., 1981), I use it in a wider sense (Linell, 1998; Marková, in press; Heen Wold, 1992a). It is a name for a bundle, or combination, of theoretical and epistemological (and mutually related) assumptions about human action, communication, and cognition that include the following:

- *Interactionism*: Communication and cognition always involve interaction with others (other persons, other systems, other dimensions of the self, etc.), and these interactions are mediated by symbolic means (e.g., language; Wertsch, 1991).
- *Contextualism*: Situated discourse is interdependent with contexts: cotexts, situations (concrete settings), activity types, interactional biographies, and cultural knowledge (language, "social representations," discourses in a Foucauldian sense).
- *Social constructionism*: Knowledge, language, communicative genres (routines), and so forth have a sociocultural history; they have been communicatively constructed, sedimented, and changed over (more or less) long periods of time.
- *Double dialogicality*: There is dialogue (i.e., interactions with prior actions and events and with possible next actions) on at least two planes, which we may call *interaction in situations* and *sociocultural praxis within (situation-transcending) traditions*.

Dialogism uses talk-in-interaction (dialogue in a concrete sense) as a model and metaphor for human communication and cognition, but dialogical analysis can be applied (with suitable accommodations of the dialogue metaphor) also to written texts (production and consumption), Internet-and-computer-mediated communication, the use of artifacts, and so forth. That is, dialogism is an epistemological framework for human sociocultural phenomena ("meaning, not matter"): semiosis, cognition, communication, discourse, knowledge, consciousness. It deals with the subject matter of the social, cultural, and human(istic) sciences (and arts), not primarily of the natural sciences (but see later). Marková (in press) wanted to put it in even stronger terms: Dialogism is not only an epistemology (a set of hypotheses about how the world is dialogically appropriated) but also an ontology of the human mind (a theory about the nature and constitution of the mind, in which tensions, oppositions, and antinomies play a major part). Some of these points are elaborated and put in a critical perspective later in this article.

THE PARTIAL SHAREDNESS OF MEANING

A dialogistic theory of meaning is naturally opposed to ideas of literal meaning and subjective solipsistic meaning (Rommetveit, 1988); it builds on ideas of intersubjectivity, the social origin of

minds and meanings, and the dialogical constitution of sense, which are ideas in the spirit of, among others, Wittgenstein, Vygotsky, and Bakhtin. However, Rommetveit also objects to the idea of a language (and culture) as being embedded in a homogeneous collectivity and as being fully socially shared. We live in a "pluralistic social world," which is "only partially shared" and "only fragmentarily known" (e.g., Rommetveit, 1984). Understandings, our (partially) shared interpretations of utterances or situations, are temporarily established through dialogical interaction. The social distribution of knowledge and understanding is expressed in Rommetveit's (more recent) metaphors of shareholding and coauthorship pertaining to language and situated meaning making, respectively (Rommetveit, this issue). We are "shareholders" in (different) language(s), which implies that we do not "own" our language. Nor do we have equal amounts of shares. And different kinds of shares may be of varying value on the market. Furthermore, we are "coauthors" of our own and others' utterances and communicative (and cognitive) activities because, as Bakhtin (1981) put it, "the word is [always] half someone else's" (p. 293); in producing a situated utterance, we respond to others and address ourselves to others, expecting and anticipating new responses from these others who thereby contribute to meaning making.

It is appropriate to discuss some aspects of shared meaning and dialogicality of communication by reference to two of Rommetveit's favorite exemplary stories, "the man who was ignorant of carburetors" and "Mr. Smith mowing his lawn." The use of such examples is, I think, typical of Rommetveit's "strategy … of shifts between interpretation of (imagined, but plausible) cases of everyday conversations and systematic conceptual analysis" (Rommetveit, this issue), a strategy that he attributes to Fritz Heider.

The carburetor story goes as follows:

> A lady who is a very knowledgeable amateur auto mechanic discovers that there is something wrong with the carburetor of her car. Her husband, who is notoriously ignorant about car engines and does not even know what a carburetor looks like, offers to drive the car to a garage to have it repaired. He tells the car mechanic at the garage, "There is apparently something wrong with the carburetor." This saves the latter considerable time in searching for the problem. (Rommetveit, this issue)

This story is designed to show, among other things, that we do not need to share word meanings fully in order to communicate successfully, for "current, practical purposes." We use our words, symbols, and expressions with varying depths of intention and understanding. As Rommetveit (this issue) notes, "the husband's contribution to this efficient chain of communication is pure 'ventriloquation' (Wertsch, 1991, p. 59)." However, this story may also be interpreted as support for a transfer model of communication: Spoken (or, a fortiori, written) words may function by simply being transferred between language users across situations. Understandings, by contrast, are variable and not concomitant with the words themselves; what is mediated by the word *carburetor* in the husband's utterance is assigned (most of its) meaning when it gets interpreted by the car mechanic, who thereby becomes its "main coauthor" (Rommetveit, this issue). Whereas the wife and the car mechanic both understand a lot about carburetors, the husband–messenger understands very little; he is just forwarding the words. Rommetveit's example thus shows that the mere act of issuing an utterance may set a communicative process into motion, a process that has a direction from speaker to addressees (and overhearers). This is indeed what is stated by the transfer model of communication, which is commonly associated with monologism (Linell, 1998, p. 22ff). However, the point is that this monologistic model says very little about understandings, the

sine qua non of actual communication between human beings. Understandings must be accomplished by human actors whose minds are embedded within worlds of socioculturally appropriated knowledge and who operate in interactions with others and with situational conditions in their actual sense making. We may therefore conclude that the monologistic aspects of communicative practices are necessarily situated within a dialogically constituted activity.

The made-up story about Mr. Smith (e.g., Rommetveit, 1990, this issue), who is out on a Sunday morning mowing his lawn outside his house in the fashionable suburb, has become something of an icon of Rommetveitian exemplification. The story has been used by Rommetveit in various ingenious ways to illustrate divergent aspects of human action and communication, and has therefore almost taken on a life of its own.[3] What is Mr. Smith doing out there, as he is toiling on his lawn, pushing his mower to and fro: simply mowing his lawn, or beautifying his garden, keeping up his property value, getting some physical exercise, avoiding his wife, and/or perhaps many other things at the same time? The core of the story, however, revolves around two phone calls that Mrs. Smith receives during her husband's lawn mowing. The first call comes from Mrs. Smith's female friend, who, in the course of her call, brings up the topic of whether Mrs. Smith's lazy husband is still lying in bed on this nice Sunday morning, and Mrs. Smith responds, "No, he is working this morning, he is mowing the lawn." Some minutes later, there is another call, this time from Mr. Smith's working mate at the fire brigade who asks if Mr. Smith is on duty this morning or if he is free to go fishing. "No," says Mrs. Smith, "he is not working this morning, he is mowing the lawn."

The story about the Smiths is designed to illustrate many aspects of language and communication, one of them being the polysemy of words, and how different communicative contexts, under different dialogically constituted conditions, can activate different parts of the meaning potential of a word; the meaning of *work* can be exploited in different ways, focusing, for example, on physical effort or on duties and paid employment. The story also shows how an interpretation becomes mutually shared in and through a dialogue with a particular framing. The situation as a whole involves different options, opportunities and potentialities, asymmetries of knowledge and participation, and so on, but in each of the cases, each adding its "surplus meaning" to the words in the particular context, the particular interpretation is developed in the dialogical interaction between Mrs. Smith and her partners. This makes it possible for two contradictory claims (about Mr. Smith as "working" and as "not working"), claims involving partly the same words, to become equally true about the same extralinguistic situation (Mr. Smith mowing his lawn). However, as Rommetveit (this issue) explains, these claims are true in different communicative contexts, in which different interests and concerns are, or have been made, salient. One cannot extract an utterance from its own context and insert it into another and yet preserve its truth.

Although "Mr. Smith mowing his lawn" is used by Rommetveit to demonstrate how dialogically constituted meaning is brought about in the situated interaction, relatively little is said about what this presupposes in terms of languages and cultures. Yet a lot of this is surely involved in most communicative exchanges (provided that they are not completely ritualized). Hence there is another side, a complementary perspective: Mrs. Smith and her interlocutors, in their situated dialogues, build on assumptions, and knowledge, of word meanings (meaning potentials) of *working* as well as of other words or concepts used or presupposed. They rely on cultural knowl-

---

[3]Rommetveit tells us (Josephs, 1998) that a Swedish opera composer wanted to use it as a libretto for a modern opera!

edge of quite a few things (what work at the fire brigade is like, what leisure-time activities can in-volve, what constitutes conventional life in a well-to-do suburb, what activities serve to make a person physically fit, etc.),[4] and they rely on resources established before the communicative situ-ation, that is, language as well as "social representations" (Moscovici, 1984) about various do-mains in social life. A dialogistic theory insists on the combination of a sociocultural perspective with a situational-interactional one.

THE ROLE OF THE OTHERS:
THE CONCRETE OTHER AND THE GENERALIZED OTHER

The role of other-orientedness, or alterity, has been extensively discussed within dialogism. Intersubjectivity, rather than subjectivity and/or objectivity, is a defining property of communica-tion; there must be intersubjectivity among participants, and such "intersubjectivity [at some level] must be taken for granted in order [for intersubjectivity at other levels] to be achieved" (Rommetveit, 1974, p. 86).

However, there is another, somewhat opposed, strand of alterity: Otherness introduces into the communicative or cognitive process elements of strangeness (Bakhtin's, "estrangement," Rus-sian *ostranenie*). As a result, our attempts at understanding social life and the world in general are full of oppositions, tensions, evaluations and accounts, and boundaries and reaching across boundaries (Marková, in press). Communication involves asymmetries of knowledge (otherwise there would be no point in communicating), and the other brings in extra ("surplus") knowledge.

The tension between the poles of alterity characterized here as (striving for) intersubjectivity and (need of) a surplus of unpredicted (strange) meaning cross-classifies with another one, which may perhaps be discussed in terms of the concrete other and the "generalized other" (which stands for the community "holding shares in" language, social representations, etc.). As an illustration of this latter dichotomy, consider what might be called the "four coordinates" of a communicative situation: I, you, it, we. I use an example involving the *x-and-x* grammatical construction in Swed-ish. This is a construction that occurs fairly frequently in Swedish conversational language and has more or less direct counterparts in several other languages. I discussed its properties as a grammatical construction within a dialogical grammar elsewhere (Linell, in press; see also Lindström, 2001). The example below[5] is drawn from a Finland Swedish dinner-table conversa-tion involving a group of young men in their late 20s, and the local topic is the fate of a German family that was forced to leave Finland after the war:

1. G: sen så beslagtos huse å (0.5) dom flytta tilbaka ti (0.7) ti Hamburg (å)

"and then the house was confiscated and (0.5) they moved back to (0.7) to Hamburg (and)"

---

[4]Rommetveit (e.g., 1991, p. 21f) went partly into these matters in discussing how interlocutors can make sense of Mr. Smith's lawn mowing as a case of "training" (Norwegian *trimme*) or "making oneself physically fit." Such an understand-ing crucially presupposes a cultural concept of fitness (*trimme*) that has been communicatively established over time.

[5]SAM:V1: 989ff. The example occurs in a data corpus collected and researched by Anne-Marie Londen and Jan Lindström, Helsinki. (The exact reference is SAM: V1: 989ff.) Numerical measures within parentheses denote timed pauses in seconds, and (.) is a very short, but noticeable, pause.

2. M: nå flytta å flytta men ja menar va (.) fan kan du göra

"well, moved and moved but I mean what (.) the hell can you do"

The *x-and-x* construction, which is quite conventionalized as a construction in conversational Swedish, occurs almost invariably in the beginning of a responsive utterance, in and through which the speaker (here: M) reacts to the use of a certain word *X* in the prior utterance, usually by another speaker (here: G). The implied meaning of *x-and-x* is that the word *X* is not quite appropriate as a description of the things talked about. The words *x-and-x* are almost always followed by an utterance segment in which its speaker elaborates on, or at least hints at, the reasons why the speaker thinks *X* is not quite an apt term, and perhaps the speaker also proposes some more adequate terms as substitutes. In our example, *X* is the Swedish word *flytta* "move (house)." The implied, situated meaning of M's utterance is that "moving (house)" is hardly a good description because the family was forced to evacuate their home in Finland and return to Germany; they had no choice ("what the hell can you do").

There are at least four referential coordinates that interact in a communicative episode of this kind. There are the events talked about (the "it," what happened to the German family, as the parties to the conversation recall or know it), and the two conversationalists, G and M, and what they communicate in and through their utterances. The "I" of M's utterance (i.e., M as the speaker of the utterance) responds to the "you," that is, G, who has referred to the reference situation as one in which the protagonists "moved house," something which M finds inappropriate. (Although there is no audible reaction from G on the tape, this is a stance that may well be shared by G, who, after all, was the one who contributed the information that the family's house was "confiscated.") However, there is yet another "party" to this episode, namely the meaning potential of the word *flytta* "move (house)"; this is something to which M orients, and he treats it as (at least partly) incompatible with the situation described: you cannot be said to "move house" if you are expelled from the country by force.

It seems to me that most traditional generalizing discussions of the communicative situation, including many of a more dialogical kind, have operated with three, rather than four, coordinates (1., 2., and 3. persons, Marková's, in press, triads, etc.). Rommetveit (1974, p. 36; 1979, p. 95), in his analysis of "the message structure" of the act of speech, works with "I," "you," and the spatial–temporal dimensions of the speech situation (which may be seen as an elaboration of "it"). At the same time, some abstract semiotic analyses of verbal signs have also used triadic relations, but in this case between expression, concept (sense), and thing–referent (or various other terms, such as in Ogden & Richards's, 1923/1970, triangle of symbol, thought, and referent; cf. Baldinger, 1970/1980). These two triadic analyses concern the communicative act and the linguistic sign of the sociocultural system, respectively. Within a theory of pragmatic semiotics building on double dialogicality, these must be combined. The realization of dimensions of sociocultural praxis, such as the (partially) shared knowledge of the use of a word *X* about certain kinds of things, within communicative inter-acts involving I, you, and the situation, necessitates an analysis in terms of (at least) four poles: an "it" (things talked about); an "I" (the speaker's attitude to "it," to the concrete other ["you/thou"] and his or her utterances); a "you/thou" (the concrete other and his or her actions; the concrete other is the addressee to whom "I" responds and from whom he expects a next utterance); and a "we" (or perhaps, a generalized, or generic, "you," in which the speaker is included, that is, aspects of a shared [or, rather, partially shared] cultural knowledge basis, includ-

ing knowledge of linguistic expressions and their meaning potentials). In our example, this last point revolves around the meaning of *flytta* and its compatibility with one's knowledge ("social representation") of situations involving war, evacuations, and so forth.

The *x-and-x* construction is an example of a grammatical resource that is designed for a more or less explicit negotiation of word meaning in relation to the needs of a particular piece of situated discourse. Not all communication involves such negotiations, bordering on metacommunication. However, it can be argued that implicitly, dialogue by means of language almost always involves an orientation to meaning potentials that transcend the immediate situations. For example, Mrs. Smith orients to, activates, and modifies different parts of the meaning potential of *work*, thus enabling herself to use the word in opposite modes ("he is working this morning," "he is not working this morning") about the same situation. The ultimate analysis of this situation cannot reside solely in the contextual aspects of the situated interaction; the dialogical account must also include the dimension of sociocultural praxis, which involves, among other things, the nature of the linguistic resources put to use.

MICROGENESIS VERSUS MACROSTRUCTURE: THE INVISIBILITY OF SOCIAL PRAXIS

The previous point touches on a classical controversy within the social sciences, namely, interaction and agency versus structure and social system. If we believe that society largely consists in the social lives of people acting and interacting in partly different, partly overlapping activity types and interpretative communities, we begin to generate a fair amount of suspicion with respect to grand theories of social structures and stable cognitions, especially if these are assumed to be static conditions controlling people's action. (True enough, there are strong "power structures" in societies and states, but these too can be largely understood in terms of situated actions of people in power, people who rely on institutions, documents, etc., inscribed with authoritative meaning.) This may explain Rommetveit's often stated hesitation and ambivalence toward "social stocks of knowledge" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Luckmann, 1992) and "social representations" (Moscovici, 1984, etc.). On the whole, he has focused most of his interest on the communicative interaction in particular situations. Nystrand (1992), accordingly, classifies him as a "social interactionist," as opposed to a "social constructionist."[6]

Social interactionists, who tend to think of language in Wittgensteinian terms as "forms of life" rather than as "objective" knowledge, defy the reification of structures as implied by structuralists; the very terms of *stock of knowledge* and *representation* may therefore appear to be disturbing or disconcerting to them. Yet, the social constructionism of, for example, Luckmann (1992) is arguably quite dialogical, and the theory of social representations can be assigned a truly dialogical interpretation (Marková, 1996) (even though this might be a minority position among social representations theorists). Social representations can, and should, be seen as dynamic, fragmentary, partially shared, and circulated in communication (Linell, 2001).

---

[6]One may debate whether such a categorization is entirely justified. Be that as it may, I argue that the balances could be shifted a little within dialogism, from a more exclusively situational interactionism to a variant that includes a more sizable portion of sociocultural (though still dynamic) constructionism.

There are comparatively few points where Rommetveit commits himself to precise proposals about linguistic and social knowledge. (In earlier texts, he often talked about word meanings in terms of "drafts of contracts concerning shared categorization and attribution"—e.g., Rommetveit, 1979, p. 97—without elaborating on these in more linguistic detail.) Some notion of relatively stable routines, assumptions, and knowledge, as regards language (e.g., meaning potentials of words) and the social world ("social representations" in and about various domains, some of which are very loosely defined), is necessary. Such structures may also change, but they do so in the *longue durée* of the continuity of sociocultural practices. Thus, when we talk about the dialogical constitution of minds, meanings, and languages, we are actually dealing with a double dialogicality, one pertaining to sociocultural traditions and one pertaining to situated interactions. A fair amount of the dialogical construction of the social world has already taken place prior to the situation in which people meet and try to make sense. Knowledge about worlds and languages has been shaped and appropriated in actors' biographical experiences of prior situations and by previous generations in sociocultural history. Such knowledge has become "sedimented" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). At the same time, this "living tradition" (e.g., Marková, 1992, p. 49) must be dialogically reappropriated and reshaped in situ, in new situations.

Many theoreticians have underscored the importance of *praxis*—the sociocultural practices consisting of situation-transcending traditions—and yet most theories of language have failed to provide it with a proper treatment. In Saussure's (1916/1964) system linguistics, it arguably belongs to the language system (*la langue*), but this cannot do justice to its dynamics. In most accounts based on conversation analysis, it is rather an aspect of situated interaction, but this makes us lose sight of its sociohistorical constitution. It seems that pervasive distinctions such as language system versus language use, structure versus agency, macrostructure versus microgenesis, and so forth, have made the central dimension of praxis largely invisible.

MONOLOGISM WITHIN DIALOGISM:
SCIENTIFIC ENCLAVES OF EXPERTISE

Finally, I turn to the place of monologue and monologism within a dialogistic epistemology. A trivial point is that insisting on dialogism as the overall worldview is, one may argue, itself mon(olog)istic in character, because it admits of only one perspective, namely, the dialogical one. (The case is therefore somewhat analogous to, say, extreme social constructionism, which may be taken to mean that nothing is objectively true—everything is culturally constructed—except social constructionism itself.)

However, perhaps less trivially, there appear to be many monological practices within this dialogical world. Mikhail Bakhtin recognized that one may talk about "dialogue" and "monologue" at several different levels (Morson & Emerson, 1990, pp. 146–159). All texts and discourses are dialogical in the sense that they respond to a situation or an interlocutor, and they are addressed to some (maybe fairly generally defined) responder. But at other levels, texts and discourses can differ in their degree of dialogicality; they can be more or less dialogical or monological. Some texts are monological in the sense that they try to apply only one authoritative perspective on the things talked about (they are monoperspectival or "monistic," Rommetveit, 1984, p. 331); thus, they are built in ways that suggest only one voice or one source. Some texts are

also designed to call forth only one type of well-defined response; a military order is a prototypical case.

Terms such as *monologue* and *monological* stand out as fairly static or frozen. Perhaps, we should prefer to talk about *monologizing* practices. For example, scientific, legal, and administrative practices, as well as such communicative activities as logic exercises, language and grammar lessons, many laboratory experiments, and so on strive for a fixed perspective on the matters involved. They decontextualize from most circumstances that are relevant in other situations, for example, in everyday mundane life. Or, to put it in converse terms, things in social life are recontextualized into these specific (scientific, etc.) contexts that are designed for decontextualization. At the same time, this means that such decontextualization is never absolute; it is always embedded with an activity context. Thus, scientific theory-building, as well as activities in science labs and experimental settings, are "local," or "context bound." Scientific practices, including natural scientific ones, are therefore both monologizing (and decontextualizing) and context bound; there is "systematic detachment" in these "enclaves of expertise" (Rommetveit, 1998, p. 230). Hence Linell (1992) coined the term "situated decontextualizing practices" (p. 258f).

Looking on the human being as an information-processing system—the mainstream perspective in individual cognitive psychology—is such a local or "situated" enterprise, which proves reasonably successful in certain contexts, in certain enclaves of expertise. Take the case of machine translation (Rommetveit, 1998, p. 228ff) as an example. As Rommetveit argued, following Wittgenstein and others, ordinary language can never be exhaustively conceptualized in simple and abstract concepts. However, machine translation necessitates that language be transformed into such formally defined entities, which can be handled by computers. This has proved to be quite successful within limited domains in which relevant human concerns and interests can be taken for granted and temporarily fixed (and often partially brought into the language of the computer program). Yet, the human interpreter, immersed in a human social world, must always make the final assessment as to whether the translations produced are reasonable and accurate.

There is indeed an "epistemological gulf" (Rommetveit, 1998, p. 213) between the natural scientific explanation and humanistic understanding of human beings. Yet, building on a theory of communicative practices as necessarily de- and recontextualizing (Linell, 1998), we can define the place of monologism within dialogism.[7] One may doubt whether a real interdisciplinary integration can be achieved, but a reconciliation between monologism and dialogism of a kind that Rommetveit, and scholars who have been similarly minded, have been yearning for, can perhaps be sought along such lines of thought. At the same time, this is a way of spelling out the crux of the big tension in dialogism.

EPILOGUE

Contradictions and tensions are part and parcel of a dialogistically constituted world. According to this view, the world is constituted not only (or even mainly) of elements and categories (as in a Cartesian epistemology) but also of essential (constitutive) dimensions of antinomies ("oppositions";

---

[7]Multiperspectivism, and its derivative thesis that singular perspectives are only locally valid, is arguably accepted metatheory also in 20th century natural sciences, after Darwin, Einstein, Heisenberg, and Bohr.

Marková, in press), tensions, divergences of intentions and intensions, interdependencies, and potentialities (in addition to actualities).

Social life is full of tensions and contradictions. So is our everyday knowledge about the world, the social representations that circulate in mundane talk and the media (Linell, 2001). Also, scientific theorizing about the world is partly characterized by contradictions and complementarity. There is consistency only in fragments, in local models or within limited perspectives. Science consists of situated decontextualizing practices; they are universalizing and decontextualizing, yet limited to science, to scientific enclaves of expertise.

Ragnar Rommetveit's work is a struggle for meaning, and for explaining what meaning is, in a dialogical world. Even though he has not specifically talked about "tensions," his stories do involve tensions and ambiguities This reflects, I think, tensions in dialogism in general. I have discussed some of these in this essay. In particular, I have been concerned with the place of monologism in a dialogical outlook on the world.

REFERENCES

Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.; M. Holquist, Ed.). Austin: University of Texas.

Baldinger, K. (1980). *Semantic theory* (R. Wright, Trans.). Oxford, England: Blackwell. (Original work published 1970)

Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1967). *The social construction of reality*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin.

Heen Wold, A. (Ed.). (1992a). *The dialogical alternative*: *Towards a theory of language and mind*. Oslo, Norway: Scandinavian University Press.

Heen Wold, A. (1992b). Introduction. In A. Heen Wold (1992), *The dialogical alternative*: *Towards a theory of language and mind* (pp. 1–18). Oslo, Norway: Scandinavian University Press.

Josephs, I. (1998). Do you know Ragnar Rommetveit? On dialogue and silence, poetry and pedantry, and cleverness and wisdom in psychology (An interview with Ragnar Rommetveit). *Culture & Psychology, 4,* 189–212.

Lindström, J. (2001). *Grammatical fields and constructions in conversational turns: The case of the x och x construction in Swedish.* Helsinki, Finland: Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literature, University of Helsinki. Retrieved December, 2001 from http://www.nordiska.uu.se/samtal/

Linell, P. (1992). The embeddedness of decontextualization in the contexts of social practices. In A. Heen Wold (Ed.), *The dialogical alternative*: *Towards a theory of language and mind* (pp. 253–271). Oslo, Norway: Scandinavian University Press.

Linell, P. (1998). *Approaching dialogue: Talk, interaction and contexts in dialogical perspectives*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Linell, P. (2001). A dialogical conception of focus groups and social representations. In U. Sätterlund-Larsson (Ed.), *Socio-cultural theory and methods: An anthology* (Skrift No. 6, pp. 163–206). Uddevalla, Sweden: University of Trollhättan, Department of Nursing.

Linell, P. (in press). On some principles of a dialogical grammar. In K. Aijmer & J. Allwood (Eds.), *Dialogue Analysis 2001: Understanding and misunderstanding in dialogue.* Tübingen, Germany: Niemeyer.

Luckmann, T. (1992). On the communicative adjustment of perspectives, dialogue and communicative genres. In A. Heen Wold (Ed.), *The dialogical alternative*: *Towards a theory of language and mind* (pp. 219–234). Oslo, Norway: Scandinavian University Press.

Marková, I. (1992). On structure and dialogicity in Prague semiotics. In A. Heen Wold (Ed.), *The dialogical alternative*: *Towards a theory of language and mind* (pp. 45–63). Oslo, Norway: Scandinavian University Press.

Marková, I. (1996). Towards an epistemology of social representations. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour 26,* 177–196.

Marková, I. (in press). *Dialogicality and social representations.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Morson, G. S., & Emerson, C. (1990). *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a prosaics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Moscovici, S. (1984). The phenomenon of social representations. In R. Farr & S. Moscovici (Eds.), *Social representations* (pp. 3–69). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Nystrand, M. (1992). Social interactionism versus social constructionism: Bakhtin, Rommetveit, and the semiotics of written text. In A. Heen Wold (Ed.), *The dialogical alternative*: *Towards a theory of language and mind* (pp. 157–173). Oslo, Norway: Scandinavian University Press.

Ogden, C. K., & Richards, I. A. (1972). *The meaning of meaning* (10th ed.). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. (Original work published 1923)

Rommetveit, R. (1974). *On message structure*. London: Wiley.

Rommetveit, R. (1979). On the architecture of intersubjectivity. In R. Rommetveit & R. Blakar (Eds.), *Studies of language, thought and verbal communication* (pp. 93–107). London: Academic.

Rommetveit, R. (1983). In search of a truly interdisciplinary semantics: A sermon on hopes of salvation from hereditary sins. *Journal of Semantics, 2,* 1–28.

Rommetveit, R. (1984). The role of language in the creation and transmission of social representations. In R. Farr & S. Moscovici (Eds.), *Social representations* (pp. 331–359). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Rommetveit, R. (1988). On literacy and the myth of literal meaning. In R. Säljö (Ed.), *The written world* (pp. 13–40). Berlin, Germany: de Gruyter.

Rommetveit, R. (1990). On axiomatic features of a dialogical approach to language and mind. In I. Marková & K. Foppa (Eds.), *The dynamics of dialogue* (pp. 83–104). New York: Harvester.

Rommetveit, R. (1991). On epistemic responsibility in human communication. In H. Rønning & K. Lundby (Eds.), *Media and communication: Readings in methodology, history and culture* (pp. 13–27). Oslo, Norway: Norwegian University Press.

Rommetveit, R. (1992). Outlines of a dialogically based social–cognitive approach to human cognition and communication. In A. Heen Wold (Ed.), *The dialogical alternative*: *Towards a theory of language and mind* (pp. 19–44). Oslo, Norway: Scandinavian University Press.

Rommetveit, R. (1998). On human beings, computers and representational–computational vs hermeneutic-dialogical approaches to human cognition and communication. *Culture & Psychology, 4,* 213–233.

Saussure, F. de (1964). *Cours de linguistique générale.* Pans: Payot. (Original work published 1916).

Wertsch, J. V. (1991). *Voices of the mind. A sociocultural approach to mediated action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.