

## 'Classic Book' Review

**V.N. Volosinov, 1929/1973, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*.**

Translated by L. Matejka and I.R. Titunik, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, ISBN 0-674-55098-6

**L.S. Vygotsky, 1934/1987, *Thinking and Speech*.** Translated by N. Minick,

in volume 1 of *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky*, New York: Plenum Press, ISBN 0-306-42441-x (vol. 1) Also translated, in abridged form, by E. Hanfmann and G. Vakar and revised by A. Kozulin, as *Thought and Language*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. ISBN 0-262-72010-8.

(This review uses the more complete and literal Minick translation.)

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### Prelude

A mere 85 years ago, when miracles could still happen, a young teacher with a strong interest in language and literature and no formal training in psychology rose to present a paper to a prestigious international conference of psychologists held in Moscow. At opposite ends of the room sat two very distinct species of psychologist greybeard. One species, led by Chelpanov, considered psychology to be the study of mental activity quite unrelated to physiology: in other words, thought without behavior. The second variety, led by Pavlov, took exactly the opposite tack, and defined a psychology of behaviour that forbade the mention of non-observable phenomena such as mind or thought or consciousness. The young teacher's paper bore the modest, unassuming, and entirely uncontroversial title of 'Consciousness as a Problem in the Psychology of Behavior'.

The young Vygotsky (for it was he) argued that an objective psychology could be based on the study of how words 'structured' behavior. His paper was rather more bold than empirical, but he ended with the observation that, for the deaf-mutes he had been working with, 'conscious awareness of speech and social experience emerge simultaneously and completely in parallel' (1997: 78). According to Luria's account (1979: 38), Vygotsky's paper, from both ends of the room simultaneously, brought the house down.

Three years later, the young musicologist Volosinov found himself in a similar predicament: his world was populated by two sorts of linguists, namely those who believed that individuals create content quite independently of structure (the Romantics) and those who believed that structure has no interest in any individual experience or indeed in any semantic content whatsoever (the Formalists). Just as Vygotsky had criticized attempts to explain thought by thinking and behavior by behaving, Volosinov saw that attempts to explain linguistic form through the process of formulation or expression through expressiveness led in circles.

Volosinov also saw that form and meaning had to develop from something else in order to develop together. For Volosinov, that 'something else' was exactly the same explanatory principle that Vygotsky had seized upon. It is found outside the individual rather than merely within; it is not abstractly objective but concrete and tangible, and it is an inseparable part of every language teacher's work day: human communication, largely carried out through and observable in words.

### ***Marxism and the Philosophy of Language***

Now approaching its ninth decade, Volosinov's book-length development of this idea is occasionally praised by professors, much feared by students, and largely left unread. Some might say this sad fate is foretold in its very pages: 'The understanding of any sign occurs inextricably tied with *the situation in which the sign is implemented* (. . .) It is always a *social situation*' (p. 37). The 'social situation' of ground-breaking scholars who have read and cherished this book is unbroken, but here and there stretched dangerously thin: from the league of extraordinary thinking men today referred to as the circle of M.M. Bakhtin, through Roman Jakobson and his Linguistic Circles in Moscow and Prague, right down to Raymond Williams and Dell Hymes. And there it seems to stop.

It is, therefore, with considerable surprise that we crack open Volosinov's book and read these lines apparently addressed to working foreign language teachers and their students:

In the process of mastering a foreign language, signality and recognition still make themselves felt, so to speak, and still remain to be surmounted, the language not yet fully having become language. The ideal of mastering a language is absorption of signality by pure semiocity and of recognition by pure understanding. (p. 69)

Words like 'signality' (as *opposed* to 'semiocity') and even 'recognition' (as *opposed* to 'understanding') are a little like highly stylized Japanese characters for 'bamboo' written with a genuine bamboo writing brush. They provide us, unhelpfully, with examples of the very things they describe; they stand

before us as barriers to comprehension, and block our attention rather than conduct it elsewhere.

Yet here Volosinov adds an intriguing footnote that similarly illustrates for us what it might mean to absorb these obstructions by 'pure semiotic' and 'understanding', and suggests why it might be worth mastering the unfamiliar language he uses. He writes that all 'sensible methods of teaching living languages' present linguistic forms in 'concrete contexts and situations'. By doing this, he claims, the 'factor of recognition', that is, the effort that goes into identifying words as words that have fixed definitions, is submerged by the realization of the word's ever-changing potential for new meanings.

To put it briefly, under a sound and sensible method of practical instruction, a form should be assimilated not in its relations to the abstract system of the language, i.e. as a self-identical form, but in the concrete structure of the utterance, i.e. as a mutable and pliable sign. (p. 69)

There is easily enough here to make a thinking language teacher want to read on.

## Beginning with the end

Volosinov obeys the Hegelian general principle of 'ascent to the concrete', whereby a problem is posed at the methodological level first, extant approaches are tried and found wanting, and working definitions and practical applications emerge only at the very end. For this reason, it might be useful to review it backwards, taking a figurative cable-car to Volosinov's concrete conclusions and then descending to his methodological approaches. Yet in actually reading the book, it's probably best to stick to the Volosinov's Hegelian procedure, since he is masterful in laying out what he is going to do, scrupulous in keeping his promises, and meticulous in summing up. This alone is evidence supporting the translator's opinion that, contrary to what Clark and Holquist (1984) and others (e.g. Wertsch and Stone 1985) have contended, Volosinov's book was not actually ghost-written by the notoriously discursive and often forgetful M.M. Bakhtin.

Part III deals with the sort of problem that interested critics like Raymond Williams and Frederic Jameson, namely the emergence of the kind of 'quasi-direct' discourse we find in *La Fontaine*: 'The fox told the crow what lovely feathers she had, that there was not her equal to be found anywhere in the forest, and that if she would only sing, he was quite certain that her dulcet tones would fully complement her elegant plumage.' Here we seem to hear the voice of the fox through the voice of the narrator. Volosinov claims that the way in which different voices are embedded in the same text reflects social changes, from 'authoritarian dogmatism' in the Middle Ages, where voices were kept separate and intact, to an even clearer delineation in

the 'rationalistic dogmatism' of the Enlightenment, to 'realist individualism', where the authorial voice reflects and refracts the voices of characters, to a Modernist 'relativistic individualism', where the authorial voice is actually decomposed by the competing pressures of characters (p. 123).

It's certainly not without interest for language teachers, who in living memory (at least, in my living memory) were trained to teach learners that English has only direct and indirect speech, and that the latter can be derived from the former through the application of a set of transformations (e.g. 'He said, "She left"' becomes 'He said that she had left'). But the main interest for us is Volosinov's method, or rather, his attitude. Instead of a system of words with stable meanings and rules to apply on tests, Volosinov stresses the historical pliability and social mutability of words-in-utterances. He points out that outside the foreign language classroom, we are quite liable to overlook grotesque grammatical errors in our native language and assume them to be meaningful, true, just, and beautiful (as in e.e. cummings' 'he sang his didn't he danced his did').

A stable attractor is not even the norm for word meanings and phonemes, otherwise historical and social change would not appear to follow a 'strange attractor', with sudden catastrophic changes such as the Great Vowel Shift. It is as if, retracing our steps to one of the great intellectual crossroads of the twentieth century (Volosinov's volume was published just eight years after Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*), we come upon a battered, neglected, and barely decipherable signpost pointing directly whence we came reading 'Don't Go This Way!' Looking around a little, we see that Volosinov actually left us two signposts, and we appear to have resolutely ignored both.

If Saussure and 'abstract objectivism' is ultimately responsible for the twentieth-century tendency to focus on 'form', then the Romantics and 'individualist subjectivism' were responsible for the current tendency to focus on 'content'. The danger is not simply that the Romantic view of language leads to the language teacher stressing expressive fluency at the expense of appropriacy and accuracy. By its own expressionistic standard, this view of communication is a disaster, for it paradoxically leads to classroom learners who, free of all contextual constraints, have absolutely nothing to say.

For Volsinov, the organizing centre of expression never lies entirely within individuals but always somewhere between them. If anything, experience owes its organizing principle to expression and not the other way around. So it is not the case that words must be uttered in order to become social property; we anticipate what our interlocutor is going to say in the very process of formulating an utterance. With this anticipation, the result of our choice of words is transformed into the reason for choosing them. Every utterance we make, we begin with the end in mind, and we end with the beginning of someone else's utterance. That is why the situation in which a sign is implemented, and even the inner, psychological situation in which that sign is first conceived, is social at every point.

## Theme and meaning

No matter which path we take in exploring Part II, we soon find ourselves back in the ‘social situation’ of meaning. This is even true with individual word meanings; they are clearly visible, like stars overhead, only from the little clearing of the ‘social situation’. Take, for example, the following exchange from the state-mandated elementary English book that we currently use in Korea:

Minsu: What time is it?

Mina: It’s . . . o’clock. (Kyoyukbu 2001: 38)

Volosinov distinguishes a ‘theme’, composed of all the elements that are contextually and temporally bound, and thus non-reproducible (such as, for example, the answer!). In contrast, there are other elements, and these include all individual word meanings, that are relatively context- and time-free and can be reproduced exactly on demand (for example, from dictionaries). Like Widdowson’s pragmatic meaning, Volosinov’s ‘theme’ is contextually negotiable and variable, and like Widdowson’s semantic meaning, Volosinov’s ‘meaning’ is an abstraction that accrues through use (Widdowson 2004: 35). This is why teachers have to contextualize examples:

[I]t is even impossible to convey the meaning of a particular word (say, in the course of teaching another person a foreign language) without having made it an element of theme, i.e. without having constructed an “example” utterance. (p. 100).

Here, as a thought experiment, Volosinov asks himself what a prehistoric language would look like if it consisted of only one word, say, a grunt, which had to be applied to every affective state and every external phenomenon. Would such a word even be a word? It would, because multiplicity of theme rather than stability of meaning is the original characteristic of human verbiage. To illustrate, he uses an example from Dostoevsky in which six workmen use a single (unprintable) word to carry on an extremely varied (and drunken) conversation.

Now why should Volosinov’s foundational model of a word be a grunt or a multi-functional obscenity rather than, say, a concrete object or an abstract concept (as Saussureans would prefer)? The reason lies in our humble origins: only the immediate material context is economically interesting for the prehistoric hunter or herdsman, so that it is quite conceivable to imagine a language for him in which pragmatic theme predominated (a largely grammarless system of referential meanings) and semantic meaning was neglected. Wray (2002) points out that fossils of this earlier language may persist in the ‘formulaic language’ whose study figures so largely in the lexical approach; Volosinov’s own examples are reduplicated expressions,

such as 'yeah yeah' or 'so so', where a single word is artificially prolonged to enable it to carry a greater weight of intonational (and evaluative) theme, and of course these are very common in early child language as well as learner talk.

As humans develop economically, the horizon that hung loosely almost around their shoulders expands. 'Man at the end of the epoch of capitalism is directly concerned about everything, his interests reaching the remotest corners of the earth and even the most distant stars' (p. 106). The results of this expansion of social purview are not hard to find. Today, language is, at least potentially, every bit as wide as the universe man inhabits. Volosinov could have been referring to the Internet, the blogosphere, and the world of Massively Multi-player On-line gaming when he wrote:

Society in process of generation expands its perception of the generative process of existence. There is nothing in this that could be said to be absolutely fixed. And that is how it happens that meaning – an abstract, self-identical element – is subsumed under theme and torn apart by theme's living contradictions so as to return in the shape of a new meaning with a fixity and self-identity only for the while, just as it had before. (p. 106)

But Volosinov's illustration of the way in which the historical 'event horizon' of man changes was doubtless more meaningful to readers of his own time than it is today.

It was hunger. At one extreme, hunger is what Volosinov calls an 'I experience', that is, it does not extend beyond the boundaries of my skin. There is nothing expressible (or even specifically human) about such an experience, and it is soon extinguished by either food or death. In contrast, the 'we experience' of hunger shows a marvelous range of expressiveness. The lone vagabond starves humbly, shamefully, or enviously, in a haphazard manner reflecting his sociolinguistic status as a loner at the 'I experience' end of 'we experience'. The peasant is part of a recognizable social group and his hunger is by no means haphazard, but because it is individually expressed, it is liable to take on the hue of 'resigned but unashamed and undemeaning apprehension (. . .) "Everyone bears it; you must bear it too."' The hunger of workers, who not only suffer but express their hunger together, will be altogether different (pp. 88–9).

While I found this example rather far-fetched, my wife, who was born into a family of peasant-cum-workers in the wake of the largest famine of modern times in China, found it wholly and utterly convincing and not a little moving. My problem in accepting this example is really that my consciousness was formed free of hunger and I turned to Chinese late in life. Volosinov would be unsurprised at my incomprehension: 'Only in learning a foreign language does a fully prepared consciousness – fully prepared thanks to one's native language – confront a fully prepared language which

it need only accept' (p. 81). Elsewhere, this cannot happen for the very simple reason that language is the very stuff that prepares conscious awareness in the child. And it is in order to understand that process that, wide-eyed, we turn the last page in Volosinov's prodigious volume and look expectantly to a book by a close contemporary which is now in its 75th year.

### ***Thinking and Speech***

This book is often referred to as Vygotsky's 'monograph' (e.g. p. 359). If by 'monograph' we understand that there is a unitary topic to be treated exhaustively and autonomously, then that description is belied by the two distinct topics mentioned in the title. One might with some justice counter that the single subject of the book is neither 'thinking' nor 'speech' but rather the conjunction 'and' that links them. This is very true, with the qualification that the meaning of 'and' is never really autonomous from 'thinking' and 'speech'. In Chapter 6, Vygotsky attempts to find out to what extent children have autonomous and 'volitional' control of the meaning of conjunctions such as 'because' and 'although', and discovers that the content of a conjunction appears to vary inversely with the child's knowledge of the circumstances conjoined!

On the other hand, if by 'monograph' we mean that *Thinking and Speech* was a unified, single-minded piece of work, the description is demonstrably false. What we have before us is more like a palimpsest. Vygotsky's critique of Piaget in Chapter 2 and his work on concept formation in Chapter 5 were both based on work done in 1929 (i.e. less than half-way into Vygotsky's short career). Chapter 6, which explicitly criticizes Chapter 2 (p. 240) and Chapter 5 (p. 229), was dictated to Vygotsky's colleague Kolbanovsky, the first of many to try to edit this sprawling collection, some five and half years later, as Vygotsky lay dying (at one heartbreaking moment on p. 188 the author appears to lose the thread of his argument and start the whole book all over again). Vygotsky himself warns at the very beginning that the book is the product of ten years' work, during which 'a great deal of hard work had to be discarded' (p. 40).

### **Three Vygotskies**

The translator, Norris Minick, in his introduction, usefully divides these ten years into three different Vygotskies, each discarding or at least definitively reformulating the work of his predecessor. First, there is Vygotsky One, the Vygotsky of the Instrumental Act, who sought to explain consciousness as he did in the paper that impressed Volosinov, as the process of structuring behavior by the use of tools and signs. This Vygotsky turned out to be curiously long-lived, because after Vygotsky's death the powerful neo-behaviorist winds sweeping Russia attempted to resurrect him in various guises

(e.g. 'activity theory'). When Vygotsky's work was denounced as 'idealist', after his death, this Vygotsky's central concern with instruments, tools, and human labor provided some 'materialist' protection for his core ideas under the names of his (not always loyal) disciples.

But this Vygotsky was definitively repudiated by Vygotsky Two around the year 1930, when Vygotsky rejected the idea that consciousness could ever be reduced to stimulus-response 'elements', even with the help of mediating artefacts. Vygotsky Two turned to the problem of psychological systems composed of developing 'interfunctional relations' with which *Thinking and Speech* opens. 'Thinking' and 'speech' are to be considered meta-functions in much the same way that 19th-century linguists had seen 'prose' and 'poetry' as separate functions of language. The consciousness of the child develops by transforming linguistic functions (such as indicating, naming, and then signifying) into psychological neo-formations (such as volitional attention, logical memory, and conceptual thought).

The problem is that, while Vygotsky One had a clear explanatory principle (roughly, the environment and tool-bearing acts upon it), it is not at all clear in what way Vygotsky Two explains how and why the child subordinates attention to volition (rather than perception), uses logical categories to store information (rather than eidetic memory), and creates concepts (rather than simple heaps of objects). This was made particularly difficult because in places Vygotsky Two appears to believe that the functions themselves do not develop, and it is merely the way they are linked which changes (1987: 24).

Vygotsky Three, the main author or at least the main editor of *Thinking and Speech*, explicitly repudiates the idea that the functions do not become differentiated. He sets out to describe how the changes in relations between functions restructure the functions themselves. If this book is a monograph, it is this new approach to the development of consciousness that is the title that dare not speak its name. The new approach is based on two instances of nay-saying. First, there is the rejection of Vygotsky One's stimulus-response 'elements' in favor of 'analysis into units'. Second, there is repudiation of Vygotsky Two's idea of unchanging functions within changing psychological systems.

But the positive explanatory principle behind this functional differentiation is not immediately clear, at least not until Vygotsky's lectures on play in mid-1932. Here he begins to formulate a link between the social situation of development of the child and the maturing psychological systems that lead to self-regulation and self-emancipation. This link, about which the world would hear a great deal in the decades to come, Vygotsky calls the zone of proximal development.

## Outside in

*Thinking and Speech* uses the same basic method as *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. The first chapter, instead of providing the working definitions

we expect, states an extremely ambitious methodological problem, namely the development of 'interfunctional relations' between thinking and speech. This is followed by the critical appropriation of the major thinkers in this field, Piaget and Stern. Stern is quickly disposed of (Chomsky-like, he does not see much internal differentiation in child language after the age of 5). Piaget, on the other hand, both enrages and enraptures Vygotsky, for nearly 40 pages in Chapter 2 and then more in Chapter 5.

Piaget's position will sound relevant, even eerily familiar, to anyone who knows the arguments in the 1980s over 'learning' and 'acquisition'. He opines that the effects of deliberate and conscious instruction simply will not reach the depths of the child's thinking, and we must instead study the unconscious process by which knowledge is acquired. Ingeniously, Vygotsky uses Piaget's own data on 'egocentric speech' to demolish his theoretical centrepiece, namely 'egocentric thought'. He demonstrates that talk apparently directed by the child to him or herself is actually social rather than 'egocentric', for the child is from the very beginning a social being.

What the child is actually doing is learning to direct and guide and control his own behavior. The child is doing this by imitating the directions, guidance, and control of others and applying them to the developing 'imaginary friend' that is the child's developing sense of self. Thus 'egocentric' speech does not disappear or become displaced, but instead moves from a consequence of action to its cause. When it accomplishes the transition from the result of activity to its reason, it 'goes underground' in the form of verbal thinking.

This ability to abstract away the sounds of language from the word meanings is, Vygotsky argues, the concrete way in which the child's conscious self is formed; it is why Volosinov can say that only in foreign language learning does a fully formed consciousness confront a ready-made language. But this is only a single instance of the child's ability to abstract a notion of 'self' from the child's social situation.

In Chapter 4, Vygotsky generalizes this argument to all the higher psychological functions: all of them, like 'egocentric speech', begin as relations between minds, that is, between real people, and are only later reconstrued as relations within minds, e.g. between mental functions such as will and memory. Not only is discourse reconstrued within the mind as grammar, but grammar is re-reconstrued as abstract logic: just as the child learnt to act before s/he learnt to speak, the child learns to use words like 'because', 'since', 'if' and even 'and' in language before s/he can actually use them in thought (p. 114).

Because the mind itself is embedded within an actual and fully developed social situation, it develops from outside inwards. In Chapter 7, using poetry and passages from Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, Vygotsky will reverse this process and take us from the innermost plane of thought to the outer realm of speech and social interaction; here he is interested in showing us how it develops rather than how it works.

## The zone of proximal development before it was fashionable

Foreign language learning is a central piece of evidence, both in showing how the child's mind develops (Vygotsky was a bilingual child himself and an early advocate of child foreign language learning) and in showing how the adult mind articulates thinking and speech. Chapter 6 makes it very clear that building a foreign language on top of the native one is, along with the construction of scientific concepts over everyday ones, the archetype of the zone of proximal development. Unfortunately, the zone of proximal development as we know it today in foreign language teaching (which is really just a 'zone of proximal learning') has relatively little to do with the one Vygotsky has in mind.

Perversely, Vygotsky celebrates the differences between first and foreign language learning (220–21). For him, it is precisely the use of abstracted word meanings that make generalizations from one subject to another possible, and without this move we cannot speak of development. So it is the volitional, conscious, analyzed meanings of words (including abstract word meanings of the native language), and not the acquisition of everyday concepts, that the zone of proximal development must build on (222).

As Chaiklin points out (2003: 42–3), vulgarizations of the zone of proximal development have tended towards one or more of three non-Vygotskian assumptions. First of all, there is the 'generality assumption': that all learning can be developmental. Then there is the 'assistance assumption': that the zone of proximal development is brought into being through interaction with an adult or more able peer. Finally, the 'potential assumption' posits that the zone of proximal development taps abilities found within the child.

If we follow the 'generality' assumption, all foreign language learning is equally developmental, and there is no reason to privilege the deliberate, volitional learning of foreign languages as a school subject over the more unconscious and more non-volitional 'acquisition' that takes place informally outside schools. But Vygotsky scoffs at the idea that complex activities that do not involve the functional differentiation of word meanings might play a role in general mental development (the examples he offers (p. 200) are riding a bicycle, swimming, and playing golf; these are all activities enthusiastically encouraged at immersion 'English villages' in Korea and elsewhere).

Similarly, if we accept the 'assistance' assumption, all successful foreign language use, no matter how asymmetrical, may be seen as evidence that development is taking place. In contrast, Vygotsky argues that imitation rather than simply interaction provides the content of the zone of proximal development and explains the link between instruction and development (210–11). Scholars such as Lantolf (2003: 353) and indeed Chaiklin (2003: 52) have emphasized that Vygotsky's expression 'imitation understood in a broad sense' is not so broad as to include unintelligent copying. But neither is it so narrow as to be restricted to face-to-face interaction (216).

Finally, if we begin from the 'potential' assumption, then successful foreign language teaching becomes a matter of providing material ('input' or 'tasks') that will somehow resonate with that potential. In contrast, Vygotsky argues that word meanings are deliberate acts of generalization on the part of the speaker in response to some tension in the social situation of development that will not admit solutions born of imitation in a narrow sense. This is in fact what we see when children move from pointing to verbally indicating, and from verbally indicating to naming objects.

So the zone of proximal development which we see in building foreign language learning on top of the most analyzed and most abstract word meanings of the native language is not some hidden potential. It is found first outside, and only then inside the child. It is the result not of learning and general nor of particular adult interventions; it is the result of an overt lack of fit between the child's semantic resources and the predicament presented by the social situation of development. This lack of fit brings about first imitation ('understood in a broad sense') and then abrupt leaps in consciousness (p. 210). Every word meaning is a generalization, but not every generalization creates a leap in consciousness. Just as children of different ages play the same game (e.g. very young children may play a soccer game simply as a matter of running after a ball, older children may play the same game as a fantasy role play about a soccer hero, and only the oldest children understand the rules and division of labour that the game entails), the use of certain functions (e.g. naming) in language by others can help children reorganize the way in which they realize functions in a foreign language (e.g. the child will name instead of simply pointing, or use complex verbal negation instead of the single word 'no'). It is not a matter of realizing hidden potential, but rather an active reconstruing of one form as another. Learning a foreign language is a matter of reconstruing what you know – and even what you are – as something other.

## Reprise

It is clearer to us what unites Haydn and Mozart than it was to them. Similarly, what links our two classics today is largely what divides them from us: terms like 'verbal thought', 'written speech', 'the philosophy of language', and even 'Marxism'. Then too there are the personal tragedies of the authors themselves. In the cold and hunger of the 1930s, Volosinov and Vygotsky died within two years of each other, both of tuberculosis. Neither lived to see the re-emergence of their work in the former Soviet Union, then Russia, and more recently in the West.

Yet when we read these books again and again (as we probably must over the next 75 or 80 years) we find deeper and more intrinsic links: the shared notion of outside-in development, the common commitment to concrete, sensuous human communication as the object of study, the shared social

purview as an explanatory principle. Vygotsky's use of *smysl* (sense) and *znachenie* (signification) is strikingly similar to Volosinov's 'theme' and 'meaning' – and very different from the actual source that Vygotsky cites, namely Paulhan (1928).

Assuming that Vygotsky and Volosinov did know about each other's work, there is also a shared reluctance to mention this mutual acquaintance. Volosinov (p. 171) cites Vygotsky exactly once, the audacious 'Consciousness as a Problem in the Psychology of Behaviour' of Vygotsky One. Vygotsky's entire oeuvre never mentions Volosinov by name. In 1982, however, the Russian editors of his completed works noted that many of the literary citations in the last chapter of Vygotsky's *Thinking and Speech* had previously appeared verbatim in works by Volosinov. There is, for example, this poignant passage from the Russian poet Fet, which Volosinov and Vygotsky share, and share with us:

How can the heart express itself  
How can the other understand (. . .)? (cited in Vygotsky 1987: 281)

Volosinov's citation goes a little further:

Oh, if one could speak from the soul, without words! (cited in Volosinov 1973: 85)

Volosinov comments somewhat deprecatingly that this is a "romantic individualist sentiment". Vygotsky would understand. For both men it is precisely through words that the soul learns to speak precisely. For humans to make themselves understood across national boundaries, the words used must always be foreign to at least one party. The exquisite paradox is that it is through these foreign words that we come to understand our own language precisely for the first time.

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