Images of “the Life of a Word” and “the Life of Language” in the Linguistic View of Mikhail Bakhtin:

What is “the Living Word”?

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As the most important expression characterizing the linguistic view of Mikhail Bakhtin, there is a phase such as “the life of a word” or “the life of language”. It does not merely designate a word or language as an object, but also expresses Bakhtin’s value-related attitude toward the object, toward what is desirable or undesirable in it. Moreover, it may be said that it is a phrase expressing Bakhtin’s actual, affirmed value and emotional-volitional tone for a word or language figuratively and intensively. In this paper, first, I highlight these images from Bakhtin’s three linguistic novel theories written in different time, namely, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Arts (1929), Discourse in the Novel (1934-35), and Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics (1963). Then, I clarify a relation between these images and Bakhtin’s thought of “an event” by examining a thesis in the early stage of Bakhtin’s activities, Toward a Philosophy of the Act (1920-24). Finally, I aim for the elucidation of “the living word” for Bakhtin, which is a node of these images and his thought.