Speaking of Bakhtin: 
A study of the sociolinguistic discourse on Bakhtin and language

by

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ABSTRACT

Thirty years after Mikhail Bakhtin came to the attention of the English-speaking world with Emerson & Holquist’s translation of *The Dialogic Imagination*, he continues to hold a prominent place in the scholarly fancy – particularly among those concerned with the sociality of language. But what have we learned from Bakhtin during this time? How has the “Bakhtinian perspective” contributed to the way researchers study and interpret linguistic phenomena? And more importantly, what can we learn about the sociality of language from the way Bakhtin has been taken up in the scholarly discourse?

These questions are addressed in the present study by comparing Bakhtin’s discourse (as it has been received) with the uptake of his theory in a selection of five peer-reviewed journals published between the years 2000 and 2011. Seven of the most commonly cited topics are examined in detail: (1) genre, (2) hybridization, (3) style & stylization, (4) double-voicing, (5) heteroglossia, (6) linguistic stratification & centralization, and (7) authority.

The surprising conclusion is that Bakhtin has had relatively little influence on the way these ideas are understood, even when he is cited as their source or inspiration, and that he is frequently invoked in support of views that he argues vigorously against. This disagreement is explained not as a breakdown of communication (in the structural sense), but – in line with Bakhtin’s own observations about the nature of discourse – as a product of the sociality of language, in which the histories and concerns of his interpreters actively shape the meanings they take him to be offering. The scholarly discourse on Bakhtin becomes a case study for the very phenomena Bakhtin describes.

It reveals that even avowedly “social” language research continues to reflect what Bakhtin calls “the centralizing tendencies in the life of language”. In particular, it reveals the enduring influence of Saussure and semiotic theory at the expense of the genuinely social model that Bakhtin consistently articulates. It consequently provides the occasion for a critique of the uptake and reproduction of theory in the “softer” social sciences, calling into question the adequacy of scholarly conventions in the face of socio-linguistic reality.
Preface

This dissertation is an original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Michael E. Volek.
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This project has evolved in many ways since it was first conceived; while the goal has never changed – to understand the functioning of language in a socially relevant discourse – the discourse on climate change, for instance, or the discourse on aging and dying – in the end, it became something a little more reflexive: an examination of the discourse on language itself. To understand how this came to be – and why anyone should care – it is important, first of all, to appreciate what is meant here when I speak of the “functioning” of language.

I am indebted in my use of this term to Michael Halliday and his “functional-semantic” approach, which focuses not on the meaning of words and linguistic constructions, but on what they do in the social and cultural contexts in which they are exchanged. This focus on function is arguably at the heart of what makes the study of language a sociolinguistics, for one cannot appreciate what a language is doing without taking into consideration the goals and activities (i.e., the social reality) of those who are using it – and this project is firmly embedded in the sociolinguistic tradition.

But a “social reality” is, of course, not homogenous; indeed, it may not even be consistent (internally or from one social body to the next). And here my position diverges from the Hallidayan view. It is not simply that the same linguistic form may function differently for different people in different situations (in which case it would be sufficient merely to account for the relevant factors and say “this form usually functions in this way under these conditions”). Rather, the way it functions in one context often becomes a social and cultural reality that can inform its use in other contexts; that is to say, the way one uses language may itself become a contextual factor in a given speech situation. This is one of the great insights of Mikhail Bakhtin.

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1 As Sperber & Wilson (1986) observe, this has been the usual way of approaching pragmatics.
A wonderful example of this is the practice of using profane and insulting remarks as a form of address among friends and acquaintances.\(^2\) No amount of deliberation over the bare meanings of such remarks, however well contextualized, could ever lead one to conclude that they serve something like a “solidarity function” – for, indeed, such a function is possible (in this case) precisely because the meanings are so inappropriate to the task: the transgression itself turns out to be meaningful. We can see in this how the “function” operates at a certain distance from the “meaning” – or, to put it another way, that language is not (or at least not always) a means for the direct expression of a communicative intention, but often serves as the vehicle for an indirect or mediated expression.

A number of important implications follow from this. The first is that meaning is realized through the utterance (written or spoken) – not simply as the actualization of an abstract potential that exists in the “system” of language, but as a collision of that potential against the concrete reality of the speech situation. We must look, in other words, to the utterance to discover how language functions. The second, as hinted at above, is that language functions without having a function. That is to say, a given linguistic form may function in ways that diverge (perhaps radically) from one community of speakers, and even from one utterance, to the next, and thus can never be assigned a specific function a priori. Finally, we can see how the words of one speaker (or speech community) – their typical meanings and functions – can get caught up in the speech of another – not directly or to the same end (as though filling a gap), but in sometimes subtle and surprising ways that result from an active interrelation – in which one utterance is animated or illuminated by the other.

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\(^2\) This practice is observed, for instance, among migrant youth in Germany. See Günthner (2011) and Günthner (forthcoming). In a phrase we will come across again, Vološinov observes that the living word has two faces, like Janus: “Any current curse word can become a word of praise, any current truth must inevitably sound to many other people as the greatest lie” (1973: 23). Compare this with Bakhtin’s comments in Rabelais and his World:

Praise and abuse are…the two sides of the same coin. If the right side is praise, the wrong side is abuse, and vice versa. The billingsgate idiom is a two-faced Janus. The praise…is ironic and ambivalent. It is on the brink of abuse; the one leads to the other, and it is impossible to draw a line between them. […] This is why in familiar billingsgate talk abusive words, especially indecent ones, are used in the affectionate and complimentary sense. (1993a: 165).
These ideas, which are central to the way Bakhtin describes the functioning of language, emphasize the importance of speech and not just speech, but speech about speech. As Bakhtin puts it:

The transmission and assessment of the speech of others, the discourse of another, is one of the most widespread and fundamental topics of human speech. In all areas of life and ideological activity, our speech is filled to overflowing with other people’s words which are transmitted with highly varied degrees of accuracy and impartiality. [...] The topic of a speaking person has enormous importance in everyday life. In real life we hear speech about speakers and their discourse at every step. We can go so far as to say that in real life people talk most of all about what others talk about – they transmit, recall, weigh, and pass judgement on other people’s words, opinions, assertions, information; people are upset by others’ words, or agree with them, refer to them and so forth (1981: 337-338).

This project – and, indeed, the field of “discourse analysis” to which it contributes – is essentially concerned with the speech of others. It is essentially speech about speech. And here at last we can understand how this project has arrived at the focus it has. In examining the speech of others – in seeking to understand how language functions in a particular discourse or in a particular discourse community – discourse analysts necessarily produce a discourse of their own: a discourse on language. And this discourse stands at an important crossroads. On the one hand, it makes a variety of claims about how language is actually being used – in discourses on homelessness, education, employment, immigration, health, conflict, reconciliation, death and dying, and so forth – claims that influence the way we perceive the various discourses and the issues that surround them, and which could (and, indeed, may be expected to) result in changes not only of opinion but of policy. On the other hand, it makes a variety of claims about how we can know that language is being used this way – and in this, it draws on an entirely different set of discourses: scholarly discourses on language that provide a theoretical basis for the other claims.

One of the basic premises of discourse analysis is that language functions in ways that are not always obvious, that upon examination a seemingly transparent stretch of text can reveal something unexpected about the speaker and about the broader discourse community – and

3 That is, the “utterance”, which, for the purposes of this discussion (as it is for Bakhtin’s), may be written, spoken, signed, etc.
even about language in general. And here, perhaps, we can see the rationale for focussing on what we might call the “upstream” discourse: the discourse on language that informs the methodologies and interpretive frameworks employed by discourse analysts. Not only does this discourse provide the ostensible grounds for “downstream” conclusions about how language is being used (for instance, in the discourse on healthcare), it also provides the authority for upstream claims about how we can know that language is being used this way – for the scholarly discourse on language is the means by which the underlying theories are disseminated among scholars and their students. An examination of this discourse thus contributes indirectly both to the downstream analyses and to the upstream propagation and development of theory. But it is also important to understand the discourse on language for the same reason it is important to understand any other discourse – not for its instrumental role in certain discourse analyses or in the propagation of language theory, but for its own sake, and for what we can learn about language and society from a study of it.

Like many other discourses, the discourse on language is extremely heterogeneous. To speak of “the discourse on language” is therefore vague almost to the point of meaninglessness. Even to claim that this project addresses “the scholarly discourse on language” would be a serious exaggeration for, in reality, it is concerned only with the smallest sliver of that discourse: the sociolinguistic discourse on language. And under that still enormous umbrella it takes aim at a very specific discourse: the sociolinguistic discourse on Bakhtin. And here we make another turn in the screw, for just as this project can be described, in the broadest terms, as speech about speech; or, more precisely, as a discourse analysis of discourse analyses; it is, more precisely still, a Bakhtian (or Bakhtin-inspired) discourse on the discourse on Bakhtin – examining what sociolinguists have had to say about Bakhtin and how Bakhtian theory contributes to their own claims about language.

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4 Whether or not it actually grounds the analyst’s conclusions is another question. The usual assumption is that a given theory is both valid and consequential, and if the underlying theory is invalidated, the conclusions themselves may be called into question. But it may also be that a given theory plays only a superficial (or even spurious) role in the analyst’s work – and this is no less interesting a possibility.

5 Or, rather, what sociolinguists have had to say about what Bakhtin says about language.
It is important to understand that, with a few notable exceptions, these are not primarily discussions about Bakhtin – not essentially concerned with the discourse on Bakhtin. Rather, they participate in the sociolinguistic discourse on language – and Bakhtinian theory is conceived within them not as an end but as a means of contributing to the study of discourse. Highlights from some of the titles should make this distinction clear. Concerns include:

- “Competing discourses in the classroom”
- “ethnicity and competing discourses in the job interview”
- “Positioning gender in discourse”
- “The management of heterosexist talk”
- “Transgression narratives”
- “Hate speech and identity”
- “Changes in Venezuelan political dialogue”
- “Navajo language socialization”
- “Discursive competition over claims of Iranian involvement in Iraq”
- “Patterns of metaphor use in reconciliation talk”
- “Language and social relations in traditional and contemporary funerals”
- “The semantics of science”
- “Language and religion”
- “The discursive construction of a world-class city”
- “The social construction of asylum-seekers”
- “Language testing and citizenship”
- “Linguistic form and social action”
- “Language and social inequality”
- “Linguistic representations of culture”
- “Fictive interaction…in a murder trial”
- “Participant roles in court interpreting”
- “Reframing family arguments in public and private”
- “Business newswriting”
- “The role of the chair in corporate meeting talk”
- “Problem presentation and resolution in Japanese business discourse”
- “Commercialization of casual conversation”
- “Culture in British TV commercials”
- “Commodification of language in the call centers of Pakistan”
- “Haggling exchanges at meat stalls in some markets in Lagos, Nigeria”

Of course, not all of these discussions rely on Bakhtin to the same extent. Indeed, some remark on him only in passing (though as discourse analysts are aware, the briefest remarks are often
the most telling). In any case, it is not the individual contributions that are the concern here; rather, it is the aggregate production that warrants our attention – the accumulation of voices comprising the broader discourse. This project is ultimately a critique of that discourse.

And here we are back to the original question: what motivates this concern and why it matters – for all this talk of “upstream” and “downstream” implications would be rather beside the point if there were no suspicion that something unexpected, something significant, was waiting to be discovered. And early in this project I began to form just such a suspicion: that an examination of the discourse on language would reveal an unexpected rupture between theory and practice (i.e., between the upstream and downstream discourses).

Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, in their efforts to articulate an alternative to the traditional, code-driven view of language, hint at just such a rupture. As they explain: “This is not to deny that many semioticians have done invaluable empirical work. However, it does not follow that the semiotic framework has been productive, let alone theoretically sound; merely that it has not been entirely sterilising, or that it has not been strictly adhered to in practice” (1986: 7; my emphasis). The point here is not that the semiotic approach is mistaken (or, as Sperber & Wilson put it, “intellectually bankrupt”), but that if its practitioners have nevertheless done important and productive empirical work it is only in spite of their theoretical positions. While I admit to being in the Sperber and Wilson camp with regard to the semiotic model, my intention here is to pursue their observation that in certain respects linguistic theory – in this case Bakhtinian theory – “has not been strictly adhered to in practice”. I refer to this, below, as “the problem of adherence”.

There is another dimension to this issue as well. The discourse on Bakhtin, while providing a point of departure for the empirical study of language, is also the terminal point – that is, the point of arrival – in the transmission of theory. In other words, it can be seen as the culmination of the ideas on which it draws. In the case of the Bakhtinian discourse on language, the views ascribed to Bakhtin by discourse analysts and other applied language researchers may be said to represent the “received wisdom” of Bakhtinian theory. But just as theory may diverge

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6 We will see this shortly, in the example of “ventriloquation” below.
from practice, the received wisdom may diverge from the theory. The risk, of course, is that it consequently becomes the point of departure for subsequent views in the never-ending chain of “speech communication”. I refer to this, below, as “the problem of propagation”.

It could be argued, perhaps, that any such views (whatever their merits) are, in a sense, “epiphenomenal” – that is, they draw on Bakhtin, reflecting his claims with varying degrees of success, but never propagate with any great effect – since the word of Bakhtin in its original form and various authoritative interpretations still exist, still speak to us, pointing us in the right direction. We might draw an analogy here to the presence of a dictionary or a grammar as a guarantor of the “appropriate” use of language: the means by which a malapropism or other violation of language may be stopped in its tracks. But for those espousing a “Bakhtinian” perspective, this will never do. According to Bakhtin, we rarely, if ever, take our words from the dictionary (that is, “from the system of language in their neutral, dictionary form”); our language is acquired almost entirely through exposure to the speech of others – “at the point of contact between the word and actual reality, under the conditions of that real situation articulated by the individual utterance” – and thus retain, as Bakhtin says, “the tones and echoes of individual utterances” (1986: 86-90).

It is not really much of a leap to extend Bakhtin’s pronouncements on language, in the narrow sense, to culture and ideology, broadly defined (and this, in fact, is something Vološinov, a fellow Bakhtinian, does explicitly in his own contribution to language theory): to rephrase Bakhtin’s conclusions about language, we might say that rarely are the views and positions we have of the world taken from a “system of ideas in their neutral, scientific form”; rather, our knowledge is acquired through exposure to the views of others – “at the point of contact between their claims and actual reality”, and thus retaining “the tones and echoes of individual assessments”. This may seem, at first blush, to be a rather dubious claim – especially in the context of a scholarly discourse, which has specific mechanisms built into it to avoid precisely this scenario – that is, to ensure that knowledge claims made at one end of the chain of speech communication match the sense and meaningfulness of those at the other. We have, for instance, well-worn conventions on the direct reporting of speech – that is, “quotation” (a topic of endless fascination for both Bakhtin and Vološinov) – and we have, as already
mentioned, the continued presence of the original speech itself, the “primary source”. And these, there can be no doubt, exert a powerful centralizing force on any discourse.

But as Bakhtin observed with respect to the life of a language, the centralizing forces of authorized speech are opposed by the centripetal effects of daily interaction among those in particular “spheres of human activity and communication”. And this leads to a stratification, not only of language, but of culture, ideology, and so forth – and a weakening of the “authoritative word”. This process is not – or at least need not be – a “struggle” in the political sense (and I would argue that any such interpretation of Bakhtin reflects, with no small irony, a weakening of his authoritative word) – rather, the authorized voice is weakened, just as gravity is, by its distance from the centre of activity; it makes itself irrelevant. And this, I propose, can be seen in the discourse on Bakhtin.

There is another, deeper, irony here as well. As a Bakhtinian discourse analyst (or at least an apprentice Bakhtinian discourse analyst) engaged in the analyses of Bakhtinian discourse analyses, the last thing I should want to do is use the authoritative word of Bakhtin to argue against the authority of Bakhtin. But this is just the sort of thing that happens when language is both the means and the object of study.

Of course, some may question whether an authoritative “Bakhtinian view” actually exists or, if it does, whether it can be known with enough assurance to justify the claims I make about it. And in the final analysis, it must be admitted that my claims are interpretive. But while it is true that in some instances Bakhtin has not said enough or expressed himself with as much clarity as we would like, I take it as axiomatic that he does, in fact, have definite ideas to convey and that his claims are not “open” to differing interpretations in the way that certain works of art might be. In other words, we may not always agree on what Bakhtin is trying to say, but we must begin by agreeing that he has something particular in mind.

7 In this, I diverge sharply from Roland Barthes (1977: 148), who famously concludes that “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author”.

8
At the same time, it should be emphasized that this project is not concerned with the margins – with the gaps or ambiguities in the claims that have come down to us as Bakhtin’s. It does not, in other words, seek to uncover something novel or unexpected in Bakhtin, to unveil new evidence in support of new readings. On the contrary, it is most interested in what we ought to know with the most confidence – what Bakhtin says with the greatest clarity in his most familiar works – for this is where disagreement ought to be the least likely (and therefore most interesting). In this sense, I believe we can speak of a “Bakhtinian view” or “Bakhtinian perspective” that can be established with sufficient clarity, not through great detective work, or by appeal to authority, but by attending to what Bakhtin says in the texts that are available to us.

An example from the literature, I think, illustrates this well, so I will turn to that before addressing a matter introduced earlier, the problem of adherence.

1.1.1. A Case Study

Consider the following claim from a book review published in 2001. The book itself (which addresses the “grammar of autobiography”) makes no mention of Bakhtin, but in an effort to situate the author’s ideas in the scholarly discourse, the reviewer observes: “Hill 1995 and others use Bakhtin to describe systematically how narrators speak with and ventriloquate voices, and this offers yet another type of linguistic device that might contribute to the self” (Wortham 2001a: 491). Here we can see both the “upstream” and “downstream” issues suggested earlier. The reviewer introduces the notion of “ventriloquation” as a way to understand certain linguistic phenomena: it is a claim about how language functions in autobiography (as a “device that might contribute to the self”). We can see the influence of upstream claims (by “Hill 1995 and others”) that language indeed functions this way, and that this is something that Bakhtin has established: the reviewer takes these ideas up and propagates them further. At the same time, she offers these ideas to the reader with the expectation (presumably) that they will help make sense of actual texts – that when certain linguistic devices are encountered in autobiography their role in contributing to the self will
be recognized. Of course, as a book review, the downstream effects remain undeveloped. But in the majority of the texts examined in this study, the downstream implications are fully realized – genuine discourses are interpreted through the lens of theory and the conclusions offered as practical knowledge (to whatever end this knowledge may eventually be put).

And here we return to the idea that something unexpected, something significant, is waiting to be discovered. In the reviewer’s brief remarks on Bakhtin, we encounter something curious: the word “ventriloquate”. This is, in fact, a term that Bakhtin has used in his work on speech. There is a passage in the *Dialogic Imagination* where Bakhtin offers an articulation of what he describes elsewhere as “double-voicing” – the notion that in “genuine” novelistic prose the author’s expressive intentions are served only indirectly by the words he puts in his characters’ mouths, that the words in fact belong to the characters themselves, and that the author, without taking ownership of them, may nevertheless be heard *through* them, much as we may hear the voice (or the implicit “expressive intention”) of someone who purports to be offering a “verbatim” account of what someone else has said. It is one of the central ideas in Bakhtin’s description of language, formulated over and over, in a variety of contexts. He writes:

Thus a prose writer can distance himself from the language of his own work… He can make use of language without wholly giving himself up to it, he may treat it as semi-alien or completely alien to himself, while compelling language ultimately to serve all his own intentions. The author does not speak in a given language…but he speaks *through* language, a language that has somehow more or less materialized, become objectivized, that he merely ventriloquates (1981: 299; my emphasis).

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8 We do, however, see precisely this sort of downstream effect resulting from another of Wortham’s texts, cited by Yamaguchi (2005: 287) who credits Wortham (2001b) – along with Bakhtin (1981) – for the idea that a particular speaker (“Marco”) “represents and enacts” his American identity through ventriloquation: “Marco represents Americans while ‘ventriloquating’ them…i.e. appropriating and ‘speaking through’ the voice of Americans”. He adds: “Marco ventriloquates Americans in direct quoted speech to position them as a particular type of people, i.e. casual and frank”.

9 It does not, in fact, appear in the original Russian, but that is not our concern, for we are interested only in the word of Bakhtin as it has come down to us. The problem of translation is taken up in Section 1.3.4.
In all of his efforts to articulate how a speaker can “refract” his expressive intentions through the words of another, the figure of a ventriloquist comes up only this once. And yet it appears in more than a dozen discussions in the discourse examined below.\textsuperscript{10} Of course, such an evocative term could be expected to find uptake. But the story continues. We find that nowhere in the discourse is the original passage ever quoted. In fact, we never find even a page reference. Indeed, in less than half the cases is the relevant text even mentioned – and in one case it is the wrong text. But it is always (more or less explicitly) presented as a Bakhtinian notion.\textsuperscript{11}

We can go on. In the book review, the author uses the term “ventriloquate”, just as Bakhtin does. But in a number of texts the word takes on the nominal form, as though it were a technical term. We thus encounter phrases like “the process of ventriloquation” (Wertsch 2001: 222)\textsuperscript{12} and “the concept of…ventriloquation” (Josey 2010: 21) and “Bakhtin’s notion of ventriloquation” (Wetherell 2001: 191). Indeed, the notion is now so entrenched that it has its own entry in a recent dictionary of sociolinguistics (Tusting & Maybin 2007: 576).\textsuperscript{13} What began as figure of speech has now become a concept in its own right. And what is more, it has come to take on meanings that Bakhtin himself could hardly have anticipated. We see, in the book review, how it gets construed as a “device that might contribute to the self”. Another

\textsuperscript{10} That is, in the corpus of the present study. A Google search of “Bakhtin + ventriloquation” yields over 1500 hits.

\textsuperscript{11} Linell (1998: 49) is typical. He cites Bakhtin (1984 and 1986) and even Vološinov (1973) before explaining that “some ideas of Bakhtin will be ventriloquated (to use his own term) throughout this book”. Grossen & Orvig (2011: 62) are less explicit. They use the French term \textit{ventiloque} without direct reference to Bakhtin – but as Bakhtinian theory plays a prominent role throughout their paper, the connection here, too, seems likely.

\textsuperscript{12} This is a reprint from Wertsch (1991), where an earlier chapter cites both Bakhtin (1981) and Holquist (1981b) as the source of this idea. Wertsch writes:

\begin{quote}
In Bakhtin’s view, a speaker always invokes a social language in producing an utterance, and this social language shapes what the speaker’s individual voice can say. This process of producing unique utterances by speaking in social languages involves a specific kind of dialogicality or multivoicedness that Bakhtin terms “ventriloquation”…the process whereby one voice speaks \textit{through} another voice or voice type in a social language (1991: 59).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{13} Park & Bucholtz (2009: 283) are the only ones in the present study to use the term “ventriloquism” – but they appear to be in the majority as a Google search of “Bakhtin + ventriloquism” yields over 36,000 hits.
voice argues that “In a view grounded in ventriloquation… the very act of speaking precludes any claims about the individual’s being ‘metaphysically independent of society’” (Wertsch 2001: 222). And another goes so far as to claim that “In Bakhtin’s (1981) sense, to be an intelligible person requires an act of ventriloquation” (Gergen 2001: 57).

Tannen (2004) is among a vanishingly small number sociolinguists to question how the idea of “ventriloquation” has come to be seen as Bakhtinian. Citing Bubnova & Malcuzynski (2001), she observes that “the term ventriloquate is actually the innovation of translators Emerson and Holquist and that the concept that has come to be associated with this term is not found in Bakhtin’s own writing” (403); that is, neither the Russian word for ventriloquism “nor any notion related to it” can be found anywhere in Bakhtin. Given a more literal translation, she insists, the final sentence of the passage cited (on p. 9) above actually reads: “the language through which the author speaks is more densified, objectified, as if it would appear to be at a certain distance from his lips” (Bubnova & Malcuzynski 2001: 31; quoted in Tannen 2004: 403; my emphasis).

As Tannen remarks, it is easy to see how the word ventriloquate might be appropriate here. But this, she insists, is a mistake. Again citing Bubnova & Malcuzynski (2001), she argues that “Bakhtin’s point…is that an author of prose fiction finds the ‘language’ of the novel given in the conventions of literary discourse. An author must speak through those conventions” (403) – which, of course, is not at all what we normally understand the word “ventriloquate” to mean. It would seem that we have been deceived. But, in a surprising twist, she adds:

Although Bakhtin apparently did not use the term and was concerned with literary discourse, one of the effects of what I am calling ventriloquizing in conversational discourse is precisely to make the words spoken “appear to be at a certain distance” from the speaker’s lips in the sense of distancing the speaker from responsibility for the utterance. Thus, although the term ventriloquize does not trace, after all, to Bakhtin, nonetheless Bakhtin’s notion of polyvocality (by which authors speak

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14 Her essay is reprinted in Tannen, Kendall & Gordon (2007).
15 We will return to this interpretation below. But note how even the counter-interpretation appears to be grounded on the interpretation of others.
16 This notion of “distancing” is one that we will see again and again in the literature.
through the conventions of literary discourse, thereby causing their words to appear “at a certain distance” from their lips) does capture an aspect of interaction that is crucial for the understanding of how speakers use [others’ voices] as a resource in communicating with each other (Tannen 2004: 404-405).

Thus, even after calling into question whether Bakhtin said or meant anything comparable to “ventriloquate”, Tannen concludes that the term nevertheless conveys the “spirit” of Bakhtin. Her objection, then, is a rather minor one: on her view, the word “ventriloquate” may be an innovation of the translators, but a justified one. Indeed, the objection itself is rather unpersuasive: the idea that Bakhtin is describing the prose writer’s subordination to literary convention rings hollow even if we take into account nothing but the claims he actually makes in the quoted passage. Bakhtin writes: “a prose writer can distance himself from the language of his own work.... He can make use of language without wholly giving himself up to it, he may treat it as...alien to himself, while compelling language ultimately to serve all his own intentions” (1981: 299; my emphasis). Not only is the author not compelled to speak through literary convention, according to Bakhtin he has the active power to compel language to do his bidding. However this cashes out, it clearly puts the author – and not the language (or literary convention) – in control. We are thus left where we started: with the idea that ventriloquation means what we have taken it to mean, and that Bakhtin offers an important articulation of it.

Tannen, I think, was on the right track. She simply failed to take her investigation far enough back.\textsuperscript{17} Cooren (2010: 88) hints at an earlier source. The passage is worth quoting at length:

Although the phenomenon of ventriloquism has rarely been mobilized to analyze the functioning of dialogue and interaction, it is noteworthy that a few authors dared to explore this question and its connection with dialogism. Holquist (1981[b]), for instance did not hesitate to draw interesting parallels between Bakhtin’s dialogic theory and the ventriloquist’s figure, positing “the author as a ventriloquist who tries out and even exploits the voices of others in order to express his true intentions, the particular message of truth...he wishes to communicate” (Carroll 1983; see also Wall 2005). In a way similar to what happens with Socrates in \textit{Crito}, making characters and figures speak allows the author to create a distance (and a form of undecidability) between what is affirmed in the text and what she or he is supposed to believe and think (in a way similar to what happens in irony). The phenomenon of polyphony,\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{17} In taking up this thread, we must make a brief foray outside the sociolinguistic discourse.
identified by Bakhtin (1994) in Dostoevsky, for instance, is a way for an author to ventriloquize characters whose viewpoints are then relativized.

Like Tannen, Cooren suggests that Holquist was the first to draw the connection between Bakhtinian theory and the figure of the ventriloquist.\(^\text{18}\) He cites a passage from Carroll (1983: 74), who also comments on Holquist’s insight:

In Holquist’s interpretation of ventriloquism, the other is simply a way back to the self; all voices are made to serve the authority and intentions of the master author-ventriloquist. If this is dialogism at all – and there are moments of Bakhtin’s text that tend to support such a view – it is a weak form of dialogism, one that is more an appropriation of the other than an opening to or an affirmation of alterity. I would agree with Holquist that for Bakhtin, “all utterance is ventriloquism” [p. 181], but I would also argue that a much more radical view of ventriloquism must be taken than the one he puts forth: one in which the intentions of the ventriloquist himself cannot be given a special status outside and preceding the dialogue of voices, where the ventriloquist himself must be seen as ventriloquated as much as ventriloquating. (cited in Cooren, 2010: 88; Cooren’s italics).

Cooren adds: “Although Carroll does not mobilize the figure of the dummy in his argument, his position appears perfectly compatible with Goldblatt’s (2006) to the extent that a certain vacillation or undecidability is identified between the ventriloquist and the dummy” (88).

Despite adding relativity – and thus a certain “undecidability” – to the mix, Cooren construes ventriloquism, as Tannen and others do, in terms of polyphony, which cashes out for them as an appropriation of language, in which the other is recruited to speak on one’s behalf. Once again, the “ventriloquist’s figure” is taken extremely literally – to the point that even the dummy has been introduced.\(^\text{19}\) But here the question of translation is never raised. The issue is treated, instead, as a matter of interpretation: Holquist has interpreted dialogism as a kind of ventriloquism. In other words, any talk of Bakhtin and ventriloquation is a legacy of Holquist’s claims about dialogism. Indeed, a closer look at Holquist’s claims reveals that his lexical contribution has little, if anything, to do with his translation of The Dialogic Imagination.

\(^\text{18}\) Morson & Emerson (1989: 3) likewise identify Holquist as the originator of this notion.
\(^\text{19}\) Tannen’s (2004) essay, “Talking the dog”, examines the role of the family pet as a sort of ventriloquist’s dummy: “The term *ventriloquize*…captures the sense in which family members, by voicing their dogs, distance themselves…from their own utterances” (405).
Holquist made two notable presentations in September 1980, one at the annual meeting of the English Institute, titled “The politics of representation”; and the other, a reworking of that paper, titled “Bad Faith’ Squared: The Case of M. M. Bakhtin”, at the Second World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies. The earlier paper was subsequently published in Greenblatt (1981) and the latter in Bristol (1982). In both, he argues that Bakhtin uses Vološinov’s “Marxist voice” to articulate a view based not on Marxism but on Orthodox Christianity, the premise being that “if the Christian word were to take on Soviet flesh it had to clothe itself in ideological disguise” (1981b: 173; 1982: 224). Holquist writes: “Bakhtin, as author, manipulates the persona of Voloshinov, using his Marxist voice to ventriloquize a meaning not specific to Marxism, even when conceived only as a discourse” (1982: 225-226; my emphasis). In the earlier text Holquist uses the phrase “ventriloquate a meaning” (1981b: 174), which is the version that gets taken up, for instance, in Black (1983), Carroll (1983) and Cole (1983), and in the profusion of discussions we see to this day.

Black argues that the idea “may be taken a step beyond the religious and political parallels suggested by Holquist”. But Holquist already takes it beyond the religious and political,

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20 This version was reprinted in 1983, and then again, as part of a collected volume, in 1997.
21 The later text includes a reference to “ventriloquism” that is particularly apposite here. Holquist writes: “Bakhtin’s ventriloquism raises several thorny questions, but the one I’d like to concentrate on is the issue of linguistic determinism. How can we systematically account for his ability to use terms from one ideology to body forth a message born in a different ideology?” (1982: 228). Note that in neither version of the paper does Holquist actually ascribe the term to Bakhtin; regardless of its appearance in The Dialogic Imagination, it is clearly offered as his term for what he believes Bakhtin is doing.
22 He writes:

such a paradox may point to a fundamental relation between artistic and political activity as modes of representation. In order to represent his ideas, insights, or visions aesthetically, the author in effect must first find some way to represent himself politically – he must find someone to represent him as a kind of proxy. Thus, when Holquist suggests that “Bakhtin, as author, manipulates the persona of Voloshinov, using his Marxist voice to ventriloquate a meaning not specific to Marxism, even when conceived only as a discourse” ([1981b]:174), he is revealing that the aesthetics and the politics of representation are inextricably related (Black 1983: 113).

In a section headed “Authors and Ventriloquists”, Carroll (1983) also looks to take the idea further:

I would agree with Holquist that for Bakhtin, “all utterance is ventriloquism” [p. 181], but I would also argue that a much more radical view of ventriloquism must be taken than the one he puts forth: one in which the intentions of the ventriloquist himself
arguing that “what in the English comic novel is often written off as mere irony, actually constitutes a paradigm for all utterance: I can appropriate meaning to my purposes only by ventriloquating others” (1981b: 169; my emphasis). He repeats: “all utterance is ventriloquism” (1981b: 181; original emphasis). It is worth quoting the broader passage:

Bakhtin’s example provides at least the beginning of an answer to some troubling questions raised recently by Paul de Man in his reading of Pascal: “From a theoretical point of view,” de Man writes, “there ought to be no difficulty in moving from epistemology to persuasion. The very occurrence of allegory, however, indicates a possible complication. Why is it that the furthest reaching truths about ourselves and the world have to be stated in such a lopsided, referentially indirect mode?”

The answer provided by Bakhtin in both his theory and his practice…suffices at least to point us in a further direction. If we begin by assuming that all representation must be indirect, that all utterance is ventriloquism, then it will be clear…that difficulties do exist in moving from epistemology to persuasion. This is because difficulties exist in the very politics of any utterance, difficulties that at their most powerful exist in the politics of culture systems (1981b: 181-182).

At this early stage there is no confusion as to where the notion of ventriloquation comes from – whose utterance it is, or the context in which it is offered – or that Holquist’s claims are ultimately interpretive (even if his readers are largely persuaded of the case he makes). Cole (1983), for instance, notes that “The particular form of collaboration that Holquist terms ‘ventriloquation’ was a necessary condition for Bakhtin’s invention” (1; my emphasis). Carroll (1983) likewise observes:

\textit{For Holquist}…the Marxist voices Bakhtin ventriloquated were only the external trappings in which Bakhtin was obliged to clothe his ‘true message’ in order to get

\textit{\ldots cannot be given a special status outside and preceding the dialogue of voices, where the ventriloquist himself must be seen as ventriloquated as much as ventriloquating. Bakhtin is certainly a man of many voices, so much so that his “own voice” can only be determined as the product of a conflict and dialogue of voices rather than as an original voice; it is a voice divided against itself, a voice in conflict even with its most profound ‘intentions’ (74). }

\textit{23 As Greenblatt (1981) explains in his preface to the papers collected from the meeting of the English institute, the latter half of the program, which includes Holquist’s presentation, was conceived in part as a response to the issues raised earlier, particularly by Paul de Man. Like Holquist, Greenblatt cites de Man’s question about the apparent inevitability of a “lopsided, referentially indirect mode” of representation, which he takes to be the clearest articulation of the problem. Holquist’s claims about ventriloquation thus appear to be formulated precisely with this question of allegory in mind.}
his work published and read […] *Holquist's Bakhtin* simply uses Marxism out of political necessity to transport and translate a religious message that cannot be expressed in its own terms (1983: 73; my emphasis).

At some point, however, the distinction between *Bakhtin* and *Holquist's Bakhtin* is lost. Holquist’s argument, in short, is:

If we begin by assuming that *all* representation must be indirect, that *all* utterance is ventriloquism, then it will be clear…that difficulties *do* exist in moving from epistemology to persuasion. This is because difficulties exist in the very politics of any utterance, difficulties that at their most powerful exist in the politics of culture systems (1981b: 181; original emphases).

It is therefore possible that:

the text of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* itself constitutes the kind of dialogic space Bakhtin is talking about within it. Bakhtin, as author, manipulates the persona of Voloshinov, using his Marxist voice to ventriloquize a meaning not specific to Marxism (1981b: 174).

But if this is true of “*all* utterance”, then it ought to be true *a fortiori* of Holquist’s as well, and – whether or not we accept the idea that Bakhtin “manipulates the persona of Vološinov, using his Marxist voice to ventriloquize a meaning not specific to Marxism” – we may well ask whether Holquist, as author (and sensing these very difficulties in persuading us of his own view of language) has created the kind of “authorial loophole” he ascribes to Bakhtin (that is, “in which he describes exactly what he is doing”): manipulating the persona of Bakhtin, using his Dialogic voice to ventriloquize a meaning not specific to Dialogism.

Certainly, as one who articulates the possibility of such discursive “bad faith” (and even suggests its inevitability), Holquist ought to be aware of the implications for his own claims

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24 In this way, Vološinov’s (1973) text becomes, for Holquist, a model of *dialogism-as-ventriloquation*, “sending out transcoded messages from the catacombs” in its effort to deceive the censors.

25 Holquist’s understanding of the Bakhtinian project itself can be seen in a claim that appears a few paragraphs earlier:

For Russians, utterance has ever been a contest, a struggle. The need to speak indirectly has resulted in a Russian discourse that is always fabular precisely when it is fueled by the most intense desire to mean. Such indirection has resulted in an allegorical mode known as “Aesopic language.” Bakhtin’s achievement is to refine, out of the particular features that have created such a situation, a synthetic philosophy of language (1981b: 181).
about Bakhtin. Indeed, this offers a ready explanation for the differences we see in the scholarly discourse and the Bakhtinian one: bad faith. We could argue that Bakhtin has been made the dummy for language theorists seeking to move from epistemology to persuasion. Just as Holquist’s Bakhtin ensured that his ideas were “carefully camouflaged in Marxist terminology” (1982: 231), it is possible that those who followed – especially those who see what Holquist (1982: 227) calls the “transcoding possibilities in indirect speech” – have “appropriated the code of [Bakhtinian] ideology to make public the message of quite another”.27

But I am sceptical of such an interpretation – indeed, I am sceptical even of the idea that Holquist has used Bakhtin this way – for the very possibility presupposes the sort of semiology that Bakhtin explicitly rejects. As we will see, it is tremendously misleading to treat the Bakhtinian notion of indirect speech as a sort of allegorical mode of communication – as though dialogue were simply the encoding of one’s real meanings in alien form (Jesus as a lamb, for instance, or Vološinov as a Marxist) – which is what Holquist’s notion of “ventriloquation” ultimately conveys. When Holquist (1981b: 181) insists that “Allegory is the prosecution of semantic intention by other means”,28 he is taking a structuralist approach: we are directed elsewhere for insight into the significance of Bakhtin’s message, to something absent, something distant (something authoritative). The “dialogizing background” of speech is thus configured as an abstraction – a (political, intellectual, historical, etc.) “situation” capable of providing the necessary interpretive framework. Indeed, conditioned as we are to

26 Indeed, he ends his presentation (1981b: 182) with a curious allegory of his own about the Bakhtinian project: the tale of a debauched merchant who manages, through the mendacity of his deathbed confession, to persuade the world that he had led the life of a saint – and at whose final resting place miracles do, in fact, begin to occur. Holquist’s point, it seems, is that Bakhtin has been canonized for all the wrong reasons, but that he is nevertheless genuinely worthy. But what has Bakhtin been canonized for, if not for his ideas about genre, dialogue, double-voicing, carnival, etc.? And what, then, should we consider his actual contribution? Holquist argues that Bakhtin’s Marxist/anti-Saussurean claims are just a cover for ideas based on his religious views. But if this argument is itself allegorical, symbolic of what Holquist actually means to convey, perhaps what we are really being led to appreciate is the Saussurean notion of comparison and exchange.

27 And as this talk of coding and transcoding suggests, the “other” message appears to be a Saussurean/structuralist one.

28 Of course, we must be careful, once again, in what we suppose “allegory” to mean. But Holquist makes his point clear: “In a very real sense, what Bakhtin is doing may be likened to the efforts of the early Christians to spread their message by parable and allegory” (1981b: 180).
thinking of discourse as the realization of language in the form of speech, which is to say, to thinking of speech as something *grounded* on an abstract system of language, it may be difficult to imagine what alternative Bakhtin may have intended. And in the sociolinguistic discourse, this way of thinking remains under the surface (despite the fact that almost every reference to Saussure reproduces the claim that Bakhtin *rejects* the Saussurean model). To be clear, I am not suggesting that sociolinguists have been consciously pursuing a “Saussurean” programme (if such a thing even exists), though some commentators are, in fact, quite overt in their treatment of Bakhtin as a (Saussurean) structuralist (see note 30 below; cf. Ch. 9.1). My point is that they continue, by and large, to look for meaning in the *system* of language – a system that may be realized in a variety of ways (some very unSaussurean).²⁹

When I speak of a “Bakhtinian perspective”, I am pointing to an alternative that Bakhtin seems to develop throughout his major works: the idea that we must often look elsewhere than the system of language (however that system is construed) if we wish to understand the speaker. The one idea that connects every topic we will explore in this discussion, from genre to style to the forces of language, is the active relationship – the collision – between two linguistic centres – “two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two ‘languages’, two semantic and axiological belief systems” (1981: 305). This, I believe, is the essence of the Bakhtinian perspective, this “inter-animation” or “inter-illumination” of meaning, which he calls *dialogism* – and which, in turn, is fully revealed only in light of its manifestation as genre, hybridity, style, heteroglossia, etc. (which is why these ideas are important for Bakhtin and for us). Nowhere in this do we find anything like a notion of “transcoding”. Indeed, nowhere in this do we even begin with the notion of “code”. What is more, Bakhtin never characterizes the essential linguistic centres as “structures” in the Saussurean sense (as systems of meaning grounded in difference). Far from deriving these ideas from Bakhtin, they are imposed on him, and he is then congratulated for cleverly concealing them in his text – or worse, he is

²⁹ I am thinking here not only of the social and cultural systems that are a frequent focus of sociolinguistic analyses, but of what Vološinov (1973: 48ff.) calls “individualistic subjectivism” – the opposite face of structuralism – according to which meaning is structured by the individual’s style or psychology.
accused of some kind of lapse or change of heart for failing to account for them. The following chapters will argue not only that Bakhtin means something very different from what sociolinguists have come to expect, but – perhaps surprisingly – that even the grossest misrepresentations are consistent with what Bakhtin says about the way language functions, which is to say, not in terms of “code manipulation”, but of illumination against a background of discourse, which is naturally dominated by certain “leading ideas of the ‘masters of thought’”.  

30 Lechte (1994) offers a useful illustration of such a tendency, first by saddling Bakhtin with a structuralist view and then by criticising him for his inadequacies as a structuralist. He begins:

Although Bakhtin formally distanced himself from structuralism and semiotics, his refusal to embrace the ideology of the author’s intentions as a way of explaining the meaning of a work of art, places him much closer to a structural approach than might at first appear. For Bakhtin, the author is an empty space where the drama would take place – or better: the author is the dramatization itself (10).

Of course, for Bakhtin, the author is precisely not “an empty space where the drama would take place”. His is a space filled with intention. The point is not that the author steps aside for the drama (indeed, the notion of “drama” itself is problematic for Bakhtin), but that he acts indirectly, conveying his intentions through others’ languages – and not even directly through those languages, but rather through the intersection of those languages with each other and with the language of the reader. Nevertheless, Lechte concludes:

the effect of Bakhtin’s use of macro-categories like ‘chronotope’ and ‘genre’ is to render invisible the unique, the singular, the individual, and the unclassifiable. […] One might…suggest that the problem of genre is that it risks turning individual works of art into myth. For myth exhibits a homogenous, and relatively undifferentiated structure; this allows it to be communicated to a vast audience. […] Perhaps if Bakhtin had been more structuralist in the Lévi-Straussian sense, and had seen the structure of genres as a kind of grammar which constituted the precondition of specific works done under its aegis, he would not have given the impression of a lack of rigour which comes with a procrustean attempt to place all works of an era under the same classificatory umbrella (11).

The very idea that Bakhtin conceives of genre as a “classificatory umbrella” reveals a profound misunderstanding of the notion, for as we shall see, it is not simply an organizing principle (neither in the “Lévi-Straussian sense” of a kind of a grammar, nor in the traditional sense of a formal literary category). Genres – at least living genres – are the outgrowth of a concrete historical situation, and when the conditions that give them life pass away, they too pass away, persisting only “in moribund form, in the lifeless and stilted genres of ‘high’ ideology” (Bakhtin 1981: 22). As for “the unique, the singular, the individual, and the unclassifiable”, Bakhtin directs us to the “utterance” (not merely to their generic types) and, of course, to the vexing question of dialogue.

31 This phrase, from Bakhtin (1986: 88-89) is taken up in more detail on p. 58, below.
The point here is not that Bakhtin has been misunderstood, but that he has *not been fully heard*. In the case of “ventriloquation”, at least, it is clear that the scholarly claims are almost completely untethered from the Bakhtinian texts. They appear, rather, to have been generated in a *peripheral discourse*, one that has begun to escape the gravity of Bakhtin’s authority.

But, again, while it might be alarming to think that, in aggregate, these views have begun to coalesce and impose their own gravity, drawing researchers into orbit around their own centre while Bakhtin shines brightly in the distance, the fact is that *this is just what we would expect to happen according to Bakhtin’s description of language*.

What we learn from Bakhtin is that the author’s expressive intention must always encounter the responsive understanding of a listener, that it is only in the collision of these two perspectives that communication happens. Thus Bakhtin writes:

> When constructing my utterance, I try actively to determine this response. Moreover I try to act in accordance with the response I anticipate, so this anticipated response, in turn, exerts an active influence on my utterance (I parry the objections I foresee, I make all kinds of provisos, and so forth). When speaking I always take into account the apperceptive background of the addressee’s perception of my speech: the extent to which he is familiar with the situation, whether he has special knowledge of the given cultural area of communication, his views and convictions, his prejudices (from my viewpoint), his sympathies and antipathies – because all this will determine his active responsive understanding of my utterance (95-96).

Of course, Bakhtin could never have anticipated the responsive understanding of researchers who are already predisposed to particular interpretations of his *own* ideas. He could thus never address such interpretations or present his ideas in ways that took them into account. Such listeners, then, are at a curious disadvantage. They hear Bakhtin in a certain way – even when they return to the source – and they reinforce this understanding in their own communications among their peers. In a sense, it is not simply that Bakhtin has not been heard, but that he *cannot be heard*, at least not without considerable effort.

All of this puts us well on our way to addressing the “problem of adherence”. What I have been calling the “problem of adherence” and “the problem of propagation” are two sides of the same coin. Even if those who posited a “Bakhtinian notion” of ventriloquation were
subsequently exposed to the original and authoritative word of Bakhtin, they would still bring an apperceptive background – and thus a style – shaped by their identification with a peripheral discourse community, and consequently bring an active, responsive understanding that fails to resolve Bakhtin’s communicative intention.

The story of ventriloquation is the story of the discourse on Bakhtin in a nutshell. It is the story of how language is transformed in the process of communication. We can see in it how the discourse community produces the meanings it ascribes to Bakhtin. It thus calls into question what we think we know about Bakhtinian ideas: if “ventriloquation” means something different in the contemporary sociolinguistic discourse than it did for Bakhtin, what are we to conclude about other important notions, like “genre”, “hybridization”, “stylization”, etc.? Does it not follow that these, too, have been transformed in the sociolinguistic discourse? And if so, how do they differ from what Bakhtin might have wanted to convey?

This, of course, leads to another important question: how can we know what Bakhtin intended? If his meanings are so easily misconstrued, how can we be sure that the interpretations offered here are any more reliable? Bell (2007: 98) enumerates some of the challenges that Bakhtin poses:

Bakhtin is difficult to read. His syntax is tortuous, his argument is not structured or ordered in the way Western academics are accustomed to, and he creates a terminology rife with cumbersome and opaque neologisms…. Among these neologisms see for example the following, whose meanings are by no means always clear in the texts which introduce and explicate them, and whose pronunciations can be difficult even for native speakers to be sure of:

- multilanguagedness
- internally persuasive discourse
- internally dialogized interillumination.

There is something almost comical about this list, which subtly underlines the point that the reader can be forgiven for failing to make any sense of it. But I would argue, on the contrary, that these “cumbersome and opaque neologisms” serve as an important reminder that meaning derives from the discourse, and that we should not presume to know what they mean on their own. Indeed, I argue below that some of Bakhtin’s most important insights –
about “genre”, “hybridity”, “style”, and so forth – have been misconstrued in large part because the terminology is so familiar that the reader feels already in command of it. That is to say, Bakhtin has not been misconstrued because his thoughts are hard to follow, but because we think we already know what he is saying. And this perhaps explains why the discrepancies go unnoticed even in the peer-reviewed literature: Bakhtin is made to say precisely what is expected of him, and so the idea that there might be a discrepancy never arises. My response is to turn back to the texts and let Bakhtin speak – to say “everything he wishes to say” (1986: 82). In that sense, what I offer is not so much an “interpretation” grounded on my own uncertain authority as it is a guided tour of what I consider to be an internally persuasive discourse.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

This study makes a number of contributions to the scholarly discourse on language. First, it brings the recent sociolinguistic discourse on Bakhtin together for critical analysis: more than a decade’s worth of disparate utterances previously obscured by the surrounding speech are foregrounded and, as a result, once-hidden patterns and characteristics are now exposed to scrutiny. It is possible now to say what the sociolinguistic discourse on Bakhtin actually entails and how it compares with Bakhtin’s own pronouncements. This leads to the second contribution: an explication of Bakhtinian theory that arises directly from the concerns and confusions expressed in the sociolinguistic discourse – making that discourse a genuine link in a concrete chain of communication for which the present discussion is inherently relevant. No other discussion of Bakhtin has done this, for no other discussion of Bakhtin has been conceived as a rejoinder to the sociolinguistic discourse. This leads to its third contribution: a detailed analysis of the discourse on Bakhtin grounded on Bakhtinian principles, offering an explanation for the apparent divergence between the sociolinguistic interpretation and Bakhtin’s actual claims that is concordant with Bakhtin’s description of language. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it raises the possibility that the treatment of Bakhtin in the sociolinguistic discourse is being paralleled elsewhere, in other disciplines and other areas of enquiry, calling into question not only our understanding of the various theories being propagated in the scholarly literature (and the various phenomena interpreted in light of those
theories), but the adequacy of the very mechanisms we rely on to ensure that those theories have been accurately and meaningfully communicated.

1.3 Methodology

While this study is firmly qualitative in design (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln 2005) and thus largely unconcerned with numerical data, efforts were made to ensure that both the texts selected for analysis and the topics examined within them were representative of the recent scholarly discourse on Bakhtin.

1.3.1 Text Selection

Five scholarly journals – chosen for their focus on discourse and discourse analysis, and widely regarded as among the “key journals in sociolinguistics”32 – were selected to represent the scholarly discourse:

(1) Journal of Sociolinguistics;
(2) Language in Society;
(3) Text & Talk (formerly Text);
(4) Discourse & Society; and
(5) Discourse Studies

In order to examine the most recent discourse, the period of study extended from the time the data-collection began, in early 2011, back to the year 2000, a relatively arbitrary cut-off point, but one that allowed for the inclusion of a full decade’s worth of data from the beginning of the 21st century (the third decade since the publication of The Dialogic Imagination in the West).

Within these boundaries, every text to mention “Bakhtin”, “Bakhtin’s” or “Bakhtinian” was flagged as a candidate for analysis. For practical and methodological reasons, a mere allusion to, or unattributed uptake of, Bakhtinian theory was ignored – and a contribution to the discourse on Bakhtin was defined as an utterance – any article, or review – in which Bakhtin was invoked somewhere in the body of the text by name. In the case of a book review, the review and the reviewed book were both included – as these were construed as parts of the

32 This phrase is used on Georgetown’s M.A. in Language & Communication homepage to describe a selection of 12 publications in sociolinguistics, four of which are represented here.
same discourse – while books and articles cited within a given text (the preceding links in the chain of discourse) were excluded on practical grounds. Mentions of Vološinov or Medvedev were also included as broadly “Bakhtinian” references, but no specific search was made for comments about either figure.

This method yielded 352 items distributed as follows:

1. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*: 44 entries
2. *Language in Society*: 70 entries
3. *Text & Talk/Text*: 53 entries
4. *Discourse & Society*: 53 entries
5. *Discourse Studies*: 50 entries
6. Reviewed books: 87 entries

Each entry includes all mentions of Bakhtin, with enough context to make the claim comprehensible. For instance, the entry for Wortham (2001) appears as:


As Quigley herself says, both presupposed information and verbal action undoubtedly play some role in narrative self-construction. But a full account will have to specify more precisely how the various functions of narrative discourse (denotational, conative, interactional, textual, etc.) create cognitive, interpersonal, or some other sorts of patterns that can then influence the self. Quigley considers, but does not clearly choose among, various possibilities. She claims that grammatical categories create possible worlds for speakers. This Whorfian idea has been elaborated systematically by Lucy 1992, and it offers one possibility for how language might create a pattern that could influence the self. Quigley also claims that a narrator “emplots himself or herself in an autobiographical storyline” (15). Labov & Waletsky 1967, among others, describe how linguistic devices create plots, and this offers another possible linguistic mechanism for narrative self-construction. Quigley proposes that narrators can position themselves with respect to their characters and the social voices that these characters represent. Hill 1995 and others use Bakhtin to describe systematically how narrators speak with and ventriloquitate voices, and this offers yet another type of linguistic device that might contribute to the self. (491).

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34 Two of the reviewed books, Amossy (1999) and Tuomanla (1999), were excluded as non-English texts, and three others, Dickinson et al. (1998), Toolan (2002), and Thompson & Hunston (2006), could not be located, reducing the final number of books in the corpus to 82.
Some entries include more than one mention, separated by a number of paragraphs or pages. For instance, the entry for Maclean (2010) appears as:


A single author may use several voices in a given text, so that a writer’s identity is often constituted by the dialogical interaction of several voice types, particularly in complex texts (Bakhtin, 1981). One example of this type of dialogism is provided by Ivanic’s (1998) analysis of a social work essay by the student writer Rachel. Rachel’s essay is characterized by relations between positions that ‘interanimate’ (Ivanic, 1998: 153) each other. This dialogized heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981) is evident in the lexical and grammatical patterns of the writing: Rachel moves, often within a single sentence, from one kind of voice, realized by narrative accounts of personal experience, to an academic discourse realized by nominalized language. (178).

[…]

Although one might expect that the writing of these student letters is merely an artificial exercise, they resemble the writing of a professional lawyer or solicitor more than they resemble academic writing. The genre of the letter of advice has its own ‘memory’ (Bakhtin, 1986). It shapes the students by bringing with it from its primary context in legal practice constraints that remain in force even in an academic setting. (184).

Some mentions are extremely brief. For instance, the entry for Argenter (2006) appears as:


The king himself is alleged to be the author of the *Book*, and the narrative is written in the first person plural of royalty. This feature alone discursively indexes a monologic narrative (Bakhtin 1981) (4).

Others – usually book chapters – go on for many pages and pursue their topics in depth. Prodromou (2008), for instance, includes a mention of Bakhtin on 34 different pages. In such cases – where it is impractical to transcribe all the relevant material – a partial transcription appears and a note indicating where the remaining mentions can be found for separate analysis. Such cases, fortunately, were uncommon enough to be manageable. In the end, 329 entries were fully transcribed, and all but a handful were transcribed at least partially.

Holquist (2002) is the lone exception as he makes Bakhtin and dialogism the central theme
for over 200 pages;\textsuperscript{35} the text is thus given its own separate treatment (in Ch. 9), as part of a more extended discussion of Holquist’s role in the sociolinguistic discourse.

1.3.2 Topic Selection

After assembling the corpus, a “grounded theory” approach (e.g. Strauss & Corbin 1998) was used to identify recurrent discourse topics. Candidate notions, like “genre”, “double-voicing”, “polyphony”, etc., were colour-coded upon their first encounter and immediately highlighted throughout the corpus. As the analysis proceeded, a picture emerged of both the density and distribution of the candidate topics and the gaps where the relevant topics had yet to be identified. As these gaps were filled in the following topics presented themselves:\textsuperscript{36}

- **Voice**: 997 mentions
- **Dialogue**: 696 mentions
- **Genre**: 687 mentions (105 texts)
- **Utterance**: 539 mentions
- **Style/stylization**: 327 mentions (76 texts)
- **Identity**: 278 mentions
- **Authority/authoritative**: 256 mentions (53 texts)
- **Ideology**: 250 mentions
- **Intertextuality**: 210 mentions (74 texts)
- **Heteroglossia**: 213 mentions (65 texts)
- **Addressivity**: 165 mentions
- **Double-voicing**: 130 mentions (53 texts)
- **Reported speech**: 76 mentions (29 texts)
- **Persuasion**: 70 mentions (24 texts)
- **Centripetal/centrifugal**: 61 mentions (14 texts)
- **Polyphony**: 62 mentions (32 texts)
- **Interdiscursivity**: 59 mentions (30 texts)
- **Hybridization**: 59 mentions (33 texts)
- **Parody**: 47 mentions (16 texts)
- **Polemic**: 34 mentions (11 texts)
- **Chronotope**: 33 mentions (9 texts)

\textsuperscript{35} Hoquist also merits special attention in light of his role as translator of what is arguably Bakhtin’s most influential work.

\textsuperscript{36} Here we can see the relevance of the transcription process, as only the transcribed text contributed to this picture of the scholarly discourse.
• *Ventriloquation*: 24 mentions (14 texts)
• Carnival: 19 mentions (10 texts)
• Polyvocality: 14 mentions (9 texts)

The first number indicates the frequency with which a given term appears in the corpus, and the second the number of texts. This is a rather rough measure of uptake, however, as some terms simply get repeated more often in a given text (“genre”, for instance appears 14 times in a single paragraph in Tardy (2009), and not every instance is related to the discourse on Bakhtin (“address”, “authority”, “persuasion”, etc., are all somewhat overrepresented as a result). There is nevertheless little ambiguity as to the topics that resonate the most among sociolinguists. Topics marked in bold were selected for direct examination, which resulted in the chapters set out below; topics marked with italics were examined indirectly, as part of the discussion elsewhere (“parody” and “polemic”, for instance, are treated under the heading of “double-voiced discourse”). The rest were passed over.

It may be observed that some of Bakhtin’s most recognizable ideas do not get examined in this discussion: an entire chapter is devoted to the relatively obscure notion of “centripetal” and “centrifugal” forces, but hardly a word to “carnival” or “chronotope”. “Voice” and “dialogue”, in contrast, are mentioned or alluded to on almost every page, yet still do not merit a chapter of their own. And between these two extremes, important notions like “polyphony”, “addressivity”, and “reported speech” are conspicuously absent. There are a number of reasons for this. It must be emphasized, first of all, that the point was not to do an inventory of Bakhtinian concepts but to analyze the scholarly uptake – and as it turns out, notions like “chronotope” (taken up by 7 authors in 9 texts) and “carnival” (by 9 authors in 10 texts) are not among the most interesting to sociolinguistic researchers. Given the time and space, it would have been interesting to show how these important ideas fit with the

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37 According to Lechte (1994: 8), for example: “Bakhtin is best known in the West, first, for his notion of carnival…second, for the concept of the dialogical, polyphonic novel…and finally, for terms, such as ‘chronotope’ and ‘novelistic discourse’”.

38 Likewise, with less than three mentions each, Bakhtin’s interesting and important discussion of the “epic” and the “romantic”, and his notion of “polyglossia” barely register in the sociolinguistic discourse. On the other hand, “intertextuality” proves to be one of the most popular notions, and (like “ventriloquation”) demands our attention even though it is not, strictly speaking, a Bakhtinian contribution.
others in the broader Bakhtinian scheme, but their absence is largely a reflection of their relatively minor role in the sociolinguistic discourse.

In the middle of the pack, notions like “polyphony”, “addressivity” and “reported speech” were simply elbowed out. It could be argued that “polyphony” (taken up in 32 texts) or “reported speech” (taken up in 29) should have been given preference over less familiar and less cited notions like the “centripetal” and “centrifugal” forces (taken up in 14) – and, again, given the time and space, they would certainly have been included. But a variety of factors militated against it: “polyphony”, for instance, is conceptually very close to themes (like double-voicing and hybridization) that are already well-represented in this discussion, and “reported speech” is less a concept than a site for the application of Bakhtinian ideas. “Identity” and “ideology”, on the other hand are not essentially Bakhtinian notions despite the interest they are shown in the literature. In any case, it is hoped that the conclusions offered on the basis of the topics studied here can be extended to those that have been set aside.

Finally, at the top of the list, notions of “voice”, “utterance” and “dialogue” present a very different challenge. Here, the overwhelming number of texts (nearly 150 on each topic) and the extended treatment they are given in many of these discussions demanded a more general, collective, approach. Indeed, it will be argued that these notions underlie all the rest, and that any discussion of Bakhtin will necessarily (if only indirectly) reveal their significance, both for the scholarly discourse and for Bakhtin’s own. We return to these important ideas more directly in the conclusion.

1.3.3 Organization

As an examination not only of “speech about speech”, but of the scholarly discourse on speech in particular, a certain recursiveness pervades this discussion: the literature simultaneously establishes the recent scholarly approach to Bakhtinian theory and is illuminated by it.39 As a result, far from grounding the approach and interpretations offered

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39 It seems appropriate, at this point, to add a footnote about the footnotes that populate this discussion. They are provided as a resource (for the curious or confused), and may be safely ignored by those who would rather not have their reading interrupted.
here or establishing a gap that needs to be filled (both of which presuppose the very sort of extrinsic structuring that this project calls into question), the scholarly discourse is literally absorbed into the present one. In a sense, the project itself may be construed as one enormous literature review, which for sake of clarity has been divided into the different chapters below.

Each chapter begins with as thorough a reproduction of the scholarly discourse as possible. For the sake of clarity, the various utterances are divided according to theme into smaller subsections (for instance, genre is characterized in turn as a “linguistic constraint”, as a “social purpose”, as an “abstract category”, etc.), but little critical commentary is offered. It is an axiom of Bakhtinian theory (and of sociolinguistics in general) that such a reproduction is subject to all manner of expressive and semantic “reaccentuations”. But the intention here is to make the original voices present for the reader without evaluation or interjection in what might be imagined as a sort of carnivalesque clamour of viewpoints.40

Each review of the literature is followed by a presentation of Bakhtin’s own discourse on the given topic. Here, too, the intention is to make the original voice present for the reader, to let Bakhtin speak for himself.41 At the same time, however, the goal is to illuminate his ideas, to draw connections between the different topics and articulations – in short, to establish a dialogizing background that makes his intention evident. The scholarly discourse is notably absent from this effort, but it maintains an invisible presence, providing its contextualizing background. Indeed, the scholarly discourse establishes both the topic and the claims to which the “Bakhtinian discourse” implicitly responds. As a result, this section of each chapter offers a much more coherent narrative, with more explicit authorial intervention, while nevertheless remaining entirely grounded on Bakhtin’s own utterances.

It is not until the final section of each chapter that the scholarly discourse is brought face to face with the Bakhtinian one and its claims are shown to diverge in sometimes profound

40 Some may nevertheless see an intentional “double-voicedness” in this effort, an implicit commentary; while others may observe the “heteroglossia” (the inter-animation or illumination of viewpoints); others may simply be struck by the contrariness of the many claims.
41 The important question of whether (or to what extent) the English translation can be considered “Bakhtin’s voice” is taken up at the bottom of Section 1.3.4.
ways from the Bakhtinian model. In a sense, this is already accomplished in the preceding section, but here at the end of each chapter the implications are finally foregrounded, bringing closure to the current topic and extending the discursive background in ways that will inform the reading of subsequent chapters.

1.3.4 The Bakhtinian texts

This study draws primarily on the English translation of Bakhtin’s five canonical texts:

- *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, trans.)
- *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (C. Emerson, trans)
- *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (V. W. McGee, trans.)
- *Rabelais and His World* (H. Iswolsky, trans.)
- *Toward a philosophy of the act* (V. Liapunov, trans.)

and one disputed work published under the name of Bakhtin’s associate Valentin Vološinov:

- *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (L. Matjka & I.R. Titunik, trans.)

There are a number of issues to be addressed in this: (1) the neglect of other important texts written by or attributed to Bakhtin (e.g. *Art and Answerability*, which contains some of his earliest essays, *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*, published in Vološinov’s name, or *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, published under the name of yet another Bakhtin associate, Pavel Medvedev); 42 (2) a failure to pursue the origins of the disputed texts; and (3) a reliance on these works in translation.

All of these issues reflect, in one way or another, the imperatives of this project. Just as notions such as “chronotope” and “carnival” have been passed over in light of the fact that they do not show the same uptake among sociolinguists as “genre” and “stylization” do – certain texts, despite their theoretical interest and importance, are not at the centre of the sociolinguistic discourse on Bakhtin. It follows, for instance, that the lack of interest in “carnival” would be matched by relatively muted interest in the Rabelais text (and analysis of

42 It may also be noted that among the texts cited, some (e.g. *The Dialogic Imagination*) are given far more weight others (e.g. *Toward a philosophy of the act*).
the sociolinguistic discourse confirms this). Again, the point is not to do an inventory of Bakhtinian concepts (or, in this case, Bakhtin’s written works) but to analyze the scholarly uptake. Here, it turns out, the discourse is overwhelmingly influenced by four particular texts, and these are consequently appealed to most frequently when a Bakhtinian “rejoinder” is offered in the discussion below:

- **The Dialogic Imagination**: 182 texts
- **Speech Genres and Other Late Essays**: 112 texts
- **Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics**: 41 texts
- **Marxism and the Philosophy of Language**: 39 texts
- **Rabelais and His World**: 8 texts
- **The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship**: 6 texts
- **Toward a philosophy of the act**: 3 texts
- **Art and Answerability**: 3 texts
- **Freudianism: A Marxist Critique**: 2 texts

Note here, as well, how frequently Vološinov’s work on the philosophy of language appears in the discourse on “Bakhtin” – despite the fact that Vološinov’s name was not included among the search terms that defined the boundaries of the discourse. This reflects two important realities: first, that the text is so close in its concerns and conceptions to what we have been calling the “Bakhtinian perspective” – being a product of what is commonly known as the “Bakhtin Circle”\(^{43}\) – that it provides relevant insight into what this perspective entails irrespective of who authored it;\(^{44}\) and, second, that authorship of the text was so long taken to be Bakhtin’s own that Bakhtin and Vološinov continue to be treated as the same individual.\(^{45}\) As Holquist (1981b: 170) puts “This is not the place to rehearse the long and

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\(^{43}\) This circle included “first and foremost” (according to Bakhtin himself): Lev Pumplianskii, Pavel Nikolaevich, Pavel Medvedev and Valentin Vološinov (Shepherd 2004: 1).

\(^{44}\) Thus, for instance, Pietikainen & Dufva (2006: 205) can speak of “the dialogical philosophy of language” as something “based on the work of the Bakhtin Circle…particularly Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) and Valentin Voloshinov (1895-1936)”.

\(^{45}\) We see this clearly when commentators refer to “Bakhtin/Vološinov”, “Bakhtin-Vološinov”, “Vološinov/Bakhtin”, etc. (e.g. Occhi 2003, Dedaic 2003), or speak of “Vološinov and Bakhtin” (e.g. Prior et al. 2006), or cite them side-by-side without distinguishing between them (e.g. Karkkainen 2006), or cite Vološinov’s text as an articulation of Bakhtin’s position, perhaps footnoting the dispute over authorship (e.g., Vandelanotte 2004). Such moves appear to be the rule rather than the exception in the sociolinguistic discourse.
complex proofs of Bakhtin’s authorship”. For us it is enough that the text continues to be taken up in the sociolinguistic discourse as an articulation of the “Bakhtinian” perspective on language. Indeed, we may go so far as to say that actual historical authorship is irrelevant to our concerns – it may even be the case, as Poole (1998, 2001) provocatively demonstrates, that Bakhtin made a habit of appropriating the work of others without attribution, and that the “seminal portion” of his work is arguably not even his own. None of this concerns us, for we are interested only in the discourse that has come down to us as Bakhtin’s: even if that discourse turns out really to have been Vološinov’s or Scheler’s or Cassirer’s, none of the observations or conclusions we arrive at below will be effected in the least.

And this takes us to the question of translation. Generally speaking, the sociolinguistic discourse on Bakhtin is no more conscious of the original Russian texts than it is of the Russian individual who has come down to us as the author of those texts, and just as uncertainties over authorship in no way affect what was actually heard, the original Russian in no way contributes to the meanings that readers actually take from the translated works. The concern here is therefore not to reconcile the sociolinguistic interpretation with a putative “original” (let alone establish an authoritative reading of the original), but to examine the scholarly

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46 Holquist (1981b: 172) says there is no doubt about it (and, indeed, he makes this position the foundation of an argument that continues to reverberate – as we will see – in the sociolinguistic discourse). On the other hand, in what Shepherd (2004: 19) calls “by far the most persuasive account”, Hirschkop (1999: 126-140) argues that Bakhtin was not the author. Shepherd (2004: 20) himself concludes that the issue of authorship “has all but become a non-question”.

47 Poole (1998: 543), for instance, writes:

We are less concerned with the ethical questions this raises. (Bakhtin never cites Cassirer in his work on Rabelais.) More important: the example simplifies the tedious task of demonstrating word for word that what we have in this seminal portion of Bakhtin’s work – his philosophical analysis of the grotesque body and the significance of its imagery – is about five pages of Cassirer punctuated intermittently with quotations from Bakhtin.

48 In this we can see a distinction that will be repeated many times throughout the following discussion, a distinction between the abstract and the concrete. For us, the implications of Vološinov being the author are purely abstract: even if based on objective, historical fact, they are nevertheless grounded in a discourse that has failed to animate the sociolinguistic one; on the other hand, the claims and writings attributed to Bakhtin, whatever their provenance, whatever their plausibility, have a real, concrete significance derived from the fact that they continue to be reproduced in the sociolinguistic discourse as “Bakhtinian”.

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discourse in the context of the actual and avowed source of its claims. To accomplish this, it is not only sufficient to limit ourselves to the translated works, but necessary to do so.

These methodological concerns, moreover, do not entail the bracketing out of a genuinely “Bakhtinian” approach – as though Bakhtin’s message were embedded in the original system of language and only fully accessible through it, and that by concerning ourselves with its recontextualization in a new system we were content to lose its original significance. This project is thus markedly different from those that attempt to make the case for an authoritative reading based on certain historical, linguistic or other facts.

Wierzbicka’s (2006) discussion of “dialogue” offers an instructive contrast with our own. In her critique of the scholarly discourse, she argues that “Bakhtin’s ideas…have often been misunderstood – partly because they have been interpreted through the prism of English (and French) words like dialogue” (684). She thus turns back to the original Russian (“объщение” and “диалогическое объщение”) to show how it diverges from the English rendering.49 Her assumption – and one that pervades the discourse on Bakhtin – is that meaning is grounded, extrinsically, in the system of language. As Wierzbicka (2006: 692) puts it: “the meanings of words are social facts which cannot be changed at will by individuals, no matter how prominent. The meaning of the word dialogue…is also a social fact, which cannot be changed at will and which is not a matter of anyone’s opinion” (692).50

Such an assumption, I will argue, is inconsistent with Bakhtin’s description of language (propagating the same semiological interpretations that Bakhtin argues against at every opportunity). An appeal to the Russian text is therefore neither necessary nor justified on Bakhtinian principles. Indeed, one of the primary conclusions offered below is that meaning is derived not so much from the words of language as from the discourses in which they are employed, and that our failure to understand Bakhtin results from the mistaken assumption that we already know what he means simply by knowing the words he has used: “voice”,

49 Tovares (2006: 463) takes a similar approach to the term “зятьская герменевтика”, which she says is better translated as “quotidian” rather than “living” hermeneutics “because it better captures Bakhtin’s concept of the everyday nature of meaning-making in discourse”.

50 Cf. Ch. 9, note 7.
dialogue”, “genre”, “hybrid”, “style”, etc. – the problem is not that these mean something different in Russian than they do in English, but that they mean something different in his discourse than they do in any other. Indeed, as the discussion of “ventriloquation” (and, to a lesser extent, “intertextuality”) will show, these same failings can be seen to occur even when dealing with a single language. The answer, I suggest, is precisely not to rely on the authority of language, but to orient ourselves to the meanings that develop out of the Bakhtinian discourse.

Now, this may strike the reader as either contradictory or impossible. As one commentator puts it: “If you ignore the authority of language, how do you understand what Bakhtin says? Bakhtin neither draws nor dances; how does he express his ideas if not through language, and the Russian language in particular?” To be clear, the Bakhtin of interest to contemporary North American sociolinguistics does not express his ideas through the Russian language; he communicates in English. So any reference to a “Bakhtinian view” or “what Bakhtin tells us” is restricted to this “English speaker”. The central problem is that even this Bakhtin appears to say something profoundly different from what many in the West suppose. At the same time, this Bakhtin provides an explanation for why such differences might occur.

The explanation, I believe, is that we continue to rely on the authority of language (even if we invest this authority in an abstract social body and call the meaning a “social fact”); we continue to look for understanding in the words themselves instead of the discourse in which the author’s intentions have been developed and the words acquire their actual, concrete meaning). There is thus no contradiction in saying that Bakhtin conveys his thoughts through language while rejecting the authority of language: the meanings are not subject to authority (in the sense of an extrinsic structuring principle); they are immanent to the discourse and cannot be fully understood without exposure to the discourse. And this is why I suggest we orient ourselves to what this English speaker we call “Bakhtin” says in his texts, for in this way we acquire the language necessary to interpret his claims.

51 Natalia Rulyova (2013; private correspondence).
52 It would be ironic (and a very different problem) if contemporary sociolinguistic interpretations somehow accorded with claims made by the Russian-speaking Bakhtin while nevertheless diverging from the English text. But this is not a possibility that concerns us.
1.3.5 The Participants

Before turning to the various discourses, it is important to know something about the participants – about the kinds of sociolinguists that have turned their attention to Bakhtin. The sheer number of texts involved makes it difficult to focus on them individually, and the variety of topics they address makes generalizations nearly impossible. We can nevertheless draw important insights about the areas of activity in which they are engaged – and thus, at least in the broadest strokes, the “apperceptive” backgrounds that contribute to their reception of Bakhtinian claims – through an examination of the scholarship they bring to these discussions.

A number of overlapping groups can be distinguished. One cluster includes those concerned with Systemic Functional Linguistics, as demonstrated by their engagement with such figures as Michael Halliday, Jim Martin, Ruqaiya Hasan, Susan Egging, Eija Ventola, Rick Iedema, and Peter White. This group overlaps considerably with those who show an interest in discourse analysis (often, critical discourse analysis) through their engagement with scholars like Norman Fairclough, Teun Van Dijk, Ruth Wodak, Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen, Lilie Chouliaraki, and Jay Lemke. It also overlaps with a smaller group oriented to other areas of the “new” genre studies articulated by figures like John Swales, Vijay Bhatia, Charles Bazerman, Carolyn Miller, and Carol Berkenkotter.

Another large group, which presents somewhat less overlap with those above, evinces an orientation to linguistic anthropology or ethnography, engaging such figures as Richard Bauman, John Gumperz, Jane Hill, Dell Hymes, Judith Irvine, William Hanks, Michael Silverstein, Kathryn Woolard, Charles Briggs and Ben Rampton. Also frequently cited are those best known for their work in variationist sociolinguistics: William Labov, Penelope Eckert, Nikolas Coupland, Allen Bell, and Natalie Schilling-Estes; interactional sociolinguistics: Deborah Tannen; and sociology in general: Erving Goffman.

53 The list is not exhaustive, but these are among the most frequently cited scholars in what we might call the “SFL group”, ordered according to the number of texts in which their names appear. In some cases, the scholars themselves are among the participants – e.g., Martin (2004a and 2004b) and White (2003).
Al-Ali’s (2005) analysis of newspaper death announcements, and Lassen’s (2006) investigation of the press release as a speech genre are some one of the clearest representatives of the first group, drawing on a variety of texts associated with SFL/APPRaisal, CDA and the new genre studies, while drawing on nothing at all from the second group. In contrast, Howard’s (2009) examination of Thai children’s play genres, and Günthner’s (2011) look at communicative practices in “transmigrational contexts”, both draw on a variety of figures from linguistic anthropology and ethnography, but none from those we have assigned to the first group.

Many, like Trinch’s (2001) look at narratives of domestic violence, and Orr’s (2007) study of retail encounters in traditional Chinese markets, draw on figures from both groups, but only a small number of texts approach the discourse on Bakhtin from entirely different perspectives, eschewing the scholarship cited by the overwhelming majority of participants. Boyarin’s (2008) discussion of the Talmud as Menippean satire, and Perri’s (2008) reassessment of the traditional views of reading and writing, are good examples. Boyarin approaches the topic from the perspective of Jewish theology, and Perri from what he describes as a “semio-anthropological” perspective influenced by the work of Umberto Eco.

The paucity of such outliers reinforces the idea that the sociolinguistic discourse on Bakhtin – at least the discourse that appears in the journals examined here – has been shaped by what we might call the “leading ideas of the ‘masters of thought’”. And this will be an important theme as the discussion unfolds: the idea that certain claims are cited, imitated and followed, claims that set the tone for the broader discourse within the community, that Bakhtin has therefore been understood in the sociolinguistic discourse not in terms of his own perspective on language, but in light of certain “leading ideas” from the sociolinguistic community.
2. **Genre**

Our look at the scholarly discourse begins with the notion of genre, a concept that plays a prominent role in much of Bakhtin’s work (and is the central topic of his famous 1953 essay, “The Problem of Speech Genres”). As a concept addressing language and discourse in terms of human activity, its appeal to sociolinguists is easy to understand: genre puts the sociality of language front and centre. As Bakhtin tells it:

A study of the utterance and of the diversity of generic forms of utterances in various spheres of human activity is immensely important to almost all areas of linguistics and philology. This is because any research whose material is concrete language… inevitably deals with concrete utterances (written and oral) belonging to various spheres of human activity and communication…. And it is here that scholars find the language data they need. A clear idea of the nature of utterances (primary and secondary), that is, of various speech genres, is necessary, we think, for research in any special area (1986: 62-63).

This notion, however, has little to do with our usual conception of genre – as a means of categorizing artistic production (film, literature, music, etc.) – and, indeed, promises to be something much more – something “of fundamental importance for overcoming those simplistic notions about speech life, about the so-called speech flow, about communication and so forth – ideas which are still current in our language studies” (1986: 67). In this we come to our first paradox in the Bakhtinian discourse on discourse: the use of a notion “still current in our language studies” as a means of overcoming simplistic notions that are still current in our language studies. To understand how such a feat may be accomplished we must understand what Bakhtin has to say about genre. We turn, then, to the scholarly literature to see how Bakhtin has been understood and how this understanding has influenced language studies.

2.1 **The Scholarly Discourse on Genre**

2.1.1 **Genre as unproblematic and self-evident**

One of the first things we discover in the literature is a tendency to treat the notion of genre as self-evident, and this will become an important theme for us: the idea that we already understand the issues that Bakhtin addresses because the terminology itself is familiar. In
some cases – for instance, in the review of another’s work – there is arguably little need or opportunity to unpack the concept. Thus, in her review of Blackledge (2005), Milani (2006: 404) only hints at the notion of genre when she describes how textual voices “become more authoritative as they move from one genre to the other”. In reviewing Clark (2006), Riggs (2008: 484) alludes to “Bakhtin’s concept of genre” and the “mixing of genres”. Stakhnevich’s (2004: 537) review of Holquist (2002) mentions “Bakhtin’s allegory of the literary genre of the novel” without elaboration, Chakorn (2007: 707) mentions Zhu’s (2005) success at incorporating “different methods for cross-cultural genre research such as intertextuality... and analyses of generic moves”, and Strauss, Feiz, Xing & Ivanova (2007: 187) mention Wertsch’s (2007) idea that various speech genres belong to a “generalized collective dialogue”. In each case, the reader must turn to the relevant text to determine what genre might mean.  

In Billig (2001) and Coupland (2001a), the word “genre” makes an appearance, but only in quoted passages, where it is arguably peripheral to points the authors are making. In other cases, the term is used by the authors themselves, but only in passing – in what we might call a “naïve” or “categorical” sense that stakes little claim to the views developed in Bakhtin or sociolinguistic theory in general. Scott (2002: 301), for instance, speaks of the “types and genres of conflict talk”, while Pinto (2004: 651) addresses “the genre of didactic literature”. Baron (2004: 270) discusses “prayer as a genre”; Tovares (2006: 569), “gossip as a speech genre”; Badarneh (2009: 647), the genre of editorials; Schiffrin, D. (2009: 421), narrative as “a blend of genres”; and Álvarez, Hoyle & Valeri (2010: 359), the genre of the written letter. Sclafani (2008: 509) mentions “print media discourse, as well as other genres of written and spoken discourse” while Sclafani (2009: 618) looks at “parody as a literary genre”. Solin

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1 Takano (2006: 741) is a bit of an exception. In his review of Yotsukura (2003), he suggests that “Genres are derived from commonalities and shared communicative activities that native speakers are assumed to develop through recurring experiences in their everyday lives”. While this does not explain what genres are, it also does not assume the reader already understands what is involved.

2 Billig (2001b) cites Vološinov’s (1973: 19-20) claim that “social psychology exists primarily in a wide variety of forms of ‘utterance’ of little speech genres of internal and external kinds” (211), while Coupland (2001a: 345) cites Bakhtin (1986), who insists: “Modern man does not proclaim”; rather, “he ‘speaks with reservations’”; “he stylizes...the proclamatory genres of priests, prophets, preachers, judges, patriarchal fathers, and so forth”. 

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(2004) speaks of “less obvious genres”, like “conversations, courtroom discourse, and therapy sessions” (268). Wei (2002: 166) refers to a speech genre (used in Papua New Guinea) known as *kros*, and Weninger (2010: 595) discusses what is arguably the least obvious genre of all: citing Collins (1999), she describes “the neoliberal concept of partnerships” as “a Bakhtinian speech genre that is based upon collaboration and consensus”. Each of these expresses a concern for genre, and makes reference to Bakhtin in this context, but none takes up his views in a recognizable way.

In many cases (as with Weninger 2010, above), even the expressly Bakhtinian view of genre is treated as unproblematic. Manning (2004), for instance, cites Bakhtin’s notion of “primary” speech genres, and Chang (2001) refers to “complex” ones. But neither finds it necessary to explain what genres are or what Bakhtin’s distinction entails. The Bakhtinian view plays a prominent role in Argenter (2001), Filliettaz & Roulet (2002), and Boyarin (2008), where it is similarly left unexplored. Genre also plays an important role in De Fina’s (2003) discussion of narrative, where despite drawing a connection between intertextuality, genre and the Bakhtinian notion of dialogism, the author never explains what we are to take genre to mean. Genre is central to the discussion in Poveda, Cano & Palomares-Valera (2005: 92), who cite “Bakhtin’s (1986) seminal work” on the notion, but never tell us precisely what genres are. Majors (2007: 481) cites a number of authors (including Bakhtin, 1981) to support her claim that “Interdisciplinary research on African-American discourse, verbal genres, and interactions has been voluminous and has provided insights into the social construction of languages and the complexity of speech events”, but, again, without unpackaging the notion of verbal genres. Vigouroux (2010: 342) introduces the notion of a

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3 As we see below, Blackledge (2005: 102) has a similar idea, describing texts that “recognisably belong to the genre of liberal explanation of social problems”.

4 Mahendran (2003) likewise addresses the distinction between primary and secondary genres, going so far as to provide examples of each. And while it would be incorrect to say that she offers no explanation of the Bakhtinian notion, the definition she provides is so elliptical as to be of no benefit to the uninitiated. She writes: “Bakhtin understood dialogue in terms of speech genres defined as ‘the specific nature of the sphere of communication’” (236).

5 They explain that Bakhtin’s work on heteroglossia and genre “highlighted the principle that all utterances and discourse practices are historically embedded and contain the ideological and formal resources of previous speakers and community members” and that they “serve as flexible interpretive frames” (91). But genre itself remains undefined.
“performing genre”, citing Bakhtin’s (1981) view of genre as something “intrinsically intertextual”, and Errington (1998: 72) distinguishes certain bilingual performances from the “generically homogenous, monoglot, ‘authoritative word’”. But neither provides further explanation. Ladousa (2002: 220) sees Hanks (1987: 687) as expressing a Bakhtinian perspective when he argues that discourse genres are produced under “various local circumstances” as “part of the linguistic habitus that native actors bring to speech”. She concludes that “School advertising and everyday conversations about schools comprise different genres in part because they provide different means of constructing relationships between languages and institutions”. But we are never told what this notion of genre entails. And Cook, Pieri & Robbins (2004: 435) warn of the “enormous potential for misunderstanding” that comes from a failure to take issues of genre (and generic hybridization) into account during communication. But they, too, elect not to pursue it.

2.1.2 The syncretic approach

The need to unpack the various theories of genre for the reader is demonstrated by a number of authors, many of whom bring Bakhtin – either his notion of genre or another aspect of his language theory – together with a variety of other sources. They often highlight the particular contribution of a given source, but generally suppose that the different contributions hang together as a coherent position. Lassen (2006: 504) makes this assumption explicit. Quoting Hyland (2002), she observes: “In spite of differences in approach and underlying philosophy, the three schools [of genre] have come to agree on the nature of genre as “abstract, socially recognized ways of using language”. Al-Ali (2005: 10) offers a similar assessment, noting that “Martin (1985), Miller (1984), Swales (1990), Ventola (1987, 1989) and others share a common view of genre as a social action, goal-oriented and cultural activity consisting of a sequence of moves”. Bakhtin is thus seen to differ only in his focus or emphases.

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6 Lassen (2006: 503) groups the various contributions into the following schools: “the North American school working within the rhetorical tradition, the Sydney School based on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and the English for Specific Purposes approach (ESP) that shares with SFL certain viewpoints as to the conceptualization of communicative purpose”.


Zhu (2005: 3), for instance, brings Bakhtin (1981, 1986) together with a vast number of others (including: Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Schutz & Luckmann, 1984; Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993; Schryer, 1994; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Günthner & Knoblauch, 1995; and Paltridge, 1997) to describe a “sociocognitive” view, according to which “genres are not just ‘sites of actions’, but also sites of ideological action which are intermingled with ‘concrete value judgements’… and express the shared ‘stock of knowledge’ and the shared values of the group” and whose semantics “can interact with intertextuality…and other genre change”.

Lauerbach (2004) likewise makes Bakhtin one of the many contributors (including: Ehlich & Rehbein, 1979; Levinson, 1979; Luckmann, 1986, 1988; Kress, 1993; Barthes, 1977; Hodge & Kress, 1988; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; and Fairclough, 1995) who have established the following “facts” about genre:

Genres…are conventionalized patterns for the communicative solution of social problems. The nature of the problem to be dealt with gives rise to the ‘external’ or institutional structure of a genre, while the specific communicative work required occasions its characteristic ‘internal’ or textual structure. […] Genres can vary across culture, time, and social class, and social change can manifest itself in the change and hybridization of genres, as can language change (355).

Al-Ali (2005) makes Bakhtin part of slightly different group. Following Martin (1992), he calls genre as “a staged, goal-oriented, social process” (388). Drawing on Bazerman (1988), he calls it a “sociopsychological category defined by a structural arrangement of textual features” (5). From Kress (1987) he takes the idea that genre “describes that aspect of the form of texts which is due to the effect of their production in particular social occasions” (5). Citing Swales (1990) and Berkenkotter & Huckin (1995), he adds that genres concern “knowledge of formal schema (i.e. the rhetorical structure of a text type) and content schema (“what content is appropriate to a particular purpose in a particular situation at a particular

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7 Macken-Horarik (2003a: 288), citing Martin (1998), observes that the notion of stage has been used extensively in SFL to reveal the generic structure of different text types. Without unpackaging the Bakhtinian notion, she goes on to explain how it can be supplemented: “the category of stage is not enough to capture what Bakhtin called the “internal dialogism” of texts. For this task we need a unit of analysis which is intermediate between the generic stage and the sentence. One that I have found particularly useful is the notion of phase” (289).
time’)” (6). And from Bakhtin he takes the idea that “generic forms are more flexible, and plastic and free” and that “one can deliberately mix genres from various spheres” (27).

Although they never explain precisely what they take genre to be, Cook, Pieri & Robbins (2004) likewise cite Swales (1990) and Martin (1985) for their views, along with Chouliaraki & Fairclough (1999) and Fairclough & Wodak (1997) for the notion of hybrid genres, and Bakhtin (1993b) for “the heteroglossia of voices, which this hybridization entails” (434-435). Crane (2007) similarly mentions Martin’s (1985) characterization of genre as “a staged, goal-oriented social process”, adding Halliday’s (1999) notion of genre as “context of culture” (228). Citing Bakhtin (1986) and Kress (1993), she points out that “genres, while relatively stable cultural entities precisely because they are born out of rather stable, recurring situations in which people interact, can transform into new generic forms recognizable within a given culture” (229). Echoing this often cited description of genres as “relatively stable types” of utterances, Taboada (2011) adds: “Most definitions of genre establish a connection with Mikhail Bakhtin’s [sic] work” (248), including Halliday’s (1994) notion of register, Martin’s (1984) notion of “staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity”, and Eggin’s (1994/2004) and Stenström’s (1994) notion of schematic structure.

Indeed, Yotsukura (2003: 65) insists that Martin’s (1985) characterization of genre as a linguistically realized activity type “complements Bakhtin’s well”, as does Ventola’s (1987) idea that genres are socially sanctioned ways of getting things done. On the Bakhtinian view, she argues, we “make our selections with an eye to how the words have been used in other utterances, particularly those that share thematic, compositional, and stylistic similarities to what it is we are seeking to express” (34). She adds: “each conversation can represent an instance of a genre, because it still exhibits a certain confluence of structural, thematic, and stylistic features” (63). Echoing Angouri & Marra (2010), she argues that “following Bakhtin … it is the confluence of many of these features” – e.g. “an opening greeting, a categorial or

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8 Angouri & Marra (2010: 617) claim that “genres are resources for getting things done”, comprising “patterns that are features of the social practices of a given community”. Bakhtin’s (1986) work is thus seen as an example of how genre can be “usefully applied to the study of the form and function of spoken meeting interaction in workplaces” (619; cf. Hyland, 2003).
‘group’ self-identification, an exchange of business salutations”, etc. – that determines whether a given conversation may be considered an instance of a particular genre (99).

2.1.3 The taxonomic view

As we see in these latter treatments, there is a tendency to interpret Bakhtin’s approach to genre as a taxonomic endeavour, according to which the “confluence” of certain formal features allows us to identify different types of speech.\(^9\) Garrett (2005: 331), for instance, addresses genre – and Bakhtin’s contribution to the theory of genre – in detail, arguing that “the notion of genre provides a basis for classifying and categorizing utterances, and ultimately for developing a taxonomy of utterances that is amenable to theorizing”.\(^10\) Citing the work of Richard Bauman, he adds:

Drawing on the insights of Bakhtin and others, Bauman (2000: 84) has recently defined “genre” as “a constellation of systemically related, co-occurrent formal features and structures that serves as a conventionalized orienting framework for the production and reception of discourse” (331).

Keane (2004) quotes the same definition (this time from Bauman, 2001: 79) while also pointing to Bakhtin (1986) and Briggs (1998). As Bauman (2011: 711) puts it:

With a further stimulus from the work of the Bakhtin Circle, genre has come to be understood in linguistic anthropology as a metapragmatic orienting schema for entextualization…that is, the production, reception, and circulation of particular orders of texts and for the production of intertextuality.

Trinch (2001) likewise argues that Briggs & Bauman (1992) and Eggins & Martin (1997) are in agreement with Bakhtin.\(^11\) She takes Bakhtin’s (1986) claim that communicative goals

\(^9\) We may also recall Bazerman’s (1988) description, cited above in Al-Ali (2005), of genre as a “sociopsychological category defined by a structural arrangement of textual features”.

\(^10\) He characterizes the Bakhtinian notion of genres as: “code-specific communicative practices – which are to some degree conventionalized and a focus of metapragmatic attention” (330).

\(^11\) This position is also implicit in Kramsch (2005: 471), who refers to “Bakhtin’s, and Briggs and Bauman’s approaches to speech genres”; and Jacobs (2007: 487-488), who ascribes to Bakhtin (1986) and Briggs & Bauman (1992) the idea that “rules of genre focus on form, its relative stability, and its embodiment of creativity, adaptability, and evolution”. Jacobs adds: “Here, the concept of genre is one that grew from the stylistic individuality of utterances,
“are reflected through a selection of not only the grammatical, phraseological, and compositional components of a language, but also through lexical selections” to mean that “there is a range of lexical items whose use may be adequate in constituting a particular genre” (586). According to Ayoola (2009: 388), Bakhtin “identifies genres as “relatively stable types” of interactive utterances with definite and typical forms of construction”. Here, she attributes to Bakhtin (1986: 52) the following claim:

The typical forms of the utterance associated with a particular sphere of communication (e.g. the work place, the sewing circle, the military) which have therefore developed into ‘relatively stable types’ in terms of thematic content, style and compositional structure.

This, however, appears to have been drawn from Eggins & Slade (1997: 63), who mistakenly structured their paraphrase as a quote. Citing Bakhtin (1981), Gales (2009: 225) argues that “a genre ‘both unifies and stratifies language’ so that commonly shared linguistic and ideological features that unify texts within a genre also serve to stratify and exclude those that lack those features”. Thus, for instance, “while political and legal language are separate genres with separate stylistic features, they are intimately connected in that they are both institutionalized varieties of language that, as a result of one enacting the other, serve much the same purpose in society”. Maclean (2010: 180) takes a similar position, as evinced by her methodology, in which she seeks “to determine which features are common to the…texts and can be considered characteristic of the genre”.

Higgins (2004: 77) takes a broader view, seeing genres as characterized not only by linguistic features, but by “linear organization (externally by turn-taking and internally by sub-components, as in literary genres), thematic and semantic content, the social settings where they may occur, and the social roles with which they are associated”. Citing Bakhtin (1981, 1984, 1986), Flowerdew (2004: 583) takes this one step further, arguing not only that “Genres are standardized forms of language, which, through repeated use, develop clearly recognizable features”, but that “A defining feature of any given genre is the communicative purpose, or action, it performs. Genres can thus be characterized in terms of sociocultural distinctive similarities across contexts of performance, and most importantly, the systematic ways people spoke about (or did not speak about) what occurred” (487-488).
process”. As Kong (2001: 476) puts it, “text types…and their inherent generic structure work together to produce a social purpose”.  

2.1.4 Genre as social purpose

For Blum-Kulka, Huck-Taglicht & Avni (2004) this becomes the essence of genre:

Our definition of genre draws on Russian literary theorist Bakhtin’s (1986) identification of speech genres as ‘relatively stable types’ of interactive discourse, and on the work of linguists, like Martin (1993), who emphasize the common social goal and recurrent structural features which give specific genres their unique character (311-312).

Zadunaisky Ehrlich & Blum-Kulka (2010) repeat this formula. Citing Blum-Kulka (2005), Martin (1993) and Swales (1990), they define genre as “culturally conventionalized discursive ways of achieving communicative ends within a community”, adding: “We adopt a Bakhtinian [sic] view of genre as situated, social, and active ‘relatively stable types’ of interactive utterances that share a functional aspect or social purpose” (213). As Woolard (2008: 445) observes: “In Bakhtin’s conception, voices merge linguistic form with social intention”.

In this we see another familiar theme: the idea that genres are defined or characterized by their social purpose. Lauerbach (2004: 66) puts it succinctly: “Genres…are conventionalized patterns for the communicative solution of social problems”. Or, as Maybin (2001: 66) puts it: “Speech genres are associated with particular kinds of contextual features, and specific kinds of social purposes”. Blackledge (2005: 8) calls them “global linguistic patterns which have historically developed for fulfilling specific communicative tasks in specific situations”; in other words, “genre refers to the type and structure of language typically used for a particular purpose in a particular context”. Clark (2006: 55) calls genre “a development whose characteristics can be explained in terms of functions previously or currently present in social practice”.

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12 Compare this with Bloor & Bloor (2007: 174), who define genre as a “socially recognized text type, e.g. business letter, novel, political speech, political interview”.
13 Al-Ali (2005: 28) seems to be expressing the same view when he finds one genre comparable with another “because the former embodies both similarities in form and social function when compared with the latter”. 

2.1.5 Genre as linguistic constraint

Higgins (2004: 96-97) goes even further, arguing that “Active regulation of discourse forms by communities is implicit in Bakhtin’s speech genres”:

The form, the sequential ordering of discourse elements, and the content of specific instantiations of a genre are under control of a social group, the discourse community. […] The discourse community model stresses the way social groups create and maintain genres and use them to reward or sanction particular speakers or writers for success or failure in producing successful instantiations of genre patterns the communities regulate.

This latter view reflects another tendency in the literature: to see genre as a constraint on speech. This seems to be Maingueneau’s (2002b) view. He describes genres as “socio-historically constrained communication devices which are always changing and to which metaphors such as ‘contract’, ‘ritual’ and ‘game’ can be easily applied” (271). Macken-Horarik (2003b: 317) likewise observes: “The genre in which a text is produced imposes certain constraints on choices”. And this is Garrett’s (2005) position as well. He argues that “Genres, irreducibly social in origin, normative and conventionalizing in nature, are the key constraint on the forms that utterances take and the ways in which those forms are combined and recombined, effectively setting parameters for the individual speaker’s situated use of language at any given moment” (331). Citing Dentith (1995), Clark (2006: 56-57) puts it in a nutshell: “genres…determine the way that people speak in different circumstances”. Howard (2009: 342) says much the same thing: “The performance of a genre structures participants’ expectations for how to talk, who should talk, and when they should do so”. As Yotsukura (2003: 64) puts it: “conversationalists are guided in their performances of speech genres by their previous experiences in those genres, as well as by the generic constraints which accompany them”. This is perhaps what Maclean (2010) means by a genre’s “memory”: that “It shapes the [writer] by bringing with it from its primary context…constraints that remain in force” (184). Takano (2006: 742) consequently finds Bakhtin’s notion of speech genres a useful “heuristic tool for identifying the rigid rules of interaction observed by Japanese people in a particular communicative situation”.
2.1.6 Mixed or hybrid genres

In spite of the many differences in what genre is taken to mean, even by those professing to offer a Bakhtinian interpretation, there is widespread agreement that genres can be “mixed” or “hybridized”.\textsuperscript{14} Perri (2008: 692) expresses a minority view when she quotes Boyarin’s (2008) claim that hybridization represents the “annihilation of genre”.\textsuperscript{15} More typical are the views of those like Al-Ali (2005: 28), who takes Bakhtin’s (1986: 80) claim that “one can deliberately mix genres from various spheres” to mean that one can produce a new type that “embodies both similarities in form and social function”. Lauerbach (2004: 354) offers some examples: “generic hybrids can be observed, in current affairs interviews and in the news, giving rise to new categories such as infotainment, confrontainment, and even politainment”. Thetala (2001: 350) refers to this “special value of incorporating linguistic elements of various kinds from one text type to another or from one socially situated discourse type to another” as “intertextuality”. Norman Fairclough appears to be the primary source for this view.\textsuperscript{16} Citing Kristeva (1986), Fairclough (2001) writes:

Bakhtin’s work emphasizes the dialogical properties of texts, their intertextuality as Kristeva (1986) puts it: the idea that any text is explicitly or implicitly ‘in dialogue with’ other texts (existing or anticipated) which constitutes its ‘intertexts’. Any text is\textsuperscript{14} Yan (2008) claims that this mixing of genres leads to “generic integrity”:

The process of genre mixing especially for the expression of private intentions within the socially recognized communicative purposes does not seem to be an exclusive property of academic texts alone. […] genres may be creatively mixed in a variety of other forms of professional discourse and such mixing will therefore result in generic integrity. The notion of generic integrity is important for most perspectives on genre because it has the potential to enhance our understanding of the role and function of genres in everyday life in which we are all engaged, and it is accomplished not only by linguistic competence but also by communicative competence encompassing semiotic devices (471).

\textsuperscript{15} Boyarin’s others claims appear less definitive. Citing Holquist’s introduction to The Dialogic Imagination, for instance, he writes:

[The novel] is thus best conceived either as a supergenre, whose power consists in its ability to engulf and ingest all other genres (the different and separate languages peculiar to each), or not a genre in any strict, traditional sense at all. In either case it is obvious that the history of what might be called novels, when they are defined by their proclivity to display different languages interpenetrating each other, will be extremely complicated (605-606; citing Holquist, 1981a: xxix).

a link in a chain of texts, reacting to, drawing in, and transforming other texts. Bakhtin also developed a theory of genre – a theorization of the different types of text available in a culture (e.g. casual conversations, interviews, formal speeches, newspaper articles, etc.). He claimed that while any text is necessarily shaped by the socially available repertoires of genres, it may also creatively mix genres. For example, interviews on television between journalists and politicians sometimes combine the genre of a conventional political interview with the genre of a television ‘chat show’ – which itself is a combination of genres of everyday conversation and entertainment (233).

Blackledge (2005: 6) takes this up with remarkable fidelity. As he explains:

the intertextuality of a text describes the presence within it of elements of other texts. The actual texts which are intertextually present may be specific, and known. More commonly, however, a text will refer to, draw on, and include, texts which are neither specific nor explicitly present. The interdiscursivity of a text refers to the presence within it of genres and styles. A single text may incorporate more than one genre or style, and may refer to and adopt genres and styles which relate to other texts. In doing so a text is contextualised within an ‘order of discourse’, a particular combination of genres, styles and discourses. The concept of recontextualisation is particularly useful as it allows analysis of the shift of meanings either within a single genre or across genres. In the process of recontextualisation meanings are transformed, as discourse is reiterated in modified form and/or in different contexts.

The issue of recontextualization is a central concern for a number of scholars. Cook, Pieri & Robbins (2004: 434), for instance, argue that misunderstandings can arise “As people with different interests…attempt to communicate across previously less permeable discoursal boundaries” through novel hybrid genres. Bloor & Bloor (2007) devote an entire chapter to the issue. In one passage, they write:

17 Yamaguchi (2009: 399) says much the same thing about what he calls “the principle of Bakhtinian “intertextuality”; citing Hill (2007: 72), he describes it as “the assumption that explicitly or implicitly, a text retains ‘traces of history and the voices of others’…after being recontextualized in a new context and thus transformed from the ‘original’”. Tekin (2008) also seems to be channeling Fairclough (though her immediately source is Wodak) when she describes intertextuality as the idea that “individual texts always relate to past or even present texts”. She explains:

Obviously it borrows from Bakhtin’s concept of intertextuality which emphasizes the dialogical properties of texts, their intertextuality as Kristeva (1986) puts it: the relation of any utterance with other utterances. It is the idea that any text (or utterance) is dialogical, explicitly or implicitly ‘in dialogue with’ other texts and gains its meaning in relation to other texts (733).

She compares this with “interdiscursivity”, the idea that “discourses behave in a similar way, they overlap and interconnect” (733). Note that in none of this do we find any mention of genre.
Bakhtin was much concerned with context, even historical context, and how specific utterances were produced and understood ‘against the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme’. Intertextuality involves both the intrusion (or adoption by the speaker/author) of aspects of previous texts into a new text either through citation, attribution or reference, and also the hybridization of one genre or text type with another (51-52).  

Weninger (2009) attempts to draw a finer distinction, between “intertextuality” and “dialogism” on the one hand, and “interdiscursivity” and “hybridity” on the other:

Intertextuality, according to Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), is concerned with ‘the presence in my discourse of the specific words of the other mixed with my words’ – the oft-cited Bakhtinian idea of dialogicality.  

Interdiscursivity, on the other hand, points to how different genres become mixed/hybridized as discourses from one social domain infuse others. This influence involves processes of both colonization and appropriation as discursive habits (genres, styles, representations) get recontextualized in new environments (87).

Coupland & Jaworski (2004) draw the opposite conclusion with respect to the relationship between “interdiscursivity” and “dialogism”, but otherwise seem to agree. On their view:

Norman Fairclough (1992) distinguishes two types of metalinguistic (or metatextual) processes: “manifest intertextuality” and “interdiscursivity”. This latter term, with its strong links to Bakhtin’s dialogism, stresses the hybrid nature of texts as admixtures of genres and discourses. This is an important notion with respect to what

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19 Kong (2006: 773) seems to express precisely this understanding of dialogism: “Any discourse – written, spoken or visual – is inherently dialogical. That is, a person’s use of language “draws on” the multiple voices of his or her culture and society”.
20 As the authors explain:

The notion of “manifest intertextuality” lies close to the problems of speech representation...as it refers to the mixing of elements of real or imagined texts within a text in the form of “reported speech”, “indirect speech”, “free indirect speech” or “discourse representation” (see Fairclough 1988, 1995). It is CDA’s approach to (media) discourse that makes it clear that metalinguistic expressions such as “manifest intertextuality” do not merely refer to language. They can, and do, introduce the speaker’s or other parties’ voices as a gloss on the ideational layer of meaning of the text. The reporting of someone’s words is not just a “neutral” account of what has been said. The act of retelling something involves the speaker’s control both of what is being retold as well as how the retelling is structured and organised, depending on the speaker’s view of the world, position of power, which will dictate the choice of the quotatives and the more or less interpretative account of the other’s words (32).
Fairclough calls the "orders of discourse", i.e. interdependent genres and discourses structuring different types of social practice into particular social orders (Fairclough 1989). These genres and discourses are characterised by shifting flows and boundaries, which leads to the hybridization of discourse (31).

Li (2009) observes a distinction between what Fairclough (1992) calls “manifest” and “constitutive” intertextuality. Where “the former refers to how quoted utterances are selected, changed, and contextualized, the latter is concerned with how texts are made up of heterogeneous elements: generic conventions, discourse types, register, and style”. Kong (2001, 2006) cites Fairclough’s distinction between “horizontal” and “vertical” intertextuality. The former (which he says can be found in Bakhtin 1981), concerns “the embedding of previous discourse into the current one” (2001: 475), while the latter concerns “different stages of generic schema…, embedded or constitutive intertextuality or what Fairclough (1992) calls “interdiscursivity”, in which one genre is embedded in another; and “mixed intertextuality”, for which it is “impossible to ascribe different parts of a text to different genres” (2006: 774). Sook (2008) ascribes both notions to Bakhtin, noting: “Bakhtin (1981) claims two senses of intertextuality: ‘horizontal dimensions of intertextuality’ (HDI) and the ‘vertical dimension of intertextuality’ (VDI)” (note 7, p. 266).

### 2.1.7 Primary and secondary genres

Despite their focus on “mixed” genres, none of these examples address Bakhtin’s distinction between primary and secondary (or “simple” and “complex”) genres, a distinction we saw alluded to earlier in Chang (2001) and Manning (2004). But in many cases, the notion of “mixed” and “complex” genres seem to merge. Citing Morson & Emerson (1990), for example, Yotsukura (2003) writes:

> Genres can…expand and grow by combining with one another. Bakhtin recognized two types of genres – primary and secondary – and he argued that primary genres can “knit together” much like bones and form new, secondary genres…. We thus find that groups of utterances, which we might call sub-genres, come together to form larger, overarching genres (35-36).

She adds: “Martin’s (1985) definition is not incompatible with Bakhtin’s notion of secondary speech genres, (that is, the larger stretches of discourse which incorporate shorter utterances
or ‘primary genres’)’’ (65). On this view, complex or secondary genres are composites of simple, primary ones. As Maybin (2001: 66-67) puts it: “Bakhtin suggests that the primary genres of unmediated speech communication are absorbed and digested into the more culturally complex artistic, sociopolitical, and scientific ‘secondary genres’, which are primarily written”. Mahendran (2003) even finds the same problems of “recontextualization” that we encountered in the earlier discussion of generic hybridization:

the social psychologist who participates, as an action researcher…, occupies an uneasy position between these two genres engaging in dialogue (i.e. primary speech genres) with participants and withdrawing to reflect and write about them from the position of the ‘social scientist’ (and thus reframing them as secondary speech genres) (236).

In many cases, “complexity” appears to be the defining feature of what are taken to be secondary genres. Maybin thus explains: “Although Bakhtin does not discuss this, I would suggest that the oral genres of the theatre, church services and political speeches would count as more culturally complex, and, therefore, as ‘secondary genres’” (67). Resche (2004) offers a similar interpretation. She writes:

given the official settings in which the reports and lectures are given, and the position of authority of the speaker-author, we are undoubtedly dealing with a formal, rhetorically complex ‘secondary speech genre’, which has more in common with written discourse, according to Bakhtin (1986), than an informal and conversational ‘primary speech genre’ (725).

Zhu’s (2005: 32) likewise observes: “Bakhtin…divides genre into ‘simple genres’ of everyday communication and ‘complex genres’ such as novels, dramas and essays”. He adds: “Bakhtin’s division represents an important contribution to genre study which goes beyond

21 Martin writes:

The term genre is used here to embrace each of the linguistically realized activity types which comprise so much of our culture.[…] All genres have a beginning-middle-end structure of some kind; these structures will be referred to here as schematic structures (equivalent to Hasan’s (1977, 1979) generalized text structures). Schematic structure represents the positive contribution genre makes to a text: a way of getting from A to B in the way a given culture accomplishes whatever the genre in question is functioning to do in that culture (Martin 1985: 250-251).
the static traditional genre practice of text description”. But he fails to tell us how or why the distinction between “simple” and “complex” genres matters.

For Chang (2001: 169), it cashes out in terms of a distinction between direct and indirect discourse, arguing that, for Chinese, indirect speech “represents a complex speech genre of its own, differing according to its manifold layers of implication”. Yotsukura, however, sees it as a distinction between “utterances” and “conversational exchanges”:

Bakhtin’s definition of genre depends upon his definition of the utterance as a complete thought or expression of intention, grounded in reality and bounded by a change in speakers. […] As speakers combine utterances within conversational exchanges for particular purposes, complex genres emerge which reflect speaker goals and exhibit a particular constellation of thematic content, stylistic choices, and compositional structure (89-90).

Garrett (2005), in further contrast, sees it as a distinction between discourses that are “code-specific” and those that allow for “code-switching”. He writes:

to the extent that a code-specific communicative practice is constitutive of its corresponding “primary” genre, in Bakhtin’s (1986) sense – for example, to the extent that the practice “joking” is constitutive of, and coterminous with, the genre “joke” – the genre in question can likewise be described as code-specific (331).

Alternatively, “metaphorical switching”:

may be exploited quite extensively by the speaker within the parameters of those code-specific genres that can be regarded as ‘secondary genres’ in Bakhtin’s (1981) sense. Gossip is a prime example: Although the vernacular invariably serves as the matrix code…the gossiper may very well code-switch when quoting someone, or perhaps as a way of characterizing someone’s manner or behavior (note 15, p. 355-356).

Kroeber (1998: 80), in ever sharper contrast, sees complex genres as constituted not by the combination or incorporation of utterances, but by the incorporation of individual intentions – that is, by “the conjunction of personal variations-in-telling with conventionalized rhythmic and lexical vocal patternings”. Native American story telling offers an example:

22 Quoting Bakhtin (1986), he explains:
the intricacies of these Bakhtinian conceptions are clarified when one looks at the
evidence from traditional Indian societies. Mythic enactments demonstrate that
individualized utterance can be created only out of previous utterances by others.
Formalized retellings display how conventionality produces reassessive innovations
dependent upon the tradition being verbally evoked. Myth, in short, would seem to
illustrate exactly what Bakhtin calls a complex speech genre (71).

Orr (2007: 73) offers yet another position, suggesting a distinction between “tightly
circumscribed communicative purposes” and “interpersonal relationships”. von Münchow
& Rakotonelina (2010) define it in terms of relationships among the underlying
“macropropositions” within a text:

the cognitive foundation of a limited number of text (or sequential) types, which might
be compared to Bakhtin’s (1986) ‘primary genres’, each text consisting of a certain number
of sequences of different types which consist themselves of a series of macropropositions
…defined by the type of relationship that links them to one another (319).

Finally, Mahendran (2003) sees the distinction primarily in terms of modality, but also in the
relative stability of the genre. As she puts it, Bakhtin:

distinguished between primary (simple) speech genres characterized as mostly oral
dialogue, face-to-face everyday conversation and secondary (complex) speech genres
characterized as having stable, thematic, compositional and stylistic features, such as
literary genres, business correspondence, political or social commentary and indeed
scientific writing (236).

This is exactly the nexus Bakhtin finds determinative of complex speech genres:
“Expressive intonation is a constitutive marker of the utterance. It does not exist in
the system of language as such, that is, outside the utterance…expression does not
inhere in the word itself. It originates at the point of contact between the word and
actual reality, under the conditions of that real situation articulated by the individual

23 She repeats this formula in two subsequent passages. In the first, she argues that “the
everyday event of buying and selling in local markets constitutes a primary genre…that has a
tightly circumscribed communicative purpose of exchange of commodities, rather than social
relations” (75-76). In the second, she reiterates: “routinized retail encounters in Chinese local
markets constitute a primary genre…that consists of a single kind of practice for achieving
the tightly circumscribed communicative purpose of negotiating commercial exchange, and
not interpersonal relationship” (99).

24 Citing Adam (1992), they identify three such “macropropositions”: (1) “problem (which is
sometimes implicit)”; (2) “explanation (mandatory)”; and (3) “conclusion (optional)".
We will see, below, how these ideas compare with Bakhtin’s own characterization of genre, but before moving on, it is worth examining what might be considered the “limitations” of his approach.

### 2.1.8 Perceived limitations of the Bakhtinian view

We have already observed that many scholars take up Norman Fairclough’s interpretation of Bakhtin and genre, but Kong (2001: 475) adds a comment representative of a rather different tendency: to see Bakhtin’s contribution to genre theory as inadequate. Kong notes: “Bakhtin’s view of the dialogic nature of discourse has been criticized by Fairclough (1995) as a ‘simple schematic view of genre’ which is unable to accommodate the high complexity of the phenomenon”. Byrnes (2007: 10) likewise reports Hasan’s (1996) view that Bakhtin’s notion of speech genres “is insufficiently developed inasmuch as it has no developed theory of social context”. Higgins (2004) makes a similar point, arguing that by adding “both a psychological and a sociological level” Swales (1990) extends genre theory in directions that are left implicit in Bakhtin. Likewise, in her review of Trinch (2004), Kramsch (2005: 471) argues that the author “moves beyond Bakhtin’s, and Briggs and Bauman’s approaches to speech genres” by describing the linguistic struggle between two narrative styles and demonstrating an institutional role in the use and development of language genres. And Garrett (2005) is dissatisfied with Bakhtin’s approach to the formal aspects of genre. Citing Bauman (1992), he explains: “As suggestive as they are…Bakhtin’s writings engender a certain amount of frustration…his perspective seems to demand a dimension of formal analysis, but he never provides it” (note 11, p. 355).

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25 Kong (2006: 774) repeats this claim almost word for word: “Fairclough (1995) argues that Bakhtin’s view is a ‘simple schematic view of the phenomenon’ that is unable to accommodate its high complexity”. In Fairclough’s view, he adds, intertextuality “is more than a simple echoing of previous voices”.

26 There are two parts to this critique: (1) that Bakhtin’s approach lacks a principle connecting the immediate social situation to the social milieu; and (2) that it fails to identify those elements of the social situation that affect speech. The author describes as an ideal the possibility of identifying the specific connection between elements of the situation and the form of speech (or at least the principles of such a connection).
In all of this we see something we will encounter again and again in our examination of the sociolinguistic discourse: an immense proliferation of intersecting and divergent claims about the “Bakhtinian approach” to language. Taken as a whole, this clamour of ideas provides no clear indication of what the Bakhtinian approach actually entails – and it is perhaps no coincidence that it supports virtually any position one might take with respect to genre – including the very ideas Bakhtin seeks to overcome. We turn therefore to the evidence available (in the translations of Bakhtin’s own discourse) to see how he would have us understand the notion of genre and how his view diverges from those suggested in the scholarly literature.

2.2 The Bakhtinian Discourse on Genre

Bakhtin offers his clearest and most sustained discussion of genre in an essay titled “The Problem of Speech Genres”. There, he begins with the observation that language is tied to human activity. He writes:

Language is realized in the form of individual concrete utterances…by participants in the various areas of human activity. These utterances reflect the specific conditions and goals of each such area not only through their content (thematic) and linguistic style, that is, the selection of the lexical, phraseological, and grammatical resources of the language, but above all through their compositional structure. All three of these aspects – thematic content, style, and compositional structure – are inseparably linked to the whole of the utterance and are equally determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication. Each separate utterance is individual…but each sphere in which language is used develops its own relatively stable types of these utterances. These we may call speech genres (1986: 60; original emphasis).

In some ways, the idea that language is tied to human activity is plainly true. But we must nevertheless ask why and how this connection is important to a distinctly Bakhtinian perspective – and the answer is not obvious. We must first understand the central role of the “utterance” in a Bakhtinian conception of language. As Bakhtin insists, language is realized in the form of individual concrete utterances. The key here is “concrete”. Utterances can be of any length, so it is not a question of complexity. And while Bakhtin spends time discussing the boundaries between utterances, this is a separate concern. The key point is that utterances are enacted. They are not theoretical constructions – abstractions, potentialities –
as words or sentences are; there can be no utterance without a speaker or an audience, without an intention or a situation of use.

The utterance is the reality of language. But how is it grounded? One of the central, and perhaps surprising, concerns in Bakhtin is to steer us away from the conclusion that the utterance is grounded in the individual will – that language, in the sense of a shared social resource, is epiphenomenal (or as Vološinov puts it, “the inert crust, the hardened lava of language creativity” [1973: 48]). Indeed, Bakhtin’s description of genre follows directly from the need to articulate an alternative not only to the abstractions offered by classic linguistic theory, but to the “individualistic subjectivism” that is often seen to oppose it. Both positions (the subjective and the objective) are alike in at least one crucial respect: they suppose that the individual has the power to produce speech (either from whole cloth or by assembling the abstract components of language) as required. Bakhtin finds this implausible. He argues: “If speech genres did not exist and we had not mastered them, if we had to originate them during the speech process and construct each utterance at will for the first time, speech communication would be almost impossible” (1986: 79). Thus, for Bakhtin, the utterance is grounded neither in the system of language nor in the individual will, but in the storehouse of genres acquired during the individual’s social development.

To put it another way, the present reality of the concrete utterance is grounded on the reality of the historical utterance: speech is grounded on other speech. That is to say: words “enter our speech from others’ individual utterances […] we hear those words only in particular individual utterances, we read them in particular individual works” (1986: 88). As a rule, we do not acquire language from the dictionary; we assimilate it from our experience, from our “continuous and constant interaction” with the speech of others (1986: 89). And this fact has enormous significance for Bakhtin’s ideas about genre. As Bakhtin observes, “The system of the language has necessary forms (i.e., language means) for reflecting expression, but the language itself and its semantic units – words and sentences – are by their very nature

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27 Elsewhere he writes: “We know our native language – its lexical composition and grammatical structure – not from dictionaries and grammars but from concrete utterances that we hear and that we ourselves reproduce in live speech communication with people around us” (1986: 78).
devoid of expression and neutral” (1986: 90). An utterance, on the other hand, always comes with a specific sense; its meaning “pertains to a particular actual reality and particular real conditions of speech communication” (1986: 86). It contains a certain expressiveness, an expressiveness, moreover, that cannot be abstracted, because it is entirely contingent on the “position” of the utterance in a given sphere of communication. As Bakhtin puts it:

Utterances are not indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another. These mutual reflections determine their character. Each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication (1986: 91).

Three crucial ideas can be seen to intersect here: (1) that utterances are expressive; (2) that this expressiveness is manifested dialogically; and (3) that this dialogism plays out within a given sphere of communication. Later we will see how a Bakhtinian notion of “style” comes into the mix.

We have already touched on the idea that utterances are expressive. Indeed, we may go so far as to say that “the expressive aspect is a constitutive feature of the utterance” (1986: 90).

With respect to dialogism, we may note that “Every utterance must be regarded primarily as a response to preceding utterances of the given sphere (we understand the word “response” here in the broadest sense). Each utterance refutes, affirms, supplements, and relies on the others, presupposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account” (1986: 91).

But how can anyone be aware of all that must be taken into account? How is it even possible for an utterance to address all the vectors that contribute to the discourse in which it participates? This line of thinking leads directly to one of the central themes in Bakhtin’s

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28 In other words, “the expressiveness of individual words is not inherent in the words themselves as units of language, nor does it issue directly from the meaning of these words” (1986: 89): “emotion, evaluation, and expression are foreign to the word of language and are born only in the process of its live usage in a concrete utterance” (1986: 87).

29 That is to say, the utterance always conveys, with varying degrees of force and significance, “the speaker’s subjective emotional evaluation of the referentially semantic content of his utterance” (1986: 84). In a nice turn of phrase, Bakhtin also calls this an emotional or expressive “colouring”, explaining that words “acquire their expressive coloring only in the utterance, and this coloring is independent of their meaning taken individually and abstractly” (1986: 87).

30 Indeed, one may “respond” not only to preceding utterances, but to anticipated future ones.
discourse on language: that no utterance – indeed, no language – is adequate to the task of taking all relevant facts into consideration. One participates not in the “world” – as an imagined unity – but in a variety of overlapping and intersecting “worlds”: spheres of activity (and thus spheres of communication) in which “the unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others’ individual utterances” (1986: 89). As Bakhtin puts it in *The Dialogic Imagination*, the living utterance “cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it – it does not approach the object from the sidelines” (1981: 276-277).

Here, we come, albeit indirectly, to the heart of the Bakhtinian discourse on genre. To say that speech is grounded on speech is not to say it is grounded on just *any* speech, but on the speech one encounters in a given sphere of communication; and it retains its expressiveness only within that sphere, as “a continuation and as a rejoinder” to the dialogue that develops there. Bakhtin writes:

> In each epoch, in each social circle, in each small world of family, friends, acquaintances, and comrades in which a human being grows and lives, there are always authoritative utterances that set the tone – artistic, scientific, and journalistic works on which one relies, to which one refers, which are cited, imitated, and followed. In each epoch, in all areas of life and activity, there are particular traditions that are expressed and retained in verbal vestments: in written works, in utterances, in sayings, and so forth. There are always some verbally expressed leading ideas of the “masters of thought” of a given epoch, some basic tasks, slogans, and so forth (1986: 88-89).

As we have already noted, the individual acquires language not from dictionaries and grammars but from the concrete utterances he encounters in speech with others. As Bakhtin observes, however, certain utterances make themselves felt more widely within a given sphere – utterances that “set the tone”, that are “cited, imitated, and followed”, utterances that are recognized as “authoritative”[^31] – not because their forms and meanings are prescribed, but because they are seen as relevant to the goals and conditions that define the sphere of activity.

[^31]: The notion of “authoritative discourse” is taken up in Ch. 8.
There is a risk of speaking in terms of goals and conditions that define a sphere of activity. Just as it would be a mistake, on a Bakhtinian view, to treat language in the abstract, it would be a mistake to understand a sphere of activity as something that follows from a particular definition, as from a contract or constitution. While there is, no doubt, a certain reflexiveness involved – whereby the aims of those who participate in a given activity include the maintenance or perpetuation of that social sphere (through the use of language as well as other means) – the important point is that the actual, concrete activity develops a recognizable profile: habits form, institutions develop, infrastructure is built, projects are devised – identifiable ways of being and doing not only come into existence but extend over time. And these ways of being and doing continue over time to suffer and impose identifiable and characteristic exigencies – identifiable not by some abstract feature but by the actual, concrete relations they stimulate, characteristic because they reflect the actual environment and resources associated with the given activity.\(^{32}\) As a consequence, we may say that certain spheres of activity give rise to certain typical forms of action.\(^{33}\) Among the “resources” associated with a given activity are speech genres, which are typical forms of utterance that develop in response to the exigencies that characterize the sphere of activity.

Bakhtin himself does not describe the process in terms of “exigence” – instead (as we see from the passage quoted above), he speaks of “specific conditions and goals” and “the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication”. But the notion of “exigence” (which I take from Bitzer 1968) helps us get to the heart of what Bakhtin means by conditions and goals, and leads us away from certain misunderstandings.\(^{34}\) Bitzer argues that “Rhetorical discourse is called into existence by situation; the situation which the rhetor perceives amounts to an invitation to create and present discourse” (9). In other words, speech is called into existence by concrete reality. Of course, this depends on what our

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\(^{32}\) And as these “spheres” are always concrete, their characteristics reflect the capacities of their actual membership, under the conditions in which their activities are actually performed.

\(^{33}\) This may seem to beg the question, as the phrase “spheres of activity” ultimately denotes certain “forms of action”. But, again, the point is that in a given sphere of activity (regardless of how such a determination is arrived at), certain typical forms of action will emerge (and may even come to be seen as constitutive of that activity).

\(^{34}\) While I take issue with Carlyn Miller’s approach to materialism (see note 35 below), I am indebted to her for bringing Bitzer’s term to my attention.
intentions might be – but to a certain extent our intentions are already implied when we speak of “spheres of activity”, and what remains are the obstacles (or the support) – that is, the specific conditions – under which these intentions are carried out. And this, I suggest, is what Bakhtin wants us to understand. In The Dialogic Imagination, he refers to “specific organisms called genres” (1981: 288), which gives a good sense of what the word exigency conveys here.\textsuperscript{35} Speaking of the novelistic genre in particular he writes:

However forcefully the real and the represented world resist fusion, however immutable the presence of that categorical boundary line between them, they are nevertheless indissolubly tied up with each other and find themselves in continual mutual interaction; uninterrupted exchange goes on between them, similar to the uninterrupted exchange of matter between living organisms and the environment that surrounds them. As long as the organism lives, it resists a fusion with the environment, but if it is torn out of its environment, it dies (1981: 253).

Later he adds: “The utterance so conceived is a considerably more complex and dynamic organism than it appears when construed simply as a thing that articulates the intention of the person uttering it, which is to see the utterance as a direct, single-voiced vehicle for expression” (1981: 354-355). We may thus imagine spheres of activity as sociolinguistic niches in which genres live and develop.

Again, when Bakhtin refers to genres as “typical forms of utterance” he is not describing abstract language forms, but, rather, characteristic ways of responding to the exigencies associated with a given sphere of communication. We may try to codify these responses – establishing what they have in common, how they differ, when and where they arise, etc. – but such efforts fail to get to the heart of generic speech, which is never neutral, never merely a form for the expression of its own singular object.\textsuperscript{36} On the one hand – and in contrast to strictly linguistic forms – speech genres are in fact expressive, like the utterances from which they are derived:

\textsuperscript{35} In a pattern we will see elsewhere, however (e.g., Holquist’s “transcoding” or Kristeva’s “intertextuality”), the notion of exigence has been conditioned in sociolinguistic circles by an utterance that sets a very different tone – Miller (1984) – in which the concreteness of its demand for a response is replaced by a socially negotiated abstraction. This is taken up again, below, on pp. 265ff.

\textsuperscript{36} We see this well in Bakhtin’s characterization of the “word”:
A speech genre is not a form of language, but a typical form of utterance; as such the genre also includes a certain typical expression that inheres in it. In the genre the word acquires a particular typical expression (1986: 87).

On the other hand, this expressiveness issues neither from the words of which a given genre is composed nor from the arrangement of those words into grammatical structures:

Genres correspond to typical situations of speech communication, typical themes, and, consequently, also to particular contacts between the meanings of words and actual concrete reality under certain typical circumstances. Hence also the possibility of typical expressions that seem to adhere to words (1986: 87).

It is not simply that genres are associated with certain typical themes and situations, but that the language is in actual contact with concrete reality. As with the utterances they typify, each genre occupies a definite position in a given sphere of communication, “Various viewpoints, world views, and trends cross, converge, and diverge in it” (1986: 93); moreover, each has “its own typical conception of the addressee” (1986: 95), whose active, responsive understanding is anticipated in the style of the genre (and – if the style is to be correctly understood by those looking at a genre from the outside – must always be taken into account). 37

The Bakhtinian discourse on style is taken up more fully in Chapter 4, but the important and subtle relationship between style and genre is worth touching on here. Bakhtin writes: “Any

Neutral dictionary meanings of the words of a language ensure their common features and guarantee that all speakers of a given language will understand one another, but the use of words in live speech communication is always individual and contextual in nature. Therefore, one can say that any word exists for a speaker in three aspects: as a neutral word of a language, belonging to nobody [i.e., as a “code” – MV]; as an other’s word, which belongs to another person and is filled with echoes of the other’s utterance; and, finally, as my word, for, since I am dealing with it in a particular situation, with a particular speech plan, it is already imbued with my expression (1986: 88).

37 Bakhtin writes:

Familiar and intimate genres and styles…reveal extremely clearly the dependence of style on a certain sense and understanding of the addressee (the addressee of the utterance) on the part of the speaker, and on the addressee’s actively responsive understanding that is anticipated by the speaker. These styles reveal especially clearly the narrowness and incorrectness of traditional stylistics, which tries to understand and define style solely from the standpoint of the semantic and thematic content of speech and the speaker’s expressive attitude toward this content (1986: 97).
style is inseparably linked to the utterance and to typical forms of utterances, that is, speech genres” (1986: 63). In short: “Where there is style there is genre” (1986: 66). Indeed, Bakhtin insists: “A deeper and broader study of the latter is absolutely imperative for a productive study of any stylistic problem” (1986: 63). This deep connection between style and genre hints at the complexities of the Bakhtinian notion. But the general principles are straightforward, and follow directly from the Bakhtin’s characterization of speech as a sort of living thing, embedded in its social environment. On the one hand, we find that speech embodies a certain history, which persists into the present. As Bakhtin explains:

However monological the utterance may be (for example, a scientific or philosophical treatise), however much it may concentrate on its own object, it cannot but be, in some measure, a response to what has already been said about the given topic, on the given issue, even though this responsiveness may not have assumed a clear-cut external expression. It will be manifested in the overtones of the style, in the finest nuances of the composition. The utterance is filled with dialogic overtones, and they must be taken into account in order to understand fully the style of the utterance (1986: 92).

The utterance always takes account of the past, responding to what has come before. But it also takes account of the future, responding pre-emptively to the listener’s anticipated reception. As Bakhtin puts it: “Both the composition and, particularly the style of the utterance depend on those to whom the utterance is addressed, how the speaker (or writer) senses and imagines his addressees, and the force of their effect on the utterance” (1986: 95). He explains:

When speaking I always take into account the apperceptive background of the addressee’s perception of my speech: the extent to which he is familiar with the situation, whether he has special knowledge of the given cultural area of communication, his views and convictions, his prejudices (from my viewpoint), his sympathies and antipathies – because all this will determine his active responsive understanding of my utterance. These considerations also determine my choice of a genre for my utterance, my choice of compositional devices, and, finally, my choice of language vehicles, that is, the style of my utterance (1986: 95-96).

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38 Later he adds: “Such objectively neutral styles select language vehicles not only from the standpoint of their adequacy to the subject matter of speech, but also from the standpoint of the presumed apperceptive background of the addressee” (1986: 98).

39 As Bakhtin notes in an earlier passage: “the speaker’s very selection of a particular grammatical form is a stylistic act” (66). Later he adds:

The speaker’s speech will is manifested primarily in the choice of a particular speech genre. This choice is determined by the specific nature of the given sphere of speech
Style, we might say, is the visible manifestation of an individual (in the case of an utterance) or typical (generic) assessment of the speech situation, comprising not just the chosen means of conveying the speaker’s semantic and expressive intention (as though the means appropriate to such a task were available irrespective of the actual conditions of a given communication), but the means determined to be most suitable under the circumstances.

Finally, it is important to touch on the distinction between primary (simple) and secondary (complex) genres, the difference between which Bakhtin calls “very great and fundamental” (1986: 62). We should note, first of all, that this difference is not a functional one (1986: 61-62), for genres, both primary and secondary, are equally realized in the form of a single unified utterance. As Bakhtin explains:

Secondary (complex) speech genres – novels, dramas, all kinds of scientific research, major genres of commentary, and so forth – arise in more complex and comparatively highly developed and organized cultural communication (primarily written) that is artistic, scientific, sociopolitical, and so on. During the process of their formation, they absorb and digest various primary (simple) genres that have taken form in unmediated speech communication. These primary genres are altered and assume a special character when they enter into complex ones. They lose their immediate relation to actual reality and to the real utterances of others. For example, rejoinders of everyday dialogue or letters found in a novel retain their form and their everyday significance only on the plane of the novel as a whole, that is, as a literary-artistic event and not as everyday life. The novel as a whole is an utterance just as rejoinders in everyday dialogue or private letters are…but unlike these, the novel is a secondary (complex) utterance (1986: 62).

As with so many other aspects of Bakhtin’s description of language, the role of concrete reality is decisive. Primary genres are those that remain in “unmediated” contact with the communication, the personal composition of its participants, and so on. And when the speaker’s speech plan with all its individuality and subjectivity is applied and adapted to a chosen genre, it is shaped and developed within a certain generic form (1986: 78).

The importance of this distinction was perhaps a late discovery for Bakhtin, for it is not articulated in his early work. The closest he comes in The Dialogic Imagination is the following:

40 The importance of this distinction was perhaps a late discovery for Bakhtin, for it is not articulated in his early work. The closest he comes in The Dialogic Imagination is the following:

So great is the role played by these genres that are incorporated into novels that it might seem as if the novel is denied any primary means for verbally appropriating reality, that it has no approach of its own, and therefore requires the help of other genres to re-process reality; the novel itself has the appearance of being merely a secondary syncretic unification of other seemingly primary verbal genres. (1981: 321).
actual speech situation. The notion of mediated discourse is examined more fully when the discussion turns to “double-voicing” in Chapter 5, but we can understand it here in the contrast between the language of poetry and the language of the (prose) novel. Bakhtin writes:

In poetic genres, artistic consciousness – understood as a unity of all the author’s semantic and expressive intentions – fully realizes itself within its own language; in them alone is such consciousness fully immanent, expressing itself in it directly and without mediation, without conditions and without distance. The language of the poet is his language, he is utterly immersed in it, inseparable from it, he makes use of each form, each word, each expression according to its unmediated power to assign meaning (as it were, “without quotation marks”), that is, as a pure and direct expression of his own intention. No matter what “agonies of the word” the poet endured in the process of creation, in the finished work language is an obedient organ, fully adequate to the author’s intention (1981: 285-286).

The expression, “without quotation marks”, is particularly apt, for unmediated discourse is discourse in one’s own language, using one’s own words. Mediated discourse, on the other hand, makes use of the words of another – and this Bakhtin sees as the defining characteristic of the novel, the prototypical complex genre. 41 He writes: “In the atmosphere of the novel, the direct and unmediated intention of a word presents itself as something impermissably naive” (1981: 279). 42 As Bakhtin explains, the novel (as a whole) is an utterance “just as rejoinders in everyday dialogue or private letters are” 43 – but in the novel the author’s expressive intention is conveyed through the juxtaposition of the incorporated languages and genres.

This latter point is crucial. The incorporated genres are not simply added together or mixed (however artfully). Bakhtin says they are “absorbed” and “digested”, but even this can be misleading. Better, perhaps, is a phrase he uses later in his essay on genres. He writes:

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41 Bakhtin often seems to use the words direct” and “unmediated” interchangeably (and often as a single phrase), but it is worth keeping the two separate, for it is possible to imagine a discourse that is both direct and mediated (which is arguably the way many commentators have characterized “stylization”). This is examined more fully in Ch. 5.

42 Indeed, calls it impossible: “for naïveté itself, under authentic novelistic conditions, takes on the nature of an internal polemic and is consequently dialogized” (1981: 279).

43 Later in the text, Bakhtin explains that even “the most complex and ultra-composite work of a secondary genre as a whole (viewed as a whole) is a single integrated real utterance that has a real author and real addressees whom this author perceives and imagines” (1986: 99).
quite frequently within the boundaries of his own utterance the speaker (or writer) raises questions, answers them himself, raises objections, and so on. But these phenomena are nothing other than a conventional playing out of speech communication and primary speech genres. This playing out is typical of rhetorical genres (in the broad sense, which would include certain kinds of scientific popularization), but other secondary genres (artistic and scholarly) also use various forms such as this to introduce primary speech genres and relations among them into the construction of the utterance (and here they are altered to a greater or lesser degree, for the speaking subject does not really change. Such is the nature of secondary genres (1986: 72-73; my emphasis).

He repeats this idea in a subsequent passage:

The vast majority of literary genres are secondary, complex genres composed of various transformed primary genres.... As a rule, these secondary genres of complex cultural communication play out various forms of primary speech communication (1986: 98; original emphasis).

Secondary genres are “complex” because each utterance of that type comprises an active combination of primary genres. In a sense, the complex genre acts as a field in which the incorporated genres can interact. Hence the notion of “playing out”. On the other hand, to the extent that they have been subordinated to the conditions of the secondary genre – conditions that reflect a single, unified perspective (for the secondary genre is ultimately “a single integrated real utterance that has a real author and real addressees whom this author perceives and imagines”) – the incorporated genres no longer remain in genuine contact with the actual speech situation from which they developed as genres. They play out their roles, but these roles (and the exigencies in which they are played out) are grounded in the context of authorial speech – in a field of relations orchestrated by the author. In artistic prose, these

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44 We may see this as an analogue of the relations among languages. As Bakhtin (1986) explains: “The interrelations between primary and secondary genres and the process of the historical formation of the latter shed light on the nature of the utterance (and above all on the complex problem of the interrelations among language, ideology, and world view)” (62; my emphasis).

45 This phrase also makes a number of appearances in Bakhtin (1981). This is taken up more fully in Section 2.3, below.

46 Indeed, we can imagine, in the case of fictional prose, the incorporation of genres that never had their own real, independent existence in the first place. Take, for instance, a fanciful activity like “human hunting” (The Most Dangerous Game, The Running Man, The Hunger Games, etc.) and the forms of communication that might typically develop around it.
roles play out dialogically, as each influences and illuminates those surrounding it; in poetry and other single-voiced discourses, they play out monologically, each not only subordinated to the field of a single voice, a single-accent system, but playing out its role as though completely alone within its own discourse.

2.3 Observations on Genre in the Literature

It is clear from even this brief discussion that the notion of genre we discover in the Bakhtinian texts has little in common with what people usually take the word to mean. And even where it overlaps in some respects with notions we might already have, it acquires a significance that cannot be grasped without reference to the larger Bakhtinian project. It is thus neither obvious nor self-evident. On the contrary, Bakhtin seems to take aim at the very sort of understanding that characterizes popular notions of genre (i.e., as abstract conceptual categories). As a result, to speak of genre (or to allow it to be conceived) in such terms (as we see in much of the literature) is to go entirely against the grain of what Bakhtin appears to be developing in his work.

In certain respects, the reader is better served by efforts that tie the notion of genre to Bakhtin more explicitly, forestalling the possibility of it being interpreted in the naïve sense. But such efforts are of dubious value when the nature of the relationship and the meanings of the concepts brought into the discussion are themselves treated as unproblematic. Passing references, for instance, to “primary” or “complex” genres, to “intertextuality” or

47 In this sense, complex artistic genres are the embodiment of heteroglossia (which is explored more fully in Ch. 6). Indeed, Bakhtin calls the incorporation of genres “one of the most basic and fundamental forms for incorporating and organizing heteroglossia in the novel” (1981: 320). Bakhtin even identifies the incorporated genres themselves as double-voiced discourse. He writes:

Double-voiced discourse is always internally dialogized. Examples of this would be comic, ironic or parodic discourse, the refracting discourse of a narrator, refracting discourse in the language of a character and finally the discourse of a whole incorporated genre – all these discourses are double-voiced and internally dialogized. A potential dialogue is embedded in them, one as yet unfolded, a concentrated dialogue of two voices, two world views, two languages (1981: 324-325; my emphasis).

In all of this, we see the notion of “complex” genres converging with Bakhtin’s notion of “hybridization” (which is more explored more fully in Ch. 3).
“dialogism”, to “hybridization”, to “authoritative discourse”, etc. – or to Bakhtinian theory in general – are of little use to the reader who is not already familiar with the underlying ideas. And rather than foregrounding a distinctly Bakhtin notion of genre, they may simply obscure the significance of those other concepts by bringing them into contact with naïve assumptions about the meaning of genre. This, of course, would be of little concern were such ideas in fact familiar to the reader. But where the notion of genre and related concepts are more fully unpackaged in the literature, the claims often seem to diverge in significant ways, both from one article to another, and from the position Bakhtin presents in his own writings. And this suggests a level of confusion sufficient to cast doubt on the idea that Bakhtinian concepts can be cited without explanation.

Part of the confusion appears to stem from the notion that the underlying terminology is portable – that Bakhtin may have spoken about genre (style, hybridity, etc.) in pursuit of his own claims about language but the ideas themselves are common currency. Such a possibility is given force by the large number of texts that sketch out a composite picture of genre by citing Bakhtin or Bakhtinian claims without qualification, alongside work that pulls in very different directions – as though there were no inherent tensions or conflicts among the various interpretations. Some, indeed, take the work of non-Bakhtinian genre theorists to be indicative of Bakhtin’s own position. Thus, for instance, we see a tendency to interpret Bakhtin’s approach to genre as a taxonomic endeavour – an interpretation that has deep roots in the popular conception of genre (and even in certain academic traditions), but which could not be further from anything Bakhtin says about language.

An early passage in Bakhtin’s essay on speech genres might seem to cloud the issue. Here, he argues that utterances (and by extension genres) reflect the conditions and goals of social activities through “the selection of the lexical, phraseological, and grammatical resources of the language” and through “their compositional structure” (1986: 60). He seems to be suggesting that these structures or resources are adequate to the constitution of a given genre and thus provide a basis for classifying and categorizing them. But as he explains in a later passage:

The utterance is what radiates its expression (rather, our expression) to the word we have selected, which is to say, invests the word with the expression of the whole. And
we select the word because of its meaning, which is not in itself expressive but which can accommodate or not accommodate our expressive goals in combination with other words, that is, in combination with the whole of the utterance. The neutral meaning of the word applied to a particular actual reality under particular real conditions of speech communication creates a spark of expression (1986: 86).  

Thus, the features of a genre – the words or structures that go into its composition – are in no way indicative of its actual expressiveness (and consequently say little, if anything, about the nature of the genre). On the contrary, such features acquire their significance only as a result of their incorporation into the utterance. Günthner’s (2011) ostensibly Bakhtinian analysis of interactions among male youth in Germany provides a helpful case in point. Günthner looks at the curious genre of “insulting remarks”, in which profanities and other forms of verbal abuse are employed by members of certain social groups – not as an expression of hostility but as “a conventionalized in-group way of addressing co-participants” (454), and thus, ultimately, of friendship and solidarity. In short, we see that the genre is not constituted by its “lexical, phraseological, and grammatical resources”, but by their selection for a particular (type of) utterance (and thus for a particular intention, with a particular expressiveness, in a particular situation, among a particular group of language users).

The notion that genres can be understood or classified according to their formal features is not so far from another claim that appears frequently in the literature: that genres are defined or characterized according to their social purpose. In a sense, the “social purpose” becomes a substitute for “significance”: instead of saying that a given type of utterance means

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48 He adds: “We repeat, only the contact between the language meaning and the concrete reality that takes place in the utterance can create the spark of expression. It exists neither in the system of language nor in the objective reality surrounding us” (1986: 87).
49 Unfortunately, while Günthner observes that such a use of language represents “a breach of the established norms” (451), she chooses not to pursue the notion that those ostensibly “abusive” words are not, in fact, abusive in the situations she examines, that the utterances have imparted an expressiveness to the constituent terms that could hardly be anticipated on the basis of their dictionary meanings. She suggests, rather, that the words derive their meanings from a private code, a “we-code” (456). The failure to offer a more Bakhtinian interpretation is not simply a missed opportunity; her claim that certain individuals have “the ‘symbolic power’ to determine the proper way of handling this genre” (454) suggests a deeper misunderstanding of the Bakhtinian notion of genre.
50 Otherwise they would merge with genuine insults, which share neither the same intention, expression, situation nor language user.
something, we can say it *does* something, something already established, something determined within the community. The underlying logic, however, is the same: when *this* form contributes to *this* social function, it can be classified as *this* genre. And even if we arrive at our determination empirically, we nevertheless see specific attributes (formal and functional) as constitutive of the genre. For Bakhtin, however, genres are the typical forms of utterances. So what we are calling the *social* purpose must really be the *typical* speech plan or intention of the utterance. But the intention of the utterance – even the typical intention of a typical utterance – is always individual, not social. That is to say, it is typical of the *individuals* who participate in a given sphere of activity.

The difference between a typical intention and a social purpose is crucial. As a dimension of speech, a *social* purpose can only be an abstraction, a myth. Vološinov makes this very point in his discussion of “social psychology”, which he says is “in its actual, material existence, *verbal interaction*”: “Removed from this actual process of verbal communication and interaction…social psychology would assume the guise of a metaphysical or mythic concept – the ‘collective soul’ or ‘collective inner psyche,’ the ‘spirit of the people,’ etc.” In fact, he says, social psychology “is not located anywhere within (in the ‘souls’ of communicating subjects) but entirely and completely without – in the word, the gesture, the act” (1973: 19). What we really find in a given sphere of activity are typical problems, that is, *real* exigencies amenable to the sort of solutions that proved effective in the past, solutions that continue to be relevant precisely to the extent that the sphere of activity maintains its profile (its membership, its infrastructure, its organization, etc.) – and in this sense, I think, the problem of genre is better understood in terms of persistence rather than recurrence. This is why genres are associated with spheres of activity – not because a given sphere has developed its own linguistic code (its own significances), but because it provides the *continuity* that makes the past relevant to the present – because it makes an *actual utterance* typical and a *typical utterance* relevant to the *actual* problems faced by actual speakers.

Grasping this distinction also takes us a long way toward understanding why it might be wrongheaded to think of genre as a constraint on speech. Bakhtin does not see genre as the prescribed means of accomplishing a social function. It does not *determine* how we are to
speak. Rather, it represents the means by which a previous intention was realized and which, all things being equal, might serve us once again in the present. A genre is therefore a resource that saves us the work of devising a novel solution to a common exigence. Bakhtin leaves no doubt that this is how he understands the role of genres, for he insists that without them, “if we had to originate them during the speech process and construct each utterance at will for the first time, speech communication would be almost impossible” (1986: 79).

Understanding how a given sphere of activity contributes to the development of a genre also helps us to understand the significance of “hybridization”. This is explored more fully in Chapter 3, where it is discussed in relation to “dialogism” and “double-voicing”. It is helpful, however, to see how the notion of hybridity has become associated with genre – something that appears almost peripheral in Bakhtin’s own writing. It should be emphasized again that hybridity is not a matter of “mixing” in the mechanical sense (though some texts seem to take this view). Rather, it is a question of bringing different voices (different utterances or styles) together into a single utterance where they can collide dialogically. As Bakhtin puts it: “the important activity is not only (in fact not so much) the mixing of linguistic forms – the markers of two languages and styles – as it is the collision between differing points of views on the world that are embedded in these forms” (1981: 360).

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51 Genre is never expressed in terms of incorporated discourses (which, after all, are not essentially related to genres), but even the term “hybrid genre” is absent, though we do find some oblique references. For instance, Bakhtin (1981: 268) alludes to Vinogradov’s recognition of the novel as a “hybrid formation”. He also notes that “in concrete examples of poetic works… numerous hybrids of various generic types exist” (1981: 287, note 12). It goes without saying that the genre to which he devotes the most attention – the novel – is a hybrid, by definition, and he thus speaks frequently of the “novelistic hybrid”. But the notion of hybridity is generally reserved for what Bakhtin calls “hybrid constructions”, that is, utterances in which different voices are brought into dialogic relation (and this is what makes the novel a hybrid). In other words, with respect to hybridity it is not the generic quality of the utterance that matters most to Bakhtin, but rather the presence within it of divergent linguistic centres.

52 In other words, we are not concerned here with what Bakhtin calls “unconscious hybrids”, which he says are “similar to double-language hybrids but they are, of course, single-voiced. Semi-organic, semi-intentional hybridization is characteristic of a system of literary language” (1981: 359, note 34). Indeed the difference between conscious and unconscious hybridity is the difference between a genuine collision and “an opaque mechanistic mixture of languages (more precisely, a mixture of the brute elements of language)” (1981: 366).
Hybridization is thus central to certain “complex” genres (of which the novel is only the most important example). We should therefore expect that a discourse on “hybrid genres” would make the connection with what Bakhtin calls a “very great and fundamental” issue in language. But this is not the case. As we have seen, even when the discourse turns to the distinction between primary and secondary genres, there is little acknowledgement that the complex (secondary) forms are any more than a merging or blending of the primary ones. And this is typical of the sociolinguistic discourse on genre, in which hybridization tends to be seen as the production of a new identity – e.g., “the genre of a television ‘chat show’ – which itself is a combination of genres of everyday conversation and entertainment” (as Norman Fairclough construes it)\(^\text{53}\).

The discourse on hybrid genres takes “intertextuality” or “interdiscursivity” as a central notion; but rather than seeing the hybrid as a sort of field in which incorporated genres are brought into contact (but where they nevertheless retain their form as genres), it sees the hybrid as a product, a form defined by the implicit significance of its heterogeneous parts. In this sense, the “hybrid” comes to be seen as a genre in which the usual boundaries are extended to include more distant (and thus heterogeneous) elements and relations – the “news genre”, for instance, that becomes “infotainment”. But this, ultimately, is not enough to distinguish it from even a primary genre, with which such notions of “intertextuality” and “interdiscursivity” are entirely compatible. Intertextuality, in other words, is the defining characteristic neither of a “complex genre” nor a “hybrid” (as Bakhtin uses the word), and the discourse on genre brings us no closer to an understanding of either notion. Indeed, it leads to the suggestion that Bakhtin’s contribution needs to be supplemented with a more sophisticated understanding of sociolinguistic relations.

But what the discourse on genre really demonstrates is that the literature itself needs to be supplemented with a more sophisticated understanding of Bakhtin. And this takes us back to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: how does an idea as familiar (and

\(^\text{53}\) In other words, the hybrid is construed as a “synthesis” (or “dialectic”) of the incorporated elements rather than a “dialogue” in which they remain independently active. This is addressed more fully in Ch. 3.
seemingly banal) as “genre” help us overcome “simplistic notions about speech life”? The answer is that it situates discourse – in its form and its content – in real, historical utterances taken up by real participants in real spheres of activity. Genre allows us to identify concrete *speech* (as opposed to abstract words or sentences) with real communities, with particular meanings or significances derived from the exigencies faced by those participants in those places and times. It is not, in other words, a timeless abstraction, produced by theorists as a means of organizing the chaos of individual speech. It is not a template on which individual speakers attempt to model their discourse. Nor is it a constraint in the sense that speakers might prefer to organize their utterances differently (but are held back by normative pressures).  

In all of this, Bakhtin seems interested in moving us away from commonly held notions of language and speech communication. And here we find an answer to our first paradox, that Bakhtin seeks to move us away from these commonly held notions by employing a term like “genre”, which carries with it such a long and familiar history of communicating precisely the ideas he argues against. If a speaker’s intentions can be discerned neither in the abstract meanings of language nor in the particular meanings employed in other communities and other discourses then it is a mistake to interpret Bakhtin in their light (as though his meanings depended on their authority). If every utterance is “a link in the chain of speech communication” we must orient ourselves to that chain; we must hear those utterances to know his intentions. In short, we must *listen* to Bakhtin.

This should seem obvious: what could be more central to the sociolinguistic project than an orientation to actual speech? But our look at the scholarly literature shows that this has not been the case with the Bakhtinian discourse on genre. Instead, we are directed to other discourses, to other spheres of activity, and the significances generated in those chains of communication; and, in this way, one of the most common notions about speech life is

\[54\] In this sense, it is a reality to which speakers are entirely oblivious. As Vološinov puts it:

The speaker’s subjective consciousness does not in the least operate with language as a system of normatively identical forms. That system is merely an abstraction arrived with a good deal of trouble and with a definite cognitive and practical focus of attention. The system of language is the product of deliberation on language, and deliberation of a kind by no means carried out for the immediate purposes of speaking (1973: 67).
perpetuated: that all these discourses are being spoken in the same (“unitary”) language, that we therefore already know what “genre” means. And this is true even when a specifically “Bakhtinian” view is offered – for instance, when genre is described as “intrinsically intertextual”, or as a “relatively stable type” of utterance – or when such a view is combined with claims made by other speakers in other discourses – to say, for instance, that it is a “staged, goal-oriented, social process” – as though Bakhtin’s contribution could be seen in the combination of meanings already familiar to the reader. Indeed, what we find in the scholarly discourse on genre is that this latter conviction – that individual significance is to be found in the way a speaker combines familiar forms and meanings – is often represented as Bakhtin’s signature contribution to genre theory. We explore this observation and its implications in Chapter 3.
3. HYBRIDIZATION

Our look at the scholarly discourse on genre (in Ch. 2) raised the vexing question of hybridity. Like genre, the notion of a hybrid is a familiar one to most speakers – suggesting a sort of (mechanical, biological, linguistic…) composite of recognizably different or incongruous elements – and like genre, it is used in Bakhtin with a rather different sense. We discovered, above, that for Bakhtin, genres are not merely forms of speech but typical forms, derived from actual speech, generated in actual spheres of activity (and therefore spheres of communication), with real, concrete exigencies and histories. To paraphrase one of Bakhtin’s clearest pronouncements on intentional hybridization, we might say that the important point is not only (in fact not so much) the linguistic forms that are produced in this social dialogue – the markers of genre and style – as it is the points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms.\(^1\) In this we can see (albeit indirectly) the importance of hybridization to sociolinguistics: it provides access to meanings produced at the intersection of different social spheres, points of view that are not expressed by any given language, genre, style, etc. on its own. But here, in the Bakhtinian discourse on discourse, we also discover something perhaps unexpected: the idea that the more one succeeds at incorporating another’s language (genre, style, etc.) into one’s own, the further one moves away from the production of a linguistic hybrid. To understand why this must be the case, we must understand what Bakhtin has to say about intentional hybrids. We thus turn once again to the scholarly literature to see how Bakhtin has been understood, and how this understanding has influenced language studies.

3.1 The Scholarly Discourse on Hybridization

One of the more common themes we discover in the discourse on genre (see Chapter 1) is the notion of generic hybrids – the idea that different genres can become mixed “as discourses from one social domain infuse others” (Weninger, 2009: 87). The hybrid genre is thus understood as the locus of intertextual (or “interdiscursive”) relations. But hybridity is not

\(^1\) Bakhtin writes: “the important activity is not only (in fact not so much) the mixing of linguistic forms – the markers of two languages and styles – as it is the collision between differing points of views on the world that are embedded in these forms” (1981: 360).

### 3.1.1 Hybridity and heteroglossia

Hybridity is frequently understood in terms of heteroglossia.\(^4\) Cook, Pieri & Robbins (2004: 434-435), for instance, suggest that hybridization entails heteroglossia. Maybin (2001: 61) explains that “different social languages and genres ‘cohabit’, supplementing and contradicting each other, and intersecting or becoming hybridized in various ways” and that “Bakhtin uses the term heteroglossia to refer to this dynamic multiplicity of voices, genres and social languages”. Nikolarea (2007: 135) likewise argues that hybridization is “closely linked” to heteroglossia, with the former referring to the “mixing of (socio-ideological) ‘languages’ within ‘the limits of a single utterance’” and the latter to the “different styles or genres within a language”. Baquedano-López (2004: 258) describes hybridity as heteroglossia “made visible in the exchanges and contact among people of diverse backgrounds”. She adds: “This hybridity in language, including the mix of codes and registers, does not only exist within and across communities, it is also inherent in the speech choices of a single individual”. Bhatt (2008) takes the same position.\(^5\) Calling linguistic hybridity the “third space” among the languages of heteroglossia, he argues:


\(^4\) The question of heteroglossia is taken up more fully in Ch. 6.

\(^5\) Indeed, Both Bhatt (2008) and Baquedano-López (2004) draw on Bhabha’s (1994) notion of a “third space”. Citing an example from a Spanish emersion class, Baquedano-López explains:

the potential for the third space emerges when the teacher acknowledges Jorge’s comments. The teacher’s response validates Jorge’s knowledge, even though he used English in the context of a Spanish lesson. Moreover, the teacher’s translation… potentially supplies for the class (and Jorge) the missing lexical reference, in this way expanding their linguistic repertoire. […] During the course of the six-week lesson, there were several instances of the Third Space, partly due to the already hybrid nature of the activity (253-254).
Creolization and code-switching are visible markers of this transformation, the creative adaptation to communicate a kind of multiplicity that is highly contextual, a new habitus representing for its speakers a new, slightly altered representation of social order. Code-switching under this view is the mechanism used to annihilate difference in a synthesis of antithetical forms...and its function is to serve as a linguistic diacritic of a new, class-based cultural identity (182).

These ideas of hybridization as “creolization” and “code-switching” correspond very well with what we saw described earlier as blended genres (like “confrontainment”) and incorporated genres (used “intertextually” or “interdiscursively”). Indeed, Garrett (2005) examines “processes commonly characterized as creolization, hybridization, and syncretism” specifically in terms of genre; and, like Bhatt, sees in them “a means by which speakers open up an alternative social space” where they “collaboratively ‘negate the alienating constraints of the historically given social order…and affirm the possibilities of a different social order’” (353; citing Limón, 1996: 193). “Heteroglossia” thus seems to be understood as a sort of “pool” from which the various components are drawn.

### 3.1.2 Hybridity as the shifting and mixing of styles

Like those above, Maynard (2007) sees hybridity in connection with heteroglossia, but as an individual matter of mixing styles. She writes:

> Regarding styles, Bakhtin (1981) comments on the heteroglossia observed when different styles (dialects) are introduced into novelistic discourse. For Bakhtin, discourse is rife with changing and shifting dialects [...] The kind of discourse created in the way described above is what Bakhtin calls “hybrid construction” (1981: 304).

The idea seems to be that a speaker is able to switch between speech styles in order to index different identities: “A simple shift in style ushers in a different discourse world where different selves interact. Styles-in-transit necessitate selves-in-transit. In this way, a conversation takes place as a case of a complex ‘hybrid construction’” (112). Macaulay

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The idea is that hybridity represents a synthesis in which different codes are brought together in a single discourse: “local knowledge, alternative language registers, non-verbal interpretations, and formal and informal registers contribute to meaning-making” (253).

6 The question of style and stylization is taken up more fully in Ch. 4.
(2005: 116) has a similar idea. He finds hybrid constructions in the “mixture of economy and elaborated forms”, that is, in stylistically incongruous lexical choices made (for instance) with the intention of projecting a more sophisticated identity. Here, in the notion of style as “the linguistic representation of our identities”, we see the connection between hybridity as the shifting of dialects, and hybridity in terms of “borrowing the words of others” – one presents a “hybridized juxtaposition of styles and identities”, as Campbell & Roberts (2007) put it. Piller (2002) seems to take this view. Like Campbell & Roberts (2007: 266), who claim that the construction of hybrid identities can be seen “as a mark of inconsistency, untrustworthiness and non-belonging”, Piller argues that “People who actually live hybridity and simultaneous multiple identities may very well be perceived as misfits” (12). But as Carter (2004: 173) explains, the mixing of voices in the production a hybrid discourse can be a creative and even socially productive act, “for the purpose of criticism, for

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7 Evans Davies (2007) review of Macaulay’s (2005) offers a good summary of Macaulay’s effort: Using an example of “a working-class speaker whose complex mixture of registers presents a challenge to current models of stylistic variation”…M discusses Labov’s “attention to speech,” Bell’s “audience design,” and Finegan & Biber’s “register variation.” …and finds all of them inadequate, preferring Bakhtin’s notion of “hybrid construction” (1981: 304-5) as a more useful analytical tool. M draws on Coupland’s (2001[a: 126]) critique of the unidimensional nature of current quantitative sociolinguistic models of style, and concludes that his narrator’s style is “a way of presenting himself to me” (429).

8 This is Finegan & Biber’s distinction. As Macaulay explains: A clear example is the contrast between the elaborated form “took one of his bilious bouts” and the more economical “be sick”. Other obvious examples of elaborated forms are “prior to” rather than “before” and “amiable” rather than “friendly”.

9 The author turns to Bell (1999: 524) to explain this notion: We need a framework which acknowledges that much of our interpersonal linguistic behaviour displays a pattern which can be systematized, and that we are also continually making creative, dynamic choices on the linguistic representation of our identities. These are to be seen as two co-existent but distinct dimensions of style, which operate simultaneously in all speech events, just as structure and agency are present in all social actions (97).

10 Piller speaks of hybrid languages, genres and identities, but the idea is that bilingual speakers who mix different languages manifest hybrid identities. In a bit of word play, Cromdal’s (2004) review of Pillar’s book (which is subtitled The Discursive Construction of Hybridity) suggests that the broad theoretical grounding of her work means “the notion of hybridity may also apply to the book itself” (470). In other words, the mixing of different theories results in a hybrid text.
the kind of banter and verbal duelling which reinforces group values and affiliations, or simply in order to express identities and values which are separate from the dominant discourses and which could not be altogether articulated by a single voice”. She offers the example of two girls chatting on the internet:

Viki: it’s snowing quite strong outside…be careful
Sue: I will, thx
Viki: wei wei…lei dim ar?
Sue: ok, la, juz got bk from Amsterdam loh, how r u?
Viki: ok la…I have 9 tmrw
Sue: haha, I have 2-4…sooooooo happy
Viki: che…anyway…have your rash gone?
Sue: yes, but I have scar oh…ho ugly ar!
Viki: icic…ng gan yiu la…still a pretty girl, haha!!

Carter points in particular to “the creative mixing of email/texting shorthand (thx =thanks), (tmrow=tomorrow), (9, 2-4=classes at 9 a.m. and 2-4 p.m.), (icic =I see, I see)” and the “creative play with voice and vocalisation (sooooooooooo, haha) and the constant inserting of interactive discourse markers from Cantonese” (175). On her view, the strongest interpretation of such mixing would:

recognise the clear need the two girls have to appropriate a language which is not simply English but their own English and, for them, to develop a repertoire of mixed codes which enable them to give expression to their feelings of friendship, intimacy and involvement with each other’s feelings and attitudes – a discourse which would not be to the same degree available to them through the medium of standard English. Here there is no overt expression of social critique as in the crossings into Creole made by many of the adolescent speakers captured by Rampton. But there is none the less an implicit recognition that standard English has no clear value for them for the purposes of daily intimate email exchange and accordingly new modes of speaking/writing are invented and developed. Both participants here creatively develop a discourse which is neither English nor Cantonese but is one which expresses for both a dual identity and a dual linguistic affinity (176-177).

In all of this, hybridity is understood as a means of bringing diverse languages or styles to a given discourse for the expression of meanings, which they are better suited to convey.

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11 Cantonese translations: wei wei…lei dim ar – hi, how are you?; ng gan yiu la – it doesn’t matter; ar, che, loh and la are Cantonese discourse markers.
Again, it is largely the same understanding that informs the notion of hybrid genres – that is, the bringing together of different genres for the expression of meanings not easily conveyed by any one genre on its own.

### 3.1.3 Hybridity as dialogue

A number of scholars characterize hybridity not simply as a synthesis or dialectic, but as a dialogical phenomenon. House (2003: 573), for instance, argues that Bakhtin “links hybridity to narrative construction and dialogicity, and regards it as a procedure to create multiphone texts made up of multiple voices showing ‘inner dialogicity’ despite being overtly realized in one language”. Maynard (2007: 104) likewise claims that “By mixing styles, the writer succeeds in introducing multiple voices in discourse, addressing the reader in multiple ways. Here, Bakhtinian dialogicality is at work, among different voices of the writer as well as multiple voices exchanged between the writer and the reader”. Wu & Lu (2007: 169) describe the relationship between certain discourses as “an internal dialogue in the form of intertextuality and hybridity”.

Garrett (2004: 55) speaks more generally of “hybrid, syncretic, heteroglossic, and dialogical phenomena”. Others also hint at a dialogic interpretation by describing the process as a dynamic one. Maybin (2001: 61), for instance, mentions the “dynamic multiplicity of voices, genres and social languages” associated with hybridization, Argenter (2001: 393) associates hybridization with the “dynamic co-occurrence of linguistic resources”, and Nikolarea (2007: 135), somewhat more obliquely, cites Bakhtin’s (1981: 358) description of hybridization as “an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses”. But even these explanations, which seem to come closest to the characterizations suggested in Chapter 2, produce more questions than answers, and so we turn once more to Bakhtin for clarification.

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12 This distinction is explored more fully below.
3.2 The Bakhtinian Discourse on Hybridization

Two distinct notions of hybridity appear in Bakhtin’s writings: “conscious” (or “intentional”) hybrids, and “unconscious” (“organic”) ones, and in The Dialogic Imagination this distinction is addressed almost as soon as the issue of hybridity is raised. Indeed, the notion is first explained as “the problem of the intentional hybrid”. Bakhtin writes:

Latin parody is an intentional bilingual hybrid. We now come upon the problem of the intentional hybrid. [...] Every type of parody or travesty, every word “with conditions attached,” with irony, enclosed in intonational quotation marks, every type of indirect word is in a broad sense an intentional hybrid – but a hybrid compounded of two orders: one linguistic (a single language) and one stylistic. In actual fact, in parodic discourse two styles, two “languages” (both intra-lingual) come together and to a certain extent are crossed with each other: the language being parodied...and the language that parodies.... This second parodying language, against whose background the parody is constructed and perceived, does not – if it is a strict parody – enter as such into the parody itself, but is invisibly present in it (1981: 75).

Thus, we see from the start that Bakhtin intends hybridity (at least in its intentional form) to be understood as something closely related to double-voicing. That is, the voices (styles, “languages”) brought together in a hybrid construction exist in a peculiar kind of tension. As Bakhtin (1984) puts it, the underlying discourse has a “twofold direction – it is directed both toward the referential object of speech, as in ordinary discourse, and toward another’s discourse,

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13 Bakhtin (1981) speaks in passing of “hybrid combinations” (27), “hybrid culture and hybrid literary forms” (63) and “hybridizations” (66) before explaining what he means by the term – which he does by distinguishing between the intentional and unintentional form.

14 Bakhtin repeats this formula almost in its entirety three paragraphs later: in parody two languages are crossed with other, as well as two styles, two linguistic points of view, and in the final analysis two speaking subjects. It is true that only one of these languages (the one that is parodied) is present in its own right, the other is present invisibly, as an actualizing background for creating and perceiving. Parody is an intentional hybrid, usually it is an intra-linguistic one, one that nourishes itself on the stratification of the literary language into generic languages and languages of various specific tendencies (1981: 76; my emphasis).

He repeats it again for good measure: “every parody is an intentional dialogized hybrid. Within it, languages and styles actively and mutually illuminate one another” (1981: 76).

15 Double-voicing is explored more fully in Ch. 5. Here, however, we may note that parody is the prototypical example of such phenomena.
toward *someone else’s speech*” (185; original emphasis). In this sense, hybridity is also to be understood as something closely related to dialogism. Indeed, as Bakhtin (1981) explains:

> Every type of intentional stylistic hybrid is more or less dialogized. This means that the languages that are crossed in it relate to each other as do rejoinders in a dialogue, there is an argument between languages, an argument between styles of language. But it is not a dialogue in the narrative sense, nor in the abstract sense, rather it is a dialogue between points of view, each with its own concrete language that cannot be translated into the other. [...] Thus every parody is an intentional dialogized hybrid. Within it, languages and styles actively and mutually illuminate one another (76).

Finally, as we see in this description of double-voiced, intentional dialogized hybridity, the constituent languages and styles “actively and mutually illuminate one another”. In this sense, hybridity is to be understood as something closely related to the notion of “heteroglossia”. As Bakhtin (1981: 411) explains, “A language is revealed in all its distinctiveness” by being “brought into relationship with other languages, entering with them into one single heteroglot unity of societal becoming”. To put it another way, “interillumination is not… accomplished at the level of linguistic abstraction: images of language are inseparable from images of various world views and from the living beings who are their agents – people who think, talk, and act in a setting that is social and historically concrete” (49). The differences among these agents of various world views are inseparable from the way they speak:

> Thus at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form (291).

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16 “Hybridization”, however, differs from the broader notion of “internally dialogized interillumination” in being a “direct mixing of two languages within the boundaries of a single utterance”. In other forms of inter-illumination – in particular, stylization – “only one language is actually present in the utterance, but it is rendered in the light of another language”. Bakhtin (1981: 362; original emphasis). This is addressed more fully in Ch. 4.

17 Heteroglossia is addressed more fully in Ch. 6.
Like the linguistic hybrid, heteroglossia represents the “co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions” in bodily (linguistic) form. But this “co-existence” is not of the settled and peaceful sort. As Bakhtin (1981) explains, in an actively polyglot world:

Languages throw light on each other: one language can, after all, see itself only in the light of another language. The naive and stubborn co-existence of “languages” within a given national language…comes to an end – that is, there is no more peaceful co-existence between territorial dialects, social and professional dialects and jargons, literary language, generic languages within literary language, epochs in language and so forth (12).

Instead of a “naive and stubborn co-existence” of languages, Bakhtin sees a struggle, a struggle that takes place between (and more importantly, within) languages. And this notion is central to his treatment of linguistic hybridity.

We are not concerned here with what Bakhtin calls “unintentional”, “organic”, or “unconscious” hybrids – which are “similar to double-languaged hybrids but… single-voiced” and thus not engaged in the sort of struggle that he observes (359, note 34). It is not, of course, that unintentional hybridization is unimportant. On the contrary, Bakhtin calls it “one of the most important modes in the historical life and evolution of all languages”. Indeed:

We may even say that language and languages change historically primarily by means of hybridization, by means of a mixing of various “languages” co-existing within the boundaries of a single dialect, a single national language, a single branch, a single group of different branches or different groups of such branches, in the historical as well as paleontological past of languages (358).

But as we can see from these comments, the undoubted importance of organic hybridization concerns its historical life, which is thus a problem of diachronic (rather than synchronic)

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18 The problem of linguistic struggle is taken up more fully in Ch. 6.
19 Or, rather, not actively engaged. As Bakhtin explains:

It is of course true that even in historical, organic hybrids it is not only two languages but also two socio-linguistic (thus organic) world views that are mixed with each other; but in such situations, the mixture remains mute and opaque, never making use of conscious contrasts and oppositions (360).

20 He repeats this in a subsequent passage, insisting that organic hybrids have been “profoundly productive historically: they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with new “internal forms” for perceiving the world in words (360).
linguistics. Indeed, from a synchronic perspective, organic hybridization is not a special case. As Bakhtin points out, “in essence, any living utterance in a living language is to one or another extent a hybrid” (361, original emphasis). We are thus concerned here with the active, intentional hybridization of what is already “to one or another extent” a hybrid.21

Part of what it means to say that languages no longer “co-exist” is that they do not “mix” in the mechanical sense. Rather, at least in the case of an intentional hybrid, it is a question of bringing different voices (different utterances or styles) together into a single utterance where they collide dialogically. As Bakhtin puts it: “the important activity is not only (in fact not so much) the mixing of linguistic forms – the markers of two languages and styles – as it is the collision between differing points of views on the world that are embedded in these forms” (1981: 360). The “unity” of a linguistic hybrid is a “heteroglot unity”. It is not “the frivolous, mindless and unsystematic mixing of languages – often bordering on simple illiteracy – characteristic of mediocre prose writers”; it is not “a random combination of the brute elements out of which languages are made”22; it is not, in other words, “a directly authorial language that is impure

21 The same distinction applies to the notion of double-voicing: to the extent that “any living utterance in a living language” is dialogic, there is a sense in which every utterance is double-voiced. But we are concerned with the active, intentional double-voicing of what is already “to one or another extent” double-voiced. This is taken up more fully in Ch. 5.

22 The idea that there are certain “brute elements” in a given language – what Bakhtin elsewhere calls the “necessary forms” or “language means” – is an important one for Bakhtin. Such elements comprise, on the one hand, the (phonological, lexical, grammatical, etc.) units held in common among different linguistic strata (and which can make it appear that there is but a single, unified language), and, on the other, units associated with a particular social sphere (which “mediocre prose writers” can take up as though they were simply other “language means” for conveying a “directly authorial intention”). In either case, what these “brute” elements exclude is an “expressive aspect”, which is a constitutive feature of the utterance. As Bakhtin explains:

The system of the language has the necessary forms (i.e., the language means) for reflecting expression, but the language itself and its semantic units – words and sentences – are by their very nature devoid of expression and neutral. Therefore, they can serve equally well for any evaluations, even the most varied and contradictory ones, and for any evaluative positions as well. (1986: 90; cf. 1986: 84).

It is (perhaps ironically) the implicit neutrality of these forms that allows them to serve divergent and even contradictory ends:

Any sly and ill-disposed polemicist knows very well which dialogizing backdrop he should bring to bear on the accurately quoted words of his opponent, in order to
and incompletely worked out” – but an “orchestration by means of heteroglossia” (1981: 366). Indeed, the difference between a conscious and unconscious hybrid is the difference between a genuine collision – a genuine struggle – and “an opaque mechanistic mixture of languages (more precisely, a mixture of the brute elements of language)” (1981: 366).

Again, a conscious and intentional hybrid is not a “mixture of heterogeneous syntactic forms characteristic of language systems (forms that might take place in organic hybrids), but...the fusion of two utterances into one” (1981: 361). Furthermore, it “is not a mixture of two impersonal language consciousnesses (the correlates of two languages) but...a mixture of two individualized language consciousnesses (the correlates of two specific utterances, not merely two languages) and two individual language-intentions as well” (359, original emphasis). Hybridity, in other words, is grounded on speech – not just the conjunction of different (abstract) language forms, but different (concrete) directions, different intentions. Nevertheless, a crucial point for Bakhtin is that these intentions – expressed as utterances, in actual, concrete situations – are representative not of the individual per se, but of his or her language and the socio-linguistic reality that it manifests. This is true of novelistic artistic hybrids, which seek to convey the “image of a language” (and not simply that of an individual). But it is true, as well, of all intentional hybrids, at least to the extent that

distort their sense. By manipulating the effects of context, it is very easy to emphasize the brute materiality of another’s words, and to stimulate dialogic reactions associated with such “brute materiality”; thus it is, for instance, very easy to make even the most serious utterance comical. Another’s discourse, when introduced into a speech context, enters the speech that frames it not in a mechanical bond but in a chemical union (on the semantic and emotionally expressive level); the degree of dialogized influence, one on the other, can be enormous. For this reason we cannot, when studying the various forms for transmitting another’s speech, treat any of these forms in isolation from the means for its contextualized (dialogizing) framing – the one is indissolubly linked with the other (1981: 340).

23 Bakhtin (1981: 360) writes:

While noting the individual element in intentional hybrids, we must once again strongly emphasize the fact that in novelistic artistic hybrids that structure the image of a language, the individual element, indispensable as it is for the actualization of language and for its subordination to the artistic whole of the novel (here the destinies of languages are interwoven with the individual destinies of speaking persons), is nevertheless inexorably merged with the socio-linguistic element. In other words, the novelistic hybrid is not only double-voiced and double-accented (as in rhetoric) but is also
individuals communicate by means of speech genres acquired from (and appropriate to) particular spheres of activity. Bakhtin (1986: 78) argues for just such a view of language: “The speaker’s speech will is manifested primarily in the *choice of a particular speech genre*”. He repeats: “A large number of genres that are widespread in everyday life are so standard that the speaker’s individual speech will is manifested only in its choice of a particular genre, and, perhaps, in its expressive intonation” (79).

In short, an intentional hybrid is an utterance constructed partially from the speech of another – but it is not simply the use of another’s words or style that gives the hybrid its distinctive character. What is important, rather, is how the incorporated speech is exposed (“illuminated”, “unmasked”) in its collision with the speaker’s own language and how it may come to mean something new – even if it appears outwardly unchanged. Thus, Bakhtin writes: “an intentional hybrid is precisely the perception of one language by another language, its illumination by another linguistic consciousness.” (359). Bakhtin offers a number of examples, which make the notion clear. In one passage (from Charles Dickens’s *Little Dorrit*), the author writes:

> That illustrious man and great national ornament, Mr. Merdle, continued his shining course. It began to be widely understood that one who had done society the admirable service of making so much money out of it, could not be suffered to remain a double-languaged, for in it there are not only (and not even so much) two individual consciousnesses, two voices, two accents, as there are two socio-linguistic consciousnesses, two epochs, that, true, are not here unconsciously mixed (as in an organic hybrid), but that come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance.

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24 The problem of genre is examined more fully in Ch. 2.

25 Here, again, we see at the level of speech, what heteroglossia entails at the level of language. Speaking of the arrival of heteroglossia, Bakhtin (1981: 12) writes:

> All this set into motion a process of active, mutual cause-and-effect and inter-illumination. Words and language began to have a different feel to them; objectively they ceased to be what they had once been. Under these conditions of external and internal inter-illumination, each given language – even if its linguistic composition (phonetics, vocabulary, morphology, etc.) were to remain absolutely unchanged – is, as it were, reborn, becoming qualitatively a different thing for the consciousness that creates in it.

Indeed, as Bakhtin (1981: 305) points out, “It frequently happens that even one and the same word will belong simultaneously to two languages, two belief systems that intersect in a hybrid construction – and, consequently, the word has two contradictory meanings, two accents”.

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commoner. A baronetcy was spoken of with confidence; a peerage was frequently mentioned (306; citing book 2, Ch. 24; Bakhtin’s emphasis).  

Here, we see the collision of two distinct speech intentions. On the one hand, there is “the hypocritically ceremonial general opinion” (produced as a parodic, double-voiced utterance); on the other (with italics added) is the opinion of the author (produced as a direct and unmediated, single-voiced utterance). Together, they form a single, hybrid utterance by means of which the character of “Mr. Merdle” gets fleshed out. Together and individually, the two voices agree that Mr. Merdle is rich and widely admired. But only one voice takes this seriously, while the other is sardonic. For the one, he is “illustrious”, an “ornament”, on a “shining course”, destined for a peerage; for the other, he is merely a man who has made himself extraordinarily wealthy. The author’s intention is conveyed through the collision of these voices – in the juxtaposition between the (parodically exaggerated) praise and the unvarnished truth, the result of which is an image not of Mr. Merdle (or not primarily), but of those who sing his praises.

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26 This example is taken up again in the discussion on the stratifying forces of language in Ch. 7.  
27 This offers an excellent illustration of the difference between double-voiced discourse and hybridization. Here, the voice of “general opinion” is reproduced parodically, and is thus invested with two intentions, two “voices”; it is double-voiced. At the same time, it is a constituent of the hybrid utterance. But it is not a hybrid in itself. Rather, it is a single utterance (embODYING a single manner, a single style, a single “language”), which has been appropriated for the expression of a speech will that is alien to it. On the other hand, Bakhtin, himself acknowledges that “every word ‘with conditions attached,’ with irony, enclosed in intonational quotation marks, every type of indirect word” – i.e., all double-voiced discourse – “is in a broad sense an intentional hybrid” (1981: 75; my emphasis). But the point here is not to see where the two notions converge in the broadest sense but, rather, how their specific differences contribute to the Bakhtinian conception of language. Just as the difference between dialogism and double-voicing is ultimately only “one of degree and character” (see Ch. 5) – while nevertheless being a useful and important distinction to maintain – so, too, is the difference between double-voicing and hybridity. In particular, hybrids represent an important alternative to the main varieties of double-directed discourse – on the one hand, to those that employ only the words of another speaker (the “unidirectional” and “vari-directional” varieties), and, on the other, to those that rely entirely on the speaker’s own words, albeit in a form that points to the influence of an absent discourse (the “active” varieties); hybrids, in contrast, are those in which the speaker’s words and the words of another appear in the same construction.
3.3 Observations on Hybridization in the Literature

One of the first things to observe in the Bakhtinian discourse is the absence of any discussion about the hybridization of genre, and this may seem odd in light of its prominence in the scholarly discourse on language.\footnote{We may also observe, on the contrary, that Bakhtin’s emphatic distinction between intentional and unintentional hybrids is acknowledged (and only briefly) in the scholarly literature by only a single researcher.} It is not, of course, that Bakhtin rejects the notion. In fact, he alludes to it in a number of passages.\footnote{He observes, for instance, that “in concrete examples of poetic works it is possible to find features fundamental to prose, and numerous hybrids of various generic types exist. These are especially widespread in periods of shift in literary poetic languages” (1981: 287, note 12).} And, indeed, the hybridization of genre is entirely consistent with the notion of hybrid languages.\footnote{And not just languages, but the socio-cultural relations and activities that accompany them. Thus, for instance, Bakhtin observes: Lower Italy was the home of a specific kind of hybrid culture and hybrid literary forms. The rise of Roman literature is connected in a fundamental way with this trilingual cultural home; this literature was born in the interanimation of three languages – one that was indigenously its own, and two that were other but that were experienced as indigenous (63).} And this perhaps explains why the issue plays such a small part in Bakhtin’s writings: the hybridization of a language is not an actively intentional process; it is a diachronic, historical one; and the same could be said for hybrid genres as genres. This is not to say that genres cannot be intentionally mixed (any more than it is to say that languages cannot be mixed) – but, rather, that the mixing results not in a hybrid genre, but a hybrid utterance (just as the mixing of languages results not in a hybrid language, but a hybrid utterance).

On the other hand, it is certainly possible to imagine a hybrid genre in which the incorporated forms maintain their intentionality – and this is arguably what Bakhtin means with his notion of “complex” (or “secondary”) genres – it is certainly what distinguishes his paradigm example of a complex genre, the novel, which is by definition a genre as a hybrid construction. Indeed, it would be a fascinating and productive use of Bakhtinian theory to investigate such hybrid forms. But despite efforts by many scholars to characterize hybridity (including the hybridization of genres) in terms of heteroglossia and dialogism, the results are usually unconscious hybrids (or, worse, the sort of unsystematic mixing that Bakhtin rails
Genres like those of “infotainment” are not intentional hybrids; they are not even unconscious hybrids (since they were never conceived in terms of inter-animation or inter-illumination, only the blending or incorporation of features). They are thus the least plausible examples of hybridization in the sense that Bakhtin appears to intend.\footnote{The genre of the “martyr’s wedding”, on the other hand, may indeed be a hybrid in the Bakhtinian sense, in that the intention of the mixture is conveyed dialogically, in speaking of death in the language of a celebration. Unfortunately, the author fails to pursue this possibility, focussing instead on formal features and functional moves.}

Others take a similar approach to non-generic hybridization. There is a tendency, for instance, to speak of “code-switching” as a form of hybridity on the discourse level. As Argenter (2001) demonstrates, it is possible to make a credible case for this, but it entails such contortions in our conception of code as to make it virtually unrecognizable.\footnote{Argenter writes: If the “Catalan Jewish dialect” really existed, then we would have to question whether this piece could be seen as containing code-switching at all, or whether the Hebrew elements in rhyme-position were accomplishing a demarcative function within a merged code. Were that the case, we would be in a position to ask ourselves whether there is any point in maintaining the assumption that “codeswitching implies the recognition of previously coexisting codes and their interplay within particular speech events in speech communities,” as stated above. This is undoubtedly a fair characterization in terms of grammar and lexicon from the analyst’s point of view, but it need not be so from an interactional, participant oriented point of view. In dealing with conversational code-switching, it has been observed that codes may be achieved through a negotiation of communicative interaction; that is, \textit{codes may emerge as an outcome of on-line bilingual speech, and not just as a precondition for code-switching communication to take place} (Auer 1998:15). This line of thought leads naturally to the recognition of “mixed codes,” code-switching side by side with other types of merging phenomena. (391; my emphasis).}

In any case, most scholars use “code” more or less interchangeably with “language” – and thus mean for us to understand code-switching as the use of elements from more than one
language system in a given discourse, the idea being that different language systems allow for different communicative possibilities – certain meanings and associations – not present in the others, and which competent speakers may access selectively. In this sense, the notion of code-switching-as-hybridization is very much like the notion of generic hybridization we looked in Chapter 2; instead of “infotainment” we have “Franglish”33.

Again, it is possible to imagine different codes interacting dialogically, one illuminating or animating another (this would be the very definition of hybridity), but this is not how it has been pursued in the literature.34 On the contrary, “code-switching” frequently merges with the notion of “style crossings” – or the strategic selection of language varieties as a way of projecting particular images or identities.35 Thus, hybridity is implicitly understood as the

33 Bhatt (2008: 182) sees it in exactly these terms. He writes:

Code-switching under this view is the mechanism used to annihilate difference in a synthesis of antithetical forms, e.g. between colonial English and indigenous Hindi, and its function is to serve as a linguistic diacritic of a new, class-based cultural identity.

Angermeyer (2005: 518) examines orthographic code-switching. He discusses the example of “бapбep shop”:

the compound noun barber shop, with barber in Cyrillic and shop in roman script. This compound noun is a hybrid, with its hybridity manifested in orthography. This form is half Cyrillic and half roman; it doesn’t wholly “belong” to either writing system.

34 Wei (2002, citing Stroud 1998), for instance, explains that code-switching is used “not only to show the speaker’s sensitivity to the co-participant’s language preferences but also to reflect a language ideology that fosters opaqueness” (166). In this sense, it is accommodating rather than inter-animating. Angermeyer (2005) likewise argues that “The previous examples have illustrated ways in which hybridity prevents the unambiguous attribution of a text or word to one particular language or writing system” (518-519). The idea is that these utterances manifest a sort of trans-linguistic consciousness – that is, a single consciousness extending beyond the boundaries of a given language, and whose hybrid speech is thus free of any sort of dialogic inter-animation. Compare this with the idea that double-voicing is form of strategic ambiguity (taken up in Section 5.1.1, below).


Nonreferential indexes are “features of speech which, independent of any referential speech events that may be occurring, signal some particular value of one or more contextual variables” ([Silverstein] 1976:29). Silverstein uses as his examples language-internal sets of differentiated forms, such as the speech levels of Javanese by means of which speakers index differences of status, rank, age, and other culturally salient variables. Likewise, in virtually any sociolinguistic setting in which two or more distinct codes are in use, speakers tend to exploit code selection for
appropriation of already-established forms and meanings – not their re-evaluation in light of other languages and world views.\(^{36}\) Moreover, this sort of understanding tends to prevail even when recognizably Bakhtinian notions, such as “dialogicity”, “intertextuality”, “dynamism” and “heteroglossia”, are offered by way of explanation. House (2003) is typical in this regard. In describing the Bakhtinian view of hybridity, she seems to hit all the right notes, calling it “a procedure to create multiphone texts made up of multiple voices showing ‘inner dialogicity’ despite being overtly realized in one language” (573). Nevertheless, she argues in her conclusion:

> In conceptualizing and researching ELF [English as a Lingua Franca], we need ‘a third way’, which steers clear of the extremes of fighting the spread of English for its linguistic imperialism, and accepting it in toto for its benefits. Accepting hybridity and using English creatively for one’s own communicative purposes seems to be one such ‘third way’. […] Such a compromise ‘third way’ for ELF had already been suggested by Fishman 25 years ago when he called ELF an ‘additional language’ (1977: 329ff.), a ‘co-language’ functioning not against but in conjunction with, local languages (574).

Here, we see a variation on the idea of hybridity as the appropriation of linguistic means of expression: the notion of “accepting hybridity and using English creatively for one’s own

\[\text{broadly analogous nonreferential indexical functions; as Ochs (1990: 293) notes, various categories of sociocultural information (genre and affective stance among them) may be indexed in this way (349).}

\[\text{Maynard (2007; quoting Rampton, 1999: 421) characterizes such a strategy as almost transgressive. She writes:}

> The classic sociolinguistic phenomenon of code-switching can be expanded into style crossings, especially when the variety chosen is associated with a group other than the speaker’s. In this discursive practice of making use of apparently outgroup linguistic styles, the speaker aims to “appropriate, explore, reproduce or challenge influential images and stereotypes of groups that they don’t themselves (straightforwardly) belong to” (70).

\[\text{A number of authors (e.g. House, 2003; Baquedano-López, 2004; Boyarin, 2008; Bhatt, 2008, etc.) likewise cite Bhabha’s (1994) notion of hybridity as “border-crossing”, or as House puts it, “taking alien items into one’s native language and culture, going against conventional rules and standards” (573).}

\[\text{This is precisely the understanding we see, above, in the long example from Carter (2004).}

\[\text{Earlier in the text she writes:}

> ELF appears to be neither a restricted language for special purposes, nor a pidgin, nor an interlanguage, but one of a repertoire of different communicative instruments an individual has at his/her disposal, a useful and versatile tool (559).\]
communicative purposes”, which is very much in the spirit with those who see hybridity as a “repertoire” of codes, which can be performed as needed to convey directly what the speaker has in mind.

Indeed, regardless of how the notion is defined in the literature (as dynamic, heteroglossic, intertextual, dialogic, etc.), it is difficult to find any example of discourse identified by scholars as a hybrid on grounds that correspond with what we find in the Bakhtinian texts. Again, Bloor & Bloor (2007: 51) seem to strike the right note when they observe that “Bakhtin was much concerned with context, even historical context, and how specific utterances were produced and understood ‘against the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme’”. But the distinction between intertextuality and hybridization is left unexplored, and no examples of hybrid constructions are offered. Muchnik (2005) comes closest in her discussion of the rhetoric of a “revivalist preacher” in Israel. She uses the phrase “double-styled hybrid construction” only in passing, and is primarily focused on the idea of double-voicing rather than hybridity (which makes this something of a missed opportunity), but her example is nevertheless illustrative. She quotes the speaker as asking:

Can it be that a person has everything he could possibly want in life – he’s got a YACHT, he’s got a BUNDLE, he TOKES away, and he’s all one big BLUFF. He’s got everything. At the age of 70, when he gets social security and a pension, and he has a private home with a garden, and drip irrigation, and sprinklers and dogs. He’s got everything, and now they take him? (390-391, original emphasis).

The utterance, as a whole, conveys the speaker’s opinion (his doubts about materialism). But mixed within it, literally as a part of the utterance itself, is another voice – one that expresses an entirely different view about what constitutes the good life.\(^{38}\) The hybridization is marked by the fact that “bundle”, “tokes” and “bluff” are all slang terms not typically associated with the voice of a religious figure; they clearly belong to someone else, to another style

\(^{38}\) And this is precisely what Bakhtin means when he describes the hybrid as “An utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two “languages”, two semantic and axiological belief systems” (1981: 304-305).
parodically represented. The speaker’s intention is conveyed, not directly, through the meanings encoded in the appropriated speech, but indirectly, in refracted form, in the collision between the two “axiological belief systems” present in the utterance. Just as Mr. Merdle’s enthusiasts are made to look ridiculous when their praise collides with the narrator’s observations, the incorporated voices in this passage are made ridiculous by their exposure to the discourse of the rabbi. Again, the speaker’s expressive intentions are served by incorporating the others’ language into his own, but the very significance of that language is altered under the conditions of the actual utterance. And this is the crucial point. The speaker is not simply drawing on the speech of another, by “performing” or “appropriating” its style, but illuminating it – and illuminating his own language at the same time. This, I believe, is the essence of a hybrid utterance in the Bakhtinian sense.

3.3.1 Dialogue & Dialectics

It is worth noting in conclusion a matter that may seem peripheral to the problem of hybridization, but which nevertheless sheds light on the distinction being drawn here between the Bakhtinian view and many of the interpretations offered in the scholarly literature. It is the question of “dialectic” and how it must be distinguished from “dialogism”. Bakhtin himself speaks of dialectics on more than one occasion (and Vološinov uses the term frequently), which perhaps explains some of the misunderstandings we find in the literature. In The Dialogic Imagination, for instance, Bakhtin writes:

In the actual life of speech, every concrete act of understanding is active: it assimilates the word to be understood into its own conceptual system filled with specific objects and emotional expressions, and is indissolubly merged with the

39 Like Bakhtin’s example from Dickens (cf. note 27, above), this one is not only a hybrid construction, but a hybrid in which the incorporated voices are themselves (parodically) double-voiced. The last of the four marked clauses (“he’s all one big BLUFF”) is particularly interesting in that it represents the speaker’s point of view directly, but in the style of those he opposes. Thus, not only is the typical expressiveness of the appropriated speech not reproduced, the actual expressiveness differs from one clause to the next. That is to say, “he’s got a bundle” is what Bakhtin (1984) would call “vari-directional”: its significance pulls in a different direction for the speaker (who rejects the value of material wealth) and for the incorporated voice (who approves); “he’s all one big bluff”, on the other hand, is “uni-directional”: it “stylizes another’s style in the direction that style’s own particular tasks” (193). This is explored more fully in Ch. 4 & 5.
response, with a motivated agreement or disagreement. To some extent, primacy belongs to the response, as the activating principle: it creates the ground for understanding, it prepares the ground for an active and engaged understanding. Understanding comes to fruition only in the response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other (1981: 282; my emphasis).

He is speaking here of dialogism, and seems to be promoting the view that a dialogic encounter results in a synthesis – a dialectic. But when he says that “understanding and response are dialectically merged” his point is to emphasize that linguistic meaning is not an abstract property of the utterance itself, but, rather, an active production of the speaker’s words and the listener’s conceptual system (or “apperceptive background”) – a “synthesis”, perhaps, but one that can never transcend the speech event.⁴⁰ As Bakhtin explains in Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics:

> Thought, drawn into an event, becomes itself part of the event and takes on that special quality of an “idea-feeling,” an “idea-force”… Extracted from this interrelationship of consciousnesses in the event, forced into a systemically monologic context (even the most dialectic), the idea inevitably loses its uniqueness and is transformed into a poor philosophical assertion (1984: 10).

Again, the merging or synthesis that takes place is inseparable from the event. This is the full extent of Bakhtin’s commitment to the notion of dialectic. Indeed, in the latter passage he seems already to be stepping back from the notion, associating “even the most dialectic” endeavour with the extraction of meaning from the event. In his final notes (published along with his late essays), Bakhtin erases all confusion about how he understands this notion. He writes:

> Dialogue and dialectics. Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness – and that’s how you get dialectics (1986: 147).

The point – and, indeed, one of Bakhtin’s characteristic contributions to theory – is precisely to articulate an alternative to dialectics, one that sees the different elements brought together

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⁴⁰ And this is how the term is used in Vološinov as well, when he speaks of “the dialectics of meaning”: “The sign and its social situation are inextricably fused together. The sign cannot be separated from the social situation without relinquishing its nature as sign” (1973: 37; original emphasis). Cf. Ch. 9, note 30, below.
in the communication as fundamentally and irrevocably individual. But what is remarkable is how faithfully Bakhtin’s description of dialectics (and not dialogism) is reflected in the discussions of hybridity we find in much of the literature (again, irrespective of the ostensibly Bakhtinian jargon in which it is often packaged). Thus, for instance, Bhatt (2008: 182) can speak of heteroglossia in one breath and in the next describe hybridity as a form of code-switching with which “to annihilate difference in a synthesis of antithetical forms”. And many others can speak of “hybrid identities” and “hybrid genres” with the same underlying sense of what it means to produce such an “admixture” or “juxtaposition”. And the difference between such an interpretation and a genuinely Bakhtinian one goes unnoticed.

Here we return to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: what is a “hybrid” if not a combination – if not a dialectic or synthesis – of familiar forms? The short answer is: a “dialogue” – which is another way of saying a “struggle”. But we must be careful: as the significance of these words is established only within the discourse itself, they are as likely to mislead as they are to illuminate (this is one of the lessons we learned in Chapter 2). The point, however, is that the contradictions within the hybrid are never resolved: both “struggle” and “dialogue” refer to this lack of settlement. And this takes us to the heart of Bakhtinian theory, for if resolution were possible then hybridity would prove consistent with the notion of a unitary language: the “hybrid genre” could take its place within the literary canon; the “hybrid language” could provide the means for a directly signifying discourse – and both the canon and the language would be enriched by it. But far from resolving the contradictions, hybrid formations consciously exploit them; indeed, they rely on them for their meaning,

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41 Caryl Emerson puts this nicely in her preface to Bakhtin’s Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics. She calls it “contiguity without fusion” (xxxiii).
42 Scollon & Scollon (2003) offer an excellent case in point when they argue that “interdiscursive dialogicality is a major concept in geosemiotics which we make in line with dialectics or dialogical theory” (168; my emphasis). Or consider the claim by Pietikainen & Dufva (2006) that “The argument that discourse has social effects and conditions is based on the idea of dialectics: language and the social having a mutually shaping relationship […] Bakhtin’s conceptualisation of language can be seen as crucial for understanding this relationship. […] language use is dialogical, setting up relations between different voices” (206; my emphasis); or Prodromou (2008), who concludes: “I hope my ‘utterance’ has been filled with the echoes of the meanings and intentions of all those who prompted this research, in true dialogic fashion. I hope it has been dialectical and that the end product is a creative synthesis of differing positions on a range of questions” (257; my emphasis).
which is produced indirectly – not through the deployment of linguistic significations but through the *refraction*, so to speak, of one in the atmosphere of the other.

This goes some way to explaining the second paradox we observed in the Bakhtinian discourse, that the more we assimilate or appropriate another’s language (genre, style) into our own, the further we move *away* from the production of a linguistic hybrid. Hybridity is nourished on difference – not difference in the structuralist sense (which can be traced to Aristotle’s three “laws of thought”), that is, a *closed* difference, predicated on a greater unity, which abhors contradiction – but an *open, productive* difference, where the juxtaposition of contradictory elements (and not their mere combination) produces meaning: as soon as the juxtaposition is submerged within the unity of a monologic context, this productive potential vanishes. What we frequently find in the scholarly discourse, however, is a characterization of hybridity as a sort of personal amalgam of styles deemed appropriate to the subjective identity of the speaker or situation – that is, we find the very sort of syncretic mixing of differences-within-unity that we have just called into question – and this is just the beginning, for hybridization is arguably the central feature of Bakhtin’s approach to style and stylization, both of which are of enormous interest to sociolinguists. We explore this connection and its implications in Chapter 4.
4. STYLE & STYLIZATION

Our look (in Ch. 3) at what Bakhtin calls the “intentional hybrid” was met almost immediately with the example of parody. Bakhtin writes:

Every type of parody or travesty, every word “with conditions attached,” with irony, enclosed in intonational quotation marks, every type of indirect word is in a broad sense an intentional hybrid – but a hybrid compounded of two orders: one linguistic (a single language) and one stylistic (1981: 75).¹

Like “hybridity”, the notion of “parody” – or rather, the process it represents (what Bakhtin calls parodic “stylization”) – is of considerable interest to sociolinguists, for stylization is an intrinsically social process, comprehensible only in terms of the relations between divergent centres of language use: it is an intentional collision of styles. As Bakhtin himself observes:

Any stylistics capable of dealing with the distinctiveness of the novel as a genre must be a sociological stylistics. The internal social dialogism of novelistic discourse requires the concrete social context of discourse to be exposed, to be revealed as the force that determines its entire stylistic structure, its “form” and its “content,” determining it not from without, but from within; for indeed, social dialogue reverberates in all aspects of discourse, in those relating to “content” as well as the “formal” aspects themselves (1981: 300; original emphasis).

But what, then, is “style”? As with genre (a notion to which it is inextricably bound)² the answer is not what we might expect. Style is not a singular, characteristic way of being or doing, but a way of relating. Bakhtin calls it “the fundamental and creative [triple] relationship of discourse to its object, to the speaker himself and to another’s discourse” (1981: 378). In this, we can see the importance of Bakhtin’s contribution to sociolinguistics even when he focuses on the novel as a genre. And here we discover another complication in the Bakhtinian view of discourse: the styles that collide in the process of stylization are themselves grounded on the diversity of speech, nourished, so to speak, on their differences – stylization gets absorbed into style itself.

¹ Cf. Ch. 3, note 14.
² Bakhtin writes: “Any style is inseparably linked to the utterance and to typical forms of utterances, that is, speech genres” (1986: 63): “Where there is style there is genre” (1986: 66).
4.1 Review of the Literature on Style & Stylization

Style as unproblematic and self-evident

Much as it does with the idea of “genre” (see Section 2.1.1, above), the scholarly literature often treats the notion of “style” as obvious and unproblematic, frequently using the word in passing. Dobrzyńska (2001: 48), for instance, cites what Vološinov calls “the subjective and stylistic stamps” of someone else’s (alien) speech as expression; Maybin (2001) mentions “linguistic style” and “generic style”; Page (2003: 233) and Kramsch (2005: 471) speak of “story-telling” and “narrative” styles; Blommaert (2005: 77) uses the phrase “speech style”; and Badarneh (2009) speaks of “stylistic effect”; all without further explanation. The notion is often linked with other concepts, which are likewise treated as self-evident. De Fina (2003), for instance, speaks of “norms and styles that are shared by other members of their communities” (25). Cook, Pieri, & Robbins (2004: 434) and Pietikainen & Dufva (2006: 209-210) speak of “genres and styles”. Blackledge (2005) speaks of “rhetorical style”, “conversational style”, “tone and style”, “genre or style”, but never unpackages the notion; while Nikolarea (2007) speaks of the “different styles or genres within a language” (134).

3 Drawing on Vološinov (1973), Maybin also discusses the distinction between a “linear style” of reporting – in which “words are reproduced verbatim, and there is a clear and obvious boundary between the voice of the reporter, and the voice being reported” – and a “pictorial” one – in which “the reported speech is infiltrated with the reporter’s speech, and the boundaries become much more fuzzy” (68-69). She notes that the “linear style” is “associated with authoritarianism”, but otherwise treats the notion of style as self-evident.

4 Yotsukura (2003) makes frequent reference to “thematic, compositional, and stylistic” features of speech (particularly in the context of genre), but these notions are never explained. A number of the quoted passages, however, hint at the Bakhtinian understanding. In one, a discussion of “addressivity”, the author quotes Bakhtin (1986: 95) as saying: “Both the composition and, particularly, the style of the utterance depend on those to whom the utterance is addressed, how the speaker (or writer) senses and imagines his addressees, and the force of their effect on the utterance” (3, 103-104). In another, a discussion of genre, she reports that “utterances reflect the specific conditions and goals of each such area not only through their content (thematic) and linguistic style, that is, the selection of the lexical, phraseological, and grammatical resources of the language, but above all, through their compositional structure.” (33; citing Bakhtin, 1986: 60; my emphasis). These ideas, however, are not pursued.
4.1.1 Style and voice

Others describe style (either on its own or in conjunction with related concepts), in the broadest terms, as a distinctive form of speech – a “voice”. Weninger (2009), for instance, speaks in general of “genres, styles, representations” as “discursive habits” (87). Pujolar (2001) associates “speech styles, register and languages” with “the voices and genres of spoken conversation” (27). He later explains: “As each social group is associated with particular activities, social relations and ideologies, each develops its own speech genres which, at the same time, gradually fashion differentiated accents, styles, dialects and languages” (31). Sclafani (2008: 510) lists “styles” along with “particular characters” and “social groups” as a way to understand the notion of “voices”. Grossen & Orvig (2011: 56) characterize “voices” as “genres, registers, styles, dialects, etc”. Howard (2009: 342) likewise groups “styles, registers, and language” as “ways of speaking”.

4.1.2 Style defined by formal features (the taxonomic view)

Often, these ideas cash out in terms of formal features. Keane (2004: 435), for instance, draws on Bauman’s (2001: 79) characterization of genre as “one order of speech style, a constellation of systemically related, co-occurrent formal features and structures that serves as a conventionalized orienting framework for the production and reception of discourse”. Mahendran (2003: 236) speaks in passing of “stylistic features”. Gales (2009: 225) uses the

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5 He adds:

The idea [that “languages, dialects, styles and accents are a product of dialogical processes”] is very suggestive, as it implies that there must be a functional asymmetry between different language varieties. This may help us to understand why particular linguistic forms become associated with particular contexts, meanings and social groups, thus giving rise to stereotypes (although values and meanings are themselves open to constant dialogical transformation as they are also adopted as voices subject to an on-going re-accentuation). In this way, Bakhtin gives us a clear indication of how we may be able to connect particular speech forms with particular cultural forms. This connection is not between particular social features and linguistic variables, but it is an indirect relation via the insertion of linguistic structures in particular social practices.

Bakhtin’s model contains interesting ideas as to how to explore these phenomena. By portraying meaning as unfinalized, open to re-accentuation and bound with linguistic forms in a way which is historically and situationally located, I believe it contains the core ideas for a social theory of meaning. (32).
same phrase, by which she means the “commonly shared linguistic and ideological features that unify texts within a genre [and] also serve to stratify and exclude those that lack those features”. This view is implicit in Holmes & Schnurr (2006: 30-36), who examine the “components of different styles”, which may be “mingled” or otherwise “manipulated” for rhetorical effect. They find, for instance, that highly modalized speech is typically considered “feminine”, while aggressive, sarcastic, sexist speech is deemed masculine. Pinto (2004: 653) speaks of stylistic qualities like “simplicity”, “directness” and “ambiguity”. And in their discussion of irony, Tholander & Aronsson (2002: 568) mention “tone of voice, accompanying gestures, or other stylistic devices”.

4.1.3 Style and situation

Makihara (2005: 729) uses the phrase “communicative style repertoire” and “repertoire of speech styles” to describe a group’s “way of speaking”. She also sees style in terms of linguistic features, but adds that these must be grounded in the communicative situation. Citing Irvine (2001) she explains: “The development of a speech style involves differentiation within a system of possibilities, linking co-occurring linguistic features to social meanings, and constituting and indexing social formations such as distinctiveness of individuals and groups in specific contexts of communicative situations” (733). Marková (2003a: 44) likewise alludes to a situated notion of style by characterizing heteroglossia as “divergent styles in speech arising from the infinite openness of languages in different concrete situations”. Woolard (2008: 445) is even more explicit, describing the “elements of style” as “inherent parts of the situation, the genre, and the stance or identity that they index”. She explains:

6 Morgan (2004: 18) also makes a passing reference to style in the context of heteroglossia, which she calls “the shifting of styles or linguistic codes that exist within and often among communities”.

7 Citing Pujolar (2001: 31), Woolard (2004) argues something very similar:

Language styles are not only a matter of form but are a fusion of form and circumstances of use. In this way they come to encode the social relations and identities of particular social groups and activities…. Language, then, is not only heteroglot but also indexical from top to bottom (86).

Indeed, she describes the “the linkage of form to social relations and ideology” as one of Bakhtin’s most valuable contributions.
We can put this in terms proposed by the theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1981): speakers acquire not languages or variable sociolinguistic markers as such but rather social ‘voices.’ In Bakhtin’s conception, voices merge linguistic form with social intention (1981: 292-293). It is this social intention that Silverstein and Errington see as not only an unavoidable part of the total linguistic fact to be explained but a rich resource for explanation of linguistic form (445).

Goddard (2004) also turns to the problem of style and situation, in a critique of Biber’s work on “styles of stance”, which she believes “falls foul of the idea that texts are stable entities regardless of the users” (37). She explains: “While corpus-based work such as Biber’s research on stance styles tends to remove the nature of the users from the picture, MDT [Mediated Discourse Theory] seeks out connections between users, texts and contexts with an expectation of conflict and complexity because of the “ideologically saturated” (Bakhtin 1986) nature of all texts” (45).8 As she puts it earlier in the text:

Focussing on language-as-action rather than language-as-text, MDT shares the approach of pragmatics-based theories to see language as a form of social behaviour, as mediated action. However, Scollon’s concept of MDT ensures that texts remain seen as the actions of real communicators rather than as the embodiments of a priori classifications (7; my emphasis in bold).

This latter view differs from many of the others in seeing style not only as an aspect of language but of speech – which is to say, as something that necessarily takes account of the actual participants in the communication and not just the social formations or “voices” associated with the forms or features employed. It differs in particular from the notion of “style-shifting” – which also takes account of audience and situation, but only as the occasion for employing a given style, which consequently remains an abstraction.

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8 Elsewhere, the author is more explicit about how she sees the problem of language:

the task is to find a set of principles for discourse analysis that are able to consider the particular constraints and affordances of different communication systems, while also paying attention to the users in their situated contexts – ‘situated’ not just in terms of their physical setting, but also socially and politically (6).

However, aside from the comment on Biber's approach, neither the issue of style nor its essential relationship with genre is pursued.
4.1.4 Style-shifting and identity

Schilling-Estes (2002) addresses the notion in detail, describing, on the one hand, both the “responsive” and “initiative” dimensions of Allen Bell’s “audience design” model, and on the other, the more recent “speaker design” approaches, in which, she claims, Bakhtin’s ideas “figure prominently” (391). As she explains:

Speaker design models are firmly rooted in social constructionist approaches, in that language and society are viewed as co-constitutive: the linguistic features and patterns speakers use are not mere reflections of static identity, as defined by one’s positions in an existent social order (e.g. white middle class male, older Native American female), but rather are resources speakers use to shape and re-shape social structures such as class and gender groups, as well as their positioning with respect to these structures and with respect to one another. In addition, speakers use linguistic resources to position themselves with respect to the talk itself, whether its subject matter or its entire “frame” – that is, the interactants’ sense of what sort of speech activity is taking place…Thus, under speaker design approaches, reified structures fade in importance, while social practice and speaker agency move to the forefront (389).

Speaker design approaches are thus distinguished from those that rely on “static identities” and “reified structures”. Style, however, continues to be understood in terms of abstract

9 She explains:

in recognizing that immediate conversational purpose is just as important as more permanent speaker characteristics in shaping speech style (as well as recognizing the importance of initiative style shift), [researchers] are moving the Audience Design framework in the direction of what we might call “speaker design” approaches, following Coupland (1996) (388).

10 Quoting Bakhtin (1986: 89) she notes in particular the idea that:

Our speech, that is, all our utterances (including creative works), is filled with others’ words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of ‘our-own-ness’, varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate (391).

Macaulay (2005) quotes a similar passage from Bakhtin (1981: 293), which, on his view, points out the problem with defining styles in terms of registers: “The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes “one’s own” only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention” (126).

11 She explains that both individual and group styles “can become objectified, or ‘reified’…and hence may join the ranks of the various abstractions to which people orient as they engage in conversational interaction” (391).
features and their associated meanings, and the examination of “as many types of features as possible” is deemed crucial, as they may “carry connotations of group belonging, through their association with the groups who use them” (390). This can be problematized without changing the basic premise. Thus, for instance:

variants may be associated with more than one group…and in addition, they may carry associations besides group membership. For example, they may be associated with particular attributes of a group rather than the group as a whole, with individuals, or with idealizations – whether ideal individuals such as “the ideal man” or ideal qualities such as “honest” or “toughness” (390).

Moreover, as Schilling-Estes notes, “people utilize stylistic resources, not only to indicate relatively longstanding group affiliations and personal attributes but also to make temporary meanings in ongoing interaction – in other words, to accomplish various conversational purposes” (390). She adds: “it is through combining existing elements in new ways and interjecting these combinations into new contexts that speakers effect change, not only in the current situation but in the meanings of features and styles as well” (391). She cites an example from Campbell-Kibler, Podesva & Roberts (2000), who “show how a gay activist and lawyer, rather than always using a set “gay” style, constructs a style that is “not too gay” in order to demonstrate professional competence while participating in a radio debate” (390).

Levon (2009) refers to this as the “both/and” approach: seeing “language styles” not “in terms of an either/or scenario – either as a product of some external structuring principle or as a resource through which speakers can do social and interactional work” but as something that “can be both at the same time” (29). Citing Bell (2001: 165), she suggests that style is “‘a framework that acknowledges [both] that our inter-personal linguistic behavior displays a pattern which can be discerned…and that we are continually making creative, dynamic

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12 As Zhang (2008) puts it, Bell’s (1984, 2001) notion of “initiative style” means that “language varieties and features...are saturated with meanings through their associations with salient social groups and cultural stereotypes” and that “Such meanings and sociocultural associations constitute the indexical potential for these resources to carry out new stylistic work” (203).  
13 Citing Bakhtin (1981: 291), she adds: “central to the creation of new meanings in stylistic variation is the notion of conflict – conflict between the various styles speakers pull together in creating a new style and between this new style and the other styles with which it is juxtaposed” (391-392).
choices on the linguistic representation of our identities”” (30). Sclafani (2009) likewise rejects the “traditional” view of style as a “primarily reactive phenomenon” in favour of the idea that it is a “proactive display of identity in interaction”, which she sees as part of a “paradigmatic shift toward viewing style as a more agentive rather than reflective phenomenon”. Like many others, she adopts Bell’s (1984, 2001) position that “the responsive and initiative dimensions of style-shifting should be viewed as two sides of the same coin” (613), but she situates this explicitly in Bakhtin’s (1981) view of dialogism, according to which “responsiveness to the audience is an active role of speakers” (613; citing Bell 2001: 143).

Zhang (2008) also locates this “reworking of existing resources for new purposes” in Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of dialogism. She explains:

The Bakhtinian dialogic view of language has profound implications for investigating social meaning beyond the immediate context. […] As linguistic features and styles bear traces of their past uses and users real and imagined (Irvine 1996: 151), the sociocultural associations that they bring from their ‘socially charged life’ (Bakhtin 1981: 293) constitute potential for, as well as constraints on, their uses in the present and future contexts. Hence, it is important for analysts to explore the meanings imbued in a linguistic feature that make it available for stylistic work (203).

In short, style is construed as a sociocultural value (a “social meaning”) indexed by a given linguistic feature, which can be reproduced and manipulated like any other signifier.

### 4.1.5 Stylization and performance

The issue of style-shifting, and the possibility of drawing on, and even transforming, particular styles leads to the question of whether style can or should be distinguished from the more “performative” uses of language, what we might call “stylization”.

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14 Perhaps this is what Levon (2009: 34) means when she argues “pace Bell and Labov, that the constraints are not grounded in the distributional facts of social or inter-speaker variation, but rather in the limits of linguistic performativity (cf. Bakhtin 1981; Derrida 1995)”.

(2009: 235) traces this distinction to Bakhtin (though he never tells us what Bakhtin means by either notion, or how the distinction plays out). Others, however, argue just the opposite, claiming that Bakhtinian theory obscures an important distinction by construing all speech as more or less stylized. A prominent source for this view is Nicholas Coupland. Coupland (2001a), for instance, claims that “For Bakhtin, stylization has a broad remit, identifying a general quality of language use contemporary to the era in which he wrote” (345). Citing Wales (1989), Coupland (2004) repeats this claim, insisting that Bakhtin equates stylization with double-voiced discourse and that since “multiple voicing is a quality of all language use, [Bakhtin] draws us to a position where all language use is stylized, and where to conceive of style monologically is insufficient or naive” (249). He argues, on the contrary, that “stylization can be analyzed with a narrower focus: in specific communicative contexts and at specific linguistic-semiotic levels, where its effects are created and experienced much more locally than Bakhtin implies” (346). Coupland (2001b) defines it as a “knowing and self-aware performance of a style or genre drawn from a pre-established repertoire”. He adds: “Discursive reflexivity is the hallmark of stylized performance” (422).

Meinhof (2004) reports Coupland’s call for “a distinction between style and stylization which he sees as being overlooked by Bakhtin’s account of all language use as inherently ‘double-voiced’” (283). As she explains: “According to Coupland, the elements of stylized speech which differentiate them from mere ‘styled’ speech lie in their ‘fundamentally

be 2004: 151]). Pichler (2009) speaks unhelpfully of stylization as discourse in which “a voice is reproduced as if it were one’s own but with ‘a slight shadow of objectification’” (97). While Rahman treats the notion of style as self-evident, he turns for his definition of “stylistization” not to Bakhtin, but to Cameron (2000b: 88), who describes it as “a community of practice with a distinctive way of speaking [and] is constructed through bricolage, using resources for meaning among which prosodic, paralinguistic and politeness phenomena are especially prominent” (236). He adds that the Bakhtinian notion is “a subversive form of multi-voiced utterance, one that discredits hegemonic, monologic discourses by appropriating the voices of the powerful and reworking them for new purposes” (345). Cekaite & Aronsson (2004) make “subversion” a central concept in their study. Citing Bakhtin, (1978: 181), they speak of “subversive stylistization” – “an appropriation of another person’s style in such a way that the voice carries the author’s original set of viewpoints and evaluation” (385).

Rampton (2009) points to own his longstanding support (e.g., Rampton 2001: 50) for the idea that performance is “a quality of most and probably all of the styling practice we have considered” (150; quoting Coupland 2007: 146).
metaphorical’ as well as ‘reflexive, mannered and knowing’ nature” (283). Style and stylization are central concepts for Thurlow & Jaworski (2006), who claim to pursue a more dynamic approach than the one traditionally offered. Quoting Fairclough (2003: 159), they describe style as “the discursive enactment of identities”: “Styles are the discoursal aspect of ways of being, identities. Who you are is partly a matter of how you speak, how you write, as well as a matter of embodiment – how you look, how you hold yourself, how you move, and so forth”. While this seems to harken back to the notion of style as voice, they add: it is “not so much a stable attribute of a particular type of speaker or situation, but a reflexively managed resource for performing acts of identity” (104). Citing Coupland (1985, 2001a, 2004), they call it “an indispensable feature of interactionally strategic positioning of self and other in forging and enacting particular social personas, a form of self-identification and self-differentiation with particular groups or group-orientations” (104). Following Rampton (1995) and Coupland (2001a) they distinguish style from the “related though narrower concept” of stylization, which they describe as “a knowing display of language style(s) deemed in a particular situation to be non-normative, unpredictable, or ‘as if’”. Citing Bakhtin (1981, 1986), they conclude that “identities are not autonomous and separate but

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19 Evans Davies (2007), on the other hand, reporting on Macaulay’s (2005) critique of sociolinguistic models of style, notes that Macaulay, far from finding the Bakhtinian approach problematic, “chides current variationist sociolinguistics for not incorporating frameworks from theorists such as Bakhtin and Voloshinov” (428). She notes that Macaulay tests a variety of models against his data, “and finds all of them inadequate, preferring Bakhtin’s notion of ‘hybrid construction’ (1981: 304-305) as a more useful analytical tool” (429). At the same time, however, he draws on Coupland (2001a: 126), “and concludes that his narrator’s style is ‘a way of presenting himself to me’” (429).

20 Quoting Bell (1997: 240) they explain: “In sociolinguistics, the term ‘style’ typically refers to linguistic variation with respect to speech and social characteristics – or simply, ‘the range of variation within the speech of an individual speaker’”. They add: “Traditionally, style shifts have usually been thought to occur in accordance with varying degrees of situational formality/informality…or the degree of attention paid to speech by the speaker… In these approaches, style has been treated as a correlate of rather simple and stable types of situations, and of speakers’ demographic characteristics” (cf. the discussion on “style-shifting” above).

21 They add: “to summarize, we take stylization to be the strategic (re)presentation and promotion of particular ways of being (or styles) involving language, image, social practice and material culture” (105).
involved and intercorporeal – produced as a series of stylizations by appropriating, reworking and subverting different ways of speaking” (104).

4.1.6 Style as a resource

Li (2009) also takes up the idea of style as identity, offering a view “informed by Bakhtin” (although again articulated by Fairclough 2003: 159), according to which style is understood as “the discoursal aspect of ways of being, identities’ linked to the process of identification – ‘how people identify themselves and are identified by others’ (an example being a politician’s way of using linguistic resources for self-identifying)” (92):

This view of style as identity construction shares a sociolinguistic approach to style that considers style as an individual writer/speaker’s use of language as a resource to evoke particular personae. Focusing on the agency of social actor, for example, Coupland (2001[a]) argues that ‘style…can…be construed as a special case of the presentation of self, within particular relational contexts – articulating relational goals and identity goals’ (p. 197). Similar to Fairclough, Coupland emphasizes the identificational processes in which style is involved, and views style as communicative achievements rather than just situational variations. This means that the writer/speaker is not just a responder to context, but a performer of context, defining situations, identities, relationships, and goals. Studying style from the perspective of persona management and identification, thus, is critical for an examination of the world views, values, ideologies, and positions people are committed to (92-93; my emphasis).

Style is thus construed as a sort of resource for the construction of an identity or persona, a way of presenting oneself, consciously and strategically. Maynard (2007) offers this view. In what seems to an allusion to the Bakhtinian notion of “stylization”, she writes: “By creatively using a style stereotypically associated with the group that the speaker does not belong to, the speaker ‘plays with’ identities” (70). In other words, “choice of styles, i.e.,

22 They situate this interpretation in the broader literature, ascribing similar views to Le Page & Tabouret-Keller (1985), Bell (1997), Cameron (2000a), and Fairclough (2003).

23 Compare this with Errington’s (1998) critique of efforts to ensure “code consistency”: formal, public speech can seemingly lack the kind of “code consistency” which Judith Irvine [1979: 777] has pointed to as characteristic of formal speech. Such consistency, she suggests, restricts a speaker’s ability to detach himself from the social persona implied by one type of usage and suggest [through use of another code] that persona is not to be taken quite “for real” (72).

24 As she explains in a later passage: “To deepen our understanding of mixing styles, particularly borrowing styles, I draw from Bakhtinian multivoicedness and the idea of styling the other” (96).
styling, is a creative strategy to introduce different voices representing different selves and identities into one’s own discourse (70).

Rampton (2009) pursues the same notion, but distinguishes between “stylization” and what he calls “crossing”:

Stylization involves reflexive communicative action in which speakers produce specially marked and often exaggerated representations of languages, dialects, and styles that lie outside their own habitual repertoire (at least as this is perceived within the situation at hand). Crossing is closely related, but it involves a stronger sense of social or ethnic boundary transgression, the variants being used are more likely to be seen as anomalously “other” for the speaker, and questions of legitimacy and entitlement can arise. As pointedly non-habitual speech practices, stylization and crossing break with ordinary modes of action and interpretation, invite attention to creative agency in language use, and often also contribute to the denaturalization of hegemonic language ideologies (149).

Snell (2010) follows Rampton (1995, 2006, 2009) and Coupland (2001a, 2007) in seeing stylization (“a concept originally associated with the work of Bakhtin”) as “the knowing deployment of culturally familiar styles and identities that are marked as deviating from those predictably associated with the current speaking context” (639; citing Coupland 2001a: 345). Günthner (2011) likewise speaks of “stylized reported speech”, which “aims at portraying typical characteristics of a specific social group by indexically relating specific ways of speaking to a particular social type” (460). Citing Rampton (2006: 225), she adds: “when speakers switch into a stylized voice, “the recipients are invited to use their broader understandings of society to figure out exactly what ‘image of another’s language’ this is actually supposed to be” (460). A rather different emphasis, however, is implicit in the author’s examples: “On the one hand, we ‘hear’ the voice of the ‘typical German’; on the other hand we ‘hear’ Si’s evaluation of this utterance as exaggerated, fuzzy, and squeamish. Thus, the typical German’s voice comes close to what Bakhtin (1981) calls ‘parodistic stylization’” (460). On this view, stylized speech is double-voiced in a recognizably Bakhtinian sense: it is simultaneously speech and *speech about speech*.

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25 She repeats this in a subsequent passage:

Again, we not only “hear” the voice of a typical German, but we also “hear” the narrator’s evaluation of the reported utterance as exaggerated, pedantic, and ridiculous.
Others, like Scheuer (2003), describe stylization as an effort to draw on the meanings (and the authority) associated with the style of another. Scheuer says of one research participant:

Niels employs stylization in order to compensate [for his lack of formal credentials]. His well-formed orations are verbal substitutes for the written statements of academic degrees. His prolix formulations, and also his personalizing narratives, are face work aimed at repairing, if not denying, a flaw in an otherwise impeccable professional profile (144).

Style is thus a resource put to the service of authoritative speech: by employing an “academic” style, Niels appropriates the qualities associated with academia:

it seems that stylization is the appropriate term for what is going on (Bakhtin 1981, Morson & Emerson 1990). The stylistic means employed by Niels are not subtle. The pace is markedly slow, pauses are markedly long, terminology is the jargon of management theory, and the structure of clauses is markedly complex, whereas information structure is markedly lucid. Thus, Niels makes it clear that this is “double-voiced” talking – that these discourses stem from and are authorized by academia (159).

Philips (2004) describes this as “the idea that by speaking in a particular style which is highly valued and/or associated with authority, or by speaking from within a particular discourse genre that is authoritative or associated with authoritative people, a speaker is more persuasive, more convincing, and more attended to” (475). Or as Wong (2005b) puts it, “In stylization, the speaker adopts someone else’s discourse to reinforce his or her own words” (770).

4.2 The Bakhtinian Discourse on Style & Stylization

To get an idea of the enormous role played by “style” (“stylistics”, “stylization”, etc.) in the Bakhtinian project, it is perhaps enough to consider how often the word appears in Bakhtin’s writings. In The Dialogic Imagination it comes up over 600 times; it appears on over 60 pages of Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, 60 pages of Rabelais and his world, and 28

In this “parodistic stylization,” “the speaker’s expressivity penetrates through the boundaries” (Bakhtin 1986: 92) of the speaking subject and spreads to the other’s speech, by transmitting it in a caricatured way. Thus, what is treated as the typical way for the majority group (Germans) to speak, is being ironicized and ridiculed. (464).

26 This is taken up more fully in Ch. 8, below.
27 For the sake of comparison: “discourse” is used about 760 times, and “dialogue” (“dialogic”, “dialogism”, etc.) about 350 times.
pages of *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Moreover, in many of these texts, the problem of style and stylistics is foregrounded. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin observes a concern in contemporary stylistics that he considers “remote from the specific conditions under which the word lives in the novel”; he says they “take a novelist’s language and style not as the language and style of a *novel* but merely as the expression of a specific individual artistic personality or as the style of a particular literary school or finally as a phenomenon common to poetic language in general (1981: 43).

The failure to grasp the stylistic peculiarities of the novel is, more importantly, a failure to grasp one of the essential characteristics of language use in general:

> We speak of a special novelistic discourse because it is only in the novel that discourse can reveal all its specific potential and achieve its true depth. But the novel is a comparatively recent genre. Indirect discourse, however, the representation of another’s word, another’s language in intonational quotation marks, was known in the most ancient times, we encounter it in the earliest stages of verbal culture. What is more, long before the appearance of the novel we find a rich world of diverse forms that transmit, mimic and represent from various vantage points another’s word, another’s speech and language, including also the languages of the direct genres. These diverse forms prepared the ground for the novel long before its actual appearance (1981: 50).

The various approaches to novelistic discourse that Bakhtin sees in contemporary stylistics have one thing in common: they invariably treat the use of language as *directly* expressive:28 they rely on the unity of language and on its unmediated equivalence of intentionality throughout. Thus the powerful style-shaping significance of another’s discourse, of a mode of indirect, “qualified” speaking, has been neglected. This has led to a situation in which stylistic analysis of novel prose is replaced by linguistic description, usually neutral, of the language of a given work, or (even worse) of a given author.

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28 (1) the author’s words alone (i.e. the “direct words of the author more or less correctly isolated”) are examined “in terms of the usual, direct poetic methods of representation and expression (metaphors, comparisons, lexical register, etc.)”; (2) “a neutral linguistic description is offered of the novelist’s language”; (3) “particular literary tendencies are isolated”; (4) the language of the novel is examined “as an expression of the individual personality”; and (5) “the novel is viewed as a rhetorical genre, and its devices are analyzed from the point of view of their effectiveness as rhetoric” (1981: 42).
Such a description of language, he insists, is not only inadequate; it is “methodologically flawed”, for in the novel there is no single language; there are rather languages, linked up with each other in a purely *stylistic* unity – not at all the same thing as a linguistic unity (the kind of situation where different dialects, coming together, shape a new dialectological unity)” (1981: 415; cf. 1986: 90-91). Indeed, “It is precisely the diversity of speech, and not the unity of a normative shared language, that is the ground of style” (1981: 308; original emphasis).

Again, this tendency is not confined to examinations of novelistic style, but, reflects a more general conception of language:

Philosophy of language, linguistics and stylistics [i.e., such as they have come down to us] have all postulated a simple and unmediated relation of speaker to his unitary and singular “own” language, and have postulated as well a simple realization of this language in the monologic utterance of the individual. Such disciplines actually know only two poles in the life of language, between which are located all the linguistic and stylistic phenomena they know: on the one hand, the system of a *unitary language*, and on the other the *individual* speaking in this language (1981: 269).

In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin is even more explicit about what he considers the essential problem in contemporary stylistics:

Contemporary stylistics, which ignores this plane of investigation [i.e. “an investigation of discourse from the point of view of its relationship to someone else’s discourse”], is in essence a *stylistics based on the first type of discourse alone, that is, on the direct referentially oriented discourse of the author*. Contemporary stylistics, whose roots go back to the poetics of classicism, has been unable to this day to free itself from the specific orientations and limitations of that poetics (1984: 200; my emphasis).

The problem of style is thus not only a central concern for Bakhtin, but a concern that takes the same form in virtually all of his major works. It is a concern for a particular aspect of style: the interrelationship between the discourse of the speaker and the discourse of another. This concern, moreover, makes the problem of style a dimension of the larger issues of

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29 Bakhtin’s typology of discourses is examined in Ch. 5. In brief, discourses of the first type are direct, unmediated, “single voiced”.
heteroglossia and dialogism – and leads directly to the notion of “double-voicing”\(^{30}\), of which “stylization” is only the most obvious form.\(^{31}\)

To get a sense of how tightly these issues are bound, consider a passage from “The Problem of Speech Genres”, which follows the discussion of the “prevailing” view of style (cited above). It begins: “But in reality the situation is considerably more complicated” (than stylistics has supposed) – then continues for more than a page and a half (with no mention of style at all) before concluding:

> The utterance is filled with *dialogic overtones*, and they must be taken into account in order to understand fully the style of the utterance. After all, our thought itself – philosophical, scientific, and artistic – is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others’ thought, and this cannot but be reflected in the forms that verbally express our thought as well (1986: 92).\(^{32}\)

The bulk of the passage is devoted to an unpackaging of the claim that every utterance is “a link in the chain of speech communication”. The point, ultimately, is that the (actual, concrete) interrelatedness of speech *determines style*. And so, while Bakhtin would never deny that style is a product of “referentially semantic and expressive considerations”, his concern is to emphasize that such considerations are not made in a vacuum – as though the speaker were “the biblical Adam, dealing only with virgin and still unnamed objects, giving them names for the first time” (1986: 93) – that *style must therefore be understood as a response to the speech of others*:

\(^{30}\) The problem of style also leads directly to Bakhtin’s most sustained discussion of the centralizing (centripetal) and stratifying (centrifugal) forces (cf. 1981: 270-273). All of these notions are addressed more fully elsewhere: “double-voicing” is taken up in Ch. 5, “heteroglossia” in Ch. 6, and the “forces of language” in Ch. 7.

\(^{31}\) This is taken up more fully below.

\(^{32}\) The problem, as he repeats over and over again, is that we have failed to recognize the role of an actively responsive listener:

> linguists have by and large gotten no further than the compositional forms by which the listener is taken into account; they have not sought influence springing from more profound meaning and style. They have taken into consideration only those aspects of style determined by demands for comprehensibility and clarity – that is, precisely those aspects that are deprived of any internal dialogism, that take the listener for a person who passively understands but not for one who actively answers and reacts (1981: 280).
However monological the utterance may be (for example, a scientific or philosophical treatise), however much it may concentrate on its own object, it cannot but be, in some measure, a response to what has already been said about the given topic, on the given issue, even though this responsiveness may not have assumed a clear-cut external expression. It will be manifested in the overtones of the style, in the finest nuances of the composition (1986: 92).

This responsiveness, moreover, is not restricted to what has been explicitly stated, but includes, on the one hand, possible implications of what has already been said, and, on the other, possible utterances, which have never been made but which can be anticipated on the basis of the communicative situation (i.e. the other’s anticipated response to the situation itself or to one’s own incipient speech). And here we can see how complex the issue becomes, for in many cases one is not simply “responding” to a past utterance or to an anticipated future utterance, but, rather, acting in accordance with the concrete reality of the speech situation:

When constructing my utterance, I try actively to determine [the other’s] response. Moreover, I try to act in accordance with the response I anticipate, so this anticipated response, in turn, exerts an active influence on my utterance (I parry objections that I foresee, I make all kinds of provisos, and so forth). When speaking I always take into account the apperceptive background of the addressee’s perception of my speech: the extent to which he is familiar with the situation, whether he has special knowledge of the cultural area of communication, his views and convictions, his prejudices (from my viewpoint), his sympathies and antipathies – because all this will determine his active responsive understanding of my utterance. These considerations also determine my choice of a genre for my utterance, my choice of compositional devices, and, finally, my choice of language vehicles, that is, the style of my utterance (1986: 95-96).

In this, perhaps, we can see how the Bakhtinian focus links style even to the problem of speech genres (which might otherwise be seen as abstract forms determined in advance of, and thus without reference to, the concrete speech situation). Because genres are the typical forms

33 And not just logical implications, but all manner of connotations and associations. In this sense, one may respond to something that was not, strictly speaking, ever actually said.
34 In a sense, “The entire utterance is constructed, as it were, in anticipation of encountering this response” (1986: 94) – and to the extent that the speaker is successful, the response may be obviated and never actually produced.
35 In short, “Both the composition and, particularly, the style of the utterance depend on those to whom the utterance is addressed, how the speaker...senses and imagines his addressees, and the force of their effect on the utterance” (1986: 95).
36 Indeed, Bakhtin complains:
of real speech, with their own typical conceptions of the addressee, genres too have styles, generic styles, which are just as resistant to analysis as individual styles when approached in isolation, without regard to the typical situation (participants, themes, etc.) that give the genre life. Indeed, Bakhtin makes the link between genre and style a centrepiece of his conception of the utterance, arguing not only that genres have styles, but that the two are inseparably related:37 “The transfer of style from one genre to another not only alters the way a style sounds, under conditions of a genre unnatural to it, but also violates or renews the given genre” (1981: 66).

The point here is that style is not an abstract quality. Even the most generic styles are forms of relation. And this is why the novel is such an important genre for Bakhtin; the novel offers a means of depicting (albeit in an orchestrated, artistic manner) concrete relations (between and among genres) that illuminate their style.38 Efforts to treat a particular style in isolation (or, worse, as representative of the whole) are therefore necessarily misguided “inasmuch as that element, removed from its interaction with others, changes its stylistic meaning and ceases to be that which it in fact had been in the novel” (1981: 266). Nor can a given style be regarded as “a phenomenon of language itself” – either as a manifestation of an individualized language/dialect (i.e., where the unity of style is taken as the unity of an individual language) or of an individual utterance – as though the individuality of the

The separation of style and language from the question of genre has been largely responsible for a situation in which only individual and period-bound overtones of a style are the privileged subjects of study, while its basic social tone is ignored. The great historical destinies of genres are overshadowed by the petty vicissitudes of stylistic modifications, which in their turn are linked with individual artists and artistic movements. For this reason, stylistics has been deprived of an authentic philosophical and sociological approach to its problems; it has become bogged down in stylistic trivia; it is not able to sense behind the individual and period-bound shifts the great and anonymous destinies of artistic discourse itself. More often than not, stylistics defines itself as a stylistics of “private craftsmanship” and ignores the social life of discourse outside the artist’s study, discourse in the open spaces of public squares, streets, cities and villages, of social groups, generations and epochs. Stylistics is concerned not with living discourse but with a histological specimen made from it, with abstract linguistic discourse in the service of an artist’s individual creative powers (1981: 259).

The problem of “genre” is taken up more fully in Ch. 1.

37 “Where there is style there is genre” (1986: 66; cf. 63, 65).
38 Bakhtin writes: “Such a combining of languages and styles into a higher unity is unknown to traditional stylistics; it has no method for approaching the distinctive social dialogue among languages that is present in the novel” (1981: 263).
speaking subject were the “style-generating factor transforming a phenomenon of language and linguistics into a stylistic unity” (264);³⁹ in either case “style is understood in the spirit of Saussure: as an individualization of the general language (in the sense of a system of general language norms). Stylistics is transformed either into a curious kind of linguistics treating individual languages, or into a linguistics of the utterance” (264).

Only by getting past these persistent ideas about style can we understand the distinctly Bakhtinian notion of “stylization” – for just as style must be understood as an expression of a speaker’s relation to the speech of another, stylization must be understood to express the speaker’s relation to another’s style or another’s language entirely. Bakhtin puts this in a nutshell when he describes stylization as “The clearest and most characteristic form of an internally dialogized mutual illumination of languages” (1981: 362; my emphasis). Stylization, in other words, is not simply a linguistic performance in the style of another, but a collision of styles. If it appears to be a performance in the other’s style, this is perhaps because the speaker’s own voice remains hidden in “the raw material provided by the language he stylizes”.

Bakhtin’s position is made explicit in Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, where stylization is identified as a form of double-voiced discourse.⁴⁰ But even in The Dialogic Imagination Bakhtin makes it clear that stylization concerns the relation between two languages:

Every authentic stylization…is an artistic representation of another’s linguistic style, an artistic image of another’s language. Two individualized linguistic consciousnesses must be present in it: the one that represents (that is, the linguistic consciousness of the stylizer) and the one that is represented, which is stylized. Stylization differs from style proper precisely by virtue of its requiring a specific linguistic consciousness (the contemporaneity of the stylizer and his audience), under whose influence a style becomes a stylization, against whose background it acquires new meaning and significance (1981: 362; my emphasis).

³⁹ Bakhtin explains: “In accordance with the point of view selected, the unity of a style…presupposes on the one hand a unity of language…and on the other hand the unity of an individual person realizing himself in this language” (1981: 264).
⁴⁰ Bakhtin (1984) specifically distinguishes “stylization” (as a “unidirectional” form) from “parody” (a “vari-directional” one). Elsewhere, however (e.g., 1981: 364), he speaks of “stylization” in a more general sense, using the phrase “parodic stylization” to differentiate between the two types.
What Bakhtin calls the “Contemporaneous language” – the language of the stylizer and his audience – never, strictly speaking, appears in the utterance.\textsuperscript{41} Nevertheless, it maintains a crucial presence as the background against which the stylized language sounds and without which the very distinction between style and stylization vanishes. Indeed, Bakhtin warns against this very danger:

If we do not recognize the existence of this second context of someone else’s speech and begin to perceive stylization or parody in the same way ordinary speech is perceived, that is, as speech directed only at its referential object, then we will not grasp these phenomena in their essence: stylization will be taken for style, parody simply for a poor work of art (1984: 185).

Again, the essence of stylization is the collision between these two “linguistic consciousnesses”:

it is only in a stylized language, one not his own, that the stylizer can speak about the subject directly. But this stylized language is itself exhibited in the light of the language consciousness of a stylizer contemporary with it. \textit{Contemporaneous language casts a special light over the stylized language: it highlights some elements, leaves others in the shade, creates a special pattern of accents that has the effect of making its various aspects all aspects of language, creating specific resonances between the stylized language and the linguistic consciousness contemporaneous with it} – in short, it creates a free image of another’s language, which expresses not only a stylized but also a stylizing language and art-intention (1981: 362; my emphasis).

We may note a curious implication of this view: the “contemporaneous” language must be the language not only of the speaker, but of his listeners as well; \textit{one cannot stylize an utterance in the language of one’s own audience}, for the crucial dialogizing background will not appear and the utterance will sound with only a single voice, “stylization will be taken for style, parody simply for a poor work of art”.

\textsuperscript{41} Bakhtin explains: “Should contemporaneous linguistic material (a word, a form, a turn of phrase etc.) penetrate a stylization, it becomes a flaw in the stylization, its mistake: an anachronism, a modernism” (1981: 363). He adds, however, that the inconsistency may be deliberate (“the stylizing language consciousness may not only illuminate the stylized language, but may also itself pick up a word from outside and introduce it as its own thematic and linguistic material into the stylized language”). Stylization thus becomes what he calls “variation” (“something that frequently borders on hybridization”).
4.3 Observations on Style & Stylization in the Literature

In many ways (and quite appropriately), the Bakhtinian discourse on style – indeed, the Bakhtinian project in general – is a reaction to contemporary stylistics, “a link in the chain” of a discourse that has already been “articulated, disputed, elucidated and evaluated in various ways” (1986: 93). It therefore wastes little time revisiting the background of opinions that converge and diverge in it, except to point out where they fall short and what they leave unexplained. In the scholarly discourse on Bakhtin, however, the background is much more unsettled: not only do we have the stylistics against which Bakhtin reacted, but the stylistics that Bakhtin argued for in its stead. We can no longer speak of style in the sense that it was used prior to Bakhtin, but nor can we take for granted that the reader will have encountered (let alone grasped) the characteristically Bakhtinian sense of the word, with all that it entails. Treating style, as many commentators do, as unproblematic (and, indeed, self-evident) therefore invites misunderstanding.

The most pernicious of these efforts treats style as a distinctive form of speech – a characteristic or habitual way of speaking, a recognizable voice – explicable in terms of specific linguistic or “stylistic” features. It “presupposes on the one hand a unity of language (in the sense of a system of general normative forms) and on the other hand the unity of an individual person realizing himself in this language” (1981: 264). It is not, of course, that such a view is mistaken but that it reproduces – as though it were expressing the essence of Bakhtin’s own understanding – the very interpretation that Bakhtin sets himself against, and, without any sense of irony, confirms his observation that “Contemporary stylistics, whose roots go back to the poetics of classicism, has been unable to this day to free itself from the specific orientations and limitations of that poetics” (1984: 200).

As social language researchers, many reporters see the various forms of speech as contextually situated – that is, associated with specific social structures – and thus argue (as Pujolar 2001: 32 does) that “Bakhtin gives us a clear indication of how we may be able to connect particular speech forms with particular cultural forms”. Again, it is not that Bakhtin

42 Bakhtin says “Both these conditions are in fact obligatory in the majority of verse-based poetic genres, but even in these genres they far from exhaust or define the style of the work” (1981: 264).
would reject the idea that languages and styles are associated with spheres of activity – indeed, such an idea is at the heart of Bakhtin’s description of genre and linguistic stratification – but that we still have not escaped the poetics of classicism. While the linking of co-occurrent formal features and structures to social meanings may uncover individual sociolinguistic strata, it nevertheless treats each stratum as a linguistic unity – “a system of general normative forms” – the features of which “index” particular social facts.

The two dimensions of the “audience design” model – “responsive” and “initiative” – reflect precisely what Bakhtin sees in “traditional stylistics”:

the unity of style in a given work is transformed either into the unity of an individual language (‘individual dialect’), or into the unity of an individual speech (parole) [...] In accordance with the point of view selected, the unity of a style thus presupposes on the one hand a unity of language (in the sense of a system of general normative forms) and on the other hand the unity of an individual person realizing himself in this language (1981: 263, 264).

What’s more, this basic orientation remains in place even when the “meanings and sociocultural associations” are taken not just as resources, but as resources open to creative reformulation, as suggested by the “speaker design” approach. Consider the explanation offered in Schilling-Estes (2002):

the linguistic features and patterns speakers use are not mere reflections of static identity, as defined by one’s positions in an existent social order (e.g. white middle class male, older Native American female), but rather are resources speakers use to shape and re-shape social structures such as class and gender groups, as well as their positioning with respect to these structures and with respect to one another. [...] Thus, under speaker design approaches, reified structures fade in importance, while social practice and speaker agency move to the forefront (389).

Here, the idea is that a speaker works with stylistic material much as he is usually thought to work with strictly linguistic material: producing new (more contextually and ideologically refined) meanings through the combination of recognized forms.43 One may position oneself, for instance, as something other than a typical “white middle class male”, by incorporating stylistic elements associated with gay activism. But here, more than ever, it is “the

43 Can this be understood as anything other than a semiotics of style?
individuality of the speaking subject that is recognized to be that style-generating factor transforming a phenomenon of language and linguistics into a stylistic unity” (1981: 264).

Regardless of whether style is interpreted according to the audience or speaker design model, a fundamental assumption remains: that certain linguistic features (“variables”) are associated with particular sociocultural realities. On the one hand, the speaker is thought to “respond” to the situation by producing the appropriate variation; and on the other, to “initiate” or establish a sense of situation by employing a given variable (or creative combination). Here we can see exactly what Bakhtin means when he says that “style is understood in the spirit of Saussure” (1981: 264). In either case, the variable is taken as the signifier of an associated meaning – the “responsive” dimension treating it as a sign within a given sociocultural system, and the “initiative” dimension as one structured by the utterance itself – “Stylistics is transformed either into a curious kind of linguistics treating individual languages, or into a linguistics of the utterance” (1981: 264). When Bakhtin speaks of “responsiveness”, however, he means something very different. On the Bakhtinian view, a stylistics can never cash out as a linguistics because the form of an utterance is never associated with a fixed meaning.44 For any given intention, the form is determined by the actual situation – and this includes, perhaps more than anything else, other utterances – which, by definition, are not accounted for by linguistics.

In this we can see how much of the literature on “stylization” diverges from what we see in the Bakhtinian texts. Nicholas Coupland, one of the more influential voices in the recent discourse, articulates a common misconception: that Bakhtin erases the distinction between

44 As he explains:

Language as a system has…a rich arsenal of language tools – lexical, morphological, and syntactic – for expressing the speaker’s emotionally evaluative position, but all these tools as language tools are absolutely neutral with respect to any particular real evaluation. […] Words belong to nobody, and in themselves they evaluate nothing. But they can serve any speaker and be used for the most varied and directly contradictory evaluations on the part of the speaker (1986: 84-85).

What Bakhtin says of “evaluation” (i.e. the “expressive aspect”) he means of style in general, for “The individual style of the utterance is determined primarily by its expressive aspect”. He adds: “This is generally recognized in the area of stylistics. Certain investigators even reduce style directly to the emotionally evaluative aspect of speech” (1986: 84).
style and stylization, bringing us to a position “where all language use is stylised, and where to conceive of style monologically is insufficient or naive” (Coupland, 2004: 249). The implicit logic here is that all language use is double voiced; stylization is a form of double-voicing; therefore all language use is stylized.

The premise that speech is always double-voiced is itself dubious (and seems to result from the conflating of “dialogism” and “double-voicing”). But even if all speech were to be construed as double-voiced (in a very broad sense), it does not follow that all speech is stylized – unless we also conflate double-voicing and stylization, and there is no support at all for this in Bakhtin. On the contrary, double-voicing most closely resembles the broader notion of dialogism when it manifests what Bakhtin calls the “active” variety – characteristic of “hidden polemic”, “hidden dialogue” and other “sideward glances” at the discourse of another – and not in the “passive” varieties among which he situates stylization. The crucial difference is that while the active varieties rely on the speaker’s own words (which are shaped, as in all dialogized speech, by prior discourse), passive varieties make explicit (and often exclusive) use of another’s language – and it is clear that not all language use is stylized in this way.

The second, and more serious, claim is that styles are (to quote Norman Fairclough) “ways of being, particular social or personal identities” (2003: 26) – and that stylization is therefore what Thurlow & Jaworski (2006: 105) call “the strategic (re)presentation and promotion of particular ways of being (or styles) involving language, image, social practice and material

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45 Indeed, the distinction between “stylized” and “ordinary” speech is implicit in Bakhtin, who sees the problem of style precisely in the common tendency “to perceive stylization or parody in the same way ordinary speech is perceived” (1984: 185).

46 These distinctions are examined more fully in Ch. 5.

47 Indeed, stylizations, by definition, make exclusive use of it. See note 41, above.

48 Fairclough later explains:

Styles are the discoursal aspect of ways of being, identities. Who you are is partly a matter of how you speak, how you write, as well as a matter of embodiment – how you look, how you hold yourself, how you move, and so forth. Styles are linked to identification – using the nominalization rather than the noun ‘identities’ emphasizes the process of identifying, how people identify themselves and are identified by others (159).
culture”. This interpretation, which is more or less explicitly and directly associated with Bakhtin, is shared by many of the most prominent voices:

Deborah Cameron (2000a) notes how style may be used as a linguistic resource for performing an identity; she refers to Allan Bell’s (1997) ‘initiative shift’ and Rampton’s (1995) ‘crossing’, both of which convey the sense of a person’s adopting a way of speaking which is not their own – in other words, putting on a voice (Coupland’s [2001a] stylization) (Thurlow & Jaworski 2006: 104).

In all of this, stylization is treated as a means for the direct expression of the speaker’s attitude. It may be “reflexive” and “knowing”, as Coupland argues, but it nevertheless takes a given style as a sort of resource with which to “forge and enact particular social personas”. Rampton’s (2009) notion of “crossing” (which is “closely related, but…involves a stronger sense of social or ethnic boundary transgression”) puts this into sharp relief. He explains: “the variants being used are more likely to be seen as anomalously “other” for the speaker, and questions of legitimacy and entitlement can arise” (149). But such questions can arise only under the assumption that the speaker is staking a claim to the other’s speech – again, as though it were a resource for the direct expression of the speaker’s individual will. But this is precisely the view that Bakhtin argues against. On the Bakhtinian view, there can be no question of one’s “right” to the use of another’s style, for it is precisely not a claim of ownership, not an appropriation of the style as such, but rather its illumination as the style of another, an effect that can only be achieved when that style is measured against the speaker’s own.49

Perhaps, then, we can see how Niels’s use of language (as described in Scheuer 2003) diverges from anything Bakhtin would describe as stylized. To suggest (as the author does) that Niels intentionally employs an “academic” style as a means of conveying his professionalism is a paradigm example of what Bakhtin sees as the traditional stylistics (i.e., a stylistics based on “the direct referentially oriented discourse of the author”), in which “The selection of language means…is determined solely by referentially semantic and expressive considerations” (1986: 90). Absent, in other words, is any consideration of Niels’s own style as a background against which the “academic” style acquires new meaning and

49 Or more precisely, against the listener’s own, as supposed by the speaker and against which the speaker’s intention is refracted.
significance. Indeed, no such background can be presented, since the “academic” style is meant to be taken as Niels’s own. Nor is there any consideration of the interviewers’ style as a background, for that too is assumed to coincide with Niels’s performance. In other words, according to the author’s own interpretation, Niels’s performance is calibrated for the system of meanings he expects his audience to hold. In this sense, his speech is profoundly dialogized, perhaps even actively double-voiced, but in no way stylized.

Consider, in contrast, how Si’s speech is interpreted by Günthner (2011). As the author observes, it is an instance of parodistic stylization (and therefore not something that easily meshes with a notion of style as a resource for the direct expression of a speaker’s intention). Günthner does not claim that German is associated with such notions as “exaggeration” and “squeamishness”, notions that can be called on or “indexed” by the use of German-styled speech. And this is the crucial point; even if Si’s friends hold negative views of Germans and their mannerisms, Si’s communicative intention cannot be achieved simply by reproducing a German “style”; Si must actively *re-accen* it,51 make it comical, and in this way speak *about* it. This is precisely what Bakhtin is saying when he explains that “The speaking person and his discourse in everyday speech…serves as a *subject* for the engaged, practical transmission of information, and not as a *means* of representation” (1981: 340).52 Again, this is easier to grasp in a parody, but on the Bakhtinian view the same holds true in unidirectional stylization. Of course, stylization

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50 Unfortunately, Günthner does not pursue this insight. Instead, she returns to the sort interpretations we have seen offered by Rampton and others. She explains:

As Rampton (1999: 421) points out, in “styling the other,” speakers exploit linguistic varieties “to appropriate, explore, reproduce and challenge influential images and stereotypes of groups that they do not themselves (straightforwardly) belong to. By performing a variety that is stereotypically associated with a group, they can evoke, represent or even identify with the group.” (Günthner 2011: 460-461).

In some ways, this recalls the sort of overly broad characterization that Coupland accuses Bakhtin of offering: stylization as the use of another’s style in seemingly any way and for any purpose.

51 Cf. Ch. 3, note 22, above.

52 He adds:

As a matter of fact, all everyday forms for transmitting another’s discourse, as well as the changes in discourse connected with these forms – from subtle nuances in meaning and emphasis to gross externalized distortions of the verbal composition – are defined by this practical engagement. But this emphasis on engaged discourse does not exclude certain aspects of representability (1981: 340).
(parodic or otherwise) is not simply speech about speech – for there are many ways to make the speech of another the subject of discourse. Rather, it is speech about speech with only the other’s discourse to guide the listener’s understanding.\(^{53}\) It works not directly, but indirectly, in the way it reflects off the background of the listener’s own linguistic consciousness. This is Bakhtin’s crucial insight, but it is one that continues to be resisted in spite of his explicit and almost single-minded efforts to articulate it as an alternative to the prevailing view.

Here we return to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: what is “style”? In our initial formulation it was distinguished as a way of “relating” rather than of “being”. Now perhaps the significance of this claim is more apparent. To say that style is a way of being is to suggest a category, an identity, which can be picked out and described as a fact on its own.\(^{54}\) But as we have seen, Bakhtin rejects this approach even with genre (which has nevertheless been treated, in scholarship and everyday speech alike, almost invariably, in such abstract categorical terms). For Bakhtin, style must be sought in the speaker’s response to a given situation.\(^{55}\) Foremost among the elements of a given speech situation is the background of discourse against which the utterance must sound. Without orienting ourselves to this background – by assuming instead that speech is direct and unconditional – we cannot hope to understand its actual style.

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\(^{53}\) In parody of the sort that Günthner describes, the strangeness of the other’s style is re-accented in ways that direct the listener’s attention to aspects of the style relevant to the speaker’s intentions – but what is produced is nevertheless (at least ostensibly) the other’s own style; and the parody would not work if the re-accentuation were not in some sense “true” to it. Compare this with Bakhtin’s (1981) discussion of “retelling”, which, he says, demonstrates “on a small scale the task implicit in all prose stylistics”. He writes:

> retelling a text in one’s own words is to a certain extent a double-voiced narration of another’s words, for indeed ‘one’s own words’ must not completely dilute the quality that makes another’s words unique; a retelling in one’s own words should have a mixed character, able when necessary to reproduce the style and expressions of the transmitted text (341; my emphasis).

\(^{54}\) As we noted above, it is just such a view that “has led to a situation in which stylistic analysis of novel prose is replaced by linguistic description, usually neutral, of the language of a given work, or (even worse) of a given author” (Bakhtin, 1981: 415).

\(^{55}\) Cf. Ch. 4, note 34, above.
This perhaps sheds light on the complications we observed at the beginning of this chapter, that style is really a *collision* of styles, and that stylization gets absorbed into style itself. This, of course, is problematic if we want to say something *about* style; how can we be certain of the background against which a style has been projected?  

Strictly speaking, we cannot – for the background (as a discourse produced in the concrete style of a real speaker) is a product of the same sorts of troubling collisions as the style in question. In purely logical terms, it seems this must result either in an infinite regress or some kind of recursive “loop”. In either case there seems to be nothing grounding these terms. But this is precisely the point: neither genres nor styles are grounded on the authority of some extrinsic structuring principle; they resolve, at bottom, only in the concrete situation that called them forth.  

We encountered this same problem in our investigation of genre, and the answer there is relevant here as well: one participates not in the “world” – as an imagined unity – but in a mass of overlapping and intersecting “worlds”: spheres of activity (and thus spheres of communication) where “the unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others’ individual utterances” (1986: 89). To say that speech is grounded on speech (or style on style) is not to say it is grounded on just *any* speech or style, but on the discourse encountered in a particular sphere of communication, where it takes on a typical and characteristic semantic and axiological profile:

Actual social life and historical becoming create within an abstractly unitary national language a multitude of concrete worlds, a multitude of bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems; within these various systems (identical in the abstract) are elements of language filled with various semantic and axiological content and each with its own different sound (1981: 288).

This is the background, and while we can never be certain about anything in language, we can be confident (as both speakers and listeners) that we have correctly perceived it by virtue

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56 As Bakhtin (1981: 374-375) observes, there are cases (of historical literature, for instance) in which we have “forever lost” the background necessary to correctly interpret the style, and many more in which the actual style “has not even been suspected”.

57 This is arguably the central idea of Bakhtin’s early philosophical writings (e.g. Bakhtin 1993a). Cf. Ch. 7, note 19 and Ch. 9, note 28, below.
of our membership – our participation – in that sphere.\textsuperscript{58} Needless to say, the “background” comprises more than others’ discourses and styles. But these are the linguistic (or at least “metalinguistic”) elements that determine the profile of any utterance (1986: 92). And what is more, they play a central role in a particular kind of “speech about speech”: utterances that Bakhtin describes as “double-voiced” or “double-directed”, in which the surrounding discourse acts not only as the contextualizing background for the referentially semantic content of the utterance, but (at the same time) as an object of speech in its own right. We examine this particular mode of discourse and its implications in Chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{58} Such membership, of course, is not ceremonial – as Bakhtin might say, “it does not approach the object from the sidelines”.
5. **Double-voiced Discourse**

Our efforts to unpack the problem of style and stylization (in Ch. 4) led to the conclusion that style was intrinsically *relational* – a collision of socio-linguistic centres. There is a certain “doubling” involved in this, as each centre maintains an authentic presence in the resulting style, which can be ignored only at risk of confusion or misunderstanding. In many cases, the “second context” of the background discourse remains off to the side, its influence limited to the role of conditioning a particular style as style. And this is true whether a given utterance is mediated by the words of another or not: it sounds in a single voice. In other cases, however, the background discourse becomes a more central participant. And here we encounter a genuine “doubling” of voices, for such an utterance is not only conditioned or mediated by the discourse of another but is literally *directed toward it*, deriving its significance from an implicit commentary *about it*. As Bakhtin observes:

> If we do not recognize the existence of this second context of someone else’s speech and begin to perceive stylization or parody in the same way ordinary speech is perceived…then we will not grasp these phenomena in their essence (1984: 185).

Indeed, we could go further and say that agreement may be taken for disagreement, rejection for approval, significations and intentions of all sorts, big and small, overlooked or misconstrued. In this, we see the obvious interest such doubling holds for sociolinguists, for strictly *linguistic* (or even *pragmatic*) considerations prove insufficient for a full and accurate understanding of speech communication.

It is perhaps clearer now that the complications we encountered in the earlier chapters are all facets of the same problem: the inescapable sociality of individual speech. A double-voiced discourse is actually spoken by a singular voice, with a singular intention and, ultimately, a singular style, which nevertheless proceeds *indirectly* – not by *means* of the voice or the intention or the style of another (though it may *also* do this) – but *through* or even *against*
that other’s discourse, which is to say, through or against that other’s intention and style.¹

The doubling of voices results in a singular effect.

5.1 The Scholarly Discourse on Double-voiced Discourse

The Bakhtinian notion of “double-voicing” is one of the more common themes to be taken up in the scholarly discourse – and one that might appear self-evident. Menard-Warwick (2004: 536) characterizes it as an “interweaving” of languages, while Prior, Hengst, Roozen & Shipka (2006: 735) describe it as “utterances that laminate different social and individual voices together” and Gordon (2007: 134) speaks of “discourse where (at least) two voices sound simultaneously”. But how and where these “voices” (“utterances”, “languages”) double up, and the implications of such doubling, are far from clear. Consider an example from Stroud (2004), who uses the term in passing. He writes:

Photographs of buildings, and clusters of foreign-looking women and children are inset in the article and complement the text. The literary technique and photographic backup construct the writer as looking down on the scene and entering the neighborhood, a trope familiar from travel literature and ethnographic writing as the sovereign figure of the-monarch-of-all-I-survey…. The quoted RS [“Rinkeby Swedish”] voice of the children [“how can you just say that, Anders? And Anders, he gapes back full of laughter: I’ll ‘schasta’ you, just wait, I’ll ‘schasta’ you.”] is subordinated through Bakhtinian double-voicing to this ethnographic framing of Otherness carried in the text and pictures, thereby contributing to the overall rhetorical effect of the text, and driving home the exotic Otherness of a superficially mundane everyday scene in the suburbs of Stockholm (210).²

¹ Thus, Bakhtin writes: “The author does not speak in a given language…but he speaks, as it were, through language, a language that has somehow more or less materialized, become objectivized” (1981: 299; my emphasis).

² Rinkeby Swedish is “a potential, imagined, pan-immigrant contact variety of Swedish” with supposed origins in the borough of Rinkeby in Northern Stockholm. It is characterized by “a specific ‘foreign-sounding’ phonology; lexical items borrowed from many different languages; productive hybrid morphologies; and a typologically unmarked or simplified syntax and morphology in relation to standard Swedish”. It is sometimes perceived as “a ghettoized form of immigrant Swedish” (199). Stroud’s point is that “immigrants are positioned as outside of a symbolically reconstituted community of ‘real’ Swedish speakers” (196). We will return to this example at the end of the chapter.
The reader may be struck by the utterance, “I’ll ‘schasta’ you, just wait, I’ll ‘schasta’ you”, in which two languages are quite literally given voice simultaneously – but this is not where the author locates the two voices.\(^3\) The suggestion here, rather, is that the discourse as a whole has been double-voiced: on the one hand, in what Anders and his playmate are saying and, on the other, in what the reporter constructs this discourse to mean (“exotic Otherness”).

5.1.1 Simultaneity, ambiguity and ambivalence

To speak of “double-voicing” as the “interweaving” or “laminating” of different voices is thus just the start. Implicit in many claims is the notion that double-voiced discourse consists of the simultaneous presence of opposing perspectives. Quoting Bakhtin (1981: 324), Hodges (2008a: 486) makes the point explicit, calling it discourse “which ‘serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author’”.

Tholander & Aronsson (2002: 568-569) cite the same passage, calling double-voiced discourse “another’s speech in another’s language”, which “manages to express two different intentions simultaneously”. Their interpretations nevertheless diverge quite sharply from Stroud’s. Hodges sees it as a matter of “transforming” the original meaning of an utterance by recontextualizing it,\(^4\) while Tholander & Aronsson see it in terms of irony. As they explain it: “The essence of this kind of irony resides in saying the opposite of what you intend to convey. At the same time, however, you make sure – through tone of voice, accompanying gestures, or other stylistic devices – that you mean the opposite of what you say”.\(^5\) Tholander (2003) pursues this line of thinking with a pair of examples:

Anja teases Linus by utilizing two kinds of ironic double-voice discourse (cf. Bakhtin, 1984). In the first part of the utterance, she portrays Linus as a gossipmonger

\(^{3}\) Compare this with Woolard, & Genovese (2007), below, who see in precisely these sorts of utterances (in which two linguistic systems are simultaneously present) a manifestation of double-voicing in the Bakhtinian sense.

\(^{4}\) Compare this with the view of “mixed” genres that we encountered in Section 2.1.6., above. It is taken up further in the context of reported speech in Section 5.1.2, below.

\(^{5}\) Holmes & Schnurr (2006: 33) offer a similar interpretation:

Talk which indexes gender in exaggerated or over-emphatic ways may be manipulated for the purpose, for instance, of parodying and even subverting established workplace norms and expectations about appropriate ways for professional employees to behave at work.
by agreeing with him in an exaggerated manner: “Yeah, ick, it’s scary!”... And in the second part of it, she portrays him as a pupil engaging in uninteresting (or perhaps illegitimate) idle talk: “What an interesting, interesting subject!” (12).

Woolard, & Genovese (2007: 504-505) also emphasize the idea of “simultaneity”. In their study of “strategic bivalency”, they raise the notion of a “Bakhtinian ‘both/and’”. As they explain: “bivalency allows speakers to activate simultaneously both one language and another from their linguistic repertoire, keeping them in tension with each other, rather than being forced to choose either one or the other”. They add: “This is a twist on the Bakhtinian concept of double-voicing that has been applied productively in other studies of language contact. In this case, not only two social intentions but also two linguistic systems (with all their cultural and political indexicality) resonate in the selfsame form.” Pujolar (2001) offers a similar view. Citing Bakhtin (1984: 189), he explains that double-voicing “refers to the author’s “use of someone else’s discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own” (31), and that “Double-voiced discourses are opposed to monologized discourses, which are intended to be seen as direct, unmediated or exclusive, i.e. a discourse that ‘recognizes only itself and its object’” (31-32). He takes this to mean that “ambivalence constitutes their double-voicing, as two different perspectives become embedded with the

6 The idea that double-voicing reflects an unresolved tension also seems to be Boyarin’s (2008: 616) position:

The Stamma itself is thus a double-voiced literary phenomenon, a monologism characterized by a drive toward a complete control of meaning under the aegis of the rule-based ‘Oral Torah’, on the one hand, and a massive disruption of that monologue at the same time, on the other hand. This double voicing in which neither voice defeats the other (or even entirely comprehends and grasps the other) is what brings it as a text closest to that which Bakhtin calls the novel.

7 Woolard (2004: 87) seems to take this view as well:

We receive all our linguistic forms through others’ uses, and thus each carries other voices. Most American English speakers can identify, for example, the teacherly voice in an admonition like “Now children, play nicely.” Even while the original voice of such an utterance is recognizable, it can be reaccentuated by another speaker, infused with a new social intention. A single utterance can combine a variety of voices, in polyphony or dialogue, as when an adult jokingly invokes the teacherly phrase to call colleagues to order. In the various kinds of double-voiced word, the speaker’s utterance and intentions enter into dialogue, and sometimes struggle, with the voice and social intentions of others who (might) have uttered the same forms. A double-voiced word may endorse and amplify the intentions of earlier uses, or it may challenge it in irony or parody.
same utterance or part of an utterance” (183; original emphasis). Marková (2003a: 34) likewise sees ambivalence as the essence of double-voicing. She writes: “All ambivalent images that Bakhtin displays are dual-bodied, dual-faced and pregnant with their oppositions. They integrate affirmation and negation, top and bottom, convergence and divergence not only as sequences of expressions but above all as expressions in their simultaneity”.⁸

Citing the work of Stroud (1998), Wei (2002: 166) sees not ambivalence but ambiguity as the operative feature. He writes:

Working with a speech genre known as kros in the linguistic repertoire of speakers in Papua New Guinea, Stroud shows how code-switching between Tok Pisin and Taiap is used as a “double-voicing” or “polyphony” (Bakhtin 1984) technique, not only to show the speaker’s sensitivity to the co-participant’s language preferences but also to reflect a language ideology that fosters opaqueness, in the sense that it is often unclear in kros how much of what is said is the speaker’s own words and how much is an echo of others’ speech.

We find the same view frequently expressed in the discourse on code-switching and stylization⁹ – that is, the “putting on” of a voice with the intention of distancing oneself from the expression, making it ambiguous as to who is responsible for the meanings. Pujolar (2001: 181) offers the example of a stylized insult:

The stylized voice served to convey Salva’s intention to dissociate himself from the insulting voice and from a voice which claimed the rights to direct the group…. The character he had animated was, therefore, not entirely himself, but not entirely an other either. The speaking subject was symbolically split due to the various potential significations of what he said. It was Salva himself putting on the character of an other which was somehow speaking for him. The exploitation of the ambivalence of ironical, mocking or cynical voices is very common in interaction. I will show below how code-switching was one of the formal devices used to deconstruct them.

Coupland (2001a: 366) puts this in a nutshell: “stylized utterance dislocates a speaker from the persona he or she voices, and from the pragmatic implications of what is said. This means

⁸ In another version of this discussion, Marková (2003b: 128) adds: “The dual-bodied world and dual-voiced language are based on the fusion of opposites”.

⁹ The issue of code-switching is discussed more fully in the context of speech hybrids (Ch. 3). Stylization is taken up briefly below, and more fully in Ch. 4.
that, under stylization, it can often be unclear just what levels of ownership, authorship, and endorsement are being implied in a given utterance”.

Koven (2004: 484-485), on the other hand, takes the notion of simultaneity to mean that different narrative roles (i.e., narrator, interlocutor, and character) can be realized at the same time:

For example, in indirect discourse, the narrator perspective is combined with that of the quoted character…. If a speaker combines plot advancement and current commentary, this is an example of interlocutor-narrator double voicing. Character and interlocutor speech can be simultaneous, if the speaker talks in such a way so that her current interlocutory attitude has become fully collapsed or superimposed upon with that of a character.

Moore (2009: 306) likewise understands the problem as one of narrative roles, but again in terms of ambiguity rather than ambivalence. He describes the blurring of the boundaries between “speech-event modalities” as “an interesting residue of Bakhtinian ‘double-voiced’ utterances”. The idea seems to be that in certain native oral traditions, the speaker often moves without warning between roles as interlocutor and narrator, and that the boundary between explanation and the narration can be difficult to discern (and perhaps even that the speaker acts as interlocutor and narrator simultaneously).

Others see double-voicing as the use of someone else’s discourse in combination with one’s own. Su (2004: 67), for instance, citing Rampton (1999: 422), argues that in double-voiced discourse: “within a single stretch of speech, stereotypic elements from elsewhere mingle with habitual speech patterns, and in the process, they generate symbolically condensed dialogues between self and other”. Holmes & Schnurr (2006: 33) echo this view, describing double-voicing as “ways in which speakers mingle components of different styles for

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10 Coupland & Jaworski (2004: 35) add:

“stylistization systematically complicates speaker modality – the speaker’s inferable relationship to the content and function of what is said. Stylized utterance is “as if” utterance, when a speaker gives reason for a listener to doubt whether s/he is the owner (in Goffman’s terms the “principle” and “author” as well as the “animator”) of his/her utterance. […] So, animators of stylized language recontextualise themselves as well as their talk, to the point of not necessarily self-representing as themselves: they may be “ventriloquating” (another concept from Bakhtin), but often without offering evidence of the mimicked source they intend, which might or might not be themselves.

Badarneh (2009: 643) likewise describes double-voicing as the use of “words that are distinctively associated with others, two voices are interacting: the group which habitually uses these words and the speaker who is currently using these words”. He adds:

Through this double voicing the speaker’s meaning forms partly through an interaction with the voice of another, who also speaks through the current speaker’s words…. The emerging double-voiced discourse is characterized by conflict as the speaker injects his own intentions into the still live words of others (643).

5.1.2 Double-voicing and reported speech

One way to understand this “mingling” of voices is through the notion of “reported speech”. Prodromou (2008: 82), for instance, describes reported speech as “An obvious example of ‘double-voicedness’”. Gordon (2006: 551) offers a similar view in her discussion of Tannen (1989) and the problem of repetition and constructed dialogue:

Tannen emphasizes that so-called reported speech is usually not an exact repetition or ‘report’ of an utterance from a prior interaction, but even if it is, it is still the creation of the quoting party in the current context (hence her introduction of the term constructed dialogue). However, she also points out that for all language use, ‘Both the meanings of individual words…and the combinations into which we can put them are given to us by previous speakers, traces of whose voices and contexts cling inevitably to them’ (quoting Tannen 1989: 100).

\(^{11}\) This is perhaps also what Milani (2010: 127) means when she quotes Cameron’s (2003: 448-449) notion of “double discourse” as language that is “simultaneously both itself and a symbolic substitute for something else”. While Milani does not draw an explicit connection between Cameron’s claims and Bakhtin’s (and Cameron’s comments about “double discourse”), in fact, have nothing to do with the Bakhtinian notion of “double-directed discourse”), Milani’s prior reference to Bakhtin (two pages earlier, on p. 125), in a discussion of the same of problem of language, directs the reader to a passage at the very heart of the Bakhtinian discourse on double-voicing (1984: 195).
Quoting Bakhtin (1984: 195) she explains that “Someone else’s words introduced into our own speech inevitably assume a new (our own) interpretation and become subject to our evaluation of them; that is, they become double-voiced” (551). Hodges (2008a: 486) turns to Vološinov (1973: 154) to explain how this “re-presentation” of another’s words becomes double-voiced: “the use of reported speech ‘imposes upon the reported utterance its own accents, which collide and interfere with the accents in the reported utterance’”. Blackledge (2005: 16-17), also drawing on Vološinov, calls it a “merging” of voices. Josey (2010: 20) likewise argues that “double voicing is possible in that a speaker can voice his own opinions while reporting the speech of others. This voicing allows speakers or characters to position themselves at a similar or differing opinion by employing various language strategies”. He observes, for instance, that a speaker “is also engaging in what Bakhtin calls double voicing in that he is directly positioning himself as a buddy and one who has been there and done that” (33).

Wertsch (2001: 228) argues that “double-voicedness ensues” when the reporting infiltrates the reported utterance. He offers the following as an example (referred to as “3”, below): “He said enthusiastically that he would be here”. Wertsch observes such infiltration/double-voicing in four places:

The first is the second ‘he’, an expression that is coreferential with ‘I’ in the original utterance [example 1: ‘I will be there!’] but has a different form. Second, it appears in ‘would’ in 3, a term that replaces ‘will’ in 1. Third, the ‘here’ in 3 replaces the ‘there’ in 1 because the spatial coordinates of utterances 1 and 3 differ. Finally, the exclamation point in 1 is replaced with the adverb ‘enthusiastically’ in 3 (228).

Citing Holquist (2002), Clark (2006: 58) offers a similar interpretation for “dialogism” in general:

The heart of Bakhtin’s dialogism is that there is no word spoken (or in this case written) without its being addressed to someone. The ‘self who speaks or writes the word is not a unitary, self-sufficient construct, but stands always in relation to the other whom it addresses. ‘I’ has no firm referent, in the sense that ordinary nouns can be said to have firm referents; ‘I’ is a ‘shifter’…that changes its meaning according to who is speaking/writing and to whom. When someone says ‘I’ they temporarily occupy it and fill it with their own meaning, which simultaneously arranges the rest of the world in relation to themselves.

Angermeyer (2009: 5) identifies this as a particular concern for the interpreter:
The implications for participant roles are very different when the interpreter translates in the third person, referring to the source speaker as he or she. Here we can speak with Bakhtin (1981: 324) of a double-voiced discourse that ‘serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions,’ namely the intention of the translated source speaker, as well as that of the interpreter him- or herself.

In such cases the question (as Wertsch puts it) is “Who is doing the talking?”

The answer must be that at least two voices are simultaneously involved. The voice that produced the reported utterance specifies the referent in each case, and the voice that produced the reporting utterance provides the particular way of identifying the referent, the ‘referential perspective…. One hears two voices in each case (2001: 229).  

5.1.3 Double-voicing and dialogism

Prodromou (2008: 82) makes an even stronger claim: that while reported speech is “an obvious example” of double-voicing, language itself is double-voiced in that it “carries the individual’s intended meanings plus meanings previously attached to the words in the utterance”. One way to understand this is to see a connection between double-voicing and “dialogism” (or what we might call “actively responsive” discourse). This seems to be Pujolar’s (2001: 26) interpretation when he argues that “each utterance [is] inherently responsive (it responds to and incorporates previous utterances, thus becoming multivoiced)”.  

Pascual (2006: 399) likewise suggests that a discourse becomes double-voiced – or even “triple-voiced” – to the extent that it is “constantly being silently responded to or questioned in the minds of both addressees and overhearers”. For Mahendran (2003: 243) such responsiveness is not even confined to prior utterances but includes those thoughts (uttered or not) that may be anticipated from the other speaker.  

12 This is problematic in something like court translation (which is Angermeyer’s concern): Third-person reference thus brings in the interpreter’s own voice, but from a legal perspective, this voice is not a legitimate component of the interaction…. Instead, the court interpreter is viewed as a conduit who is expected to translate ‘verbatim,’ functionally replicating the source speaker’s utterances (5).

13 The notion of “multivoicing” is explored more fully below.

14 Grant (2003a) summarizes Mahendran’s project well. He writes: Mahendran examines the multivoicedness of the [Scottish Young Person’s] Centre on four levels comprising face-to-face dialogues, the internal dialogues of the dialogical self, dialogism of words-in-use and dialogues of the self as social agent with the
Like Prodromou, Sclafani (2008: 510) argues that “all utterances are polyphonic; that is, they contain several “voices”, reminiscent of particular characters, social groups, or styles”. And Strauss (2004) even quotes Bakhtin’s (1981: 279) claim in this regard, arguing that “all discourse is ‘oriented toward the “already uttered,” the “already known,” the “common opinion” and so forth’” (166). Meinhof (2004: 283) agrees that, for Bakhtin, all language use is inherently double-voiced; but she echoes Coupland’s (2001a) position that a finer distinction needs to be drawn than Bakhtin himself has offered – which is to say that even if all discourse is double-voiced, we must still recognize the unique form it frequently takes in stylized performance. A number of others, however, argue that Bakhtin already addresses the possibility of a uniquely double-voiced discourse. Badarneh (2009: 643), for instance, says it occurs when “the speaker injects his own intentions into the still live words of others”. He is alluding here to a passage that Blackledge (2005: 102) and Trester (2009: 166) quote directly, where Bakhtin (1984: 185) speaks of “inserting a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and retains, an intention of its own”.\(^{15}\) For Maynard (2007: 68) this cashes out as a form of intertextuality: “inserting another conversation within a conversation”; citing Kristeva (1980), she explains: “Different voices echo, and as a result, it minimally creates a double-voiced discourse”.

### 5.1.4 Double-voicing and power

Bucholtz (2009) draws a similar connection between double-voicing and dialogism, though she is primarily concerned with the problem of entextualization.\(^{16}\) She argues that “All ...

\(^{15}\) Hodges (2008a), Angermeyer (2009) and Grossen & Orvig (2011) all quote (and Tholander & Aronsson, 2002 paraphrase) a similar passage: Bakhtin (1981: 324), where double-voiced discourse is described as discourse which “serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author”.

\(^{16}\) Citing Bauman & Briggs (1990) and Silverstein & Urban (1996), Bucholtz calls this: a process whereby language becomes detachable from its original context of production and is thus reified as text, a highly portable linguistic object […] embodied language use is extracted from the richly contextualized social interaction in which it is originally produced and through its recontextualization in writing is rendered static and fixed on the printed page (2009: 505).
entextualizations are necessarily arrived at dialogically and are thus inherently ‘double-voiced discourse’” (506). She adds that “By erasing the intertextual gap between the originary and the entextualizing discourse...however, institutions are able to portray their entextualizations as objective and transparent, thus fostering an ideology of institutions as neutral and disinterested entities” (506).

In this we see another view that comes out in the literature – the idea that efforts are sometimes made to conceal a given discourse under the cloak of another. Blackledge (2005: 14), for instance, argues:

illiberal discourse may masquerade as liberal argument, as that which is less acceptable is dressed in more acceptable clothing. In other instances a political speech may be sharply aware of the discourse of its opponents, responding to it, clashing with it and dismissing it. In each of these instances we can look to Bakhtin’s [sic] notion of ‘double-voiced discourse’ for clarification.

As with Bucholtz, above, Blackledge sees this as an expression of power. He writes:

It is important to recognise that this is a social model of language – that is, the relation between the various voices within an utterance is subject to the relations of power within society. The authority of the authorial voice is likely to be maintained where it belongs to those in powerful positions in society. Its discourse may nevertheless be double-voiced, where it dismisses or deletes voices which contradict its perspective (16).

Examples include “discourse which acknowledges its own opposition within a single utterance, discourse which clashes with another, absent discourse, or discourse which adopts the perspective of another’s discourse” (17).

17 Higgins (2007: 5), on the other hand, says “(Re)entextualization is certainly linked to the concept of intertextuality (Bakhtin 1981, Kristeva 1986)” and also that it “borrows theoretically from Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of polyphony, the idea that speakers use language for their own communicative purposes”. The notion has some uptake in the literature, garnering 30 mentions in 8 texts. Quoting Silverstein & Urban (1996), Higgins defines it as a process in which:

speakers may “take some fragment of discourse and quote it anew, making it seem to carry a meaning independent of its situation within two now distinct co(n)texts,” or, alternatively, they can take a text and “reanimate it through a performance that, being a (mere) performance of the text, suggests various dimensions of contextualized ‘interpretive meaning’ added on to those seemingly inherent in the text” (5).
Others describe the implicit struggle in such discourse, not as an effort by one voice to suppress or conceal the other, but as a “struggle for influence”. Tovares (2006: 485), for instance, quotes Bakhtin’s (1981: 354) claim that “in double-voiced discourse a ‘struggle between one’s own and another’s word is being waged, a process in which they oppose or dialogically interanimate each other’”. Campbell & Roberts (2007: 266) put a similar emphasis on the element of struggle. Citing Bakhtin (1981: 348), they call double-voicing a state “whereby ‘a variety of alien voices enter into the struggle for influence within an individual’s consciousness’”. Tsitsipis (2004: 570) seems to take this view as well. He argues:

The word of language…recognises not only its referential object, but also the word of the other, a word invading, so to speak, the speaker’s world from the outside and carrying over its social accents and background to another consciousness. Thus a word often becomes double-voiced, and its voices constitute ideological positions on the world.

5.1.5 Double-voicing as polyvocality

In many of these claims we encounter a notion touched on briefly above: the idea that the utterance, or even language itself, is at the centre of many, often competing, voices. Pascual (2006: 399), for instance, argues that in some cases (e.g., juridical speech) a discourse may take on more than two voices simultaneously:

the most fundamental type of invisible communication in Western courts could be seen to constitute a fictive triologue involving (i) the prosecution, (ii) the defense, and (iii) the judge/jury…. a fictive triadic exchange involving different voices often overlapping each other, in which an attorney’s argument is constantly being silently responded to or questioned in the minds of both addressees and overhearers. It follows then that ordinary legal discourse – just as other forms of confrontational communication – does not only involve ‘double-voicing’…but also what could be called ‘triple-voicing’.

Prodromou (2008: 82) likewise claims that “An utterance is not the product of a solo performance but the coming together of two or more voices” [my emphasis]. And Prior, Hengst, Roozen & Shipka (2006: 735) speak of texts that “might be double- or multi-voiced”. Here, then, we see the notion of “double-voicing” merge with “heteroglossia”, “multi-voicing” or “polyvocality”. Sclafani (2009: 618) observes this very issue, noting that double-voicing

and polyvocality “are often conflated under the term ‘intertextuality’”. In Maynard (2007), “multivoicedness” becomes another word for “heteroglossia”. As she explains:

The meaning of a word is shaped and interpreted in dialogue with the addressee, and with the society that endorses its very existence. Multiple voices echo in one’s words (including utterances of prior as well as future speakings), and these voices are supported by social heterogeneity. Voices representing various registers, classes, cultures, and sub-cultures reverberate in speech, where the voices coexist and interanimate among themselves (66).

argues that “in double-voiced discourse a ‘struggle between one’s own and another’s word is being waged, a process in which they oppose or dialogically interanimate each other’”. Then she adds: “According to Bakhtin (1984), any idea is distributed among many, often conflicting, voices. Polyphony and heteroglossia, a dialogic co-presence of multiplicity and diversity of voices, lie at the heart of his understanding of the nature of discourse”. The connection between the two is never explained. In other cases, the author refers to “polyphony”, “multi-voicedness”, or “heteroglossia” in terms that reflect what some have called double-voicing, but without ever using the word itself. It is therefore difficult to know whether or not the author considers double-voicing to be a related term. For instance, Pietikainen & Dufva (2006) make the Bakhtinian notion of “voice” a central concern. Like many others, they argue that “individuals’ ways of speaking are characterised by multi-voicedness, or polyphony” (209). At the same time, they offer a formula familiar from the discourse on double-voicing, arguing that “In voicing different discourses speakers do not repeat them word for word: instead, they position themselves with respect to them, either acknowledging or refusing the representations and positions suggested and adding nuances, modifying and reaccentuating them” (215). There is thus reason to suspect that these authors consider double-voicing to be part of the same phenomenon. Macaulay (2005: 59) likewise offers an excellent example of double-voicing, which he nevertheless calls “polyphonic speech”:

In relating how his teachers at school were very surprised at his success as Malvolio in the school production of Twelfth Night, he reports them as saying “Gibson, we didn’t know you had it in you”. His intonation and tone of voice caught the Scottish teacher’s patronising and sarcastic manner very effectively. This is polyphonic speech (Bakhtin [1984]) at its richest. Gibson has managed to convey both the attitude of the teachers to the boys and the boy’s (and the adult’s) reaction to them. There is no need for explicit comment on either.

Similar ambiguities can be seen in a number of other texts, which have not been included in this discussion (e.g. Horton-Salway, 2001; Kong, 2001; Piller, 2002; De Fina, 2003; Schiffrin, 2003; Feld, Fox, Porcello & Samuels, 2004; Vandelanotte, 2004; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Kong, 2006; Tannen, 2006; Shenk, 2007; Li, 2009; Pichler, 2009; Snell, 2010; Turbide, Vincent, & Laforest, 2010; and Gales, 2011).

Nikolarea (2007), on the other hand, ascribes to Bakhtin (1981: 34) the view that “a ‘retelling in one’s own words’…can produce either single-voicedness or multi-voicedness. Both of these can be characteristic of heteroglossia, which refers to different styles or genres within a language” (134; my emphasis).

Later she adds:
Grant (2003a: 5) likewise uses “multi-voicedness” as another word for “heteroglossia”. Addressing the conclusions of Marková (2003a: 17), he points to “the asymmetry and tensions of dialogue as a heterogeneous nexus of meanings and multivoicedness”. Like Maynard, Carter (2004: 69) speaks of “multivoicing”, as a process whereby speakers can “move between voices as the context changes”. Menard-Warwick (2004: 544) appears to take this view as well when she addresses “the multiple voices with multiple evaluations that the narrator dialogically draws upon to make sense of the changes taking place in her family, community, and nation”.

5.1.6 Double-voicing and performance

Coupland (2001a) also speaks of the “multi-voiced utterance”. Citing Goffman’s notion of “footing”, he treats multi-voicedness in terms of stylization, as a sort of performance or “putting on a voice”. Thus, he argues: “Dialect stylization allows us to interpret Bakhtin’s...

By shifting styles, related personalized expressive meanings are foregrounded. By using rhetorical sentences, the writer presents thoughts in a chain-linked unit, as if telling a story. In these cases, similar to the Bakhtinian double-voiced discourse in the novel, one hears multiple voices. An identical speaker or a writer speaks in different styles echoing different voices. It is as if different selves were interacting in discourse to create the discourse world where multiple interactions are enacted. At the same time, it is as if different selves were participating in multiple interactions with partners. (94).

Grant (2003b: 114) argues that “The corollary of heteroglossia (as Bakhtin understood it) is the immersion of speakers in multivoiced worlds” (114). One implication of this, as Maynard (2007) observes, is “language simply cannot avoid reflecting multiple voices simultaneously” (67). Quoting Bakhtin (1981: 292), she nevertheless observes, helpfully, that the narrator “double-voices her characters ‘for the orchestration of (her) themes and for the refracted (indirect) expression of (her) intentions’” (542); and later describes double-voicing as “where the narrator refracts another’s words to give her own perspective” (545). These ideas are taken up below. Thurlow & Jaworski (2006: 104) repeat this formula. They draw a connection between ‘stylization’ and ‘the work of Mikhail Bakhtin on multivoicing’, according to which “language is never monologic but always dialogic, which presupposes a rich mixing and multiplicity of ‘voices’, or ‘heteroglossia’” (104; cf. Thurlow & Jaworski, 2009: 195). Snell (2010: 645), who takes up Coupland’s (2001a, 2007) view of style and stylization, offers a hint of what this “mixing” might entail:

Drawing on the theoretical perspective of Bakhtin (1981), Ochs (1992: 338) notes that the voice of the speaker, the voice of the someone referred to in the utterance and the voice of the person for whom the utterance is conveyed may blend and become part of the social meanings indexed within the utterance. In this example the multiple
“multiple voicing” rather literally” – that is to say, one can literally “put on” a dialect and speak in another’s style. In her study of language socialization, Gordon (2002, 2007) sees it offering the possibility for the child (and perhaps other learners) to experiment with various identities. She argues, for instance, that “repetition is used by one child as a means of recreating footings that allow her to try out aspects of her mother’s identity” (2007: 139). Babaii (2009) adds that “through repetition, the child is not simply imitating and copying her mother’s discourse, but is re-creating and re-contextualizing the roles she assumes in the context of family and society” (403). Double-voicing can thus be seen as a means of invoking the social role of the voice being performed.

In this, we come back to an idea that we first encountered in Section 4.2.6: that in “performing” a particular voice we may benefit from the prestige or authority associated with it. Scheuer (2003: 159), for instance, characterizes double-voicing as the strategic reproduction of another style, in which the speaker “makes it clear that this is ‘double-voiced’ talking – that these discourses stem from and are authorized by” the associated body.24 Su (2004: 67) likewise argues that double-voicing allows the speaker to benefit from the prestige and other values associated with different voices. Citing Hill & Irvine (1992: 6), Baron (2004: 275) insists that “one of the principal ways in which utterances come to be seen as authoritative concerns speakers’ ability to create ‘double-voiced’ utterances… that manage to add the moral weight of other voices to their own”. Thus, for instance, “when [a speaker] invokes God’s voice to construct a more powerful persona for herself, she is using the technique of ‘double-voicing’: She adds the weight of God’s voice to her own, so that her speech acquires convincing authority”.

Coupland (2001a) and Coupland & Jawarski (2004: 35) both point to another important theme in the discourse on double-voicing, the idea that the words or styles of others can be voices include those of Helen, Nathan, Miss Snell, Mrs Moon and other pupils such as Charlotte and Andrew.

24 Macaulay (2005) makes virtually the same observation in his study of “Mr. Wilson” – though he interprets this as a matter of “style” rather than double-voicing. He writes: “his style is a way of presenting himself to me. My own speech in the interview is much less elaborated than his, but he knows that I am an academic and he may wish to show that he can talk to someone like me in a form that he considers appropriate” (126).
voiced “with the intention of endorsing or discrediting them”. As Gordon (2007: 138) puts it, repetitions of another’s speech “can be used in the same way the other used the words (i.e., to pay homage to that other), or in a way opposite to what the other intended (i.e. to mock that other)”. Like many commentators, Coupland (2001a: 373) notes that Bakhtin himself draws such a distinction in terms of “uni-directional” and “vari-directional” double-voicing:25 “In the uni-directional case, a speaker voicing a prior style endorses or validates it. In the vari-directional case, the speaker voices the style with the intention of discrediting it (that is, parodies it)” 26 Coupland insists, however, that “This two-term opposition in terms of ‘directions’ is… too stark…because it stops short of articulating specific motivations, contexts, norms, and modes of reception” (373).

25 Su (2004) explains:

Bakhtin (1984) further characterizes several kinds of double-voicing. With unidirectional double-voicing, the speaker employs someone else’s discourse “in the direction of its own particular aspirations”. In contrast, with varidirectional double-voicing, “the author again speaks in someone else’s discourse, but…introduces into that discourse a semantic intention directly opposed to the original one” (67; citing Bakhtin 1984: 193).

Sclafani (2008) observes this distinction too, citing “what Bakhtin calls varidirectional double-voicing, in which the representing voice uses the voice of the represented to subvert or call into question the ideological implications of the discourse of the represented” (518). Sclafani (2009) applies this notion to the study of parody, “because in parody, there is a necessary contrast between the purpose or intention of the original speaker and that of the speaker who has borrowed the voice for his or her own purposes” (618). Without ever mentioning the notion of “double-voicing”, Wong (2005b) likewise describes parody as “the speaker’s appropriation of someone else’s words to serve his or her own purposes”, adding that “while the two voices are in accord with each other in stylization, the speaker’s voice in parody is directly opposed to the other person’s voice”. Quoting Rossen-Knill & Henry (1997), he also explains that “The differences between the two voices are emphasized so that the parodist can distance himself or herself from the parodied point of view” (771). Trester (2009) notes “the differences between uni-directional double voicing, in which the ‘character carries out (in part) the author’s intentions’…and varidirectional double voicing in which there is a clash ‘of the two represented positions’” (147-148). Badarneh (2009) describes “authoritative” discourses as “both univocal and unidirectional” (646), but never unpackages the notion.

26 Coupland & Jaworski (2004: 35) repeat this formula word for word.
5.1.7 Double-voicing as double-directed discourse

Blackledge (2005) addresses the distinction more implicitly, speaking of “discourse which clashes with another, absent discourse, or discourse which adopts the perspective of another’s discourse” (17).27 He observes another dimension as well, noting:

A further aspect of double-voiced discourse is that of ‘hidden dialogicality’, or ‘hidden polemic’.... In this type of discourse it is as if there is a dialogue between two people, in which the speeches of the second person are omitted, but in such a way that the sense of the speech is still clear (15).28

Blackledge (2005) also makes the uncommon observation that, for Bakhtin, double-voiced discourse is discourse with a “two-fold direction”29 – or, as Trester (2009: 147) puts it, as “the use of (and orientation towards) someone else’s discourse”. This is not another way of describing discourse directed toward or away from the styles, meanings, intentions, etc. of other speakers, but, rather, discourse that has two different concerns at the same time. Blackledge (2005: 17) and Gordon (2007: 137) both quote Bakhtin’s claim that double-voiced discourse “has a twofold direction – it is directed both toward the referential object of speech, as in ordinary speech, and toward another’s discourse, toward someone else’s speech” (Bakhtin 1984: 185, original emphasis). It is with this latter notion that we will begin our look at Bakhtin’s own discourse on double-voicing.

5.2 The Bakhtinian Discourse on Double-voiced Discourse

Bakhtin begins his clearest and most sustained discussion of double-voicing with an observation we see quoted in both Blackledge and Gordon above – that stylization, parody, dialogue, etc. (“despite the very real differences among them”) have one thing in common: “discourse in them has a two-fold direction” (1984: 185). It is not a claim about the speaker’s

27 To this he adds, somewhat obliquely, “discourse which acknowledges its own opposition within a single utterance” (17).
28 Badarneh (2009) also mentions hidden polemic – as “a double-voiced discourse that takes a ‘sideward glance’ at somebody else’s hostile utterances” (647), while Marková (2003a) speaks of “oppositions, ambivalence, double-voicedness and hidden polemics” (34), leaving the relationship between these terms unstated.
29 Gordon (2007) is the only other author to use this phrase, though Tovares (2006) refers to double-voicing as “discourse with deliberate orientation toward the words of others” (469).
possible agreement or disagreement with the words of another, but about the dual concerns that motivate such a discourse. As Bakhtin explains, the first concern is with the “referential object” of speech – that is, with the direct significance of the utterance – the sort of meaning that could be derived from an utterance understood within the limits of a single monologic context – the sort of meaning that typically concerns linguistics (and pragmatics). At the same time, however, in such a discourse there is a second concern – and it is, ultimately, not a concern about language (even contextualized language) in the strictest sense. Rather, as Bakhtin (1984: 181) explains in his long preamble to the discussion on double-voicing, it reflects a concern about discourse; that is, about “language in its concrete living totality”. It is thus a metalinguistic concern: a concern not for speech, but for speech about speech. A passage quoted in the introduction to the present discussion bears repeating. Bakhtin writes:

The transmission and assessment of the speech of others, the discourse of another, is one of the most widespread and fundamental topics of human speech. In all areas of life and ideological activity, our speech is filled to overflowing with other people’s words which are transmitted with highly varied degrees of accuracy and impartiality. [...] The topic of a speaking person has enormous importance in everyday life. In real life we hear speech about speakers and their discourse at every step. We can go so far as to say that in real life people talk most of all about what others talk about – they transmit, recall, weigh, and pass judgement on other people’s words, opinions, assertions, information; people are upset by others’ words, or agree with them, refer to them and so forth (1981: 337-338).

This passage, from *The Dialogic Imagination*, comes – just as the discussion of double-voicing in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* does – immediately after Bakhtin explains the significance of stylization, parody and skaz. Indeed, he argues (in both works) that these are all double-voiced phenomena. And the key to grasping such phenomena is to understand how they manifest that second concern, for speech about speech. As we observed at the beginning of this chapter:

If we do not recognize the existence of this second context of someone else’s speech and begin to perceive stylization or parody in the same way ordinary speech is perceived, that is, as speech directed only at its referential object, then we will not grasp these phenomena in their essence: stylization will be taken for style, parody simply for a poor work of art (Bakhtin 1984: 185).

30 “Skaz” denotes a form of oral narrative in which certain aspects of double-voicing are highly pronounced. The particulars do not concern us here.
Double-voiced discourse is essentially speech about speech. But it must be emphasized that not all speech about speech is double-voiced. We can reproduce the speech of another – we can say what has been said, agree with it or disagree, affirm it, supplement it, etc. – and thus engage dialogically – without thereby orienting ourselves to it in the sense that Bakhtin intends. And this distinction is extremely important. One of the clearest examples of this is scholarly discourse, in which the utterances of a variety of authors are reported, some for refutation, others for confirmation or supplementation. Yet, as Bakhtin explains, “This is not a clash of two ultimate semantic authorities, but rather an objectified (plotted) clash of two represented positions, subordinated wholly to the higher, ultimate authority of the author. The monologic context, under these circumstances is neither broken nor weakened” (1984: 188).31 Despite the inclusion of many and diverse positions, such a discourse remains single-voiced.32 It becomes double-voiced only when it is permitted to retain its original semantic intention even as it is given another by the reporting speaker. Only then, when two separate semantic intentions can be discerned, is it double-voiced.33 In this sense, there are three

31 Bakhtin says much the same thing later in the passage, where he observes that the author’s intention “does not penetrate inside the objectified discourse, it takes it as a whole and, without changing its meaning or tone, subordinates it to its own tasks. It does not invest it with another referential meaning. […] objectified discourse sounds as if it were direct, single-voiced discourse” (1984: 189). Compare this with his comments in The Dialogic Imagination, where he explains that “Pure drama strives toward a unitary language, one that is individualized merely through dramatic personae who speak it. Dramatic dialogue is determined by a collision between individuals who exist within the limits of a single world and a single unitary language (1981: 405).

32 This point cannot be emphasized enough. The mere inclusion within one’s speech of utterances by different speakers, even those with whom one disagrees, is not, in itself, enough to produce a double-voiced discourse. Bakhtin (1981: 328) offers some insight here when he characterizes “voice” as “a single-accent system”.

33 It must be emphasized that these types (and their varieties and sub-varieties) are not meant to be definitive. As Bakhtin explains:

we have far from exhausted all the possible examples of double-voiced discourse, or all the possible means of orienting toward another’s discourse, processes that complicate the ordinary referential orientation of speech. It would be possible to create a more far-reaching and subtle classification with a greater number of varieties, perhaps even of types. But for our purposes the classification we have offered is sufficient (1984: 198-199).

He adds:

A concrete discourse may belong simultaneously to different varieties and even types. Moreover, interrelationships with another person’s discourse in a concrete living context are of a dynamic and not a static character: the interrelationship of voices in
fundamental types of discourse: (I) unmediated discourse directed exclusively toward its referential object (which serves as the expression of the speaker’s ultimate semantic authority); (II) mediated, objectified discourse (the discourse of a represented person, which has been subordinated to the speaker’s authority); and (III) double-voiced discourse (which is discourse with an orientation toward the discourse of another). We are concerned here only with the third type – i.e., double-voiced discourse – of which a number of varieties (and even more sub-varieties) can be distinguished. The three basic varieties that Bakhtin identifies are: (III-1) the unidirectional variety; (III-2) the vari-directional variety; and (III-3) the active variety. The first two varieties encompass discourses in which only the other’s words are presented; the third variety encompasses discourses in which only the reporting speaker’s words are visible.

The first variety includes: (III-1-a) stylization; (III-1-b) narration; and (III-1-c) the “unobjectified discourse of a character who carries out (in part) the author’s intentions” (e.g., dialogue in a modern novel). Bakhtin calls this variety “unidirectional” to indicate a shared perspective or outlook; that is, the speaker adopts the other’s attitude or style. There are two important points here. The first is that the speaker does not embrace the other voice wholly or unconditionally – he does not make the other’s discourse his own; a certain distance – a “slight shadow of objectification” – always remains between the two. There is agreement, but not identity. Where there is identity (a complete merging of voices) we find not double-

discourse may change drastically, unidirectional words may turn into vari-directional ones, internal dialogization may become stronger or weaker, a passive type may be activized, and so forth (1984: 199).

Specific types and varieties are therefore to be understood merely as guideposts to certain tendencies in language, and not as genuine elements of a system or structure. Nevertheless, Bakhtin’s detailed taxonomy is valuable to us for the way it makes clear just how systematic his ideas were, and how carefully developed.

34 Bakhtin distinguishes two varieties of objectified discourse, according to whether: (II-1) there is a predominance of “socio-typical” determining factors or (II-2) a predominance of “individually characteristic” ones. (See 1984: 199 for the complete breakdown).

35 Instances in which both voices are present in the same utterance are called “hybrids”. These are examined more fully in Ch. 3.

36 Bakhtin (1981) observes another sub-variety: “variation”, which “joins the stylized world with the world of contemporary consciousness, projects the stylized language into new scenarios testing it in situations that would have been impossible for it on its own” (362-363).
directed discourse, but imitation. Nevertheless, adopting the perspective of the other leaves no room for only partial or equivocal agreement. This does not mean that in stylizing the other, one is committed to every aspect or implication of the other’s point of view – only that the two intentions expressed in the utterance coincide. As Bakhtin puts it, “The author’s thought, once having penetrate[d] someone else’s discourse and made a home in it, does not collide with the other’s thought, but rather follows after it in the same direction” (1984: 193). This leads to the second point, which is that the coinciding of perspectives is necessarily singular, hence unidirectional. After all, the reason for employing such a discourse is that it mediates the expression of one’s own intention; in this sense (and only to this extent) must they coincide.

Where the two points of view diverge, where the intentions do not coincide, the discourse is characterized as vari-directional, the second variety of double-voicing. Parody is the most recognizable form of such discourse precisely because the divergence is so stark. As Bakhtin puts it: “in contrast to stylization parody introduces…a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one. The second voice…clashes hostilely with its primordial host and forces him to serve directly opposing aims” (1984: 193; my emphasis). But in addition to the various forms of parody (III-2-a~d), vari-directional double-voicing includes (III-2-e) “any transmission of someone else’s words with a shift in accent”. As Bakhtin explains, these other forms of vari-directional double-voicing are likewise used “for conveying aspirations that are hostile to it […]…expressions of doubt, indignation, irony, mockery, ridicule, and the like” (1984: 194).

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37 Bakhtin writes: “should the stylizer’s enthusiasm for his model destroy the distance and weaken the deliberate sense of a reproduced style as someone else’s style” stylization is reduced to imitation. (1984: 190).

38 Bakhtin’s claim seems somewhat exaggerated here (what does it mean to be “directly” opposed?). The point, however, is that the two intentions diverge, and that such divergence, however subtle or crude, does not allow for partial agreement. We might think of the oppositions as binaries (e.g., “gigantic” and “not gigantic”) rather than polar opposites (“gigantic” and “tiny”). We could imagine, for instance, a conversation in which a speaker claims, “Muhammad Ali was a pretty good boxer” and another replies, “Yeah, ‘pretty good’ – he was the greatest of all time!” In the mouth of the interlocutor the phrase “pretty good” is vari-directionally double-voiced: in using it, he orients his speech to the original utterance with a markedly different intention. Here, however, the new intention is “opposed” to the other only insofar as it sees it as an understatement.
Note that in both the unidirectional and vari-directional varieties we encounter the voice (the actual words or the recognizable style) of another. But it is also possible for speech to be double-voiced even when the words of another are not obviously present – when it is only the speaker’s words we hear. Bakhtin calls this the “active” variety, as the speaker’s discourse actively (if implicitly) takes into account a discourse that remains outside of it. Among the different forms of active double-voicing Bakhtin identifies are: (III-3-a) “hidden internal polemic”; (III-3-b) “polemically colored autobiography and confession”; (III-3-c) “any discourse with a sideward glance at another’s word”; (III-3-d) “a rejoinder in a dialogue”; and (III-3-e) “hidden dialogue”.

Again, this final variety is characterized by the changes wrought in the speaker’s own discourse as a result of his awareness of another, absent, one: “the other’s words actively influence the author’s speech, forcing it to alter itself accordingly under their influence and initiative” (1984: 197). This, however, is also very close to the way we might describe dialogism in general. Indeed, Bakhtin acknowledges the connection: “In every style, strictly speaking, there is an element of internal polemic, the difference being merely one of degree and character. Every literary discourse more or less sharply senses its own listener, reader, critic, and reflects in itself their anticipated objections, evaluations, points of view” (1984: 196; my emphasis). The difference, perhaps, is that single-voiced utterances, even as they anticipate their listener’s response, are not derailed by that awareness: in ordinary speech, anticipation allows the speaker to construct his utterance in a way that meets his communicative intention; the utterance remains singular in its direction. But when speech is actively double-voiced, it loses that singular focus; it becomes distracted by other concerns. This is certainly true of internally polemical discourse (with its “sideward glance” at the other’s word), which feels compelled to stop and throw barbs at the other or, on the contrary, cringes in anticipation of the other’s reaction. And this is true, to one degree or another, of all double-voiced utterances, which, after all, achieve their ends by directing the listener’s attention to

39 Indeed, we can imagine the same utterance double-voiced by some speakers unidirectionally and by others vari-directionally, and all in a variety of ways. Charlie Sheen’s exclamation, “winning!” is a familiar recent example.

40 Bakhtin (1984: 199) actually calls this the “active type” – but it is really the third variety of double-directed discourse (cf. 1984: 197), and might better be referred to as the active variety.
the words (or style) of another. There may be elements of polemic (in the broadest sense) in every discourse, but not all utterances draw attention to the other in this way.

In his essay on speech genres, Bakhtin argues that “Every utterance must be regarded primarily as a response to preceding utterances of the given sphere…. Each utterance supposes them to be known, and somehow takes them into account” (1986: 91). He adds: “However monological the utterance may be (for example, a scientific or philosophical treatise), however much it may concentrate on its own object, it cannot but be, in some measure, a response to what has already been said about the given topic, on the given issue, even though this responsiveness may not have assumed a clear-cut external expression” (1986: 92). This responsiveness, however, can take a variety of forms:

Others’ utterances can be repeated with varying degrees of reinterpretation. They can be referred to as though the interlocutor were already well aware of them; they can be silently presupposed; or one’s responsive reaction to them can be reflected only in the expression of one’s own speech – in the selection of language means and intonations that are determined not by the topic of one’s own speech but by the other’s utterances concerning the same topic (1986: 91; my emphasis).

Among the various forms these reactions can take, the other’s utterances may be silently presupposed – and thus dialogic without being (double-) voiced – or they may be shaped (in an “active” sense) “not by the topic of one’s own speech but by the other’s utterances concerning the same topic”. In the latter case, it frequently happens that:

the expression of our utterance is determined not only – and sometimes not so much – by the referentially semantic content of this utterance, but also by others’ utterances on the same topic to which we are responding or with which we are polemizing. They also determine our emphasis on certain elements, repetition, our selection of harsher (or, conversely, milder) expressions, a contentious (or, conversely, conciliatory) tone, and so forth (1986: 91-92; my emphasis).

Here, where the expression is determined less by the referentially semantic content of the utterance itself than by the speech of others, we have arguably crossed the threshold from the merely dialogic to the conspicuously double-voiced utterance.
5.3 Observations on Double-voiced Discourse in the Literature

Among the first things we might notice in the literature is the virtual absence of any discussion of the “two-fold direction” that characterizes the Bakhtinian notion of double-voiced discourse. Indeed, even the mention of a “two-fold direction” appears in only a pair of texts, and in each case is part of a direct quote that receives no subsequent explanation. This is significant not only because the notion of a “two-fold direction” goes a long way to clarifying Bakhtin’s understanding, but in its absence we are left to grapple with “double-voicing”, which tends to stimulate ideas that have little or nothing to do with the claims Bakhtin actually makes.

On the one hand, the “doubling” suggests a multiplicity of voices (languages, styles, etc.) within a given discourse. With no obvious reason why the participating voices should be restricted only to two, double-voicing becomes triple-voicing or, more generally, “multi-voicing”, which in turn becomes conflated with “polyvocality”, “polyphony”, “intertextuality”, “heteroglossia”, and even “dialogism”. On the other hand, we find a pervasive uncertainty about what constitutes a “voice”, which is consequently interpreted in the broadest terms – as any recognizable position, role, identity, etc. Uniting this “multiplicity” of “voices” within a single utterance is a vast assortment of relations.

In many cases, Bakhtin himself is called on to perpetuate the confusion. Consider, for instance, the claim (cited above) that “in double-voiced discourse a ‘struggle between one’s own and another’s word is being waged, a process in which they oppose or dialogically interanimate each other’” (1981: 354). In the original passage, Bakhtin actually writes that “Within the arena of almost every utterance an intense interaction and struggle…is being waged” (1981: 354; my emphasis). Bakhtin’s observation is not about double-voiced discourse in particular, but about speech in general. And representing it as a claim about

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41 It is perhaps significant that one author cites the wrong text, and the other an anthologized collection rather than the original.
42 The “doubling” in “double-directed discourse” does not have the same implication, for it is not as easy to imagine a discourse oriented simultaneously toward a plurality of distinct others.
43 We see something similar in the suggestion that double-voicing relates to the fact that “we receive all our linguistic forms through others’ uses, and thus each carries other voices”. While it is true that, on the Bakhtinian view, speakers take up and reproduce the forms (and
double-voiced discourse risks obscuring the point that dialogic inter-animation is something we encounter in virtually every utterance; an utterance need not be double-voiced for it to engage in a struggle with another’s word. At the same time, it obscures the distinction between double-voicing and other forms of dialogic inter-animation – objectified discourse, for instance, or even direct, unmediated discourse (e.g. imitation or unconscious hybridization).\textsuperscript{44}

To take another example, consider the claim that double-voicing is a state “whereby ‘a variety of alien voices enter into the struggle for influence within an individual’s consciousness’” (1981: 348). Once again we see double-voicing characterized in terms of a struggle – this time a struggle for influence within one’s own consciousness. But if we turn to the original passage (1981: 348), we discover that Bakhtin’s observation is not really about double-voicing at all, but about authoritative and internally persuasive discourse.\textsuperscript{45}

And although the process – which is a process of discovering and developing one’s own internally persuasive discourse – entails the objectification of the words of another (and therefore offers the potential for producing a double-voiced discourse), this is all peripheral to the question of what constitutes double-voicing, and representing it as a commentary on double-voicing serves only to obscure the role of double-voicing in the development of an internally persuasive discourse (an important phenomenon in its own right).\textsuperscript{46} At the same time, thus the expressiveness) of prior speech, this is not to say that such forms carry other voices (as though “voice” were simply another word for “individual speaker”); on the contrary, in assimilating such speech one takes up the associated voice (that is, affirms a shared point of view). This is not a question of double-voicing at all, but of genre. It is an entirely different matter when one reproduces a style (or utterance) that is not one’s own, and from which one maintains a certain distance.

\textsuperscript{44} This point is worth emphasizing. As we saw in an earlier passage, Bakhtin himself acknowledges that every discourse contains elements of internal polemic – and is thus “double-voiced” – in the sense that it “more or less sharply senses its own listener, reader, critic, and reflects in itself their anticipated objections, evaluations, points of view” (1981: 196). There is nevertheless a difference between double-voicing in the productive – or at least marked – sense that Bakhtin describes and the strict sense acknowledged here, a difference, as he explains, of degree and character.

\textsuperscript{45} The notion of “authoritative” vs. “internally persuasive” discourse is taken up in Ch. 8.

\textsuperscript{46} Bakhtin writes:

One’s own discourse and one’s own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other’s discourse. This process is made more complex by the fact that
time, it perpetuates the view (common throughout the literature) that double-voicing concerns the influence of outside voices on one’s own speech. But, as we have seen, to the extent that this is true, it is true only of a very particular sort of double-voiced discourse (what Bakhtin calls the “active” variety). One might just as well describe double-voicing as the influence of one’s own voice on the speech of others (i.e., the “passive” varieties).

This distinction between “active” and “passive” double-voicing gets entirely passed over in the literature, but it helps us to understand why double-voiced discourse should be not construed as multi-voicing. When we think of double-voicing in terms of the active variety – as discourse influenced from without – it seems reasonable to suppose that the influences are multitudinous. But the same cannot be said of the passive variety. When I direct my attention (and my listener’s attention) to the words of another, I am concerned with a specific and a variety of alien voices enter into the struggle for influence within an individual’s consciousness (just as they struggle with one another in surrounding social reality). All this creates fertile soil for experimentally objectifying another’s discourse. A conversation with an internally persuasive word that one has begun to resist may continue, but it takes on another character: it is questioned, it is put in a new situation in order to expose its weak sides, to get a feel for its boundaries, to experience it physically as an object. For this reason stylizing discourse by attributing it to a person often becomes parodic…. Novelistic images, profoundly double-voiced and double-languaged, are born in such a soil, seek to objectivize the struggle with all types of internally persuasive alien discourse that had at one time held sway over the author (348).

That is to say, “Multiple voices echo in one’s words” – voices that are “subject to the relations of power within society”; or that “The word of language… recognises not only its referential object, but also the word of the other, a word invading, so to speak, the speaker’s world from the outside and carrying over its social accents and background to another consciousness”; or, again, that “the meanings of individual words… and the combinations into which we can put them are given to us by previous speakers, traces of whose voices and contexts cling inevitably to them”.

And this, as we have noted above, risks conflating double-voiced discourse with other forms of speech, which are likewise (perhaps unavoidably) influenced by the words of others, but which we might nevertheless hesitate to characterize as “double-voiced”.

These may appear to describe the same thing from different perspectives – i.e., my influence on the words of another, and another’s influence on mine – but this is far from the case. The active variety reflects the influence of an established discourse on an incipient one (i.e., the influence of the past on the present); the passive variety, on the contrary, reflects the influence of an incipient discourse on an already established one (i.e., the present’s influence on the past). Or, as one commentator puts it, that “language simply cannot avoid reflecting multiple voices simultaneously”.

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recognizable style or perspective. Even if this style is complex and multifaceted, with roots that sink deep into the social fabric, it must nevertheless be construed as a singular object – and this is a point Bakhtin stresses when he speaks of the “shadow of objectification” that must be cast over it (“objectification being, as we know, inherent to a certain extent in all discourses of the third type”; 1981: 198).\(^{51}\) Such discourses can therefore never be more than double voiced. Here, perhaps, we can understand the significance of the term “double-directed discourse” – for one’s speech cannot be oriented simultaneously to a multitude of others. And this, perhaps, sheds light as well on why the active types are also only double-voiced: it is not simply that my speech has been influenced from without, but that I have actively oriented myself to this influence; in responding to it, I am responding to something in particular. This becomes obvious when we think, for instance, of “hidden polemic”: my speech must polemicize with something in particular, and this something is the singular other with which my speech is double-voiced.

We can see from this how insufficient (indeed, misleading) it is to characterize double-voiced utterances simply as those that “laminate different social and individual voices together” or as “discourse where (at least) two voices sound simultaneously”. Such characterizations, however, at least maintain a plausible connection with what we find in the Bakhtinian texts. But this cannot be said for a large part of the literature. We saw, for instance, in one of the passages above, the claim (grounded on Bakhtin’s 1981: 324 discussion) that double-voiced discourse was “another’s speech in another’s language”\(^{52}\), which “manages to express two different intentions simultaneously”. This is taken by more than one commentator to mean something like “irony resides in saying the opposite of what you intend to convey, making sure – through tone of voice, accompanying gestures, or other stylistic devices – that you mean the opposite of what you say”. On the Bakhtinian view, the “essence” of double-voiced discourse is not simply in saying the opposite of what you

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51 Perhaps this is what ultimately distinguishes double-voiced discourses (even the active varieties) from dialogically animated speech in general: the other is singularized, objectified (if only to a very small degree), made the object of attention.

52 Even this, however, is misleading, as it actually reflects Bakhtin’s encapsulation of novelistic heteroglossia, which constitutes “a special type of double-voiced discourse”, and hardly scratches the surface of what Bakhtin means by “double-voicing” in general.
mean, but rather in orienting your speech to the words or style of another. If calling a tedious lecture “fascinating” (for instance) can be construed as an instance of double-voiced discourse, it is only because the speaker has invoked a recognizable style, one clearly at odds with his own, which thus articulates a position he would reject.

Other interpretations drift even further from Bakhtin’s claims by taking the notion of simultaneity to mean either that the speaker’s intention is unknown (ambiguous) or unresolved (ambivalent). The usual idea is that communication is enriched by the uncertainties and complexities of ambiguous or ambivalent speech. But this appears to be a distortion of the argument that Bakhtin makes in *Rabelais and his World*, where it is clear that such dualities are intended to convey both the heteroglossia of language – the fact that language means differently for different segments of society and cannot be resolved on its own, in the abstract – and the fact that, ultimately, even the language community is incapable of establishing a fixed meaning, as the community itself is always in the midst of change, of metamorphosis. Thus: “The grotesque images with their relation to changing time and their ambivalence become the means for the artistic and ideological expression of a mighty awareness of history and of historic change which appeared during the renaissance” (1993a: 25). Bakhtin offers this as an explanation for the ambiguity and ambivalence of the billingsgate idiom:

some in the audience may be the representatives of the old, dying world and ideology…others are the representatives of a new world of light, laughter and truth. Together they form one people, dying and renewed, and this people is abused and praised simultaneously. But this interpretation is at the closest range. In the longer view, beyond the crowd, there is the whole world, unfinished, uncompleted, which generates in dying and is born to die (1993a: 165).

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53 Indeed, it could be argued that the use of (para)linguistic cues to reverse the unmarked meaning of an utterance is entirely consistent with single-voiced discourse.

54 Bakhtin (1984: 189) explains: “Such a discourse, in keeping with its task, must be perceived as belonging to someone else”.

55 As Barker & Galasinski (2001: 43) put it: from the Bakhtinian perspective, “meaning cannot be guaranteed, it is not pure but always ambivalent and ambiguous”.

56 It appears, briefly, in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* as well (1984: 122-137), in the same context of “carnival”.

57 This, of course, is precisely the opposite of Saussure’s famous dictum that neither the individual nor the community could alter the significance of even a single word of language (1966: 71; cf. Ch.9, note 7).
The notion of ambiguity and ambivalence is raised only in this context – as an acknowledgment that in the ever-changing present, significance remains open.\textsuperscript{58} The interpretation offered in the sociolinguistic discourse, on the other hand, seeks to make it an aspect of double-voiced discourse, distorting the notion that a single utterance can express divergent intentions by suggesting that they maintain a sort of tension or balance.\textsuperscript{59} On the Bakhtinian view, however, there can be no such balance, for the words of the other, whatever their original significance or intention, have, in a sense, been overpowered and made to serve a new master;\textsuperscript{60} it is through their failed resistance that they are able to mediate the new intention.

The idea that double-voicing is a matter of ambiguity or ambivalence has even less in common with Bakhtinian claims when it is applied to narrative roles, as some commentators have attempted. The idea is that an utterance is double-voiced if the author speaks through the narrator or one of the characters, or moves between roles as speaker and interlocutor. Rather than double-voicing, however, this recalls the sort of dramatic or dramatized dialogue that Bakhtin (1984: 188) characterizes as objectified, single-voiced discourse: the “plotted clash” of positions wholly subordinated to the authority of the author, much as when divergent positions are cited in a scholarly article, their words serving the author’s purposes without thereby manifesting genuine double-voicedness.

The same confusion can be seen in many of the claims about reported speech. As we found with the notion of objectified discourse, one can cite the words of another (accurately or otherwise) without the utterance thereby becoming double-voiced. It is not a question of

\textsuperscript{58} The notion of double-voicing as a sort of “strategic” or rhetorical ambiguity is never raised. Indeed, Bakhtin argues explicitly against such a possibility. And while Coupland & Jaworski (2004) claim that Bakhtin’s notion of uni-directional and vari-directional double-voicing theorizes something like the ‘as if’ quality they perceive in stylized utterances (i.e. “when a speaker gives reason for a listener to doubt whether s/he is the owner of his/her utterance” [35; cf. Coupland, 2001a: 373]) there is nothing in Bakhtin to support such a view.

\textsuperscript{59} All of this presupposes, moreover, that the discourse is not only double-voiced, but vari-directional – for in stylized speech and other unidirectional double-voiced utterances, there is no opposition to begin with.

\textsuperscript{60} Consider, for instance, the effect of parody on another’s speech. As Bakhtin observes, it is easy “to make even the most serious utterance comical” (1981: 340). Again, the “tension” between the serious and comical intention is neither balanced nor unresolved; far from being challenged by the seriousness of the original, the parody feeds off it.
objectivity. There can be little doubt that reported utterances are (perhaps inevitably) constructed or recontextualized in ways that serve the rhetorical needs of the speaker. Reported speech, like any other utterance, becomes double-voiced not when the other’s words or meanings are reproduced, but when the other’s intention is appropriated and made to mediate the speaker’s own. A more serious misconception, however, can be seen in claims that certain grammatical aspects of reported speech are implicated in double-voicing: the change in pronouns or adverbs, for instance, that occurs in indirect speech. Notwithstanding the importance these issues have (for instance, in courtroom translation), describing them as double-voicing reflects only the most superficial aspect of the claim that double-voiced discourse is something that “serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions”.

The construal of double-voicing in terms of “performance” is a more subtle matter. Proponents of this view, perceiving a connection between particular forms of language and the conditions in which they are used, argue that speakers actively reproduce those forms as a means of calling up or “indexing” the associated values or conditions. Thus a child may speak in the voice of a parent, rehearsing roles that he or she will take up later in life; a student may speak in the voice of a scholar, drawing on the authority of academia; an orator may use biblical language as means of conveying spiritual authority; and speakers in daily conversation may use forms of speech that carry relevant associations. Double-voicing in this sense is like putting on a costume (or a uniform). There are two voices because the speaker never truly becomes the character performed: the chosen form is only a “footing”, a face presented to the world.

From a Bakhtinian perspective, however, this is not a double-voiced discourse; it is a dramatization of roles set out within the limits of a single language. The performances are meaningful precisely because the participants (speakers and listeners past and present) share an orientation to the forms being invoked. Gordon’s (2007) study of children’s role-play

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61 It is perhaps indicative of the confusion here that one author describes his example of such phenomena as both “double-voiced” and “unstylized”.

62 On this view, “vari-directional” double-voicing is a sort of “anti-performance” – playing the clown or the villain for particular effect.
offers a case in point. In her analysis, Gordon sees little Natalie “trying on” different footings (e.g. “mother as disciplinarian”, “mother as teacher”, “mother as worker”, “mother as wife”, etc.). Sometimes she will do it as a game (“I want to pretend…I’m mommy and you’re Natalie”); other times she will spontaneously reproduce her mother’s language or style. In neither case, however, does she orient her speech to her mother’s; rather, she takes her mother’s discourse up as if it were her own. It is true, of course, that we hear the mother’s language and style in the child’s enactment. In this sense, perhaps, we can say that two voices are present simultaneously. But the same could be said of anyone who speaks, for instance, with a recognizable dialect: in every utterance we can discern both the speaker’s voice and the voice of a gender, class, profession, region, etc. But as Bakhtin explains, “if we do hear another’s voice, then it is certainly not one that had figured in to the imitator’s plan” (1984: 190). The performer does not intend for the audience to hear anything but the voice of the other, while the imitator does not intend for the audience to hear anything but her own voice. Consider Scheuer’s (2003) observation about “Niels”. While it is true perhaps that we can hear the voice of academia in Niels’s performance, we are not, presumably, meant to hear it as another’s voice: the speaker does not simply invoke the authority of academia through his manner of speaking, but, rather, represents himself as a product of higher education. Indeed, it may not even be a question of “performance” at all: the adopted style may in fact be one the speaker considers contextually appropriate – his own style, in the genre of academic discourse. In this case we are back to the question of imitation, which “takes the imitated material seriously, makes it its own, directly appropriates to itself someone else’s discourse”. And, again, “What happens in that case is a complete merging of voices” (1984: 190).

On the Bakhtinian view double-voiced discourse is neither an imitation nor a performance of another’s discourse. Coupland (2001a) comes closest in describing it as a “stagey” or “studiedly artificial” production – especially in the sense that it “invites attention to its own

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63 In this sense, what we are observing in Natalie’s behaviour is precisely what Bakhtin describes as the development of generic speech. This is taken up more fully in Ch. 2.

64 And this is perhaps why some insist on saying that all language use is double-voiced.
modality” (350). He calls it a performance as a way to emphasize that it is not merely an imitation, but “a form of strategic de-authentication”. It is not as much a performance of something as it is a performance rather than a discourse in one’s own voice. As Meinhof (2004: 283) puts it:

The “double-voicedness” of stylized speech…depends on the conscious performance of a particular form of linguistic or paralinguistic behaviour which needs to be consciously recognised for its metaphoric value. In other words, it needs to be recognised as a performance of something other than itself.

This, indeed, would be the complete opposite of what Scheuer sees in Niels’s performance. On this view, we would have to imagine Niels producing an academic style of speech in order to say: “This is how some people talk”, either endorsing its clarity and precision or deriding it as stiff or obscurant. But this still misses the essence of the Bakhtinian notion, which is not a performance, even in Coupland’s sense, because the speaker does not pretend to be other than himself – not even in a “studiedly artificial” way – any more than a scholar pretends to be another when reproducing another’s argument. Rather, he employs the language or style of another as other, speaking not merely “with” or “about” the other’s words, but through – or, in a sense, against – them. The “performance” does not simply

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65 That is to say, the performance draws attention to itself as a performance. Coupland (2001a) writes: “The knowingness of these projections, the way they dislocate speakers from the most immediate socio-cultural meanings of their own speech styles, and the interpretive complexities that they trigger are what I take to be the hallmarks of stylization” (347). As Coupland (2004) puts it, stylization “doesn’t blatantly or convincingly recontextualise the event. It reframes it…and again invites reappraisal of it […] Again, then, my simple action potentially situates comparison and re-evaluation” (251).

66 In describing the motivation behind the “playful, erratically voiced Welshness” of certain radio show hosts, for instance, he says “this is us momentarily playing at being the real, traditional us” (371). It is performance, he insists, “in the strong, theatrical or quasi-theatrical sense of that term” (346).

67 Bakhtin is clear: “The stylizer uses another’s discourse as other” (1984: 189; my emphasis).

68 As Bakhtin (1984) puts it, the speaker “works with someone else’s point of view. Therefore a certain shadow of objectification falls precisely on that very point of view, and consequently it becomes conditional” (189-190). Bakhtin (1981) adds:

one need only emphasize ever so slightly the conventionality in stylized discourse for it to take on a light overtone of parody or irony, a sense that words have “conditions attached to them”: it is not, strictly speaking, I who speak; I, perhaps, would speak quite differently (1981: 65; my emphasis).
invite comparison or reappraisal (as it does on Coupland’s view); it requires it – which is to say, its basic functioning depends on the difference between the speaker’s own style and that which has been reproduced.

Confusion about the difference between double-voicing and imitation or performance leads, in turn, to confusion about what Bakhtin means when he speaks of “directionality”. As we have seen, Bakhtin describes double-voicing as discourse that “serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author” (1981: 324). The speaker’s intention, he argues, can either follow in the direction of the other’s or stand directly opposed to it (1984: 193). Those who interpret double-voicing as a sort of performance take this to mean that one can either endorse the other’s voice or seek to discredit it, a view that may seem rather simplistic. Coupland (2001a), for instance, argues that it is “too stark…because it stops short of articulating specific motivations, contexts, norms, and modes of reception” (373), and he consequently calls for a more nuanced view.69 Others try to make their observations fit one or the other of the two posited poles. Su (2004), for instance, looking at the use of “Mock-Taiwanese-Mandarin” (MTM) by mainland Chinese, concludes:

> The familiar, congenial persona associated with the accent is integrated into the practice of MTM. On this level, the voicing is unidirectional: the author aligns himself or herself with the indexical values associated with the accent and its local prestige. However, the transformation from a spoken accent to a written wordplay, which implies the ability to manipulate language, filters out the negative connotation of backwardness often linked with the accent. Hence, by using MTM, the internet users simultaneously associate themselves with and dissociate themselves from the different levels of connotations of such an accent (67).70

Here we see the typical result of trying to reduce the complex motives of speech to a binary opposition. The discourse is construed as “unidirectional”, to the extent that speakers seek to convey the “congeniality” associated with of the Taiwanese accent, and at the same time “vari-directional”, in that they manage to avoid connotations of rural backwardness.

69 See note 66 above.
70 We should perhaps be speaking of a “double-languaged” discourse here rather than a “double-voiced” one, but the distinction is not crucial.
While such an interpretation seems almost inevitable when double-voicing is construed as a performance, it must be emphasized that this is not how Bakhtin characterizes directionality. Vari-directional double-voicing does not seek to avoid or mitigate the connotations of a given style; on the contrary, it draws attention to them – and in doing so, presents them as something other. We can imagine, for instance, someone reproducing a “backward” style to make a clever or profound observation. The disjunction between the expectations generated by the chosen style and the actual significance of the utterance has an ironic effect, demonstrating perhaps that the speaker is not as simple as the listener might have supposed.

Menard-Warwick (2004: 543-545) offers an excellent example in the telling of a story about a man’s decision to volunteer for battle, a decision the story-teller finds entirely incomprehensible (“I believe they went like little chickens [pollitos] to die”). The narrator recounts that in response to his mother’s demand to know why he was going, he replied: “Oh, mom…don’t you see?” As Menard-Warwick explains: “Raquel voices him with a tone of exaggerated reasonableness. The first few words…are drawn out at great length, with rising intonation on ‘mom’ and ‘see,’ implying that the answer to his mother’s question should be obvious” (544). Not only is the intention of the man’s utterance not obscured in the retelling, it is emphasized. Indeed, the narrator orients the listener to this intention precisely to undermine it, her own intention being refracted in the disjunction between what the man takes to be self-evident and what the story-teller does.

Perhaps because the unidirectional variety does not clash with the discourse of the other it is not as easy to see that it, too, works by drawing attention to the other as other – and not simply by taking up elements of the other’s style (knowingly or otherwise) as a means of accessing its associations. Thus, it is not the case, for instance, that mainland Chinese speakers produce a unidirectional double-voiced discourse (at least not in the Bakhtinian sense) simply by aligning themselves with the indexical values associated with the Taiwanese accent. On the contrary, as we have seen above, such an effort is entirely consistent with a single-voiced discourse. Rather, if Mock-Taiwanese-Mandarin is double-voiced it is because the speaker, in using it, intentionally orients the listener to Taiwanese-Mandarin as an alien style, one that diverges from the norm in ways that speak to the warmth
and congeniality of the Taiwanese. It is double-voiced, in other words, because it is double-directed. Here, too, the speaker’s intention must be refracted in the disjunction between the Taiwanese perspective and what is taken to be the mainland norm. But rather than undermining the appropriated voice, the intention follows in its direction.

This takes us back to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter: what does it mean to speak “through” or “against” the voice of another? It is emphatically not a matter of deploying (in whole or in part) the meanings “encoded” within the other’s discourse; it is not simply to avail oneself of the resources present in another’s language or style. Nor, on the other hand, is it to put one’s own words or meanings in the other’s mouth, either literally (by employing the other as a proxy) or figuratively (by misconstruing the other’s words or intentions). Nor again is it a combination of these alternatives, a synthesis or a composite that retains elements of both. Rather, it is to make the other’s discourse present, with its own intentions and autonomy, and, in doing so, indirectly, convey a meaning that would not otherwise be expressed.

Here, at last, we can understand what Stroud means by double-voicing in the example we encountered at the beginning of this chapter. When little Anders says “I’ll ‘schasta’ you, just wait, I’ll ‘schasta’ you” (whatever that means), his intention is conveyed more or less intact. He is a child playing in the neighbourhood with his friend. At the same time, however, his utterance has been reproduced in such a way as to direct our attention to its strangeness – it says, in effect, look at the way Anders speaks; how strange! How exotic! This second intention, which, clearly, could never be Anders’s own, is nevertheless mediated by Anders’s own words. This is double-voicing in the Bakhtinian sense.

And here we can also resolve the paradoxical notion that a double-voiced utterance is in fact profoundly singular. On the one hand, we hear only little Anders’s voice, playfully threatening his friend in his peculiar way; the author, speaking through this vignette, stays out of the frame. On the other hand, we hear only the author’s voice, for the vignette is merely the vehicle through which the real significance of the utterance is conveyed: there is
no ambiguity or ambivalence in this,\textsuperscript{71} no migration or appropriation of socio-cultural forms, or any “negotiation” of meaning; the author’s singular intention passes through unscathed.

And something even more remarkable can be detected here, something more central to the sociolinguistic project than the mere possibility of a speaker “orchestrating” another’s utterance for his own intentions: we find that a given language or style, like Anders’s, with its ostensibly \textit{unitary} system of meanings, has been given a new layer of significance in its encounter with the reader’s “axiological belief system” (the implicit background against which the author’s intentions sound); we discover that the background is not merely “discursive” (not just prior speech) but \textit{socio-ideological}, and that the ostensibly unitary language must have as many layers as there are centres of socio-ideological activity. In this we see the essential characteristics of \textit{heteroglossia}, a notion we explore in Chapter 6.

\textsuperscript{71} Or if there is, it is an entirely separate matter – a failing, perhaps, on the author’s part; or a device employed in addition to the double-voicing.
6. HETEROGLOSSIA

Our look at the doubling of discourse (in Ch. 5) made it clear that the relationships underlying style and stylization are not logical or systematic in the sense that they can be reconciled to a single or overarching structure of meaning: on the contrary, they depend on the real existence of different socio-linguistic centres – what Bakhtin calls the “semantic and axiological belief systems” or “social languages” – whose contact with one another (whose “inter-animation” or “inter-illumination”) serves to release new meanings. And here we arrive at the heart of both the Bakhtinian discourse on language and its importance to sociolinguistics: just as the style of a given discourse must be characterized “from the point of view of its relationship to someone else’s discourse”, the semantic and axiological belief system that informs it must likewise be understood from the point of view of its relationship to other social languages. Language is social not just in the way it manifests the concerns and practices of its own community, but in the way it manifests relations between communities. And here, in what Bakhtin calls “heteroglossia”, we see another facet of that puzzle we have been encountering throughout this discussion: heteroglossia does not present itself (historically or conceptually) when different languages – different ideological systems and approaches to the world – develop side-by-side (each turned inward to the concerns of its own community); heteroglossia results from the end of this “peaceful co-existence”, when it becomes clear that these languages contradict each other and are in no way able to live together in peace and quiet; heteroglossia, then, is not the separation or stratification of languages but their coming together.

6.1 The Scholarly Discourse on Heteroglossia

6.1.1 Heteroglossia defined

As elsewhere (for instance, in the discussion of genre), we can see a tendency to treat the notion of heteroglossia as a known quantity (and therefore not in need of clarification).\(^1\)

\(^1\) And as elsewhere, it often happens when reference is made to heteroglossia in the introduction to another’s work – as when Hodges & Nilep (2007) introduce Schulthies & Boum’s contribution to their edited volume, and Garrett (2004) introduces Woolard’s contribution to his – or when reviewing a book that addresses heteroglossia – as when Swann
Lynne Cameron (2003: 7) thus speaks of “Bakhtin’s focus on the prosaic and on heteroglossia”. Wu & Lu (2007: 169), citing the glossary in Bakhtin (1981), speak of “a world dominated by heteroglossia”. And Baron (2004: 262), likewise citing Bakhtin (1981), speaks of a “heteroglossic universe” in which “consciousness finds itself inevitably facing the necessity of HAVING TO CHOOSE A LANGUAGE” (original emphasis). Grant & Iedema (2005) offer a hint at what this entails when they suggest a connection with “new and hitherto marginal(ized) kinds of meaning” that can be arrived at when discourse is construed as “as a means for illuminating play, contradiction, and dialogism” (50). But they see no need to further unpack the idea.

When the notion is specifically unpackaged, the sociolinguistic discourse offers a multitude of interpretations: The most common themes include “stratification”, “diversity”, “multiplicity”, “conflict”, “sociality”, “engagement”, and “code-switching”. Woolard (2004: 86), for instance, observes: “For Bakhtin, all societies are linguistically diverse (‘heteroglossic’). Language is never really unitary in even the most monolingual settings, but is always stratified by the distinct social experiences of its speakers”. In this, we see the conjunction of three related ideas about heteroglossia: that language is stratified, diverse and socially oriented. Argenter (2001: 386) offers a somewhat longer and more nuanced discussion, but likewise observes in heteroglossia “a peculiar kind of sociolinguistic stratification”. Pujolar (2001) tells us more than once that heteroglossia is “the social stratification of
language” (27, 31). Elaborating on the theme of “sociality”, he adds: “any language is always stratified into the forms and meanings constructed by the various regional, social, professional or generational groups that use it” (128). Badarneh (2009: 642) offers the same formula, calling heteroglossia the ‘internal stratification’ of language”, then, like Pujolar, adds “As a result of heteroglossia, language inherently has linguistic forms that are associated with different social groups which are defined by social position and ideological commitments”.

We will return to the question of sociality, but first consider some ideas closely tied to stratification: “diversity” and “multiplicity”. For some authors, like Woolard (2004), heteroglossia is characterized primarily in terms of linguistic diversity. For Baquedano-López (2004: 258), it is a “diversity of social voices”, a sort of “hybridity” that includes a “mix of codes and registers”. Pietikainen & Dufva (2006: 210) characterize it as “a variety of genres, styles, registers and discourses... characteristic of all language use”. Nikolarea (2007: 134) says it refers to “different styles or genres within a language as well as their use in the literary domain”, while Marková (2003a: 44) describes such “multivoicedness” as “divergent styles in speech arising from the infinite openness of languages in different concrete situations”.

Like Marková (2003a), a number of commentators define heteroglossia as “multi-voicedness” (e.g., Grant, 2003 and Pahta, 2007). Hoops (2011: 218) calls it “the multivocality of social reality”. Riley (2007: 65) says it “refers to the coexistence within a single text of a multiplicity of language varieties or registers”. Prodromou (2008: 82) describes it as “the simultaneous presence of ‘other’ languages within a particular language”, while Heller (2007: 8) describes it as “the multiplicity of voices (stances, perspectives, social lives) which emerge in any given stretch of social performance”. Piller (2006: 158) sets it “in contrast to monologic texts, in which there is only one voice, or one dominant, hegemonic voice and a number of submerged voices”.

3 Elsewhere she calls it a “multiplicity of speech styles present at any point in a given society”: “a very diverse and constantly changing set of speech forms that roughly follow social boundaries of all types” (304). She adds:

This linguistic stratification is likely to pose difficult problems if we approach it with a purely taxonomic attitude and seek to represent it through lists, maps or graphics. After all, there is no reason to assume that many speech styles do not overlap or may not be seen as having relationships of inclusion with others (304-305).
Many authors allude to a particular relationship among the “voices”. Thurlow & Jaworski (2006: 104) describe heteroglossia as “a rich mixing and multiplicity of ‘voices’”. Joseph (2006: 45) describes a situation “where a multiplicity of different ways of speaking are constantly intermingling with each other”. Others stress the active or dynamic nature of this “intermingling”. Maclean (2010: 178), citing Ivanic (1998), speaks of “relations between positions that ‘interanimate’”. Maybin (2001: 67) calls it a “dynamic multiplicity of voices, genres and social languages”. Baxter (2003: 38) describes it as “the co-existence in any discursive context of a plurality of voices that do not fuse into a single consciousness but rather, exist in different registers, generating a ‘dialogic’ dynamism among themselves”. Tovares (2006: 470) echoes this view, calling heteroglossia “a dialogic co-presence of multiplicity and diversity of voices”; likewise Maynard (2007: 66), who explains: “In concrete terms, heteroglossia is observed in a fictional character’s voice, which reflects the authorial voice. These two voices are in dialogical relationship, as if they were talking to each other”. Li (2009: 91) similarly calls it a “dialogized interrelation of languages and discourses that involves multiple voices speaking through text”. Grossen & Orvig (2011: 56) call it “a dialogized intermingling between voices in praeresentia and voices in absentia”, arguing that “representing another’s discourse necessarily implies a modification, a transformation, a confrontation, etc. In this intermingling, the speakers adopt various points of view on what is said by themselves or others”.

For some, the relationship among these voices is one of conflict or struggle. Bailey (2000: 560) says heteroglossic language is language “shot through with multiple and competing sociohistorical voices and ideologies”. Citing Cazden (1989), Prodromou (2008: 86) likewise speaks of “speech situations where ‘voices are felt by the speaker to be in conflict’”. Piller (2006: 159) quotes Hirschkop’s (1989) description of heteroglossia as “stylistic and generic stratification and conflict within the confines of a national vernacular”. Tsitsipis (2004) calls it a “struggle of voices” (590, note 6), while in 2007, he speaks of “a heteroglossic struggle between [a minority] voice and the voice of institutional authority” (288) and “the tension between languages and sociolects when the one is seen through the eyes of another” (284). The latter formula is also offered in Tsitsipis (2004: 585), where it is argued that heteroglossia is “the viewing of one language through the eyes of the other”. This is also taken up by Nikolarea
(2007: 145), who finds it in situations where “identity is seen vis-à-vis its…Other”. Coupland & Jaworski (2004: 27) characterize heteroglossia as “various combinations of linguistic forms, the co-existence of past and present linguistic forms, and competing voices of different socio-ideological groupings and traditions”.

This notion of “socio-ideological groupings” takes us back to the question of sociality. Speaking of heteroglossic “language practices”, Higgins (2004: 76) argues that “Through social discourse, a range of social voices (official or resistant, defined by geography, age, ethnicity and race, class, religion, gender or lifestyle) participates in an ongoing struggle to define social reality”. Woolard (2002: 477) observes this in her review of Pujolar (2001), associating heteroglossia with the idea that “particular speech varieties (including consciously stylized accents) are used…to construct views of the world and of speakers’ relationships with one another and with other groups”. These are seen as “positionings within the macro-social structure that can result in reproduction or change of that structure”. Schulthies & Boum (2007: 146) likewise argue that “words and ideas emerge in a particular social and historical context where participants appropriate, challenge, and negotiate their meaning”. We might call this view “social constructivist”, in that the struggle is over the construction or presentation of a certain social identity. Bhatt (2008: 181) refers to “the dialogic and social character of speech” in this regard. Keane (2004: 441) offers a similar view, calling heteroglossia “the capacity for coexisting linguistic styles to index multiple social identities”, while Messing (2007: 562) says it “consists of multiple codes – languages and dialects, and syncretic speech – but also of identities that are constructed as local, state…, national…, and/or global, and of identities that are marked by social class, skin color, and gender”. Macken-Horarik (2003a: 286) calls heteroglossia the view that “all the diverse social voices (classes, genders, movements, epochs, viewpoints) of a community form an intertextual system within which each is necessarily heard”.

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4 Hodges & Nilep (2007: 6) reproduce this idea, which appears to be an interpretation of Holquist’s (1981a: 428) claim that “At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions…that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions”.

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For others, however, heteroglossia is essentially the product of, rather than a means of constructing, a given social identity. In his review of Heller (2007), Sandel (2009: 97) explains that heteroglossia is concerned with “historical social relations, rather than just details of surface form”. Badarneh (2009: 642) argues that “As a result of heteroglossia, language inherently has linguistic forms that are associated with different social groups which are defined by social position and ideological commitments”. Poveda, Cano & Palomares-Valera (2005: 91) argue that Bakhtin’s work on heteroglossia “highlighted the principle that all utterances and discourse practices are historically embedded and contain the ideological and formal resources of previous speakers and community members”.

Proponents of Peter White’s Appraisal theory treat heteroglossia in terms of “engagement”. White (2003: 261), himself, describes such engagement “as the various options by which intersubjective positions are adopted, with that taxonomy attending to how, and to what ends, the textual voice engages with alternative voices and positions and thereby actively represents the communicative context as one of heteroglossic diversity”. Others echo this view. Coffin (2002: 508) speaks of “heteroglossic diversity” as “the various convergent, alternative and counter sociosemiotic realities or positions activated and referenced by every utterance”. Burridge (2008) claims that the “Bakhtinian conception of heteroglossic engagement” is linked to the way “versions of opposing arguments are constructed and countered through forms of stake inoculation” (31), describing the “ways in which speakers engage with or against available positions” (36). Martin (2003: 174) likewise speaks of “heteroglossic construals” as concerned with “whether or not and how speakers acknowledge alternative positions to their own”. Lauerbach (2004: 364) speaks of utterances “that allow for possible other perspectives and voices”, while Sook (2008: 246) points to “the extent of the writers’ willingness to acknowledge the diverse opinions of the reader”. de Oliveira & Pagano (2006: 628) speak of writers “heteroglossically acknowledging the existence of alternative positions to their own”. Gales (2011) argues that heteroglossic utterances “reference other viewpoints; they refer to, reflect, and/or negotiate the stances of those who came before, while at the same time anticipate forthcoming stances of new audiences”. She adds that in heteroglossic situations “the voices of others – past, present, and future – are acknowledged, ultimately opening the door to debate, discussion, and a negotiation of
power” (30); they “reference multiple voices, allow for further discourse, and assume
disalignment with the audience” (37). Cook, Pieri & Robbins (2004: 435) likewise argue that
speakers have the option “of engaging with the heteroglossia of voices…or of keeping their
contribution more or less monologic…by dealing with only one, or one type, of argument”.

Another line of thinking has it that heteroglossia relates to code-switching. This differs from
the views of those, such as Woolard (2004), who take heteroglossia to be one of the
conditions that make code-switching possible. Morgan (2004) characterizes heteroglossia
itself as “the shifting of styles or linguistic codes that exist within and often among
communities” (18, note 4). Bhatt (2008: 193) seems to have this in mind when he speaks of
“language use as fundamentally heteroglossic” [my emphasis], adding: “Code-mixing, under
this analysis, enhances the meaning-potential…of the utterance”. Nevins (2008: 208) sees
heteroglossia as concerned with “the relevant repertoires and positions of speakers and the
contexts in which [speech] occurs”. Coupland & Jaworski (2004: 27) argue that it
encapsulates “the metalinguistic nature of communication, in which speakers alternate and
accommodate their speaking styles (registers, dialects, languages, etc.) to the speaking styles
of others”. They add that “Bakhtin makes a distinction between “heteroglossia alone”
(unconscious switching between different language varieties), and “heteroglossia with
awareness” (conscious manipulation of language choices)”. Bailey (2007: 257) argues that
heteroglossia denotes “the simultaneous use of different kinds of forms or signs”. She adds:
“this definition of heteroglossia subsumes formal definitions of bilingualism (as the
coeexistence of two linguistic systems) or code-switching (as the alternation of codes within a
single speech exchange)”. Pujolar (2001: 174) sees code-switching as “one particular
manifestation of heteroglossia”, while Riley (2007: 65) sees both heteroglossia and code-
switching as “major manifestations” of intertextuality. Hefright (2009: 115) seems to accept
this view only in part, arguing – contra Riley – that heteroglossia is “not limited to any
particular number of varieties, nor is it fully parallel to ‘code-switching,’ since it includes
contemporaneous, as well as sequential, co-existence of multiple varieties”.
6.1.2 Heteroglossia understood

In all of this, the authors consistently address the question of *hetero-* (“difference”) and -
*glossia* (“language”). Where they frequently disagree, it seems, is on the question of where
and how this difference is manifested, and what it entails. As we can see from the passages
cited earlier in the discussion, proponents of Appraisal theory offer a very consistent
interpretation. As with many of the others, they see heteroglossia in terms of individual or
social voices that can (or should) be engaged within the text or utterance. In this, they have
something in common with those who see heteroglossia as a demand to make space for other
arguments and other ways of thinking – a demand for engagement with other discursive
positions. They differ, however, in their commitment to these other viewpoints, seeing them
only as a reality (and potentially an obstacle) that may be acknowledged or not according to
the speaker’s objectives and the rhetorical exigencies of the situation. Thus, in “Hunting is
not just for blood-thirsty toffs” (to cite but one example), Burridge (2008) examines how
versions of opposing arguments are constructed and countered during a British campaign
against a proposed ban on hunting with dogs. As evident from the title, the idea that hunters
are “blood-thirsty toffs” is given air only to convey its (alleged) wrong-headedness.

A number of others, however, treat heteroglossia as an ideological notion, an attitude of
solidarity or support, as Baxter (2003: 38, 70) puts it, for “non-official viewpoints, those of
the marginalized, the oppressed and the peripheralised”, with an implicit promise to
deconstruct social injustices and reconstruct spaces in which the silenced can speak. Piller
(2006: 158-159) takes this view, describing “heteroglossic texts” as “the democratic ideal of
language use – in contrast to monologic texts, in which there is only one voice, or one
dominant, hegemonic voice and a number of submerged voices”. Schulthies & Boum (2007:
146) express a similar idea. Citing Maranhão (1990) and Tedlock & Mannheim (1995), they
describe how “multiple voices and cultural logics contend with each other and challenge the
authority of the narrator”, who is “successively enfeebled, first, by his lack of autonomy in
the face of his addressees, who also participate in the production of meaning; second, by the
dilution of his identity behind the characters, who start speaking for him and soon speak as
independent voices; third, by the characters themselves having their roles attenuated by the
polyphony”. Hoops (2011: 218) seems to take a similar line when he argues that a single
“cohesive text does not engage in this particular discursive and cultural struggle”. For all these authors, heteroglossia is construed as a sort of discursive arena in which individuals or groups literally contend over ideas.

Higgins (2004: 76) also speaks of a linguistic struggle, but on his view the various social voices struggle not simply to contribute to a given discourse, but to carve out a particular social reality by creating, maintaining, and enforcing their own linguistic standards. Baxter (2003: 70) offers a similar view, seeing language as “the space of confrontation between differently orientated voices, as diverse social groups fight it out on the terrain of language.”

She explains:

while the dominant discourse strives to make a given sign, such as ‘woman’, uni-acentual and endowed with an eternal, reified character, resistant discourses rise up to challenge and disrupt conventional understandings offering multi-acentual readings. In post-structuralist terms, heteroglossia describes the struggle for the control of signifiers such as ‘woman’, and the process by which discourses compete to fix meaning permanently and irrevocably on behalf of hegemonic interests (70).

Messing (2007: 562) takes this view as well; citing Hill (1993), she speaks of ‘confronting’ heteroglossia, an effort she observes among certain indigenous groups in Mexico, who call upon pro-indigenous discourse in an attempt “to interrogate and invert the stigma that is associated by many with indigeneity, and to refocus local ideology of Malintzi identity as a marker of prestige rather than backwardness”.

Li (2009: 91) appears to take a similar position, arguing that heteroglossia is “the competition of different voices, identities and positions to maintain, adopt, or abandon power and control”. But here, it turns out, the utterance itself is the “arena”. On this view, individual speakers may express their intentions and create new meanings by incorporating and recontextualizing a range of socially typical perspectives or speech forms into their own utterances. Thus, media representations “are reconceptualizations of observable linguistic markers according to specific intentions of those involved in the process of media

Indeed, she calls this “Bakhtin’s specific contribution to post-structuralist thinking” – the foregrounding of “the linguistic dimension of social struggle: the ways in which all utterance and discourse are subject to the deforming and transforming struggle for power” (70).
Maybin (2001: 69) has a similar idea, but allows for the incorporation of even more individualized “voices”:

A newspaper report…may have involved a journalist interviewing witnesses and spokespeople and incorporating their voices into his article. This report was then cut and edited by the newspaper in accordance with a senior editorial decision. The voices of witnesses and spokespeople (of varying degrees of authority), the journalist, sub-editor and editor all participate in constructing the message for the reader.

Buchstaller & D’Arcy (2009: 297) take this quite literally. Drawing on Vološinov (1973), they see heteroglossia in the incorporation of another speaker in quotation, reproduced “with a different ‘voice’…from that which encodes the surrounding material in terms of prosody, pitch, accent, etc.” For Carter (2004: 198), this becomes a sort of play or creative performance (rather than serious conflict), as each participant draws inter- and intra-textual connections to prior utterances. She observes, for example, that one of the extracts (in her data set) “shows an attention to syntactic and lexical parallelism across contributions that would be worthy of any literary author”.

A different contingent sees the many styles and genres within a language not as alien voices, not as alternative perspectives that ought either to be given space or resisted, but as the basic material from which a socially relevant variety of language may be derived. Bhatt (2008: 182) expresses such a view in his description of a “third space” of linguistic hybridity, which “gives rise to possibilities for new meanings and, at the same time, presents a mechanism to negotiate and navigate between a global identity and local practices…creating counter-discourses to the hegemony of the monoglossic standards”. Bailey (2000: 560) sees something similar in the linguistic forms used by Dominican Americans in Providence, which “reflect a social reality of being raised in Dominican families with Dominican social networks, but residing and going to school in an American inner city”. And in speaking of the heteroglossic nature of ELF, Prodromou (2008: 138), observes that “rather than merely draw its norms from the authority of ENL, ELF may have the power to transgress those norms and transform them”, with language users “bending English to suit their purposes”. Pujolar (2001: 129)

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6 English as a Lingua Franca
7 English as a Native Language
speaks in similar terms, arguing that “Heteroglossia shows up in people’s talk as they integrate a variety of speech forms of their society in their talk in the same ways”. He adds:

the alternation between linguistic varieties or languages can be seen as one particular aspect of the polyphony of utterances. In this way, bilingual speakers can be seen as appropriating the two languages in different ways, in different degrees of ownness and otherness…. Language choice would involve seeing one linguistic variety as being fully appropriated by the speaker on a given occasion, whereas codeswitching would refer to voices treated in a more distant manner (174).

Maclean (2010: 178) seems to express this view as well when she argues that “dialogized heteroglossia is evident in the lexical and grammatical patterns” of the writing of her research subject, in that she “moves, often within a single sentence, from one kind of voice, realized by narrative accounts of personal experience, to an academic discourse realized by nominalized language”. Taken to a certain extreme, the ostensibly alien voices of other socio-linguistic spheres can be seen as alternative aspects of one’s one own identity. Pietikainen & Dufva (2006: 211) offer such a view, describing “the presence of different perspectives, or voices in one’s inner reality” as the “multi-voicedness of the mind”. Morgan (2004: 4) seems to speak in a similar way of the Asian American “community norm of mediating language ideologies and heteroglossia”, that is, “the shifting of styles or linguistic codes that exist within and often among communities” (18, note 4).

Thurlow & Jaworski (2006), on the other hand, see heteroglossia as compatible with the sort of distance that Pujolar rejects. They argue that identities are “not autonomous and separate but involved and intercorporeal – produced as a series of stylizations by appropriating, reworking and subverting different ways of speaking” (104). While they speak of appropriating different identities, a certain distance is implied by the notion of “stylization” they employ. On their view, heteroglossia provides the linguistic resources, the different ways of being and communicating, that may be adopted and developed into a repertoire for the performance of socially appropriate speech acts. Coupland & Jaworski (2004: 27) give a clear sense of this when they associate heteroglossia with the way “speakers alternate and accommodate their speaking styles (registers, dialects, languages, etc.) to the speaking styles of others”. Citing Hymes (1972a, 1972b, 1996) they add: “Each choice of a linguistic form or language variety
is strategic, i.e. it is part of the speaker’s communicative competence… and his/her sense of how each utterance fits in their linguistic universe and what it can achieve for them”. Nevins (2008: 208) likewise argues that the recontextualization of media discourse is intrinsically heteroglossic, “because recontextualization in everyday speech will vary according to the relevant repertoires and positions of speakers and the contexts in which it occurs”. Woolard (2002: 477) describes the same “strategic” use of language varieties, noting that “particular speech varieties (including consciously stylized accents) are used… to construct views of the world and of speakers’ relationships with one another and with other groups”. Badarneh (2009: 642-643) echoes this with the claim that “As a result of heteroglossia, language inherently has linguistic forms that are associated with different social groups”. Citing Wortham & Locher (1999), he adds: “Accordingly, speaking with a certain ‘voice’ means ‘using words that index some position(s), because these words are characteristically used by members of a certain group”’. Tovares (2006: 476) likewise observes heteroglossia “in the way participants bring the ‘social languages’ of fairy tales and religion into private gossip about the TV show”, while Baron (2004: 262) finds, in her study, that the speaker “represents many voices in the text, and she also assumes different voices herself, each one a conscious ‘active choice’”, the most actively chosen one being “the voice that calls God into the conversation each time she wants to exert extraordinary influence”.

Tsitsipis (2004, 2007) and Nikolarea (2007) stand out from the above. In characterizing heteroglossia as “the viewing of one language through the eyes of the other” (Tsitsipis 2004: 585), they put the emphasis not on the multiplicity of alternative perspectives, or on the “struggle” between them, but on the way one language may illuminate another, or give it a significance it would never otherwise have, by imposing its own (alien) interpretive background. This differs from the Appraisal view, in that it denies the very possibility of “accounting for” the alternative perspective, since the two do not exist on a common plane (i.e., the “account” itself would be subject to reappraisal). By the same token, it cannot be a question of “making space” for the other or even of “challenging” the other. Such an interpretation also differs from those that associate heteroglossia with “code-switching” (or linguistic “appropriation”, “stylization”, etc.) in that the differences are not seen to be encoded or given strictly formal expression (i.e., the meaning of a given word is in the “eye” of the beholder).
6.2 The Bakhtinian Discourse on Heteroglossia

Early in *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin writes:

> The new cultural and creative consciousness lives in an actively polyglot world. […] The period of national languages, coexisting but closed and deaf to each other, comes to an end. Languages throw light on each other: one language can, after all, see itself only in the light of another language (1981: 12).

Bakhtin later explains: “We have been speaking so far of the interanimation of major national languages (Greek, Latin), each of which was in itself already *fully formed* and *unitary*, languages that had already passed through a lengthy phase of comparatively stable and peaceful monoglossia (1981: 66).

Thus we begin our understanding of heteroglossia with the usual notion of language – i.e., with a “national language” – as something “closed” and “pure”, which at some point\(^8\) awakens not just to the presence, but to the significance, of the languages surrounding it. This moment of awakening:

set into motion a process of active, mutual cause-and-effect and inter-illumination. Words and language began to have a different feel to them; objectively they ceased to be what they had once been. Under these conditions of…inter-illumination, each given language – even if its linguistic composition (phonetics, vocabulary, morphology, etc.) were to remain absolutely unchanged – is, as it were, reborn, becoming qualitatively a different thing for the consciousness that creates in it (1981: 12).

Already we encounter some of the phrases that appear over and over in the Bakhtinian description of language: “inter-animation”, “inter-illumination”, “mutual cause-and-effect”. And what he says here of the incipient relations between languages in the narrow sense – i.e., the *inter*-linguistic relations characteristic of an active polyglossia – he means, *a fortiori*, for the *intra*-linguistic relations that develop between the “languages” of heteroglossia.\(^9\) He writes:

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\(^8\) I am not sure how important it is whether such a “point” is a genuine “historical” moment or merely a “conceptual” one. In any event, Bakhtin is not suggesting that there was ever a sharp break between a monoglotic and a polyglossic era. Indeed, he argues that “Polyglossia had always existed” (1981: 12) and that “at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom” (1981: 291).

\(^9\) As he explains in his brief “Response to a Question from *Novy Mir*”:
The naive and stubborn coexistence of “languages” within a given national language also comes to an end – that is, there is no more peaceful coexistence between territorial dialects, social and professional dialects and jargons, literary language, generic languages within literary language, epochs in language and so forth (1981: 12). In a later passage, Bakhtin makes the link between these two ideas (polyglossia and heteroglossia) even more explicit. He writes: “Closely connected with the problem of polyglossia and inseparable from it is the problem of heteroglossia within a language, that is, in the realm of culture, outsideness is a most powerful factor in understanding. It is only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly (but not maximally fully, because there will be cultures that see and understand even more). A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures. We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise itself” (1986: 7).

Bakhtin (1984) points to a very similar interpretation by Otto Kaus (1923). He explains: Kaus claims that Dostoevsky’s world is the purest and most authentic expression of the spirit of capitalism. At some earlier time those worlds, those planes – social, cultural, and ideological – which collide in Dostoevsky’s work were each self-sufficient, organically sealed, and stable; each made sense internally as an isolated unit. There was no real-life, material plane of essential contact or interpenetration with one another. Capitalism destroyed the isolation of these worlds, broke down the seclusion and inner ideological self-sufficiency of these social spheres… and wove them into its own contradictory evolving unity. These worlds had not yet lost their own individual profile, worked out over centuries, but they had ceased to be self-sufficient. Their blind co-existence and their peaceful and trusting ideological ignorance of one another came to an end; their mutual contradictoriness and at the same time their interconnectedness was revealed with the utmost clarity. Every atom of life trembled with this contradictory unity of the capitalist world and capitalist consciousness, permitting nothing to rest easily in isolation, but at the same time resolving nothing. The spirit of this world-in-the-state-of-becoming found its fullest expression in the works of Dostoevsky (19; my emphasis).

We may note, in passing, how this same phenomenon underlies what Bakhtin elsewhere calls “carnivalization”. He writes, for instance:

We can now say that the clamping principle that bound all these heterogeneous elements into the organic whole of a genre… was carnival and a carnival sense of the world. In the subsequent development of European literature as well, carnivalization constantly assisted in the destruction of all barriers between genres, between self-enclosed systems of thought, between various styles, etc.; it destroyed any attempt on the part of genres and styles to isolate themselves or ignore one another; it brought closer what was distant and united what had been sundered. This has been the great function of carnivalization in the history of literature (1984: 134-135).
the problem of internal differentiation, the stratification characteristic of any national language” (1981: 67; original emphasis). On the Bakhtinian view, it does not matter whether we are speaking of language in the “broad” sense or the “narrow” sense. Language, at every level, has become subject to the influence of its neighbours. Indeed, Bakhtin writes, “At this point it becomes necessary to broaden the concept of polyglossia somewhat” (1981: 66) – and this is precisely what heteroglossia is: a broadening of the notion of polyglossia into a description of the relations within a given national language.11

It must be emphasized here that what Bakhtin sees as having “come to an end” is not the “purity” or homogeneity of language; it is never a question of moving from a unified to a stratified language. Nor is it the privileging of the centre over the periphery (or vice versa). Rather, what comes to an end is the “naive and stubborn co-existence” of languages – the “peaceful co-existence” between languages.12 In its place comes a “struggle” – even an “intense struggle” (1981: 78) – “a complex and centuries-long struggle” (1981: 83) – a “social and ideological struggle” (1981: 68) – “a struggle that occurred everywhere in Western Europe” (1981: 77).13 It is easy to read this in terms of a “revolutionary” struggle – 

11 We might say that polyglossia offers the “macro” level view of linguistic relations and heteroglossia, the “meso” level view.
12 Bakhtin writes:

As soon as a critical interanimation of languages began to occur in the consciousness of our peasant, as soon as it became clear that these were not only various different languages but even internally variegated languages, that the ideological systems and approaches to the world that were indissolubly connected with these languages contradicted each other and in no way could live in peace and quiet with one another – then the inviolability and predetermined quality of these languages came to an end, and the necessity of actively choosing one’s orientation among them began.

The language and world of prayer, the language and world of song, the language and world of labor and everyday life, the specific language and world of local authorities, the new language and world of the workers freshly immigrated to the city – all these languages and worlds sooner or later emerged from a state of peaceful and moribund equilibrium and revealed the speech diversity in each.

Of course the actively literary linguistic consciousness comes upon an even more varied and profound heteroglossia within literary language itself, as well as outside it. Any fundamental study of the stylistic life of the word must begin with this basic fact. The nature of the heteroglossia encountered and the means by which one orients oneself in it determine the concrete stylistic life that the word will lead (1981: 296).

13 The word “struggle” appears 64 times in The Dialogic Imagination.
especially in light of the historical backdrop of Bakhtin’s work. But such a reading is unhelpful and extremely misleading. For Bakhtin, a “heteroglot” language:

represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. These “languages” of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying “languages” (1981: 291).

In other words, every “language” that develops in a concrete, historical place and time is already the result of a “struggle” – that is, the struggle to express a socially typical perspective on the world in the face of conflicting experiences. This, of course, includes (though in no way is it limited to) socio-political “class” struggle. The essential point is that a heteroglot language is the product not of its own hermetic perspective on the world, but of the way its perspective has intersected others in its ongoing development. It is the “bodily form” of such a perspective as it has responded to the challenges of conflicting opinion (and must therefore differ even from a “comparable” perspective that has grown out of another environment). This is true, as Bakhtin says, “even if its linguistic composition (phonetics, vocabulary, morphology, etc.) were to remain absolutely unchanged” – it becomes “qualitatively a different thing” (1981: 12).

The key notion is therefore not “struggle” but “inter-animation”, and this inter-animation has a paradoxical effect. Unlike languages that express a single hermetic perspective (and which can, in a sense, be set side-by-side with other languages and other perspectives – even those with which they clash – and thus contribute to an exhaustive – monologic – account of the different views of the world), heteroglot languages develop gaps – or, rather, the opposite: meanings that exist for one but not another, and which are thus untranslatable (and even invisible) to those working with a language.\footnote{Bakhtin thus insists:}

\begin{quote}
It is necessary that heteroglossia wash over a culture’s awareness of itself and its language, penetrate to its core, relativize the primary language system underlying its ideology and literature and deprive it of its naive absence of conflict (1981: 368).
\end{quote}
But Bakhtin turns the problem on its head. If heteroglot languages inter-animate one another – provide the background against which each develops its own stylistic profile and tone – then they must also be capable of “illuminating” one another – of representing a standard, a subjective norm, against the background of which the other’s style is exposed. Thus Bakhtin writes:

In actual fact…there does exist a common plane that methodologically justifies our juxtaposing them: all languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values. As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically (1981: 291-292).

This is the essential problem addressed by the writer of novelistic prose:

in the process of literary creation, languages interanimate each other and objectify precisely that side of one’s own (and of the other’s) language that pertains to its world view, its inner form, the axiologically accentuated system inherent in it. For the creating literary consciousness, existing in a field illuminated by another’s language, it is not the phonetic system of its own language that stands out, nor is it the distinctive features of its own morphology nor its own abstract lexicon – what stands out is precisely that which makes language concrete and which makes its world view ultimately untranslatable, that is, precisely the style of the language as a totality (1981: 62).

Thus, the prose writer works not simply within a language, but among languages; not by orchestrating conflicts among the speakers of a language, but by orchestrating conflicts among the languages themselves (i.e., through conflicts among characters representative of those languages). And while Bakhtin focuses, in The Dialogic Imagination, on the importance of heteroglossia to the modern prose writer, the effort to “illuminate” or produce an “image” of language through the orchestration of heteroglossia is not purely aesthetic and in no way limited to the novel.15 Even for the author, the illumination of a language goes

15 Nevertheless, Bakhtin (1981: 400) sees a special role for the novel:

In the novel, literary language possesses an organ for perceiving the heterodox nature of its own speech. Heteroglossia-in-itself becomes, in the novel and thanks to the novel, heteroglossia-for-itself: languages are dialogically implicated in each other and begin to exist for each other (similar to exchanges in a dialogue). It is precisely thanks to the novel that languages are able to illuminate each other mutually; literary language becomes a dialogue of languages that both know about and understand each other.
hand-in-hand with what Bakhtin calls the “refraction” of speech – a phenomenon that goes to the very heart of communication. Bakhtin writes:

Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel (whatever the forms for its incorporation), is another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author (1981: 324).

Heteroglossia is another’s speech in another’s language, but such speech never passes through a vacuum. In the novel it passes through an atmosphere of languages and situations orchestrated by the author for a particular (artistic) purpose. Outside the novel, where there is no such orchestration, speech must still pass through an atmosphere of differently oriented interests and experiences. In either case, speech (and by extension, language) responds to this atmosphere – it gets “refracted” by it, the way a beam of light will when it passes from one medium to another.

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16 It may even be argued that reported speech is, in fact, an “orchestration” of linguistic viewpoints on par with the machinations of the prose writer.
17 The optical metaphor (“light”, “illumination”, “refraction”, etc.) figures frequently in Bakhtin’s efforts to describe heteroglossia. In one of his most evocative passages, he writes:

any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist – or, on the contrary, by the “light” of alien words that have already been spoken about it. […] The way in which the word conceptualizes its object is a complex act – all objects, open to dispute and overlain as they are with qualifications, are from one side highlighted while from the other side dimmed by heteroglot social opinion, by an alien word about them. And into this complex play of light and shadow the word enters – it becomes saturated with this play, and must determine within it the boundaries of its own semantic and stylistic contours. […] And an artistic representation, an “image” of the object, may be penetrated by this dialogic play of verbal intentions that meet and are interwoven in it; such an image need not stifle these forces, but on the contrary may activate and organize them. If we imagine the intention of such a word, that is, its directionality toward the object, in the form of a ray of light, then the living and unrepeatable play of colors and light on the facets of the image that it constructs can be explained as the spectral dispersion of the ray-word, not within the object itself…but rather as its spectral dispersion in an atmosphere filled with the alien words, value judgments and accents through which the ray passes on its way toward the object; the social atmosphere of the word, the atmosphere that surrounds the object, makes the facets of the image sparkle. (1981: 276-277).
Speech is thus like the image that appears to a spear fisher looking into the water. The fisher who thrusts his spear directly at the target will miss his mark because the image has been refracted. An experienced fisherman will take account of the situation (his angle to the water, the index of refraction, etc.) and aim his spear where there seems to be no fish at all. A naive observer might question his accuracy. But, for Bakhtin, such an observer is like the linguist who regards language “from the speaker’s standpoint as if there were only one speaker who does not have any necessary relation to other participants in speech communication” (1986: 67). Such an individual “can understand neither the genre nor the style of speech” (97-98) and thus fails to grasp its expressive significance. As Bakhtin explains:

When constructing my utterance, I try actively to determine this response. Moreover, I try to act in accordance with the response I anticipate, so this anticipated response, in turn, exerts an active influence on my utterance (I parry objections that I foresee, I make all kinds of provisos, and so forth). When speaking I always take into account the apperceptive background of the addressee’s perception of my speech: the extent to which he is familiar with the situation, whether he has special knowledge of the cultural area of communication, his views and convictions, his prejudices (from my viewpoint), his sympathies and antipathies – because all this will determine his active responsive understanding of my utterance (1986: 95-96).

In a word, it will determine how my utterance is refracted in his active responsive understanding.18 In the spear-fishing analogy, refraction is the distance between the fish and the image. In language, we could say it is the distance between the speaker’s intention and the listener’s reception. In normal conversation, this distance is closed (even before it opens)

18 Bakhtin (1981: 282) writes:

Thus an active understanding, one that assimilates the word under consideration into a new conceptual system, that of the one striving to understand, establishes a series of complex interrelationships, consonances and dissonances with the word and enriches it with new elements. It is precisely such an understanding that the speaker counts on. Therefore his orientation toward the listener is an orientation toward a specific conceptual horizon, toward the specific world of the listener; it introduces totally new elements into his discourse; it is in this way, after all, that various different points of view, conceptual horizons, systems for providing expressive accents, various social “languages” come to interact with one another. The speaker strives to get a reading on his own word, and on his own conceptual system that determines this word, within the alien conceptual system of the understanding receiver; he enters into dialogical relationships with certain aspects of this system. The speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener’s, apperceptive background.
by a combination of the speaker’s anticipation and the listener’s responsive understanding. But when (or to the extent that) a speaker and listener come from different socio-ideological spheres the gap may remain open. In novelistic discourse, the author’s intentions are conveyed through an orchestration of such gaps that open up between narrator or character and reader (or another character with whom the reader is expected to identify). Bakhtin explains:

The prose writer as a novelist does not strip away the intentions of others from the heteroglot language of his works, he does not violate those socio-ideological cultural horizons (big and little worlds) that open up behind heteroglot languages – rather, he welcomes them into his work. The prose writer makes use of words that are already populated with the social intentions of others and compels them to serve his own new intentions, to serve a second master. Therefore the intentions of the prose writer are refracted, and refracted at different angles, depending on the degree to which the refracted, heteroglot languages he deals with are socio-ideologically alien, already embodied and already objectivized (1981: 299-300).

A passage from Sinclair Lewis’s Babbitt illustrates this well:

A stranger suddenly dropped into the business-center of Zenith could not have told whether he was in a city of Oregon or Georgia, Ohio or Maine, Oklahoma or Manitoba. But to Babbitt every inch was individual and stirring. As always he noted that the California Building across the way was three stories lower, therefore three stories less beautiful, than his own Reeves Building. As always when he passed the Parthenon Shoe Shine Parlor, a one-story hut which beside the granite and red-brick ponderousness of the old California Building resembled a bath-house under a cliff, he commented, “Gosh, ought to get my shoes shined this afternoon. Keep forgetting it.” At the Simplex Office Furniture Shop, the National Cash Register Agency, he yearned for a dictaphone, for a typewriter which would add and multiply, as a poet yearns for quartos or a physician for radium (Ch. v, part ii; my emphasis).

The first sentence is given in an objective, authorial voice, setting the stage for the reader’s subsequent understanding: Zenith is a town without distinction. But then, even while maintaining the indirect style and pseudo-objective narrative voice, the perspective subtly shifts to that of Babbitt himself; these are Babbitt’s thoughts. We can see the blending (or “hybridization”) of the two voices in the description of the “one-story hut”: though it has been grammatically and compositionally incorporated into the narrator’s utterance, it nevertheless expresses Babbitt’s judgement. Indeed, the novel’s artistic effect is achieved precisely by giving voice to Babbitt’s point of view (or, rather, the view of those he
typifies\textsuperscript{19}, by taking it seriously (even too seriously), and thus creating a gap between his expressive intentions and the reader’s reception (it is, after all, not the author’s opinion that “bigger is better”). As Bakhtin explains, the author “welcomes” his characters’ intentions, for it is through them that his own (in this case, parodic) objectives are refracted.

There is one further point that bears addressing. “Heteroglossia”, as characterized above, describes the “inter-animation” or the “inter-illumination” of the various socio-linguistic strata of a given national language. On the one hand, it may be manifested passively, or even unconsciously, among the speakers of a language, as an unremarkable linguistic reality (and this is true both for those who remain more or less unaware of the socio-historical encounters that have shaped their language, and those unaware of how their language continues to shape their reception of utterances produced in other social languages); or it may be conscious and intentional, as in novelistic discourse, when the author puts different languages into contact for the purpose of illuminating one by means of another. In either case, the underlying tension is between the languages that have come into contact, each of which is typical not only of the speakers involved but of the social bodies they represent.

We do not see in this an essential role for the “central” or “unified” literary language. For instance, in the passage from \textit{Babbit}, we see the linguistic profile of an early-twentieth-century, middle-class American set against the linguistic consciousness of a (presumably) more reflective and critical reader. And this is precisely how Bakhtin characterizes heteroglossia in the comic novel. He writes:

\textsuperscript{19} Bakhtin writes: “The internal bifurcation (double-voicing) of discourse, sufficient to a single and unitary language and to a consistently monologic style, can never be a fundamental form of discourse: it is merely a game, a tempest in a teapot” (325). He goes on: in the novel heteroglossia is…personified, incarnated in individual human figures, with disagreements and oppositions individualized. But such oppositions of individual wills and minds are submerged in social heteroglossia, they are reconceptualized through it. Oppositions between individuals are only surface upheavals of the untamed elements in social heteroglossia, surface manifestations of those elements that play on such individual oppositions, make them contradictory, saturate their consciousness and discourses with a more fundamental speech diversity (326).
the primary source of language usage in the comic novel is a highly specific treatment of “common language.” This “common language” – usually the average norm of spoken and written language for a given social group – is taken by the author precisely as the common view, as the verbal approach to people and things normal for a given sphere of society, as the going point of view and the going value. To one degree or another, the author distances himself from this common language, he steps back and objectifies it, forcing his own intentions to refract and diffuse themselves through the medium of this common view that has become embodied in language (a view that is always superficial and frequently hypocritical) (1981: 301-302).

The relationship is not between the centre and the periphery, but between one social group and another. In a later passage, addressing the role of hybridity in the novel, Bakhtin is less explicit about the languages being social languages, but the sentiment is the same. He writes:

> The image of a language conceived as an intentional hybrid is first of all a conscious hybrid (as distinct from a historical, organic, obscure language hybrid); an intentional hybrid is precisely the perception of one language by another language, its illumination by another linguistic consciousness. An image of language may be structured only from the point of view of another language, which is taken as the norm (1981: 359).

Again, the “norm” that one illuminates through an orchestration of heteroglossia is not (or not necessarily) the standard, unitary language, but simply “another” language – the norm for a socially typified language user.

Nevertheless, the frequently cited glossary to The Dialogic Imagination calls heteroglossia “as close a conceptualization as is possible of that locus where centripetal and centrifugal

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20 Bakhtin sees “hybridity” as a distinct form of linguistic inter-animation and inter-illumination, manifesting heteroglossia both in language and in the novelistic image of language. The notion of “hybridity” is examined in detail in Ch. 3.

21 Bakhtin mentions the historical resistance to the literary language – though the emphasis suggests that this is a particular case, rather than a defining characteristic of heteroglossia:

> Heteroglossia organized in these low genres, was not merely heteroglossia vis-a-vis the accepted literary language (in all its various generic expressions), that is, vis-a-vis the linguistic center of the verbal-ideological life of the nation and the epoch, but was a heteroglossia consciously opposed to this literary language. It was parodic, and aimed sharply and polemically against the official languages of its given time. It was heteroglossia that had been dialogized. (1981: 273).
forces collide” (1981: 428). In other words, heteroglossia is said to embody a linguistic tension not simply between one language and another, but between a given language and the language of the centre. But this is not what Bakhtin argues, for instance in the passage below, when he describes the advent of the European novel. He writes:

This latecomer reflects, in its stylistic structure, the struggle between two tendencies in the languages of European peoples: one a centralizing (unifying) tendency, the other a decentralizing tendency (that is, one that stratifies languages). The novel senses itself on the border between the completed, dominant literary language and the extraliterary languages that know heteroglossia, the novel either serves to further the centralizing tendencies of a new literary language in the process of taking shape (with its grammatical, stylistic and ideological norms), or – on the contrary – the novel fights for the renovation of an antiquated literary language, in the interests of those strata of the national language that have remained (to a greater or lesser degree) outside the centralizing and unifying influence of the artistic and ideological norm established by the dominant literary language (1981: 67).

Here, the suggestion seems to be that heteroglossia occupies one pole of a binary struggle between the centre (i.e. “the completed, dominant literary language”) and the periphery (“those strata of the national language that have remained…outside the centralizing and unifying influence of the artistic and ideological norm”). Bakhtin is not speaking of heteroglossia per se, but of how the novel manages to give voice to the languages of heteroglossia while simultaneously establishing the “grammatical, stylistic and ideological norms” of the dominant literary language. In other words, it is the novel, not heteroglossia, that we find at “that locus where centripetal and centrifugal forces collide”. Indeed, the novel conveys what is true for all discourse. As Bakhtin explains:

Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance; the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well; it is in fact an active participant in such speech diversity. And this active participation of every utterance in living heteroglossia determines the linguistic profile and style of

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22 I take this to be Holquist’s interpretation, rather than Bakhtin’s own pronouncement, but it represents an important reading of the Bakhtinian position. The notion of “centripetal” and “centrifugal” forces is examined in detail in Ch. 7.
the utterance to no less a degree than its inclusion in any normative-centralizing system of a unitary language.

Every utterance participates in the “unitary language” (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces) (1981: 272).

6.3 Observations on Heteroglossia in the Literature

One of the first things to note from this summary of Bakhtin’s approach to heteroglossia is how inadequate the phrase “multi-voicedness” is to our understanding. Of course, heteroglossia reflects (at least in part) the idea that a given national language is always stratified into a countless number of intersecting social languages or “voices”. But while even this (opaque and inadequate) understanding requires a leap from the phrase “multi-voicedness” – the scholarly literature is often content to characterize heteroglossia simply as a plurality of languages, styles or even individual speakers, without exploring what such a plurality entails for Bakhtin. This can be misleading in a variety of ways. Bakhtin is explicit that the idea of heteroglossia concerns the relation between “languages” in a particular sense (with particular consequences), differing both from inter-linguistic relations (“polyglossia”) and inter-subjective ones (“dialogism”). On the one hand, heteroglossia is concerned with the stratification of an ostensibly unitary national language – thus extending the notion of polyglossia into a given language – an issue quite distinct from “bilingualism” or “code-switching” (for instance), which are concerned with an individual’s ability to move among formally separate languages. On the other hand, heteroglossia remains concerned with linguistic, not individual, relations. The “voices” of heteroglossia are thus not to be construed as individual perspectives.

Of course, it is not enough to identify heteroglossia with the stratification of language. Indeed, while stratification is fundamental to heteroglossia, it is not the defining trait. Just as different national languages may develop side-by-side – “coexisting but closed and deaf to each other” – we can imagine the various strata within a language developing without regard to those around them. But this “peaceful co-existence between territorial dialects, social and professional dialects and jargons [etc.]” is not what Bakhtin means when he speaks of heteroglossia (or polyglossia in the broadest sense). On the contrary, heteroglossia becomes
active only when the “naive and stubborn co-existence of ‘languages’ within a given national language” comes to an end, replaced by “a process of active, mutual cause-and-effect and inter-illumination” that gives words and languages a different feel, making them something other than what they had been before (1981: 12).

Many of the texts in the scholarly literature acknowledge the importance of these interactions, but they often remain shrouded in misleading generalities. What, for instance, are we to take from the claim that heteroglossia is a “mixing” or “inter-mingling” of voices? There are many ways for different voices to mix – even “dynamically” or “dialogically” – without in any way contributing to the sort of inter-illumination that defines heteroglossia. 23 Indeed, the notion that “code-switching” might be a manifestation of heteroglossia seems to be founded on just such an unrelated notion of “mixing”. The speaker who switches between linguistic codes during speech is clearly “mixing” or “intermingling” different languages (and these “languages” may even be construed as social rather than national) but this is not the sort of intermingling that constitutes heteroglossia. 24 We see a similar divergence throughout the literature between the ostensibly Bakhtinian notion that heteroglot languages “interanimate” (or dynamically interrelate) and what this inter-animation entails in practice.

The notion that heteroglot languages are in “conflict” is another example of a Bakhtinian claim that gets taken up in rather misleading ways. The idea for Bakhtin is that the various languages of heteroglossia become unsettled by the alternative perspectives they perceive in the world around them. As Bakhtin puts it:

Within the arena of almost every utterance an intense interaction and struggle between one’s own and another’s word is being waged, a process in which they oppose or dialogically interanimate each other. The utterance so conceived is a considerably more complex and dynamic organism than it appears when construed simply as a thing that articulates the intention of the person uttering it, which is to see the utterance as a direct, single-voiced vehicle for expression (1981: 354-355).

23 A crowd of people milling about the lobby of a theatre after a show, discussing their views of the performance is also a mixing of voices and viewpoints – but it is not heteroglossia.

24 This, of course, is not to say that code-switching is inconsistent with heteroglossia, only that an utterance is not heteroglossic simply by virtue of having incorporated more than one language – or, to put it another way, code-switching is not inconsistent with monoglossia.
Rather than relying on the inherent and attestable meaning of the words they produce or encounter, language users must *work* to establish meaning – both to convey an expressive intention in the face of an alien perception and to understand the significance of an utterance produced by an alien tongue. Such a “conflict” is not essentially political; it is neither a “struggle for power” nor a struggle to “define social reality”; rather, it is a struggle to produce (or comprehend) meanings that are no longer construed as “given” in language – and may be directed to whatever end language can be put to, political or otherwise.

When heteroglossia is understood not as a struggle for dominance by hermetic social perspectives, but as a sort of arena in which every perspective is simultaneously the *object of perception*, it becomes clear that heteroglossia describes neither the effort to produce a particular social identity through the strategic use of language (social constructivism) nor the influence of a particular community on the historical development of a language (social determinism). Both interpretations fail to acknowledge the decisive role of alien perception, and instead regard language “from the speaker’s standpoint as if there were only one speaker who does not have any necessary relation to other participants in speech communication”.

Finally, those promoting the notion of “heteroglossic engagement” seem to be relying on what Bakhtin calls a merely “rhetorical” double-voicedness. Bakhtin argues that genuine “double-voicedness makes its presence felt by the novelist in the living heteroglossia of language, and in the multi-languagedness surrounding and nourishing his own consciousness; it is not invented in superficial, isolated rhetorical polemics with another person” (1981: 326-327). In a later passage he explains:

Rhetorical genres provide rich material for studying a variety of forms for transmitting another’s speech, the most varied means for formulating and framing such speech. Using rhetoric, even a representation of a speaker and his discourse of the sort one finds in prose art is possible – but the rhetorical double-voicedness of such images is usually not very deep: its roots do not extend to the dialogical essence of evolving language itself; it is not structured on authentic heteroglossia but on a mere diversity of voices; in most cases the double-voicedness of rhetoric is abstract and thus lends itself to formal, purely logical analysis of the ideas that are parcelled out in voices, an analysis that then exhausts it (1981: 354; cf. 353ff.).
Over and over we see in descriptions of heteroglossic engagement the idea that other voices are acknowledged. This, indeed, seems to be the defining criterion. But as Bakhtin points out, it frequently happens that one acknowledges the position of another in a way that “lends itself to formal, purely logical analysis of the ideas that are parceled out in voices”. In other words, one may give voice to the possibility of alternative perspectives (for instance, by constructing “opposing arguments”), without thereby participating in heteroglossia. As Bakhtin puts it in his work on Dostoevsky’s poetics, “This is not a clash of two ultimate semantic authorities, but rather an objectified (plotted) clash of two represented positions, subordinated wholly to the higher, ultimate authority of the author. The monologic context, under these circumstances, is neither broken nor weakened” (1984: 188; my emphasis). Indeed, this concern with “represented positions” comes at the expense of any notable interest in the linguistic relations that stand at the heart of heteroglossia: the emphasis, in every case, is on divergent “positions” and “viewpoints”, which are in no way restricted to competing languages.

While these comments necessarily paint a very general picture of the treatment of heteroglossia in the scholarly literature, the conclusion to be drawn is that where the scholarly discourse does not simply obfuscate the Bakhtinian notion, it ascribes to Bakhtin a view of language that diverges sharply from the original. Indeed, the various individual claims differ as much from each other as they do from Bakhtin, making it difficult for a reader to know what to make of the concept. Certainly, there are insights to be had – Argenter’s (2001) discussion of verbal practices among Catalan Jews in the Middle Ages does as an admirable job of putting the notion of heteroglossia to work in linguistic research (indeed, in the improbable service of a discussion on code-switching), and Tsitsipis’s (2004, 2007) work consistently seeks to ground the notion of heteroglossia in perception – but it is emblematic of the situation that nowhere in the literature is heteroglossia explained in terms

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25 Sook (2008: 247), for instance, offers the example, “Sydney seems to be a multicultural city or according to research, Sydney is a multicultural city”. Citing White (1998, 2004), she writes:

From this heteroglossic/social perspective, modalization (e.g., may, would, probably) is interpreted not so much as the writers’ lack of commitment to truth and politeness strategies, but rather as the extent of the writers’ willingness to acknowledge the diverse opinions of the reader.
of linguistic “inter-illumination”, and only once is the notion of “refraction” cited.\(^{26}\) Instead, we see innumerable variations on the theme of “multi-” and “voiced” and only the slightest effort (if any) to ground these claims in the Bakhtinian treatment of heteroglossia.

And here the paradox we have been observing throughout this discussion is finally transformed into irony. The issue itself can be seen as a variation of the venerable problem of “the One over Many”: that the \textit{unified} language is at the same time a \textit{multiplicity} of languages. Again, this is not an abstraction in the sense that an extrinsic unifying principle (a shared origin, grammar, spatio-temporal boundary, etc.) has been applied to otherwise autonomous “varieties” (that is, autonomous from the perspective of the individual language user). Indeed, no such principle could ever forge a genuine unity from a collection of varieties that were not already dialogically coordinated in the linguistic consciousness of the speaker, and no such principle is required when such a consciousness is present. On the one hand, in rousing the different languages from their “peaceful and moribund equilibrium” (where they would otherwise have continued their separate and independent lives), the “modern” linguistic consciousness is responsible for bringing language together (if only to emphasize the underlying contradictions); on the other hand, the same consciousness discovers that even these hitherto independent languages are internally variegated.

The irony is that the scholarly discourse on heteroglossia (like its treatment of genre, hybridity, style and double-voicing) neither assimilates the meanings Bakhtin produces in the context of his discourse on language, nor engages in the sort of interanimating relationships that he considers the hallmark of the modern linguistic consciousness. Rather, even as it turns to Bakhtin

\(^{26}\) While discussing Vološinov’s (1973) view of language, Joseph (2006) claims:

*Signs are ideological by their very nature, and social existence is not merely reflected in them but ‘refracted’ by them. For the sign is not like a smooth mirror, but one with a cracked and irregular surface, created by the ‘differently oriented social interests within one and the same sign community, i.e., by the class struggle’* (65).

The meaning is not clear, but the suggestion seems to be that social existence is distorted by the sign, as though reflected in the “cracked and irregular surface” of a mirror. But refraction, in the Bakhtinian sense, is neither a distortion nor even a question of social reality, but rather the mediation of linguistic meaning through the collision of differently oriented social languages. In two other texts (Maynard, 2007 and Grossen & Orvig, 2011) the term appears in a quoted passage (1981: 324), but in neither case does the author pursue the notion.
and the sociality of language, it struggles to reproduce its own hermetic contexts – as though it were “completely deaf to dialogue”. And this is something Bakhtin himself observed. He writes:

Linguistics, stylistics and the philosophy of language that were born and shaped by the current of centralizing tendencies in the life of language have ignored this dialogized heteroglossia, in which is embodied the centrifugal forces in the life of language. For this very reason they could make no provision for the dialogic nature of language, which was a struggle among socio-linguistic points of view, not an intra-language struggle between individual wills or logical contradictions (1981: 273).

The problem of these “centripetal” and “centrifugal” forces is pursued in Chapter 7.
7. CENTRIPETAL & CENTRIFUGAL FORCES OF LANGUAGE

Our investigation (in Ch. 6) of what Bakhtin calls “heteroglossia” concluded that linguistic stratification was the product of relations between linguistic strata. In this we come back to a problem we encountered in Chapter 4, where we discovered that “style” was ultimately a collision of styles, a conscious “hybrid” whose significance could only be fully understood against the background of discourse to which it actively responded. And as before, what appears to be an infinite regress is in fact a demand to ground language on the concrete relations of actual speakers – a solution we discovered in the Bakhtinian notion of genre. Indeed, in this we come full circle, for as Bakhtin himself observes: “This stratification is accomplished first of all by the specific organisms called genres” (1981: 288). Of course, “genres” are no more capable than “languages” or “styles” are of stratifying anything. Such work is done by speakers through speech alone.

And here we arrive at the question of the centripetal and centrifugal forces of language. As Bakhtin (1981: 272) explains:

> Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. […] Every utterance participates in the “unitary language” (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces).

Not just speech, but all speech participates in this process. And here we see another facet of that puzzle we have been encountering throughout this discussion, for every concrete utterance of a speaking subject not only stratifies language but simultaneously centralizes it. To understand how such a feat may be accomplished we must understand what Bakhtin has to say about the centripetal and centrifugal forces of language.
7.1 The Scholarly Discourse on Centripetal & Centrifugal Forces

7.1.1 Heteroglossia and the forces of language

Many of those citing what Bakhtin calls the “centripetal” and “centrifugal” forces of language characterise them in terms of “heteroglossia”.1 Grant (2003a: 5), for instance, introduces “Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia or multi-voicedness” with a quote from Bakhtin (1981: 272),2 that “Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward”. Joseph (2006: 46), quoting a slightly earlier passage, takes this up in the context of a “unitary language”. He points to Bakhtin’s (1981: 270) claim that such a language “makes its real presence felt as a force” for overcoming heteroglossia, arguing that “the tension between the unitary language and heteroglossia constitutes the arena of the class struggle where voices and signs are concerned”. He thus sees the centripetal forces as the product or expression of the “unitary language” and the centrifugal forces as the expression of heteroglossia. Schulthies & Boum (2007: 154) disagree. They cite Holquist’s (1981a)3 claim that “all utterances are heteroglot in that they are a function of a matrix of forces”. The passage from Holquist is worth quoting more fully; it reads: “all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve. Heteroglossia is as close a conceptualization as is possible of that locus where centripetal and centrifugal forces collide” (428).4 Hoops (2011: 218), quoting the same passage as Grant, agrees, explaining: “Bakhtin (1981) defined all social processes as

1 Note that while this discussion is largely restricted to texts in which the idea of centripetal and centrifugal forces is raised explicitly (Blommaert, 2005, being the only exception), a number of others (Pujolar, 2001; Woolard, 2004; Piller, 2006; Prodromou, 2008; Badarneh, 2009; Gales, 2009; and Li, 2009) address the issue more or less implicitly, in terms of linguistic “stratification” (usually in the context “heteroglossia”). The problem of “heteroglossia” is taken up in Ch. 6.
2 This is mistakenly cited as Bakhtin (1984).
3 This is mistakenly attributed to Bakhtin (1986).
4 Maybin (2001: 66) alludes to this when she says “individual utterances and texts will reflect the heteroglossia of language itself, and the conflicts that permeate it, between centrifugal and centripetal forces and between authoritative and inwardly persuasive discourse”.

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products of “a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies” (p. 272): the centripetal (i.e. forces of unity) and the centrifugal (i.e. forces of difference)”. He adds: “The multivocality of social reality, or what Bakhtin calls heteroglossia, is constituted by this interplay of centripetal and centrifugal forces”. Argenter (2001: 393), on the other hand, argues that heteroglossia is “constituted by the dynamic centrifugal concurrence of interrelated social codes”;\(^5\) which is to say, not in the collision between centripetal and centrifugal forces, but among the various centrifugal forces themselves.

Mahendran (2003: 247-248), again quoting Bakhtin (1981: 272), argues for yet another interpretation, one that makes no mention of heteroglossia. Having observed that managers at a youth centre were parroting government jargon (“social inclusion”, “participation”, “outreach”, etc.) without any clear notion of what these terms meant or entailed, she concludes:

> official utterances are subject to centripetal and centrifugal forces – the forces of linguistic centralization and unification are challenged and stratified by centrifugal forces – “the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification”. The result is the “contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language” (Bakhtin 1981: 272). The managers, as civil servants, who may regard themselves in an actual dialogue with ministers, listening and being listened to by the government, take on the centralizing, unifying task. However this will be stratified also by centrifugal forces.

The idea seems to be that by reproducing such jargon, managers contribute to linguistic centralization, while the uncertain and \textit{ad hoc} operationalization has a stratifying effect.

### 7.1.2 Conventionality vs. creativity

Maynard (2007: 71), citing the same passage, adds intentionality to the mix, turning to the notion of centripetal and centrifugal forces as part of an exploration of the relationship between creative aspects of language and identities. She characterizes the former as “the stabilizing, centralizing impetus of convention…in language and in linguistics”, and the latter as those involved in decentralization and disunification. She explains: “Bakhtin’s (1981\footnote{She explains how these “codes” are to be understood: “One such code is to be thought of as a concrete sociolinguistic belief system that defines a distinct identity for itself within a surrounding heteroglot context” (393).}

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\(^5\) She explains how these “codes” are to be understood: “One such code is to be thought of as a concrete sociolinguistic belief system that defines a distinct identity for itself within a surrounding heteroglot context” (393).
[272]) view reminds us that at the moment of speech, two forces are brought to bear, the norm and its violation. In other words, the stabilizing, conventionalized standard of language is always in tension with the decentralizing, momentary, creative use of language”. She thus associates the centripetal forces with the conventional, normative use of language, and the centrifugal forces with transgressive or creative uses:

When we view language and discourse as an activity motivated by the centrifugal forces and when we understand discourse as practice inhabited by heteroglossia, it is not difficult to see how selves are realized in association with varied and shifting voices. [...] Language is a source for our individual identity. Although and because language is stabilizing and conventionalized, it yearns for a decentralizing, momentary, and creative formation. By manipulating this tension, we are able to create, mark, and transform our identities through languaging. By echoing multiple voices in a creative way, an individual person finds his or her own voices. Ultimately, through the creative use of language, we present our selves and manifest our identities (71).

7.1.3 Authority vs. internal persuasiveness

In both Mahendran (2003) and Maynard (2007) we see ideas that resonate with claims made in Maybin (2001), who associates the forces of language with what Bakhtin calls “authoritative” and “inwardly persuasive” discourses respectively.⁶ According to Maybin, the “Centripetal forces produce the authoritative, fixed, inflexible discourses of religious dogma, scientific truth, and the political and moral status quo” (65).⁷ They are “in constant tension with, and interpenetrated by, centrifugal forces,⁸ which result in language varieties associated with different genres, professions, age-groups and historical periods, each with their own associated views and evaluations of the social world around them”.⁹ At their “most extreme”, she adds, “centrifugal forces are associated with what Bakhtin terms ‘inwardly persuasive discourse’” (65).

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⁶ The problem of “authoritative” vs. “internally persuasive” discourse is taken up in Ch. 8.
⁷ Quoting Maier (1993: 55), Errington (1998: 54) likewise speaks of the “centripetal effects of standardizing social authority”.
⁸ Here, she seems to claim that the centralizing forces themselves are “interpenetrated” by the stratifying forces. Compare this with Mahendran (2003: 247-248) who likewise associates the centralizing forces with authoritative discourse and argues that “the forces of linguistic centralization and unification are challenged and stratified by centrifugal forces”.
⁹ As she explains:

Bakhtin sees a dynamic tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces operating at every level of language use. For example, national drives to set up or maintain a standard
7.1.4 Multiple centres

Blommaert (2005), addressing the issue more obliquely (in terms of “centring” and its opposite), offers a sharply different view of decentralization. He writes:

every semiotic act is intrinsically creative. At this point, however, it is important to underscore that every semiotic act is also oriented towards one or several centring institutions, the work of which may result in all kinds of remarkable social facts occurring simultaneously. An act of communication may break the rules of one order of indexicality by following the rules of another one (77).

On his view, the opposite of the “centre” is not necessarily the “periphery” (which would be the case if there were only a single, genuine centre). As he explains:

ironically adopting someone else’s speech style, may be a transgression in the eyes of some, while it may be an accurate display of membership competence in the eyes of others. Such phenomena, often assuming the shape of a Bakhtinian carnival in which established roles and relationships are inverted, have often been seen as a form of revolt against norms. This is true, but only partially so. It is true to the extent that one assumes a social world dominated by only one set of rules; adopting a polycentric image of society shows a more complex and more nuanced picture in which a reaction against something is also a marker of adherence to something else. This has important effects on how we should perceive ideology and identities (77).

In other words, where there are multiple centres, what is stratifying from one perspective may be centralizing from another. This is also perhaps how we may understand Garrett’s (2005) claims. On the one hand, he appears to offer the same binary view of the two forces that we see in many of the other commentaries:

centripetal forces are those that tend to have centralizing, homogenizing, regimenting, normative (often prescriptive, standardizing) effects on language and language use. Centrifugal forces are those that tend toward decentralization, heterodoxy, and diversity, and often involve the lifting or breaking (or breakdown) of normative constraints (note 7, p. 355).

language or a literature canon reflect centripetal forces, but working against this are the ways that language is used differently by different classes and different age groups, and the way in which usage varies across different contexts, and changes over time (65).

In short: “Language reflects and instantiates the omnipresent tension between centralizing centripetal forces, and the centrifugal forces of diversification” (66).
On the other hand, he interprets these phenomena specifically in terms of *genre* – arguing that the Bakhtinian notion is “sophisticated and dynamic in that it explicitly addresses the tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces” (330):

some genres remain fairly resistant to innovation and transformation for remarkably long periods, while others morph more readily and more rapidly into new forms. In Bakhtinian terms, *genres are subject to the same centrifugal and centripetal forces as languages*, and their coherence (and hence their identifiability and utility as units of analysis) ultimately derives from the same kinds of resultant tensions (352-353; my emphasis).

Claiming that individual genres are subject to the same forces as languages seems to imply that each operates from, or tends toward, its own centre, while at the same time being pulled away and transformed by an opposing tendency. Messing (2007) is similarly ambiguous on this point, though her comments appear consistent with Blommaert’s. She suggests “opposing ideological forces” as an explanation for how “individuals internalize social change to the point that it affects their ways of speaking”. As she explains:

Bakhtinian centripetal and centrifugal forces are in play…as available ideologies in support of, and against, particular ideologies of indigenousness (*menosprecio* and *pro-indígena*) surface in local talk about *salir adelante*. Individuals in the Malintzi region feel the competing forces through mixed and ambivalent attitudes towards language socialization, in which ideologies of Nahuatl purism, local identity and notions of modernity are consistently multiple (562).

Rather than speaking of a single, authoritative centre, she describes “particular ideologies” in support of and against which the forces of language may be understood. Again, the implication seems to be that each ideology represents its own centre, which the two forces support or resist.

Like Messing, Nikolarea (2007(147-148)) interprets the issue in terms of socio-political ideologies, arguing that supranational economic policies (such as the EMU and the Euro) “function as a centripetal force creating a unified source of authority and an imaginary unified self” while supranational politics function as “a centrifugal force which, at times of crises, destabilises the illusory, constructed European identity into multiple national and cultural identities”. Thus, she argues, “We should find “something” – a value system – that
can hold the centripetal and centrifugal forces together”. This apparent call for a balance between the two forces is somewhat at odds with Maybin’s (2001: 66) claim that the two inevitably find a balance:

At any point in time, one or other tendency may be dominant, but it will always be pulled back by the forces working in the opposite direction. It is this tension between the centre and the margins, between the standard and diversity and between dominant knowledge and everyday experience which keeps language alive, preventing it from ossifying and losing meaning potential in an over-rigid authoritative discourse at one extreme, or fragmenting to the point where meaning disintegrates and communication becomes impossible at the other.

Consider, finally, Scollon & Scollon (2003), who acknowledge Bakhtin as the source of their notion of dialogicality (210), while nevertheless characterizing the centripetal and centrifugal forces as no one else does. They write: “There is a dynamic tension between the centrifugal forces by which discourses distribute themselves across time and space and the centripetal forces by which discourses converge in time and space to form semiotic aggregates” (23). The idea seems to be that, on the one hand, a given discourse will spread out in time and space, while, on the other, a given time and place will be the site of convergence for a particular set of discourses. As they explain:

We could look at discourses in place in the material world from one of two perspectives. From one point of view, if we pick a specific place on the earth, we will find at that place a semiotic aggregate of many discourses all in interaction with each other. This view is a kind of centripetal one that focuses on the gathering in of discourses to produce a particular place as a unique place on earth because of the multiple discourses which are found there ....

On the other hand if we take the point of view of a particular discourse we see that it is distributed very widely across many different times and places. This centrifugal view would show that whatever might be found in any single place would lead out into many other places and times. From this point of view what is unique about any particular place or time or action is the construction of that moment out of elements all found elsewhere but in different combinations of semiotic interaction (23).

Let us see how these ideas compare with Bakhtin’s own description.

Her point is less clear when she argues that “in the process of hybridisation (and while the centrifugal forces of several identities are fully fledged), the authors of this utterance search and yearn for a unified, centripetal force, which in this case is the EU ‘Other’” (141).
7.2 The Bakhtinian Discourse on Centripetal & Centrifugal Forces

At first glance, Bakhtin’s discussion of the “centripetal” and “centrifugal” forces of language appears to be a minor one, spanning a mere four pages (270-273) of The Dialogic Imagination, and reprised nowhere else in his writings. But interspersed in this discussion, and clarifying it, are the related terms, “centralizing” and “decentralizing” (and in one instance, “stratifying”) – which appear in a number of places throughout the text, and serve to bridge the underlying ideas with essential Bakhtinian notions like “heteroglossia”, “genre”, “style” and “double-voicing”. The discussion, for all its brevity, is thus firmly situated in Bakhtin’s broader discourse on language, illuminating and illuminated by these other concepts.

It is worth examining Bakhtin’s general observations about the “centralizing tendencies” of language before turning to his more explicit comments on the centripetal and centrifugal forces. He begins with an important claim:

11 We may note, in particular, their relevance to the problem of style, above all in the artistic prose of the modern novel. Bakhtin writes:

This problem is of primary importance for understanding the style and historical destinies of the modern European novel…. This latecomer reflects, in its stylistic structure, the struggle between two tendencies in the languages of European peoples: one a centralizing (unifying) tendency, the other a decentralizing tendency (that is, one that stratifies languages). The novel senses itself on the border between the completed, dominant literary language and the extraliterary languages that know heteroglossia, the novel either serves to further the centralizing tendencies of a new literary language in the process of taking shape (with its grammatical, stylistic and ideological norms), or – on the contrary – the novel fights for the renovation of an antiquated literary language, in the interests of those strata of the national language that have remained (to a greater or lesser degree) outside the centralizing and unifying influence of the artistic and ideological norm established by the dominant literary language (67).

Note how the notion of “struggle” is being used: struggle in the stylistic structure of the novel is its own objective. The novel serves neither to promote “grammatical, stylistic and ideological norms” nor to undermine them (at least not directly). It seeks, rather, to reproduce the struggle between them: the conflict itself (and what it reveals) – and not the victory of one side or the other – being the direct objective. As Bakhtin explains, “It is necessary that heteroglossia wash over a culture’s awareness of itself and its language, penetrate to its core, relativize the primary language system underlying its ideology and literature and deprive it of its naïve absence of conflict” (368; my emphasis).
Where languages and cultures interanimated each other, language became something entirely different, its very nature changed: in place of a single, unitary sealed-off Ptolemaic world of language, there appeared the open Galilean world of many languages, mutually animating each other (65).

Here he observes the role of “polyglossia” in the “slow death of myth and the birth of novelistic matter-of-factness”, introducing a crucial opposition: on the one hand, “a single, unitary sealed-off Ptolemaic world of language” and, on the other, “the open Galilean world of many languages, mutually animating each other”. These, as we will see, represent two poles, two directions or tendencies exhibited by language. He continues:

In the historical period of ancient Greek life – a period that was, linguistically speaking, stable and monoglotic – all plots, all subject and thematic material, the entire basic stock of images, expressions and intonations, arose from within the very heart of the native language. Everything that entered from outside (and that was a great deal) was assimilated in a powerful and confident environment of closed-off monoglossia, one that viewed the polyglossia of the barbarian world with contempt. Out of the heart of this confident and uncontested monoglossia were born the major straightforward genres of the ancient Greeks – their epic, lyric and tragedy (66-67).

Note in particular that “monoglossia” does not entail the rejection or renunciation of alien forms or ideas, but their *assimilation*, their incorporation into a single, unitary system of meaning (what Nietzsche might have described as the fitting of new material into old schemes: “making equal what is new”13). This is the first, implicit, articulation of what Bakhtin calls the centralizing tendencies of language, the practical result of which is the production of the traditional literary genres and the stylistic categories appropriate to them.

Bakhtin follows this with his first explicit observations about such tendencies. He writes:

> These genres express the centralizing tendencies in language. But alongside these genres, especially among the folk, there flourished parodic and travestying forms that

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12 He later explains: “Closely connected with the problem of polyglossia and inseparable from it is the problem of heteroglossia *within* a language, that is, the problem of internal differentiation, the stratification characteristic of any national language” (67). The relationship between “polyglossia” and “heteroglossia” is explored more fully in Ch. 6.

13 Indeed, Bakhtin (1981: 267) uses the same image as Nietzsche (1968: 273) to describe the way “traditional stylistic categories” make meanings fit the scheme: the “Procrustean bed”.

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kept alive the memory of the ancient linguistic struggle and that were continually nourished by the ongoing process of linguistic stratification and differentiation (67).¹⁴

Again, the closed-off monoglotic genres are expressive of the centralizing tendencies.¹⁵ But alongside these are forms, grounded not on their own systems of meaning, but on their contact with – indeed, their conflict with and their struggle against¹⁶ – the forms and systems of closed-off monoglossia. These forms, which express the tendencies of “the open Galilean world of many languages, mutually animating each other”, are thus “nourished” by the stratification and differentiation that makes such a multitude of languages possible.¹⁷ With this we come closer to Bakhtin’s characterization of the linguistic forces.

The problem is framed in terms of “style”.¹⁸ Bakhtin’s view of language, embodied in the modern novel, is set out as a response to the stylistics derived from the traditional poetic genres, which Bakhtin saw as being “at the heart of all concepts of style”. He writes:

¹⁴ He repeats this in a later passage: “Parody is an intentional hybrid…that nourishes itself on the stratification of the literary language into generic languages and languages of various specific tendencies” (76; cf. 82).
¹⁵ Indeed, as Bakhtin emphasizes: “in the majority of poetic genres, the unity of the language system and the unity (and uniqueness) of the poet’s individuality as reflected in his language and speech, which is directly realized in this unity, are indispensable prerequisites of poetic style” – while the novel (a paradigm expression of the decentralizing tendencies in language) “not only does not require these conditions but…even makes of the internal stratification of language, of its social heteroglossia and the variety of individual voices in it, the prerequisite for authentic novelistic prose” (1981: 263; my emphasis).
¹⁶ Cf. note 11, above.
¹⁷ “Languages” here denotes not only (and not so much) a given national language but the innumerable strata of any given language; that is, the:

- social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (1981: 262-263).
¹⁸ The issue of style and stylization is explored more fully in Ch. 4. But Bakhtin puts it in a nutshell when he explains: “Linguistics, stylistics and the philosophy of language that were born and shaped by the current of centralizing tendencies in the life of language have ignored…dialogized heteroglossia, in which is embodied the centrifugal forces in the life of language” (273).
The strength and at the same time the limitations of such basic stylistic categories become apparent when such categories are seen as conditioned by specific historical destinies and by the task that an ideological discourse assumes. These categories arose from and were shaped by the historically aktuell forces at work in the verbal-ideological evolution of specific social groups; they comprised the theoretical expression of actualizing forces that were in the process of creating a life for language (1981: 270; my emphasis).

The basic categories – and, indeed, the notion of a single unified language – “arose from and were shaped by” real forces, actual, historical forces – “forces that serve to unify and centralize the verbal-ideological world”:

A common unitary language is a system of linguistic norms. But these norms do not constitute an abstract imperative; they are rather the generative forces of linguistic life, forces that struggle to overcome the heteroglossia of language, forces that unite and centralize verbal-ideological thought, creating within a heteroglot national language the firm, stable linguistic nucleus of an officially recognized literary language, or else defending an already formed language from the pressure of growing heteroglossia (270).

We have yet to establish precisely where these forces originate or how they are manifested, but we come at last to Bakhtin’s primary claim, that “Unitary language constitutes the theoretical expression of the historical processes of linguistic unification and centralization, an expression of the centripetal forces of language” (270). Note that this is only a theoretical expression. Bakhtin does not want to claim that it reflects our actual experience of language: “A unitary language is not something given but is always in essence posited – and at every moment of its linguistic life it is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia” (270). It is not that the posited unity is a fiction – on the contrary, it is only through the unitary language that we can establish something like the “validity” of speech. The point, rather, is that such abstract “validity” is irrelevant to the reality of speech.19 This may be difficult to grasp, but Bakhtin

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19 This is not to say that such “validity” is somehow doubtful. As Bakhtin (1993a: 8) explains:

Insofar as the abstractly theoretical self-regulated world (a world fundamentally and essentially alien to once-occurrent, living historicalness) remains within its own bounds, its autonomy is justified and inviolable. Such special philosophical disciplines as logic, theory of cognition, psychology of cognition, philosophical biology (all of which seek to discover – theoretically, i.e. by way of abstract cognition – the structure of the theoretically cognized world and the principles of that world) are equally justified.

The problem arises only when: “the world as object of theoretical cognition seeks to pass itself off as the whole world, that is, not only as abstractly unitary Being, but also as concretely unique Being in its possible totality” (8). Bakhtin cautions:
offers a hint in one of his earliest texts, where he addresses these ideas in terms of moral obligation. He writes:

no theoretical determination and proposition can include within itself the moment of the ought-to-be, nor is this moment derivable from it. There is no aesthetic ought, scientific ought, and — beside them — an ethical ought; there is only that which is aesthetically, theoretically, socially valid, and these validities may be joined by the ought, for which all of them are instrumental. These positing gain their validity within an aesthetic, a scientific, or a sociological unity: the unity gains its validity within the unity of my once-occurent answerable life (1993a: 5).

The various theoretical unities (of which only language concerns us here) are mere instruments, which become genuinely meaningful only in relation to actual lived experience, where they are not only validated and reinforced, but also challenged and repudiated.

And this begins to shed light on the nature of the centralizing forces. If the unitary language is “always in essence posited” as a reality, then it must be posited by someone or something. And these are what give initial expression to the centralizing forces:

Aristotelian poetics, the poetics of Augustine, the poetics of the medieval church, of “the one language of truth,” the Cartesian poetics of neoclassicism, the abstract grammatical universalism of Leibniz (the idea of a “universal grammar”), Humboldt’s insistence on the concrete – all these, whatever their differences in nuance, give expression to the same centripetal forces in socio-linguistic and ideological life; they serve one and the same project of centralizing and unifying the European languages (271).

But they are not alone. As Bakhtin explains, the norms established in the positing of a unified language in turn impose a real (and not merely abstract) imperative. The unified language itself is a centralizing force:

it makes its real presence felt as a force for overcoming this heteroglossia, imposing specific limits to it, guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding and crystalizing into a real, although still relative, unity – the unity of the reigning conversational (everyday) and literary language, “correct language” (270).

In that world we would find ourselves to be determined, predetermined, bygone, and finished, that is, essentially not living. We would have cast ourselves out of life – an answerable, risk-fraught, and open becoming through performed actions – and into an indifferent and, fundamentally, accomplished and finished theoretical Being (1993a: 9).
Again, the language itself has a centralizing effect (an analogy to gravity might be appropriate here). This force is not an extrinsic reality. Nevertheless, as we see already, inherent to the notion of a centralizing force is the opposing reality of heteroglossia – not merely a state of disunity (on which the centralizing forces impose their order), but rather an active force in its own right, a decentralizing, centrifugal force:

the centripetal forces of the life of language, embodied in a “unitary language,” operate in the midst of heteroglossia. At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word (according to formal linguistic markers, especially phonetic), but also – and for us this is the essential point – into languages that are socio-ideological.... From this point of view, literary language itself is only one of these heteroglot languages – and in its turn is also stratified into languages (generic, period-bound and others). And this stratification and heteroglossia, once realized, is not only a static invariant of linguistic life, but also what insures its dynamics: stratification and heteroglossia widen and deepen as long as language is alive and developing. **Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward** (271-272; my emphasis).

There are two important points to note here. The first is that, just as the posited unitary language makes its presence felt as a force, which imposes its own unifying tendencies, the various strata produced by the decentralizing influence of dialogized heteroglossia constitute the very elements whose relations define heteroglossia. That is to say, it is not that each stratum makes its own presence felt as a decentralizing force (as though it were the centre, drawing language use into its own orbit) but, rather, that the dialogic relations among the strata have such a force. In short, the centralizing and stratifying forces are not just opposite, but asymmetric. And this must be emphasized: heteroglossia is not identical with the “languages” into which the national language has been stratified; heteroglossia is defined by an active resistance to such an ordering, for it is precisely in this resistance that one language is illuminated by the other and exposed as something new. Bakhtin writes:

It is only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly (but not maximally fully, because there will be cultures that see and understand even more). A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures. We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it
did not raise itself; we seek answers to our own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us its new aspects and new semantic depths (1986: 7).

To be clear: such “contact” is not to be construed as “opposition” in the (Saussurean) structural sense. This is why parody is such an important exemplar of language use for Bakhtin: parodic meanings cannot be drawn from a single, unified system of language (even one defined by difference); they require, rather, that “two languages are crossed with each other, as well as two styles, two linguistic points of view, and in the final analysis two speaking subjects” (1981: 76). This, ultimately, is why the unified language can only be “posited”: not just because there are always other cultural practices and meanings to account for, but, more fundamentally, because without the resistance offered by heteroglossia, its own meanings remain one-sided and incomplete.

This brings us to the second point. The two “cultures” may appear even to use the very same forms – that is: “stratification may not violate the abstractly linguistic dialectological unity of the shared literary language” (1981: 290).20 As Bakhtin explains: “stratification expresses itself in typical differences in ways used to conceptualize and accentuate elements of language” (1981: 290).21 His point is that stratification is essentially a matter of differences in the underlying “semantic and axiological belief systems” and not necessarily in the formal linguistic markers. “Accent” and “accentuation” – terms Bakhtin also uses frequently – are likewise not to be taken in strictly phonetic or phonological terms. They refer, rather, to characteristic emphases on the facts that inform specific meanings. Thus Bakhtin speaks of the resistance between two languages as “one point of view opposed to another, one evaluation opposed to another, one accent opposed to another (i.e. they are not contrasted as

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20 This is because the various linguistic forms “can serve equally well for any evaluations, even the most varied and contradictory ones, and for any evaluative positions as well” (1986: 90; cf. Ch. 3, note 22, above). Thus: “It frequently happens that even one and the same word will belong simultaneously to two languages, two belief systems that intersect in a hybrid construction and, consequently, the word has two contradictory meanings, two accents” (1981: 305).

21 Or, as he puts it in the context of the novel:

For the creating literary consciousness, existing in a field illuminated by another’s language, it is not the phonetic system of its own language that stands out, nor is it the distinctive features of its own morphology nor its own abstract lexicon – what stands out is precisely that which makes language concrete and which makes its world view ultimately untranslatable, that is, precisely the style of the language as a totality (1981: 62).
two abstractly linguistic phenomena)” (1981: 314; my emphasis). Only the most enduring differences leave traces in linguistic form:

The longer this stratifying saturation goes on, the broader the social circle encompassed by it and consequently the more substantial the social force bringing about such a stratification of language, then the more sharply focused and stable will be those traces, the linguistic changes in the language markers (linguistic symbols), that are left behind in language as a result of this social force’s activity from stable (and consequently social) semantic nuances to authentic dialectological markers (phonetic, morphological and others), which permit us to speak of particular social dialects (1981: 293).

Decentralization is thus not at all a question of linguistic change in the (Labovian) variationist sense. Again, parody offers some of the clearest examples. Consider a passage from Charles Dickens’s *Little Dorrit*:

That illustrious man and great national ornament, Mr. Merdle, continued his shining course. It began to be widely understood that one who had done society the admirable service of making so much money out of it, could not be suffered to remain a commoner. A baronetcy was spoken of with confidence; a peerage was frequently mentioned (1981: 306; citing book 2, Ch. 24; Bakhtin’s emphasis).

Here, we have what Bakhtin calls “a typical double-accented, double-styled hybrid construction” (1981: 304).\(^{22}\) The important point for us is that the language used to produce it is stratified: the italicized portion conveys the axiological belief system of the author/narrator (and, presumably, the reader),\(^{23}\) while the rest is produced according to the “specific tendencies” of (fictive) “common opinion”. The differences between the two are real – and, indeed, *essential* for the expression of the author’s parodic intentions\(^{24}\) – but they are

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\(^{22}\) This example is discussed more fully in Ch. 3.

\(^{23}\) That is, “the narrator’s story or the story of the posited author is structured against the background of normal literary language, the expected literary horizon” (1981: 314).

\(^{24}\) Bakhtin writes:

> We puzzle out the author’s emphases that overlie the subject of the story, while we puzzle out the story itself and the figure of the narrator as he is revealed in the process of telling his tale. *If one fails to sense this second level, the intentions and accents of the author himself, then one has failed to understand the work* (1981: 314; my emphasis).

He repeats this in his work on Dostoevsky’s poetics:

> If we do not recognize the existence of this second context of someone else’s speech and begin to perceive stylization or parody in the same way ordinary speech is
nevertheless not realized in any “abstractly linguistic” (i.e., phonological, lexical, grammatical, etc.) form. The implications of this are enormous. Bakhtin writes:

As a result of the work done by all these stratifying forces in language, there are no “neutral” words and forms – words and forms that can belong to “no one”; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have the “taste” of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. Contextual overtones (generic, tendentious, individualistic) are inevitable in the word (1981: 293).

Again, stratification is not simply a matter of language breaking down into forms correlated with particular social groups: in some cases, the forms themselves may not even register the essential differences. Indeed, Bakhtin seems to comes at the problem almost from the opposite direction, describing stratification as a matter of “populating” or colonizing the words and forms of a given language with its speakers’ ideologies (making language itself an expression of the intentions and perspectives of its users); far from language breaking down, it is a matter of language filling up. And this is how we must understand Bakhtin’s oft-quoted claim that language is “half someone else’s”:

As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes “one’s own” only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own (1981: 293-294).

And here, too, we can see why heteroglossia cannot be equated unproblematically with the languages into which the national language has been stratified. We cannot say that a word or perceived, that is, as speech directed only at its referential object, then we will not grasp these phenomena in their essence: stylization will be taken for style, parody simply for a poor work of art (1984: 185).

This is taken up more fully in the discussion on double-voicing in Ch. 5.
form conveys a particular meaning, even for a given community of speakers, without taking into account the other meanings that populate it and in whose light it is inevitably illuminated. Or, rather, it is possible, but only by appeal to extrinsic authority, and thus by resisting stratification, by aligning oneself with “the forces that serve to unify and centralize the verbal-ideological world”.

But even if we do acknowledge heteroglossia we do not thereby avoid participating in the struggle against stratification. As Bakhtin explains:

Every concrete utterance... serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance; the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well; it is in fact an active participant in such speech diversity. And this active participation of every utterance in living heteroglossia determines the linguistic profile and style of the utterance to no less a degree than its inclusion in any normative-centralizing system of a unitary language. Every utterance participates in the “unitary language” (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces) (1981: 272).

The point is that we cannot help but choose sides: every utterance must answer “the requirements of its own language” – that is, its own “semantic and axiological belief system” – accentuating, and consequently subordinating, other meanings according to its point of view. Thus, the voice of “common opinion” in *Little Dorrit* – which honestly admires Mr. Merdle’s achievements – is given a new and singular significance by the author/narrator. There is no ambivalence or ambiguity in this. On the one hand, both “languages” are necessary: the author’s intention is conveyed not by denying or ignoring heteroglossia, but by acknowledging it, responding to it – even emphasizing it; but on the other hand, the speaker is in no way conceding authority or granting validity to the other’s point of view: on the contrary, the other’s entire perspective is appropriated and made to fit into the author’s schema, where, in this case, it sounds as parody. In other cases, it may sound differently – it

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25 That is, “authority as such, or the authoritativeness of tradition, of generally acknowledged truths, of the official line and other similar authorities” (1981: 344). The question of “authoritative discourse” is taken up more fully in Ch. 8.
may even be construed as the voice of truth – but even then it is granted truth not on its own terms, but from the unifying perspective of the utterance that acknowledges it. Of course, the utterance is not always hybridized or double-voiced the way it is in *Little Dorrit*. More often, it employs only a single voice: the speaker’s. But here, too, we can see the same forces at work: the speaker imposes a singular perspective (one that makes the utterance sound according to the “axiologically accentuated system” he brings to bear) and, in doing so, adds a new layer to the language he employs, filling it up, populating it, with yet another concrete intention.

### 7.3 Observations on the Centripetal & Centrifugal Forces in the Literature

There are two distinct questions to keep in mind as we examine the discourse on the “centripetal” and “centrifugal” forces of language. The first, and perhaps less obvious, is what these forces accomplish; it is not enough to say that one serves to centralize and unify language and the other to decentralize or stratify it, for that is simply to rephrase the question: how are we to understand the idea of centralization and stratification? The second question, closely related to the first, is what these forces actually are and how they are effected. We began our look at the literature by observing a number of claims about the relationship between linguistic stratification and heteroglossia, a relationship Bakhtin addresses in his own discussion. But our initial questions remain. Indeed, the problem is made even more difficult by the lack of consensus on how the notion of heteroglossia should be understood: in some cases, it is construed as the embodiment of forces opposed to linguistic centralization, in others as the product, and in others, still, as the embodiment of the conflict itself – that is, of the tension between the centralizing and stratifying forces.

This latter view is given particular force as the interpretation offered by one of Bakhtin’s noted translators, Michael Holquist, whose glossary in *The Dialogic Imagination* is often

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26 We do, however, make some progress here, even if only by affirming that this is after all a question about the stratification of language (and not, for instance about the aggregation or distribution of signs). This allows us to dispense with Scollon & Scollon (2003), whose approach evidently owes nothing to Bakhtin, despite being grounded, as the authors claim, on the Bakhtinian notion of dialogism.
cited as though it were written by Bakhtin himself. Holquist calls heteroglossia “as close a conceptualization as is possible of that locus where centripetal and centrifugal forces collide” (1981a: 428). Bakhtin, however, is hardly ambiguous on this point: he identifies “social and historical heteroglossia” with “the centrifugal, stratifying forces” that the unitary language seeks to overcome (1981: 272). Heteroglossia is thus no more the locus of the collision between these forces than the unitary language is. Nevertheless, there is indeed a collision among the languages of heteroglossia – and this is the heart of the problem: heteroglossia, for all its resistance to the unitary language, is not a unified opposition – and this internal tension, the inter-illumination and inter-animation of different languages, definitive of heteroglossia, is what produces the stratifying effect. Argenter (2001: 393) expresses it best when she says that heteroglossia is “constituted by the dynamic centrifugal concurrence of interrelated social codes”.

This is a crucial observation, for while it is not especially difficult to see how the unitary language might have a normative, centralizing influence on “verbal-ideological thought”, it is less obvious that the stratifying effect of heteroglossia results not from its opposition to the centre but from the opposition of its constituent languages (including the official literary language) to each other. Indeed, many of the examples in the literature treat stratification as the outcome of individual usage. In one, for instance, Mahendran (2003) suggests that the “official” (government or bureaucratic) jargon has a centralizing influence, while the inconsistent and potentially contradictory uptake of that jargon has a stratifying effect. In another, Maynard (2007) argues that the conventional, normative use of language is opposed by transgressive or creative uses – what Garrett (2005: 355) calls “the lifting or breaking (or breakdown) of normative constraints”. In such cases, the stratifying forces are construed as individual or idiosyncratic imperatives, which disregard, and consequently violate, convention. Stratification is understood, not as the effect of linguistic inter-animation or inter-illumination, but as a single-voiced deviation from the norm.

There are a number of problems with such interpretations (among them only a very loose sense of what this phenomenon is meant to address: “language”, “discourse”, “utterance”, “genre”, “ideology”, etc., all tend to be treated interchangeably), but the most glaring is the failure to account for any obvious “force”: the creative use of language, for instance, may be transgressive, but it is not thereby a linguistic force. The Bakhtinian notion is thus reduced to a vague figure of speech denoting different sorts of innovation, whereby “an individual person finds his or her own voices”. And underlying this is an even more significant failing: a failure to conceptualize what is meant by “stratification”. If Bakhtin speaks of linguistic “strata” rather than “fragments” it is because he imagines each as a complete verbal-ideological system – a language – tied to a real, concrete historical speech community, and not simply an individual linguistic flourish. Nor is such a community (or its language) the product of separatist tendencies. Rather, it is the outcome of a real, concrete history of interactions within a specific sphere of activity. And these communities and their languages, for all their differences, could still be embraced under the aegis of a single unifying norm – just as the literary canon is capable of recognizing distinct and incommensurate genres – if not for the fact that they no longer recognize other ideological systems and approaches to the world as separate. This is the essence of heteroglossia: not the mere co-presence of different linguistic varieties but their mutual illumination. And this is the heart of the centrifugal force: not individual innovation, not even the innovation of individual communities, but the intersection of these social languages, the putting of each in a new light, which reveals new and unexpected significances.

There is no way to reverse the centrifugal force, as Bakhtin conceives it, such that it may appear, from another perspective, to be centralizing. The inter-illumination of languages always adds new shades of meaning, always defies norms because the underlying relationships are themselves novel and yet to be normalized. But as it often gets interpreted in the literature, the stratifying force stratifies only from the perspective of the linguistic standard. As we noted above, Blommaert (2005: 77) makes this point explicitly, arguing, that while “every semiotic act is intrinsically creative…every semiotic act is also oriented towards one or several centring

28 There is an irony here: to the extent that the different social languages are able to maintain a separate, “peaceful co-existence” they can find a place within the single, unified language; it is only when this ability to remain separate and independent comes to an end that heteroglossia begins the process of stratifying the unitary language.
institutions”; in other words: “a reaction against something is also a marker of adherence to something else”. Blommaert takes this “polycentric” interpretation to be Bakhtin’s own view of stratification, when it demonstrates instead only that we have been mistaken in thinking that the centralizing force must be effected from a single, unified core – when, on the contrary, the disparate social languages are themselves the very definition of individual normative centres, whose centripetal influence we witness, so to speak, from the other side.

But in pointing out that there are multiple centres, Blommaert makes an important observation. We tend to identify the “unitary language” with the reigning dialect – as though its unrivalled power and reach were definitive. And, to be sure, there is no question that the incumbent has unique authority, and that this distinguishes it from the dialects and jargons spoken on the periphery – and for any number of questions this may indeed prove to be definitive. But in terms of conceptualizing the centre as the embodiment of a normative force, the reigning dialect is not unique. And we must recognize this, not because other (more or less minor) “centres” play a comparable role to the “official” language, but because they do not, on their own, represent the radical alternative that Bakhtin describes when he speaks of stratification: however diverse and contradictory they may appear from the perspective of the reigning dialect, they nevertheless embody the same normative, centralizing tendencies.

Again, stratification is not simply “adherence to something else”, something already defined: it is the production of something new, a new layer of significance within a given system of meanings, activated by its encounter with another semantic and axiological belief system.

By the same token, the two forces are not in league with each other – as though each performed a certain regulating function in the language, one pushing it toward new and creative heights, and the other pulling it back, keeping it within the bounds of established practice (as Maybin suggests). Nor is such a dynamic to be understood as something worth striving for, as though the give and take were desirable for cultural or political reasons (as Nikolarea suggests). Nor, again, is it something that occurs (or ought to be pursued) from the perspective of multiple centres, as though our mistake were simply in treating the centre as singular and unique rather than multiple and diverse (as Garrett implies in his discussion of genre, and Messing in her treatment of cultural ideologies). In all of this we fail to appreciate Bakhtin’s ideas, relying
instead on a naïve sense of what it might mean to “decentre” and “stratify” language, as a matter of rejecting the official line in favour of something with more personal resonance.  

Note how much these interpretations have in common with the standard sociolinguistic approach to dialectical variation and language change (as laid out, for instance, by Chambers & Trudgill, 1998) – “stratification” being understood as the development of linguistic varieties (dialects, sociolects, idiolects, etc.), and “centralization” as the maintenance of, or convergence to, a standard. On this view, the various “strata” are united only with respect to the characteristics they have in common (or have derived from a common ancestor). Thus the logic of standardization: if every member of the community employs the same features, all must be speaking the same language (and this logic remains even if we pose the problem in terms of “varieties” rather than “languages” proper: “centralization” will simply denote convergence to a local centre, and “stratification” to a developing one).

In Bakhtin’s description, however, the formal features of a language are almost an afterthought. A given language will inevitably display a certain “linguistic and stylistic profile” simply by virtue of the way it is taken up and reproduced by its speakers – but these characteristics are not constitutive of the language. And as a consequence, “mere knowledge of the linguistic

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29 Indeed, Maybin (2001) puts it in precisely these terms, comparing the centripetal and centrifugal forces with what Bakhtin calls “authoritative” and “inwardly persuasive” discourses respectively; that is, with the “inflexible discourses of the status quo” and more “informal” discourses that have greater relevance to the individual. In this, Maybin manages to misrepresent both the Bakhtinian notion of linguistic forces and the notion of authority in discourse. But even at a more basic level, her claims should raise flags. What, for instance, could it mean for the centripetal forces to be “interpenetrated” by the centrifugal ones? Or for the latter “at their most extreme” to be associated with inwardly persuasive discourse?

30 Labov’s (1963) study of language change on Martha’s Vineyard is the classic example. Linguistic stratification is understood as the development of a characteristic manner of speech, one that serves to promote a local identity (cf. Bailey 2002).

31 This is explored more fully in the discussion of genre in Ch. 2, but it is worth reflecting here on one of Bakhtin’s most famous pronouncements:

Utterances and their types, that is, speech genres, are the drive belts from the history of society to the history of language. There is not a single new phenomenon (phonetic, lexical, grammatical) that can enter the system of language without having traversed the long and complicated path of generic-stylistic testing and modification (1986: 65).
and stylistic profile...will be insufficient: what is needed is a profound understanding of each language’s socio-ideological meaning and an exact knowledge of the social distribution and ordering of all the other ideological voices of the era” (1981: 417). Indeed, this takes us back to a point raised earlier: the different strata may not exhibit any outward differences at all; stratification may be entirely ideological – but with no less significance (and with conceivably far more) than might result from more visible (phonetic, lexical, grammatical) changes. This fact alone should give pause to those who treat the Bakhtinian notion simply as another articulation of how sociolinguists have always understood language.

One of the better examples of stratification in the sense that Bakhtin seems to be articulating is offered by Wertsch (2007: 63-64), who nevertheless interprets it not as an issue of stratification at all, but of double voicing. He describes how, in the aftermath of the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign, in which George W. Bush accused his opponent, John Kerry, of “flip-flopping”, “the term ‘flip-flop’ took on a new meaning in American cultural life” and that it became difficult, “at least in the immediate aftermath of the campaign, for a speaker of American English to use the term “flip-flop” without hearing the dialogic overtones of those who levelled the charge against Kerry”. As suggested throughout this discussion, dialogism is indeed at the heart of the matter. And while it is clear that, for a time, “flip-flop” featured in numerous double-voiced utterances, something even more fundamental can be seen at work: the term itself was being wrested, both from the gravity of the unified language and from the particular axiological belief system of one campaign or the other. It “took on a new meaning” – but not one that could be added to the list of entries found in a dictionary. Indeed, from that perspective, it continued to mean what it already had (“a reversal, as of a stand or

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His point is that every element of language is the visible result of something much more profound, what we have been calling a “semantic and axiological belief system” situated in a concrete historical world. Thus, to speak, as Hall-Lew (2008: 690) does, of “the existence of power in particular linguistic forms” or, as Trester (2009: 164) does, of “the role that discourse markers play in conveying, “ultimate semantic authority”” is to miss the point entirely.

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As we observed at the conclusion of Ch. 4: Actual social life and historical becoming create within an abstractly unitary national language a multitude of concrete worlds, a multitude of bounded verbal-ideological and social belief systems; within these various systems (identical in the abstract) are elements of language filled with various semantic and axiological content and each with its own different sound (Bakhtin 1981: 288; my emphasis).
position”). There could even be agreement on precisely which stands or positions were at question (for instance, the war in Iraq), and which individuals were guilty of it (John Kerry).

But underlying all the agreement are potentially incommensurate ideologies: one, for instance, that espouses “constancy” as a virtue, and another, “flexibility”. Thus, even those double-voiced utterances from 2004, filled with dialogic overtones of the charges levelled at Kerry, were not all constructed from the “same” word. Consider the following comments from an editorial that appeared in the *Columbus Dispatch* during the heat of the campaign:

Bless me, dear reader, for I have sinned. I am a flip-flopper. I no longer believe it was necessary to invade Iraq. Alleged facts have been discredited. New information has been received. Circumstances have changed. As a result, I have changed my mind. The Baltimore Catechism of my youth offered no guidance on the matter, but today’s presidential campaign instructs that reversing one’s views is a sin. So, I confess (Hallet, 2004).

Here, the term “flip-flopper” maintains the overtones observed by Wertsch, with the utterance moving in turn from parody to polemic to stylization (all forms of Bakhtinian double-voicing). But its meaning nevertheless sounds differently coming from the editor than it does from the Bush campaign or its supporters. Indeed, its significance is precisely the opposite: when the editor declares himself a “flip-flopper”, he is not acknowledging a weakness; he is implicitly accusing the others of a foolish consistency. Where do we look for such a meaning? Not in a unified language. Not in the editor’s own verbal-semantic system (as though he were the centre). And not in the meanings generated by those with whom he is polemicizing. We find it, rather, in the collision of those divergent perspectives, in heteroglossia. This is how Bakhtin characterizes the stratification of language.

And where is the centralization? Recall Bakhtin’s insistence that “Every utterance participates in the “unitary language” (in its centripetal forces and tendencies)” (272). We should thus be able to identify within the utterance itself the unitary language toward which it tends. Is it something as banal as the crude “linguistic” elements it employs and affirms even as it reverses the meaning of a certain phrase? We do, after all, see many such elements

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33 Note how the utterance forms a dialogical link in a chain of communication that traces back to John Maynard Keynes: “When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?”
reproduced in the utterance, and it is difficult to imagine how we could avoid them. But this is not what Bakhtin is describing. Once again, his discussion of Little Doritt is instructive. Over and over again he repeats a phrase that proves essential to his conception of style: “common opinion”. Only in their contrast to common opinion can the author’s parodic meanings be recognized. As he explains in an earlier passage: “every extra-artistic prose discourse – in any of its forms, quotidian, rhetorical, scholarly – cannot fail to be oriented toward the ‘already uttered,’ the ‘already known,’ the ‘common opinion’ and so forth” (1981: 279).

And here we return to the paradox suggested at the beginning of this chapter, that the same “concrete utterance of a speaking subject” simultaneously stratifies and centralizes language. In order to illuminate a language, to undermine it or show its hidden sides – that is, to stratify it – it is first of all necessary to affirm it, to implicitly acknowledge that this is indeed the way other speakers see it – for without this common understanding, there is no background against which one’s own perspective may sound. This background – the “already uttered,” the “already known,” the “common opinion” and so forth – is the posited unitary language. And this is precisely what we see in the editorial from the Columbus Dispatch: the editor’s resistance to the standard meaning of “flip-flopper” presupposes the standard view, affirms it as the norm against which the editor’s voice sounds. Even in its resistance it must answer “the requirements of its own language”.

The apparent contradiction arises from the fact that both perspectives – the “already uttered,” the “already known,” the “common opinion” and so forth, on the one hand; and the unique, the resistant (or even the sympathetic), on the other – are equally present in the utterance. But they are not present on the same plane. In a crucial sense, the former offers only extrinsic validity, a validity grounded on its own terms, which may nevertheless be acknowledged as such; while the latter offers only intrinsic validity, a validity grounded on the concrete reality of the speech situation. In this, we discover two very different notions of discourse, what Bakhtin calls, on the one hand, “authoritative” and, on the other, “internally persuasive”: one in which the word is grounded in accordance with some recognized authority; and another in which it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts, where it may be freely developed and applied to new material and new conditions. In presenting these alternatives,
it may appear that Bakhtin rejects (or would have us reject) one view in favour of the other. But as we have discovered throughout this discussion, it is really the collision between these two perspectives that he seeks to emphasize. We explore these issues of authority and persuasion in Chapter 8.
One of the constant themes we have encountered throughout this discussion is the idea that language is relational. Even such notions as style and genre, which we might expect to provide the necessary unity to ground external relations, prove to be relational through and through. And so it is with the question of authoritative and internally persuasive discourse. The issue, ultimately, does not revolve around the role of “power” in language (of possessing or gaining a voice in society, for instance), but around two very different conceptions of language itself: one grounded in unity, objectivity and finality; the other in endless and subjective division. As Bakhtin puts it in one of his earliest texts:

Two worlds confront each other, two worlds that have absolutely no communication with each other and are mutually impervious: the world of culture and the world of life…the world in which the acts of our activity are objectified and the world in which these acts actually proceed and are actually accomplished once and only once.

An act of our activity, of our actual experiencing, is like a two-faced Janus. It looks in opposite directions: it looks at the objective unity of a domain of culture and at the never-repeatable uniqueness of actually lived and experienced life. But there is no unitary and unique plane where both faces would mutually determine each other in relation to a single unique unity (1993a: 2).

The paradox here is the central paradox of the Bakhtinian view of language: that we are obliged – as members of established speech communities, and contributors to endless chains of discourse – to make use of words and genres that precede us, to concede their authority (“authority as such, or the authoritativeness of tradition, of generally acknowledged truths, of the official line and other similar authorities”), even as we invest those words and genres with new and unexpected significance – meanings that depend as much on the “second context of someone else’s speech” (or style or language…) or some other actual experience, as they do on the authorized meanings they carry with them. To make sense of this we must understand what Bakhtin has to say about authoritative and internally persuasive discourse, and so we turn, once again, to the scholarly literature to see how Bakhtin has been understood and how this understanding has influenced language studies.
8.1 The Scholarly Discourse on Authoritative & Internally Persuasive Speech

8.1.1 Authority and power

Baxter (2002a: 855) describes authoritative discourse as part of a “modernist tyranny” that attempts to pin down meanings of highly contested terms and phrases (such as those denoting sex/gender). Implicit here is the idea that individuals have their own perspectives, which may not fit into a “single authoritative account”. The solution, Baxter suggests, is to provide a “juxtaposition” or “counterposing” of voices in one’s own discourse – what she calls “making space for the voices and concerns of the oppressed” – by weaving together various “internally persuasive discourses” (2003: 77, 153) with the aim of representing multiple, diverse and often dissonant perspectives on a given issue. She identifies this effort with the Bakhtinian notion of “polyphony” – “the co-existence, in any textual or discursive context, of a plurality of voices which do not fuse into a single consciousness, but rather exist on different registers, generating a ‘dialogical’ or intertextual dynamism among themselves” (67):

According to Bakhtin, this intertextual dynamism doesn’t lead to ‘mere heterogeneity’ but offers an interplay of voices which are juxtaposed and counterposed in order to generate something ‘beyond themselves’. For Bakhtin (1981: 60), each cultural voice exists in dialogue with other voices so that ‘utterances are not indifferent to one another and are not self-sufficient; they are aware and mutually reflect each other’. According to this view, social or discursive diversity is fundamental to every utterance, even to those utterances which on the surface ignore or exclude other, related voices (2003: 67).

Nevertheless, she confesses that even her own work “represents an attempt to fix meaning, however much it purports to be in the business of destabilizing the meanings generated by ‘authoritative discourses’” (2003: 65).  

Blackledge (2005) is similarly oriented to the concerns of the disenfranchised, but characterises the issue as one of unequal opportunity – an inability to inform “authoritative

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1 She repeats this in a later passage: “I am more than aware that, however self-reflexive the researcher, it is difficult to resist academic convention and move away from the “single authoritative account” (Bakhtin 1981) which, despite all good intentions, does indeed dominant [sic] this analysis” (68). Horton-Salway (2001: 182) echoes this with the claim that “traditional” texts “are more likely to be in the business of constructing factuality and authority than deconstructing it”.
and powerful discourse” (e.g., “the more authoritative discourses of senior politicians”) – rather than a problem with the notion of a single authoritative perspective per se.² He writes: “Relations of power in society are influential in determining which voices gain authority as they are transformed along chains of discourse, and which voices diminish either partly or entirely” (14; cf. 59). As he explains (citing Bakhtin’s notion of “dialogic discourse”):³

It is important to recognise that this is a social model of language – that is, the relation between the various voices within an utterance is subject to the relations of power within society. The authority of the authorial voice is likely to be maintained where it belongs to those in powerful positions in society (15).

Like Baxter, Blackledge sees authoritative discourse in the way a powerful group can transform a polyphony of voices (i.e., the “perspectives of a range of social actors”) in a “new, more authoritative context” (156-157, cf. 207).⁴ Nevertheless, citing Bakhtin (1984: 88),⁵ he claims that “In political discourse, the authoritative voice senses and responds to the voices of others, is influenced by them, transforms and is transformed by them” (16).

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² Citing the conclusions of Van Dijk (2000) and Reisigl & Wodak (2001), he describes a “topos of authority”, according to which “if an authoritative figure says that something is right or wrong, then it is right or wrong” (70).

³ We saw Baxter use the phrase “dialogic dynamism”, above, and many others (indeed, the majority) cite this notion as well. Wertsch (2001), below, for instance, speaks of “the dynamics of dialogism”. As Blackledge explains: “Bakhtin emphasised the dialogicality of language, in the sense that a text is always aware of, responding to, and anticipating other texts, and also in the sense that discourse is at times ‘double-voiced’”. He adds: “In Bakhtin’s theory of language as responsive to the social world, discourse is dialogic, shaped and influenced by the discourse of others. An utterance is a link in a complex chain of other utterances, and is informed and shaped by other utterances in the chain” (14). Quoting Holquist (1981a: 427), both Wu & Lu (2007: 170) and Wästerfors (2009: 781, 791) insist: “Undialogized language is authoritative or absolute”.

⁴ One of his most frequent claims is that these transformations occur in “increasingly authoritative settings” (28, 29, 72, 90, 155, etc.), where “the process of negotiation of identities becomes less and less an option” (36, 155). Weber’s (2007) review of Blackledge (2005: 395) also mentions this idea of “authoritative settings” and “authoritative contexts”. Quoting Matoesian (1999, 2000), Trinch (2001: 577) also argues that “what Bakhtin calls ‘spheres of communication’, in other words, the physical place in which an account is narrated, can also lend authority to the text”.

⁵ Bakhtin writes: “The idea begins to live…to take shape, to develop, and to find and renew its verbal expression, to give birth to new ideas, only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of others”.

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Wertsch (2001) argues just the opposite, claiming that “Bakhtin characterized the difference [between authoritative and internally persuasive discourse] in terms of the degree to which one voice has the authority to come into contact with and interanimate another” (226):

authoritative discourse is based in the assumption that utterances and their meanings are fixed, not modifiable as they come into contact with new voices…. Instead of functioning as a generator of meaning or a thinking device, an authoritative text ‘demands our unconditional allegiance,’ and it allows ‘no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants on it’ (227).

Tied to this is the idea that authoritative discourse is a “one-way transmission”. As Pinto (2004: 653) explains: “Given its position of supremacy, [authoritative discourse] is a one way transmission rather than an open means of communication, a monologue from above that imposes itself on the subordinate”. Wertsch (2001: 228) makes the same observation:

Throughout his account of authoritative discourse, Bakhtin emphasized its inability to enter into contact with other voices and social languages. It is for this reason that it gives rise to the kinds of univocal text presupposed by transmission models of communication. As Bakhtin noted, ‘authoritative discourse cannot be represented – it is only transmitted’.

Maynard (2007: 67) and Badarneh (2009: 646) likewise emphasize the connection between authoritative discourse and the conduit or transmission model. Both describe authoritative discourse as “univocal and unidirectional”, and, like Wertsch, contrast it with discourse that encourages dialogic inter-animation. The significance, as Wertsch explains, is that:

transmission models of communication cannot adequately account for many of the social and individual processes we wish to address. Instead, the dynamics of dialogism will often come into play. This does not mean that one should simply dismiss the transmission model as inadequate. […] Texts may simultaneously serve different functions” (2001: 227).

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6 Tsitsipis (2004: 571) takes a similar position. He writes: “In my discussion of the Arvanítika data below I will try to show why we need both kinds of discourse for the study of linguistic ideology”. See also Maybin (2001: 66), who identifies internally persuasive and authoritative discourse with the stratifying and centralizing forces of language respectively – “preventing it from ossifying and losing meaning potential…at one extreme, or fragmenting to the point where meaning disintegrates and communication becomes impossible at the other”. 220
Note the difference in emphasis between this latter view – that authoritative discourse is a form of communication consistent with the transmission model – and the view (more or less explicitly offered by Baxter, Blackledge, and others) that authoritative discourse is the discourse of power and domination (with an emphasis on its users and uses).

### 8.1.2 Voices of authority

In many of these discussions we encounter the idea that authority is manifested in certain “authoritative voices”. Examples of such voices are sometimes offered – Maybin (2001: 65), for instance, speaks of “the authoritative, fixed, inflexible discourses of religious dogma, scientific truth, and the political and moral status quo which are spoken by teachers, fathers and so on” [my emphasis] – but the categories themselves are treated as self-evident (there is no question of whose voices are authoritative or in what sense): authoritative discourse is the discourse of power, the power to “fix” or establish reality.\(^7\) We got a hint of this in Baxter and Blackledge, who attribute it to a lack of will, among authoritative voices, to negotiate meaning. For Maybin (2001: 66), such “over-rigid” discourse leads to the “ossification” of language and a loss of meaning potential.\(^8\) Pinto (2004: 652-653) goes even further, characterizing authoritative discourse as the outright work of fiction, arguing that it “typically creates a world of its own, freeing itself of the need to comment on reality”.\(^9\)

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\(^7\) Tsitsipis (2004: 571) also alludes to the idea of authoritative discourse as fixed and inflexible, noting that “An important feature of authoritative discourse is its totalizing nature. Whether it is rejected or accepted, it is viewed as an unfragmented whole”. As Bakhtin observes, this applies as much to scientific truth as it does to religious dogma, and this, Tsitsipis argues, is what “makes this discourse inherently ideological”. Rampton (2002: 510), on the other hand, focuses on the “sacral overtones” of the authoritative word (“hieratic”, “profaned”, and “taboo”).

\(^8\) She offers the following example: “strong government rhetoric about the increasing prosperity of a country may be contradicted by the experience of an individual and their close associates, who nevertheless may interpret this experience as exceptional, because of the dominant national discourse (65-66).” Errington (1998: 72) sees this “loss in meaning potential” quite differently, arguing that the “generically homogenous, monoglot, authoritative word” imposes a demand for “code consistency” that “restricts a speaker’s ability to detach himself from the social persona implied by one type of usage and suggest [through use of another code] that persona is not to be taken quite ‘for real’”. This issue is explored more fully in Ch. 4.

\(^9\) Drawing on the claims of Marková (1997), Mahendran (2003: 247-248) offers a remarkably similar view. Like Pinto, she characterizes “official” discourse (“what [Bakhtin] terms
Citing Manoliu-Manea (1989: 64), he adds: it “‘eliminates any reference to the present factual world’…opting for the creation of its own world, a vision of Utopia, rather than commenting on the mundane world we are already familiar with”.

### 8.1.3 Authoritative discourse as a resource

Regardless of its validity, many commentators see the discourse of authority as a sort of resource, which speakers may imitate and appropriate as part of their socio-linguistic development. Cekaite & Aronsson (2004), for instance, speak of authoritative discourse as a resource for learners:

> The children’s playful recyclings inventively explored prior classroom conversations, and featured parodic imitations of what in Bakhtinian terms may be called ‘authoritative discourse’ (1981: 345). Appropriations of teacher talk involved not only teachers’ prior utterances and actions but also recycling of teacher talk register. The resources that the children drew upon in joking events were thus clearly stamped with the mark of their shared classroom biography (387).

Drawing on the work of Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and Maybin (2007), Pichler (2009) likewise argues that speakers frequently quote or even appropriate authoritative voices to construct themselves as adults, for instance, by talking about the importance of education (14, 103, 246). Shuck (2004) warns of the dangers inherent in such an appropriation. In describing the “discourse of exclusion” in which the discourse of L2 speakers is represented as gibberish (and “only native speakers of certain varieties of English – are admitted as comprehensible, unremarkable members of the community of English speakers”), she observes:

> ‘authoritative discourse’” as a langue de bois (a “wooden” language), containing “little semantic information” and “few references to reality”.

10 Maybin (2001) likewise argues not only that certain voices can be authoritative, but that they can be represented in ways that emphasize their authoritativeness. Citing Volosinov (1973), she writes:

> Volosinov suggests that the reporting mode is linked both to the nature of the voice being reported (authoritative voices tend to be reported in the linear style) and to prevailing ideological practices within a society (the linear style being associated with authoritarianism). In this section, for instance, I have included some linear reporting quotations from Bakhtin’s work so that his authoritative voice can speak directly, and in the more general discussion, his voice is still dominant in what is presented as knowledge. A more pictorial reporting might have interpreted or adapted these ideas and interwoven them more closely with my own research interests and data (69).
These patterns are relatively stable, accessible, and pervasive, akin to what Bakhtin 1981 might call authoritative discourses that have become assimilated into our ideological consciousness as “internally persuasive discourse” (1981: 342-48). They are accepted uncritically as true, at least at the moment of their utterance, and are reanimated in new contexts as though they were originally conceived. [...] The creation of this performance, then, depends on the prior existence of an ideological model that provides the speaker with performable themes and linguistic patterns. Moreover…the relative stability of these patterns allows them to serve as resources for aesthetic transformation in conversational performances (202; my emphasis).

Prodromou (2008: 85) makes a very similar observation about the assimilation and reproduction of idiomatic expressions, but describes it as an aspect of authoritative rather than internally persuasive discourse. He writes: “Idiomaticity, in Bakhtin’s terms, has an ‘authority’ that determines the norms which shape our utterances”. On this view, authoritative discourse is a sort of genre (“relatively stable, accessible, and pervasive”) that, once appropriated, can serve as a model or resource for the speaker to use in subsequent linguistic performances. Mahendran (2003: 247) makes this view explicit: “Bakhtin argued that official discourse or what he terms ‘authoritative discourse’ corresponded to ‘unique’ genres requiring special analysis”.

According to Pujolar (2001: 137), “Bakhtin (1981) claims that popular genres often exploit their relationship with more authoritative ones and acquire their meaning out of this dialogical relationship”. In this, we see a related idea: that speakers reproduce the voice of authority as means of making themselves more authoritative. As Philips (2004) puts it:

Authoritative speech refers to the idea that by speaking in a particular style which is highly valued and/or associated with authority, or by speaking from within a particular discourse genre that is authoritative or associated with authoritative people, a speaker is more persuasive, more convincing, and more attended to (475).

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11 The question of genre is taken up more fully in Ch. 2.
12 Milani (2006) also alludes to “the way in which voices are transformed, and become more authoritative as they move from one genre to the other” (404), and he cites Bakhtin’s (1984: 195) observation that our speech is full of words that we take as authoritative and which “we use to reinforce our own words” (405).
13 She problematizes this somewhat with the observation that:

There is…a reflexive quality to authoritative speech – it is authoritative because of who uses it, and those who use it are authoritative because they are able to use it. [...] There are also other concepts related to the idea of authoritative speech that show us
Quoting Hill & Irvine (1992: 6), Baron (2004: 275) likewise claims that “one of the principal ways in which utterances come to be seen as authoritative concerns speakers’ ability to create ‘double-voiced’ utterances (to use Bakhtin’s term) that manage to add the moral weight of other voices to their own”. Thus, “When Lucía invokes God’s voice to construct a more powerful persona for herself, she is using the technique of ‘double-voicing’: She adds the weight of God’s voice to her own, so that her speech acquires convincing authority”.

8.1.4 Authority and conflict

Others see authoritative discourse as an influence to be resisted. Lin (2009) expresses the view implicit in many of these accounts: that the individual is often obliged to struggle against the voice of authority. She describes, for instance, how the self-identity of a woman named A-ma “emerged from her struggle between various authoritative voices, mediated through the languages used on television and in the family’s discourse, and her internally persuasive voices” (315). She concludes: “A-ma’s internally persuasive voice regarding her there is flexibility, creativity, and emergence in making speech authoritative, and not just the invocation of traditional authority. First, some forms of evidence are considered more reliable than others. For example, reported or quoted speech is imported into talk as a way of drawing on the authority of the person whose speech is being reported (Hill and Irvine 1993). The Bakhtinian (1981) concept of “voices” more broadly develops similar ideas (476).

Woolard (2004: 88) offers a similar perspective:

if a certain linguistic variety is associated with the authority of the classroom or court, it may come to be heard as authoritative language. Its use in a different context can then itself signify authority, in a creative form of indexicality. [...] The indexical value of a linguistic form can be transferred ideologically not just from context to context, but from context to speaker, or vice versa, and can be transformed in the process. Individuals who use the kind of language now perceived as authoritative can project themselves as authoritative kinds of people.

White (2003: 262) appears to treat “authority” in much the same way, examining, for instance, how authors “construe themselves as morally authoritative”.

14 Indeed, she argues that “authoritative discourse” is one of three concepts central to “Bakhtin’s notion of the dialogic construction of identity” (the others being “voice” and “internally persuasive discourse”) (314). This is also, perhaps, what Wu & Lu (2007) mean to convey in their discussion of Chinese traditional medicine (TCM) when they write:

As a result of the growing perception of the limitation and harmfulness of Western science, TCM has recently gained worldwide acceptance in the West. Chinese people are proud of selling their “heritage” to the world. An internally persuasive discourse of the other
linguistic status ‘enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts’ (Bakhtin 1986: 346): Her uneducated past is reexamined and reaccentuated in the new context of television viewing, translating her uneducated experience into regret” (322).

Nikolarea (2007: 134), in contrast, argues that authoritative discourse “enters the situation (context) from without as a voice of authority, as a command which one can neither enter into a dialogue with nor doubt” [my emphasis]. It “ignores or even excludes answerability; it is the kind of discourse in which single-voicedness dominates” There is thus no question of a struggle. Her examples of such discourse include:

(a) legal directives coming from above to which we have to conform (at least for a certain time); (b) summaries of historical periods of countries about which we know nothing and thus we take the knowledge provided at its face value…; and/or (c) translated passages, which we have to take at their face value if we do not know the original language (134).

When she speaks of a “voice of authority”, she is thinking of something quite different from those, above, who see it embodied in particular actors. Tsitsipis (2004) describes it simply as “the domain of non-reflexively accepted views (Bourdieu’s doxa)” (note 7, p. 590). The alternative, according to Rampton (2002) and Nikolarea (2007: 134, 145) is to “retell” the other’s discourse in one’s own words – an effort that reflects or generates an internally persuasive discourse. But even here there is disagreement, for while Nikolarea and others construe the “voice of authority” as a malign and oppressive external force, Tsitsipis (2004) insists that “conflict, tension, and insecurity” are all major features of internally persuasive discourse – which “show up as soon as we step out of the confines (and the protection) of the word of authority” (note 7, p. 590).

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for transforming TCM language in China is enacted to satisfy their will of being glorious, wealthy, and strong, which was lost in the encounter with the West (171; my emphasis).

15 He makes a similar claim earlier in the text: “This kind of discourse, whether accepted or rejected, produces non-reflexive thinking, and thus constitutes a component in the process of misrecognition: the combination of subjective blindness and objective legitimation” (572).

16 As we have already seen, the notion of an “internally persuasive discourse” is frequently cited in opposition to “authoritative discourse”. This, however, is not always the case. Of the texts in which at least one of these terms is cited, nearly half make no mention of internally persuasive discourse at all. In contrast, only one – Georgakopoulou (2009: 417) – mentions internally persuasive discourse without also discussing the authoritative word.
8.1.5 Internally persuasive discourse

Rampton observes the following of a course in German as a second language:

the German lessons were, in Bakhtin’s terms, much more about “reciting by heart” than “retelling in one’s own words” (1981: 341), and they pushed students to become mere “animators,” demanding levels of conformity and status renunciation – “unconditional allegiance” – unmatched anywhere else in the curriculum. Equally, as discussed in the comparison with DuBois’s list of the features of ritual speech, German was also located in a “distanced zone,” not in a sphere of “familiar contact.” So on both grounds, we can classify instructed German as an “authoritative discourse” (509).17

In being forced to recite their lessons by heart, the students became mere “animators” of the authoritative word.18 The alternative, as we have seen, is “internally persuasive” discourse. Baxter (2003: 67) associates this with the voices and concerns of the marginalized and oppressed – “a plurality of voices which do not fuse into a single consciousness, but rather exist on different registers, generating a ‘dialogical’ or intertextual dynamism among themselves”. As Wertsch (2001: 228) puts it: “authoritative discourse tends to discourage contact, [while] internally persuasive discourse encourages it”.19 Quoting Bakhtin (1981: 345-346), he explains:

17 He encounters some problems with this interpretation, however, as the students appear to have appropriated at least some of the discourse for themselves:

This recycling of German does not, then, strictly conform to Bakhtin’s account of the “authoritative word,” but this does not mean that we should align German/Deutsch with the second kind of “alien” discourse he describes, the “internally persuasive”… […] As I have discussed elsewhere… adolescents seemed to pay as much (or more) attention to the sound properties of Deutsch as to its denotational meaning, and over all, there was little to suggest that Deutsch was “awakening new and independent words.” Thus, while German might not elicit quite the absolute acceptance or rejection that Bakhtin attributes to authoritative discourse, it certainly didn’t permeate outward in the manner of the “internally persuasive” (510).

Compare this final comment with Coupland’s (2001a: 373) claim that Bakhtin’s call for a binary distinction (in terms of stylistic direction) is “too stark”. In both cases, the author’s own observations about language seem to call the Bakhtinian claims into question.

18 Compare this, however, with Shuck’s (2004) comments (cited above), where “internally persuasive” discourse is characterized precisely as the authoritative word that has been “accepted uncritically as true” and subsequently “reanimated in new contexts”.

19 As we saw in note 3, above, more than one commentator quotes Holquist’s (1981a) description of undialogized language as “authoritative or absolute”. The corollary is that dialogized language is internally persuasive.
‘the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else’s’; it allows dialogic interanimation. Indeed, ‘its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses out of words from within, and does not remain an isolated and static condition…The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is not finite, it is open; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever new ways to mean’ (227).

Others, however, citing this same passage, come to very different conclusions. Shuck (2004: 202), for instance, describes internally persuasive discourse as authoritative speech that an individual takes up and reproduces uncritically as true. Lin (2009: 315) likewise describes it as authoritative speech that has been assimilated or appropriated. In contrast to Shuck, however, Lin says it is “in constant dialogue or struggle with authoritative discourse and thus is historically anchored and subject to change”.

Philips (2004: 476) expresses a very different strand of thought, according to which persuasiveness is the outcome of authoritative speech. On this view, speakers are able to produce persuasive discourses by drawing on authority (through citation, imitation, invocation, and so forth). Maybin (2001: 65) moves even further from these interpretations. As she explains, “inwardly persuasive discourse” is:

expressed in everyday informal conversations and people’s reflections on their experience, within inner dialogues. This discourse is open and provisional in the way it produces knowledge and is often swayed by other people’s inwardly persuasive discourses and by the authoritative discourses which frame people’s everyday actions.

On her view, internally persuasive discourse owes little, if anything, to authoritative discourse. On the contrary, she identifies it with the stratifying forces of language “at their most extreme”, where “meaning disintegrates and communication becomes impossible” (66).

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20 She also describes internally persuasive discourse as the speaker’s own – as “her internally persuasive voices”, which are engaged in a constant struggle with the voices of authority, in the construction or negotiation of self-identity.
8.2 The Bakhtinian Discourse on Authoritative & Internally Persuasive Speech

As with many other Bakhtinian ideas, the notion of “authoritative” or “authoritarian” discourse can be deceptive; especially in the context of claims about “violence” and “struggle”, it can take on a sinister tone. Consider, for instance, Bakhtin’s comments in *Rabelais and his world*, where he describes the “serious aspects” of class culture as “official and authoritarian”: “they are combined with violence, prohibitions, limitations, and always contain an element of fear and of intimidation” (1993b: 90). What fear? – “the mystic terror of God”, “the awe inspired by the forces of nature”, and most of all “the oppression and guilt related to all that was consecrated and forbidden (‘mana’ and ‘taboo’)” (90). What power? – “divine and human power…authoritarian commandments and prohibitions…death and punishment after death, hell and all that is more terrifying than the earth itself” (90-91). Here, the authoritarian word is terrifying, dogmatic and irrational. But even in *Rabelais and his world*, Bakhtin observes another strand of culture, one that was neither so dogmatic nor irrational – one, indeed, that was defined precisely by its orientation to truth and reason – but which was no less authoritarian in its outlook: the culture of the Renaissance. Here, the defining characteristic is its completeness or consistency. Bakhtin writes:

Rationalism and classicism clearly reflect the fundamental traits of the new official culture; it differed from the ecclesiastic feudal culture but was also authoritarian and serious, though less dogmatic. [...] In the new official culture there prevails a tendency toward the stability and completion of being, toward one single meaning, one single tone of seriousness (1993b: 101).

In a later passage, Bakhtin offers a window onto this view with a side note on Victor Hugo’s conception of genius. He writes:

In his mind the grotesque nature of creative work is the sign of genius… [...] The special traits that he considers the sign of genius, in the Romanticist sense of this word, must be attributed to writers who reflect essentially and deeply the great moments of crisis in world history. These writers deal with an uncompleted, changing world, filled with the disintegrating past and with the as yet unformed future. A peculiar positive and one might say objective incompleteness is inherent in these writings. They are imbued with an only partially expressed future for which they have to leave the way open. Hence their many different meanings, their apparent obscurity. Hence their rich and varied heritage. *Hence also the apparent monstrosity, that is, the*
Here, an important distinction is drawn between two cultural epochs – or, more importantly, between two perceptions of the world reflected in artistic discourse: on the one hand, a consciousness of the world in crisis – “an uncompleted, changing world, filled with the disintegrating past and with the as yet unformed future” (which can only be represented in a discourse that “leaves the way open” to the unknown); and, on the other, its implicit opposite – a stable, unified world that extends rationally and univocally from a known past to a clearly defined future. It is this latter view of the world – which, indeed, repudiates the unknown, the irrational and the monstrous (and says nothing about violence and oppression) – that embraces authoritarian discourse.

Bakhtin makes a very similar point in the “The Bildungsroman” when he describes the eighteenth century, the time of Enlightenment, as “the most abstract and antihistorical”: one that turned its back on “the sage and scholar” and by turning against “everything that was otherworldly and authoritarian, that nourished outlooks, art, daily life, the social order, and so on” made the world “qualitatively poorer in the most immediate way”. He writes: “there turned out to be much less that was actually real in it than was previously thought; it was as if the absolute mass of reality, of actual experience, had been compressed and reduced; the world had been made poorer and drier” (1986: 44). He is not, of course, condemning the Enlightenment, for, as he observes, “by dispersing the residue of otherworldly cohesion and mythical unity, [it] helped reality to gather itself together and condense into the visible whole of the new world. New aspects and infinite prospects were revealed in this condensing reality” (45). But note the role he ascribes to the “otherworldly and authoritarian”: as that which “nourished outlooks, art, daily life, the social order, and so on”, and whose abandonment (though it consequently opened the world to new and infinitely greater possibilities) had the immediate and real effect of making it “poorer and drier”.

Bakhtin’s conception of authoritarian discourse is thus more subtle than we might initially suspect, and his intention not so much a repudiation of it as an articulation of an entirely different paradigm. Bakhtin observes in some of his final notes that “The problem of the
writer and his primary authorial position became especially acute in the eighteenth century (because of the decline of authorities and authoritarian forms, and the rejection of authoritarian forms of language)” (1986: 149). And there can be little doubt that the same problem remains acute today. But, again, it would be a mistake to describe the Bakhtinian view of language as one that simply rejects (or worse, opposes) authoritative discourse: for that does little more than restate the problem, without even the benefit of clarifying how exactly we are to understand this notion of “authority”.

We saw in the passage from Rabelais the suggestion that authoritarian discourse had “a tendency toward the stability and completion of being, toward one single meaning, one single tone of seriousness”. In this already we see an important conceptual division between the notion of authority as “power” and authority as a form of “significance”. The difference between the two can be seen in a comment about poetic genres in The Dialogic Imagination. Bakhtin writes:

…the language of poetic genres, when they approach their stylistic limit, often becomes authoritarian, dogmatic and conservative, sealing itself off from the influence of extraliterary social dialects. Therefore such ideas as a special “poetic language,” a “language of the gods,” a “priestly language of poetry” and so forth could flourish on poetic soil (1981: 287).

More than anything, it is the “sealed-off” quality of such a discourse that establishes its authoritativeness: as its significance is internal there is nowhere else to turn to extract its meanings, no other possible authority. In his final notes Bakhtin returns to this idea, linking the authoritarian word with such notions as “indisputability”, “unconditionality”, and “unequivocality”. There he adds: “Because of its sacrosanct, impenetrable boundaries, this

21 That is to say, even if authoritative discourse is (as Bakhtin explicitly says) “indissolubly fused with its authority – with political power, an institution, a person – and it stands and falls together with that authority” (1981: 343), they are not the same thing. Indeed, the nature and extent of the authority that sustains a given discourse may have nothing at all in common with the authority that sustains another: the authority of the artist, the mathematician, and the autocrat can hardly be compared.

22 As Bakhtin points out in a footnote (1981: 287, note 12), his comments about poetry “continually advance as typical the extreme to which poetic genres aspire” and which concrete examples may often refute. As always, his intention is to uncover certain tendencies in language rather than hard and fast rules or categories.
word is inert, and it has limited possibilities of contacts and combinations. This is the word that retards and freezes thought. The word that demands reverent repetition and not further development, corrections, and additions” (1986: 132-133).

If one thinks of the many (and often acrimonious) debates over the meanings of sacred texts, Bakhtin’s claims about the “indisputability, unconditionality, and unequivocality” of authoritative discourse may ring somewhat hollow. But his point is not that such meanings are transparent – on the contrary, the more opaque they are the greater the power that may be enjoyed by those to whom we must turn for explanation; rather, his point is that an indisputable, unconditional and unequivocal meaning can be derived entirely from the underlying structure of the discourse (or the language) itself, a meaning that has been and will continue to be true, regardless of what happens in the world, for all eternity.

The Bakhtinian discourse on authority is not essentially a discourse on power but a discourse on structure, and as such, it ties in closely with Vološinov’s critique of the “Second Trend” (i.e., the structuralist trend) in linguistics. According to such a view, Vološinov writes:

1. *Language is a stable, immutable system of normatively identical linguistic forms which the individual consciousness finds ready-made and which is incontestable for consciousness.*
2. *The laws of language are the specifically linguistic laws of connection between linguistic signs within a given closed linguistic system.* […]
3. *Specifically linguistic connections have nothing in common with ideological values (artistic, cognitive, or other).*
4. *Individual acts of speaking are, from the viewpoint of language, merely fortuitous refractions and variations or plain and simple distortions of normatively identical forms…. There is no connection, no sharing of motives, between the system of language and its history. They are alien to one another* (1973: 57; original emphasis).

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23 Bakhtin (1981: 343) says much the same thing:

Authoritative discourse may organize around itself great masses of other types of discourses (which interpret it, praise it, apply it in various ways), but the authoritative discourse itself does not merge with these (by means of, say, gradual transitions); *it remains sharply demarcated, compact and inert*: it demands, so to speak, not only quotation marks but a demarcation even more magisterial, a special script, for instance [my emphasis].
The key here is “ready-made”, a convenient catchword for what unites the various characteristics that Bakhtin and Vološinov oppose in this view of language: (1) self-identity: the precedence of stability of form over mutability; (2) monologism: the precedence of abstract forms over concrete historical ones; (3) systematicity: the precedence of abstract relations over living ones; (4) reductivism: the precedence of individual elements over the whole; (5) reification: the treatment of individual elements as capable of actual historical existence; (6) singularization: the precedence of single meanings and accents over a living multiplicity; (7) heritability: the treatment of language as a sort of “ball” tossed from one generation to the next rather than a “stream” into which one enters and which is inseparable from the actual process of verbal communication; and (8) exteriority: the precedence (for the speaker) of normative forms over the inner generative processes of language (Vološinov, 1973: 77-82). All of this they find peculiar to a certain form of linguistic consciousness. Compare the following with Bakhtin’s earlier discussion of Victor Hugo and the notion of genius:

True creators – the initiators of new ideological trends – are never formalistic systematizers. *Systematization comes upon the scene during an age which feels itself in command of a ready-made and handed-down body of authoritative thought.* A creative age must first have passed; then and only then does the business of formalistic

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24 Vološinov attributes this to “philologism”: “At the basis of the modes of linguistic thought that lead to the postulation of language as a system of normatively identical forms lies a practical and theoretical focus of attention on the study of defunct, alien languages preserved in written monuments” (71). Compare this with what Bakhtin (1981) says about language treated as an object:

The word can be perceived purely as an object (something that is, in its essence, a thing). It is perceived as such in the majority of the linguistic disciplines. In such a word-object even meaning becomes a thing: there can be no dialogic approach to such a word of the kind immanent to any deep and actual understanding. Understanding, so conceived, is inevitably abstract: it is completely separated from the living, ideological power of the word to mean – from its truth or falsity, its significance or insignificance, beauty or ugliness. Such a reified word-thing cannot be understood by attempts to penetrate its meaning dialogically: there can be no conversing with such a word (352).

Later he adds:

To speak of discourse as one might speak of any other subject, that is, thematically, without any dialogized transmission of it, is possible only when such discourse is utterly reified, a thing; it is possible, for example, to talk about the word in such a way in grammar, where it is precisely the dead, thing-like shell of the word that interests us (355).
systematizing begin – an undertaking typical of heirs and epigones who feel themselves in possession of someone else’s now voiceless word (1973: 78; my emphasis).

Bakhtin addresses many of these themes in a long discussion on authoritative discourse in *The Dialogic Imagination*. Compare, for instance, the notion of a “handed-down body of authoritative thought” with his claim that:

The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already acknowledged in the past. It is a prior discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it from among other possible discourses that are its equal. It is given (it sounds) in lofty spheres, not those of familiar contact (1981: 342).  

Again, what our predecessors have handed down to us is not only superior (why else would we continue to adopt it?) but ready-made and thus complete: “its semantic structure is static and dead, for it is fully complete, it has but a single meaning,” the letter is fully sufficient to the sense and calcifies it” (1981: 343). There is no question of changing it (for it cannot be improved) or of illuminating a novel aspect of it (for it is already fully realized) and thus no need for it to come into contact with concrete reality:

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25 Reference to “fathers” is frequent in *The Dialogic Imagination*, where it is used consistently in terms of foundings and origins – that is, with respect to a hierarchically superior past that comes down to us without making genuine contact with the present. It is what constitutes the epic as a genre and, more broadly, the “epic” as a form of linguistic consciousness. He writes:  
The world of the epic is the national heroic past: it is a world of “beginnings” and “peak times” in the national history, a world of fathers and of founders of families, a world of “firsts” and “bests.” The important point here is not that the past constitutes the content of the epic. The formally constitutive feature of the epic as a genre is rather the transferral of a represented world into the past, and the degree to which this world participates in the past (1981: 13).

He adds: “epic time itself, in its entirety, is an ‘absolute past,’ a time, of founding fathers and heroes, separated by an unbridgeable gap from the real time of the present day (the present day of the creators, the performers and the audience of epic songs)” (1981: 218).

26 Its completeness and its single-voicedness are two sides of the same coin. It is not open to stylistic development, to “interanimating relationships with new contexts”. “It is by its very nature incapable of being double-voiced; it cannot enter into hybrid constructions” (1981: 344).

27 “Its inertia, its semantic finiteness and calcification, the degree to which it is hard-edged, a thing in its own right, the impermissibility of any free stylistic development in relation to it – all this renders the artistic representation of authoritative discourse impossible” (1981: 344).
All these functions determine the uniqueness of authoritative discourse, both as a concrete means for formulating itself during transmission and as its distinctive means for being framed by contexts. The zone of the framing context must likewise be distanced – no familiar contact is possible here either. The one perceiving and understanding this discourse is a distant descendent; there can be no arguing with him (344).

We might well ask why anyone would accept a discourse whose timeless and universal proclamations are, by definition, indifferent to the particulars of the present, and therefore not intrinsically persuasive. Here we can see why *authoritativeness* depends on *authority*. Bakhtin writes: “The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it” (1981: 342). Absent any intrinsic persuasiveness, it must rely on this authority to persuade us: “It is indissolubly fused with its authority – with political power, an institution, a person – and it stands and falls together with that authority” (343). And this is the sense in which the two are “indissolubly fused”: “If completely deprived of its authority it becomes simply an object, a *relic*, a *thing*” (344).

What, then, is the nature of the authority that sustains such a discourse? We began with the idea that it was the power over life (physical or spiritual) – the threat of torment and destruction. And while few can believe that authority must always be expressed so crudely, there is still a risk of conflating it with “power” (or worse, the *abuse* of power) – that is, with the ability to compel the unwilling. Authority comes in many forms, but Bakhtin’s argument ultimately has little to do with power in this sense. Indeed, there is nothing inconsistent in the notion of the very powerful (the king) accepting the authority of the relatively powerless (the scholar): it is precisely in this sense that we speak of something like “the authority of science”. Persuaded of the success of the scientific method and the rigour of accreditation, a layman may accept the claims of a scientist even when they defy experience (authority itself can be persuasive). And we must keep this in mind when Bakhtin describes “the authoritative word” as “the word of a father, of adults and of teachers, etc.” (1981: 342) – the authority of such figures may indeed be like the authority of the despot (taken by force); but it may also be like the authority of the “expert” (willingly and rationally bestowed). Grasping such a distinction is important – not because Bakhtin rejects one in favour of the other, but because he treats them *both as characteristic of the same form of discourse*, and construing authority
simply in terms of power risks overlooking a form of discourse very much unlike either of these, and the very one that Bakhtin means to set the authoritative form against.

What characterizes every form of authoritative discourse is a reliance on extrinsic means of persuasion.28 Again, this is equally true of the despot who “persuades” us with the threat of violence and the scientist who persuades us on the strength of his reputation.29 The alternative to both is internally persuasive discourse – one that persuades by its own power (in the context of a real listener, in a real situation, etc.), and may thus persist without any privilege, authority, public acknowledgement or legal standing. In practice, of course, the two must often overlap. Indeed, Bakhtin observes that “Both the authority of discourse and its internal persuasiveness may be united in a single word – one that is simultaneously authoritative and internally persuasive – despite the profound differences between these two categories” (1981: 342). But more often, he says, there is a sharp gap between them –

28 In his introduction to Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, Wayne Booth (1984: xxi) uses the phrase “authoritatively persuasive” as the counterpart to “internally persuasive”; and this is a helpful way of understanding the distinction. “Persuasive” is used here in the broadest sense, describing anything that provides a reason to accept a given discourse. Being made to act is therefore, in this sense, being persuaded to act. This, indeed, is what Bakhtin sees in the earliest stage of cultural development (i.e., the “epic”) – a period, he says, when “all that a man is acquires its full significance only in external expression: only externally does it become associated with authentic life experience and authentic, real time” (1981: 240). One’s private reservations are inconsequential. Note as well how the notion of the “ready-made” applies to the epic hero:

he is a fully finished and completed being. This has been accomplished on a lofty heroic level, but what is complete is also something hopelessly ready-made; he is all there, from beginning to end he coincides with himself, he is absolutely equal to himself. He is, furthermore completely externalized. There is not the slightest gap between his authentic essence and its external manifestation. All his potential, all his possibilities are realized utterly in his external social position, in the whole of his fate and even in his external appearance; outside of this predetermined fate and predetermined position there is nothing. He has already become everything that he could become, and he could become only that which he has already become. He is entirely externalized in the most elementary, almost literal sense: everything in him is exposed and loudly expressed: his internal world and all his external characteristics, his appearance and his actions all lie on a single plane (1981: 34).

29 The precise nature of the authority – “authority as such, or the authoritativeness of tradition, of generally acknowledged truths, of the official line and other similar authorities” (1981: 344) – is less important than the fact that it fills a role that would otherwise be performed by the discourse itself.
perhaps because the tendency of authoritative discourse to distance itself from the “zone of contact” with individual consciousness (with individual ideological life) leaves it isolated from precisely those elements that could be internally persuasive.

These “profound differences”, however, do not mean the two categories carry out their ideological work in isolation from one another. Indeed, for the individual, there is initially no distinguishing between them. Bakhtin writes:

consciousness awakens to independent ideological life precisely in a world of alien discourses surrounding it, and from which it cannot initially separate itself; the process of distinguishing between one’s own and another’s discourse, between one’s own and another’s thought, is activated rather late in development. When thought begins to work in an independent, experimenting and discriminating way, what first occurs is a separation between internally persuasive discourse and authoritarian enforced discourse, along with a rejection of those congeries of discourses that do not matter to us, that do not touch us. (1981: 345).

We begin, in other words, immersed in the discourses of others, without any clear boundary between our own ideas and theirs. And when a distinction finally develops, it develops within the territory of our own consciousness. Thus, it must be emphasized, even what we come to recognize as internally persuasive is a category of alien discourse. It is not our own until we assimilate it and make it our own – and even then it is not entirely our own, but “half-ours and half-someone else’s”; that is, another’s idea taking root in one’s own mind. Bakhtin explains:

Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts (1981: 345-346).

And even after we have grasped the distinction, the two categories remain in contact. We can compare the outcome to the awakening of the polyglot world.\(^{31}\)

\(^{30}\) Bakhtin repeats this later in the passage: “One’s own discourse is gradually and slowly wrought out of others’ words that have been acknowledged and assimilated, and the boundaries between the two are at first scarcely perceptible” (1981: 345, note 31).

\(^{31}\) The notion of polyglossia (and its extension as heteroglossia) is explored more fully in Ch.6.
The world becomes polyglot, once and for all and irreversibly. The period of national languages, coexisting but closed and deaf to each other, comes to an end. Languages throw light on each other: one language can, after all, see itself only in the light of another language. The naive and stubborn co-existence of “languages” within a given national language also comes to an end—that is, there is no more peaceful co-existence between territorial dialects, social and professional dialects and jargons, literary language, generic languages within literary language, epochs in language and so forth. All this set into motion a process of active, mutual cause-and-effect and inter-illumination. Words and language began to have a different feel to them; objectively they ceased to be what they had once been. Under these conditions of external and internal inter-illumination, each given language—even if its linguistic composition (phonetics, vocabulary, morphology, etc.) were to remain absolutely unchanged—is, as it were, reborn, becoming qualitatively a different thing for the consciousness that creates in it (1981: 12).

In much the same way, “The struggle and dialogic interrelationship of these categories of ideological discourse [i.e., the authoritative and the internally persuasive] are what usually determine the history of an individual ideological consciousness” (1981: 342; my emphasis). Not only do we begin to distinguish the internally persuasive from the authoritative, we develop it against the backdrop of the latter, in reaction to it and in dialogue with it. Thus even if we come to reject it (and the authority that sustains it) we cannot simply turn our backs on it. What’s more, the same kind of struggle (“an intense interaction”) is being waged against other internally persuasive discourses:

Our ideological development is…an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values. The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is not finite, it is open; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever newer ways to mean (1981: 346).

Here, perhaps more clearly than anywhere else, we can see that internally persuasive discourse is defined by the locus of its persuasive power (i.e., within the discourse) and not simply by the fact that it has been affirmed by the individual. Indeed, the “struggle for hegemony” demonstrates that an individual’s receptiveness to such discourse remains

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32 This dynamic occurs at every level of language, including genre. Bakhtin (1984) writes: “Each fundamentally and significantly new genre…exerts an influence on the entire circle of old genres: the new genre makes the old ones, so to speak, more conscious; it forces them to better perceive their own possibilities and boundaries, that is, to overcome their naivety” (271).  
33 The internally persuasive word “enters into an intense interaction, a struggle with other internally persuasive discourses” (1981: 346).
Authoritative discourse must be understood in precisely the same way: not according to the authority it actually commands (for it may not in fact possess the authority necessary to enforce its demands) but, rather, according to the locus of this authority. There can be no struggle for hegemony among authoritative discourses, for their persuasive power (i.e., their authority) is extrinsic to the discourse itself; their struggle takes place in a very different arena: victory may be decided on the battlefield, for instance, or on the campaign trail; it may be decided by reason rather than force, or by appeal to emotion – but it is decided there and then (wherever that is, and for however long the victory can be sustained) and not by any power of the discourse that comes out of it.

8.3 Observations on Authoritative & Internally Persuasive Discourse in the Literature

Some scholars, as we have seen, draw a connection between authoritative discourse and the pedagogical practice of “reciting by heart” and, as a corollary, between internally persuasive discourse and a “retelling in one’s own words”. The source for this is a passage in The Dialogic Imagination. There Bakhtin writes:

When verbal disciplines are taught in school, two basic modes are recognized for the appropriation and transmission – simultaneously – of another’s words (a text, a rule, a model): “reciting by heart” and “retelling in one’s own words.” [...] It is this second mode used in schools for transmitting another’s discourse, “retelling in one’s own words,” that includes within it an entire series of forms for the appropriation while transmitting of another’s words, depending upon the character of the text being appropriated and the pedagogical environment in which it is understood and evaluated (1981: 341-342).

And from there he embarks on a long discussion about authoritative and internally persuasive discourse. He begins:

The tendency to assimilate others’ discourse takes on an even deeper and more basic significance in an individual’s ideological becoming, in the most fundamental sense. Another’s discourse performs here no longer as information, directions, rules, models and so forth – but strives rather to determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behavior; it performs here as authoritative discourse, and an internally persuasive discourse (1981: 342).
In the glossary of *The Dialogic Imagination*, Michael Holquist contributes to the view that recitation is somehow connected to internally persuasive discourse, explaining that *internally-persuasive discourse* is “akin to retelling a text in one’s own words, with one’s own accents, gestures, modifications” (1981a: 424). But this explanation is highly misleading, for the problem is precisely how persuasive discourse is “akin” to retelling. It is not simply a question of changing the words around – for instance from “Thou shalt not steal” to “You must never take what isn’t yours” – though this is just what we would expect to hear from a student instructed to retell the eighth commandment “in his own words”. Such a discourse is hardly less authoritative for the reformulation. By the same token, “Any sly and ill-disposed polemicist knows very well which dialogizing backdrop he should bring to bear on the accurately quoted words of his opponent, in order to distort their sense” (1981: 340): meanings can be changed and authority undermined even when the words have been accurately recited.  

Bakhtin’s point is not to identify “recitation” with the authoritative word, or “retelling” with internally persuasive discourse; rather, it is to offer a mode of speech that must, by its very nature, be double-voiced. As Bakhtin explains:

> retelling a text in one’s own words is to a certain extent a double-voiced narration of another’s words, for indeed *one’s own words* must not completely dilute the quality that makes another’s words unique; a retelling in one’s own words should have a mixed character, able when necessary to reproduce the style and expressions of the transmitted text (1981: 341; my emphasis).

In other words, unlike a recitation (which *can* be single-voiced), a retelling is *essentially* double-voiced: as a re-telling, one’s speech must, to some extent, reproduce the original, while, as a re-telling, it must also convey something of the speaker’s engagement with the original. This is why Bakhtin follows his discussion of retelling with the observation that

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34 Indeed, this very issue is at the heart of Bakhtin and Vološinov’s investigation of reported speech, where “recitation” and “retelling” take the form of “direct” and “indirect” discourse respectively. Aligning the authoritative word with verbatim or quoted speech (as many scholars do) not only contradicts Bakhtinian insights into reported speech, but takes the notion of authority in a direction that has nothing in common with the Bakhtinian view – leading to the claim, for instance, that “quoted speech is imported into talk as a way of drawing on the authority of the person whose speech is being reported”. This is taken up more fully below.

35 Cf. Ch 4, note 53.
assimilated speech performs as authoritative and internally persuasive discourse (1981: 342); retelling is, in a sense, like the discourse of a developing consciousness, simultaneously authoritative and internally persuasive:

consciousness awakens to independent ideological life precisely in a world of alien discourses surrounding it, and from which it cannot initially separate itself; the process of distinguishing between one’s own and another’s discourse, between one’s own and another’s thought, is activated rather late in development. When thought begins to work in an independent, experimenting and discriminating way, what first occurs is a separation between internally persuasive discourse and authoritarian enforced discourse (345).

When thought begins “to work in an independent, experimenting and discriminating way”, the individual comes to see how other discourses engage with his own developing ideology or, on the contrary, maintain their distance from it – and, more importantly, how they may strive to overcome that distance by extrinsic means. The idea of “retelling”, then, is only indirectly related to the question of internally persuasive discourse – serving to illustrate a pedagogical mode appropriate to the undeveloped linguistic consciousness: one that manifests, in the form of a concrete discourse, the same incipient duality that Bakhtin sees in the undeveloped mind – and it consequently vanishes from the discussion as soon as Bakhtin establishes that the mind awakens to discover, in most cases, a sharp gap between authoritative and internally persuasive discourse.

He describes the internally persuasive word as one “that is denied all privilege, backed up by no authority at all, and is frequently not even acknowledged in society (not by public opinion, nor by scholarly norms, nor by criticism), not even in the legal code” (342) – but this is not, of course, what constitutes such discourses as internally persuasive; Bakhtin is simply putting

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36 And where the other’s speech neither engages by its own power nor brings sufficient authority to bear on its views, it takes its place among “those congeries of discourses that do not matter to us, that do not touch us” (and are consequently of no interest to us here).

37 It also serves to illustrate “on a small scale the task implicit in all prose stylistics” – which is to recognize the double-voicedness of what amounts to an authorial re-production of the characters’ speech. Here, of course, it is a question neither of a developing linguistic consciousness nor of internally persuasive discourse – but of the collision between two voices. This is taken up more fully in Ch. 5.
the two categories into the sharpest possible relief. His point is that certain discourses are capable of acting on us in spite of any such deficits, that their power resides in something other than extrinsic authority. Some, however, have taken Bakhtin’s comments quite literally to suggest that there are two poles to discourse: on the one hand, a singular, overweening, even “tyrannical”, centralizing power; and on the other, the powerless – “the marginalized, the oppressed and the peripheralised” – a multitude of discordant and silenced voices.

In some passages, Maybin (2001) offers just such a binary interpretation, grounded in terms of what Bakhtin calls the “centrifugal” and “centripetal” forces of language (e.g., pp. 65-66). Elsewhere, however, she seems to back away from such a view and offers something closer to what we have been observing here: a notion of authority that is essentially neither centralized nor political (nor, least of all, identified with “power” in the sense of a crude capacity to compel agreement). She writes, for instance:

> In everyday talk, people, people often repeat something they have read in the newspaper, heard on television, been told by a friend, or remember from childhood. We often reproduce the views of those who have been a strong influence on us, and we may invoke authoritative voices from law, the church or education to support a point we want to make. The voices of authoritative others are often particularly evident in children’s speech (68).

It is possible that the conjunction here of friends and authorities is fortuitous, and the author means only to say that in our everyday use of language we repeat the words of others, authoritative and unauthoritative alike. But the list recalls Bakhtin’s own words – which suggest something quite different. As noted earlier, Bakhtin describes the authoritative word as “the word of a father, of adults and of teachers, etc.” (1981: 342). But in his essay on speech genres that list is expanded to include “authority, writer, scientist, father, mother, friend, teacher, and so forth” (1986: 88). His point is that such utterances are not only ubiquitous but the very source of our own discourse. More importantly, he suggests something about the implicit nature of their “authority”: we refer to them (cite them, imitate them, follow them, etc.) because we deem the speaker credible. In this sense, even the

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38 Indeed, as he acknowledges, the two may even be united in a single word – “one that is simultaneously authoritative and internally persuasive” (342).
39 This idea is explored more fully in Ch. 7.
discourse of friends and acquaintances – even the discourse of the oppressed and the marginalized – can be authoritative for us, in that we grant it credence on the basis of the speaker’s presumed exposure to (and thus insight into) an issue that we know (or can know) little or nothing about and can therefore never challenge. It is not at all a question of whether or not such a discourse is “internally persuasive” to the speaker – either way it must be accepted or rejected entirely in accordance with the authority it is granted by the listener. Thus, even the discourse of a drug addict living on the sidewalk can be authoritative – indeed, the addict may be seen to offer the only authoritative word on the experience of drug addiction, and thus be accorded a peculiar prestige by those eager for the truth that only he can speak. And if he says, for instance, that the need for drugs compelled him to do the unthinkable – something for which our own experience is utterly inadequate to comprehend, and which could not therefore be internally persuasive – we nevertheless accept it on his authority.40

Again, Bakhtin clearly argues that individuals take up and reproduce the discourses they encounter in different spheres of activity – some of which are authoritative, others internally persuasive. But nowhere does he claim that speakers appropriate authoritative discourse as a means of appropriating (in whatever sense) the underlying authority, which, as we have seen, is a common refrain in the literature. There is a subtle reversal at work here.41 The Bakhtinian claim begins by assuming that the listener has granted the speaker a certain

40 The converse is that even the word of the despot may be internally persuasive (as when he tells us 2+2=4). Orwell’s 1984 provides the ultimate articulation of this possibility. We discover that the Party is not satisfied with brute authority – with the power to compel submission – or even with the wilful acceptance of party doctrines by its subjects. As the plight of the protagonist demonstrates, its end (accomplished only at the literal end of the story) is to express its authority with such totality and completeness that it becomes indistinguishable from internal persuasiveness. Here, it is not that the individual comes to recognize the authoritative word as consistent with his own experience of the world (a not-uncommon situation); rather, in Orwell’s nightmare scenario the individual’s experience of the world is made to conform with the Party’s demands – when 2+2=5 is embraced as internally persuasive only because (and as long as) the Party says so.

41 We see this in Phillips’s (2004: 476) claim that authoritative speech “is authoritative because of who uses it, and those who use it are authoritative because they are able to use it”.

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authority (without which he has no reason to accept the discourse at all). But this authority is not an abstract power that can be transferred from one discourse to another at will. It is not that the speaker has “authority” and therefore the discourse must be accepted, but rather that this discourse relies on the authority granted the speaker. While it is possible that other discourses also rely on the authority granted the same speaker, it is not the case (at least not from a Bakhtinian perspective) that the speaker has a generalized authority that makes the discourse attributed to him authoritative.

Consider a scenario in which the speaker uses an “academic voice”: according to some in the literature, this voice embodies a certain abstract authority, which can be transferred to one’s

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42 I use the word “speaker” here, but this is a simplification. The authority may equally reside in an institution, tradition, system, etc. The claim, for instance, that “lying is wrong” may be grounded on the authority of an individual: “Jesus tells us not to bear false witness”; an institution: “it is a crime to commit perjury”; a norm or tradition: “everyone knows that lying is wrong”; a system: “lying is a violation of the categorical imperative”; etc. There is a tendency in the literature, however, to treat the authoritative word as an authoritative voice – as authority personified, either in the figure of the despot (to be resisted) or the parent (to be emulated). This is true even when speaking of institutions, which tend to become singularized as more or less abstract “voices”. The broader notion of authority as a system of belief is not as widely acknowledged. Prodromou (2008) is an exception in this regard. In his discussion of the authority underlying idiom speech he quotes Kelly Hall (1995: 212) who writes:

> in the most extreme form of authority, the meaning of such a resource is reified, making its history invisible and, more significantly, the possibility for change or modification of the meaning seem impossible. And, in using the resource, the participant does not acknowledge, indeed, cannot see, the historical voices attached to it. The more institutionalized the meanings of the resources are, the more authoritative their voices and the more difficult they are to change (86; my emphasis).

Here, authoritativeness is identified with the invisible history of a given expression: the authority of “the way things are done”. It is an important insight. Idiom is an example of language that is not explicitly “taught”, that does not come from a dictionary, that does not have the obvious imprimatur of linguistic authority. And yet nothing will mark one as a linguistic outsider as definitively as a failure to employ the local idiom correctly. Idiom is backed not by a single authoritative figure or institution, but by a broadly distributed “grassroots” authority based almost entirely on collective experience. By grasping the authoritativeness inherent in this form of language one can appreciate the deep significance of the Bakhtinian view of authoritative discourse.

43 The corollary of such a view would be that other voices – what Baxter (2003: 38) calls “the marginalized, the oppressed and the peripheralised” – lack this abstract authority and must therefore produce a different kind of discourse. But far from producing a different kind of discourse, “making space” for such voices ultimately is an effort to make them authoritative.
own discourse, making it authoritative. Or, according to another strain of thought, the discourse may be produced, for instance, in a lecture hall, where the physical space invests it with authority. In either case, this gets the relationship backwards. What we must understand is that such a discourse is authoritative precisely because it relies on the authority granted the “academic voice” or the academic institution (and would be rejected if that authority were withheld). The crucial difference is that we do not begin with any presumptions about what constitutes authority.\footnote{When Bakhtin describes the authoritative word as “the word of a father, of adults and of teachers, etc.” he does not mean to suggest an abstract category of authority figures we might imitate (and whose authority we would thereby acquire).

We can see how this difference plays out in a related idea: that speakers quote authoritative figures as a means of appropriating their authority.\footnote{Even Maybin (2001: 69), who elsewhere seems to recognize the problem of reported speech, claims: “I have included some linear reporting quotations from Bakhtin’s work so that his authoritative voice can speak directly, and in the more general discussion, his voice is still dominant in what is presented as knowledge”. Badarneh’s (2009: 647) interpretation is less clear; quoting Wortham & Locher (1999: 116), he says authoritarian discourse is “when a speaker quotes another who has been forced to espouse the same position”. He argues that the use of rhetorical questions in newspaper editorials invites readers to choose sides among hostile positions, producing an internally persuasive discourse as the newspaper no longer demands a particular allegiance from its readers (646-647). This seems to make a muddle not only of the Bakhtinian concepts but of the common-sense understanding of rhetorical questions, which, far from inviting the reader to choose a side, serve to establish their positions with more than usual firmness. Consider one of his own examples: “What has stability brought by dictatorial regimes achieved other than backwardness, subservience, corruption, nepotism, sectarianism, and tribalism?” (646). Can any reader see this an invitation to support dictatorship?}

As we noted above, Phillips (2004: 475-476) argues that “reported or quoted speech is imported into talk as a way of drawing on the authority of the person whose speech is being reported”, with the result that the speaker is “more persuasive, more convincing, and more attended to”. Indeed, there is a sense in which this seems almost to be self-evident:\footnote{Indeed, Bakhtin (1984: 195) observes this himself. But his point is that our speech is full of other people’s words, some of which we assimilate as our own (and with which we may express ourselves directly), some of which we keep at a distance (but which may nevertheless be recruited to serve our intentions), and some of which are simultaneously our own and another’s. Of these possibilities, it is the latter that interests Bakhtin. This is taken up more fully in Ch. 5.}
instance, declaim “the certainty that all impenitent sodomites...will inevitably go to Hell”,
they advance their position with innumerable quotes from the authoritative word of the bible
(e.g., Romans 1:18-32, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 1 Timothy 1:8-11, Jude 7, etc.). But while
quotation serves, in cases like this, as an obvious means of aligning one’s discourse with that
of a recognizable authority, it serves in others as a means of conveying something internally
persuasive: one may quote Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (“To every thing there is a season...”) or 1
Corinthians 13:1-13 (“Love is long suffering...”). Here, the words of the same authority are
offered – not with the bible as the guarantor of their truth, but with truth made evident to the
listener through the words themselves.

Rampton’s (2002) discussion is instructive here. Rampton argues that students learning
German in the classroom are pushed “to become mere ‘animators,’ demanding levels of
conformity and status renunciation – ‘unconditional allegiance’ – unmatched anywhere else
in the curriculum” (509). But to appreciate this “unconditional allegiance”, which
Bakhtin (1981: 343) says authoritative discourse seeks to elicit from us, we need to understand the
nature of the exigence. It is not – or not essentially – a question of enforced opinion. To take
a very different example, consider the claim that an infection is caused by a virus as opposed
to the influence of evil spirits. Even if the explanation is more “persuasive” to patients in the
West (and certainly not something cold sufferers are forced to accept by an authoritarian
regime), it is nevertheless grounded on unconditional allegiance to the authority of Western
medicine. That is to say, we accept it, not because we are persuaded but, rather, we are
persuaded because we accept the authority of the medical establishment. Our allegiance is

47 Westboro (n.d.). Compare this with Baron’s (2004) claim that “Lucia invokes God’s voice
to construct a more powerful persona for herself...She adds the weight of God’s voice to her
own, so that her speech acquires convincing authority (275).
48 Or we may quote a secular authority – the father of empiricism, Francis Bacon, who
writes: “It is impossible to love and be wise”; or the 20th century’s greatest despot, Josef
Stalin, who observed: “A single death is a tragedy, a million deaths is a statistic”. Neither
could possibly be described as authoritative discourse (except, perhaps, in parody).
49 It hardly bears mentioning that much (even most) of our speech reports the words of those
who haven’t any real authority at all. If we repeat Shakespeare’s advice to “Love all, trust
few, do wrong to no one”, it is not because his words are backed by authority – on the
contrary, to the extent that Shakespeare has authority (or that his discourse has become
authoritative) it is because his words are internally persuasive.
“unconditional”, as Bakhtin says, because conditions are competing grounds for acceptance. One may demand, for instance, a comprehensive description of the mechanism of viral infection before accepting the explanation, but this, by definition, moves it away from the authoritative and toward the realm of internally persuasive discourse. On the other hand, even such a demand may test only the outer limits of authority, for however detailed the explanation, one may still have to accept certain premises unconditionally, and thereby affirm one’s allegiance to the authority of the underlying (in this case, medical or scientific) discourse.

Here we may also grasp what Bakhtin (1981: 342, 344) means when he says that authoritative discourse occupies a “distanced” zone (rather than one of “familiar contact”): whenever we demand an explanation we are moving the discourse into contact with our present experience, seeking to assimilate it with our own understanding; authoritative discourse, however, is precisely such discourse as remains outside this zone of familiar contact (it is never assimilated without ceasing to be authoritative); rather, it is accepted as such despite the gap between it and one’s actual understanding. In none of this do we see any “compulsion” in terms of brute enforcement; rather, to the extent that we are compelled, it is on the basis of an allegiance that has already been established (through whatever means) and is thus presupposed by the discourse.

Without such an allegiance, even a verbatim reproduction may be subject to reaccentuation – which is to say, appropriation – and this, indeed, is what Rampton (2002) observes elsewhere (e.g., pp. 504-505), when particular repetitions are made in the classroom with obviously parodic or subversive intent. He nevertheless resists the conclusion that the students’ appropriation of classroom German – is evidence of its having become internally persuasive. He writes:

In the way that impromptu Deutsch was concentrated around issues of order and propriety, it simply reproduced the broad association of language with authority and discipline that was epitomized in the German-lesson choral drills, and there was no evidence of its being extended beyond this rather narrow moral/linguistic nexus to any concern with, for example, German places, products, or people. […] Thus, while German might not elicit quite the absolute acceptance or rejection that Bakhtin attributes to authoritative discourse, it certainly didn’t permeate outward in the manner of the “internally persuasive” (510).
The idea is that since recycled German was used in ways that could be construed as expressing “authority and discipline” it could not be considered internally persuasive; when someone urges “schnell schnell”, for instance, in response to the teacher’s request that the students take their seats, the language maintains its orientation toward the enforcement of discipline:

1 Mr. N: erm (.)
2 take a seat everybody
3 take your coats off please (.)
4 Hanif: schnell schnell
   ((trans: quick quick))
5 Mr.N: schnell schnell exactly (1.0)
6 vite vite
   ((French, meaning ‘quick quick’) (504).

But this, again, is to conflate the notion of “authoritative discourse” with the expression of power, and to overlook the significance of the individual’s expressive intentions. As a double-voiced utterance (which it almost certainly is), the student’s intention in saying “schnell schnell” is clearly parodic. And to argue that “it simply reproduced the broad association of language with authority and discipline that was epitomized in the German-lesson choral drills” is to miss the point. The student has no authority to hurry his peers, nor does he genuinely expect compliance. We may argue that his intention is rather to undermine the notion of authority – but even this is too clumsy and categorical an interpretation (and, ultimately, beside the point). Whatever his specific communicative intentions, there can be no doubt that the student made the words his own, appropriating them, creatively (in the context of an English classroom), and infusing them with a new and unexpected significance – and this is precisely what Bakhtin has in mind when he speaks of internally persuasive discourse.

Rampton, however, argues that that the lessons turned German into “a ritual language that was subsequently ‘taken in vain’” (2002: 510). How can we account for what he calls the “sacral” overtones (“hieratic”, “profaned” and “taboo”)? We must begin by recognizing that religious discourse is a paradigm case of the authoritative word. Religious discourse (like the authoritative word in its broadest sense) is “hieratic” in that its validity is grounded entirely on the authority of a particular individual or social body (in this case, the priesthood, but more broadly speaking, the law, the bureaucracy, the scientific community, etc.), without
which its claims are little more than cultural or historical curiosities. To say that such a word can be “profaned” is to suggest that one can be outside or set against the institutions that invest it with significance (in a way that one cannot be outside or in opposition to language in the dialogical sense) and thus behave in ways that injure the dignity of its authority (“taboo”). Consider an example from the Bible:

You shall consign the images of their gods to the fire; you shall not covet the silver and gold on them and keep it for yourselves, lest you be ensnared thereby; for that is abhorrent to the Lord your God. You must not bring an abhorrent thing into your house, or you will be proscribed like it; you must reject it as abominable and abhorrent, for it is proscribed (Deuteronomy 7:12 – 25-26).

Only those who have submitted to the authority of the Bible (or its official agents) are bound to perceive the images of another culture’s gods as abhorrent and their possession as profane or taboo. The significance of the graven image has nothing to do with the object itself (with its specific cultural, historical and aesthetic value) or the people with whom it is associated, but derives entirely from the discourse that produces it as a taboo, under the authority that such a discourse is granted by each participant. In this (its authority and constitutive power) – and not in any ability to enforce a cultural or religious practice – do we see the essential characteristics of the authoritative word. It demands neither ritual nor coercion (even if those are frequently observed alongside it). The point, rather, is that it has no power of its own and therefore stands or falls never on its own merits but according to the force of some other imperative (authority).

Only by recognizing the function of authority as the guarantor (rather than enforcer) of meaning can we understand how science, religion and law all offer the same model of discourse. Science, on this view, is not authoritative in the sense that it imposes a dominant (or “hegemonic”) view of the world. It is authoritative in the sense that its determinations are established entirely within its discourse (just as the graven image is determined as an abomination only within the discourse of the bible), relying solely on the authority granted the discourse by the individual (just as the graven image is determined as an abomination solely on the authority granted the bible and its official agents). How these discourses manage to acquire their authority (or, rather, why the individual would submit) is an entirely different question.
Internal persuasion, on the one hand, is a function of the contact between the speaker’s words and the consciousness of the listener, irrespective of that speaker’s authority. The validity of authoritative discourse, on the other hand, is not subordinated to the listener; its claims are grounded elsewhere.\textsuperscript{50} It is therefore nonsensical to claim, as Blackledge does, that “the authoritative voice senses and responds to the voices of others, is influenced by them, transforms and is transformed by them” (16).\textsuperscript{51} It is also misleading to describe it as a “monologue from above that imposes itself on the subordinate” – which takes us back to the binary view where authority is made despotic. Wertsch and others are correct, however, to compare the authoritative word with the transmission model of communication – for if meaning is construed as objective and not necessarily conditioned by the concrete situation of the speech event, communication becomes a matter simply of conveying information: facts may be disputed – the listener may respond to the original speaker – but this back-and-forth resolves itself into a series of one-way transmissions, in which the underlying authority (the religious, political, philosophical, scientific, etc. system) is never questioned, but only the output or the interpretation is. Thus, even the most rancorous disputes may be consistent with the logic of the authoritative word.\textsuperscript{52}

But none of this is to suggest that authoritative discourse can or ought to be resisted out of principle. Claims that it lacks meaning potential or is somehow disconnected from reality are difficult to take at face value: of all the discourses that may be called “authoritative” none are

\textsuperscript{50} There is no middle ground here, no “greater or lesser degree”, no “tendency” for one type of discourse to “encourage contact” and another to “discourage” it (as Wertsch, 2001: 228 insists). Either the underlying authority is both necessary and sufficient for one’s acceptance of a given discourse or it is not.

\textsuperscript{51} Pinto’s (2004) claim is similarly wrongheaded. He argues that Bakhtin’s notion of authoritative discourse (AD) is “linguistically manifested in the context of didactic literature”: “Some of the rhetorical devices that appear in AQS [Así quiero ser, a post-war Spanish civics text] include the simulation of multiple voices, the employment of strategies of control and manipulation, and the use of emotionally charged language through myth making” (651; cf. 665). He adds: “Despite the monologic nature of AD, there is an attempt to create the illusion of dialogue by means of various linguistic devices, such as the use of question and answer and the juxtaposition of point of view” (653). The idea seems to be that authoritative discourse embodies the awareness of its own illegitimacy, which it seeks to conceal through the trappings of something more dialogic.

\textsuperscript{52} Again, the corollary is that even the most submissive reception of another’s speech may be consistent with internal persuasiveness.
as prominent or as deeply embedded in modern culture as those of science; this alone should suggest the relevance – if not the desirability – of certain authoritative discourses. But the authoritative word is appropriate not just to “systems” of knowledge (religious, philosophical, scientific, etc.) – subject to whatever critiques one may have of how that system has been realized (or even of systemization in general as a form of knowledge-making) – for a “system” is but one of many possible forms of authority to be accepted or rejected according to the credence granted it by the listener. Nikolarea’s (2007: 134) examples are particularly apposite here (even though the author herself must be counted among those hostile to authoritative discourse); they include summaries of historical periods we know nothing about, and passages translated from languages we do not understand. Validity in either case, far from being decided by the sorts of deductions characteristic of systematized knowledge, and which may even be the product of actively responsive dialogical processes, is nevertheless entirely contingent on the credence granted by the listener, who in reality depends on the (personal, professional, institutional…) authority of historians and translators as a matter of course.

It is evident, moreover, that one could never “struggle” with such an authority – as one might conceivably struggle with an oppressor – for the term denotes a reality already conceded by the individual: in a sense, the potential for resistance has already passed. One might, for instance, refuse to accept that a foreign passage has been translated correctly – even without knowing the original language – simply by rejecting the “translator’s” claims to have understood it (or to have reproduced it in good faith). But the moment we do accept these conditions, we are conceding the authority, and there can thus be no struggle against it, for it is something we, ourselves, have granted. On the other hand, were we to learn the language and, on the basis of our own understanding, challenge the translator’s claims, we would no longer be oriented to the discourse as authoritative discourse; or, rather, it may become authoritative from the perspective of the grammars and dictionaries to which we appeal – but the translator’s claims themselves would become something else, something to which we orient on their own merits and which succeed or fail not as authoritative discourse but as something internally persuasive.

And here we return to the paradox of the Bakhtinian view of language, which we have already seen transformed into the irony of the scholarly discourse on Bakhtin. Like “genre”,
“hybridity”, “style”, etc., notions of “authority” and “internal persuasion” enter the discourse with certain meanings already clinging to them, meanings that are both authoritative (from the perspective, say, of “everyday speech”) and internally persuasive (in that they resonate with our own histories and perspectives as language users, and can be further developed along those lines). As a consequence, Bakhtin tends to be heard in peculiar ways even by those who listen conscientiously. The irony is that those meanings obscure the message that *we cannot rely on extrinsic authority to fully understand a discourse* – that the discourse itself invests the language we use with the meanings we intend.  

We thus come, full circle, back to the question of genre, to the paradox that Bakhtin was obliged to use a notion “still current in our language studies” as a means of overcoming simplistic notions that are still current in our language studies – the use of which, moreover, we have found, ironically, to be among the primary reasons Bakhtin continues to be misunderstood while the ideas he argues against remain current (and are even enhanced by his authority). We could have anticipated this, for it is all laid out in Bakhtin’s discussion of speech genres, which we explored in Chapter 2…

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53 In another irony, we find that this “extrinsic authority” includes our own “internally persuasive discourse” – with which we may be tempted to structure our understanding of Bakhtin. This is the romantic trend that Vološinov (1973: 83) derides as “individualistic subjectivism”, the opposite (and equally inadequate) face of the monologic utterance.
9. CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the sociolinguistic discourse on Bakhtin is its consistency. This is not to say that all its claims are consistent with each other in their focus or their applications – on the contrary, as we have seen, Bakhtin is taken in a great variety of directions; nor is it to say that they are consistent with Bakhtin’s pronouncements: this, too, is manifestly not the case. Indeed, the discourse is consistent precisely in its refusal to coincide with what we find in the Bakhtinian texts – a refusal, moreover, accompanied not by a consistent stand against those ideas, but by a consistent endorsement of them. And this is true even when Bakhtin is quoted directly. The remarkable fact is that a reader exposed to the sociolinguistic discourse on Bakhtin cannot help but come away without any clear idea of what a Bakhtinian approach to language might entail.

Holquist (1986: xvii-xviii) observed such confusion in the appropriation of dialogism nearly 30 years ago. At the time, he insisted that “Bakhtin himself must bear part of the responsibility…. For while dialogue is a frequently invoked concept in most of what he wrote, there are relatively few places where he concentrates on the subject in any detail, as he does here” (xviii; my emphasis). “Here” refers to Bakhtin’s late essays, first published in English translation in 1986. Clearly – after decades of scholarship devoted to the explication of Bakhtinian ideas – it is no longer plausible to attribute the confusion to Bakhtin’s way of writing. But the confusion persists nevertheless. It can be seen in every topic examined in the preceding chapters. And it persists – despite Holquist’s own concentrated efforts – even in the uptake of dialogism.\(^1\) Blommaert (2005: 44) offers one of the more recent observations on this point, noting three problems in particular that are “encountered over and over again in published work”: the presumption that dialogism entails “co-operativity”\(^2\), that it entails

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\(^1\) Dialogism is nevertheless one of the better understood concepts – and this is arguably a direct result of Holquist’s influence.

\(^2\) We see this, for instance, in Carter (2004: 67-68), who writes:

The Russian linguist and sociocultural theorist Mikhail Bakhtin…argues that all language is fundamentally dialogic in so far as every utterance responds to a previous utterance and anticipates what will be said next. This dialogic process is normally a consensual and collaborative one, extending in the case of some texts to considerable
“sharedness”\(^3\), and that it entails “symmetry in contextualizing power”.\(^4\) But we can just as readily find the opposite of these ideas – claims that it entails struggle,\(^5\) difference,\(^6\) and asymmetry – and these are often just as misleading.

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faith on the part of the consumer of a text that it will eventually prove worth it to have read it or listened to it for a long time, before the point of the text merges or its ‘tellability’ (its value as something to be told to others) becomes clear.

See also Prodromou (2008: 79), who quotes Sinclair’s (2004: 104) description of dialogism as “an interactive mode…the structure of the discourse is co-operative, and utterances from all the participants contribution [sic] towards its construction”.

\(^3\) Skidmore (2008: 84) for instance, argues that “An utterance…is the product of creative ideological work, an instance of the putting to use of shared semiotic resources” [my emphasis]. And in a subsequent passage he observes:

> This joint improvisation of variations on a theme lends the interchange a dialogic character in which the shared resource of prosodic dynamics carries meaning across turns by different speakers, binding the discourse together and providing a cohesive force that helps to unify the discussion as a shared social accomplishment (90; my emphasis).

For Gales (2009: 227), it is a matter of shared perspective or shared space: “This dialogic system (see, e.g., Bakhtin, 1981) allows authors to create alignment and solidarity with their audience by using language that expands the discourse to include other voices and opinions”.

\(^4\) It is difficult to find explicit articulations of this in the literature, though it is clearly consistent with the structural approach to pragmatics, which treats context as just another abstract variable to be accounted for by the participants in the communication. This, for instance, is what Yotsukura (2003: 34) assumes in her discussion of the utterance: “In traditional pragmatic terms, an utterance is considered to be the contextualized analogue to the more abstract, theoretical notion of a sentence”.

\(^5\) We see this, for instance, in Higgins (2004: 76), who explains: “I rely on Bakhtin’s (1981) model of language practices as dialogic and heteroglossic. Through social discourse, a range of social voices…participates in an ongoing struggle to define social reality, creating, maintaining, and enforcing a set of speech genres through which to do so”.

\(^6\) Hall (2001: 329), for instance, explains that “Meaning…is established through dialogue – it is fundamentally dialogic. Everything we say and mean is modified by the interaction and interplay with another person. Meaning arises through the ‘difference’ between the participants in any dialogue”. Dunmire (2005: 486) combines the idea of “struggle” and “difference”, expressing a view familiar among “critical” discourse analysts. Quoting Kress (1995: 119), she explains:

> “To the extent that similarities of social experience and positioning can lead only to a restatement of the similarity, the dynamic of text production has to reside in difference. Hence, what emerges in text is difference….” Texts, in this view, are produced by language users who occupy different, often-competing positions within a social system and who have differential, often unequal access to power within that system. These competing positions and relations give rise to contestation over the meanings and understandings of social actions and events that comprise social contexts.
One of the great ironies in the sociolinguistic treatment of Bakhtinian theory is its tendency to take such words as “struggle”, “authority”, “hybrid”, “voice”, “genre”, etc. at face value – even as these are being used by Bakhtin to repudiate the idea that words can be understood in such a limited sense – that is, as units of meaning structured by the system of language (or by whatever semiotic system the reader brings to the reading) without concern for the backdrop of relations against which they have been given meaning – as though we knew already what Bakhtin meant by “struggle” (etc.) and had no need to pursue the question in his discourse.  

We will not pursue these notions here. The point is only that we get no closer to a Bakhtinian perspective by citing one meaning rather than its opposite – or even some “third way” between the two. Indeed, no word or phrase, on its own, can succeed – not even the ones we encounter in the Bakhtinian texts. This seems to leave us in an impossible position – for if we are unable to trust Bakhtin’s own words (let alone those of his interpreters), how are we to understand his meaning? The answer is not, as some have concluded, that Bakhtin is intentionally ambiguous – that he is ideologically opposed to committing himself or the reader to a definite meaning – or that his ideas are positively ambivalent, containing within themselves their own oppositions and contradictions – and that we can therefore make them mean in ways that suit our own perspectives (and that this, ultimately, is Bakhtin’s intention:  

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Wierzbicka (2006) approaches this conclusion when she observes that the Bakhtinian notion: has little to do with the importance of ‘dialogue’ in current political and cultural discourse in the English-speaking world. Bakhtin’s ideas have been extremely influential in the West, but they have often been misunderstood – partly because they have been interpreted through the prism of English (and French) words like dialogue. (683-684). Rather than ground Bakhtin’s actual meanings in his discourse, however, she turns to the system of language in the original Russian, noting that the term Bakhtin actually uses, obščenie, means something closer to “communion” than it does to “dialogue”. She then reveals her Saussurean credentials even more fully, as she asserts:  

It is important to realize…that the meanings of words are social facts which cannot be changed at will by individuals, no matter how prominent. The meaning of the word dialogue analyzed in this article is also a social fact, which cannot be changed at will and which is not a matter of anyone’s opinion. (692).

Compare this with Saussure’s observation that “No individual, even if he willed it, could modify in any way at all the choice that has been made; and what is more, the community itself cannot control so much as a single word; it is bound to the existing language” (1966: 71).
to liberate and empower the individual’s linguistic autonomy). The answer, rather, is to make ourselves aware – not of his *words* but of his *utterances*.

“Utterance”, of course, is also just a word – and there is a risk of imposing on it the same extrinsic significance we might impose on any other word – but the point here is that we must not presume to know the significance of a word outside its concrete expression in real speech. Holquist (2002: 15) argues that “Dialogue is an obvious master key to the assumptions that guided Bakhtin’s work throughout his whole career”, that “all Bakhtin’s writings are animated and controlled by the principle of dialogue”. But this is true only if we have understood what Bakhtin and Holquist mean by “dialogue”. If, as Blommaert (2005: 44) complains, we take it to be a “friendly, co-operative conversation and exchange of views” or, on the contrary, what Baxter (2003: 70) calls a “deforming and transforming struggle for power”, we will have missed the point. In this sense, “utterance” is the more fundamental notion. The claim that “dialogue is an obvious master key” is helpful only when taken as an utterance – as concrete historical speech with a particular place in a chain of communication – and not as an abstract linguistic construction (in which “dialogue” really can be construed as a “friendly, co-operative conversation and exchange of views” or made to mean something like a “deforming and transforming struggle for power”).

The utterance is central to Bakhtin’s ideas about language not just because it is “concrete” (whatever *that* means) but because concreteness implies a real listener – an addressee, for whom the utterance has been constructed – and a real speaking subject. The confluence of

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8 The apparent regress, I believe, is a product of abstract logic. As Wittgenstein (1953: §1) puts it: “Explanations come to an end somewhere”. “Utterance” is used here in a particular way, with a particular meaning, which can only be fully grasped in the context of my own utterance – but it has been chosen strategically, with the expectation that even its typical signification will be adequate to this particular task, at least provisionally.

9 Consider, for instance, the sort of claim offered in Bolívar (2001: 25), who explains:

Based on the assumption that all discourse is dialogical…I use the term in its wider sense to refer to an interactive process that forms part of social relations, both verbal and non-verbal and also as a social construction expressed through texts, either written or spoken. Thus in political dialogue we can focus on the political groups and their participation through history to observe the chronological turn-taking at power, or we can look at the texts produced and exchanged between them in various contexts of political activity.
these factors – the “concrete (individual) situation of speech communication with all its individual circumstances, its personal participants, and the statement-utterances that preceded it” – allows the listener to “easily and quickly grasp the speaker’s speech plan, his speech will” (1986: 77-78; my emphasis). We cannot help but misconstrue Bakhtin if we fail to see that, for all his talk of “voices”, he is fundamentally concerned with how real speakers execute and accomplish their actual speech will. And here we come to the heart of the matter: in speaking about speech, Bakhtin is both a language theorist and a participant in a real speech situation. One reason we might fail to understand him as a theorist is because we have failed to hear him as a speaker. We listen instead to other speakers, with other speech plans, playing out in other dialogues, and we assume that Bakhtin is a part of their conversation; we take their utterances for his. One could do an inventory of the many different orientations (structuralist, social constructivist, “critical” theoretical, and so forth) that these utterances take in the scholarly discourse on Bakhtin, but what they have in common is a tendency to make Bakhtin sound in their own image.

Is this unique to the discourse on Bakhtin? Is there something in the circumstances surrounding this discourse – either historically or conceptually – that makes it a special case? Is the discourse on Bourdieu or Foucault or Deleuze (for instance) likely to reproduce those thinkers’ ideas with greater fidelity? There is no reason to think so. Irwin (2004: 227), for example, observes the same thing happening with Kristeva’s notion of “intertextuality”, which “has come to have almost as many meanings as users”: “So disgruntled by such misuse of the term intertextuality was Kristeva, that she later abandoned it in favor of ‘transposition’” (229-230; cf. Kristeva 1984: 59-60).10 Granted, we are concerned here with the expression of novel theories and formulations – the work of what Vološinov (1973: 78) calls “true creators” – and not simply the “playing out” of ideas already rooted in the contemporary linguistic consciousness. But within that context, I think, the real significance

10 It may be worth noting here that the very idea of “intertextuality”, so often taken in the literature as a “Bakhtinian” notion, is in fact Kristeva’s synthesis of Bakhtin’s dialogism and Saussure’s structural model (Irwin 2004). Just as we have traced the notion of “ventriloquation” from Holquist’s utterances, we might trace “intertextuality” from Kristeva’s. And we might see both as conditioned by the revival of Saussure that was taking place (in the early 1980s) at the very moment Bakhtin was being introduced to the West.
of our investigation into the discourse on Bakhtin is that its calls into question the much broader discourse on discourse.

9.1 Bakhtin the Structuralist?

What we learn from Bakhtin (in theory) and from the scholarly discourse (through empirical observation) is that no matter how accurately transmitted, the speech of another is always subject to certain semantic changes. We cannot assume that meaning is given in the language itself; if we are to assess and divine the real meaning of others’ words, we must be aware of “who precisely is speaking, and under what concrete circumstances” (1981: 340). There can hardly be a better example of this than the appearance of “ventriloquation” in the literature. Of course, the word is used in Bakhtin – tucked into the bottom of a single paragraph deep in The Dialogic Imagination – but it is clear that this is not where it was heard by those who treat it as a “Bakhtinian concept”. In this case, when we ask whose voice we are hearing, whose utterance are we responding to, the answer begins with Michael Holquist.

And while it surely does not end there, we can see that Holquist’s “leading ideas” continue to permeate the scholarly discourse. Among the most familiar and misleading, I believe, is the notion that Bakhtin can be understood in Saussurean/structuralist terms, a perspective Holquist takes for granted. In explaining, for instance, why Bakhtin (as Vološinov) rejects the romantic trend in linguistics, he reproduces the Saussurean view with astonishing fidelity:

> The great weakness of this [Romantic] school is its inability to assimilate the undeniable fact that language does have its systematic aspects. Phonetics, grammar, and syntax are not merely phantoms in a Genevan obsessional fantasy, they constitute the normative, given side of language, even where it is defined as utterance. Language, among other things, is systematic, standing before the individual user as a set of inviolable norms. The individual acquires the system of language from his speech community

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11 This is not to say, as Wertsch (2001: 223) does, that “meaning is always based in group life” in a “collectivist” sense (which recalls the claims we saw in Ch. 2 regarding “social purpose”). On the contrary, it assumes that meaning is particular and cannot be fully grasped without taking into account the identity of the speaker and the listener and the concrete circumstances of the utterance.

12 See discussion at Section 1.1.1 of the Introduction.
completely ready-made. Any change within that system is beyond the range of his individual consciousness (1982: 217 [compare this with Saussure, 1966: 71-78]).

Holquist supports this with a passage in which Vološinov argues that “a synchronic system may be said to exist only from the point of view of the subjective consciousness of an individual speaker belonging to some particular language group at some particular historical time” (1973: 66). But Vološinov never says that such a system actually exists – only that its existence would have to be a subjective one. “Whether the fact itself is correctly constituted, whether language actually does appear only as a fixed and inert system of norms to the speaker’s consciousness – that is another question” (67) – and one Vološinov immediately rejects:

Now we must ask: Does language really exist for the speaker’s subjective consciousness as an objective system of incontestable, normatively identical forms? […] We must answer this question in the negative. The speaker’s subjective consciousness does not in the least operate with language as a system of normatively identical forms. That system is merely an abstraction arrived with a good deal of trouble and with a definite cognitive and practical focus of attention. The system of language is the product of deliberation on language, and deliberation of a kind by no means carried out for the immediate purposes of speaking (1973: 67)

“That system”, he insists, “is merely an abstraction arrived with a good deal of trouble” – and yet it continues to be offered as essentially Bakhtinian (often in the guise of a “social” reality).

I have argued throughout this discussion that Bakhtin’s idea of sociality is not reducible to an abstract system of norms, that language is not acquired from the speech community “ready-made”. On the contrary, as we found in the chapter on genre, Bakhtin begins with the utterance and with the concrete historical relations that this notion of “utterance” entails. It might be helpful, however, to examine the idea of Bakhtin as a structuralist head on – not because we care about structuralism per se, but because it offers a view from the other side,

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13 Cf. the discussion at Ch. 8, note 24, below.
14 Saussure (1966: 71, 73) writes: “No individual, even if he willed it, could modify in any way at all the choice that has been made […] No society…knows or has ever known language other than as a product inherited from preceding generations, and one to be accepted as such. […] A language constitutes a system”.
15 This is not to say that language can be understood any better in terms of “creative” individual volition. Cf. note 18, below.
where not only is meaning thought to be derived from an abstract system, but where Bakhtin is thought to endorse such a view. For this, we turn briefly to arguments made by Ken Hirschkop, one of the leading voices in Bakhtin studies.\(^{16}\)

Hirschkop (2001: 9) insists that “sometime in the middle or late 1920s, Voloshinov and Bakhtin change their tack. Their new argument is that the diversity of actual intentions and values is expressed not by means of an individualising intonation, but by the varying styles of a language, the consistent patterns of usage which overlay a basic syntactic and grammatical structure”. This, he argues, is the moment Bakhtin becomes a structuralist:

The adoption of the concept of style implies – and Bakhtin recognises that it does – that intentions and values, embodied in language, are social quantities,\(^{17}\) a notion which would represent a radical departure from the earlier doctrine. Bakhtin would seem to be claiming that the situatedness of an utterance can be expressed by the kind of abstract structures identified by linguistics; but he cannot quite bring himself to accept this position. So the original philosophical position rumbles along underneath, creating an ambiguity in the concept of dialogism […] On the one hand, it is the relation between linguistically distinct styles; on the other hand, it is the relation between individual utterances, a formulation which preserves the belief in the uniqueness of each speech event. But even when endorsing the latter formulation, Bakhtin will accept that dialogism is perceptible only in very specific textual moments, when linguistic structures – syntactic, lexical, or generic – appear as the expression of particular delimited ‘points of view’ (2001: 9).

We may note from the outset how close this characterization of style – as “consistent patterns of usage” overlaying “a basic syntactic and grammatical structure” – approaches the formulation that Bakhtin warns against when he describes the “narrowness and incorrectness of traditional stylistics, which tries to understand and define style solely from the standpoint of

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\(^{16}\) While Hirschkop is arguably best known for his doctoral work (under the supervision of Terry Eagleton), published in 1999 as *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy* (a text Emerson [2001] calls “learned”, and both Brandist [2000] and Eskin [2002] laud as “masterful”), the claims examined here come from a work with a closer connection to the sociolinguistic discourse, appearing in a volume, edited by Hirschkop & Shepherd (2001), which is directly cited by a number of authors in our corpus.

\(^{17}\) Here, the notion of a “social quantity” is implicitly Saussurean. Saussure writes: “for the realization of language, a community of speakers [*masse parlante*] is necessary. Contrary to all appearances, language never exists apart from the social fact, for it is a semiological phenomenon. Its social nature is one of its inner characteristics” (1966: 77).
the semantic and thematic content of speech and the speaker’s expressive attitude toward this content” (Bakhtin 1986: 97). The essential point is not whether the speaker’s intentions and values are expressed by means of an individualizing intonation (as opposed to the styles of a language)\(^\text{18}\) – but, rather, that style must be seen to take account of the speaker in a complex dialogical relationship with the listener, which (even in “so-called neutral or objective styles of exposition”) includes the speaker’s assessment of the listener’s active receptivity to his speech. It is here, at the intersection of concrete individual histories, that the (abstract, formal) characteristics of style, like those of language in general, are imbued with actual meaning.

Thus, even if style implies that intention and values are “social quantities” (and Vološinov clearly argues that ideology is social),\(^\text{19}\) it is unclear how one could claim that the situatedness of an utterance is expressed by a linguistic abstraction. On the contrary, there is no need to suppose that differing styles are linguistically distinct (which is to say, that style is based on – and thus “overlays” – an abstract syntactic and grammatical structure). We may posit, for instance, the kind of style observed in Sinclair Lewis’s *Babbitt* – which embodies the crass “bigger is better” attitude of the American middle class during the inter-war years. As Lewis demonstrates, the values shared by this social body and conveyed in language, are not (or not essentially) expressed through “the kind of abstract structures identified by linguistics”. We hear the other’s style even without linguistic markers.\(^\text{20}\) As we saw in Section 2.2, Bakhtin writes:

> The system of the language has necessary forms (i.e., language means) for reflecting expression, but the language itself and its semantic units – words and sentences – are by their very nature devoid of expression and neutral. Therefore, they can serve equally well for any evaluations, even the most varied and contradictory ones, and for any evaluative positions as well (1986: 90; my emphasis).

\(^{18}\) Indeed, Vološinov’s (1973: 45ff.) critique of the “two trends of thought” in the philosophy of language can be understood as an effort to expose this dichotomy as a false one.

\(^{19}\) He writes, for instance:

> Orientation in one’s own soul (introspection) is in actuality inseparable from orientation in the particular social situation in which the experience occurs. Thus, any deepening of introspection can come about only in unremitting conjunction with a deepening understanding of the social orientation (1973: 37).

\(^{20}\) Cf. Ch. 6, p. 180.
In other words, the utterance does not derive its evaluative content from the system of language – even while depending on that system for its means of expression. Whether the actual intention is conveyed by an individual expressive intonation (a position Bakhtin maintains even in his late essays) or by a choice of genre, the meaning of an utterance, along with the evaluative position it communicates and its stylistic character, can diverge radically from that of another – *irrespective of formal linguistic identity*. While acknowledging this point, Hirschkop nevertheless insists:

> if ideologies were not expressed at all in terms of particular linguistic structures (Bakhtin’s habit is to describe those forms as sedimentations, or deposits, of ideological impulses), then one’s choice of linguistic forms, the style of the utterance, would cease to be socially significant. We would return to a situation in which style was an individuation of language, not a mode of expressing social relations and identities (2001: 21).

The point here is that if style is to be understood as a means of expressing social relations and identities (ideologies), then there must be something about the style itself (i.e., about the linguistic form of the utterance) that serves to index the underlying ideology. The only alternative, it seems, is a return to the notion of style as an individuation of language. Of course, this dichotomy – between style understood, on the one hand, as a structured linguistic form and, on the other, as an individuation of language – is precisely what Vološinov (1973) makes it his mission to undermine. This is the logic that leads to the structuralist conclusion: “However much Bakhtin may have polemised against Saussure, he here indicates a debt to him.” For by ‘language’ Bakhtin can only mean some formal deep structure which can be

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21 Compare this with some of Bakhtin’s observations on ethics and aesthetics, where he writes:

> There is no aesthetic ought, scientific ought, and – beside them – an ethical ought; there is only that which is aesthetically, theoretically, and socially valid, and these validities may be joined by the ought, *for which all of them are instrumental*. These positings gain their validity within an aesthetic, a scientific, or a sociological unity within the unity of my once-occurrent answerable life (1993a: 5; my emphasis).

Here we encounter the idea that a *posited* theory, like language, is an *instrument* whose actual significance is determined only in the context of concrete historical reality.

22 He writes: “Are styles definable in linguistic terms? On the one hand, clearly not: the object of Bakhtin’s metalinguistics is the utterance, which we are repeatedly told is not a linguistic form. Sentences identical from the perspective of linguistics may be entirely different as utterances” (2001: 21).

23 Hirschkop cites the following passage from Bakhtin:
evidenced in particular instances of speech. [...] speech is only represented as an index of a more abstract structure, the socio-ideological language” (2001: 22).

But why should Bakhtin’s interest in “language” commit him to a Saussurean/structuralist position? Hirschkop’s claim is that to speak of a “language” (let alone the “spirit” of a language) is to “enforce a kind of abstraction of the speech presented” – and that to do so is to posit a deeper abstract structure. Certainly, for Bakhtin (and for Vološinov), “language” is a kind of abstraction (or, more precisely, a “typification”) 24 – but not of the speech presented, not directly, but rather of the ideological relations (concrete social structures) that are “retained in verbal vestments: in written works, in utterances, in sayings, and so forth” (Bakhtin 1986: 88). The difference between these interpretations is profound.

In following Saussure, we are led to see the abstract system of language as the basis of speech. 25 On this view, if one’s style of speaking is not to be understood as a strictly individual matter, it must have a recognizable form (i.e., it must be encoded) in one of the relevant socio-ideological languages of heteroglossia (“for how else are we to know that the significance of some cited discourse is that it is ‘in the style of the declassée intellectual’ or whatever?” [2001: 22]). But rather than taking speech as an “index of a more abstract structure”,

typical aspects of language are selected as characteristic of or symbolically crucial to the language. Departures from the empirical reality of the represented language may under these circumstances be highly significant, not only in the sense of their being biased choices or exaggerations of certain aspects peculiar to the given language, but even in the sense that they are a free creation of new elements – which, while true to the spirit of the given language, are utterly foreign to the actual language’s empirical evidence (Bakhtin 1981: 336-37).

It should be noted, however, that here Bakhtin is speaking not of “language” but of specific instances of “social language” – “whether generic, professional or that of a literary trend” – which are “selected” or “elevated” (in the artistic representation of the language) as characteristic of it or symbolically crucial.

24 When Bakhtin speaks of the “typical” use of language (e.g. 1986: 87) he is referring to how actual utterances reproduce particular forms of actual prior speech.

25 Hirschkop says of the ideologies underlying style: “that they exist in social, semiotic form… defined by their necessary relation to opposing and alternative ideologies” (21). On this interpretation, just as parole is the expression of langue, style is the expression of an ideology, which in turn is a sign defined by its place in a system of oppositions (Cf. Ch. 4, note 43).
Bakhtin really argues for a view of language as an index of a more concrete reality: the socio-ideological world expressed in speech. It is only here that we can make sense of style.

Thus, when someone asks what legitimates the classification of an utterance as, say, an instance of “modern bureaucratic style”, the answer must be: “the socio-ideological reality of modern bureaucracy” as the author imagines certain individuals to have experienced it, and which he seeks to reproduce in a way that the reader will also experience. To the extent that the utterance is more than a typification – that is, to the extent that it is capable of producing “not only a typical, but also (depending on the genre) a more or less clearly reflected individual expression, which is determined by the unrepeatable individual context of the utterance” (1986: 88) – its “style” is not an abstract linguistic form but a concrete manner of engaging in the world: only by ignoring the “necessary relation to other participants in speech communication” can one expect the chosen linguistic form to express a particular ideology.

It is only in this sense that Bakhtin defines the task of the novel as the artistic representation of the image or spirit of a language. Again, the structuralist will see this as a demand for the depiction of the underlying linguistic structure (and thus the enforcement of a kind of abstraction of the speech presented). But as Bakhtin (1981: 336) explains, in order for language to become an artistic image, “it must become speech from speaking lips, conjoined with the image of a speaking person”. This is not to say that the novel is essentially concerned with the speaking subject – “Characteristic for the novel as a genre is not the image of a man in his own right” – but, rather, that it is through the depiction of the speaking subject’s concrete engagement with the heteroglot world that the spirit of the language is revealed.

Hirschkop argues on the contrary that “Utterances may very well depend on such things as context and situation for their meaning, but, arguably, these too are formalised and conventional, and must be in any society” (2001: 14; my emphasis). He thus accuses the early (i.e., “pre-Saussurean”) Bakhtin of “a kind of gross and vulgar materialism” (2001: 13).

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26 We ignore here the very serious question of whether “classification” is really an appropriate term for the differentiation of styles in the Bakhtinian sense.
His claim bears a striking resemblance to the position taken by Carolyn Miller and the “North American School” of genre theorists. As Miller (1984) puts it:

Much of the debate regarding situational theory has concerned ways of mitigating the materialist interpretation of it. … in order to understand recurrence, it is necessary to reject the materialist tendencies in situational theory. […] Recurrence is an intersubjective phenomenon, a social occurrence, and cannot be understood on materialist terms. … *What recurs is not a material situation (a real, objective, factual event) but our construal of a type* (157; my emphasis).

The logic behind this claim is apparently solid: “What recurs cannot be a material configuration of objects, events and people, nor can it be a subjective configuration, a ‘perception’, for these, too, are unique from moment to moment and person to person” (157). But from a Bakhtinian perspective, it is precisely the “never-repeatable uniqueness” of the situation – in contrast to “the objective unity of a domain of culture” – that must be accounted for if language is to surmount the merely abstract validity of its content. Otherwise, as Bakhtin (1993a: 3) observes: “the individual-historical aspect (the author, the time, the circumstances, and the moral unity of his life) is completely immaterial, for this universally valid judgment belongs to the theoretical unity of the appropriate theoretical domain, and its place in this unity exhaustively determines its validity”. In other words, if we reduce the rhetorical situation to a recurrent abstraction then language would seem to have no need for the individual-historical moment; meaning would be established entirely within the structure of the language.27 Interest in a material interpretation of the rhetorical situation reflects a concern to steer clear of precisely such universalizing abstractions – to anchor the entire system of meanings in the individual participant’s concrete experience of the world.28 Far from privileging the physical over the symbolic, the effort grounds the symbolic in the *real* world – a world in which the space and time of the individual participant’s life is the valuative centre. Bakhtin (1993a: 61) explains:

What we intend to provide is a representation, a description of the actual, concrete center (both spatial and temporal) from which valuations, assertions, and deeds come

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27 This important notion is unpackaged in Ch. 2, in the discussion at note 34.
28 Bakhtin writes: “It is an unfortunate misunderstanding (a legacy of rationalism) to think that truth can only be the truth that is composed of universal moments; that the truth of a situation is precisely that which is repeatable and constant in it” (1993a: 37).
forth or issue, and where the constituent members are real objects, interconnected by concrete event-relations in the once-occurrent event of Being (in this context logical relations constitute but one moment along with the concrete spatial, temporal, and emotional-volitional moments).

The dichotomy implicit in Miller’s analysis is thus a false one: it is not necessary to choose between a notion of recurrence as intersubjective or material: the intersubjective determination of a type – that is, the given, universally valid judgment – can become a real (and no longer merely theoretical) moment in the individual’s unique, non-recurrent experience of the world.

We must, however, find a way to reconcile this with Bakhtin’s claims that languages themselves are “specific points of view on the world…each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values”, coexisting in the consciousness of real people – people who thus bear not only the languages, but the world views they embody. Expressing himself this way, Bakhtin seems to be arguing that languages possess their own (albeit, abstract) autonomy: “these languages live a real life, they struggle and evolve in an environment of social heteroglossia” (1981: 292). Bakhtin, however, is not saying that these languages structure speech. On the contrary, it may be argued that he means something closer to the opposite, that speech – or, rather, the intentional (referential, expressive) quality embodied in speech – structures language:

This is why we constantly put forward the referential and expressive – that is, intentional – factors as the force that stratifies and differentiates the common literary language…. By stressing the intentional dimension of stratification in literary language, we are able…to locate in a single series such methodologically heterogeneous phenomena as professional and social dialects, world views and individual artistic works, for in their intentional dimension one finds that common plane on which they can all be juxtaposed, and juxtaposed dialogically (1981: 292-293).

What simultaneously stratifies and differentiates the various languages, on the one hand, and draws them together as languages, on the other, is not an orientation to the world in some abstract theoretical sense, but the living impulse that each embodies – not merely an orientation, but a real engagement, by a real community, facing the concrete exigencies of a
particular time and place.\textsuperscript{29} And this is one of the great attractions of language as an object of study – it makes present the living reality of the actual social situation:

Discourse lives, as it were, beyond itself, in a living impulse toward the object; if we detach ourselves completely from this impulse all we have left is the naked corpse of the word, from which we can learn nothing at all about the social situation or the fate of a given word in life. \textit{To study the word as such, ignoring the impulse that reaches out beyond it, is just as senseless as to study psychological experience outside the context of that real life toward which it was directed and by which it is determined} (1981: 292).\textsuperscript{30}

In all of this we see the essence of dialogism, and, more to the present point, why we must take Holquist’s notion of ventriloquation neither as a metaphor for such a phenomenon nor as an explanation for its misrepresentation in the sociolinguistic discourse. A genuinely Bakhtinian account must recognize discourse as a real engagement, by a real community, facing the concrete exigencies of a particular time and place. In this sense, the confusion we observe in the sociolinguistic discourse on Bakhtin is best understood not as a cunning (mis)appropriation of Bakhtin (for ulterior purposes), but a reflection of what Bakhtin himself describes as the reality of language and speech communication, a concretely \textit{social} phenomenon.

\textsuperscript{29} This is precisely what we see in the editorial from the \textit{Columbus Dispatch} (at the end of Ch. 7).
\textsuperscript{30} Elsewhere in the same passage he emphasizes the importance of grasping more than the formal attributes of a language:

the linguistic markers (lexical coloration, semantic overtones, etc.) of generic languages, professional jargons and so forth – markers that are, so to speak, the sclerotic deposits of an intentional process, signs left behind on the path of the real living project of an intention, of the particular way it imparts meaning to general linguistic norms. These external markers, linguistically observable and fixable, cannot in themselves be understood or studied without understanding the specific conceptualization they have been given by an intention (1981: 292).

Compare this with Vološinov’s observation that for the speaker:

the center of gravity lies not in the identity of the form but in that new and concrete meaning it acquires in the particular context. What the speaker values is not that aspect of the form which is invariably identical in all instances of its usage, despite the nature of those instances, but that aspect of the linguistic form because of which it can figure in the given, concrete context, because of which it becomes a sign adequate to the conditions of the given, concrete situation (1973: 67-68).
9.2 Bakhtin the Sociolinguist

The discourse on ventriloquation is a microcosm of such a phenomenon. It begins with an idea about Bakhtin, offered by one of the “masters of thought”. The utterance expressing this point of view gets taken up and reproduced by those involved in related activities, eventually settling into an abbreviated form – the word “ventriloquation” – in which resounds the generic whole of all those utterances. Its meaning is not abstractly “structured” by that discourse, but directly invested by the actual speech of the various participants: “ventriloquation” is made to mean in a certain way. Thus right from the start, the centre moves away from Bakhtin even as he remains the ostensible foundation: Bakhtin’s speech is replaced by Holquist’s speech about Bakhtin’s speech (and this is subsequently massaged and reaccentuated by the contribution of others, like Black and Carroll).

But as the utterances multiply and the discourses penetrate into different spheres of activity, the original tones and echoes are supplanted by new ones – even as the form continues to be reproduced and, indeed, to be presented as if it were Bakhtin’s own conception. Holquist’s speech is no more able than Bakhtin’s to remain at the centre. We see this plainly in the disjunction between his use of the term “ventriloquation” (as a sort of allegorical “transcoding”) and the views offered in the recent literature, where the authors (unfamiliar with what the word was made to mean in the context of Holquist’s discourse) typically turn to the vernacular for insight (construing “ventriloquation” as something like “speaking in a way that makes one’s words appear to come from another source”).

This, of course, is the same vernacular meaning (the same “language means”) that Holquist draws on in the production of his own utterances; and we can see how his choice of words

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31 I am tempted to say that the word itself becomes a sort of genre, but this is taking things too far. It is perhaps enough to say that the word acquires a typical (generic) significance from the types of utterances in which it usually functions (in this case, utterances about Bakhtin). Cf. Bakhtin (1986: 87-89).
32 Nor, as we have seen, is Kristeva’s – or even Fairclough’s reading of Kristeva’s – reading of Bakhtin.
33 Even here, however, we cannot conclude that its significance is determined by an abstract linguistic structure, for the vernacular is, in turn, a meaning typical of utterances produced in the broader speech community.
conveys his speech plan: his point is that Bakhtin made his words appear to come from Vološinov, and by extension, that he made his orthodox Christian ideas appear to come from Marxist ideology. But as Bakhtin might have put it, Holquist’s words “have not only a typical, but also…a more or less clearly reflected individual expression…determined by the unrepeatable individual context of the utterance” (1986: 88). And here is the crucial point: we can see the typical meaning in Holquist’s utterance, but we cannot see Holquist’s meaning in the typical utterance. And so, whenever the notion of ventriloquation is repeated without reference to what Holquist actually says, we are left only with its typical (vernacular or generic) meaning or else a particular meaning determined by yet another speaker’s utterance (which may or may not be propagated further) – and we lose whatever connection it initially had to Bakhtin, even as its reproduction in the discourse affirms it as a Bakhtinian notion.

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34 Bakhtin’s (1981: 299) idea of “refraction”, on the other hand – offered here only in passing (since those who reproduce Holquist’s term do not appear to have heard the original utterance) – is that a prose writer may express his ideas not in another’s language (Christianity expressed in the Marxist idiom) but through it (Marxism illuminated in such a way that the Christian view is conveyed implicitly).

35 Bakhtin writes:

The way in which the word conceptualizes its object is a complex act – all objects, open to dispute and overlain as they are with qualifications, are from one side highlighted while from the other side dimmed by heteroglot social opinion, by an alien word about them. And into this complex play of light and shadow the word enters – it becomes saturated with this play, and must determine within it the boundaries of its own semantic and stylistic contours (1981: 276; my emphasis).

36 Consider, for instance, Carter (2004: 211), who observes that “voicing”:

includes projecting or throwing of the voice by an individual or by pairs or small groups of speakers, and revoicings (when the voices of others are reproduced). There are challenges in accounting for the creative functions of voicing which in the case of revoicing, in particular, can involve accounting in varying degrees for comic parodies, for reaccenting and ventriloquising the voice of others in different types of representation and misrepresentation, and for the use of revoicing for purposes of polemic and critique. Here, “ventriloquising” is to be taken either very literally as a “throwing of the voice” or as an extension of this meaning in the form of “revoicing” – that is, of speaking in another’s voice – on the pretense that one is merely a dummy conveying the other’s words. Yamaguchi (2005: 287), citing Wortham (2001b), uses “ventriloquating” in a similar way, but with the appropriation of the other’s voice construed as a conventional means of conveying the other’s character. Coupland & Jaworski (2004: 35), citing Hill & Hill (1986), take it even further, suggesting that speakers “may be ‘ventriloquating’…but often without offering evidence of the mimicked source they intend, which might or might not be themselves”.

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As this is repeated throughout the scholarly discourse, not only does Bakhtin get burdened with misleading representations, but the message he is trying to convey – one with obvious interest and importance for social language research – gets overlooked: language is irremediably social – and we cannot avoid taking responsibility for this by reducing the notion of “sociality” to an abstraction. The irony of the sociolinguistic discourse on Bakhtin is how well it demonstrates this fact even as it articulates its abstractions: the ideas it develops and propagates result from a living dialogue among different groups of speakers, and not from a reliance on abstract authority; its treatment of Bakhtin is evidence of this.

Even if we take the term “ventriloquation” in the non-Bakhtinian sense that the sociolinguistic discourse has established, scholars are not ‘invoking’ or channelling Bakhtinian insights – as, for instance, Linell (1998: 49) suggests with his claim that “some ideas of Bakhtin will be ventriloquated…throughout this book”. The scholarship is not, as Gergen (2001: 257) puts it, “borrowing from the cultural repository” of Bakhtinian theory. It is “ventriloquating” Bakhtin (again, on its own terms) only to the extent that it has made Bakhtin the dummy. From that perspective, scholars really are “speaking at a distance” – putting their own ideas and conclusions about speech phenomena into Bakhtin’s mouth, making him speak their words.

Of course, this latter notion of ventriloquation, which actually takes the scholarly discourse seriously, is not one that scholars would wish to endorse, for it implies that Bakhtin is not the authority they have represented him to be. On the contrary, just as Holquist concluded that Vološinov’s words were the medium for a secret Bakhtinian discourse, we would have to conclude that Bakhtin’s words are simply the medium for the scholarly discourse on each case, the author draws directly on the vernacular or on an extension of the vernacular determined by another speaker, and not on the notion of transcoding that Holquist describes. 37 Park & Bucholtz (2009: 495) apply ‘ventriloquism’ in a similar sense to describe the use of subtitles “to highlight or comment on ongoing discourse in light entertainment programs”:

Producers insert such texts, which Park terms “impact captioning,” to enhance humorous moments, but they do so through the heteroglossic lamination…of their own words onto the bodies of the television host and guests, a kind of ventriloquism that allows producers to project a public moral authority while maintaining their own institutional neutrality.
language. It is not a conclusion that scholars would endorse for it implies a sort of bad faith, a violation of the authority that is supposed to ground the discourse (to whatever extent it has been invoked): if Bakhtin and Bakhtinian scholarship do not actually ground the discourse, then the reliability of the structure ascribed to him is called into question. This is no problem for Holquist, for his very point is to call into question the structural role of Marxist ideas in Vološinov’s text and to suggest an alternative authority in Bakhtin. It is more problematic, however, when the authority of Bakhtin is replaced by a discourse that does not acknowledge having taken on such a role for itself.

But this, again, is to perpetuate a structuralist reading when what we want to do here is offer a Bakhtinian explanation for how manifestly non-Bakhtinian notions have come to be seen as expressions of Bakhtin’s ideas about language. Our discussion began with the claim that there were two facets to the problem: propagation and adherence. As we examine the various discourse topics the problem of adherence stands out – not only in the disjunction between Bakhtinian themes and their representation in the literature, but in how a given representation diverges from another. At the same time, we see how the various representations coincide (or appear to coincide) with broader strains of thought – they are not idiosyncratic, not spoken as though for the first time or without reference to an ongoing dialogue; they represent a continuation of that dialogue: Bakhtin is invoked in the context of a discourse on code-switching or on genre-mixing or on language standardization, and so forth. There is thus a certain consistency to the different representations – they form clusters; they adhere to their own perspectives. In some cases, they are restricted to a small discourse community; in others, they extend to the broader community. But in almost every case the ideas attributed specifically to Bakhtin are produced directly through the discourse of the individuals in those communities. And this is where the problem of adherence begins to overlap with that of propagation. Bakhtin writes:

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38 This is perhaps clearest in the treatment of heteroglossia by those involved in APPRAISAL, where it is consistently represented it as a form of engagement with the views and opinions of others (cf. Ch. 6).
39 Consider the treatment of genre as a simple literary category or hybridization as the blending of genres.
The words of a language belong to nobody, but still we hear those words only in particular individual utterances, we read them in particular individual works, and in such cases the words have not only a typical, but also (depending on the genre) a more or less clearly reflected individual expression, which is determined by the unrepeatable individual context of the utterance. […] the word appears as an expression of some evaluative position of an individual person (authority, writer, scientist, father, mother, friend, teacher, and so forth), as an abbreviation of the utterance (1986: 88).

And here we can see precisely how the notion of “ventriloquation” has gained traction:

In each epoch, in each social circle, in each small world of family, friends, acquaintances, and comrades in which a human being grows and lives, there are always authoritative utterances that set the tone – artistic, scientific, and journalistic works on which one relies, to which one refers, which are cited, imitated, and followed. In each epoch, in all areas of life and activity, there are particular traditions that are expressed and retained in verbal vestments: in written works, in utterances, in sayings, and so forth. There are always some verbally expressed leading ideas of the “masters of thought” of a given epoch, some basic tasks, slogans, and so forth. […] This is why the unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others’ utterances. This experience can be characterized to some degree as the process of assimilation – more or less creative – of others’ words (and not the words of language) (1986: 88-89).

There is little doubt that Holquist’s authoritative utterances on dialogism-as-ventriloquation (which were, themselves, a “more or less creative” assimilation of Bakhtin’s own words) set the tone for those who followed. And so it goes throughout the discourse on Bakhtin. What we see so clearly in the singular example of “ventriloquation” is repeated endlessly in each small circle of language researchers, whose claims – about genre, style, heteroglossia, etc. – seem so often to be at odds with Bakhtin’s utterances. In many cases, these claims rely on only the most general ideas about the underlying topics, a tendency exacerbated by the apparent familiarity of the terms in which they are often expressed: genre, style, hybrid, authority, persuasiveness, etc., all retain the echoes of particular traditions in the lives and activities of those who encounter them. Genre is thus construed as a literary category defined by certain formal features, style as an individual way of speaking, hybrid as an admixture of different elements, authority as political or institutional power, etc. In some cases these traditions are more circumscribed, reflecting the currents of specific disciplines and the

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40 That is, in the singular idea of a singular authority so easily traced to its origins.
utterances deemed authoritative by the individuals involved in them. The Bakhtinian notion of genre is thus construed as a form of “social action” among those for whom the echoes of Miller, Bazerman, and Swales are still pronounced; while others, informed by the likes of Wodak, Kress and Fairclough emphasize the intertextuality of generic forms; and others still (echoing the ideas of variationist sociolinguistics) concern themselves with formal features.

This is not simply a matter of conflicting definitions or theoretical perspectives – as though one could be distinguished from another according to its place in the structure of the scholarly discourse on language. On the contrary, the various articulations are inseparable from the chains of communication in which they were fashioned, typical of the spheres of activity whose concerns are at the heart of their discourses. Bakhtin is not at the centre of these activities. His words, which sound so much like those produced by other authorities on the sociality of language, carry the tones and echoes of the discourses in which they participate – and they cannot be inserted unproblematically into the different contemporary discourses as though he were speaking the same language. But this fact is largely ignored – perhaps because it follows from a Bakhtinian notion of speech communication and thus presupposes an orientation to the discourse that unfolds in the Bakhtinian texts. Instead of entering into conversation with him, the sociolinguistic discourse consequently produces mostly “dramaticized dialogues” (cf. Bakhtin 1984: 188-189) in which Bakhtin appears as one of the supporting characters, his utterances objectified and subordinated to a variety of monologic contexts where they serve to reproduce ideas to which he ultimately owes very little.

Perhaps surprisingly, the very mechanisms we have in place to ensure the reliability of the scholarly discourse – namely, citation and peer review – are among the factors that can be expected to contribute to this situation. “Recontextualization” is a familiar notion in sociolinguistics – and one might be tempted to attribute certain misunderstandings to the

41 In some ways, he does not appear even to be at the centre of the discourse on dialogism as Holquist (1981b: 165) construes it, the notion being taken, rather, as a broadly Russian or Slavic conception (with roots in Geneva): “Russians, Poles, and Czechs such as Baudouin de Courtenay, Nikolai Krushevski, Mikhail Bakhtin, Lev Vygotsky, Sergej Karsevskij, Jan Mukafovsky, and of course, Roman Jakobson himself sought at least since the early 1920s” to articulate a dialogic view of language.
potential for speech to be taken out of context. Peer review would serve, in such cases, to
confirm that a given representation maintained the sense of the original utterance. But such a
perspective ultimately reaffirms the unity of language by ascribing potential differences in
meaning to the differing circumstances in which a given form is used. What we learn from
Bakhtin, on the contrary, is that language itself is stratified and that a given utterance can
mean differently, not only in different contexts but for different groups of speakers (and
listeners) irrespective of context. In a sense, Bakhtin represents the final repudiation of Sapir-
Whorf: far from finding ideology to be constrained by the structure of a given language,
Bakhtin demonstrates that language is conditioned (and thus differentiated) by the socio-
ideological horizons of the language user.

Citation thus becomes a source of misunderstanding as reported utterances are invested with
meanings and inflections derived from the reader’s own socio-linguistic experience (and
refuted, confirmed or otherwise supplemented on that basis). This may be the case even
when such utterances appear novel and provocative, even those capable of persuading
readers to take new positions or see new sides of familiar problems: the reader’s monologic
context can be modified without being broken or weakened. Scholarship that appears to be
engaging with Bakhtin, addressing specific claims from specific texts, may thus continue
instead to work through or “play out” ideas from its own spheres of activity – projecting
these ideas (literally “ventriloquating” them, in the contemporary sociolinguistic sense of the
word) onto the Bakhtinian texts. Peer review can be expected to contribute to this tendency,
as reviewers are, by definition, participants in the same spheres of activity as the reporters (or
their audience) and therefore bring substantially the same socio-ideological backgrounds to
bear on their interpretations. Indeed, their authority is a function of their mastery over the
very discourses that differentiate their use of language from others’, and their role is
precisely to identify lapses or inconsistencies from that perspective; they are thus
proportionately less likely to perceive the background of (alien) discourse against which the
reported utterance originally sounded.

All of this, as I hope to have demonstrated, is consistent with the Bakhtinian discourse on
language, and it presents a peculiar difficulty for scholarship. As I observed in the
introduction, there are those (like Bell 2007: 98) who would fault Bakhtin for his “cumbersome and opaque neologisms”. But these, at least, remind us that Bakhtin is speaking a different language, encouraging what he calls an “active responsive understanding”. But how is this to be achieved? The solution is not to seek out a glossary, as though his words could simply be added to the unified language (cf. Bakhtin 1981: 291). On the contrary, what we learn from Bakhtin is that expressive significance develops “at the point of contact between the word and actual reality, under the conditions of that real situation articulated by the individual utterance” (1986: 88). My approach has therefore been to reconstruct Bakhtin’s discourse as a rejoinder to the sociolinguistic one, to put Bakhtin in dialogue with it, and in this way re-establish the significance of his observations for contemporary sociolinguistics. It is an effort, in other words, not just to explain Bakhtin’s ideas, or to point out how contemporary sociolinguists seem to have misconstrued them, but, to a certain extent, to enact them. My hope is that the reader will have been able to hear, however faintly, Bakhtin’s own voice in this enactment, to discern the peculiar semantic and axiological belief system that unites the topics addressed in the chapters above, and unites, as well, the many that were left aside. Only then, I suspect, will sociolinguistics be able to make full and productive use of Bakhtin’s insights for the study of language.

42 Needless to say, I am not referring to the original Russian, but to the unique social language that grows out of his concrete sphere of activity, and which would be just as opaque to uninitiated speakers of Russian.

43 This, however, is precisely what Tusting & Maybin (2007: 576) suggest when they note that: the turns to social constructionism and to discourse across the social sciences have produced opportunities for interdisciplinarity which are now reflected within the theoretical and methodological scope of sociolinguistics itself. Thus, in a recent dictionary of sociolinguistics, ‘substrate’ is listed alongside ‘subjectivity’ and ‘velar’ alongside ‘ventriloquation’.
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