

# Bakhtin's heteroglossia and its place creative writing

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in the Modern Analysis of Novelistic Prose

## **Bakhtin's Heteroglossia and its Place in the Modern Analysis of Novelistic Prose**

In the King James Bible, the Gospel of John opens with the following words, “In the beginning was the Word.” The unquestionable immutability of the Word is emphasized in the text that follows – “and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” While for Michail Bakhtin, the Russian philosopher and linguist, having just one meaning of the spoken words – whether in regular life or in novels – is something that signifies “the narrowness of this type of thinking and its inadequacy in all areas of discourse’s artistic life.” For him, there is no fix understanding of either past or present meanings, which depend on the constantly developing dialogical contexts.

In fact, as far as the novels are concern, in his essay “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin tackles the “stylistic analyses of novelistic prose” (Bakhtin, p. 261) by introducing a new linguistic concept, heteroglossia, or “the social diversity of speech types,” (Bakhtin, p. 263) which represents a wide range of various voices in the novel, as well as their multiple interrelations and interpretations. The prominence given to heteroglossia, “the internal stratification of language” in the novel is fascinating and, according to Bakhtin, it is “the prerequisite for authentic novelistic prose” (Bakhtin, p. 264) and also a key to the modern stylistic analysis of any literary prosaic work. However, while trying to draw our attention to different types of speeches in the novel and the importance of the counterpoint of this multitude, Bakhtin offers deeper understanding of heteroglossia by emphasizing the speech of the author as the primary source and location of

the various speeches and languages present in the novel. Furthermore, he defines heteroglossia as “another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way.” At the same time, he cautions that “the substitution of the individualized language of the novelist for the style of the novel is doubly imprecise: it distorts the very essence of a stylistics of the novel” (Bakhtin, p. 265). Thus, Bakhtin's literary theory sheds the light on the limitations of the prosaic stylistic analyses existing prior to the invention and development of such linguistic concepts as heteroglossia and dialogism, with the latter bearing the dialogic significance of discourse in the novel and its connection to other works.

Bakhtin's creative interpretation of the stylistic analysis focuses on “the whole of the novel” and reminds about the imperfections of the traditional stylistic analyses, which suffer from two types of substitution of studies – instead of the comprehensive outlook on the novel as a whole thing per se – and, all in all, “remain incapable of dealing effectively with the artistic uniqueness of discourse in the novel” (Bakhtin, p. 266). Thus, the impact of Bakhtin's linguistic concept of heteroglossia on the modern stylistic analysis of novelistic prose and philosophy of discourse is hard to underestimate.

Dissecting the differences between the stylistic analyses of poetic and prosaic literary works, Bakhtin pinpoints that the former are distinguished by only one definite discourse – “even when speaking of alien things, the poet speaks in his own language, whereas the writer of prose, by contrast attempts to talk about even his own world in an alien language” (Bakhtin, p. 287). Moreover, he further asserts that there is a limited possibility of heteroglossia in the poetic world while the richness of the novelistic prose is

illuminated through the unlimited possibilities of the dialogical discourse. Heteroglossia in the novel is as important as it is in the every-day social life. For Bakhtin, any uttered word can never be neutral, for “ the intentional possibilities of language filled with specific content, they are permeated with concrete value judgments” (Bakhtin, p. 289). Stratification of the language in the novel is likened to the social stratification of the real world, and Bakhtin’s heteroglossia is definitely a highlight of his literary theory.