In “Discouse in the Novel” Bakhtin attempts to help verbal art “overcome the divorce between an abstract formal approach” and the “equally abstract ideological approach (p. 269). According to Bakhtin for this to be possible there must be an acceptance the “social phenomenon” that is verbal discourse. Bakhtin takes issue with stylistics because they don’t account for the “social life of discourse outside the artist’s study” (p. 269). This is problematic for Bakhtin because, if I understand this correctly, he views discourse as something living. So, while there may exist a “unitary language” there also exists what he refers to as heteroglossia. Unitary language is a linguistic norm, but one that exists in an attempt to centralize language. However, heteroglossia exists in language. In language heteroglossia can be described as the “coexistence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past” (p. 291).

If I understand heteroglossia correctly it exists despite any attempt to create the unitary language, because of the social nature of discourse, which essentially means that language changes over time due to varying factors, and to study only the stylistics would be to ignore the negotiation and coexistence of languages due to heteroglossia. Bakhtin is clear that literary language, and the novel, make use of heteroglossia because style and genre come together in the novel. Bakhtin’s defines style as the “fundamental and creative relationship of discourse to its object” and the speaker and the discourse of others (p.378). This view of style depicts it as deliberate, but as seen with the concept of heterglossia, style can also be viewed as the result of discourse, or multiple discourses.

In “The Problem of Speech Genres” Bakhtin addresses the problem of studying speech genres from the perspective of the sentences, and not from utterances. The role of the utterance in language is to affirm it written and oral forms. Utterances are generally responsive, and as such are more important in studying speech genres than the sentence. The importance of the utterance, and it generally being the result of responding to preexisting utterances, accounts for why Bakhtin argues it vital to studying speech genres. The utterance in a speech genre builds on the utterance that came before it, and it does so with both a speaker and audience in mind. There are three elements to an utterance. It utilizes style, finalization, and it due to the responsive nature it must relate to speakers and audiences. This attention to both the audience and the speaker is interesting to me, because it requires that the speakers place themselves in the audience as well as they are listeners.

This brief overview of the utterance and its role in speech genres to my understanding is similar to the discussion of heterglossia. I’m not arguing that the two build on each other in any way, but I do think that that utterance is similar to the concept of heterglossia in that an utterance is reflective of different language practices based on appealing to the audience. So, if heterglossia is the coexistence of language, then is a speech genre an example of heteroglossia existing in a social setting, rather than in the literary language of the novel? What I found most interesting about these readings was the attention given to what makes up a language, and the responsive nature of language. It portrays language and its uses as deliberate, which I don’t disagree with, but also as a continually living and changing thing based on uses by people and what the audience hears.