Identifying and Analyzing Heteroglossia

Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin identifies the coexistence of, and conflict between, different types of speech:

- the speech of characters,
- the speech of narrators,
- and the speech of the author

Heteroglossia is "another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way." In other words, we can read/understand the *author's* voice through the interplay of the different types of speech within the text**.** This means there are (at least) *two voices* and *two meanings* in a single utterance.

This **double-voiced discourse** expresses authorial intention but in a "refracted" way. It serves two speakers (the character/narrator and the author) at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions:

- The direct intention of the character who is speaking
- The refracted intention of the author

If characters are functions of ideology (i.e., they represent ideas/values we're supposed to accept or reject), the author uses those characters to communicate meaning to the audience. Sometimes the author's meaning/intention is aligned with a character's, but often the two meanings are not aligned. It is our job as readers to determine the meaning of a text as communicated through this interplay of voices.

Note: Although we may speak of an author's "intent," we cannot truly know what an author intends, so our analysis is always an interpretation. It is also vital to remember that what the author intends *is not always exactly what the text* communicates*. We are after the meaning of a text no matter*

Identifying Heteroglossia

According to Bakhtin, heteroglossia is a feature of the novel. But I believe we can identify and analyze heteroglossia any time there is a multiplicity of voices representing a range of perspectives and ideologies. It is generally easier to identify and analyze heteroglossia in prose or narrative poetry.

How do we know when a passage is an example of heteroglossia? Easy—every passage is an example of heteroglossia! The harder part is finding a passage where the heteroglossia is significant for us to analyze. Below are a few ideas to aid you in finding such a passage.

1. The best place to start is with a passage that stands out to you in as you read
    a. This could be a passage you underlined or starred, or perhaps a point where something important seemed to happen
    b. When you have such a passage, ask yourself why it stood out in the first place: Does it seem to be saying something important? Does it reveal something different about the culture than you'd expect? Does it represent a different way of thinking? Was there a noticeable shift in tone or style?

2. Another way to identify a passage that will yield interesting analysis is to find places where the interplay of voices seems to indicate conflict or contradiction
    a. If characters are arguing or presenting different sides of an idea, we are probably meant to pick a side (or reject both sides!)
    b. If the narrator contradicts, or otherwise highlights, something a character says, we are probably meant to learn something from that contradiction
    c. If a character or narrator presents an **aside** (a remark that is not directly related to the main topic of discussion, or only meant for the audience), we are probably being presented with something we're meant to agree or disagree with
    d. Watch for irony! If we're presented with an idea or statement that seems to contradict or does not fit in with the context around it, we're probably meant to question the idea or statement
3. A lot if this is intuition, which can only be developed through practice, so don't be frustrated if passages aren't jumping off the page at you!

Analyzing Heteroglossia

Identifying an instance of heteroglossia is only the first step in your analysis, however. It's not enough to say "this is heteroglossia," but instead your analysis will focus on what is being communicated in that passage and *how* it is being presented. Here are a few strategies for analyzing an instance of heteroglossia:

As You (Re)Read

- Ask questions about what the passage means—what is the author trying to communicate?
- Focus on the *voices* represented in the passage:
    - Who is speaking in the passage (either direct dialogue or implied dialogue)?
        - Do characters speak? Does the narrator comment? Does the narrator include the characters' speech, or imply it?
    - What ideologies/perspectives are represented by each voice?
        - Are characters expressing opposing/conflicting perspectives? Does the narrator express a separate/distinct perspective?
    - Which voices/perspectives are we supposed to agree or disagree with?
        - How do you know? What are the language/structural clues to this?
    - Are any of the voices meant to be taken as ironic? Are any of the voices meant to be **parody**?
- Consider how this passage (and its voices) fits into the larger context of the work—does it represent a pattern or the breaking of a pattern?
    - Does the meaning you've identified in the passage correspond with the larger meanings/themes of the whole text?
- Any word you are unsure of, or which looks strange in the context given, look up in the *OED*.
- Don't just point out the obvious: anyone can spot that one word rhymes with another; close reading requires that *you* account for why that word rhymes with that word, this word with this word and what it *means* for the passage
- Consider why the author made the choices they made—why include these voices in this way? What are they *not* saying?
- Analyze the passage's technical and narrative elements—such as diction, sentence patterns, tone, figurative language, structure, plot, character, setting, etc.

Make a Claim

1. As you develop a claim about the use of heteroglossia in the passage, consider:
    a. When you have thought about the text's form, diction, meaning and so on, you need to think about what effect this creates and what the author is saying by doing this.
    b. There is no 'right' argument to be gained through completing this process as each interpretation will choose to focus on a different aspect of the text.
    c. An argument looks to persuade, not insist; it engages the reader as a thoughtful listener, who could be imagined as responding to, or questioning, your claims.
    d. An argument also takes its observations to the 'next level' by using its initial answers as the stuff for questions. What are the implications of these representations; what are the stakes in presenting matters in this way?
    e. An argument also depends on the analysis you have already done in the annotating process: you should then relate all of the relevant details to that thesis.
2. Write down a claim arguing for a certain interpretation of this passage
    a. Don't just state "this is heteroglossia"
    b. Your claim/thesis should argue the meaning communicated through the words/actions of a character/narrator in your selected passage
    c. *EX: In* Oroonoko*, the narrator's stated refusal to comment on whether the captain's capture of Oroonoko was brave or not communicates to the reader that we are supposed to see it as cowardly and unjust, especially in the context of the narrator's diction of betrayal versus innocence in the description of the capture.*
3. Provide textual evidence and support for your claim
    a. The order of the evidence depends on how it relates to your central argument. Don't let the passage walk you through your analysis; instead, re-organize the passage to suit your discussion of it.
    b. Point to specific moments in the passage and quote it
    c. Use the *OED* to look up words, and look at all the definitions—consider the dates of usage to make sure the definition(s) apply
    d. *EX: We can see the narrator wants us to think poorly of the captain's actions through the diction of betrayal in the presenting Oroonoko's capture. Using words like 'treachery,' 'treacherous,' and 'betrayed,' Behn casts the action in a negative light. . .*
4. Remember the C.S.Q.T. Method for incorporating textual evidence!

Note: This is just an exercise to think about how to identify and analyze heteroglossia. This is meant merely as a possible and helpful model, not as a required template.