Special Focus Introduction: Translating Multilingualism

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The title of this special focus section co-edited by Bettina Brandt and Yasemin Yildiz, *Translating Multilingualism*, is deliberately open-ended. While it may first and foremost suggest the challenging act of translating multilingual texts from "one" language into "another," the contributions take up both this question and other ways that translation and multilingualism interact. Some essays draw our attention to the fact that multilingualism may be translated not just across languages but also modalities and media, and they thus examine innovative photography, illustration, and performance projects. Other essays consider how translation is not something that is done with and to texts after their completion, but rather serves as a poetic resource in the very production of multilingual, or at times even seemingly monolingual texts. Using a broadened understanding of translation thus serves as a means of examining the conditions under which multilingualism emerges, circulates, and functions in literary and other artistic works today.

The study of literary multilingualism has come a long way over the last two decades. While some postwar scholarship had intermittently identified and tackled literary practices such as mixing different languages in a text, oeuvres in more than one language, or in a language the author acquired later in life, the approaches were either focused on individual—often canonical—authors such as Beckett and Nabokov, or were taxonomical in nature (see Beaujour; Forster). In either case, they remained compartmentalized and did not lead to the establishment of a field centering multilingualism itself. Postcolonial studies, meanwhile, offered a particularly rich and sophisticated engagement with the question of language(s), from examining language choice in the face of imposed colonial languages to delineating strategies of appropriating those languages and inscribing indigenous languages into them, often in translational form (see Zabus). But that scholarship was also primarily undertaken under the umbrella of the postcolonial rather than the multilingual, while the latter has come more to the fore in the post-postcolonial (Bandia). It was arguably the greater visibility of multilingualism in an age of globalization that has led to a more focused and sustained engagement with it. Since the late 1990s, scholars such as Steven Kellman have been instrumental in documenting the widespread nature of multilingual practices among writers across times and places. This work amply demonstrated that multilingualism was not an exception in the literary landscape. That insight, in turn, provoked the question of how it had come to be treated as such for so long. In the 2010s, scholars began to answer this question by turning to the role of monolingualism. Denaturalizing monolingualism by tracing its historical (and belated) emergence to a series of

shifts dating back to 17th and 18th century Europe and reconceptualizing this "invention" (Gramling) as a "paradigm" (Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue*) rather than a mere numerical descriptor, the study of literary multilingualism has acquired new contours as one always necessarily in conversation with the force of monolingualism. A greater attention to institutional dynamics such as that of the publishing industry drew further attention to the very conditions of possibility under which "multilingual" forms could appear and circulate in the first place (see Lennon; Komska). Decentering the printed publication as primary object of analysis, scholarship that delved into archives has offered further insight into the dynamic interplay of multilingual practices—much more readily and differently found in unpublished material—and the monolingual pressures they were subjected to (see Weissmann).

Meanwhile, scholars such as Till Dembeck have argued that all literary texts are multilingual and that scholarship should thus not limit itself to identifying a corpus of multilingual literature, but rather develop a differentiated toolbox for the analysis of all literary texts in a multilingual philology. More recently, the very premise of literary multilingualism as locatable on a textual level has come in for more systematic scrutiny. A shift from a focus on *writing* multilingually to *reading* multilingually is revamping the field in productive new ways. Julia Tidigs and Markus Huss's notion of "reader diversity," for instance, breaks with the assumption of a monolingual audience and repositions the reader as "co-creator of the multilingual text" (210). It does so by putting forward a multimodal perspective on multilingualism, "where the sensorial and semiotic modalities of the multilingual literary text are taken into account," such as the visual and the aural dimensions (219). That means that readers with different linguistic repertoires will read a text differently, will (internally or externally) pronounce and make sense of the encountered words and scripts in different ways, and thus in the act of reading will produce a differently mono- or multilingual work.

The very definition of multilingualism has thus been shifting. In this context, it is important to remember that the term "multilingualism" itself has been contested. For one thing, many competing terms—such as "bilingual," "translingual," "heteroglossic, and "exophonic," to name just a few—circulate and describe at times overlapping and at times distinct phenomena. Moreover, scholars in applied linguistics and writing studies, in particular, have come to reject "multilingualism" in favor of "translingual" or "translanguaging" because the prefix "multi" upholds the fiction of linguistic practices and repertoires that can be counted as separate entities and are usually limited to standard languages (see Canagarajah). In response to these critiques, Stefan Helgesson proposes "regimes of comprehensibility" as an alternative to reifying such language boundaries in literary studies. His concept aims to move away from any notion of the lingual based on countable units within texts and towards a focus on their differentiated

and strategic negotiation of comprehension or non-comprehension instead. In this light, the retention of "multilingualism" as an umbrella term in the present issue is primarily due to its greater legibility.

Finally, much of the work on literary multilingualism has taken place in contexts or literary traditions that have defined themselves as normatively monolingual, by variously providing evidence to the contrary. But what if we do not start from such contexts? A move beyond Europe and beyond literature, as exemplified by the work of Moradewun Adejunmobi on African popular film production, helps further recalibrate the field's premises by drawing attention to different configurations of mono- and multilingualism both in everyday life and in particular medial forms. Analyzing linguistic choices in Nollywood cinema by comparing and contrasting them to linguistic practices in the everyday, in literary texts, and in art films in West Africa, Adejunmobi offers a medially differentiated understanding of the negotiation of multilingualisms in traditions that don't rely on monolingualism. Yet as she shows, the result is not a free-for-all linguistic multiplicity, but follows its own generic, aesthetic, and economic logic in configuring languages.

In many of these studies on artistic mobilizations of multilingualism, translation is referenced at least in passing. The question of the relationship between translation and multilingualism, however, remains open, and in part depends on the definition of both structures separately and together. Traditionally, translation has been understood as "the substitution of one language for another" while multilingualism has been seen as the "co-presence of two or more languages" as Rainier Grutman reminds us (157). Yet especially with the cultural turn in Translation Studies, that notion has been abandoned or reworked and translation has come into view as a fundamental cultural praxis that is itself generative and hybridizing, a broadened understanding that also underlies the present issue. From this vantage point, translation and multilingualism can appear to be continuous. As Reine Meylaerts, who has approached this nexus in a number of important contributions, put it, "at the heart of multilingualism, we find translation" (227). Yet as Meylaerts herself astutely observes, there are practices that are better described as non-translation, such as in her example of language policies that explicitly prohibit translation (229). Furthermore, drawing on a broad linguistic repertoire while speaking or writing (i.e. being "bilingual" or "multilingual") does not necessarily involve acts of translation any more or any less than doing so in "one language." In some contexts, overemphasis on translation over multilingualism might even be politically and aesthetically troubling as it may deny competence to some speakers or writers (see Yildiz, "Response"). In literary multilingualism studies, Brian Lennon has most forcefully argued for viewing translation as potentially opposed to multilingualism. As he points out, translation carries the risk of erasing and displacing any "strong" textual multilingualism by

preventing the material encounter with other languages. More recent scholarship, such as Ellen Jones's study of translational multilingualism and multilingual translation in the Americas, aims to negotiate these positions. Likewise, the essays in the present special focus section offer their own multifaceted approach to the interplay of translation and multilingualism, drawing sometimes more on Translation Studies and other times more on Literary Multilingualism Studies.

The special focus section begins with the issue of translating multilingualism in its most concrete form: How do you transpose a multilingual literary text into "another" language? For a long time, multilingual originals were simply translated as if they were monolingual (Grutman). There was little to no attempt to retain the valence of the original multilingualism in the new text, underscoring how much multilingualism has been subject to monolingualizing dynamics in translation practices. Amy Olen's essay takes up translating literary multilingualism as both a conceptual and a practical challenge through the case of her own rendition of Peruvian writer Edgardo Rivera Martínez's Andean-set stories. To this end, she analyzes the multilingual layers of Rivera Martínez's texts with close attention especially to the presence and literary negotiation of Quechua in this non-Indigenous author's work, along with his incorporation of medieval and early Modern French and Italian source texts. In illuminating close readings, she shows the very different modes of presence and narrative function of these languages, down to their typographical treatment on the page. Olen's careful contextualization particularly highlights the colonial pressures to which the Indigenous languages that are gathered under the name Quechua have been subjected as well as the resilient quotidian manner in which they have persisted. Rivera Martínez, she shows, registers this resilience as translationally informed multilingual literary form. Olen translates this nuanced understanding into her own translational practice as she discusses the strategies she developed in rendering this complex layering in English. As becomes clear, the challenges of translation are multiplied when facing a text that differentially incorporates multiple languages and codes that function as carriers of particular histories and memories (see also Brandt and Schyns). Olen's essay ultimately underscores the importance of understanding the distinct functions of literary multilingualism(s) for the practice of a non-monolingualizing translation.

While the next two contributions take us from the Andes to Europe, it is to projects that foreground European multilingualisms centering contemporary refugee and immigrant experiences. Moreover, both of these contributions combine textual and visual elements, thus examining transmedial translations of multilingualism. In her essay, Kristin Dickinson introduces a photography collection that renders the multilingualism of the immigrant and refugee neighborhoods of the post-industrial West German city of Dortmund in visual form. Arranged in a print book, Iranian-German photographer Peyman Azheri's *Heimat*

132 consists of a series of photographs of local street scenes, on the one hand, and of individual candid portraits of the residents, on the other. Short narratives and quotes from those depicted accompany the images. The title already features the key word that the entire collection takes on: *Heimat*. Meaning home or homeland in German, the assertion of its untranslatability accompanies almost all invocations of this highly politicized term and is thus central to its meaning. This claim to untranslatability serves to cement the vision of "home" as based on an unchangeable, singular origin, a deep-seated rootedness, and an ineffable affective charge. *Heimat*, in other words, is meant to be singularly monolingual. As Dickinson shows, Azhari's photographs break with this monolingualism not just by listing languages spoken by the people from 132 nationalities who live in northern Dortmund—hence the title—but by visually rendering *Heimat* as thoroughly multilingual. In close readings of photographs featuring shop windows, underpasses, and advertisements, children excitedly posing for the camera or residents casually inhabiting the space, Dickinson retraces this transmedial translation. This translation of multilingualism into the visual includes the textual elements within the photographs, but more significantly extends to formal features such as framing or the visual mobilization of transparency and opacity. In the process, Dickinson delineates a productive approach for reading multilingualisms across media.

The transposition of multilingualism into other media is also at the forefront of Jamie Trnka's essay, underscoring the specific affinity of multimedial and multimodal forms and multilingualism. Where Azheri's photography collection zooms in on a German location inhabited by communities who often arrived as refugees or exiles, Trnka's contribution unpacks a multimedial, multi-authored project seeking to reconceptualize Europe from a refugee-centric perspective. EU pronouncements have long declared multilingualism as the essence of European identity, in this manner seemingly leaving behind the insistence on monolingualism at the national level. Yet as Susan Gal had already shown two decades ago, this multilingualism was principally oriented towards standard varieties of majority and minority languages conceived as territorially anchored in the continent, and more specifically, in the member nations. By contrast, the Brussels-based artistic and civic project *Letters to Europe*, which Trnka highlights, seeks to expand this vision by situating the languages of refugee and exile writers in its very core, in formally experimental ways. Part of the distinctive and experimental dimension of this project lies in its multi-genre, multi-authored, and multimedial format: consisting of both a one-time performance and a bound publication that incorporates textual elements and visual illustration, it is itself an unruly object to examine. The textual elements, for instance, consist of excerpts from "letters" written by the large group of authors who were invited to contribute on any topic, as long as it was addressed "to Europe." They were also free to choose the language(s) of their letters. These

multilingual and multiscript excerpts were then arranged by the editors based on principles of collage. As Trnka's patient guidance through the layers of meaning of genres, media, and concepts at work in the project underscores, it takes many resources to reframe a vision of multilingualism in Europe from an additive, sanctioned one to an expansive, inclusive, and creatively open one. The close attention to form, understood in a broadened multimedial and multimodal framework encompassing the textual, visual, and performative, is key in this endeavor.

Where the emphasis in the previous contributions is on multilingualism made visible in translation, both in texts and in images, the next essay in the special focus section takes us to a radically different configuration of translation and multilingualism, in which the latter appears "excluded." Marie-Christine Boucher examines three literary texts that seem to present a paradox. Each of the contemporary novels she discusses—by Katerina Poladjan, Olga Grjasnowa, and Nino Haratischwili—are clearly set in multilingual lifeworlds and centrally involve exchanges in and across languages. Yet each novel is entirely written in German, thus translating an insistently conjured multilingualism into textual monolingualism. Boucher suggests that a textually oriented definition of multilingualism, which principally looks for the presence of words or phrases from other languages, may not find much to work with in these books. To capture what many of these monolingual texts set in multilingual lifeworlds are doing, she proposes, we need to approach them through the lens of "pseudotranslation." A concept from translation studies that has also been used productively by other literary scholars (see Rath; Toremans and Vanacker), pseudotranslation refers to a text's self-presentation as taking place, in part or in full, in a language other than the one actually in use. We are reading German, but we are meant to understand that the events or conversations are taking place in Armenian as in Poladjan's novel, or in (potentially) Georgian as in Haratischwili. Even as this mode is indeed widespread—Olen's essay also features such examples with regard to Spanish and Quechua—Boucher shows that it can be put to very different literary uses. From marking the gap left by an irrecuperable mother tongue in Poladjan to a deliberate indifference towards languages as identity markers in Grjasnowa, pseudotranslation can be a nuanced analytical tool rather than just a descriptor, Boucher demonstrates.

If Boucher traces how pseudotranslations are able to animate monolingual texts, the final contribution to this section turns to translation as actively producing—rather than erasing or transposing—multilingual literary texts. Melissa Tanti's essay brings into focus two North American writers who mobilize translational poetics in their creation of multilingualism, namely Québécoise poet Erín Moure and US author Kathy Acker. For both of these authors, translation is generative, while the particular mode of translation they enact is indebted to and

furthers a feminist vision of solidarity. Moure's translation of Galician poet Chus Pato thus results in a new form in which she (also) "translates" the associations the Galician words, sounds, and meanings provoke for her into an entirely new, subjective version. Galician and a number of other languages also appear more explicitly in Moure's most multilingual work, the genre-defying 2012 publication *The Unmemntionable,* underscoring the materiality of languages as poetic resource in identifying traumatic absences. Such materiality is also mobilized in Kathy Acker's "Persian Poems," which create multiscript texts. Through her readings, Tanti shows such translationally produced multilingualism as aesthetic and critical strategy aimed at unmooring certainties and provoking listening, rather than as asserting belonging.

Tanti's essay is a reminder of women's experimental writing as a particular site and practice of multilingualism and translation. While she focuses on North Americans and especially Canadians, works in this tradition in the European context include Christine Brooke-Rose's multilingual tour-de-force *Between,* Ingeborg Bachmann's story "Simultan," and much of the early work of German-Japanese writer Yoko Tawada (see Brandt). Their works involve female translators and interpreters as points of departure for multilingually questioning both gender and stable subjectivity and in the process occasion questions about gendered implication in national frameworks, histories, and traumas. Such writings thus do not principally serve the assertion of cultural identity and belonging, as is so often assumed for multilingual works, but rather seek openings to a differently gendered or, in the case of Tawada, non-binary, non-gendered horizon. Depending on the particular formal coordinates at work, translating multilingualism thus can be a form of opening up to non-belonging just as much as it can be a form of asserting belonging.

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