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MULTILINGUALISM AND TRANSLATION

ALTHOUGH BOTH ARE WIDESPREAD intercultural phenomena, multilingualism and translation are not usually considered in connection with each other. Whereas multilingualism evokes the co-presence of two or more languages (in a given society, text or individual), translation involves a substitution of one language for another. The translating code not so much supplements as replaces the translated code, and translations are rarely meant to be read side by side with the original texts (except, perhaps, in a classroom setting). Surely, Friedrich Schleiermacher's ideal reader, 'who is familiar with the foreign language' yet to whom 'that language always remains foreign' (quoted in Lefevere 1992: 152), remains the exception, not the rule. Far from having its origin in 'a certain ability for intercourse with foreign languages . . . among the educated part of the population' (Lefevere 1992: 152), translation is today more commonly held to cater to the monolingual reader by disclosing unknown literatures to her, thus effectively restricting bilingual competence to the translators themselves.

There is another sense in which the concept can prove useful to translation studies. In literary poetics, 'multilingualism' stands for the use of two or more languages within the same text. Those languages are not always 'foreign', however. The medieval habit of interspersing vernacular poetry with Latin phrases and the 'code switching' between Spanish and English in recent Chicano writing both attest to a blurring of linguistic boundaries. Medieval Latin, though strictly speaking nobody's mother tongue, was more than a dead or foreign language (Zumthor 1963: 82-111; Tavani 1969: 55-73; Forster 1970: 10-11; Lange 1973). Something similar occurs in bilingual texts by Mexican-American authors, who paradoxically use English, the language of the dominant culture, to assert their difference (Keller 1984; Flores 1987; Arteaga 1994).

1. Poetics and/or politics

The extent to which languages have been put to use in literature varies greatly. While the presence of a single loanword can theoretically be considered as a minimal requirement for a text to be identified as multilingual, there seems to be no objective limit. Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy (1760), for instance, contains several pages of Latin digressions. His contemporary Denis Diderot incorporated entire, untranslated, paragraphs of English, Spanish, and Italian, as well as of Latin, in his bawdy Bijoux indiscrets (1747), thus echoing François Rabelais' Pantagruel

(1532), whose glossolalic character Panurge rambled on in no less than thirteen tongues, some of them entirely artificial.

Regarding these texts, a few things can be immediately pointed out. First of all, the study of textual multilingualism does not involve a close examination of the writer's actual language skills, pace statements to the effect that '[t]he author's own limitations naturally constrain the language of the narrator and that of the characters most.' (Traugott 1981: 121) Writers have been known to consult either their entourage or a nearby library (or both), and philologists such as J.R.R. Tolkien, who devised an ingenious linguistic system for The Lord of the Rings (1954-5), tend to be rare. Even if a biographical link can be shown to exist, it is questionable whether it enhances our understanding. Does Charlotte Brontë's stay in Brussels, for instance, really explain the role of Adèle's French in Jane Eyre (1847)? Secondly, writing that makes use of more than one language does not necessarily presuppose a polyglot public, though its deciphering more often than not requires some imagination (compare Forster 1970: 12-13 to Baetens Beardsmore 1978: 93 and Sternberg 1981: 226). While it no doubt adds to the pleasure, one need not know Russian to enjoy Anthony Burgess' A Clockwork Orange (1962) or Latin for Umberto Eco's The Name of the Rose [Il nome della rosa] (1980). Thirdly, from the vantage point of textual analysis, it matters relatively little whether dialects, slang, classical, national or indeed artificial languages make up the multilingual sequences. The (rhetorical, stylistic,...) impact of linguistic varieties depends as much on the ways in which they are visually embedded in the overall text as on the values attached to them in extra-textual (i.e. real) society. Self-reflexivity being one of the hallmarks of (modern) literature, multilingualism is by no means limited to the reported speech of the characters, but appears in the narrative as well as in parts of a text that escape narratorial control: prefaces, titles and epigraphs of individual chapters, explanatory footnotes and glossaries.

Faced with such an array of possibilities, it makes little sense to come up with an all-encompassing typology. Just as language use is tied up with language attitude, literary multilingualism is subject to a number of factors that a purely formal description cannot account for. When reviewing Waverley for the Edinburgh Review, in 1814, Francis Jeffrey complained that half of the novel was composed 'in a dialect unintelligible to four-fifths of the reading population of the country' (Scott 1985: 605). Such critical reactions should not be taken at face-value, but as indicators of generic constraints and aesthetic norms. Among the latter, the romantic discovery and subsequent fetishizing of 'national mother tongues' affected the ways in which 'foreign' languages were viewed, learned, and hence used within the realm of literature. It could even be argued that the degree of multilingualism in a given text is commensurate with the status of the literature that it belongs to: a young, (post)colonial literature or that of an oppressed minority would show more openness

than the firmly established canons of the imperial powers. In texts belonging to this last category, the languages presumably spoken by foreign characters are either sampled to provide some comic relief or, worse, dismissed 'as an irrelevant, if not distracting, representational factor' (Sternberg 1981: 224; see Goetsch 1987: 45). Thus Shakespeare's Caliban, Crusoe's Friday and Voltaire's Ingénu all speak their master's language. Similarly, the Louisiana Creoles depicted in Kate Chopin's The Awakening (1899) echo Yankee assimilationist politics, their French accent being 'only discernible through its un-English emphasis and a certain carefulness and deliberation' (1986: 106).

There is no need for linguistic otherness to become invisible, however. Despite romanticism and national unification, Italian writers have remained notoriously aware of language differences, freely juxtaposing regional and popular varieties of Italian as well as foreign tongues in their poetry, fiction, and drama. Theirs is a mixed linguistic heritage, for both political and cultural reasons: multilingualism has been 'endemic' (Paccagnella 1983: 109) in Italy's literary history since the sixteenth century if not since Dante. Authors like Ruzzante and Teofilo Folengo — the father of so-called 'macaronic' verse — handed down a tradition of language blending that has yet to vanish from the literary scene (Segre 1979; Folena 1983). Minority writers also resort to multilingualism in order to convey the linguistic heterogeneity of their speech communities. But in addition to creating a powerful reality effect, the use of French by Flemish, Spanish by Catalan and English by French-Canadian authors, for instance, underlines their dependence on the culture(s) that surround them. Thus, in the nineteenth century, Flemish naturalist Cyriel Buysse and Quebec romantic novelist Philippe Aubert de Gaspé did more than borrow French or English linguistic items; they established an intertextual dialogue between Flemish and French, *Québécois* and British cultural patterns (Grutman 1996), respectively. In a study of recent Quebec writing, Sherry Simon calls such incorporating of texts and intertexts from other languages a 'poetics of translation', which, she argues, 'unfolds in the borderlands where creation and transfer, originality and imitation, authority and submission merge' (1994: 20) by turning the relationship with 'foreign' cultures into a positive connection.

2. Multilingualism translated

Translational strategies indeed enjoy a privileged status in multilingual texts, akin to the magic of fairy tales (where animals speak) and the technology of science fiction novels (Goetsch 1987: 62-63). While confronting readers with the peculiarities of foreign speech, added translations create a buffer zone, as it were, between the 'other' language and the one shared with the writer. They can be found in footnotes, but are more often tagged on to the quote itself. Consider the solution found by Sir

Walter Scott in Waverley (1814). When requested to give his opinion on the outcome of the Jacobite uprising, the pedantic Baron of Bradwardine calls upon the authority of a Roman historian: 'Why, you know, Tacitus saith "*In rebus bellicis maxime dominatur Fortuna*", which is equiponderate with our own vernacular adage, "Luck can maist in the mellee".' (Scott 1985: 335) We are free to either skip or stop to read the Latin sentence. By the same token, a translation does not require bilingual competence but maintains a double standard, clearly to the advantage of the monolingual reader. It has been argued accordingly that similar 'cushioning' of foreign words and expressions reduces them to mere exotic signs without questioning the power relations between representing and represented codes. Especially in the context of post-colonial writing published in the language of the former colonizers, 'the forceful proximity of both items represents the failure to achieve cultural symbiosis' (Zabus 1990: 354). In Scott's novels, however, which are certainly not devoid of imperialist tendencies in their treatment of Scottish English and Gaelic, Latin quotes serve another purpose. The vivid portrayal of Troy's decay and fall in Virgil's Aeneid proves to be an essential intertext for Bradwardine's reading of the Scottish defeat at Culloden. 'To be sure,' he confides to Edward Waverley, 'we may say with Virgilius Maro, *Fuimus Troes* [We are Trojans no longer] and there's the end of an auld sang.' (Scott 1985: 443) It thus appears that accompanying translations, though elucidating the referential meaning of an utterance, cannot entirely do justice to its cultural connotations.

Some twentieth-century writing was to parody, or abandon altogether, this practice of decanting content from one language to another. Modernist poets (T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound) and novelists (James Joyce) allowed the major European languages to playfully interact with each other, while their avant-garde colleagues went as far as to write linguistically hybrid poems (Forster 1970: 74-96). Most, if not all, of these experiments bespeak a growing consciousness of language as a material in and of itself, not merely a mould for thoughts or a transparent means of literary representation. D.H. Lawrence's Women in Love (1921) is a case in point. When Ursula Brangwen calls the dominant behavior of a male cat 'a lust for bullying a real *Wille zur Macht* so base, so petty,' Rupert Birkin observes:

> I agree that the *Wille zur Macht* is a base and petty thing. But with the Mino, it is the desire to bring this female cat into a pure stable equilibrium, a transcendent and abiding *rapport* with the single male. Whereas without him, as you see, she is a mere stray, a fluffy sporadic bit of chaos. It is a *volonté de pouvoir*, if you like, a will to ability, taking *pouvoir* as a verb.
>
> (Lawrence 1960: 167)

By joining translations that have such a different ring in English yet are supposed to mean the same in German and in French (*la volonté de pouvoir* being the equivalent of Nietzsche's *Wille zur Macht*), Birkin's comment becomes truly metalinguistic in nature. While the harsh German sounds suggest violence, the French language confirms its penchant for rhetorical niceties, as Ursula stresses in her reply: 'Sophistries!'.

What happens to multilingualism in translation? According to Henry Schogt, who compared Western translations of the Russian classics, 'as a rule only the main language of the text is replaced, the foreign elements remaining unchanged.' (1988: 114) Antoine Berman (1985), on the other hand, claims that most translators will rather reduce the interlingual tension found in the original. An additional complication arises when the target language actually is the embedded foreign language of the source text. In his French version of Thomas Mann's The Magic Mountain [Der Zauberberg] (1925), a famous example of textual multilingualism, Maurice Betz successfully maintained the distinction between the narrator's, Hans Castorp's and Madame Chauchat's voices, in spite of the fact that the latter two already spoke French in the German text (Berman 1985: 79-80). Such feats are rare. Usually, multilingual texts undergo the fate of Lawrence's novel, as becomes clear from a cursory look at the French rendering of the quoted passage:

> Je suis d'accord que la volonté de puissance est quelque chose de vil et de mesquin. Mais avec Minou, c'est le désir d'amener cette femelle à un équilibre stable et parfait, à un rapport transcendant et durable avec le mâle célibataire. Tandis que sans lui, comme vous voyez, elle est un simple fragment égaré, une parcelle ébouriffée et sporadique du chaos. C'est une volonté de pouvoir, si vous voulez, en prenant «*pouvoir*» pour un verbe.
>
> (Lawrence 1974: 210)

All traces of foreignness have been conveniently erased. Gone is Nietzsche's German, and with it, the philosophical gist of the conversation. Moreover, the stylistic opposition between French and English is neutralized, were it not for a footnote mentioning that the second '*pouvoir*' figured in French in the original (but so did '*rapport*' and the earlier '*volonté de pouvoir*'). Finally, one easily sees why in instances where the use of another language has political overtones, as in Quebec, its concealment in translation participates in what Kathy Mezei calls a 'subtle subversion' (1988: 13) of the source-culture by downplaying the symbolic value of the original multilingualism.

Further reading

Alekséev 1975; Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989; Bassnett 1985; Elwert 1960; Gauvin and Grutman 1996; Giese 1961; Grutman 1990, 1993; Horn 1981; Klein-Lataud and Whitfield 1996; Kürtösi 1993; Lyons 1980; March 1984; Pöckl 1981; Reyes 1991; Sarkonak and Hodgson 1993.

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