

*Multilingual negotiations: the place and significance of translation in
multilingual poetry*

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Abstract: Multilingual poetry, which weaves together multiple languages, necessarily straddles multiple cultural contexts. This raises the question of how poets who write multilingually negotiate and deploy their cultural knowledges, who they write for, and how their audiences receive them. Using Suresh Canagarajah's Negotiation Model to examine poets' linguistic choices, including whether and when to provide translations, and Mendieta-Lombardo and Cintron's adaptation of the Myers-Scotton Markedness Model to consider audience and context, this paper will examine examples of contemporary bilingual and multilingual poetry published in Australia and Canada to identify the many conversations and negotiations that must take place between language-cultures as well as between multilingual poets and audiences for these poems to 'work'.

Keywords: multilingual poetry, code-mixing, markedness

Multilingual poetry – that is, poetry that weaves together multiple languages such that each language is integral to the overall effect of the poem – necessarily straddles multiple cultural contexts. Although the mixing of languages in poetry is not in itself new (Forster, 1970), and although writers have always had complex relationships with the languages in which they write, there is at present an arguably more actively political element to code-mixing in poetry and to literary language mixing in general.

Historically, bilingualism or multilingualism has been the province of either the highly educated or the newly arrived, presumably impoverished and almost certainly disadvantaged, migrant or refugee, and literary language mixing has traditionally been the preserve of the former. But as Doris Sommer argues, in the coexistence of languages lies much opportunity, regardless of who happens to be wielding said languages (Sommer, 2004).

While the internet has not heralded the death of the book or the publishing industry after all, it has nonetheless had a profound impact on the writing, dissemination and growing popularity of poetry. Multilingual poetry, always a somewhat niche occupation because of its code-mixing, does particularly well in the automatically international and accessible environment of

the internet. The growing interest in questions of identity and belonging amongst minoritised communities, migrant and refugee populations, and those investigating their ancestry also provides fertile ground for the development of new multilingual writing that runs the gamut of explicitly political verse, as in Lorna Dee Cervantes's work (Cervantes, 2005; Cervantes, 1981) and more experimental but personal writing such as that of Antoine Cassar (Cassar, 2008; Cassar, 2009).

This proliferation of multilingual verse raises the question of how poets who write multilingually negotiate and deploy their cultural knowledges in this mixed context, who they write for, and how their audiences – those they write 'for' as well as those they do not – receive them. The question of translation – whether, when and to what to degree materials such as glossaries, transliterations, full translations, and discursive explanations are provided – is one that can colour the conversations had both about the poetry and between the poet and audience.

Part I

In the first part of this paper, I will draw on and discuss Suresh Canagarajah's Negotiation Model and Mendieta-Lombardo and Cintron's adaptation of the Myers-Scotton Markedness Model to first establish multilingual poets' choices as agentive, deliberate and rational. I will then examine examples of contemporary bilingual and multilingual poetry published in Australia and Canada to identify the many conversations and negotiations that must take place between language-cultures as well as between multilingual poets and audiences for these poems to 'work'. In doing this, I hope to demonstrate that multilingual poetry grows out of a complex and sophisticated negotiation of context and culture and addresses multiple audiences in multiple ways. My aim, ultimately, is to equip readers to understand these poems not simply literally but in terms of the many complex conversations and negotiations that occur within them.

A. Suresh Canagarajah argues that much of the discourse around multilingual writing is hampered by 'monolingualist assumptions' that '[prevent] us from fully understanding the resources multilinguals bring to their texts' (Canagarajah, 2006). He says that, in monolingual contexts, particularly Anglophone ones, there is a tendency to see languages other than English as impediments to the acquisition and use of English, instead of parallel and equal cultural capital upon which the multilingual writer can (and should!) draw in their writing. This tendency causes monolingual readers to assume writerly idiosyncrasies as necessarily a product of the (assumed) 'native' language rather than evidence of craft and choice. The writer is even presumed to be unable to exert significant influence on English such that their writing necessarily always reflects the ingrained patterns of their 'real' language in ways that the writer cannot resist. This, he argues, is a mistake, and a particularly grave one because, by not understanding the writer as agentive relative to their context, we miss out on important aspects of the communication taking place between writer and reader.

Leonard Forster, in his lectures on multilingualism in literature, says:

Since the Romantics we have all been brought up to believe that each language has its mystery and its soul, and that these are very sacred things...I want to make the point that, if we put sentiment aside, there are very many people and very many situations for which different

languages are simply tools appropriate to certain definite purposes, analogous to the different stylistic levels within any one language. (Forster, 1970, p. 7)

Forster is not arguing that there is no emotional component or factor in the linguistic choices made by writers, but rather, like Canagarajah, that the multilingual writer makes informed, intentional decisions when they put pen to paper. This understanding of the writer as agentive becomes even more crucial when the text itself is multilingual. The degree and type of linguistic mixing must be considered as existing in conversation with a context that may not be our default Anglophone one. Indeed, the text itself can be a clue as to who the intended audience really is.

Carol Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model, although developed to study different registers within languages (Myers-Scotton, 1998), can also be adapted to the examination of multilingual writing. Briefly, Myers-Scotton posits that some linguistic registers are 'unmarked' or expected and some 'marked' or unexpected in any given context. Switching from English to German in a monolingual Anglophone context, for instance would be a marked choice, but so too would a switch from formal English to slang.

Except, of course, when it wouldn't. If the context itself becomes bilingual or the expectation of formality is dropped, then neither of the above switches would be marked. So, we can argue that the context determines the markedness of a choice and that the multilingual writer, by choosing when and how to switch between their languages, is in constant conversation with their context.

Eva Mendieta-Lombardo and Zaida A. Cintron (1995) argue that markedness/unmarkedness is not simply something to be determined based on context but is a tool at the multilingual writer's disposal. In deciding which language to use at precisely which moment in a poem (their models are Spanish/English bilingual poems), the writer enters into a complex relationship with their audience. Not only that, the 'audience' is not singular but divided *by the writer* into multiple in-groups and out-groups. Their model 'accounts for the speakers' sociopsychological motivations when they engage in Code Switching' (Mendieta-Lombardo & Cintron, 1995, p. 566) arguing that their use of code-switching can be either a marked or unmarked choice, depending on the type of code-switching or mixing they employ. For instance, from their examples, a poem in which English is the primary or 'carrier' language and that employs highly culturally loaded words from another language is arguably addressing speakers of that language more so than speakers of English or more general speakers of the other language.

Specialised speakers of the other language become the 'in-group' and non-speakers are pushed out of the poem after a certain point. On the other hand, if the 'other' language uses words that are fairly familiar outside the language – a lot of food words would fit this category, but so would exclamations or phrases popularised in mainstream media – then they can be said to be addressing a broader audience, and even perhaps excluding their more specialised audience. The non-speaker out-group created in the first example now becomes part of the in-group and, depending on the type and variety of language used, the earlier in-group may even be pushed out or have it signalled to them that they are not really the target audience for this poem.

Translation is often left by the wayside in these discussions, but it is not insignificant to consider that the translatability of the text and the poet's decision to provide translations in the first place also has a direct impact on who their work can reach and who they understand to be their intended audience. For example, Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* was one of the first modern,

literary, English-language accounts of life in a young Pakistan written by a Pakistani woman and remains much beloved in Pakistan as a result. However, in a scene in one of the early chapters of the book during which Suleri and her friends go out for a snack, Suleri pauses to describe what a *gol guppa* is (Suleri, 1989, p. 39) It is a brief interlude, but its presence immediately makes it clear that Suleri's assumed audience is not Pakistani at all. This is not wholly surprising if one considers that she was already teaching at Yale University when the book was published and, although it was distributed in Pakistan, its initial publication was in the United States.

In contrast, Pakistani author Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* (2000) – also published internationally, first in the UK and then in the US – is littered with transliterated Urdu phrases with no translation, though there are contextual clues aplenty. In choosing not to explain herself, Shamsie signals that her audience is one who can either already understand her or is astute enough to figure out what she is saying from the context. (This also suggests a generational shift in attitude towards the English language in Pakistan, but further discussion of this is beyond the scope of this paper.)

This is not to suggest that translation in itself is not useful or necessary. As Edith Grossman says, '[t]ranslation is crucial to our sense of ourselves as serious readers' who are aware that there is knowledge and art to be found in languages beyond our immediate capacities (Grossman, 2010). Translation provides readers with a bridge into other languages and new ways of thinking about the world and is invaluable as such. However, Álvarez and Vidal remind us that it is not a neutral endeavour – the question of what gets translated into which language is political and bound up in questions of power as well as 'the strategies used by this power in order to represent the other culture' (Álvarez & Vidal, 1996). Although Álvarez and Vidal were speaking in the context of more traditional translation, their argument that translation is 'culture bound' and 'deeply inscribed with the politics, the considerations, the positions and the strategies of power' (Álvarez & Vidal, 1996) is just as relevant to multilingual poets as to translators, but in different ways. While translators must negotiate the movement between one language and another, multilingual poets must inhabit both at once.

The 19th Century saw the rise of the Western European belief that an individual could only belong to one nation and that each nation had to be represented by one language (Kamusella, 2009). This belief is foundational to the now global conflation of language and national identity that makes multilingual writers something of an anomaly, despite the fact that many populations remain actively multilingual in their daily lives. It is also largely responsible for the inherently political space that multilingual writers must inhabit by dint of using their languages in tandem rather than separating them (Sommer, 2004). As Tariq Rahman shows, speaking multiple languages does not depoliticise them, even if the speakers' relationships with these languages is intimate (Rahman, 2002). The agentic multilingual writer (Canagarajah, 2006) then, is aware of what the act of translation does both for and to their work and it may make artistic, aesthetic, emotional or even ethical sense to pull up the drawbridge and *not* translate on occasion.

Part II

In the second part of this article, I will examine not only the choices the poets make within their poems, but also the editorial choices made in terms of the provision of translations and

transliterations with each poem, as well as the conversation each publication has with their poets and their audience regarding these choices.

The poems I have chosen to examine closely in this section come from two multilingual publications: *The Polyglot* published in Canada, and *The Australian Multilingual Writing Project* (AMWP), which is published in Australia. Both publications are quite young and showcase a growing stable of writers who mix their languages. *The Polyglot* is the older publication and publishes mainly Canadian writers in themed issues which are sold online as PDFs via its website. The AMWP publishes exclusively Australian writers and its issues are available free to read online. The AMWP also provides downloadable audio files of the poets reading their work aloud.

Both publications have an open policy towards translations and transliterations, that is, the editors ask that translations be provided during the editorial process, but only publish additional information such as a glossary, transliteration, explanations or full translations when the writer requests it. This is because the aim of both publications is to present the relationship multilingual writers have with their languages and with their audiences in as authentic a manner as possible. To date, and to the best of my knowledge, these are the only two multilingual journals of creative writing in the world at present that are based in Anglophone countries and publish work that showcases code-mixing specifically as a means of resisting a monolingualist literary paradigm.

The first poem I will consider is 'Intersections at the Palais Royal' by Elena Siemens from the first issue of *The Polyglot* (2017). The poem begins:

May 2016. Moscow's behind, now in Paris,
my frequent point de transfert
The sky's overcast, dark heavy clouds
Les Parisiens wear black

A set of pedestrian crossings at the Palais Royal
Like a stage for a precarious everyday drama
Or maybe instead a vaudeville, or a political farce
with marionettes marching in their gilded uniforms,
Or a Cirque du Soleil performance?

This part of the poem is written in a combination of English and French with English being the carrier language, but Siemens is careful to use cognates so that the use of French poses no real impediment to the monolingual Anglophone reader. A monolingual French reader, on the other hand, would struggle to make sense of more than a few words. It would be easy therefore to dismiss this poem as pseudo-multilingual because the use of French is almost unremarkable or to assume that the poet was using the veneer of multilingualism to add flavour to an otherwise monolingual piece of verse. The audience for this poem is quite comfortably monolingual, after all.

However, I argue that this poet is having two different conversations with two different audiences in this poem. The poem is easy enough to read in English alone, but from the point of view of a bilingual French-English reader, it presents a few difficulties. The use of cognates, which may well have been deployed for the sake of inclusivity, presents a fairly fraught question to the bilingual reader/speaker: when one has two or more pronunciations for a word that are all contextually correct, blurring the context as Siemens does makes the decision

regarding which to use difficult. Reading this poem out loud – or even in my head – is frustrating because I am not actually sure how to pronounce ‘marionette’, ‘point’ and even ‘Cirque du Soleil’; all can be said comfortably in *either* English or French, but they are seldom presented to the reader simultaneously in *both*. This pushes the reader into a difficult, although not unfamiliar, space from which the poem’s description of repeated and sometimes disorienting geographical movement is exemplified in the somewhat disorienting shift between languages.

Still, this poem is gentle with its Anglophone readers; when Siemens shifts into Russian in the very last stanza, rendered in Cyrillic, she is careful to translate both instances in the poem itself. With

In Russian, a crossing/intersection is переход

and the Pasternak quote with which she ends the poem

"Жизнь прожить не поле перейти" –
"To live life is not to cross a field"

the Anglophone reader is only momentarily baffled by the unfamiliar alphabet and reassured that the poem is still ‘for’ them. At the same time, by providing an embedded translation, Siemens is also suggesting that the poem is not addressing Russian-speakers at all. Overall, the impression created is that of these languages existing in the same space at the same time for the writer – a kind of overlapping consciousness that is constantly aware of multiple realities at once.

Rashida Murphy’s ‘Sab Ki Diwali’, from Issue 1 of the *Australian Multilingual Writing Project* (Murphy, 2018), is similarly gentle with the reader. The poem is in English and Romanised Hindustani – a combined form of Urdu and Hindi from which both languages originate – and, like Siemens’s work above, exemplifies a fluid, simultaneous kind of bilingualism, but one that is still fraught; Murphy is a Muslim woman writing a poem about a Hindu festival in her country of origin and this is integral to understanding her linguistic and stylistic choices in this poem. Although the title of the poem is in Hindustani, the use of Roman script rather than either Devanagari (Hindi) or Nastaliq (Urdu) suggests not just an openness to being read by English speakers but also both Hindi and Urdu readers, as these languages render the same words in scripts that are mutually unintelligible. That the title translates to ‘everyone’s Diwali’ further communicates that Murphy is calling upon a shared cultural identity that transcends religious differences. However, Murphy also provides not only a glossary but also a brief note explaining the significance of Diwali so, clearly, she is also writing for an English-speaking audience, and presumably non-Indian one.

The poem itself reads like the story of a family growing from festival to festival. Murphy writes:

My nephew was born during Diwali
every dhamaka
of every phataka
rumbled through his body
like an earthquake,
and he couldn’t sleep

Like Siemens, Murphy moves back and forth between languages mid-sentence, code-switching as multilingual speakers are wont to do when the situation allows (Gardner-Chloros, 2009). Unlike Siemens, she cannot use cognates, but the brevity of her shifts and the use of the Roman alphabet both act to smooth the transition.

As I noted earlier, Hindustani is both the precursor to and the combination of Hindi and Urdu. The main difference between the latter two is that, in their more formal registers, Hindi borrows from Sanskrit and Urdu from Persian, thus ending their mutual intelligibility, and that vernacular Urdu pronunciation leans more towards Persian (the use of the kh or /x/ sound is an example of this). This means that words such as 'phataka' can become shibboleths. The meaning of the word is clear enough across the languages, but the spelling, suggesting the pronunciation 'fa-ta-ka', marks it as more Hindi than Urdu (where the pronunciation would be 'pa-ta-kha'). This is a miniscule difference, but when the languages in question have a fraught political history, it is telling. However, Murphy complicates this reading in the next stanza:

Years later, another Diwali
another birth
At dawn my mother rose from namaz
to hear my daughter's first cry
What shall we name her, she asked
meri jaano jigar, meri baade sabah?

If the glossary and Romanised Hindustani are all one has to go on, this is simply more code-mixing for aesthetic effect. However, 'namaz' is a specifically Urdu and Muslim term for prayer and the phrase that closes the stanza is poetic Persianised Urdu, both of which serve to identify the speaker and the grandmother firmly as Muslim. The poem confirms this, continuing:

Before our children interrupted Diwali
our mother bought us payals and kangans
and toe-rings
in chaandi
to appease a goddess
she didn't believe in

Where a Hindu writer saying that Diwali is for everyone may read as patronising or even glib given the tensions between Hindus and Muslims in India, a non-Hindu claiming Diwali in this nostalgic way points to a more genuinely communal moment in time. This is further underscored by the closing stanza:

Now, that girl born at Diwali dawn
wears chaandi and khadi
and names her cat Tulsi
What was it like, she asks
growing up where
everyone celebrated everything?

The memory of home and community that existed across religious divides is refreshed and revived in the final lines where the migrant child sports the trappings of her mother's culture and asks for stories of the idealised homeland. The avoidance of italics – which are often standard when rendering non-English languages, particularly when they are written in different scripts – suggests that the writer makes no distinction between her relationship with the two

languages throughout the poem, but also reads as a powerful symbol of a child embracing her heritage.

Pierrette Requier's 'Irises' (Requier, 2017), a French-English bilingual poem also from the first issue of *The Polyglot*, deploys language quite differently. The poem begins entirely in English, then switches completely into French, and then ends in English with only the briefest overlap between the languages.

Your grief—
The mauve sound
of delphinium
petals
falling
like a second
breath-beat
beneath my heart—
The dark ones
bruise purple,
the colour of
your mother's
crooked love.
And Oh, your fetish—
How I wish
the Bad Boy
had blossomed,
au lieu de se baigner
dans le bénitier
du p'it gars chéri
Là où nous avions puisé
à l'eau vive
de nos corps
Où nous avions bu
à l'ivresse de
nos lèvres folles
Là où je t'ai supplié—
Va-t-en pas.
Reste.
Là où du doigt
j'ai touché
la plaie—
Oh Christ
Crucifié.
How I wish
you had stolen back
your fire
your blue flame.
You whose kisses
were like irises.

Although the shift into French is perhaps a little sudden, the lines remain short and the change of language does not substantially alter the music of the poem. The poem is consistent with the earlier two in its avoidance of italics, making the transition between languages seamless. However, unlike in Siemen's work above, the French used is not the kind with which English

speakers can be assumed to be familiar, nor do the words chosen map readily onto English cognates. It is also distinctly Canadian in its use of 'p'it' rather than 'petit' or even 'p'tit'. Unlike Murphy, Requier has provided no accompanying translation or glossary either. All of this means that the abrupt shift to French immediately shuts the door on anyone who does not speak the language. Arguably, it does the same to monolingual French speakers who would not be able to read the English parts of the poem either, thus suggesting that the poem is only for people who have both languages, and specifically for those whose French is Canadian.

The choice of carrier language is also significant. As a bilingual speaker of languages that share an alphabet, Requier could have chosen to begin the poem in French. That she does not suggests that English is the dominant language among her intended audience and its use becomes an invitation into the poem; however, monolingual speakers are only invited in so far – there is, at the heart of the poem, a space where they may not tread but that they must go around until they reach the English ending. Shifting languages mid-sentence is 'natural' as noted above, but because she does not shift back, the monolingual speaker is left in the lurch. This placement of the French, then, becomes a space of resistance to the dominant linguistic and cultural paradigm, a space that is to be accessed only by those with whom Requier shares both languages and who can follow her in her movement between them. Towards the end of the poem, Requier says 'Oh Christ/Crucifié'. Without 'Crucifié' immediately following it, it would be unclear which language 'Oh Christ' was in. It is a curious choice – is the writer throwing the English reader a bone or is she claiming this shared religio-cultural epithet as her own?

In her poem 'In गति' (gati/motion), Bree Alexander (Alexander, 2019) mixes Hindi into English to describe a train journey taken in India. Rather than transliterate as Murphy does, Alexander uses the Devanagari script in her poem. This has the immediate effect of alienating anyone who does not read the script. But because the bulk of the poem is in English and because it serves as a meditation on being in motion while on a journey through the world, these unfamiliar shapes that rush past the reader in the poem seem an exemplification of the unfamiliar places and things that the poet encounters momentarily through the train windows.

the gentle sway, mesmerising dance
that will go on for days
that drives me to meditate, into an altered state
brings me into a शांत place with my प्यार
for this compact space, this flow, this flux
that will see me embrace my dreamscape
release my clenched fists, my downward gaze
let it all go, a state of calm,
I surrender, let the गति take me

Notably, this poem (and the AMWP's publications in general) is accompanied by an audio recording of the poet reading the piece out loud. Immediately, this starts to invite more people into the poem – as discussed above, the use of one script or another necessarily leaves out either Urdu or Hindi speakers, but remove the visual element and the poem is rendered accessible to both. Further, Alexander provides a glossary and a transliteration of each word, which opens up the poem even more. As a student of Hindi rather than a native speaker, Alexander is demonstrating how much she has learned and understood of the language, as well as a certain warmth towards it – the words she renders in Hindi are for the most part about food offered as hospitality and care, words for herself as she learns to articulate herself in this language (lambey

log, paradisi), and words for her state of mind (sant, pyar) – but her audience, or in-group, is still clearly those who do not or cannot read or understand the language.

Paula Abul too uses a non-English script in their poem, ‘Горчивник’ (Gorchivnik/Bitternik) (Abul, 2018), but complicates matters further by rendering not just Russian in Cyrillic but Bengali as well. In their bio note published alongside the poem, Abul says that they inherited their Russian through their Bengali father who studied in the USSR at one time, and that because of this, their understanding of the two languages is intertwined. This is exemplified in their rendering of Bengali words such as ‘orna’ (scarf), ‘sorisa’ (mustard), ‘Podda’ (tributary of the Ganges) and the exclamation ‘Alhamdulillah’ (Praise God) in Cyrillic alongside and in the middle of otherwise Russian phrases. It should also be noted that the title is ‘made up’ as well – a combination of the word ‘bitter’ and the suffix ‘-nik’.

The structure of the poem is somewhat similar to Requier’s ‘Irisés’ in that it begins in English and then starts to incorporate more and more Russian towards the centre, before returning to English, however the distribution of languages is a little less rigid in Abul’s work.

it’s my duty as a daughter to flatten you
into something I can hold, tuck you into
the top of my boot and call it growth.
горе живое и ржавит тебя.

...

it seems to me now the
most adult thing, to twist in the
heat and call it pleasure.
I think if Openness had eyes they’d
be fringed in fine gold petals, холуд
dancing down her arms, gauzy орна
flapping in the sticky жар.
на его месте, у нас есть холод,
Российская верность, склизкие
слова напиханные в шершавые
чемоданы, a language that casts
mustard in sorrow’s shadow.
now I buy шориша oil labelled
‘for human consumption’ and
think of a yellow so bright it
seems lit with sin, a lurking vapour
like sirens, capable of firing twelve
rounds into your sinuses with a laugh.
I stepped in shit by the river too,
caked it deep in the grooves of
my self-conscious boots
and the crescent boats curling
towards the sky rocked as my cries
thundered across the Подда.

The poem uses bitter, pungent mustard oil as a central image. Because mustard oil is very commonly used for cooking across South Asia, and because it is particularly popular in Bengal, it is immediately a signifier of roots, origin and heritage located in that part of the world. However, this only becomes clear if the reader recognises the word ‘sorisa’ in the accompanying audio file or if they happen to both read Russian and understand Bengali, as Abul has chosen not to provide any sort of translation or transliteration of the poem. This is

significant because despite the linguistic acrobatics performed in this poem, this poem is arguably not a performance at all but a missive from a child to a father that just happens to have been printed where other people can see it.

In *Echolalias*, Daniel Heller-Roazen discusses the ‘mother tongue’ which Dante defines as that which ‘we acquire from those around us’ and which is imitated ‘without any rules’ (Heller-Roazen, 2008, p. 163). Dante of course assumes that only one language is learned in this way, but in a more fluid world, it is possible for children to pick up a mix of languages simultaneously, as Abul did, in such a way that which came ‘first’ is a moot point. Indeed, it may even be that the *mix* of languages is the mother tongue, so that what reads as code-mixing is in fact an idiolect or ecolect in itself. This is not to say that these cannot or must not be translated – they can – but that the choice to not translate becomes more understandable when the poem is then addressed to a very specialised audience.

These examples of the choices that multilingual poets make both in writing and choosing whether and how much to translate are by no means exhaustive, nor do they encompass all the different types and media of multilingual poetry in the world. My examples are necessarily bound to publications located in Anglophone countries established on land appropriated from Indigenous populations. This makes for a particular kind of cultural hostility towards multilingualism and the foreignness it is assumed to embody, and the work produced by multilingual poets exists against the backdrop of, if not in conversation with, this reality.

In *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991) Kristeva frames xenophobia as the fear of acknowledging what is foreign within all of us, arguing that the foreigner unsettles the idea of nationality and the nationalism that depends on it. Because of the association of nation with language (Kamusella, 2009), a multilingual individual is almost always perceived as ‘foreign’, particularly to a monolingual interlocutor, and is therefore likely to be treated with suspicion. The multilingual writer – particularly one who refuses complete translation – creates anxiety by holding on to their ‘foreignness’ rather than assimilating into the broader literary discourse.

As for my second point about the appropriation of Indigenous land, there is, even today, very little acknowledgment of the linguistic arm of the Indigenous genocide upon which settler nations such as Canada and Australia were built. To take the Australian example, according to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), although 250 Indigenous languages still survive in Australia today, 90% of them are considered endangered (2021). This suppression of the original linguistic diversity present on this continent is an essential part of the establishment of Australia as a largely monolingual, English-speaking nation. Danica Čerče argues that ‘white Australia is still largely incapable of surpassing the stereotypical images of Indigenous people as second-class citizens’ and ‘explicitly declares the superiority of all those who were born speaking modern European languages’ (Čerče, 2020).

But even within ‘European languages’ there is a hierarchy. Australia is constructed as primarily – if not exclusively – anglophone. Therefore, although the acceptance of multilingualism waxes and wanes in Australia, the common factor in its acceptability is that one of the languages spoken always be English, as it – and no other language – is seen as essential to Australian citizenship (Luchtenberg, 2002). This supports Hage’s assessment of ‘multiculturalism’ (implicit as it is in multilingualism as discussed earlier) as it is framed in Australia as remaining mired in white supremacy, i.e., the ‘other’ must be framed and understood in the language of the dominant group – here Anglo-Australians – in order to be afforded ‘tolerance’ (Hage,

2000). Indeed, the xenophobia directed at multilinguals living in monolingual societies, catalogued variously by Isabelle De Courtivron (2003), Mary Besemeres (2002), and Mary Zournazi (1998), among others, shows that this requirement placed on 'othered' individuals to remake themselves into acceptable citizens is not unique to Australia at all.

Multilingualism, and particularly the kind of translation-resistant code-mixing that the multilingual poetry discussed here represents, is therefore unsettling to the notion of nationality because it claims for itself the right to remain illegible if it so chooses. The discomfort that the multilingual elicits in the monolingual, is, as Kristeva says about the foreigner, the result of the monolingual being made to see their language as only one among many rather than ascendant. This anxiety around the foreign in settler societies like Australia, then, is not simply a reaction to the alien, but arguably a reaction to the appropriating self as alien to the very country it claims.

Inevitably, multilingual poetry shares some characteristics across the board: multilingual poems incorporate two or more languages meaningfully, there is usually a carrier language that is determined as much by location and assumed audience as by the writer's aesthetic, political and personal preference, and the poet chooses how accessible to make the poem and to whom based not only on the language used but on the provision of glosses, transliterations, explanatory notes, and complete translations. In doing this, they are making a statement about who they expect to have as an audience, who they allow only partial access and who they turn away from. In discussing this here, I hope to have provided a way of not only decoding the poetry itself but of understanding the larger conversations that multilingual writers are having with the world today.

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