

The Emergence of a Literary Translingual Practice in Contact Studies

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ABSTRACT

Translingualism is an emergent term, which is becoming widespread in academia, but is still in need of fuller definition and of being distinguished from other terms with which it overlaps. This article uses the term translingualism to refer to texts, which use more than one language in interactive ways, emphasising the dynamic, fluid and generative qualities in texts, which cross cultural and linguistic borders and boundaries. The methodological approach used in this article integrates literary studies with findings in linguistics and language contact, since its objective is to understand the way languages in situations of contact influence each other in texts in transformative and interactive ways, rather than merely co-existing in the same diglossic space. This approach involves a text-focused interpretive method, which I define as a literary translingual practice (LTP). It focuses on the ways linguistic elements are exchanged between or synthesised from two or more linguistic systems. It also explores the ways texts in contact create linguistic and aesthetic innovations that produce a new type of literary text, which defies homogenous language systems or dominant discourses. A tentative definition of the translingual, whose purpose is to make clear the differences to similar-sounding terms, which are often used indiscriminately, is followed by a wide range of examples of translingual writing from different genres, cultures and language combinations. Without claiming to provide definitive or final answers, this article's overall goal is to move forward an understanding of translingualism, its scope and its transformative force.

Keywords: translingualism, contact linguistics, bilingualism, interlanguage, code-switching and meshing.

Introduction: Translingualism

This article explores the prominence of the term translingualism as an emerging term in literary studies. The term translingualism has been used to refer to texts in which more than one language or a second language is used (cf. Canagarajah, 2013; Kellman, 2000). Technological developments and globalization, as well as migration, exile and border-crossing have all contributed to new developments in communication across cultures and languages. Because of these developments, there is a need to rethink language

contact in communities and societies, as well as a need to question existing paradigms in order to ascertain their validity in describing situations of language contact. Paradigms are currently being constructed in relation to changing social, economic and political conditions, and in relation to “new communicative realities that demand suitable alternatives” (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 287). Evolving terminologies testify to the need to gain a more comprehensive understanding of communicative practices. The term ‘translingualism’, as an emerging paradigm, is gaining consensus, as well as criticism, in both literary, literacy and communicative studies (cf.

Canagarajah, 2013a; Canagarajah, 2013b; Edwards, 1994; Edwards, 2012; Won Lee, 2018).

Translingualism is now at the forefront of many discussions. A conference in London in 2019, entitled “Across Languages: Translingualism in Contemporary Women’s Writing” has demonstrated this growing trend.¹ This strand is part of a wider research initiative into “Cross-Language Dynamics: Reshaping Community Translingual Strand”.² This conference demonstrated emphatically the extent to which the notion of “translingualism” has been foregrounded in literary scholarship. The conference sought to bring together scholars who are working on translingual women’s writing in a wide range of fields, “in order to explore the particular richness of texts produced by writers in languages that are not their mother tongue” (IMLR 2019³). The conference included around thirty-five speakers. Around ten papers invoked translingualism in their titles (excluding the plenary and final discussions). Many of the speakers tended to refer to bilingualism, multilingualism, the exophonic, translanguaging, transnationalism, transculturalism, translation and translingualism in ways that makes it clear that the terms are often overlapping, inconsistent, mutually or internally contradictory. This conceptual fuzziness has been manifest, for as long as the term has been present in the secondary literature. There is a need for tighter definitions and for the development of a particular notion of the translingual as a phenomenon in contact studies, in which more than one language is evident.

A Translingual Approach: Towards a Theory of a Literary Translingual Textual Practice

The methodological approach I have developed is a text-focused interpretative practice, which analyses linguistic interferences and processes and cultural features inherent in certain texts. This practice explores the strategies adopted in the text through a critical reading, where the underlying mechanisms of certain translingual elements can be identified and explained. This analysis enables valuable insights into the meaning of the term translingualism, as it today stands and may also add new understandings in the fields of contact studies, literary multilingualism and literary translingualism. This practice is an interdisciplinary one, which applies linguistics to literary studies. It aims to understand the linguistic

structures within the texts, and to explain what occurs to languages in situations of contact. It is also concerned with what these texts generate in terms of a text’s aesthetics and its literariness. This approach observes linguistic processes, such as code-switches, mixing and meshing, as well as borrowings and loan transfers. The advantage of this approach is to pinpoint distinctive and possible uses of translingualism that may help to provide a wider picture of the scope of literary translingualism in various fields of study.

Furthermore, this approach focuses on texts that use more than one language in more complex, enriching, generative and interactive ways. (Zucca, 2022, p.4). It aims at viewing texts that move beyond bounded communities, as prescribed by monolingual ideals and standards, towards theorizing language boundaries as fluid, dynamic, hybrid and mobile. Traditionally languages were viewed as a purported whole, whilst a translingual approach views heterogeneity as the norm (cf. Canagarajah, 2013, p. 192), and not as a deficiency or a lack, in any sense. A translingual approach counteracts the view that languages are distinct and indisputable entities that belong to established territories with set boundaries (Lu & Horner, 2013, p. 677). This view, as has been argued, has led, in a sense, to impoverished debates that aim “at pinning down the structure of individual languages and the social boundaries for their use” (Lu & Horner, 2013, p. 677). A translingual practice and approach also enables an understanding of the generative and emergent relationship between differing languages and the fluidity of language boundaries.

This practice, grounded and informed by insights from linguistics, helps gain insights into the underlying mechanisms and inherent processes involved in translingual texts. In this regard, it focuses on the way the different languages are used, to what extent, and for what aesthetic purposes. On a linguistic level, it attempts to understand if linguistic interferences, borrowing, code-switching and mixing have occurred, and to what degrees within the texts. Thus, it explores the ways linguistic elements have been used, transformed and transferred from one language system (L1) to a second (L2) or third language system (L3).

Linguistic interferences, also known as “transfers” or “negative transferences”, occur when elements of one language are incorporated into another linguistic system; over time, they may become entrenched and embedded. (cf. Edwards, 1994, p. 72; Grosjean & Ping, 2013, pp. 130-131). Interferences or transfers may occur at a lexical, morphological, semantic, syntactic,

¹ Conference held at the Institute of Modern Languages Research, School of Advanced Study University of London, May 2019.

² cf. crosslanguagedynamics.blogs.sas.ac.uk

³ Institute of Modern Language Research (IMLR). Conference brochure. *Across Language: Translingualism in Contemporary Women’s Writing*.

phonological or prosodic level, as well as in conjunction. In fact, interferences may affect more than one element in a sentence. They may occur during second language acquisition (SLA), but can also result from “imperfect learning” strategies. During processes of interference, speakers, as well as writers make linguistic choices which may deviate from standard norms governing stable language systems. Interferences, have in the past been viewed as negative outcomes of language learning processes, which have often been considered as an inability or failure on the part of a speaker to fully acquire or produce the correct structures of the target language. Yaron Matras, in contrast, suggests that if inferences do not “result in incomprehensibility and a breakdown of the communication” they could be considered as features that enable “language users to create bridges among different subsets within their overall repertoire of linguistic forms, and to use these bridges to sustain communication” (Matras, 2009, p. 74), instead of being viewed as constituting errors in SLA. Below is an example, taken from the Caribbean author Linton Kwesi Johnson (1975) *Street 66*, which helps identify the way an author may use “imperfect learning” strategies for aesthetic purposes.

“De room woz dark-dusk howlin softly
Six-a-clack,
Charcoal lite defying site woz
Moving black;
De soun woz muzik mellow steady flow,
an man-son min jus mystic red,
Green, red, green.... Pure scene” (Donnell & Welsh, 1996).

Johnson uses language in a particular way to create bridges between his linguistic and cultural repertoires. In this text, the linguistic interferences, such as “De”, “woz” and “clack” emphasise the complex interrelationship between languages and language varieties. (Donnell & Welsh, 1996) They add new textures and resonances of the Caribbean culture to texts that avail of an English variety. These nuances affect the aesthetic qualities and sound system of the poem. The supposed deficiency, which might once have been viewed as a negative deviation from standard norms, instead valorises difference and highlights the creative innovations in translingual writing, where words create bridges between different cultures and languages. In this instance, we can also apply the term, “code-meshing” (Young, 2004), which is the use of a standard code alongside a language variety.⁴

⁴ More recently, the term code-meshing has been used in the studies of pedagogy, in contrast to the term code-switching in SLA (Canagarajah

The forms of linguistic borrowing⁵ and code-switches in translingual texts are highly literary: they do not always comply with the actual speech patterns of a given community. The degree and frequency of code-switching in literary texts may appear more conflated and perhaps more artificial than real life contact situations, but not for this reason less significant. Rather, it is this peculiarity which becomes a focal point when analysing translingual texts, utterances and phenomenon. Compare for example the extract by Alfred Arteaga, *Small sea of Europe*, with an example of a conversation from a Chinese community in Manchester.

“Verkehr,⁶
from the Sanscrit (small sea).
vyavahara:
performance traffic,
former act of transformation,
and exchange.
Ecos escritos: *Sruti, Smriti, Sastra*⁷
three sisters in myth, very
sources of Europe, Western Man,
the very sound slipping: 3Ss, sans(é)ecrit
3Ss
3Ss: ecos escritos (S grito) ”⁸ (Arteaga, 1997 pp. 109-110).

In the second extract, mother and daughter have been looking at paint brochures and are discussing which paints to decorate their house with. This extract is in Cantonese and English. The mother (M) is of Singaporean extraction, the Father (F) is from Hong Kong and their daughter (D) was born in Britain (Matras, 2007, pp.193-94):

“D: maami aa, when are you next going again?
M: Nei man nei dedi laa (you ask your daddy)
D: dedi nei geisi zoi heoi aa? (daddy you when again go)
F: Heoi bindou aa? (go where aa?)

2013b; Young, 2004, p. 713n8; Young 2007; Young in Canagarajah 2013a;). For Young code-meshing is the “blending, adjusting, playing, and dancing with standard English and academic discourse” (Young, 2013a p. 3284-3288). He refers to this blending of codes as “meshing”, which he views as a “strategic, self-conscious and un-self-conscious blending of one’s own accent, dialect” (Young, 2013a p. 3284-3288). For the purposes of this article, code-meshing focuses on the interrelationship between a standard English and a language variety, to explore the ways the two codes interact, in order to understand what impact this interaction generates in literary texts in contact.

⁵ In the case of borrowing, lexical features are the first elements to be borrowed. Borrowed words may be treated as stems. Heath suggests that “these stems may really be words, including affixes, in the source language” (Heath 1988, p. 37). If the item has undergone full integration, the element that is integrated can be regarded as a borrowed item (McArthur et al.1992, p. 229). There are exceptions to these rules, which makes it difficult to distinguish between borrowing and code-switching (cf. McArthur et al. 1992, p. 229).

⁶ Traffic.

⁷ Written echoes: “the heard, the remembered, the learned-from-another” (Spivak, 1997 p.109).

⁸ Grito means to shout.

D: B&Q.
I need to get some of these.
F: Get what?
D: This one. I need to get the pink one.
F: ngo. I see
D: I need it. (5 sec)
F: dai jat aa (another day)" (Matras, 2009, p.126).

Both extracts make use of a number of linguistic strategies. The latter conversation takes place in a familial setting, using both Cantonese and English, for meaning-making contexts. This type of communication requires a degree of competence or some knowledge of the languages used in the communicative act. However, not all the speakers have full bilingual competence. The language usage in the latter extract signals group identity. (cf. Matras, 2009, p. 127) The former extract is an example of a highly literary artefact. It represents a conflated type of linguistic contact, in that the switches between differing languages do not follow typical conversational modes of communication (as the latter conversation appears to do). The extract is taken from Arteaga's text *Cantos*. The dominant languages in this text are English and Spanish. However, the poet references Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak in an epigraph, from *Can the Subaltern speak?* In doing so, he also incorporates German, Spanish, English, Sanskrit and Hindi into *Small Sea of Europe*. The text questions subaltern languages (Hindi and Chicano) and their relationships to more dominant discourses. In the second extract, in contrast, English is used and modified to suit the context and the level of the proficiency of the speakers. The terms bilingual "competence" and "proficiency" are terms that are often utilized as parameters for discussing bilingual and multilingual situations and contexts. However, a translingual practice is more concerned with the ways languages are used, and for what aesthetic purposes, rather than solely focusing on competence and proficiency as benchmarks. This is an extract from Abelardo Delgado's (1982) epistolary novel, *Letters to Louise, via Air Mail*, where the focus is on the interaction between the languages, not the fact that the text is written in multiple languages.

"I had a padrino⁹ sort of on the crazy side. This was way back in Boquilla. He used to get drunk. Cuando se le pasaban las copas he used to be extra generous with his Godchild Santiago and I would get pesetas and tstones.¹⁰ We had them un escusado de loyo¹¹ and the

⁹ "godfather" (Delgado, 1982, 49).

¹⁰ "When he was drinking he used to be extra generous with his Godchild Santiago and I would get small change, dimes and quarters" (Delgado, 1982, p.49).

¹¹ The sentence "un escusado de loyo" is a spoken view of a Spanish phrase, which means, a hole in the ground, either used as a toilet or an outhouse.

paper shortage to wipe our butts with was I've described it before" (Delgado, 1982, p. 49).

This extract shows similarities with the following conversational extract below, taken from S. Poplack (1981), "You didn't have to worry que somebody te iba a tirar con cerveza o una botella or something like that"¹² (Poplack, 1981, p.170). The last two extracts seem to have more in common than the previous two examples. The languages combine, generating the spoken language of a community. The differences, however, between the last two extracts, is that the former is situated in a literary context, and the latter is a transcript of a conversation. This does not signify that the latter utterance is less translingual. This article draws on speech utterances for reference and comparison¹³ (cf. Canagarajah, 2013a&b). It also focuses to some extent on the interrelationship between orality and literacy. Written texts are related "somehow directly or indirectly to the world of sound, the natural habitat of language" (Ong, 1982, p. 8). Although the written word can be related to sounds, to the phonemes that they encode, they are nevertheless "isolated from a fuller context in which spoken words come into being" (Ong, 1982, p. 100). Written words, however, may be honed and refined for specific literary aesthetic effects.

Literate Arts of the Contact Zone: Translingual Texts

The translingual elements, such as linguistic interferences, borrowings and code-switching and mixing are viewed here as a consequence of language contact between differing languages and cultures. Translingualism is considered here as a product of contact, and in contemporary writing, it is perceived of as a product of global contact, occurring in contact sites – at specific points of contact between different languages. In J. Blommaert's view, "languages are intrinsically connected to processes of globalization" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 2). Literary constructs are artistic products of contact, but

In Corbella view's view, in spoken Spanish, there is a tendency to move the final "l" in "del" to the next word when it begins with a vowel. In this way, "escusado del hoy" becomes "escusado de loyo." The "h" in "hoyo" becomes silent. This linguistic movement is an attempt to represent oral speech in a written text (Corbella 2005, p.275; Cutter, 2005).

¹² "You didn't have to worry that somebody would oblige you to go to throw with beer or a bottle or something like that" (Poplack, 1981, p.170).

¹³ The text's main objective of this article is to explore translingual texts. However, it explores speech utterances for means of comparison. I refer the reader to studies provided by Canagarajah for an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon (cf. Canagarajah 2013a; Canagarajah 2013b). It is relevant to point out, that there is an element of overlap between communicative utterances (like the ones provided above) and literacy and literary practices in the field of translingual studies.

they can also be viewed in a sociological, linguistic, as well as in a literary light. “Contact zones” as defined by Pratt (1991) are viewed as social spaces where different cultures “meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power [...]” (Pratt, 1991, p. 34).

Linguistic contamination may occur on various levels in certain linguistic and cultural texts and spaces. These linguistic spaces in texts entail different types of exchanges, where concepts, discourses, metaphors and cultural references are appropriated, transferred, transposed and translated, and it is also where relationships between languages and cultures may be mediated, to varying degrees. These linguistic and cultural encounters may also require negotiation, and in some instances, generate a struggle – linguistic, aesthetic, ethical, national and psychological – where cultures compete, and may be subjugated, and words, languages and discourses appropriated. Whilst Pratt sees contact sites as strained and conflictual, they may also be viewed as collaborative, generative and dynamic, as opposed to fixed and homogenous. Canagarajah suggests that “the new genres evolving in these zones are translingual, showing the meshing of different or competing norms” (Canagarajah, 2013b, p 30). Contact in literary contexts produces new “literate arts of the contact zone” (Pratt, 1991, p. 40).

The following extract emphasises the ways in which each language occupies and interacts in and within contact spaces in a literary context. It is taken from the Gujarati, English and German author Sujata Bhatt’s (1997) poetry collection *Point No Point*. It also highlights the way languages compete with each other in situations of contact. The extract is from the poem *Search for My Tongue*. In the poem, English and Gujarati are incorporated within the same context. The two languages are juxtaposed to draw attention to their differences, emphasising the slippery boundaries between languages.

“મને હુતું કે આબ્બી જીભ આબ્બી
(munay hutoo kay aakhee jeebh aakhee bhasha)
મેં થૂંકી નાબી છે
(may thoonky nakhi chay)
પરંતુ રાત્રે સ્વપ્નામાં મારી ભાષા પાછી આવે છે.
(parantoo rattray svupnama mari bhasha pachi aavay chay)
હૂલની જેમ મારી ભાષા મારી
(foolnee jaim mari bhasha nmari jeebh)
મોઢામાં બીલે છે
(modhama kheelay chay)
હૂલની જેમ મારી ભાષા મારી
(fullnee jaim mari bhasha mari jeebh)

મોઢામાં પાકે છે
(modhama pakay chay)
it grows back, a stump of a shoot
[...]
it pushes the other tongue aside.
Every time I think I’ve forgotten,
I think I’ve lost the mother tongue,
it blossoms out of my mouth”¹⁴ (Bhatt, 1997, p. 36).

The elements in each language are not integrated into the other language. Yet, they are presented in the same context and work together to convey new meaning. The phonetic transcription of the Gujarati lines are shown below each sentence, as in “modhama kheelay chay/fullnee jaim mari bhasha mari heebh”. (Bhatt, 1997, p. 36) A translation of this sentence is, “my language, my language matures/ like a fruit in my mouth” (Bhatt, 1997, p. 36). The sentence does not continue in Gujarati, but code-switches into English. She writes, ‘it grows back, a stump of a shoot’ (Bhatt, 1997, p. 36). A feature of translanguaging is its very capacity to incorporate different and diverse linguistic systems in the same context to create unique texts with different textures, nuances, features and resonances in new meaning-making contexts.

A literary translanguaging practice (LTP) is a critical approach to texts, which analyses the translanguaging linguistic processes and cultural features inherent in these texts. In *Search for my tongue*, feelings of linguistic and cultural alienation are at the forefront of the poem. The poet writes, “there was a little girl/who carried a black clay pitcher on her head/[...] but I can’t think of her in English” (Bhatt, 1997, p.35). The poet feels a disconnect to the English language. She writes, “I can’t hear my mother in English” (Bhatt, 1997, p.38). The figure of the mother is twofold. It symbolizes both the mother figure and the mother tongue. The speaker fears that her mother tongue, Gujarati, will “rot and die in [her] mouth/[...] but overnight while [she] dream[s], /[...] it grows back [...]” [(Bhatt, 1997, pp.35-36) my additions]. It fights back, “it ties the other tongue in knots/it pushes the other tongue aside” (Bhatt, 1997, p.36). In this instance, the poem conveys experiences of bigamy and betrayal. It emphasises the darker side of living in-between [*entre/antre*] worlds and words, continuously translating words and self, trying to piece together a sense of identity.¹⁵ Where is the centre?

¹⁴ “I thought my whole tongue is my tongue/ I spat, but again the night/it comes in my dreams/My language, my language flowers/Like a flower in my mouth/My language, my language matures/Like a fruit in my mouth” (Bhatt, 2012, p.36).

¹⁵ Leslie Adelson argues that the metaphor “between two worlds” is conceptually problematic. It implies “static logical relations among the elements [also, it refers to] a delimited space where two otherwise mutually

And where do the borders begin and end? One is stuck in some “betwixt and between place”, writes Eva Hoffman in her memoir *Lost in Translation* (Hoffman, 1989, p. 216).

However, not all translingual texts emphasise disconnect and inner split. In another poem by Bhatt, *The Undertow*, three languages, English, Gujarati and German inhabit the same page and contact space. The poet juxtaposes the languages, dissects the words and syllables and phonological systems, to find some common ground between the languages.

“But the waves keep us back,
the undertow threatens;
so we take one word at a time.
Take ‘dog’ for example,
કૂતરો (kootro) in Gujarati, Köter in Low German
Hund in High German, Like hound in English.
Dog કૂતરો (kootro) Köter Hund

Hound dog Köter કૂતરો (Kootro)

કૂતરો કૂતરો કૂતરો
(Kootro kootro kootro)

The waves come chasing
the dogs on the beach
the waves come flooding the streets
listen to the seals swimming
through the bookstores, listen
the words spill together,
the common sounds
[...]
kö kh ga” (Bhatt, 1997, p. 47).

Although the languages have different grammatical, syntactical, semantical and phonological systems, the poet attempts to find linguistic equivalences and typological and phonological similarities between the languages systems, rearranging them so that ‘they spill together’ (Bhatt, 1997, p. 32). “Hund” in high German is phonologically similar to “Hound” in English. The lower German “Köter” has similarities with the Gujaratian “(Kootro)”. The phonemes of the words are also juxtaposed “kö”, “kh” and “ga” (Bhatt, 1997, p.32). The poet comes to acknowledge that “the three languages are there/swimming like seals fat with fish and sun/they smile, the three languages/understand each other so

exclusive worlds intersect [this denotes] the presumption of an originating essentially intact world [...] [(Adelson, 2005, pp.3-5) my additions]. For her, this concept suggests that the world as is “remains stable while unstable migrants are uncertainly suspended between them. [And it] does more to assuage anxieties about worlds [...] in flux than it does to grasp the cultural innovations that migration engenders” (Adelson, 2005, p.3).

well” (Bhatta, 1997, p. 46). Literary translingual texts bring languages together in unique ways that defy the laws of grammar and syntax. To an extent, translingual texts defy the very speech they attempt to emulate, by bypassing and surpassing the very boundaries of speech contexts.

Linguistic and literary innovations in translingual texts may reflect the authors’ aesthetic aims, they are not always indicative of community practices outside of texts and may end with the text. Translingual writing is a unique case of language contact in a literary context. Recognizing the importance of language contact studies for the situatedness of translingualism will facilitate an understanding, not only of the development and propagation of English varieties, such as the rise of Pidgin and Creole, but also of the various types of linguistic interactions that may arise and occur between languages in many instances of situations of contact.

The Social Aspects of Language Contact in Translingual Con/texts

This section explores the social context of linguistic contact and the importance this has for the understanding of translingualism. Thomason and Kaufmann have advanced a framework which takes into consideration the importance of social elements in instances of language contact.¹⁶ They argue that “it is the social context, not the structure of the language involved, that determines the direction and the degree of interference,” in situations of language contact (Thomason & Kaufmann, 1988, p. 19). In the literary example below, social factors are a determining element in many of the linguistic switches that occur due to the social context. The extract below is an example of the way the Sardinian author, Salvatore Niffoi, avails of a language’s social hierarchy, prestige and function in *La Vedova Scalza* (2006).¹⁷

“Ohi Micheddu,¹⁸ che hai lasciato moglie zovanedda e unu ofaneddu!”

Ora pro nobis, misere nobis. Cristo, ascoltaci. Cristo, esaudisci.”

“O Deus, Babbu Mannu, consola con la forza del tuo amore [...]” (Niffoi, 2006, p. 15).¹⁹

¹⁶ They were not the first to suggest this correlation (cf. Coteanu, 1957, p.147; Kiparsky, 1938 p.176).

¹⁷ *The Widow Without Shoes*. [my translation] Throughout this chapter all translations from Italian and Sardinian to English shall be mine, unless explicitly mentioned otherwise.

¹⁸ *Micheddu* is the Sardinian for *Michele*, the Italian rendition.

¹⁹ “Oh Michael, that has left a wife young and orphaned. Pray for us. Have mercy upon us. Christ, listen, Christ, hear us. Oh God, Great Father, console with the force of your love [...]” (Niffoi, 2006, p. 16).

Niffoi adopts a triple register. He uses Italian, the Sardinian dialect (Barbaracina variety) combined with a hybrid form of Italian, which has roots in his dialect and Latin. I have italicized the words in the Sardinian language. The Latin words are also italicized and are highlighted in bold. The switches from one language to another highlight and emphasise certain words. They draw links between the themes and the language typically associated with that topic (Barrett, 2014, p. 29). For example, Latin here is used for liturgy. These switches “exploit the context-meaning associated with each language” (Barrett, 2014, p. 29). In fact, Niffoi makes use of the Sardinian adjective “zovanedda” [young] and the exclamation noun “*ofaneddu!*” (orphan), which adds to the despair and pathos. The Sardinian words elicit sympathy from the reader, and also from the characters within the text. They also add a sense of realism. The religious invocation: “*O Deus, Babbu Mannu*” is more intimate when it is uttered in the Sardinian language (Niffoi, 2006, p. 15). The word “Babbo” (dad) is more personal and affectionate than the Italian word “padre” (father). Each language in Niffoi’s text plays a different role. On the one hand, the switches combine to create an overall aesthetic effect. On the other hand, the choice of language can also be seen in a political light. The use of a minor language in a standard Italian text could also be perceived as an act of defiance against hegemony. Latin, on the other hand, is used here for religious rituals. Latin is the language of prestige. The text respects, in this sense, the hierarchy of languages and the social positioning of each language.

Other contributing factors in social contact also regard the intensity and duration of contact in a given community. Language contact can be due to factors, such

as immigration, colonization, exile, as well as the effects of globalization. The level of bilingualism can also play a significant role in certain language contact situations. If a community is not bilingual, then normally words will be borrowed (exceptions apply. cf. Thomason & Kaufmann, 1988, Chapter 3). If there is extensive bilingualism that has lasted over a considerable amount of time, then there may be substantial structural borrowing. Extensive bilingualism does not imply that every borrowing-language speaker is bilingual. However, the longer the bilingualism the more chance there is for structural features to be transferred from one language to another (Thomason & Kaufmann, 1988, p.41-48). The size of a group, the degree of access to the target language and the length of contact time will all play a considerable part in language change and variation, to varying degrees (Thomason & Kaufmann, 1988, pp. 41-48).

Interlanguage and “Imperfect Learning” Strategies in Translingual Writing

The concepts of “interlanguage”, “imperfect learning”, agency and attitudinal social factors in SLA, all contribute to the understanding of language development and language variety development. (cf. diagram below) The concepts of “ease of learning” and “imperfect learning”, terms used in contact studies and linguistics, play an important aspect in social considerations of language contact, as they can impact negatively or positively in the speaking and writing process.

The diagram above highlights a transitional system that ranges from the initial stages of language contact to the

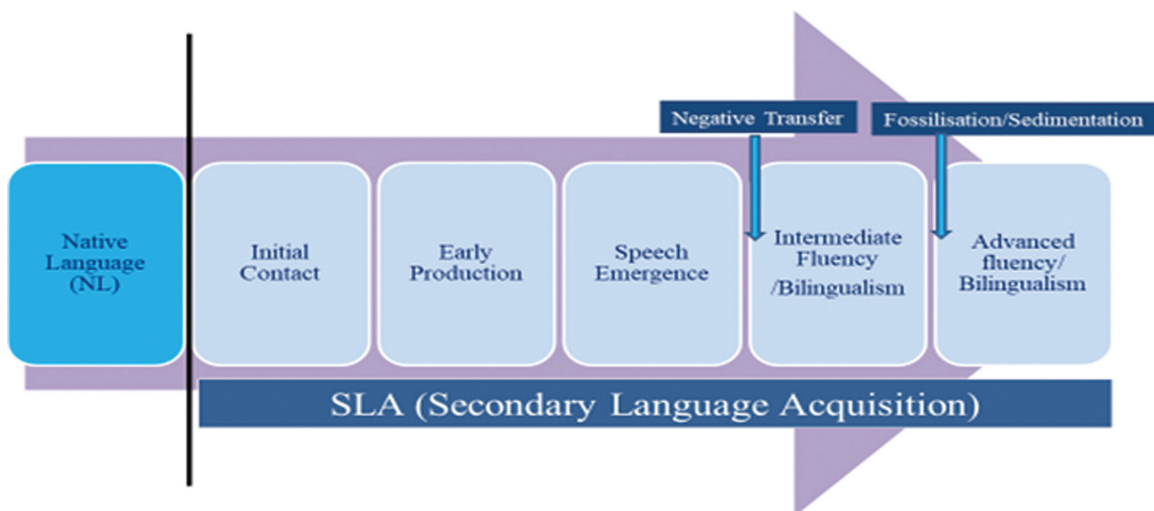


Figure 1. Interlanguage
Source: Claudia Zucca, 2020.

acquisition of language proficiency in a second language. It evidences, to some extent, a linear development, from a starting point of initial contact to full proficiency in L2. However, interlanguage does not always follow a linear trajectory, and does not always lead to full proficiency. I have included this diagram to highlight, firstly the use of terminology in interlanguage processes, and secondly, to emphasise the processes of language contact. The term “interlanguage”²⁰ (IL) was adopted by Selinker (1992) to describe an emerging linguistic system produced by an SLA learner during the acquisition of a TL (target language). Interlanguage is used to refer to deviations from the norms of either language (Weinreich, 1953, p.1). For Selinker, it also refers to error making in SLA (Selinker, 1992). This language system approximates the target language (TL), but at the same time, it preserves features of a second learner’s first language. The diagram also highlights the process of sedimentation or fossilization, which refers to a cessation of progress towards the target language and full proficiency. All aspects of IL become entrenched and permanent (cf. Matras, 2009; Nemser 1971; Sridhar 1980; Tarone 1976). In the diagram, fossilization is situated between intermediate fluency and full proficiency. However, fossilization can occur at any stage of SLA and IL. Interlanguage and imperfect learning can produce creative literary innovations. An example of “imperfect learning strategies” can be found in the Nigerian Ken Saro-Wiwa’s (1985) novel, *Sozaboy*.

“So, although everyone was happy at first, after some time, everything begin to spoil small by small and they were saying that trouble have started. [...] Radio begin dey hala²¹ as ‘e never hala before. Big grammar. Long words. Everytime. Before, the grammar was not plenty and everybody was happy. But now grammar begin to plenty and people were not happy. As grammar plenty, na so trouble plenty. And as trouble plenty, na so plenty people were dying” (Saro-Wiwa, 1985, p. 3).

The text is written in a blend of pidgin English (the lingua franca of the former British colonies in West Africa) and standard English. It also incorporates the prosody and rhythms of Nigerian speakers, “small by small” and “radio begin dey hala” (Saro-Wiwa, 1985, p. 3). Furthermore, it highlights aspects of imperfect learning in sentence constructions and verbal tenses, as in ‘everything begin to spoil’ (Saro-Wiwa, 1985, p. 3). It is relevant to point out that the text is an example of a literary construct, even if it attempts to mimic the speech of a certain community.

²⁰ However, the concept of interlanguage was first used by Uriel Weinreich (1953) in *Languages in Contact*.

²¹ “holler, shout” (Wiwa-Saro, 1985, p.183).

The text also emphasises attitudinal factors that are also present in interlanguage processes. Saro-Wiwa entitles his novel “Rotten English”. By defying grammar and borders, the English language is defamiliarized, but in a creative and unique way. It is written “with delicate and consummate skill” (Boyd, 1994). Saro-Wiwa argues that the text “has no rules and no syntax”, (Saro-Wiwa, 1985) however, this claim is exaggerated. In Boyd’s view, “English has been skilfully hijacked – or perhaps “colonized” would be a better word.” (Saro-Wiwa, 1985) In the context of attitudinal factors and imperfect learning strategies, the text can be viewed as an act of defiance. It can also be perceived as a highly creative literary invention.

The traditional view of interlanguage viewed the process of SLA as a linear sequence. However, this model does not capture the different contexts of each learner’s experience. It also viewed interlanguage as an incomplete or a deficient version of the target language (Matras, 2009, p. 74). An alternative approach views interlanguage as a “composite matrix language” (Matras, 2009, p. 74). This model views language contact as a combination of three language systems. The first is the learner’s L1 or N1. The second is a variety of the target language, and the third is “the developing learner variety” (Matras, 2009, p. 74) (cf. Jake, 1998; Jake & Myers-Scotton, 1997; Myers-Scotton & Jake 2000). The third learner variety differs for each speaker.

Many translingual texts also avail of imperfect learning strategies for aesthetic and literary purposes, producing innovative forms in contact situations. Gerald Durrell’s (1960) travel novel, *A Zoo in My Luggage*, offers a different view on the use of imperfect learning strategies and the processes of interlanguage.

“After breakfast, while we were attending to the animals, I happened to glance over the verandah rail and noticed on the road below a small group of men approaching the house. [...]

‘Iseeya, my friends,’ I said.

Morning, Masa’, they chorused, grinning.

Na beef, sah,’ they said.

‘But how you savvaydat I done come for Bafut for buy beef? I asked, greatly puzzled.

‘Eh, Masa, de Fon ‘e done tell us, said one of the hunters.’

‘Good Lord, if the Fon’s been spreading the news before we arrived, we’ll be inundated in next to no time, said Jacquie. [...]

‘Oh well, I suppose we’ll manage. Let’s see what they’ve got.’

I bent down, picked up a raffia bag and held it aloft.

‘Which man bring dis? I asked” (Durrell, 1960, p.62).

In this particular case of contact, the speaker has learnt a form of pidgin English from the Cameroons in Western Africa. The main speaker's acquisition of a pidgin language differs to the way the African speakers have acquired an L2. According to interlanguage process, a speaker's aim is to approximate the target language L2 (cf. diagram above). However, the English speaker's point of origin, in the interlanguage diagram above, differs from that of the indigenous speakers point of origin. The speaker starts from a position of knowledge of L2, which is in actual fact his L1 (native language). In order to acquire the language, he has to deconstruct his L1, to understand where and how the language has sedimented. Furthermore, he also has to learn the local sayings and linguistic expressions, which have been integrated into the pidgin English, so that he can communicate more effectively. In a sense, the speaker also needs to go through a process of interlanguage to re-constitute the new language that has developed and emerged from a situation of contact between two cultures and languages. However, the diagram above is not fully representative of his learning curve and fails to account these unique experiences of language learning strategies. Durrell's text is an innovative example from translingual literature that demonstrates the inadequacy of models that assume a single, linear movement from L1, via an interlanguage to L2.

Of further significance, is the pivotal role that mimicry plays in discussions of interlanguage processes. Mimicry is often used in post-colonial settings to refer to the ambivalent relations between colonizer and the colonized subject. When the colonizing authority exerts expectations upon the colonized subject to learn and adopt the colonizers cultural values and language, this representation results in an imitation that can never be a faithful representation of an original copy or in the sense of the interlanguage model. Rather it resembles "a blurred copy" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin et al. 2000, p. 124) or an obscured replica that cannot fully represent an original version. Furthermore, this new adaptation can be perceived as "quite threatening" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin et al. 2000, p.124). The reason for this feeling of threat is that mimicry can become in turn a mockery of all that it attempts to emulate. This is because it appears to parody that which it mimics (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin et al. 2000, p.124). Furthermore, in Bhabha's view, not only does it contain a mockery, it also enhances a certain menace, "so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86). Thus, this illusion of a faithful reproduction can be viewed as a failure of representation. In this sense, mimicry reveals the limitations of colonial discourse, what we have here is "a flawed colonial mimesis" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 87). However,

this essential flaw/s is also what sets this writing apart, for it highlights the ways these texts engage with languages in situations of contact, in unique and creative ways. As a consequence, the "imperfect" rendering of what is mimicked is used as a literary aesthetic device.

Saro-Wiwa's novel is an example of the way the text critiques the colonizer's difficult grammar and "long words", by parodying the colonizers' speech. Furthermore, it includes words from Nigerian origin, such as "Yanga", "Kpuhu" and "Kotuma" (Saro-Wiwa, 1985, pp. 3, 4, 8). Thus, the relationship in the text is one of ambivalence in its form of mimicry. Saro-Wiwa uses English, but in a way that negates the very nature of the English language itself, by using language/s on his own terms. Furthermore, the text calls to the fore ambivalence, defiance and mockery in that the text moves beyond the control of colonial authority; for it disturbs the normality of dominant discourse (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin et al. 2000, p. 126). Mimicry, in this sense, is a destabilizing force, which produces innovative ways of writing that moves beyond the colonizer's language into a new terrain.

On the other hand, Durrell's passage above asks us to question how the discourse of mimicry actually works in reverse situations of contact, where the speaker in the context is the one learning a pidgin language (cf. Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2000, pp.124-17). What type of relationship is established? There is evidently a reversal in the mimicry relationship, with the speaker trying to adapt to the colonized subject's position. However, it is a dubious transference, specifically in the way the speaker is viewed by the locals. This is due to the fact that traces of colonial discourse remain, as is evidenced in the use of the words, such as 'masa' (master) and "sah" (sir) (Durrell, 1960, p. 62). The speaker has to obtain different species of animals. To do so, he must be able to communicate with the locals. He needs to emulate, thus mimic their speech patterns, to a certain extent, so that he is understood. Mimicking, in this sense, is also an act and a means of gaining trust. In contrast, Jacquie never talks pidgin English. This evidences resistance towards that which is "other" and "difference". It also highlights the role of hegemony. In this extract she talks to the Fon, the leader of the locals,

"Did you like the Queen?" asked Jacquie
'Wah! Like? I like um too much" (Durrell, 1960, p.60).

However, even though the speaker has managed to learn how to emulate the speech forms and patterns of the locals, he still fails to understand all the subtle cultural nuances between races, he writes,

"I underestimated the Fon's abilities. He had obviously realized that any publicity is better than none" (Durrell, 1960, p. 60).

Mimicry is not a straightforward process. It is complex and multi-layered on both ends of the spectrum. It reveals the limitations of colonial discourse, and also the limitations and failures of colonial appropriation of local speech,

Conclusion

This article has applied the term translingualism to refer to texts which use more than one language in interactive and generative ways, rather than referring to languages in an additive manner. It has availed of what I term, a "literary translingual practice" (LTP). This methodological approach is a text-focused interpretative evaluation of texts. It analyses the linguistic structures within the texts, and the linguistic processes that occur in situations of contact, such as linguistic interferences, borrowing, loan transfers, code-switching, code-mixing and code-meshing. In this regard, the approach adopted is interdisciplinary, for it avails of contact linguistics to explore literary translingual texts and speech utterances. Its objective is to understand the way translingual texts negotiate and foreground linguistic differences and cultural identities. My findings have suggested that a translingual approach to texts enables an understanding of the relationships between languages and cultures. A literary translingual practice enhances an understanding of languages as fluid, generative and interactive in situations of linguistic and cultural contact.

The linguistic findings in this article are also integrated with an investigation of the cultural, social, geographical, historical, and the political, which inform the texts, to varying degrees. My findings have also suggested that "imperfect learning" strategies are often viewed as negative elements in learning strategies (SLA). However, in a translingual context, these elements are considered in a creative light, generating new aesthetic literary works that further distinguish translingual texts. Translingual representations have a tendency to defy monolingual ideologies and expectations, as well as challenge language boundaries and ideas of homogenous language systems. Furthermore, my findings have highlighted the importance of viewing translingual texts and phenomena as products of contact, and in more contemporary contexts, to consider these as a result and effect of global contact.

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Dr. Claudia Zucca is from Italian and English extraction, born in South Africa. She completed her Ph.D. at Trinity College Dublin in Comparative Literature in 2020 and her MA at Sussex University in Creative Writing in 2010. She is an English Professor and examiner at the University of Cagliari, Italy.



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Her research includes an investigation of oral, written and digital texts, as well as the performative to provide ample examples of the way translingualism may be understood in globalised contexts.

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