

## Invisible Borders: Translation and Multilingualism in an Unequal World

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**Abstract:** Inspired by Jan Blommaert's approaches to linguistic landscaping and his studies of linguistic mobility, this article traces the changing meanings of multilingualism and monolingualism in a world fractured by uneven vectors of globalization and super-diversity. Drawing on such examples as Polish anti-racist billboards, the commercial, transnational space of the mall, or translation policies in the European Union, it is possible to see the paradoxical effects of neoliberal transformations on linguistic diversity, with the hegemony of English on the one hand, and the revival of ethno-linguistic particularity on the other. Alison Phipp's theories of multilingualism from above and from below, as well as Yaseem Noorani's concept of "soft" multilingualism are used to make further differentiations between assertive nationalist monolingualism from below and aggressive global monolingualism from above. These different kinds of multilingualism and monolingualism, produced at intersections of complex historical, political, and economic factors, not only uphold the existing legacies of colonialism and modernity, but also create new hierarchies of global/cosmopolitan and national/local languages and identities.

**Keywords:** Monolingualism, multilingualism, super-diversity, globalization, inequality

**Résumé :** Le présent article examine des exemples de graffitis racistes en Pologne, l'espace du centre commercial et les politiques de traduction de l'Union Européenne pour tracer l'évolution de la notion de mobilité linguistique dans un monde fracturé par des vecteurs inégaux de globalisation et de super-diversité. Les effets paradoxaux des transformations néolibérales sur la diversité linguistique se manifestent, d'une part, par l'hégémonie de l'anglais et, d'autre part, par la résurgence des particularités ethno-linguistiques. Les notions de multilinguisme imposé *–from above–* et de la base *–from below–* (Phipps) et celle de multilinguisme faible *–soft–* (Noorani) nous permettent d'élucider les différences entre le caractère affirmatif du monolinguisme de la base et la nature agressive du monolinguisme global imposé. Ces variétés de multilinguisme et de monolinguisme créent de nouvelles hiérarchies dans les langues et identités transnationales, globales, cosmopolites, nationales et locales.

**Mots-clé :** monolinguisme, multilinguisme, super-diversité, globalisation, inégalité

**Resumo:** Partindo de exemplos de graffitis poloneses racistas, do espaço comercial de shopping centers e das políticas de tradução na União Europeia, este artigo mapeia as ressignificações da mobilidade linguística no mundo fraturado por vetores desiguais de globalização e superdiversidade. Os efeitos paradoxais das transformações neoliberais na diversidade linguística são visíveis tanto na hegemonia do inglês, quanto na reemergência de particularidades étnico-linguísticas. Os conceitos de multilinguismo da base para o topo e do topo para a base (Phipps) e do multilinguismo "suave" (Noorani) são empregados para realizar diferenciações mais profundas entre o forte monolinguismo nacionalista da base e o agressivo monolinguismo global do topo. Estas variações do multilinguismo e do monolinguismo produzem novas hierarquias para as línguas e identidades locais, nacionais, cosmopolitas, globais e transnacionais.

**Palavras-chave:** monolinguismo, multilinguismo, superdiversidade, globalização, desigualdade.

**Resumen:** Tomando como base ejemplos de graffitis racistas polacos, del espacio comercial de los centros comerciales y de las políticas de traducción de la Unión Europea, este artículo busca seguir los cambios en lo que significa la movilidad lingüística en un mundo fracturado por vectores dispares de globalización y superdiversidad. Los efectos paradójicos de las transformaciones neoliberales sobre la diversidad lingüística son visibles, por un lado, en la hegemonía del inglés y, por el otro, en el resurgimiento de la

particularidad etnolingüística. Los conceptos de multilingüismo “desde abajo” y “desde arriba” (Phipps), al igual que el multilingüismo “suave” (Noorani), se usan para marcar aún más las diferencias entre el enérgico monolingüismo nacionalista desde abajo y el monolingüismo global agresivo desde arriba. Estas variantes de multilingüismo y monolingüismo crean nuevas jerarquías de lenguas e identidades transnacionales, globales, cosmopolitas, nacionales y locales.

**Palabras clave:** monolingüismo, multilingüismo, superdiversidad, globalización, desigualdad

During a recent visit to Poland, the country that I left more than twenty-five years ago and that in my absence has gone through major transformations in its transition to the capitalist market economy, I found myself inadvertently drawn to practicing what the sociolinguist Jan Blommaert rather disparagingly calls “hit-and-run” ethnography (*Ethnography* 114), or what I might describe as ethnographic *flânerie*: walking through the city and opening oneself to chance encounters and impressions. As a mobile way of experiencing an urban space, such momentary immersion in the flux and flow of signage can facilitate scanning the surfaces already inscribed by vectors of change. Blommaert, known for his work on linguistic mobility, has turned his attention to ethnographic research into language landscapes in his own neighbourhood in Antwerp. However, as he reminds us, this flaneuristic mobility and unpredictability cannot be divorced from considerations of complexity: from the need to grasp layered meanings and histories that bear upon the visual field traversed by the ethnographer/flâneur’s gaze. Inspired by his example, I also used my digital camera to capture signs in public spaces that can be helpful in illuminating the incursion of new languages and discourses into a changed (and constantly changing), historically layered social fabric. The images I have come across provide insight into the processes of semiotization that endow space with social, cultural, and political significance decipherable to its inhabitants. The semiotics of space where multiple languages vie to be heard reveals a lot about whose identities are being legitimized, what forms of authority are being exerted—in other words, what meanings are encoded through linguistic landscaping. Space is not neutral; it is historically shaped by different discourses and everyday practices. Messages in public spaces “always display connections to social structure, power, and hierarchy” (Blommaert, *Ethnography* 40). Consequently, linguistic signs in public spaces select and construct specific audiences and demarcate legitimate users of these spaces; they point to who is included in and who is excluded from these spaces. In multilingual contexts, languages are deployed not just horizontally, that is, in synchronic contiguity, or next to each other, but also vertically, one above another, reflecting stratified hierarchies of agency and symbolic power. Looking at snapshots of linguistic landscapes, such as the ones I took in Poland, we need to be aware of what goes on below the surface, much the same as in analyzing translation and multilingualism we must take into account unequal vectors of cultural and economic exchange that operate in any language transaction.



Figure 1: A Polish anti-racist billboard promoting double cultural identity, The text reads: “She is Polish. She is Roma. Małgorzata. She is an artist. One among many.” Taken in the city of Tarnów. (Photo courtesy of Andrzej Gunia)

I am reproducing here two sets of images that reveal how people use and conceptualize language and identity in contemporary Poland. In Figures 1 and 2, showing two Roma people, we see the anti-racist billboards that have been placed in public spaces of different Polish cities as part of the social campaign called “Some Among Many” (*jednizwielu*). The campaign showcases portraits of diverse Polish Roma individuals, taken by the American photographer Chad Evans Wyatt, whose photo exhibit “Romarising” has been touring Poland and other European Union countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia), as well as Canada, in the past several years. According to the campaign website, the aim of Some Among Many is “to change the attitude of Poles towards the Roma minority. The Roma often face prejudice or other barriers that hinder their social integration. Some Among Many are Roma whose integration has been successful” (*jednizwielu.pl*, *translation mine*). The campaign has been largely successful, except for a few isolated cases of vandalism. The billboard seen in Figure 2 has been marked by intrusive, neo-Nazi graffiti that rewrites the demarcating power of the sign, delegitimizes its message, and changes the addressee. As a result, two different kinds of spaces clash on this billboard: the paid space of anti-racist advertising financed by the European Union and the “illegitimate” intervention into the space reserved for a democratic interpellation of tolerance. The inscriptions contest the question of whose presence is legitimate. We can also recognize “the historical dimension of space [where] every sign points backwards towards the conditions of [its]

production [...] and forward to its potential uptake” (Blommaert, *Ethnography* 51). What such brutal interventions erase is the four-hundred-year history of coexistence within Polish borders of the Roma and Polish peoples. In these instances, the desired uptake of increased social acceptance for double cultural Polish-Romani identity is met with resistance. Paradoxically, the graffiti justifies the European Union’s efforts to “modernize” the Poles by divesting them of their ethnic prejudice by means of such anti-discriminatory billboards.



Figure 2: Another billboard from the same campaign, defiled by skinhead graffiti, found in the city of Głogów. The caption reads: “He is Polish. He is Roma. He is a world champion. Gerard. One among many.” It has been spray-painted with a swastika and a hate message “Death to Gypsies”. (Photo courtesy of Paweł Szuber)

In the second set of pictures (Figures 3 and 4), presenting fragments of the urban mall, we can see traces of change and transformation. Language choices are always significant. Although Polish is the official language in this context, the multilingual signage shows English emerging as the commercial lingua franca, which is consistent with the post-communist goals of attracting foreign capital, including US companies (e.g. McDonalds and Pizza Hut in Figure 4). Since joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1999 and entering the European Union in 2003, Poland has become an attractive political, economic, and military partner to the United States, for strengthening the US position in Eastern Europe. The use of multilingualism, here mostly English and German, connotes an upwardly mobile economy, aspiration, and the ambition of becoming global. Language in this context is not tied to ethnicity, but to consumption, influenced by the development of contemporary capitalist culture with transnational connections and the production of consumerist life styles. Taken together,

these two sets of images are emblematic to me of the problems with monolingualism and multilingualism in today's world. The defiled billboard of the Roma individuals whose double ethno-cultural identity is declared in Polish, not Romani, as required proof of their assimilability to Polish society, is a sign of monolingualism, ethnic and linguistic, that prevails in national contexts. On the other hand, the snapshots of commercial spaces, advertising products and services by multinational firms, are evidence of economic multilingualism. Both monolingualism and multilingualism coexist in the same linguistic landscape. In these images, two different types of identity are constructed: a traditional, monolingual identity, tied to ethnic essentialism and nationalism (you can only belong if you are like us); and a cosmopolitan one, "impure" and open to linguistic hybridity, albeit only as related to consumerism. Interestingly, it is not necessary to be fluent in English to participate in this consumer culture. However, the hateful message reminds us that national and nationalist discourses are still powerful factors that determine very real boundaries of identities and belonging.



Figure 3: Wrocław, Poland. Galeria Dominikańska Mall (Eva C. Karpinski photo)

I am again and again drawn to Mikhail Bakhtin's theorizations of unitary language, with its centripetal and centrifugal pull, toward unification and centralization on the one hand, and toward multiplicity, dialogue, and heteroglossia on the other. Recognizing the

ideological underpinnings of any language, Bakhtin describes these contradictory forces as constantly at work in an embattled linguistic field, where centripetal forces seeking to impose the rule of unitary language serve to limit diversity and heterogeneity and to overcome the heteroglossia of language. Such forces operate in larger fields as well, not just in unitary language, but also in constructions of identity and difference that posit coherence onto the subject, ignoring plurality and stratification within and without. On the global scene of multilingualism, the Bakhtinian centripetal and centrifugal forces translate into Blommaert's "updated" model derived from theories of entropy and chaos, where the chaos and unpredictability of any multilingual system, its "intense energy of diversity," is always counteracted by entropy, that is, a tendency to develop toward uniformity and homogeneity, equivalent to a loss of energy (*Ethnography* 10). While the default tendency is toward entropy, toward "uniformity, standardization, [and] homogenization," it is in fact the chaotic dynamics of unpredictable diversity that prevent the system from stasis (12). Whereas for Bakhtin the value of heterogeneity and difference was undisputable, I will argue that today nothing is intrinsically good or bad—rather, everything is complex and contingent on multiple socio-political, economic, and cultural factors. This observation applies to multilingualism and translation as well. Similar to the privileging of single, monologic contexts of *one* language or *one* author in traditional linguistics and literary studies, the positing of source and target languages as unitary and bounded entities is prevalent in translation studies. As much as we think about language as unitary rather than heteroglot, we perceive the monolingual paradigm as the norm, an idea propagated by the widespread use of such naturalizing concept-metaphors as the allegedly organic "mother tongue" (Yildiz 10). In order to understand how contemporary inequalities manifest in and through language in multilingual contexts or in translation, we must go outside language and turn our attention to the changes in our global environment, changes that have already been hinted at in the images reproduced here and that I want to elaborate further.



Figure 4: Wrocław, Poland. Galeria Dominikańska Mall (Eva C. Karpinski photo)

In his 2007 article, Steven Vertovec coined the term “super-diversity” to show the complexities of the postmodern, transnational diversity that has surpassed familiar multicultural demographic frames that still operate in terms of multiple unitary or hyphenated identities and nation-states. In other words, modern diversity has further been diversified under the conditions of neoliberalism, with the expansion of global capitalism and Internet communication that have introduced new patterns of mobility—of people, goods, services, images, and information. While some boundaries separating populations have been lifted, others have been tightened with increased surveillance practices. According to Vertovec,

the 1990s-early 2000s have seen more migrants from more places entailing more socio-cultural differences going through more migration channels leading to more, as well as more significantly stratified, legal categories (which themselves have acted to internally diversify various groups), and who maintain more intensely an array of links with places of origin and diasporas elsewhere. (1043)

In Europe, for instance, asylum seekers have become the largest category of migrants in the last twenty years, at the same time as statistics show that fewer and fewer applicants

are granted asylum, which leads to increasing numbers of stranded refugees and undocumented or illegal migrants scattered all over the world. In the context of globalization and super-diversity, this mobility often creates situations of inequality and exclusion, where different subjects cannot experience full citizenship and membership in dominant speech communities. In that sense, super-diversity has triggered a new global economic restratification and created new forms of multilingual behaviour, both online and offline. Blommaert compiles some new terms for communicative practices exhibited by people in super-diverse environments, such as “linguaging” (the use of foreign words to impress or add local colour), “polylinguaging,” “crossing” (the use of someone else’s language), “metrolingualism,” or “transidiomatic practices” that involve the mixing of languages in digital and geographical contact zones, borderlands, diasporic sites, where people use whatever linguistic resources are available and blend them into new forms (*Ethnography* 8). As he notes elsewhere, “the late-modern” or global postmodern subject is increasingly “polyglot,” with “glot” replacing “lingual” because in super-diversity a full knowledge of one or more languages is not necessary since people often rely on “truncated” bits and pieces, and language “impurity” is widespread (Blommaert et al, *Dangerous Multilingualism* 9). The photographs of Polish commercial spaces (Figures 3 and 4) illustrate this phenomenon. Polish consumers do not have to speak English to be able to relate to the marketing slogan of the transnational clothing brand Tatum, “feel good, feel mood.” Sprinkling the façade of the mall with foreign-sounding words like “markt,” “vision express,” or “shoes” does not prevent consumers from correctly identifying the products and services they can obtain there.

We are witnessing new paradoxes of monolingualism and multilingualism that exacerbate existing legacies of colonialism and modernity and further contribute to creating and reinforcing an unequal world, fractured by uneven vectors of globalization and super-diversity. In this newly redrawn geopolitical space, multilingualism has multiple valences. Accordingly, Alison Phipps distinguishes between multilingualism “from above”, linked to economic privilege, free mobility, and commodity exchange, and multilingualism “from below”, associated with pre-modern temporality, non-marketability, and invisibility. While the former comprises dominant majority languages with global currency, spoken by transnational elites (financial, commercial, entertainment, and academic), the latter refers to those local, “minor” languages and idioms that belong to Indigenous peoples, subalterns, asylum seekers, refugees, and migrant workers. Obviously, these forms of multilingualism are implicated in different forms of mobility and migration. Multilingualism from above privileges world trade languages and languages of colonial and economic domination, as opposed to multilingualism from below, which is rendered invisible, associated with traditionalism and radical difference. Its languages are idioms that cannot be learned from Berlitz or Rosetta Stone publications because they are not easily commodifiable. While Phipps considers multilingualism from below as “unmoored” from political status, economic security, and often from rights and citizenship, she also challenges us to consider the possibility of a radical unmooring of her own languages (English, French, German, and Portuguese) as the ones that are “implicated in the oppressing of millions of people [through] treaties and laws passed, in documents signed, and speeches made which have taken land and languages from peoples” (101).



The confrontation of multilingualism from above and from below exposes what Mary Louise Pratt, in the inaugural issue of *Critical Multilingualism Studies*, refers to as the *mala fe* (bad faith) of the monolingual nation-state, with its centripetal pull. Presenting the US dogmatic attitudes toward English monolingualism as detached from reality and history, she draws connections between a monolingual paradigm and liberal-democratic ideals of individualism and autonomy. Like de Saussure's diagram of communicative exchange between two equally aligned white male heads, which Pratt deconstructs by placing it next to the early seventeenth-century drawing of the "bad" confession taken by the Spanish priest from the kneeling Indigenous man, liberalism insists on keeping the gendered and racialized bodies of Indigenous, ethnic, and migrant speakers, with their multiple tongues, "out of the picture" (Pratt 21). The epistemic violence of liberalism posited as a dominant political discourse of democracy and power finds its linguistic counterpart in a politics of official monolingualism. Despite Pratt's critique of the colonial underpinnings of the US monolingual dogma that equates English with loyalty to the nation, she nevertheless does not avoid collapsing the experiences of Indigenous peoples and immigrants in the Americas, ignoring the distinction between coerced and voluntary assimilation. Still, her final example of Hilaria Supa, an Indigenous woman politician from Peru, who has been attacked for using Quechua in Congress, demonstrates the power of the colonial unitary language and the devaluing of Supa's multilingualism from below by associating it with "illiteracy," bad grammar, and intellectual deficiency. We must remember that Pratt speaks from the dominant context of US political, economic, cultural, and linguistic expansionism, and that countries like Poland, relatively recently re-initiated into the capitalist fold, are on the receiving end of the aggressive US global doctrine whose traces can be detected in Figures 3 and 4.

Consequently, it is probably more accurate to speak of multilingualisms in the plural, of different kinds of multilingualism that are produced at intersections of such historical, political, and economic forces as nationalism, colonialism, capitalism, migration, globalization, and postmodernity. As Pratt shows, the prevalence of the monolingual paradigm in modernity and its continuing hold can be linked to the ideologies of liberalism and the nation-state and to the privileging of individual autonomy within these philosophical and socio-political formations. These historical conditions produce different types of multilingualism "structured in relations of domination and subjugation" (Pratt 24). Ironically, the developed economies of powerful monolingual (or officially bilingual, like Canada) nation-states have traditionally benefited from the use of imported cheap labour of slaves, immigrants, and guest-workers or, in the case of settler-colonies, from the appropriation of Indigenous lands and the erasure of Indigenous languages. This is precisely where Pratt recognizes the *mala fe*, or hypocrisy, of US monolingualism. As a result, with regard to such phenomena as multilingualism and translation, Blommaert makes a case for complexity rather than simply applying a reductive judgment and seeing things in terms of either their positive or negative sides. The editors of the *Critical Language and Literacy Studies* series, in which Blommaert's argument has been published, describe his idea of complexity as one that foregrounds "non-linear, recursive and emergent forms of meaning making" (*Ethnicity* xi), where we simultaneously grasp the contradictory and unstable character of any concept or category. Concepts and

categories only serve their purpose momentarily, and tomorrow they may be elsewhere and serving different, as yet unpredictable, purposes.

Globalization has thus had a paradoxical effect on linguistic diversity, revealing both centripetal and centrifugal pressures. On the one hand, it has contributed to the loss of linguistic diversity and imposed the hegemony of English; on the other hand, it has provoked a reaction to these assimilatory and unifying forces. While globalization has often led to reactive responses and initiatives aimed at containing demographic super-diversity, for example through the mandatory testing of immigrants and the introduction of various integration policies, it has also spurred the development of protective legislation to ensure the recognition and respect for minority rights, including linguistic rights. Languages are dying at a fast rate: the linguist David Crystal estimates that out of the world's 6,000-7,000 languages, at least one language dies every two weeks or so (qtd. in Grenoble and Whaley ix). In response, language revitalization programs have been implemented in different countries, communities, and transnational or supra-national institutions and organizations, to protect or restore endangered languages. One of the most successful examples has been the revitalization of the Mohawk language through immersion programs in Kahnawa:ke, Canada. Similar initiatives have been taken in Hawaii, Siberia, Cornwall, Ireland, and some South American countries. In Europe, since the end of the Cold War, ethnic groups and minorities have been outspoken about their linguistic, territorial, and cultural rights. In 2001, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, which in Article 5 states: "All persons should therefore be able to express themselves and to create and disseminate their work in the language of their choice, and particularly in their mother tongue; all persons should be entitled to quality education and training that fully respect their cultural identity." Earlier, Article 3.2 of the 1996 Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (UDLR) stated that "the collective rights of language groups may include [...] the right to an equitable presence of their language and culture in the communications media," as well as the right to receive education and services from the government in their own language (qtd. in Stanton 261).

Similar statements have been adopted by a number of multi-ethnic states and by the European Union, which champions multilingualism on its forum. However, while "minor" languages and dialects of multilingualism from below are being dealt with on the model of human rights, exemplified by the UDLR, the weakness of such initiatives framed through human rights discourses becomes obvious when we consider how hard they are to implement and monitor. What we are participating in is the constantly shifting global ecology, where we must notice the relationship between the loss of linguistic diversity and biodiversity, and where, to quote Gayatri Spivak, the "demands for multilingual education [...] become risible. All we have is bilingualisms, bilateral arrangements between idioms understood as essentially and historically private, on the one side, and English on the other [...]. This is the political violence of translation as transcoding" (16). Spivak interrogates the relation between biopiracy and the appropriation of Indigenous cultures, between standardized environmentalism and traditional knowledge (17). The languages of multilingualism from below, those local, "minor" languages and idioms, whose survival may be precarious, become like endangered species vis-à-vis the hegemonic languages of multilingualism from above that have global market currency. Indeed, several scholars

have talked about the correspondence between biodiversity and linguadiversity, and there have been coalitions among linguists and environmentalists united in their efforts to protect those minority languages and idioms, noting “striking correlations” between diminishing cultural and linguistic diversity and low biodiversity (Stanton 263). One example would be the international NGO called Terralingua, concerned about the future of the world's biological, cultural and linguistic diversity, whose website states that it “works to sustain the biocultural diversity of life – a precious heritage to be cherished, protected, and nurtured for generations to come” (*Terralingua*).

The case of the European Union, which has its own Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, reveals yet another paradox of multilingualism that can be managed so as to reinforce unitary, centripetal tendencies of global capitalism pushing for one economic model. At the same time, the EU offers a glimpse of how translation has been implicated in the process of linguistic homogenization. The EU materials must be published in all 24 languages of its 28 member states. However, before documents are translated into the languages of member states, they are routinely drafted in one of the dominant working languages: French, English, German, and Spanish (Tosi 54). This situation frequently compromises the quality of translation and leads to the contamination of member-states’ languages with neologisms and lexical jargon. The enormous translation machine actively mediates the transformation or transcoding of the Union’s language diversity into “Eurospeak” or “Europese” (Tosi 56), assimilating member languages into dominant standards. Translation thus plays a double and dubious role of facilitating quick communication and levelling difference. It is hard to tell whether to view such changes as a threat or enrichment. In fact, the multilingualism of the EU may increasingly conform to the model identified by Yaseem Noorani as “soft” multilingualism that resembles monolingualism. Noorani’s concept of “soft” multilingualism helps us to reflect on the homogenization of world languages resulting from the processes of modernization and the ascendance of monolingual nation-states, which have introduced as universal values such ideologies of modernity as liberalism, democracy, capitalism, rights discourses, gender equality, progress, autonomy, and so on. Soft multilingualism entails similar communicative templates; increasingly, with the spread of globalization, we operate within familiar frames of reference, using similar lenses through which to view reality.

Today’s “soft” multilingualism has been both enabled by globalization and in turn has enabled its progress. As a result, watching the news in English, German, French, or Polish, we experience the affinity of our concepts of self, common structures of feeling and thought, shared ideologies—our multilingual worlds converge and adapt to the dominant standards of translatability. This confirms the sociologist Ernest Gellner’s observation that with the advent of the modern nation-state, “the content of the culture is essentially the same in every nation” (qtd. in Noorani 19), and national languages become increasingly similar to each other. For a Canadian visitor, navigating daily life in Germany, France, or Poland involves habitual expectations because such spheres of life as transportation, banking, markets, communications, and commodities are more or less standardized in these countries. What disappears are the “hard edges” of difference, exteriorities, and cultural and linguistic incommensurability. Instead, what is growing is interchangeability and equivalencies. According to Noorani, “hard” multilingualism,

premised on radical linguistic, social, and cultural difference, may be confined today to tribal languages or learning “dead” languages as embodiments of ultimate alterity (8). We should note that similar to the way translation has been complicit in this homogenizing, multilingualism is also amenable to the projects of neoliberal rationality in its pursuit of homogenization and global security. One needs only to think about the opportunities for increased surveillance created in the post 9/11 US and Canada and the governments hiring multilingual Internet spies or multilingual interpreters on the ground, in conflict zones, locally, as in Afghanistan.

While linguists claim that multilingualism is good for societies, historically it has always been seen as a problem to be managed by individuals and groups, especially from the perspective of the modern nation-state. As the photographs of the Roma people testify, we see the tensions today between inclusion and exclusion, in the persistence of the modernist pull towards uniformity, suppressing hybridity and enforcing standardization and linguistic border control, often through restrictive government policies. Such politics reflects what Blommaert describes as the “ethnolinguistic assumption,” that is, a linear alignment of language, culture, and ethnicity, based on the idea that the modern subject is monolingual and monocultural (*Dangerous Multilingualism* 2-3). Multiculturalism has been critiqued precisely for embracing this ethnolinguistic assumption. In the past, and still often today, the ethnolinguistic assumption of the nation-state was the force behind cultural genocide, oppression of speakers of minority languages, and forced assimilation. Paradoxically, we see its revival today in the arguments against the monolingual nation-state and calls for the recognition and respect of linguistic and cultural diversity, in demands for minority rights and the empowerment of endangered languages. This is a paradox of continuity and discontinuity, suggesting that both the modernist nation-state and the postmodern hybrid state operate within a similar discursive framework, based on modernist, monoglot concepts of language, culture, and identity. Similarly, we can say that language ideologies that operate in multilingualism studies and translation studies still often “implicitly confirm the idea of the existence of culturally and linguistically homogeneous groups and usually consider the language use of social elites to be ‘a language’”, what has been defined as “methodological nationalism” (Schneider 2).

If—as we are told—languages can symbolize “different types of mobility” (Schneider 114), which in turn are interrelated with issues of power, we need to fine-tune our perceptions of multilingualism and translation in an unequal world. Blommaert says that more mobile discourses have more currency and are more prestigious, which explains the symbolic power of English as a highly mobile resource. But there are primarily social and economic correlations to linguistic, geographic, and cultural mobility: you can be multilingual or bilingual in “major” or “minor” languages, in cosmopolitan cities or Indigenous villages. You can be a member of a transnational class or a stigmatized illegal migrant. Thus there are emerging new linguistic hierarchies of global/cosmopolitan and national/local languages, where multilingualism from above is a marker of cosmopolitan, global citizenship, while multilingualism from below is linked to minoritized identities. Similar to the sobering-up of the enthusiasm about translation’s *subversive, liminal, democratic, hybridizing, and new-ness producing* potential, in the neoliberal commodity circuit the high stakes of multilingualism must undergo a necessary theoretical

reevaluation as we begin to recognize that non-marketable “minor” multilingualisms have fewer chances of survival.

At the same time, with English becoming a global “majority” language, the difference between multilingualism and monolingualism veers toward “soft” multilingualism. The status of English as a transnational lingua franca resembles a monolingual global regime, with one hegemonic language and all the others relegated to the role of inferior dialects. Again, in this case the emergence of “soft” multilingualism functions as a form of symbolic domination. Britta Schneider, in her study of transnational salsa communities, offers a diagram that is useful insofar as it maps out different overlapping contexts of multilingualism and monolingualism (127). It shows several crisscrossing axes connecting the discursive spaces identified as global and national on the one hand, and migrant and cosmopolitan on the other, linking them to various potential deployments of multilingualism and monolingualism. This diagram reminds us that we experience today the simultaneous co-presence of often conflicting and contradictory language ideologies: “a national monolingual [language] ideology *and* a global monolingual ideology [of the universalist, transnational English] *and* ideologies of cosmopolitan multilingualism” (Schneider 127). Thus the ideology of monolingualism can be indexed to different contexts: traditional liberal discourses of universal humanity and tolerance (Figure 1); the national/nationalist monolingualism “from below” (Figure 2); and the global incursion of monolingualism “from above” in the form of the *lingua franca* ideology of English as a replacement for Polish in newly globalized commercial spaces (Figures 3 and 4). The same incursion can also be read as “soft” cosmopolitan multilingualism, in contrast to migrant or “minor” or Indigenous multilingualisms from below, represented by the muted Romani language that cannot be spoken on the Polish Roma billboards.

In the end, faced with linguistic super-diversity, paradoxically polarized between the centrifugal pull of porous borders and the centripetal force of enhanced border security, we arrive at the limitations of our vocabulary that force us to multiply differentiations between forms of multilingualism and monolingualism from above and from below. Established concepts and categories that have been taken as “given”, such as language, culture, the native speaker, mother tongue, multilingualism, and translation—all predicated on thinking in terms of bounded entities and synchronic coexistence—suddenly seem inadequate, although they are still operational and have a strong grip on our descriptions of reality. They belong to the national era and fall short in post-national contexts (Schneider 113). They can neither describe nor fully explain complex phenomena in super-diverse communicative environments, nor sufficiently account for the heterogeneity, instability, and vertical layering of their objects. They throw us into an epistemological crisis, where old metaphors and concepts are no longer good enough to deal with the complexity of our world.

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