**Julia Tidigs**
University of Helsinki

**Markus Huss**
Södertörn University

# THE NOISE OF MULTILINGUALISM: READER DIVERSITY, LINGUISTIC BORDERS AND LITERARY MULTIMODALITY

**Abstract:**

The article proposes a new multimodal approach to literary multilingualism, with special attention devoted to how readers with different language skills partake in making literary multilingualism happen. It presents a critical assessment of previous scholarship on literary multilingualism, which we claim is characterized by monolingual assumptions and a problematic division between mono- and multilingual literature. As a continuation of the theoretical argument, multimodal readings of three contemporary poets Cia Rinne, Caroline Bergvall and Ralf Andtbacka are presented. Instances of contemporary multilingual poetry, the article concludes, can help us to critically scrutinize notions of clear-cut linguistic borders, as well as to study the intricate dynamics between the acoustic and visual aspects of literary multilingualism.

**Keywords:**

literary multilingualism ◆ readers ◆ multimodality ◆ language borders ◆ contemporary poetry

> *Speech with the nomads is impossible. They do not know our*
> *language, indeed they hardly have a language of their own. They*
> *communicate with each other much as jackdaws do. A screeching*
> *as of jackdaws is always in our ears.*

—Franz Kafka, "An Old Manuscript" (2002: 67)
translated by Edwin Muir and Willa Muir

In Franz Kafka's short story "Ein altes Blatt" ("An Old Manuscript"), a language unknown to the narrator, spoken by nomads who have invaded his country, is described in terms of an omnipresent animal noise, a "screeching as of jackdaws." To the narrator's ears, this language can hardly be counted as one, since it suggests animal sounds, and animals—per definition—lack a language in the human sense of verbal communication. The description of the sound of language as animal noise in turn renders the nomads animal-like and non-human. Kafka's short story recalls European travelers' and linguists' efforts in the 19th century to describe the click-consonants in the Nguni-languages Zulu and Xhosa. Linguistic anthropologists Judith T. Irvine and Susan Gal demonstrate how these click sounds were compared to animal noises such as "hen's clucking, ducks' quacking, owls' hooting;" hence, they were considered brutal and primitive (Irvine and Gal 2000: 40). They also cite the German linguist Max Müller, who in 1855 writes: "I cannot leave this subject without expressing at least a strong hope that, by the influence of the Missionaries, these brutal sounds will be in time abolished" (ibid).

The language noise of the nomads in Kafka's story, "the screeching as of jackdaws," does not refer to any existing language outside the realm of the literary text, although one could, of course, try to speculate to what language Kafka might have referred.[1] Such an interpretation, however, fails to account for a more general aesthetic point of the passage in Kafka's story, namely how it confronts the reader with an experience of a foreign language that eludes any direct access to it. Here, language appears as disturbing sounds and noises, associated with

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[1] Marek Nekula, following Hartmut Binder, interprets the nomads as an allegory for the Eastern European Jewry, where the screeching as of jackdaws (jackdaw is "kavka" [kafka] in Czech) illustrates Yiddish and "die sprachlose jüdische Identität" [the tongueless Jewish identity] (Nekula 2006, 142).

intrusion and acoustic overflow of the narrator's sense of hearing. Müller, for his part, attempts to describe the foreign-language noises in terms of animal sounds, which in turn justifies his wish for them to be abolished from the realm of human language altogether.

We claim that the narrator's language description in Kafka's short story, as well as the linguist Max Müller's description of the click-consonants in Nguni-languages, have something important to teach scholars of literary multilingualism and multilingualism studies in general. The reason is not to be found in the disregard and contempt for the languages demonstrated by their descriptions, but rather in the attentiveness to the sound of foreign tongues, and the associated imagery. This attentiveness, in turn, exposes fantasies around what we count as language and what we regard as mere noise. As Douglas Kahn has noted, "noise" is usually understood as that which disturbs communication, such as "[i]mperfections in script, verbal pauses, and poor phrasing" (Kahn 1999: 25). As his work on the history of sound in modernist arts demonstrates, however, noises and sounds should not be defined as the opposite of meaning, as somehow transcending signification as opposed to an articulated language. They are, on the contrary, part of a social, cultural and political space imagined by humans (ibid: 4). Following this view, instances of 'noise' in multilingual literature *do* signify in many important ways, as we shall see; furthermore, they have the potential to help us rethink common theoretical assumptions in the field of literary multilingualism.

Our general aim in this article is to show how literature and, perhaps most vividly, instances of contemporary multilingual poetry, can help us to critically scrutinize and reflect upon the contingency of linguistic borders—borders between languages as well as the border between language and noise—but also how partial fluency (cf. Walkowitz 2015: e.g. 42–44) or even incomprehension can give rise to aesthetic effects among different readers, demanding an understanding of the reader as co-creator of the multilingual literary text.

In order to account for the role of the reader as active participant in the multilingualism of the text, we argue that a multimodal perspective is essential. Above all, literature combines the verbal and the visual, giving rise to imagined inner voices or actual speech when read aloud. In contrast to the bulk of previous research on literary multilingualism, we therefore emphasize the need for an integrated multimodal perspective in the study of literary multilingualism. Specific to the examples we present in this article, we highlight the aural and visual modalities of the literary texts that are foregrounded in the reading process. A focus on the reader as co-creator of the multilingual text, as well as a multimodal perspective on the process of reading, goes hand in hand with a questioning of predetermined linguistic borders.

This questioning, in turn, is a necessary part of critical scholarship on literary multilingualism, aiming to work through an inherited monolingual bias in scholarship on the phenomenon, where a conception of languages as clearly defined and countable entities often is taken for granted (cf. Yildiz 2012: 2; Blommaert 2010: 4; Sakai 2009, passim.). Our investigation will therefore include a problematization of the term multilingualism itself.

We do not wish to establish a scheme or model for determining the role of different types of readers of multilingual texts. On the contrary, we claim that any such scheme or model would be of little use, since readers cannot be divided into two or three neat categories, such as "readers with complete knowledge of all languages present in the text" versus "readers without such knowledge." Rather, we stress the diversity of readers: each reader, with her or his specific languages skills, reacts to and interacts differently with the languages of the text. Some readers may read even an apparently monolingual text as a multilingual one, while others read a multilingual text as a monolingual one. In our readings of contemporary multilingual poetry by Caroline Bergvall, Cia Rinne and Ralf Andtbacka, we stress partial fluency as a condition of reading.

**Towards a New Understanding of the Readers of Multilingual Texts**

The starting point for our argument on the need for a multimodal perspective in scholarship on literary multilingualism is the reader—or rather readers, in the plural. On the one hand, it is perhaps obvious that multilingual texts are perceived and received differently by readers with different sets of linguistic skills (e.g., Sommer 2004; Huss & Tidigs 2015). Kafka's short story depicts the experience of incomprehension of a foreign language, whereby a language appears as mere noise in the ears of the listener. Obviously, grasping or not grasping the semantic content of what is said or written matters; therefore, the reader's perspective is important.

On the other hand, the various readers of multilingual texts have largely been overlooked in scholarship on the matter or, at least, the question of what constitutes an "ideal" reader or a "successful" reading experience has been treated too lightly. Traditionally, the multilingual reader, possessing the exact language skills that the multilingual text requires, has been considered the ideal or "target" reader: "Basically, multilingual literature needs multilingual readers, that's why usually they are not made for a mass readership" (Knauth 2011: 17). This view is also well represented in Scandinavian scholarship on multilingual literature (e.g., Lilius 1989: 112; Mazzarella 2002: 229; for a critical study of debates on multilingualism and

intelligibility, cf. Tidigs 2016), and it is connected to an understanding of literature as communication of content from author to reader (e.g., Haapamäki and Eriksson 2011; Laakso 2012). Per this conception of literary communication, failure to understand or translate the semantic content of "foreign" words or phrases of the text is, unsurprisingly, interpreted as failure to appreciate the text at all.

The ability of the multilingual text to turn to and from different readers has mostly been discussed in terms of inclusion and exclusion (cf. Timm 2000; Gordon and Williams 1998), and the ability to strengthen in-group belonging and exclude monolingual readers has been seen as one of the hallmarks of literary multilingualism (cf. Timm 2000: 104 f.; Jonsson 2005: 248). Johanna Laakso has a rather different conception of "exclusive" and "inclusive" multilingualism. "Inclusive" is understood as multilingualism "describing and targeting 'us' and 'our multilingual reality', something the readers can identify themselves with" whereas "exclusive multilingualism," according to Laakso, refers to "the use of foreign elements to describe or characterize 'the Other'" with whom neither author nor reader identifies (Laakso 2012: 30). Implicit in Laakso's reasoning is a pact between author and readers, and the presupposition that they belong to the same homogeneous language community.

The privileging of multilingual readers for multilingual texts is consistent with a view of literature as communication, but is also often part of a critique of the monolingual bias in literary scholarship. This critique concerns previous neglect of literary multilingualism and of multilingual readers, as well as universalist claims of monolingual readers to complete understanding (leading to the demand for either a monolingual text or one where "foreign elements" are translated). Both the preference for monolingual texts and the preference for multilingual readers for multilingual texts, however, rely on the demand for semantic transparency and an implicit view of literature as communication of semantic content. Hence, the critique of monolingual literary norms actually carries with it the same assumption of literature-as-communication as the monolingualist conception of literature that it criticizes. Because of this underlying assumption, different kinds of literary meaning-making as well as the materiality of literary language are neglected, alongside other productive literary effects of multilingualism.

Multilingual texts that do not translate or in other ways "gloss" (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 61-64; Tidigs 2014: 59-61) foreign words undoubtedly make clear that different readers are treated differently, in a more explicit manner than in so-called monolingual texts (a distinction to which we will return later). The fact that different readers are affected differently does *not*,

however, imply that some readers are, in fact, "better" or "ideal" targets for multilingual texts. Instead, the traditional conception of a certain target or preferred audience needs to be overhauled in favor of a more dynamic understanding of the role readers play for the effects of literary multilingualism itself.

We are, evidently, not alone in this view. In her seminal book, *Bilingual Aesthetics* (2004), Doris Sommer turns the idea of the target reader of multilingual texts on its head, with the aid of Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky:

> Wordplay, distractions, detours, *foreign words* are among the devices of deliberate roughness that make up literary technique for Shklovsky. Roughing it, let's not forget, is a reliable English recipe for pleasure by way of discomfort. Ironically, and in the same spirit of Shklovsky's provocations, the delays or difficulties that English-only readers may encounter in a multilingual text probably make them better targets for aesthetic effects than readers who don't stop to struggle. That's why T. S. Eliot resisted translating the foreign words of "The Wasteland." Roughness can irritate the senses pleasantly enough to notice both the artist at work and a refreshed world that may have grayed from inattention. (Sommer 2004: 30, italics in original)

Sommer emphasizes effects, and the affects connected to these effects. Shock, surprise, and irritation over an inability to understand, or a sense of satisfaction when one does understand, are all parts of the effects of literary multilingualism. While the affects of reading have been a focus in literary scholarship, they had seldom been treated at length in the examination of literary multilingualism, before Sommer's ground-breaking study.

Sommer's focus on effects and affects is accompanied by a re-evaluation of incomprehension. Incomprehension, according to Sommer, is not a sign of failure, at least not if the readers notice that they have missed something. An initial sense of exclusion on the part of the monolingual reader can be transformed into participation: "displeasure at finding yourself out of control or just incompetent to understand can cause you to take two steps back. Then reflection comes like the relief of pinching yourself after losing control" (Sommer 2004: 63-64). Surprise or a sense of irritation can lead to a struggle that results in new perspectives. If estrangement is considered an important aspect of literature, as opposed to a conception of literature as either the communication of content or the written representation of an object, then the apparent "non-ideal" readers of a multilingual text are, in fact, excellent "targets" for multilingual literary effects.

In this context, there is another important distinction between *intelligible* and *meaningful*. Reed Way Dasenbrock (1987: 12) has argued that "the meaningfulness of multicultural works is in large measure a function of their unintelligibility for parts of their audience." This, we argue, refers not only to in-group belonging based on shutting out other groups of readers, but also to the concerns of the reader for whom foreign words are not intelligible, but still meaningful. Understanding can encompass other aspects than being able to translate that which is perceived as foreign. It can also involve noticing a lack of understanding, noticing that another language is present, and reacting to what is foreign. The condition, however, is that the reader become aware of the fact that he or she does not understand.

In her discussion of multilingual literature, and with a reference to Ernst Jandl, Monika Schmitz-Emans (2004) directs attention to the manner in which the presence of several, (perhaps unknown) languages becomes meaningful, if not comprehensible in a traditional sense:

> Wenn verstehen heißt, etwas so erfaßt zu haben, daß man es in die eigene Sprache übersetzen könnte, dann gibt es hier schwerlich etwas zu verstehen, denn wie sollte man Vielsprachiges in eine Sprache übersetzen? […] Durch Abweichung von der Konvention macht Jandl auf die Sprache, die SprachEN als solche aufmerksam, erinnert an ihre Verschiedenheit, indem er sie ostentativ ignoriert. Die SprachEN selbst scheinen so zu tun, als seien sie nur eine, während ihre Wörter doch zusammenstoßen, sich aneinander reiben und voneinander abstechen wie nicht abgestimmte Farbwerte. (16)

According to Schmitz-Emans, the business of the analysis of literary multilingualism is not to translate the multilingual text into a monolingual one. Multilingual literature displays and simultaneously transgresses linguistic borders; it works by means of difference, and not just by the semantic content seen to reside in the words themselves. Therefore, the purpose of analyses of literary multilingualism is, rather, to examine what multilingualism or other kinds of linguistic tensions *do* with the text and to readers, as well as to their attentiveness to language.

The reader as part of the text, and the reader as the place where the effect takes place, is implicit in Sommer's reasoning. Therefore, our argument is inspired by Sommer's thoughts on incomprehension and challenge as productive factors in reading. Sommer also emphasizes literary multilingualism as an invitation to play, directed at both multi- and monolingual readers (Sommer 2004: passim). Encouraged by the insights of Sommer, we wish to develop

the discussion of the readers of literary multilingualism by further emphasizing that readers not only react (differently) to multilingualism, but are also co-creators of literary multilingualism. Here, partial fluency is the starting point, and in this context, we argue, the material qualities of language are inseparable from multilingualism itself. We hope to illustrate what this entails in a concrete manner, through examples of contemporary multilingual poetry involving different languages and linguistic registers. First, though, we will critically discuss previous definitions of multilingual literature, as well as the mono-/multi- divide, arguing for a revised conception of linguistic difference.

**Literary Multilingualism and Linguistic Borders**

Why do we need to include a multimodal approach within the study of literary multilingualism? One answer to this question is to be found in contemporary multilingual literature itself; it is increasingly characterized by an emphasis on tensions between different modalities of the literary text. This tendency is particularly strong in the genre sometimes referred to as sound poetry, combining different languages and linguistic registers in various media formats such as the printed text, online publication, digital recording or a singular performance by the artist. Jesper Olsson has described the poets Caroline Bergvall, Cia Rinne and Barbara Jane Reyes, among others, as inhabiting a "multilingual space of sound poetry" propelled by the widespread use of digital media (2013: 183-190). Furthermore, the need to include a multimodal approach to literary multilingualism is also, we claim, triggered by the fundamental question with which anyone dealing with literary multilingualism is eventually confronted: what is a language, and how should the *multi-* in literary multilingualism be understood?

In early studies of linguistic diversity in fiction and poetry, the term code-switching was often preferred, and is still in use (e.g., Valdés Fallis 1976; Timm 2000; Jonsson 2005; Refsum 2011, among many others). Just as code-switching as a concept relies on the concept of different linguistic codes among which switching takes place, the "multi-" in multilingualism is often taken for granted in definitions of the phenomenon. Multilingualism is usually defined as the use of multiple languages within the same text (e.g., Knauth 2004: 266-267); consequently, it is a pre-determinable property of the literary text as a container for a limited number of (most often national) languages.

In contrast to the seemingly definitive border between codes or languages implicit in the terms, several studies of linguistic diversity in literature from as early as the 1970s have

explored features that display the malleability of the border between multi- and monolingual literature. Important here is the inclusion of "intralinguistic" variation, in the form of dialect, stylistic registers or the like (cf. Schmitz-Emans 2004: 15), which is included in the umbrella term "multilingualism." In fact, other forms of multilingualism besides the most obvious one, the lexical, have been included in definitions of code-switching and multilingualism since the 1970s. In his 1976 and 1979 contributions on bilingual features in literature, Gary D. Keller launched a broad definition of code-switching where "latent" features—often on the levels of syntax or semantics—bring forth a "dual code" (1979: 278). Among Keller's examples we find Ernest Hemingway's idiosyncratic use of the English "rare", corresponding to the Spanish *raro* (ibid: 279).

In the article "Polylingualism as Reality and Translation as Mimesis," Meir Sternberg (1981: 222) argues that the fundamental problem for literary art is "how to represent the reality of polylingual discourse through a communicative medium which is normally unilingual."[2] Thus, he works solidly with a highly reductive conception of literature as the representation of a fixed, extra-textual object. For Sternberg, it is the correspondence with this object that assigns value to, or detracts value from, multilingual phenomena, and in accordance with this he neglects any possible aesthetic and political effects of textual linguistic phenomena that do not correspond to those of the supposed "object." Such phenomena Sternberg pejoratively labels "vehicular promiscuity," dismissing everything "from the medieval *muvaššah* to Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*—where shifts of medium are mimetically gratuitous and polylingual means are often flagrantly summoned to represent a unilingual reality of discourse" (ibid: 224). Sternberg's problematic assumptions of mimesis aside, he nevertheless includes linguistic border-crossing elements in his analysis, such as orthographic idiosyncrasies (as markers of a foreign accent), grammatical errors, lexical deviations and other stylistic features (ibid: 227). He also mentions what Ashcroft et al. (1989: 68-69) call "syntactic fusion," whereby syntactic features of two languages are brought together.

More recently, Hana Wirth-Nesher has performed discrete analyses of border-phenomena in her studies of Jewish-American literature. Wirth-Nesher defines multilingualism as "not only the literal presence of two languages but also the echoes of another language and culture

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[2] Sternberg prefers the term "polylingualism" and proposes that "the sociolinguistic term" "multilingualism" is reserved for characterisation of "the linguistic range of a single speaker or community" (Sternberg 1981: 222). Scholarship has since proven Sternberg wrong, as bi- and multilingualism are now the dominant terms in research on literary multilingualism on both sides of the Atlantic, e.g. Sollors 1998; Sommer 2004; Schmitz-Emans 2004; Wirth-Nesher 2006; Yildiz 2012; Taylor-Batty 2013; Tidigs 2014).

detected in so-called monolingual prose" (2006: 6). Among the phenomena she discusses are interlingual homonyms, interlingual puns, and orthographic deviations to indicate broken speech (ibid: passim; Wirth-Nesher 1990: 305). In *Beyond the Mother Tongue. The Postmonolingual Condition*, Yasemin Yildiz widens the discussion of multilingualism in literature to include literal translations as "a form of multilingualism that is both visible and invisible in the text," (Yildiz 2012: 144) and as "a multilingual form that can affectively recode all involved languages" (ibid: 168).

Regardless of terminology or value assigned to the phenomena in question, Keller, Sternberg, Wirth-Nesher and Yildiz (for others, cf. Tidigs 2014: 50-55) bring attention to literary multilingualism on the borders between national languages; it is a multilingualism that is not only lexical, but also often syntactic, semantic or orthographic. The scholars in question do not always discuss the relevance of different readers and readings for this kind of multilingualism (although sometimes they do, e.g., Yildiz 2012: 144). However, these kinds of multilingualism illustrate the reader's role in determining what is to be considered multilingualism: it takes a certain kind of reader to recognize that something is off with Hemingway's use of some English words and to discover Spanish behind them; some readers will recognize a Turkish literal expression translated into German, while other readers will read the same passage as simply a German neologism or a strange turn of phrase. The language skills of readers are of crucial importance, but not in the sense that they determine whether a reading experience is rewarding or not. Readers familiar and unfamiliar with the languages in question will be affected by multilingualism, albeit differently.

The role of different readers in the creation of multilingual effects and affects is closely related to conceptions of language and translation. Several translation theorists and sociolinguists, perhaps most notably Naoki Sakai (2009) and Jan Blommaert (2010), have criticized the tendency to regard languages as clearly identifiable entities rather than social processes characterized by perpetual mobility through time and space. Sakai illustrates his core theoretical problem by posing the question whether languages should rather be compared to water instead of to clearly separable and countable entities, such as apples and oranges (Sakai 2009: 73). As an alternative to an atomistic conception of language, he argues for a notion of translation as an activity of linguistic *bordering*; that is, he promotes an understanding of translation as an ambiguous practice, "not only a border crossing but also and preliminarily an act of drawing a border, of *bordering*" (ibid: 83). Thus, Sakai highlights the translation's simultaneous ability to bridge gaps between language communities, while at

the same time *producing* both linguistic borders and notions of languages as enclosed entities (cf. Huss & Tidigs 2015: 17).

From a similar theoretical vantage point, Jan Blommaert (2010: xiv) makes a case for "a view of language as something intrinsically and perpetually mobile, through space as well as time, and made for mobility. The finality of language is mobility, not immobility." According to Blommaert (ibid: 12), "conventional treatments of [...] patterns of shifting and mixing (for instance 'code-switching', where 'codes' are understood as artefactualized languages) fail to do justice to the complexity of language repertoires characteristic of globalization." In a similar manner, we argue that the linguistic practices of contemporary poetry defy description according to clearly differentiated "codes."

Till Dembeck's proposal for "a philology of multilingualism" or *eine Philologie der Mehrsprachigkeit* (Dembeck 2014: 9–38), informed by theorists such as the previously mentioned Sakai and Yildiz, follows a similar path. Dembeck underlines the need for a philological approach to multilingual literature to stress the multiplicity and potential linguistic variation of any text, as opposed to regarding multilingual literature as a separate category and a deviation from a pre-established monolingual norm (which would be historically inaccurate). He argues for a philological approach to literary multilingualism that not only seeks to translate and explain instances of linguistic difference, but rather takes as its departure for analysis phenomena that are characterized by untranslatability or inexplicability (ibid: 27). Dembeck's philological approach to multilingualism, stressing the particularity of every literary text rather than adhering to a general definition of literary multilingualism, is in line with our argument.

To understand the tendency to maintain and enforce a view of languages as enclosed entities, one must turn to the historical, ideological and political contexts of language differentiation. Irvine and Gal (2000: 35) have highlighted the "ideological aspects of language differentiation" in terms of three semiotic processes that concretely pinpoint how borders between languages are the result of ideological performance: "iconization, fractal recursivity, and erasure" (ibid: 37).[3] Irvine and Gal discuss three historical examples of these processes

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[3] In short, iconization occurs when linguistic features are understood as iconic representations of certain social group's seemingly inherent nature. Fractal recursivity refers to the projection of oppositions that recur on many levels—"intragroup oppositions might be projected onto intergroup relations, or vice versa" (Irvine & Gal 2000: 38), providing "actors with the discursive or cultural resources to claim and thus to attempt to create shifting 'communities', identities, selves, and roles, at different levels of contrast, within a cultural field" (ibid.). Erasure,

from Europe and Africa, particularly emphasizing how the study of language has participated in colonial discourses, as in linguistic descriptions of Senegalese languages, or in efforts by Western European observers to identify and standardize Macedonian. Importantly, they stress the need to recognize these processes, which still occur and are embedded in our own analytical frameworks; they require our critical awareness and reflection.

Instead of defining the multilingual literary text as a definitive textual configuration containing a specific number of languages, we wish to argue—in line with Sakai's notion of translation as *bordering*, as well as Irvine and Gal's research on language ideology—for an understanding of the multilingual literary text that takes the reader into account, and especially how the text encourages the reader to engage in different bordering processes. Depending on each individual's reading and based on the reader's linguistic capacities and other contextual factors, different articulations of the multilingual literary text will result. Since Sakai and Blommaert have a different focus than literature, we wish to highlight the role of the *readers* in the production of literary multilingualism. Thus, our main concern is to discuss literary multilingualism as a process between the text and the reader, where the borders between languages and sounds are drawn, muddled and re-drawn.

**A Multimodal Perspective on Literary Multilingualism**

The continuous drawing and redrawing of linguistic borders through time and space finds its parallel in the unstable border between meaningful (linguistic) sounds and incomprehensible noises. When readers engage with multilingual literature, they typically rely not only on the visual sense, but also on the aural in a process of inner articulation. Furthermore, this calls forth the need for a multimodal approach to literary multilingualism, where the sensorial and semiotic modalities of the multilingual literary text are taken into account. With such an analytic focus, we argue, the complex interaction between different readers and the multilingual literary text can be highlighted in greater detail.

The terms "sensorial modality" and "semiotic modality" originate from Lars Elleström's (2010: 11-48) model for understanding intermedial relations, an attempt also to conjoin the two fields of intermedial studies and multimodal studies. As Elleström shows, multimodality has usually been understood as a combination of text and sound, or the auditory and the visual sense faculty (ibid 14). According to Elleström, these broad conceptual categories run the risk

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finally, is the process where persons, activities or sociolinguistic phenomena considered to be "inconsistent with the ideological scheme" are rendered invisible in some way (ibid.).

of ignoring the distinction between the materiality of media and the perception of media, and creating an impression of various media as fundamentally different from each other. On the contrary, the modalities often overlap and interact, thereby also producing different instances of media. The modalities "are the essential cornerstones of all media without which mediality cannot be comprehended and together they build a medial complex integrating materiality, perception and cognition" (ibid 15). Elleström's model distinguishes four modalities of media: the material modality, the sensorial modality, the spatiotemporal modality and the semiotic modality (ibid). The different configurations between the four modalities are thus what constitute the individual medium. To demonstrate the use of his model on the case of printed poetry, Elleström (ibid 23) offers the following multimodal description:

> Printed poetry has a solid, two-dimensional material interface, or a sequential combination of such interfaces (if realized in the technical medium of a book). It is perceived by the eyes, but also when read silently it becomes apparent that it also has latent auditory qualities in the conventional system of signification called language. Most poetry gains its meaning through these conventional signs, but there may also be substantial portions of iconicity in both the visual form of the text and the silent, inner sound experiences produced by the mind.

The fact that reading literature involves not only the visual sense, but also an auditory dimension, for example as "inner sound experiences," might come across as self-evident, not least when considering the history of Western poetry since antiquity; the practice of silent reading is a fairly late phenomenon, having gradually been established as a consequence of print culture (see e.g., Ong 2002: 127-129). The distinction made between music and poetry in the West is also a modern one; the ancient Greeks, for example, regarded the two spheres as part of the same category, under the heading of *mousike* (Prieto 2003: 1).

Still, we wish to stress the importance of taking this auditory dimension into account when analyzing possible readings of multilingual poetry, for two important reasons: Firstly, multilingual poetry—as illustrated by the literary examples in the following—seems to make use of poetry's sounding potential to *a greater extent* than other poetic genres. Secondly, this tendency to propel the reader into a sphere between language and sound, and the specific effects and consequences it has for notions of language and its borders is of particular interest for scholars engaged in critical multilingualism studies.

However, the examples of multilingual poetry that we will discuss below encourage readers to consider not only inner articulatory attempts in search of possible linguistic sounds and

meanings, but also visual explorations of the printed text. Multilingual poetry has a strong tendency to utilize and highlight the visual and material qualities of letters and sign systems, operations that to an even greater extent defamiliarize naturalized understandings of writing and language in general as straight-forward communication. The historical ties to and inspiration from modernist visual poetry of the inter- and postwar period are also strong in contemporary multilingual poetry (Perloff 2010; Olsson 2013).[4]

To map the moves between the auditory and visual dimensions in the reading process of multilingual poetry, a focus on the interaction between the sensorial modalities of seeing and hearing, combined with the semiotic modality, is illuminating. Drawing on Charles Sanders Peirce's typology of the sign, "symbol," "index," and "icon," Elleström characterizes the three modes of the semiotic modality as "convention (symbolic signs), resemblance (iconic signs) and contiguity (indexical signs)" (2010: 22). Furthermore, Elleström stresses that the three modes are far from clear-cut categories, and are often mixed in the process of interpretation.

This mix of possible significations also involves the simultaneous use of seeing and hearing. For example, when a reader is trying to determine whether an "x" forms part of a conventional sign system such as the Latin alphabet, a certain pronunciation is implied and thus also an imagined or articulated sound sequence. On the other hand, the "x" could be interpreted in terms of an iconic sign denoting prohibition, or censorship. Depending on the linguistic knowledge of different readers, an "x" will also be pronounced in different ways, thus producing multiple articulatory possibilities and imagined inner sound sequences. But an "x", to use Elleström's own example, could also be taken to resemble the wings of a windmill, if contextual factors make such an interpretation feasible: "Ian Hamilton Finlay is said to have written a poem called 'The Windmill's Song' that reads like this: 'X'" (ibid: 3).

Thus, we argue that a multimodal perspective can help us to analyze how different modalities contribute to the way readers categorize literary texts according to different languages, and what readers' roles are in the co-creation of literary multilingualism. The examples of multilingual poetry discussed below aim to support this general claim.

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[4] In this article we discuss texts that are written solely in the Latin alphabet. The issue of literary biscriptalism is, however, an important one for the study of the multimodality of literary multilingualism. In the case of bi- or even multiscriptalism, the visual aspects of written language are further enhanced, as are the challenges for those readers who are unfamiliar with some of the script. The phenomenon of literary biscriptalism has received relatively little scholarly attention, although there are exceptions, cf. Schmitz-Emans 2014.

### Listening to Languages amid Noise: Cia Rinne

A piece of poetry such as the example to the right, part of "notes for orientation" from the collection *notes for soloists* by Berlin-based artist Cia Rinne (b. 1973), shows how her tossing the same letters about in different constellations prompts the reader to search for recognizable words in sequences of letters and sounds. What readers find differs: the most obvious language here is the French *mais oui* [but yes], but a speaker of Finnish, for example, also finds the combination of *iso* [big] and *uima* [swim-, as in swimsuit, *uimapuku*]. Words can be sorted out from linguistic noise on the level of the single line, but the lines can, of course, also be read one after another. In such a reading, even familiar words of languages known to the reader turn into sound sequences of repeated vowels, blending in with each other. In this sense, Rinne's poetry enacts the

```
*   maisoui
    aisouim
    isouima
    souimai
    ouimais
    uimaiso
    imaisou

    ouimaisoù?
```

Cia Rinne, *notes for soloists*, Gothenburg: OEI Editör 2009)

processes of linguistic bordering described by Sakai: the poems engage their readers in an act of distinguishing and dissolving languages, drawing and dissolving borders. Thus, in the act of reading and through the attention directed toward the visual and acoustic qualities of language, the problematics of linguistic borders are experienced sensorially, as opposed to only being acknowledged intellectually.

```
17 questions
(eine frage des charakters)

caractēristi/quē?
misanthropi/quē?
philosophi/quē?
hēdonisti/quē?
sympathi/quē?
hystēri/quē?
grotes/quē?
exoti/quē?
pani/quē?
blo/quē?
ni/quē?
o/quē?
/quē?
quē?
uē?
ē?
?
```

Cia Rinne, from *zaroum* / *notes for soloists* / *l'usage du mot*, Berlin: kookbooks 2016

In the example to the left, from Rinne's *l'usage du mot* [*the use of the word*], an accent aigu marker, coupled with a forward slash, turn what would have been single words in a single language (French) into several words from two languages (French, Spanish). The poem is, in several ways, a question of character [*eine frage des characters*]. Not only the adjectives turn into questions about someone's character, but other characters than alphabet letters, such as the accent marker and the question mark, i.e., visual markers, also change the word and the language. Depending on whether the reader chooses to articulate the words in

French or Spanish using the accent markers, the inner imagined sound sequence and possible subsequent pronunciation will differ.

Beyond this conventional mode of the semantic modality, to use Elleström's terminology, the poem also demonstrates a strong visual component on the level of resemblance: The letters are arranged in the shape of a large comma, itself a punctuation mark conventionally indicating a separation between clauses and sentences, whereby a visual contiguity to the forward slashes separating each word line is established. Thus, the poem seems to pose a broad question concerning separation in language and between languages: How are sounds organized and attributed to different languages? In what ways can letters be inhabited by different sounds and languages? Here, the accent marker is the fundamental *frage des charakters*, the question of character: if the divided word is read as written across the dividing forward slash, a hybrid word is created, on the basis of pronunciation. Moreover, the poem invites readers—especially those unfamiliar with French and Spanish—to interpret the poem in terms of a numerical cipher, as an alternative to regarding the letters as semantic units in a conventional sense: The title's number "17" recurs in the number of lines, as well as in the number of letters in the first line's hybrid word *caractéristi/qué?*. Furthermore, an attentiveness to the graphic shapes of the two numbers "1" and "7" is mirrored in the shape of the large comma, as if the two numbers would have been merged into one figure. As this brief interpretation indicates, Rinne's poem prompts the reader to constantly move between different sensorial levels (seeing and hearing), as well as different semantic modalities, in the search for possible linguistic registers.

**Mining Language for Sound: Caroline Bergvall**

In her essay "Middling English," London-based, French-Norwegian poet Caroline Bergvall (b. 1962) writes the following under the subheading "the meddle":

> Spoken, transmitted, inscribed languages are at the root of the imagination of writing. They highlight the social machines that underpin the work: the voices, the languages, the pleasures, the complex nexus of cultural and literary motivations with their access markers, their specific narratives, existential tropes, their polemical procedures and formal devices. It is the writer's role to test out, provoke the naturalized edges and bounds of language use and rules. She mines language for what is always moving, always escaping. To travel at the heels of writing activates reclaiming zones, fictitious collective memory. (Bergvall 2011: 16-17)

Following Bergvall's intriguing call upon writers to excavate language through literary means are her own attempts to put such a poetics into play. Provoking the naturalized edges and bounds of languages is one key move that she employs in the suite of poems called "Shorter Chaucer Tales." The orthography of the poem "Fried tale (London Zoo)" forces the reader to stop in order to struggle with the dynamic between visual sign and its possible semantic component:

> 1
> All juicit with an arseful of moola, wonga, clams & squids
> doks stasht in identikl blakases hanging from ther hans
> 2 Suits, a mega pair of Smith, Blupils no dout,
> viddying how they trading outa goodness welth stuporifik,
> shake handes, hug n abuse ech othre on the bak. [...] (Bergvall 2011: 38)

The language of this tale is simultaneously contemporaneous and futuristic, with most of its "[s]pelling and some syntactical usage" taken from films such as *Clockwork Orange* and *The Matrix* as well as Russell Hoban's sci-fi novel, *Riddley Walker*, written in an imagined English called "Riddleyspeak," (Bergvall 2011: 162; Scott 2010: 160). Although the orthography departs from standard English towards spoken language, this makes it more difficult for readers to imagine what words the letters form. At the same time, placed in a context with Chaucer, whom Bergvall samples in "The Host Tale," this language also appears archaic, with its "squilyons," "tawk," and "chaunce" (Bergvall 2011: 38-39). Thus, the poem mixes temporal linguistic layers in a way that forces the reader to reflect upon the contingency and constant flux of language within a language such as English, however it is defined.

While "Fried Tale (London Zoo)" demonstrates a playful Joyce-esque sampling of different and possible Englishes, the poetic suite "Cropper" meditates on the interconnections among body, language and loss. The first section creates a striking visual effect, initially leaving the reader disoriented: the page consists of two blocks of text, where the middle part of each line has been erased. The text has also been mirrored. In the upper right corner, a title—with an erased middle part—has been placed (ibid: 139). The remaining traces of the letters suggest the title "CORPUS," i.e., the Latin word for body.
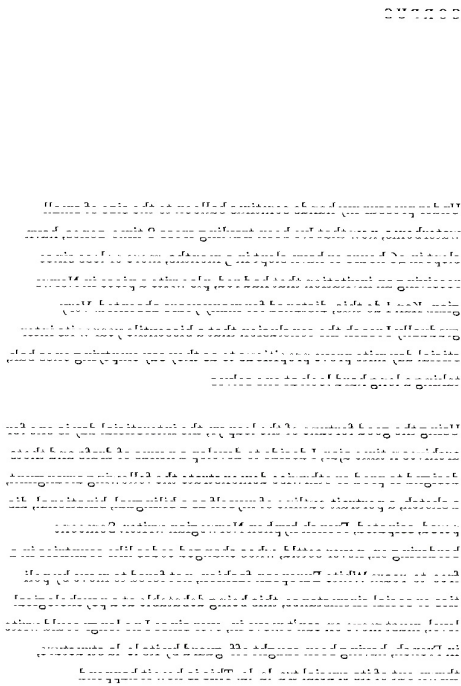
Turning the page to the next section, the reader finds the title "Croup" (designating a type of respiratory infection, typically giving rise to a heavy cough), which develops an autobiographical meditation on the author's languages, especially a perceived distance to Norwegian and an inability to write in French: "having been caught off-guard by its le-la structure, thrwn out of its crucial tra-la-la" (ibid: 140). This quote, as well as the beginning of "Croup," illustrates how Bergvall's English has been slightly cropped, demanding the reader not only to fill in the gaps, but also to reflect on language as something simultaneously absent and present:

> Under pressure my hands sometimes balloon to the size of small waterbombs, now that Ive been travelling across 8 time-zones, havn slept in 26 hours or havn slept in 3 months, more or less since receiving an invitation that had read, pls write a piece in Norwegian. (ibid)

Caroline Bergvall,
*Meddle English: New and Selected Texts*
Callicoon, NY: Nightboat Books 2011: 139

The concluding part of "Cropper" has the title "Crop" (resembling the Norwegian and Swedish word for body, *kropp*) and begins with a reflection on the relationship between one's body and different languages: "How does one keep ones body as ones own, what does this mean but the relative safety of boundaries, could I make sure that what I called my body would remain in the transit from othr languages, that it would hold its progression into English [...]" (ibid: 147). The poem puts homophones into play (crop/*kropp*/corpus) and re-enforces the connection between body, language, loss and cropping/erasure. Following this brief introduction are what at first sight seem to be groups of three sentences divided into the three languages English, Norwegian and French:

Some never had a body to call their own before it was
    taken away
som aldri hadde en kropp de kunne kalle sin egen før den ble
    revet bort
ceux dont le corps d'emblée leur est arraché

Caroline Bergvall,
*Meddle English: New and Selected Texts*,
Callicoon, NY: Nightboat Books 2011: 147

However, these sentences are not to be understood as straightforward translations of each other, as the reader with knowledge of all three languages soon realizes: The Norwegian *som*, as Bergvall writes in a note about the poem, "'is a conjunction that introduces relative sentences or sub-clauses" (ibid: 164), as opposed to the English "some," denoting an unspecified amount. Furthermore, the French *ceux* translates into "Those who," whereby it receives a specific character, as opposed to the English "Some." Still, on the level of pronunciation, "Some," *som* and *ceux* resemble each other acoustically, whereby a contiguity, to use Elleström's term, is established between the three languages. It is important to note that the letters forming the sentence in Norwegian are printed in a lighter shade of gray than the other two. Interpreted in the light of the Croup-sections' descriptions of a distance from and possible loss of Norwegian, the lighter shade of gray seems to demonstrate this gradual disappearance on a visual level. On the other hand, a reader who is unfamiliar with both Norwegian and French might assume that the sentences following the English are translations of the first, but the visual difference of the Norwegian sentence would disturb such an assumption. Even more important, though, is the fact that the reader's unfamiliarity with one or two of the languages on the page seems to be a main point of "Cropper," since the experience of language, in terms of eluding acoustics and a division between body and language, is reiterated throughout the text. Thus, one might argue that readers who are only familiar with English might be even better addressees for the poem (in line with partial fluency as creator of aesthetic effects, cf. Walkowitz 2015: e.g., 42–44), than readers familiar with the three languages being used in it.

**Writing with Stones in the Mouth: Ralf Andtbacka**

In his encyclopedic *Wunderkammer* (2008), Ralf Andtbacka (b. 1963), a Swedish-language poet from Finland, presents an expansive net of motifs ranging from the collection of names and objects to the reproduction of the human voice throughout history. In fact, *Wunderkammer* explores the transformation of the voice from an essentially corporeal phenomenon to an inscription (as transcribed soundwaves by a phonautograph, as a record or

an audiofile) to something possible to collect as an object. Likewise, the language of the poems foregrounds questions of orality and inscription, and the transposition of voice into literature, which involves the transformation of an ethereal bodily and sensorial phenomenon into a solid, printed object.

The poem "Fvivet mev ftenav i mummen" ['Wittem wiv ftones in te mouh'] is an attempt to stutter in writing, the way one would sound when attempting to speak with stones in the mouth:

### *Fvivet mev ftenav i mummen*

JA fka fviiva, ja fvivev me ftenah ja fka ftena
tu fka fköh tu fka fö-ööö-öökah tu fka fööö-hööö-ööööhhhhh ftena fka fiviva
f       t       e       e       n       a       n       a       h
pvvvvv fka pvvvvvvvvvvvv ftenav tu fka
f t e n a v n a f   f t e n a v   f t e n a h
han fka fvjije-ee-ä-yiva fka fvjije-ee han fka fvj-vj-vj-yyyyyyyyyiiyeeeeee
h o n   f k a   f k v i v v k a k a k k a   h o n   f k a   f v - g v v f f
k .a - k a k k a   f t e n a n a   f t e n a n   a
ftevtuuuuvvv ten fka tet fka ten tet fka ten fka ten tet ten tet ten tet ten
f       t       e       e       n       a       v       n       a
vi fka auuuuuuuuu-aa fka ooooooooooooooooooo-y-i-aaaaaaa
f t e n   f t e n   f t e n   m f f h
ä n n n a f f   i   v y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y
v i   f k a   f k v ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö
f k a   ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö
v i   f k a   ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö ö
f t e n       f t n f t v ä k       k
n       i               f       k       a
fkvvv nnnnnnnnnn u-aouy-aa bbbbbbbbbbvvbvb
f ö v t v ä m m a f   i   t v a a a f   å   g v ö m m v k k o
t i   f k a   b u m v a   m u b v a   m u b v a
v o v v i n   ä n n   a - t o m m b v i n n
at me fteeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeenav i mummiienn
m o v m m a s   i   m u v v v
a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a a o o o o o o o o o
o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o u u u u u u u u u
u       u       u       u       u       u       u       u
f       t       v       f       v       t       f       v       t       f       v       t       f       v       v       t
f       a       m       k       a       f       f
å å å ännnaff i vyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyiiiiiiiiiii vvyyaaeeou
iiiiiiiiiiiiiiooooooooooouuuuuuuuuuuuyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy

Ralf Andtbacka
"Fvivet mev ftenav i mummen"
*Wunderkammer* 2008: 72

In the first part of the poem, readers are forced to sift the words out of mere noise: "Ja fka fviiva, ja fvivev me ftenah ja fka ftena tu fka" [a distorted spelling of the standard Swedish *Jag ska skriva, jag skriver med stenar jag ska stena du ska*, which in turn translates as: "I will write, I write with stones I will stone you will fköh"]. After this passage, recognizable words can be distinguished sporadically, but the poem concludes in the noise of repeated but disconnected letters:

```
å å å å å å å å å å å å å å ä ä ä ä ä ä ä ä ä ä ä ä ä ä ä ö ö ö ö ö ö ö i
v v v v v v v v y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y y å
t        v         ä         k         k         å
ä  f  f  f  f  f  f  f  f  f  f  f  f  f  v  v  v  j  a  a  a  a  h  !
…
```

<p align="center">(Andtbacka 2008: 73)</p>

Strictly speaking, one can write perfectly well with stones in the mouth; it is writing whilst holding stones in the hand that would be difficult. What Andtbacka does is to transpose what speaking with stones in the mouth would sound like in writing. The result is a text where language on the one hand is gradually dismantled into noise, a text where reading becomes a rather taxing process. On the other hand, the result is a text where the visual aspects, for lack of semantics and even acoustic variation, are dominant. Instead of the automated gathering of semantic content, it is the fluctuation of visual density on the page that dominates the sensorial impression.

The poem almost begs for a Deleuzian interpretation in terms of minorization and deterritorialization. In fact, Andtbacka's poem highlights an aspect of minorization and literature that is often neglected. When expanding on the concept of minor literature in *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari speak of "minor literature" not only as that which a minority creates within a major language (such as Kafka, a Czech Jew, does within German, or Andtbacka, a Finland-Swede, within Swedish), nor only as a form of language use where the writer uses his or her "own" language as if he or she were a foreigner (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 16-27); they also emphasize language, and especially written language, as a deterritorialization of the mouth:

> Rich or poor, each language always implies a deterritorialization of the mouth, the tongue, and the teeth. The mouth, tongue, and teeth find their primitive territoriality in

food. In giving themselves over to the articulation of sounds, the mouth, tongue, and teeth deterritorialize. Thus, there is a certain disjunction between eating and speaking, and even more, despite all appearances, between eating and writing. Undoubtedly, one can write while eating more easily than one can speak while eating, but writing goes further in transforming words into things capable of competing with food. (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 19-20)

In Andtbacka's poem, stones enter the mouth, whereby food is replaced with solid objects unable to be swallowed and digested. In this process, language and words are splintered into single letters and noise. Perhaps paradoxically, this process of transposing speaking with stones in the mouth into writing with stones in the mouth creates a mouth/poem that eats, chews and spits language. On the one hand, what takes place is a drastic reterritorialization of words as meaningful sounds into noise and corporeal phenomena. On the other hand, the poem reads as an exploration of the moment of deterritorialization, since "articulated sound was a deterritorizalied noise but one that will be reterritorialized in sense" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 21); in this moment, the articulated sounds of the poem's I are not reterritorialized in sense. Although partially comprehensible, the language of the poem is always "traversed by a line of escape—in order to liberate a living and expressive material that speaks for itself and has no need of being put into a form," as Deleuze and Guattari (ibid.) write of Kafka's preoccupation with music and animal sounds.

The end of Andtbacka's poem resembles a record getting stuck in small bursts of consonants, or an old-fashioned cassette tape that has been worn out. But it can also be interpreted as the person speaking with stones in the mouth choking and finally spitting the stones out in a sigh of relief: the "j    a    a        a    h        !" of the final line can be read as a very drawn-out but satisfied *ja* [yes]. The poem demonstrates how the border between language and noise is not clearly drawn; rather, noise is always a potential, present in language—simply adding blank spaces between letters transforms the one into the other. In the opening lines, the words can still be categorized as language, but they are not language exclusively; scraps of noise are already making themselves heard.

**Conclusion: Listening to the Noise of Multilingualism**

This article has focused on readers as active participants in the co-creation of multilingualism in literary texts. We have tried to demonstrate how readers partake in the bordering processes of multilingualism, not only in distinguishing between languages, but also in recognizing different kinds of language, and the distinctions between languages and noise. This, in turn, is

deeply connected to the material qualities of language. Furthermore, the readers' participation should not be overemphasized as it is also limited: literary texts impose boundaries and limitations for their readers.

On the one hand, readers' associations to other languages and familiar sounds extend in different directions. On the other hand, readers must work with what is presented. Associations can travel in multiple directions, but their triggers will always be located in the specific text itself. In addition, the fact that one reader does not recognize the presence of one language in another, or even that a word belongs to a language and is not "mere noise," does not imply that those words are categorized into languages solely by other readers. Although linguistic borders, as we have discussed, are malleable and produced in processes of bordering, involving everything from speaker practices and linguistic science to literature, they are also institutionalized in many ways through scholarship, dictionaries, education, and state policies.

In *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, Yildiz, (2012: 13-14, emphasis in original) argues that one ought to "*work through* the mother tongue and not simply sidestep its force," since the force of this "highly ideological, charged, and misleading term" (13) is still active, although it is a historical construct of the 18th century. Similarly, the conception of national languages as countable entities is historically determined as well as problematic, not least because it regards variation as secondary to unity. In an approach similar to that of Yildiz, we therefore argue for a careful and critically informed use of the term "multilingualism" where the mono/multi-divide is not taken for granted. Avoiding the term altogether does not lessen the influence of artefactualized (Blommaert 2010: 4) views on language. Instead, a treatment of linguistically diverse texts is possible where we can *work through* the concept of multilingualism in a double sense: to put the concept to work, and to work through the processes of bordering through which the perception of difference as "multi-" is created.

To summarize our line of argument, we claim that there is a need to direct further scholarly attention to the participation, reactions and affects on the part of the readers of multilingual literary texts. Poetry of the kind we have analyzed could easily be described as particularist, inclusive of privileged readers with refined linguistic skills and exclusive of others (cf. Walkowitz 2015: 32-33). Such an interpretation, however, neglects the possible productive effects of poetry such as Rinne's, Bergvall's and Andtbacka's. In their texts, orthography and visual organization suspend an automatized understanding of language and sense-making, engaging readers in a productive struggle with the text. Once on the look-out, new

and surprising fragments of language can be found in that which is at first thought either familiar or completely foreign. With these texts, no reader is fully "native," and in any case a sense of "mastery" is not the goal; it is rather partial fluency that paves the way for the most surprising engagements with these texts.

Such poetry also encourages readers to leave behind the silent reading practice in favor of loud articulation, in order to make sense of the text's uncertain semantics and noise. This, in turn, directs attention to the importance of the acoustics of language, or as we would like to call it: the noise of language. These insights or reader reactions are connected to the awareness of language as not only meaning, semantics, but also as sounds, noises and visual signs—as poignantly illustrated in Kafka's short story, where the nomads' speech appears as an overflow of animal noise in the ears of the narrator.

Such material aspects are, necessarily, a part of *all* literature written in an alphabet; characters are, after all, approximations of sounds. We argue that the questions we have raised in this article are relevant for literary multilingualism at large. The impact of orthography and acoustics is not always immediately discernible, but visual and aural dimensions of language are often a significant aspect of the literary multilingualism of many different kinds of texts, whether this multilingualism takes the form of interlingual puns, orthographically marked accent, homonyms or transposed literal translations. In every reading, there is a reader who meets the multilingual text with his or her own version of partial fluency.

The fruitfulness of contemporary poetry like Rinne's, Bergvall's and Andtbacka's for the discussion of these issues emerges in how it pushes questions of linguistic borders and materiality to the forefront; it works *through* these questions in the most concrete and material manner, i.e., they are the modi operandi of the texts. The ways these texts question linguistic borders are in many ways inseparable from how they problematize the borders between sound and noise, letter and image. Multilingualism and multimodality are, in these instances, two sides of the same coin, and need to be recognized as such if their effect on readers is to be fully explored.

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