

2024

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### Recommended Citation

Boucher, Marie-Christine (2024) "Multilingual Lifeworlds and Textual Monolingualism: Pseudotranslation in Katerina Poladjan, Olga Grjasnowa, and Nino Haratischwili," *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*: Vol. 48: Iss. 1, Article 8. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.2253>

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## Multilingual Lifeworlds and Textual Monolingualism: Pseudotranslation in Katerina Poladjan, Olga Grjasnowa, and Nino Haratischwili

### Abstract

A great deal of existing research on literary multilingualism focuses on the explicit presence of multiple languages in literary works. Yet these texts represent only a relatively marginal portion of contemporary literary production. To focus on this rare literary phenomenon neglects the fact that literary systems pressure most authors to write increasingly monolingual texts—which does not preclude them from portraying scenes of everyday multilingual life. Rather than rendering different languages directly in the text, however, this multilingualism is often excluded: in a monolingual (literary) world, authors translate worldly multilingualism into textual monolingualism. I analyze the distinct strategies authors employ in this type of translation in three German-language novels partly set in the Caucasus region: *Das achte Leben (Für Brilka)* (Nino Haratischwili, 2014), *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe* (Olga Grjasnowa, 2014), and *Hier sind Löwen* (Katerina Poladjan, 2019). Using pseudotranslation as a mode of reading (Rath 2017), I probe the presence of multilingualism forced into absence.

### Keywords

textual monolingualism, pseudotranslation, German literature, Katerina Poladjan, Olga Grjasnowa, Nino Haratischwili

### Cover Page Footnote

This article is partly based on research conducted in the context of my dissertation project funded by the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et Culture (FRQSC).

Multilingual Lifeworlds and Textual Monolingualism:  
Pseudotranslation in Katerina Poladján, Olga Grjasnowa, and Nino Haratischwili

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A great deal of existing research on literary multilingualism focuses on the overt presence of multiple languages in literary works (see Bürger-Koftis; Dembeck and Mein; Kellmann; Lvovich and Kellmann).<sup>1</sup> However, these texts remain a rather rare literary phenomenon, representing only a relatively marginal portion of contemporary literary production (Gramling 137). This means that even texts that thematize multilingualism are most of the time in fact written in a single language. Rather than rendering different languages directly in the text, however, these scenes of everyday multilingual lives are rendered into literary monolingualism. Yet even (seemingly) monolingual texts can pose a challenge to existing institutional boundaries.

In the German-speaking academic context, authors tend to be read according to their migration biography, so that authors who speak a Slavic language as a first language, for example, are often the subject of analysis in Slavic studies (see Aumüller and Willms; Aumüller; Hitzke and Finkelstein; Hitzke; Hausbacher). This focus on the origin of the authors excludes them from being treated the same way as authors who are perceived as native writers of German literature. This is partly a consequence of the inflexibility of academic disciplines. Tristan Leperlier claims that literary studies still perpetuate “methodological monolingualism,” a consequence of the monolingual paradigm (“La langue des champs”). According to Yasemin Yildiz, within the monolingual paradigm, “individuals and social formations are imagined to possess one ‘true’ language only, their ‘mother tongue,’ and through this possession to be organically linked to an exclusive, clearly demarcated ethnicity, culture, and nation” (2). Since nation and language remain the unreflected framework of most research in the field, Leperlier argues, even research on multilingual authors still focuses on how individual authors “rework” their mother tongue, which does not question the dichotomy between native and non-native speakers. Texts are therefore assumed to belong to the language or culture of origin of their authors, even if they are written (mostly) in German or tell stories set in a German-speaking country.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Silvia Casazza, David E. Susa, Magdalena Pfalzgraf, and Stefan Trajković-Filipović; the editors of this Special Focus Section, Yasemin Yildiz and Bettina Brandt; *STCL* editor Laura Kanost, as well as the anonymous reviewer and proofreader for their valuable feedback.

The methodological monolingualism outlined above also influences the way in which multilingual texts are categorized and read within national literatures. As Till Dembeck points out, “national philology [...] still rests on the presupposition that monolingualism is the ‘unmarked case’ (Ellis) of literary production, and therefore also the basic framework of scholarship” (“Multilingual Philology and National Literature” 8). Consequently, multilingualism is usually approached as an exception to the unmarked standard of monolingualism, even though, as David Martyn points out, scholars of literature and linguistics—perhaps the best-known case being Bakhtin, already in the first half of the twentieth century—have observed the ubiquity of multilingualism for a long time (Martyn 38).

Attempts to classify literature beyond national and linguistic borders have not necessarily been successful at leaving behind methodological monolingualism. As Robert J. C. Young argues, “world literature adopts [a] colonial model unconsciously, looking for literatures written in identifiable languages and then organizing each language and its literature in relation to nationality, region, or cultural origin: the literature and its language are then tacitly assumed to represent the people who are associated with them” (1209). Also in an attempt to classify literature beyond national and linguistic borders, Ottmar Ette coined the concept of *Literatur ohne festen Wohnsitz* ‘literature without a fixed abode,’ which can be productive as a way to “[queer] the familiar distinction between national literature (the province of the still-dominant national philologies) and world literature (the domain of comparative literary studies)” (Ette 8). Drawing upon research on literary multilingualism (see Dembeck, “Es gibt keine einsprachigen Texte”), I would however argue that introducing a new category does not deconstruct existing ones—everyone’s national literature is someone else’s world literature—nor does it question the possibility of literature ever really having a ‘fixed abode.’ In order to fully deconstruct our methodological monolingualism, the solution should not be to create more categories but to adjust our ways of reading.

In this article, I will elaborate how pseudotranslation as a mode of reading can complement our understanding of seemingly monolingual literary texts. By reading the texts both as originals and as translations, we can shed light on how these seemingly monolingual texts challenge prevailing notions in regard to the relationship between readers and texts. After a brief discussion in which I introduce the concepts of “pseudotranslation” and “excluded multilingualism,” I will demonstrate this approach using examples from three contemporary German-language novels: *Hier sind Löwen* (‘Here Are Lions’) by Katerina Poladjan (2019),

*Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe* ('The Judicial Uncertainty of a Marriage'<sup>2</sup>) by Olga Grjasnowa (2014), and *Das achte Leben (Für Brilka)* (*The Eighth Life (For Brilka)*, 2019) by Nino Haratischwili (2014).

These three authors are rather well established in contemporary German literature. Haratischwili (born 1983 in Tiflis) is as well-known playwright, theater director, and novelist born in the former Soviet Republic of Georgia and raised there and in Germany. While she regularly collaborates with German and Georgian theaters ("HLT M – Nino Haratischwili"), she writes principally in German and has been awarded multiple German literary prizes for her novels. Grjasnowa (born 1984 in Baku) has become a household name—and "star author" (Lenz 2023)—of contemporary German-language literature since the publication of her bestselling debut novel *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* (*All Russians Love Birch Trees*) in 2012. Born to a Russian-Jewish family in the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan, she arrived in Germany as a child refugee. An award-winning author, she also regularly participates in public discourse, with notable contributions on multilingualism (Grjasnowa, *Die Macht der Mehrsprachigkeit*). Yet she writes solely in German. Katerina Poladjan (born 1971 in Moscow), whose family emigrated from the Soviet Union to West-Germany when she was a child, is perhaps not as well known as Haratischwili and Grjasnowa but has likewise received significant literary awards, including the Chamisso-Preis Dresden in 2022. The Chamisso-Preis is awarded to "herausragende auf Deutsch schreibende Autor:innen, deren Werk von einem Kulturwechsel geprägt ist" ("Adelbert-von-Chamisso-Preis der Robert Bosch Stiftung") 'outstanding authors writing in German whose work is characterized by a cultural transfer.' Connecting German literature in their distinct literary styles with a region deemed far away, and doing so exclusively in German, the works of these authors lend themselves to the comparative study of rendering multilingual lifeworlds in textual monolingualism.

### Reading in Pseudotranslation<sup>3</sup>

The concept of "pseudotranslation" has been introduced in both Translation Studies and in the study of literary multilingualism, albeit differentially. Gideon Toury defines pseudotranslation as a form of manipulation of the reader's

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<sup>2</sup> I borrow Stuart Taberner's translation of the title in *Transnationalism and German-language Literature in the Twenty-First Century*, but it could also be translated as 'The Legal Imprecision of a Marriage.'

<sup>3</sup> The title of this section is a reference to Rebecca Walkowitz's call for "reading in translation," to understand originals differently by reading originals the way we read translations (see Walkowitz, *Born Translated* 177–78).

awareness of “the positions translations and translators, as well as the activity of translation as such, are allotted in [a given] culture and the functions they may fulfill [within that context]” (47). By composing texts “as if they were translations,” “producers of texts” are in essence manipulating what Toury calls the source-text postulate (47). This postulate rests on the “assumption that there is another text, in another culture/language, which has both chronological and logical priority over it” (Toury 29). It is through this relationship to an imagined original that, according to Toury’s definition, these “fictitious translations” (47) can be regarded as pseudotranslations. These fictitious translations raise questions about the essence of translations as products, particularly about their role in the assumed target culture as well as the assumptions they convey about the postulated source culture of the imagined original text.

In contrast to Toury’s text-centered model of pseudotranslation, Brigitte Rath suggests that it should also be understood as a mode of reading. Reading texts as pseudotranslations assumes that even when there is no underlying original and no transfer actually occurs from a source language text to a target language text, we should read texts in a way that takes into account the crossing of linguistic and cultural boundaries that is inherent to all texts—whether due to the condition of their creation, their content, or their reception. This is particularly relevant for the analysis of transcultural narratives. Instead of locating the texts at a specific place and time, this allows the reading to focus on the complex cultural entanglements that are at the source of their inception. In doing so, the texts are interpreted both as the original and “a translation pointing toward an imagined original, produced in a different language for a different audience” (Rath, “Pseudotranslation” 230).

When texts that are seemingly written in only one language are not investigated to uncover the traces of other languages within them, the dominance of that main language remains unquestioned (Walkowitz, “Future Reading” 109). While there are texts that challenge this dominance by using multilingualism for stylistic effect, to focus only on those instances reduces linguistic choices to a question of aesthetics. Yet this kind of linguistic experiment (even if of great literary value) is the exception rather than the rule, as most texts—and their respective authors—might not be in a position to challenge the dominance of monolingualism. Indeed, most authors operate within a literary system that pressures them to write increasingly monolingual texts (Gramling 137).

The concept of pseudotranslation as a mode of reading unsettles assumptions in two ways. Firstly, even texts written entirely in German are not necessarily monolingual because, under the surface, they contain multitudes of languages. Secondly, the fact that these novels are not solely in German should not be extrapolated from the biographies of the authors, simply because they are not considered native speakers of the language. We should rather consider the multilingualism of real-world situations that these novels depict. In fact, Till

Dembeck even goes so far as to argue against the existence of monolingual texts (“There Is No Such Thing as a Monolingual Text!”). In that sense, pseudotranslation as a mode of reading also offers a framework that can be used to read all texts in the same way, no matter the origin of the author. The objective is to do justice to the complexity of all literary texts, without creating categories that separate native writers from their non-native counterparts.

Consequently, the corpus at hand was selected according to their subject matter, rather than the origin of the authors. The novels are read in pseudotranslation, not according to their authors’ biographies, but because they all feature multilingual characters going about their multilingual lives. While it is true that Poladjan, Grjasnowa, and Haratischwili have origins that relate to the Caucasus region, where these narratives are taking place, the analyses focus primarily on the literary consequences of that fact.

#### Excluded Multilingualism as Pseudotranslation

Many scholars have proposed models to describe and categorize forms of textual multilingualism. Natalia Blum-Barth proposes a typology that divides text-internal multilingualism<sup>4</sup> into three main forms: manifest, latent, and excluded. Building on Giulia Radaelli (*Literarische Mehrsprachigkeit: Sprachwechsel*, “Literarische Mehrsprachigkeit. Ein Beschreibungsmodell”), she categorizes manifest multilingualism as the most overt presence of more than one language in a text. This can be divided into two main subcategories: *Sprachwechsel* ‘code-switching’ and *Sprachmischung* ‘code-mixing’ (see Blum-Barth 69). The second category, latent multilingualism, refers to the presence of languages below the surface. Blum-Barth relates this to Jeanne E. Glesener’s *étrange langue* ‘strange language,’ which Glesener also calls *sprachinterne Mehrsprachigkeit* ‘language internal multilingualism’ (Glesener 326). This type of multilingualism hides somewhere under a seemingly monolingual surface, subverting and “deautomatizing” the language. In contrast with manifest multilingualism, which is understood as a horizontal phenomenon where languages coexist side by side, latent multilingualism is rather vertical, with languages merging into each other, for example through *Lehnübersetzung* ‘calque’ or *interlinguales Wortspiel* ‘interlingual wordplay’ (Blum-Barth 77–78).

While the first two categories have been the subject of most research on literary multilingualism because of their undeniable aesthetic potential, I argue that

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<sup>4</sup> Here, “text-internal” is used in contrast to “text-external” multilingualism, which refers to the multilingualism of authors who use different languages in their *oeuvre*, but not necessarily within a single text.

we should also pay greater attention to excluded multilingualism, the third and last main category. Blum-Barth describes this form of multilingualism as “talking about” other languages, without these languages being actualized in the language of the text. Other languages are excluded from the discourse, even though they are present in the storyworld (Blum-Barth 85). Excluded multilingualism resembles an earlier iteration of Brigitte Rath’s concept of pseudotranslation, which she defined as a process in which “eine Äußerung einer Sprache eine Äußerung in einer anderen Sprache als deren imaginiertes Original evoziert, diese anderssprachige Äußerung aber nur durch eben diese Imagination zugänglich ist” (“Unübersetzbares, schon übersetzt. Sprachliche Relativität und Pseudoübersetzungen” 16) ‘an utterance in one language evokes an utterance in another language as its imagined original, but this utterance in another language is accessible only through this very imagination.’ These pseudotranslations are therefore available to the readers in their already-translated form. While this approach might at first glance be comparable to Robert Stockhammer’s *Das Schon-Übersetzte* ‘the already-translated,’ Stockhammer’s proposed typology of the already-translated in literature in fact rather overlaps with Blum-Barth’s manifest and latent multilingualism (265, 273).

In actual translations, the language of the original has been made for the most part invisible. Similarly, reading texts as *pseudotranslations*—not as actual translations of existing originals, but as imagined translations of a multilingual storyworld into a monolingual discourse—allows us to shed light on the linguistic and cultural composition of texts whose worldly multilingualism has been translated into literary monolingualism—to borrow David Gramling’s expression (110). This mode of reading offers a perspective that can be applied to any work—including narratives of travel, migration, and life in cosmopolitan cities—without relying on new categories that exclude these texts from the genres and categories they actually belong to simply because of their authors’ biographies.<sup>5</sup> The objective is to bridge the gap between studies explicitly interested in literary multilingualism, which offer a structuralist perspective on this type of literary production and tend to focus on forms of manifest and latent multilingualism, and cultural analysis, which tends to remain unaware of the presence of multilingualism when it is excluded from the text.

This brings us back to the original question: How “German” are the seemingly monolingual texts studied here? Is German implicitly not being spoken in texts that are fully written in that language? While the discourse of the novels is

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<sup>5</sup> Stuart Taberner mentions this in his analysis of Nellja Veremej’s *Berlin liegt im Osten*, which addresses a very current debate about German memory culture of the Second World War. It was overlooked as such because literary critics were too quick to label the novel as a migration narrative (Taberner, “Memories of German Wartime Suffering” 413).



fully in German, that language merely stands for what is being expressed in multiple other languages within the stories.

The three books that serve as case studies for this article are set primarily in the South Caucasus region. Through emigration history, more or less current political developments, and the spread of past empires, this region is an actively multilingual environment. Katerina Poladjan's novel *Hier sind Löwen* is set in part in Yerevan, Armenia. The protagonist is the German-born daughter of a Russian mother who is herself descended from Armenian exiles in Russia. Nino Haratischvili's<sup>6</sup> *Das achte Leben (Für Brilka)* is a family saga that spans over a century and covers a very wide geographical territory, from Georgia to the United Kingdom. Olga Grjasnowa's *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe* is a travel narrative set between Berlin and various parts of the Caucasus region. These texts show how pseudotranslation as a mode of reading can be particularly fruitful when it comes to reading excluded multilingualism.

#### The Lost Mother Tongue and the Necessity of Translation in Poladjan

The first example considers a monolingual text that addresses the necessity of translation that results from loss and absence. In *Hier sind Löwen*, the protagonist works in Berlin as a book conservator and is on her way to the Armenian capital to learn the traditional Armenian book binding technique. She is the daughter of a mother born in Moscow to Armenian parents and a German father she has never met. The novel is set entirely in Armenia and Turkey, as Helen is already on her way to Yerevan at the beginning of the story. The Armenian language and its physical preservation play a central role in the novel. On the personal side, Helen perceives a gap in her family history, which was marked by the Armenian genocide: "Meine Mutter spricht von einer Lücke. Plötzlich denke ich, ich trage auch etwas von dieser Leerstelle in mir" (109) 'My mother speaks of a gap. Suddenly I think I also carry some of this void inside me.'<sup>7</sup> One way in which family histories are perpetuated in Armenia is by preserving handwritten Bibles that have been passed on from one generation to the next. Therefore, the restoration work Helen is doing in Yerevan allows her to physically take care of these empty spaces: "Ich pflegte Leerstellen, [...] die farbigen Risskanten ließen vermuten, dass hier Miniaturen ausgerissen worden waren" (51) 'I cared for empty spaces, [...] the colorful torn edges suggested that miniatures had been torn off the page.' While looking for

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<sup>6</sup> As I mainly work with the German version of the text, I use the German transliteration of the author's name. In English, the novel was published under the name Nino Haratischvili.

<sup>7</sup> All translations my own, unless otherwise indicated.

traces of her own family history, Helen gets attached to a family bible she is restoring. The story of that family—which in a way stands for her own family’s missing narrative—is embedded into the main narrative.

The Armenian genocide caused a historical caesura that makes Armenian language and culture inaccessible for many emigrants. Just as for the protagonist who does not speak the language of the ancestors she is looking for, translation is a necessary process for many Armenians who have family in the diaspora. This need for translation to ensure intergenerational communication is thematized when Helen meets a car driver in Ashtarak. He tells the story of his search for relatives, which took him to an old aunt in Thessaloniki, with whom he could not even exchange a single word: “‘Haben Sie Ihre Tante in Griechenland jemals wiedergesehen?’, fragte ich. ‘Nein, sie ist gestorben. Aber ihre Tochter schreibt mir noch.’ ‘Auf Griechisch?’ ‘Ja.’ ‘Sie verstehen es nicht.’ ‘Nein’ (109) “‘Did you ever see your aunt in Greece again?’ I asked. “No, she died. But her daughter still writes to me.” “In Greek?” “Yes.” “You can’t understand it.” “No.”” This exchange—which is in German in the discourse, but most likely takes place in Russian or English in the story—illustrates a void created by the exile of family members. The car driver does not speak the language of his relatives who emigrated to Greece. As direct communication has become impossible, this void could only potentially be filled through translation, although this exchange rather points to a caesura and the absence of translation.

Since the narrator does not know any Armenian when she arrives in Yerevan, she has to rely on English and Russian to communicate with the people around her. These exchanges are numerous examples of excluded multilingualism, where dialogues taking place in these other languages in the story are translated into German at the level of the discourse. From her Armenian colleagues’ perspectives, she is perceived as German, since she is sent to Yerevan by a German library. This explains Levon’s surprise when he realizes that Helen speaks Russian with her mother: “‘Wer ist Sara?’, fragte Levon. ‘Sara ist meine Mutter.’ ‘Du sprichst russisch mit ihr.’ ‘Du sprichst auch russisch mit mir’” (138-39) “‘Who is Sara?’ Levon asked. “Sara is my mother.” “You speak Russian with her.” “You also speak Russian with me.”” Her mastery of the Russian language makes communication with most people she meets in Armenia easier, given that Russian was the lingua franca of the Soviet Union. Only with younger people does she speak English. As with Russian, this is only visible through references to the language. In the following example, a conversation in indirect speech is interrupted by the narrator’s reflection: “Das englische Wort für Unmerkbarkeit fiel mir nicht ein” (57) ‘I could not remember the English word for *Unmerkbarkeit*.’<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Using a concept from translation theory, one might say that the narrator is pointing to the untranslatability between the two languages caused by the greater flexibility of the German

There are multiple references in the narrative to conversations taking place in Russian. In one scene, Helen is with Levon, one of her colleagues from the Armenian National Library, and his wife: “Julja fragte mich etwas. ‘Was sagt sie?’ ‘Sie mag deine hellen Haare.’ [...] ‘Du brauchst nicht zu flüstern. Meine Tochter versteht kein Russisch, und mein Vater ist eingeschlafen’ (80-81) ‘Julja asked me something. “What is she saying?” “She likes your light hair.” [...] “You don’t need to whisper. My daughter doesn’t know any Russian, and my father is asleep.”” Another example of excluded multilingualism, this very short exchange, rendered entirely in German, suggests the presence of two other languages in the story. Julja asked a question in Armenian, which Helen did not understand. Her husband Levon translated the sentence into Russian for Helen. This we know because he confirms that Helen does not need to control her voice, since his daughter does not understand Russian, and that his father, who is asleep and cannot hear them, does. This exchange is therefore a pseudotranslation into German of a conversation that takes place in Armenian and Russian.

The protagonist’s feelings about not understanding Armenian differ significantly from not understanding other languages. Helen says she never had issues restoring manuscripts in languages she could not understand, such as Hebrew, Latin, or Arabic, yet Armenian proves to be different. She considers that they were all telling her stories, even if she could not decipher the words. With Armenian, she is bothered for the first time, as if aware of the expectation that this language is a lost mother tongue towards which she should have particular feelings. She therefore decides to practice writing Armenian by copying the instructions manual for the microwave. The parallel is interesting: she is practicing her handwriting—in an alphabet that was invented in order for the Bible to be read in that language—on something very modern. The protagonist contrasts her work with that of monks who understood what they were writing, while she must compare each word of the user manual with the English and Russian translations in order to recognize patterns, in a sort of modernized interlinear translation: “[Ich] suchte Sinn in den Buchstaben, und bald sprachen sie mit mir, weil meine Hand sie schrieb. [...] Dann schrieb ich լուսին—Mond—und բերան—Mund. Աստվածաշունչ—Asdwadzaschuntsch—nennen die Armenier die Bibel, Hauch Gottes” (49) ‘[I] looked for meaning in the letters, and they soon began to speak to me as my hand wrote them. I then wrote լուսին—moon—and—բերան—mouth. Աստվածաշունչ—Asdwadzashuntsch—is the name Armenians give to the Bible, breath of God.’ Here, the first two Armenian words are presented in the text using

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language when it comes to lexical creativity. She cannot find the meaning of *Unmerkwürdigkeit* because it is a neologism. Its meaning would be something like the opposite of *Merkwürdigkeit* ‘strangeness, oddness.’

the Armenian alphabet, followed by a German translation, without a transliteration. Only the third word is accompanied by a transliteration. As the protagonist cannot understand them, these first two words fulfill the same function for her as they do for the assumed reader of the novel. They are ciphers that can only be observed from the outside for their aesthetic qualities since the absence of transliteration makes it impossible to imagine what these words would sound like if they were uttered.

At the level of both story and discourse, this novel displays many layers of pseudotranslation. The traumatic history has caused a gap in family histories. Consequently, relatives in exile have adopted other languages. While the connection to this family history deeply relates to language, most characters have to rely on translation in order to access it. This is also the case of the protagonist, who does not have knowledge of the Armenian language. The dialogues and translations taking place in languages other than German in the story are then conveyed in a narrative in German. All of these examples of excluded multilingualism point to the relevance of pseudotranslation as mode of reading, which enables us to see the languages that are seemingly absent from the text.

#### Cosmopolitan Multilingualism in Translation in Grjasnowa

While Poladjan's novel connects translation with a historical and personal rupture, Grjasnowa's novel introduces it as part of a flexible relationship to multilingualism that is largely detached from and indifferent to feelings of belonging. *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe* is told in two almost parallel parts. In the first part, the protagonists of the titular marriage, Altay and Leyla, live in Berlin. The story begins when they meet the American Jonoun, who has recently moved to the city. She quickly becomes Leyla's lover, which causes some friction in Leyla and Altay's relationship. In the second part, the three protagonists travel around the Caucasus. Both Leyla and Altay are originally from Baku and moved to Berlin after some years of living in Moscow. As Stuart Taberner explains, the "'judicial imprecision' (juristische Unschärfe) of Leyla and Altay's marriage [...] derives from the fact that [they are] entirely indifferent to [...] the legalistic heteronormativity of their German setting" (*Transnationalism* 123).

As in Poladjan's novel, there is a discrepancy between the languages of the story and discourse: the novel is written in German, although it is not the language in which the characters usually communicate. It is also not the native language of any of the characters, except for an Austrian side character who appears briefly as one of Jonoun's love interests. This character does not even have a name, but is simply referred to as "*der Österreicher*," 'the Austrian,' which in a way decentralizes the German language: the only character who is very clearly a German speaker in the German capital is someone who comes from a different

country. As Taberner points out, in *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe*, “Germany is simply a space that privileged minority characters traverse as they shape new transnational and transcultural identities. [...] Olga Grjasnowa’s minority German protagonists appear indifferent to the nation whose passport they carry” (*Transnationalism* 76, 208). In the same way, they are as indifferent to the German language as they are to any other language, since they do not seem to regard any language as a core part of their identity. There are also no references to any other language being a character’s “mother tongue.” Languages are only referred to on a scale of fluency going from “broken” ‘*gebrochen*’ (193) to “decent” ‘*passabel*’ (103).’

As is the case with Altay and Jonoun, Leyla leads a thoroughly multilingual existence. She speaks Russian (she lived in Moscow for years studying at the Bolshoi) and has a Georgian mother and an Armenian grandfather (she speaks Georgian, but not Armenian). Which languages she does speak, and which one(s) she is most fluent in, must be reconstructed through the narration. We know she speaks other languages because of the content of her “weißes Ikea-Regal” ‘white Ikea bookshelf,’ in which most books are in the original version—it contains some worn Russian hardcovers, “ziemlich alles, was Judith Butler jemals geschrieben hatte” (39) ‘pretty much everything Judith Butler had ever written,’ Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex*, Suzanne Brøgger’s *Sondern erlöse uns von der Liebe* (the German title of the 1973 essay collection *Fri os fra kærligheden*, ‘*Deliver us from love*’), and Michel Houellebecq. During a later disagreement Leyla has with Jonoun, the latter expresses her jealousy at the life of privilege that Leyla has experienced, as her mother cared to get her to attend ballet school and French lessons (224). So Leyla took French lessons as a child, reads books in English and in French, and lived in Moscow for a number of years. Does she speak German? This information is simply omitted from the narrative. While Altay’s knowledge of German is made explicit by the narrator, there are no traces in the narrative of Leyla’s level of knowledge of the German language or of the language(s) in which her exchanges with Jonoun (English?) or Altay (Russian?) are taking place. Even though she was born in Azerbaijan, Leyla does not seem to speak Azeri—the language does not overlap with the nation; the native is not a native speaker. The clue that leads to this conclusion comes from a scene in which the trio is listening to a radio interview with a member of parliament in Baku: “Altay übersetzte das Interview für Leyla und Jonoun” (174) ‘Altay translated the interview for Leyla and Jonoun.’ Again here, the act of translation points towards languages that are present in the story but excluded from the discourse. The interview is taking place in Azeri, which Altay translates into an unspecified language that both Leyla and Jonoun understand.

Rather than attributing the quality of mother tongue to any language and thus singling it out, the novel implies that Leyla’s behavior is influenced by the

language she speaks. While Leyla and Jonoun are travelling together through the Caucasus, Jonoun reflects on how Leyla's behavior changes depending on the location: "In jeder Stadt war Leyla eine andere, in jeder Stadt bewegte sie sich anders" (217) 'In each city Leyla was different, in each city she moved differently.' From Jonoun's perspective, she looks the most relaxed when speaking Georgian. Since Leyla's mother is Georgian, it could be that she considers that language to be her mother tongue and that she therefore feels more at ease when speaking it. This might be the remark that most closely resembles the monolingual paradigm. Even there, when Jonoun exclaims that she was not aware that Leyla knows Georgian—when she did not understand the language, her first hypothesis was that they were speaking Azeri—Leyla answers plainly: "Meine Mutter ist Georgierin, schon vergessen?" (215) 'My mother is Georgian, remember?' thereby mentioning her mother but not attributing any quality to her knowledge of that language.

Just as the language of the mother is not necessarily the mother tongue, the language of the native is not necessarily the language of the nation. When Altay and Jonoun arrive in Baku, the taxi driver taking them from the airport to the center of the city just switches from one language to another: "Er hatte nur ein Bein und das dringende Bedürfnis nach Kommunikation, die Worte sprudelten in lautem Azeri aus ihm heraus, doch als er merkte, dass ihm niemand zuhörte, stellte er auf Russisch fest: 'Sie haben ihr Vaterland verlassen'" (157) 'He had only one leg and an urgent need to communicate, the words gushed out of him loudly in Azeri, but when he realized that no one was listening to him, he stated in Russian: "You have left your fatherland.'" The taxi driver recognizes that the passengers do not respond to the language, but still refers to them as locals when speaking in Russian by referring to Azerbaijan as the fatherland. Again, nation and language do not overlap.

While Leyla's background remains relatively undefined, it is clear that Altay speaks Azeri. Most of the rare scenes of manifest or latent multilingualism in the text involve him. In a scene where Altay is speaking to a lover in Baku, a brief code-mixing signals that the interaction is most likely taking place in Azeri: "Mach dir keine Sorgen, Altay-jan" (228) 'Don't worry, Altay-jan.' The appended *jan* means something similar to "dear" and is one of the rare interruptions of a usually monolingual text. In an earlier scene, a flashback to his days working at a hospital in Moscow, he is seen speaking with Russian colleagues. In direct speech, the speaking colleagues are referred to as Marina Andrejewna and Arkadij Arkadjewitsch. One of Altay's superiors then addresses him by using only his first name, without the patronym, which is considered informal in Russian. The narrator points to the tension caused by the fact that this is perceived as very impolite in a professional context. This is an example of latent multilingualism, where the manner of speaking another language—in this case, Russian—is incorporated into

the German narrative, thereby pointing simultaneously to one language in the story and a different one in the discourse.

Jonoun, the third protagonist, comes from Brooklyn, New York, the last place she lived before moving to Germany, and has also lived a somewhat multilingual life, though to a lesser extent than the other two. The only sign that a language gives her a sense of belonging comes from an interaction she has with the receptionist of a hotel, a teenager with a New York accent: “Die Rezeptionistin war nicht älter als fünfzehn, sprach Englisch mit einem unüberhörbaren New Yorker Akzent [...] Jonoun fühlte sich sofort zu Hause und plauderte ein wenig mit ihr, während Leyla das Gepäck nach oben trug” (230) ‘The receptionist was no older than fifteen and spoke English with an unmistakable New York accent. [...] Jonoun immediately felt at home and chatted with her a bit, while Leyla was carrying the luggage upstairs.’ Interestingly, Jonoun’s sense of belonging is not related to a nation, but to a city. Her mother grew up in an unspecified Jewish Orthodox community, “in der engen Welt der Gelehrten” (22) ‘in the restricted world of scholars,’ while Jonoun was born in India to an Israeli father. She grew up on a kibbutz in Israel before being sent to her paternal grandmother at the age of three. It is indicated that she has learned Aramean and Hebrew on her own, which suggests that they were not part of her living environment growing up. As with Leyla, the indications about her knowledge of the German language are vague at best: “In der Schule hatte Jonoun Deutsch gelernt und eine gute Note gehabt” (22) ‘In school, Jonoun had learned German and gotten a good grade.’ In one scene, she listens to *Deutschlandradio Kultur*, which may suggest a certain level of understanding but does not necessarily confirm it. As a foreign guest traveling around the Caucasus, she often elicits translation, which is referenced by the narrator with phrases such as “Leyla übersetzte schnell für Jonoun” (193) ‘Leyla quickly translated for Jonoun’ or “Levan übersetzte für Jonoun” (217) ‘Levan translated for Jonoun.’ These references to translation happening within the story are all examples of excluded multilingualism, as the languages are being referred to, but are not actually present in the text.

The three protagonists live multilingual lives, yet do not seem to attach any particular importance to these languages. Moving from one language to the other—often requiring translation—is their default behavior, as none of them has what could be qualified as a mother tongue. Excluded multilingualism, through references to other languages and to characters translating for each other, points to a flexible relationship to languages that does not elicit feelings of belonging. In this sense, the German language of the novel is present on the surface, but is almost completely absent from the story. The fact that the novel itself is in German feels almost arbitrary and invites us to read it as a pseudotranslation.

## Translation as Emancipation in Haratischwili

As much as translation is already a given in *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe*, in Haratischwili's novel it rather represents an ideal to be attained, as a way of emancipation from cultural and familial expectations. *Das achte Leben (Für Brilka)* is a family saga that spans just over a century. It tells a very complex story consisting of numerous border crossings. The Jaschi family is impacted by the political and social developments of Georgia as it goes from being a part of the Russian empire, the short-lived Transcaucasian Republic, and the Soviet Union, until its independence in the 1990s and the Revolution of Roses in the early 2000s. Throughout it all, several languages make their way into the story, despite the fact that they are not explicitly featured in the narrative. Many characters' biographies take detours through Russia: the narrator's mother goes to an elite Russian school, where she develops an accent in her *Muttersprache* 'mother tongue,' Georgian; an aunt ends up exiled in London—where she becomes a famous singer, in English; and the narrator starts a new life as a lecturer in East European history in Berlin—where a professor once comments that her command of the language is better than that of her native students: “Nun, Sie schreiben mittlerweile ein besseres Deutsch als ihre muttersprachlichen Kommilitonen” (1184) ‘You write better German now than your native-speaker classmates (868).’

In this novel, pseudotranslation results from the discrepancy between the language of the discourse and its implied reader. The narrator and implied author of the text is the aunt of the titular Brilka, the narratee, who does not have the same linguistic knowledge as the implied reader of the novel.<sup>9</sup> The young Brilka does not know German, which means that the narratee—the internal address of the novel—does not speak the language of the discourse of the novel, which was published as an original in German. This raises three possible scenarios. In the first scenario, the story could be an assumed translation at the diegetic level. If this were the case, and there were any hinting at a translation process following Toury's source-text postulate (Toury 29, 47), it would presuppose the existence of a fictitious original in Georgian, of which this German text would be a translation. However, this does not seem to be the case, as nothing points to a translation process within the story. We are then left with two possible scenarios.

In the second scenario, the story is implicitly written in Georgian. This would imply that the narrative follows the accepted practice in which a narrative is supposed to be understood in a language other than the text's own. It is already the case with the dialogues, which are clear examples of excluded multilingualism since the direct speech in the story is to a very large extent taking place in languages

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<sup>9</sup> I follow the narratological categories as defined in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*.



other than German, whether this is made explicit or not in the respective dialogue. For example:

Erinnerst du dich jetzt? Dämmert es dir langsam?, schrie Mariam, doch keine Regung der Frau. Ihr Gesichtsausdruck blieb unverändert. – Du bringst hier irgendwas gewaltig durcheinander, Schätzchen!, sagte sie dann auf Russisch und aschte direkt auf den Boden. – Aber wir, wir erinnern uns an dich! Sogar verdammt gut, nicht wahr? Und hättest du dir nicht auch noch Kostja mit deinen Hurenhändchen gegriffen, wären wir vielleicht gar nicht hier. (412-13)

Do you remember now? Is it starting to come back to you? shouted Mariam. But the woman didn't stir. Her expression remained unchanged. – You're very confused about something here, darling! she said, in Russian, and tapped her cigarette ash onto the floor. – But *we* remember — we remember you! Bloody well, in fact, don't we? And if you hadn't got your harlot's hands on Kostja, too, perhaps we wouldn't even be here. (299)<sup>10</sup>

The mention of Russian in the second line alludes to a change of language, the other woman having chosen not to answer in the language in which she was first addressed. The language in use is marked in this exchange because there is a change of language. This is not the case with most dialogues, where the language in use is not always mentioned if the dialogue partners are speaking the same language. Therefore, dialogues alone cannot give a definitive answer to the question of whether the narrative actually is implicitly told in Georgian since it is usually possible to infer what language a dialogue is taking place in from contextual clues.

Comparatively, the narration offers less information. If the story is implicitly written in Georgian, it would imply that the discourse in German, including the narration, is a pseudotranslation of a narrative in Georgian. Something that could point to an answer is the fact that the narrator mentions the Georgian alphabet multiple times, although it is not actually reproduced anywhere in the text. The narrator says of the “ornate” Georgian writing, which is unique to that language, that it is puzzling to outsiders: “allen Außenstehenden als eine Art Geheimschrift vorkommt” (103) ‘the ornate script [...] looked to outsiders like a kind of secret code’ (68). Therefore, the use of Georgian in the text would have an exclusionary purpose: to make certain parts of the text inaccessible to implied readers—the external address of the novel—distancing them from the narratee of

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<sup>10</sup> The page numbers in the English translation refer to the Scribe edition from 2019, translated by Charlotte Collins and Ruth Martin.

the story—the internal address—who does understand the language. This would also create a distinction between the implied and the actual language of the discourse, which would break the illusion. If the story is implicitly told in Georgian, all of the actual German stands in for that language. The presence of the Georgian script in the German narrative would interrupt this illusion.

This brings us to the last scenario: It could be that the narrator is telling her twelve-year-old niece this story in German, a language she does not yet understand. Instead of following the accepted practice which requires the suspension of disbelief of the implied readers—the external address of the novel—this would rather imply that Brilka herself has to learn German in order to understand the story that her aunt has written down for her. At the diegetic level, this seems plausible. The narrator asks her niece to enter an interpretive loop by alternately approaching and distancing herself from the culture and history of her country and family. In this sense, the narrator may intend for her niece to achieve this distance by learning a foreign language, as she has done herself. Another clue that the original was also—intratextually—written in German is the allusion to “*acht*” ‘eight’ and “*achten*” ‘look after, pay attention, respect.’ The narrator tells her niece, “Ich schenke dir meine Acht. [...] Auf immer und Acht. [...] Nimm meine Acht an” (16, 1271) ‘I am giving my eight to you. [...] Forever and eight. [...] Accept my eight’ (6, 931).<sup>11</sup> In German, the homograph *Acht* can mean simply the number eight, which the narrator uses as a metaphor for eternity, but is also etymologically related to *achten* ‘look after, pay attention, respect’ or *achtgeben* ‘watch out, be careful.’ Since this is an important element that the narrative builds on, this double entendre in German, which plays on the title and the structure, does not seem to be gratuitous.

No matter which scenario is most likely within the storyworld, all of them point to a complex relationship with language that goes beyond monolingualism at first sight. The first two scenarios outlined above would qualify as pseudotranslations *par excellence* because they would imply that the entire discourse should be read as such. Even the last scenario, which implies that the narratee cannot understand the text and would have to learn a foreign language in order to do so, as a way to emancipate herself from her family history and her nation, contains a large amount of excluded multilingualism in its dialogues.

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<sup>11</sup> This paragraph repeats at the beginning and the end of the story. In the English translation, the third sentence, ‘Accept my eight,’ was removed from the beginning of the book and appears only in the second occurrence.

## Conclusion: Translating Multilingualism

David Gramling warns against “depoliticizing the very monolingualism of the text and its means of production” (7). He notes that this could occur if too much emphasis is placed on the multilingualism of monolingual texts. Since no language or culture is “pure,” and all culture is intercultural, analyzing any text as multilingual could potentially erase the very conditions that lead to most literary texts being (at least seemingly) monolingual. While his observation raises a valid concern, I would argue that doing the opposite can have the same effect. Explicitly multilingual texts do not constitute the majority of current literary production. Focusing too much on a limited number of overtly multilingual texts can therefore also potentially lead to neglecting monolingualizing forces. Instead of focusing almost entirely on the ways in which authors explicitly experiment with their multiple languages, more attention should be given to the ways in which multilingualism is translated into monolingualism.

In this article, I showed how pseudotranslation as a mode of reading can complement our understanding of the excluded multilingualism of literary texts. In *Hier sind Löwen*, the intergenerational void can only be filled through translation. The protagonist does not speak the local language; therefore, the necessity of translation is inherent to the story being told. For the protagonists of *Die juristische Unschärfe einer Ehe*, multilingualism is their default behavior, even as they remain indifferent to linguistic identities, an indifference that translates into the novel’s own textual monolingualism. The narrator of *Das achte Leben (Für Brilka)*, finally, sees multilingualism as a way to emancipation. Examples from these three contemporary German-language novels show that adjusting our ways of reading by looking beyond the surface to consider all the languages of seemingly monolingual texts is a necessary first step in deconstructing the methodological monolingualism still prevalent in literary studies.

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