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Multilingualism, Identity, and Language Ideologies: Insights from the globale°-Polyphonie Cooperation

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1. Introduction

In recent years, it seems that writers dealing with stories of transnationality and multilingualism have claimed their space in the German-speaking literary market. One of the highlights was Saša Stanišić´s win of the German Book Prize 2019 for his book *Herkunft (Where you come from)*, which deals with questions of migration and origin. In a German-speaking context, texts by authors with a transcultural biographical background were categorized as literature of a second class, not being recognized by literary critics or by media focusing on cultural life (*Feuilleton*) as in literary studies. Historically intertwined with the political events of workers coming to Germany from e.g. Turkey and elsewhere, the literature produced by those with said background was classified as “Guest worker literature”

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(*Gastarbeiterliteratur*) (Amodeo 1996). The discourse and conversation evolved since then and topics of polyphonic writings in different contexts shape not only literary studies, but literature itself.

This paper aims to lay out the plan of the synergy between the globale° festival for border-crossing literature in Bremen, Germany, and the Research Center Polyphonie at the Universities Genoa and Catania, Italy. The cooperation, detailed in the following pages, focuses on topics of multilingualism and literary creativity, and seeks to connect cultural praxis and academic thinking to broaden dialogues and open new perspectives on contemporary issues of polyphony and writing. Since both pillars do not exist in a vacuum and can benefit from each other, this cooperation represents a best practice example for interdisciplinary research. For this paper, the research questions in the Center are:

- How do multilingual authors writing in German navigate issues of agency, identity, and solidarity in the face of hegemonic language ideologies?
- What is the contribution of globale° in such a debate?

Over the course of the next chapters, the cooperation between globale° and Polyphonie is explained, before, based on examples drawn of said cooperation, questions of language ideologies are discussed with examples from interviews with writers Katja Petrowskaja and Marjana Gaponenko. This is not accidental, but rather selected due to the pressing issue of the Russian and Ukrainian language, which happens against the backdrop of the full-on invasion in Ukraine by Russia. In this case, political events also shape questions of literary production which are illustrated in this paper.

2. The globale°-Polyphonie Cooperation

In 2023, a collaboration was initiated between the literary festival globale° and the research network Polyphonie (cf. Pellegrino et al. 2025; Schmidt et al. 2025).[2]

[2] See also the joint website of the collaboration: https://globale-polyphonie.de/ [06/06/2025].

This partnership represents an innovative interdisciplinary approach that addresses the future challenges facing German Studies in the context of multilingualism, migration, and cultural forms of expression. The primary aim of the collaboration is to foster long-term, transnational scholarly exchange between the fields of culture and academia on topics such as multilingualism, border-crossing, and literary and cultural transfer. The following sections provide a brief overview of the festival and the research center.

2.1. globale° – Festival for Border-Crossing Literature

In 2007, the first globale° festival for transcultural contemporary literature, its title at that time, took place at the Shakespeare company Bremen. Organized by journalist Libuše Černá and Wolfgang Schlott, president of P.E.N. exile, authors Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Artur Becker and Marica Bodrožić were invited to talk about questions of writing in German and not in their mother tongues, being recognized by the literary market and their individual understanding of being an author.[3] The discussion was lively and fruitful, all three authors claiming to be seen as ‘German writers’ without any other labels.

After the first edition of globale°, the festival grew and broadened its spectrum. Nowadays, the festival takes up one week and consists not only of readings, but also of symposia, panel discussions and a program for young readers (young globale°) as well. Globale° played an integral part in the application of Bremen as a UNESCO City of Literature, which the city was eventually awarded in 2023.

The term border-crossing has since widened and does not only include writers from transnational backgrounds, but also subjects of gender, (East-)Germany, class and politics. It has been organized by the club globale e.V. since 2013. The

[3] For more information as well as all the programmes so far see the globale° website at globale-literaturfestival.de/en.

festival has had a connection to universities and the academic world for more than half of its lifetime. Already in its second year, the festival worked together with the Jacob's University Bremen where Immacolata Amodeo served as professor for literature. Together with her staff, she not only helped organizing the festival, but also published three volumes of books focusing on the writers and their topics attending the festival (2009, 2010, 2011). After the departure of Prof. Amodeo, the University of Bremen came into play with Elisabeth Arend, Professor for transnational literary studies, as the bridge between festival and academia. She implemented a globale° seminar where students worked on the books at each festival, visited the festival, wrote reviews and conducted interviews with the authors, which were then published on the platform blogsatz.org. After Prof. Arend's retirement, Karen Struve, Professor for romance language and literary studies, took over, with Prof. Arend remaining in the festival's team. As of now, the festival is organized by the club, the University of Bremen and Theater Bremen. As one of the city's main international cultural institutions, the festival holds connections to many partners outside Germany, e.g. Ukraine (Centre Gedankendach), Czech Republic (Czech Literary Center), the Netherlands (Netherlands Embassy), USA (Dickinson College).

2.2. Polyphonie. Mehrsprachigkeit_Kreativität_Schreiben

Polyphonie. Mehrsprachigkeit_Kreativität_Schreiben (Polyphony. Multilingualism_Creativity_Writing) is a permanent international research project that originated from a 2009 workshop attended by Italian and Austrian scholars. The project systematically investigates the complex interconnections between multi-lingualism and creativity in writing from an interdisciplinary perspective, with particular attention to the following disciplines: biographical research, multi-lingualism stud-

ies, neurolinguistics, applied linguistics, translation studies, literary studies, comparative literature, media and communication studies, foreign and second language didactics.

The Polyphonie-project seeks to explore the nuanced relationship between individual/societal multilingualism and creativity, with a particular emphasis on literary creativity. The first outcomes of the initiative were published in Bürger-Koftis et al. (2010). These initial contributions laid the foundation for a broader scientific endeavour, culminating in the launch of the web portal Polyphonie. Mehrsprachigkeit_Kreativität_Schreiben[4] in 2012, and the establishment of the inter-university research center POLYPHONIE[5] in 2018, jointly coordinated by the Universities of Genoa and Catania (Italy).

A central component of the Polyphonie-project is the collection and dissemination of language-biographical interviews, conducted primarily in audio format and, in selected cases, as video recordings. A key consideration in the preparation phase is the choice of interview format – whether to adopt a narrative, a segmented structure, or a hybrid model –[6] depending on the specific objectives of the inquiry. In any case, the interview protocols are designed to elicit detailed linguistic and cultural biographies, with a particular emphasis on language biographies (see e.g. Franceschini 2010; Busch 2013; Luppi & Thüne 2022). This approach aims

[4] https://www.polyphonie.at [06/06/2025]. The web portal Polyphonie. Mehrsprachigkeit_Kreativität_Schreiben is a platform that offers an opportunity for publishing articles, but it is also a multilingual portal which offers the support of "collective intelligence" (Malone & Bernstein 2015) by bringing together both primary and secondary material on the subject.

[5] https://www.polyphonie-centroricerca.it/ [06/06/2025].

[6] On the different types of qualitative interviews, see https://methodenzentrum.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/e-learning/qualitative-erhebungsmethoden/qualitative-interviewforschung/unterschiedliche-formen-qualitativer-interviews/ [06/06/2025].

to offer a comprehensive view of the language socialization processes experienced by writers, beginning with early language acquisition through caregivers (so-called “motherese” or *Mutterisch*),[7] and continuing through the development of one or more first languages via informal and formal learning environments. The interviews further explore the acquisition of additional languages in later life – both second and foreign languages – and the continued processes of learning and using these languages, particularly in written form.

Special attention is devoted to the language biographies of authors who write in German, with the aim of examining the role of multilingualism in their personal narratives and literary production. Through this focus, the interviews contribute to a nuanced understanding of the linguistic socialization of multilingual writers and the significance of language in shaping their identities and creative expression.

3. Language ideologies and Biographical Narratives: a Qualitative Perspective

In their study on identity construction strategies in biographical-narrative interviews, Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann (2002, 20) highlight the central role of autobiographical narration in shaping individual lives. Through narrative, speakers can convey experiences, evaluations, and themes that are meaningful for them, while also articulating their worldview. This function becomes particularly salient when individuals reflect on their relationship to the languages that constitute their linguistic repertoire (cf. Busch 2013).

To explore how multilingual authors writing in German negotiate issues of agency, identity, and solidarity within the framework of hegemonic language-related ideologies, this study draws on the concept of language ideologies.

Michael Silverstein, arguably the first scholar who provided a definition of language ideologies, defines these as “sets of beliefs about language articulated by

[7] See https://dorsch.hogrefe.com/stichwort/motherese [06/06/2005].

users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (Silverstein 1979, 193). According to Paul Kroskrity, language ideologies are "multiple, context-bound, and necessarily constructed from the sociocultural experience of the speaker" (Kroskrity 2010, 192), thus suggesting that the experience of speakers shapes their beliefs about language, language practices and language use. Language ideologies, in other words, consist in "the cultural (or subcultural) system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interest" (Irvine 1989, 255).

However, the empirical observation of such ideologies in human interactions poses a substantial challenge. Hence, Kathryn Woolard argues that language ideologies can be embodied and made visible in communication practices carried out by speakers. For example:

> a listener's shudder upon hearing a grating vowel pronunciation, a student's blush at an instructor's attempt to use youth slang, or a speaker's own stammering shame at speaking a language variety she believes she controls imperfectly (Woolard 2020, 2).

In sum, "[i]deologies are morally and politically loaded because implicitly or explicitly they represent not only how language is, but how it ought to be" (ibid.).

Up to date, the concept of language ideologies has been widely used as a both theoretical and analytical tool to explore the views on language practices by speakers belonging to different socio-cultural communities. Only more recently it has, however, been explicitly used to study the beliefs of individuals in their own linguistic biographies.

Therefore, this paper adopts the concept of language ideologies as developed by Busch (2013, 2015; Spitzmüller et al. 2021). As Busch explains, "[l]inguistic ideologies are used to construct social, ethnic, national and other affiliations and exclusions. They have a major influence on whether we feel that a language we

speak brings respect, or whether we try to hide it from others or even to get rid of it" (Busch 2015, 8).

Busch's reflections on language ideologies, linguistic categorization, and the power asymmetries embedded in and expressed through language – especially as they manifest in contexts of migration – provide a valuable analytical lens for interpreting the language-biographical interviews collected as part of the Polyphonie-project (see § 2.2). These interviews foreground the experiential and subjective dimension of language, conceptualized by Busch (2015) as *Sprachenerleben* (lived experience of language). This is especially relevant here, as in recounting their linguistic trajectories, speakers reflect not only on their attitudes and practices, but also on the impressions and emotions associated with the languages in their repertoire. Regarding language attitudes, Busch notes:

> Personal attitudes to language are largely determined by the value ascribed to a language or language variety in a particular social space. […] this means that the restrictive or exclusionary power of linguistic categorizations is at its most noticeable when language is not available as a matter of course, for example when people are not acknowledged (or do not perceive themselves) as legitimate speakers of a particular language or way of speaking. This may happen […] also when spaces that were familiar to them are reconfigured, and as a result change their linguistic regime within a short space of time. Such situations can arise when state borders are redrawn or radical political changes occur, bringing a re-evaluation of linguistic ideologies (Busch 2015, 8-9).

Against the backdrop of the ongoing war in Ukraine following the Russian invasion in February 2022, it becomes especially relevant to examine how Ukrainian authors articulate their linguistic attitudes toward the Russian language. This contribution focuses on two interviews with two Ukrainian-born writers who work in German – Marjana Gaponenko and Katja Petrowskaja – and explores how their language ideologies emerge through biographical interviews conducted within

the framework of the literary festival globale°, in collaboration with the Polyphonie-project.

The choice of these two authors is grounded mainly in linguistic-biographic and literary reasons. Gaponenko and Petrowskaja are among the most prominent contemporary German-language writers of Ukrainian origin, and their works engage deeply with themes of memory, identity, and multilingualism, which makes them particularly relevant to an inquiry into language ideologies. Moreover, their active involvement in globale° as invited guests and participants in public dialogues provides a unique opportunity to analyze their reflections within a transdisciplinary space that bridges artistic practice and academic discourse. Their dual positioning – as literary figures and as contributors to the globale°-Polyphonie collaboration – makes them especially suited to examining how language attitudes are shaped, challenged, and renegotiated in times of geopolitical crisis.

The interviews were analyzed using a qualitative-interpretative approach that combines elements of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Thematic Analysis (TA), allowing for an exploration of both individual experiences and recurring patterns across the narratives.

4. Language Ideologies in iInterviews with German-Speaking Authors: Two Examples

The following sections present two case studies that illustrate how language ideologies are reflected and negotiated in the autobiographical narratives of multilingual authors. Drawing on interview excerpts, the analysis highlights the complex interplay between language, identity, and political context. While both writers share a Ukrainian background and a strong presence in contemporary German-language literature, their linguistic attitudes reveal notably different responses to the ongoing war and to the role of Russian in their personal and creative lives.

4.1. Marjana Gaponenko

Marjana Gaponenko was born in 1981 in Odesa, Ukraine, where she spent her childhood and youth. Her family background reflects the cultural and linguistic diversity of the post-Soviet space: her mother is from Vladivostok and her father from Georgia. Russian was the language spoken at home, while Ukrainian was part of her formal education at school. Gaponenko studied German at Odesa University, and began writing poetry in German early on. Her linguistic and cultural border crossings inform much of her work, which often engages with themes of identity and belonging.

Her literary breakthrough came with the novel *Wer ist Martha?* (2012), which received widespread acclaim and earned her the Adelbert-von-Chamisso-Preis, a prestigious award that honours authors whose first language is not German, and who have made a significant contribution to German-language literature (cf. e.g. Occhini 2025).

Gaponenko was a guest of the literary festival globale° in 2016 and returned in 2024 to take part in a reading session organized within the framework of the globale°-POLYPHONIE conference on 18th July.[8] On that occasion, she was interviewed by Libuše Černá as part of a dialogue addressing the challenges – and at times the perceived impossibility – of writing in times of war.[9]

In the first excerpt, Gaponenko conveys her perception that, in light of recent events, the Russian language has become untenable as a means of communication for her:

> Marjana Gaponenko: Ich hatte oft einen Traum als Kind und in dieser Phase, wo ich Deutsch gelernt habe. Ich habe mir vorgestellt: So, jetzt kannst du diese paar

[8] See https://globale-polyphonie.de/programm/ (06/06/2025).

[9] The interview is available in the interview database hosted on the web portal Polyphonie. Mehrsprachigkeit_Kreativität_Schreiben (see § 2.2).

> Brocken Deutsch in meinem Halbschlummer, ich habe mir vorgestellt – das war etwas Schönes sogar –, dass ich in der Zeit zurückreise und irgendwie Offiziere anspreche und sage: Bitte, tut das nicht. Das ist völlig surreal, eigentlich. Das ist so eine absurde Vorstellung. Kann man natürlich (nicht). Man kann nicht mit Unmenschen reden. Genauso wie ich jetzt mit den Russen nicht unbedingt über solche Themen diskutieren würde auf Russisch, obwohl ich es könnte. Irgendwo ist so eine Grenze überschritten, da versteht man, man kann mit der Sprache nichts mehr erreichen, gar nichts.[10]

Gaponenko's reflections underscore the symbolic burden that can come to weigh on a language in the context of political violence and war. Despite her fluency in Russian and its status as her first language, she describes a point at which *eine Grenze ist überschritten* (a boundary has been crossed), rendering the language ineffective or even inappropriate for certain forms of communication. Her reluctance to use Russian to discuss ethical or historical questions with Russians, even though she could (*obwohl ich es könnte*), suggests a disillusionment with the communicative potential of the language in specific contexts. This reveals the extent to which language ideologies, as defined by Busch (2015), are not only tied to social and political power structures, but also deeply entangled with personal experiences, moral boundaries, and the perceived (in)efficacy of language. Russian, in this instance, becomes ideologically marked not only as the language

[10] "Marjana Gaponenko: I often had a dream as a child, and during that phase when I was learning German. I imagined – half-asleep – 'Now you know a few scraps of German', and I pictured myself – actually, it was even something beautiful – traveling back in time and somehow speaking to officers, saying: 'Please, don't do this'. It's completely surreal, really. Such an absurd idea. Of course you can't. You can't talk to people who have lost their humanity. Just like I wouldn't necessarily discuss such topics with Russians today in Russian, even though I could. At some point, a boundary is crossed, and you realize that language can't achieve anything anymore, absolutely nothing." (if not specified otherwise, translations are by the article's authors.)

of the aggressor, but also as a language that, in the speaker's experience, no longer offers a viable medium for negotiation or resistance.

In the second excerpt, Gaponenko reflects on the evolving dynamics of her linguistic identity and language use amid the ongoing conflict:

> Marjana Gaponenko: [...] inzwischen bin ich mir nicht ganz sicher, was meine Denksprache ist. Ich kann mich selbst nicht mehr so gut treffen. Also ich koche inzwischen so stark in diesem Kriegssüppchen. Ich lese auch hauptsächlich ukrainische Nachrichten und kommuniziere eher mit Ukrainern. Und wenn ich mir selbst im Kopf zuhöre, glaube ich, dass ich ja, dass das Deutsche nicht mehr so wichtig ist, dominant ist. Aber es ist auf jeden Fall meine Arbeitssprache. Ich werde alle meine Bücher auf Deutsch schreiben.
>
> Libuše Černá: Das ist jetzt die Entwicklung in den vergangenen zwei Jahren. Oder war das schon vorher?
>
> Marjana Gaponenko: In den vergangenen zehn Jahren, würde ich sagen. Es wurde immer mehr und mehr. Und ich höre mich im Kopf eigentlich nur auf, zum Glück, auf Ukrainisch schimpfen, nicht mehr auf Russisch. Das ist irgendwie so, funktioniert nicht mehr.[11]

[11] "Marjana Gaponenko: [...] by now, I'm not entirely sure what my thinking language is. I can't really reach myself that well anymore. I feel like I'm steeped in this war broth, so to speak. I mainly read Ukrainian news and mostly communicate with Ukrainians. And when I listen to my own thoughts, I think, yes, German is no longer so important, no longer dominant. But it is still my working language. I will write all my books in German.
Libuše Černá: That's a development from the past two years, right? Or was it already the case before? / Marjana Gaponenko: I'd say it's been developing over the past ten years. It grew gradually, more and more. And when I hear myself swearing in my head, luckily, it's only in Ukrainian now – not in Russian anymore. Somehow, that just doesn't work anymore."

Gaponenko expresses uncertainty about her “thinking language” (*Denksprache*), signalling a shift in her inner language repertoire shaped by the ongoing war. Her increased engagement with Ukrainian media and communication primarily in Ukrainian suggests a realignment of linguistic allegiance, which is emblematic of how language ideologies operate within socio-political contexts. This shift underscores the powerful role of language ideologies in shaping not only external language practices but also internal linguistic subjectivities: Gaponenko’s distancing from Russian as a language of thought and emotional expression reveals the deep affective and symbolic disassociation from Russian, fueled by her ideological repudiation of Russia’s actions in the current war. Gaponenko’s detachment from Russian as the language in which she processes thoughts and emotions is underscored by the following remark: “And when I hear myself swearing in my head, luckily, it’s only in Ukrainian now – not in Russian anymore” (*ich höre mich [...] nur auf, zum Glück, auf Ukrainisch schimpfen, nicht mehr auf Russisch*). Given the deeply emotional nature of swearing, this statement reflects not only an affective reorientation, but also a profound symbolic rupture with Russian.

4.2. Katja Petrowskaja

Daughter of the historian Svitlana Vasylivna Petrowska and the literary scholar Miron Petrowski, Katja Petrowskaja was born in Kyiv in 1970. She was brought up in a Russian-speaking household and received her early education in a Russian-language school in Kyiv. However, while Russian is the primary language of her upbringing, Petrowskaja's biography is marked by a variety of multilingual and transnational educational experiences: she studied Literary Studies in Tartu, where Jurij Lotman taught, obtained a scholarship from the University of Stanford (USA) and a doctorate in Moscow. Eventually, she moved to Berlin in 1999, where she nowadays lives with her family and works as a journalist, literary scholar and writer.

While writing newspaper columns in German – most notably for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* – Katja Petrowskaja published her literary debut *Vielleicht Esther* (*Maybe Esther*) in 2014. This work, a collection of short prose texts, explores the impact of twentieth-century history within the author's family genealogy. *Vielleicht Esther* was received with significant international approval and has since been translated into over thirty languages. Petrowskaja received the Ingeborg-Bachmann Prize in 2013, widely regarded as one of the most prestigious literary awards in the German-speaking area, for its eponymous chapter, *Vielleicht Esther*, which had been published before the full work. Additionally, she won the Premio Strega Europeo in 2015. Indeed, her debut work marked a significant turning point in her career. A few years later, she published two collections of her columns under the titles *Das Foto schaute mich an* (2022, The Photo Was Looking at Me) and *Als wäre es vorbei* (2025, As Though It Were Over). Additionally, Petrowskaja participated in the 2014 edition of *globale*°, where she was interviewed by Lore Kleinert.

David Pappalardo (author of the present section) had the chance to conduct a semi-structured linguistic-biographic interview with the author in her apartment in Berlin in December 2022. The conversation focused on Petrowskaja's linguistic background and the relationship between her lived experience of multilingualism (Busch 2015) and her writing practices, as shaped throughout her personal and professional biography.[12] In the following paragraphs, two excerpts from the interview will be, therefore, presented and commented with particular emphasis on the impact of linguistic-ideological discourses on the author's linguistic repertoire and writing process.

In reflecting on her relationship with Ukrainian, the author – herself a Russian-speaking individual born and brought up in Soviet Ukraine – expresses a critical

[12] This interview is part of the data corpus of the author's PhD dissertation. The full interview text will be published in his thesis soon with a thorough linguistic analysis and a comparison with the author's literary work.

stance towards ideologically charged conceptions of language as fixed national symbols. She positions this stance as a deliberate act of resistance against the essentialist conceptions of linguistic identity, as evidenced in the following excerpt:

> Katja Petrowskaja: Ja, es ist auch ganz komisch jetzt für mich, dass ich Ukrainisch kenne. Also mein Ukrainisch ist auch nicht perfekt und ich kann zum Beispiel so wirklich wichtige Gespräche auf der Bühne nicht richtig auf Ukrainisch führen. Aber natürlich so die Alltagssprache schon, und ich kommuniziere jetzt mit sehr, sehr vielen Menschen, natürlich auf Ukrainisch. Äh, in der Familie, puh/ Aber mich zum Beispiel irritiert, wenn meine Mutter mit mir auf Ukrainisch spricht.
>
> DP: Ah!
>
> KP: Ich finde das nicht okay. Also, und das ist auch die Situation mit der russischen Sprache jetzt. Weil tatsächlich (.) möchte ich nicht, dass Putin von uns unsere Muttersprache wegnimmt, ja? Es reicht schon, dass er ukrainische Städte, die auch zum großen Teil Russisch gesprochen haben, zerbombt. Wir müssen ihm noch die Sprache abgeben? Das wäre wirklich eine Kapitulation für mich, ja?
>
> DP: Mhm (bejahend)
>
> KP: Es ist natürlich eine sehr, sehr komplexe Frage jetzt, weil für viele Ukrainer Russisch ist einfach ein rotes Tuch, obwohl auch für Teil des Landes das seine Muttersprache ist oder Teil des Lebens.[13]

[13] "Katia Petrowskaja: Yes, it's also quite strange for me now that I know Ukrainian. My Ukrainian isn't perfect either and I can't really have important conversations on stage in Ukrainian, for example. But, of course, I can have everyday conversations, and I now communicate with many, many people in Ukrainian. Uhm, in my family, phew/ But it irritates me, for example, when my mum speaks to me in Ukrainian. / DP: Uh! / KP: I don't think that's okay. Well, and that's also the situation with Russian now. Because actually (.) I don't want Putin to take our mother tongue away from us, right? It's enough that he's

The author's words underline the sociolinguistic consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on her everyday language practices. While Ukrainian has become more present in her daily interactions, Petrowskaja deliberately maintains the use of Russian within her most intimate family context, particularly in communication with her mother. For the author, abandoning the use of Russian in her private sphere would constitute a form of "capitulation" – a surrender to the ideological confusion of languages with national allegiance. By rejecting the notion that states possess legitimate authority over individual linguistic choices, her continued use of Russian functions as an act of sociolinguistic resistance.

The dramatic nature of such an act of resistance is, after all, clearly visible in the author's word choice, which includes such phrases as "*take away our* mother tongue from *us*", "*we* still have to give *him our* language?", "capitulation" and "red rag". The linguistic violence involved in the aggression is expressed through military metaphors, with an accentuated use of deictic pronouns that clearly depict the power dynamics involved (*our* mother tongue, from *us*, we still have to give *him*, etc.).[14] The act of resisting aggression entails a refusal to acknowledge the centralisation of linguistic authority, which, in this particular instance, is attributed to the Russian regime.

Similarly, a comparable act of resistance is manifest in her debut work*, Vielleicht Esther*. The text is principally written in German, which may appear an intriguing

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bombing Ukrainian cities, most of which also spoke Russian. We still have to give him our language? That would really be a capitulation for me, you know? / DP: Mhm (affirmative) / KP: It's of course a very, very complex question now, since for many Ukrainians Russian is simply a red rag, even though for part of the country it is their mother tongue or at least a part of their life."

[14] See Kindrachuk 2015 on how the spread of Russian in Soviet Ukraine between the 1960s and the 1970s is connected to a political plan of russification of Ukraine, and Boman 2023 on how russification is problematised in Ukrainian linguistic-political discourse since its independence.

choice given that the entire book aims to reconstruct the story of the author's family, who were partly of Jewish origins and some of whose members were murdered or deported by the army of the Third Reich. Petrowskaja's decision to adopt German as her writing language for her debut work has several grounds (See Byrnes 2020), one of which is the morphological closeness of the Russian word for German to the word "mute", as the author explains:

> Katja Petrowskaja: Ich meine, ich kann tausende Gründe nennen, warum ich *Esther* auf Deutsch geschrieben habe und auch diese Problematik mit Taubstummheit. [...] Taubstummheit auf Russisch ist немота ("nemota"). Also, немой ("nemoy") ist jemand, der nicht sprechen kann, und немец ("nemetz"), das ist so die Bezeichnung von Deutsch.[15]

Some of the relatives in *Vielleicht Esther* – the protagonist's grandfather Ozjel, who directed a school for deaf children in Kyiv, and her grandmother Rosa, who taught at a similar institution in Warsaw – were professionally engaged in deaf education. The term "deaf-mute", while now recognized as obsolete and discriminatory, remained in institutional use during the period in which Ozjel and Rosa were active. Within the narrative, muteness emerges as a metaphorical bridge between Russian and German, drawing on the etymological similarity in Russian between the words for "mute" (*немой*) and "German" (*немец*), both of which derive from the same root. In this framework, German becomes symbolically associated with silence, i.e. with those people who do not (or cannot) speak Russian. This metaphor is further reinforced in the context of historical trauma: German is also the language of the perpetrators of Nazi violence, including the presumed

[15] "Katja Petrowskaja: I mean, I can name a thousand reasons why I wrote *Esther* in German and also this problem with deaf-muteness. [...] Deaf-mute in Russian is немота ('nemota'). So немой ('nemoy') is someone who can't speak, and немец ('nemetz'), it's the word for 'German'."

murderers of the protagonist's grandmother, Esther, in Kyiv in 1941. Paradoxically, however, German is also the official language of Petrowskaja's current country of residence, and the language in which her book is written and published. German, therefore, occupies an ambivalent position in the story: it is, at once, a language of violence and loss, and one of literary expression and production.

Thus, the decision to compose a literary work in German, which centres on the narratives of her own relatives whose stories have been cancelled by the horrors of the 20th century, can be interpreted as an effort to transcend a wide-spread dichotomy between victim and aggressor languages. In this context, it is crucial to note that no language is inherently responsible for any wars; these are the actions of nations, armies, governments and people.

Petrowskaja's confrontation with language-ideological discourses – particularly those that position certain languages as inherently oppressive – distinguish her debut work. Her refusal to abandon Russian, despite its indexing as a language of political aggression, reflects a broader stance of resistance against the instrumentalization of language by authoritarian regimes. In this context, languages are not inherently aggressors or victims; rather, it is their appropriation for ideological ends that must be critically examined. Petrowskaja's literary and biographical choices thus exemplify a refusal to cede linguistic authority to political regimes that seek to employ language as a tool of hegemony.

5. Conclusions

The Russian attack on Ukraine has had a dramatic impact on Gaponenko's and Petrowskaja's linguistic repertoires. Marjana Gaponenko's reaction involves a symbolic detachment from Russian, a deeply affective response to Russia's actions in the current conflict. In contrast, Katja Petrowskaja actively opposes the view that languages ought to be regarded as representatives of nations or political

forces, by refusing to give up the use of Russian in her daily communication. While the way authors navigate issues of linguistic ideologies may vary, it is evident that their personal views and experiences exert a visible influence on their respective repertoire and, inevitably, in their writing processes. Marjana Gaponenko eschews the use of Russian, while Petrowskaja's *Maybe Esther* features mixtures of Russian and German, both languages that in the story of the protagonist's family have been employed as means of repression and violence.

In order to further investigate the interplay between language ideologies and writing processes, cooperations between culture and academia remain crucial. In this context, literary festivals such as globale° offer a platform for debates on how (language) ideologies contribute to expanding conflicts on (socio)linguistic levels in the lives of contemporary authors. Exploring the manifold nuances of conflicts, even those affecting language use itself, may prove helpful in uncovering possible connections between the lived experience of multilingualism and its impact on writing.

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