Multilingual Literature,
Literary Studies and the Literary Field

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Ciao, bella, I'm Tommaso
Addicted to tobacco
Me like mi coffee very importante […]
Life is like spaghetti, it's hard until you make it […]
(Cash 2025).

1. Introduction

If you watched the Eurovision Song Contest 2025, or listened to some of its main hits, you will have come across Tommy Cash's *Espresso macchiato*, which I cited in the epigraph of this article. It was Estonia's contribution to the Eurovision Song Contest and came third in the finals of the contest. Tommy Cash, i.e. Tomas Tammemets, is an Estonian rapper who has described in interviews his mixed immigrant ancestry – Estonian, Ukrainian, Russian, and Kazakh – tracing back to his grandparents. In the song *Espresso macchiato*, he mixes at least three languages, namely Italian, English and Spanish – none of them is from his family's cultural and linguistic background. Other contributions at the Eurovision Song Contest 2025 were characterised by multilingualism and transculturalism, too: the

Dutch contribution was sung in French, San Marino's contribution was dedicated to Italy and the singer of the Albanian contribution has Italian roots.

I do not want to go into any detail here and I therefore will not analyse Tommy Cash's song (and am thereby also avoiding having to discuss the criticism of his art – in the case of *Espresso macchiato*, Italian stereotyping). Rather, the song is just one of many examples of the way multilingualism is used in mainstream pop culture and, in particular, in music, today. Many other examples can be given, also from Italian pop music: Zucchero sings his songs both in Italian and English, the band Måneskin has had international success due to their songs in English. In literature, too, there are several examples of authors and texts that – despite or due to – their multilingualism were successful: for instance, Bosnian-born Saša Stanišić was given the *Deutscher Buchpreis* (German Bookprize) in 2019 for his novel *Herkunft* (2019; *Where you come from*, 2021); Tomer Gardi, of Israeli origin, was awarded the *Preis der Leipziger Buchmesse* (Prize of the Leipzig bookfair) in 2022 for his novel *Eine runde Sache* (2021; A well-rounded affair), and Serbian-born Barbi Markovic won the same prize in 2023 for her novel *Minihorror* (2023). These success stories might be read as positive examples of accessibility and inclusion in the literary field, understood as the removal of barriers for multilingual authors to enter the literary field (for instance, gaining access to publishing opportunities and recognition) and the possibility to fully participate and be recognised within literary culture. Furthermore, they go hand in hand with an increased interest in multilingual literature (and multilingual art) in literary and cultural studies as well as in linguistics. I would therefore like to take them as a starting point and, in what follows, give an overview of research on literary multilingualism during the past decades and explore some of the concepts and approaches that have been suggested by scholars. This also includes a definition or, rather, a discussion of the different possibilities to define literary multilingualism and/or multilingualism in literature.

This will then lead me to what I would like to call the "dark sides" of literary multilingualism, i.e. what lies beyond the celebration and idealisation of multilingualism,

self-translation and hybridity. I would like to address these dark sides both in terms of the literary field (or: fields) and in terms of research on literary multilingualism. To do so, I will confront positive and negative aspects of definitions, approaches and methodology in my article.

2. Definitions of Literary Multilingualism

To start with, I would like to discuss possible definitions: what do we talk about when we talk about "literary multilingualism/multilingualism in literature/multilingual literature"? In fact, the term literary multilingualism can refer to various phenomena, as Monika Schmitz-Emans stated already in 2004. In what follows, I build on some of her categories of the various forms of literary multilingualism. To start with, I would like to suggest three possible ways of defining literary multilingualism: (1) multilingual literature as the literatures of multilingual nations, regions and cultures; (2) multilingual literature as the works by multilingual authors; and (3) multilingual literature defined as multilingual texts. In what follows, I will discuss these three possible definitions.

2.1. Multilingual Literature as the Literatures of Multilingual Nations, Regions and Cultures

Literary multilingualism can refer to the literatures of multilingual nations, regions and cultures. A striking example of this is India, where, in addition to the two official languages of the central government, Hindi and English, there are 22 recognised regional official languages and over 400 (if not more) other languages (cf. Eberhard et al. 2025). Austria, to name another example, also has state-recognised minorities whose languages are enshrined in the constitution: Burgenland Croatian, Romany, Slovakian, Slovenian, Czech, Hungarian and, since 2005, the Austrian sign language are so-called minority languages. This means that some of these languages are official languages (alongside German) in certain regions

or municipalities of Austria, and their speakers are entitled to schooling in these languages. Turkish and Kurdish, which are spoken by large groups of the population, as well as the languages of the former Yugoslavia, but also Polish, Arabic and Chinese, are not recognised minority languages, but nevertheless characterise multilingual Austria in everyday life.

Also in Italy, there are twelve languages that are officially recognized as spoken by linguistic minorities: Albanian, Catalan, German, Greek, Slovene, Croatian, French, Franco-Provençal, Friulian, Ladin, Occitan and Sardinian. However, full bilingualism (*bilinguismo perfetto*)[1] is legally granted only to the three national minorities whose first language is German, Slovene or French, and enacted in the regions of Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and the Aosta Valley, respectively.

The multilingualism of nations, regions and cultures is influenced by various aspects that are interdependent, such as:

- ideologies: the prestige that languages have in a society depends on various factor such as politics, economy, religion etc. This prestige impacts not least which languages are used in which contest, which languages are promoted and which languages are learned and taught at schools;
- foreign language learning: the choice of languages that people study (also outside their school training) depends on traditions, but also on political, economic and cultural factors;

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[1] This means that both languages have equal legal status and their use is compulsory in education, administration, and public life. However, it should be noted that there are significant differences in the degree of knowledge and use of the two languages among different communities. For example, the region Trentino-Alto Adige is considered bilingual, but this does not mean that most speakers use both languages fluently. Rather, a German-speaking and an Italian-speaking community coexist in the area. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for pointing out this aspect.

- cultural developments: cultural artefacts may make single languages more attractive – examples of this are opera and musical terminology in Italian, as developed in the Renaissance and Baroque periods, and pop music in English today. French, on the other hand, was the language of the court and thus a prestigious language that was widely used as a lingua franca throughout Europe until well into the twentieth century. This is still expressed in literature at the beginning of the twentieth century, as shown by a dialogue between Hans Castorp and Clawdia Chauchat, largely written in French, in Thomas Mann's otherwise German novel *Zauberberg* (Mann 2012, 508-520; *Magic Mountain*). Mann could assume that his contemporary readers would easily understand the French passages in this dialogue. In current editions of the novel, however, the scene is usually reproduced in translation at the end of the novel. Today, English has taken over this role as lingua franca. In fact, English is usually not translated in contemporary novels that have different main languages. An example for this are the dialogues in Jenny Erpenbeck's novel *Gehen, ging, gegangen* (2015; *Go, Went, Gone*, 2017).

These cultural, political and historical aspects affect how multilingualism is perceived and lived in multilingual nations, regions and cultures. They influence the self-perception of a nation, region or culture as multilingual or monolingual. They have an impact on the decision about which languages are promoted – in schools, in public places (from the street to the parliament), at cultural institutions etc.

These factors are therefore also reflected in the literature of multilingual regions, whose multilingualism can be more or less pronounced, depending on the historical development of multilingualism, political influences and social aspects. For instance, we might ask who has the opportunity to write and publish at all – which literary languages are promoted, who is censored or whose writings are suppressed? Which languages have the necessary prestige and are therefore recognised as literary languages? In which languages are texts read? Is there a multilingual common literary culture or rather several separate, perhaps even

rivalling literary cultures (for instance, due to two distinct (monolingual) linguistic communities that coexist)? These questions lead us to possible dark sides of literary multilingualism in multilingual nations, regions and cultures.

In India, for example, works are published and read in many of the official languages of the country; however, it is mainly works written in English that are received abroad and translated into other languages. Thus, internationally, Indian literature is (at times even inadvertently) equated with Indian literature in English when, in fact, this is only part of India's literary production. The resulting one-sided impression of Indian literature abroad has often been criticised (see Findeis 2014, 41-44).

In Austria, Slovenian literature has been published for decades by several publishing houses (such as Drava and Wieser), both in the original and in translation, not least thanks to targeted public funding. In addition, some of the statutes of national literary prizes and awards have been amended in recent years to allow them to be awarded also to Austrian authors who do not write in German. Examples of this are the *Franz Nabl Preis* (Franz Nabl Prize) of the City of Graz and the *Großer Österreichischer Staatspreis* (Grand Austrian State Prize), which were awarded to the Slovenian-writing author Florjan Lipuš in 2013 and 2018 respectively. This decision (and the necessary changes of the statutes) was taken after discussions in 2016, when the Grand Austrian State Prize could not be given to Florjan Lipuš as he did not write in German (Leben & Koron 2019, 13, note 5). Furthermore, at the bookfair in Leipzig in 2023, where Austria was the invited country, it presented its literature as multilingual.

The example of Austria shows that inclusion and accessibility in the literary field can be actively promoted and encouraged, for instance via literary prizes and festivals and the funding of publishing houses. Such interventions eventually can have an effect on the literary canon (also understood as what is read at schools and universities).

2.2. Multilingual Literature as the Works by Multilingual Authors

Literary multilingualism can also refer to works by multilingual authors. Their multilingualism is individually based; it can be related to the region they come from, their family situation and socialisation, their personal life story, which can be shaped by travel, migration, but also flight. There are many examples of multilingual authors; well-known and often mentioned are Adelbert von Chamisso, Joseph Conrad, Elias Canetti, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov or, more recently, the Nobel Prize winner Kazuo Ishiguro, the German-Turkish author Emine Sevgi Özdamar and the Japanese-German writer Yoko Tawada.

Multilingual authors are not necessarily authors of multilingual literature, especially when we consider that there are probably many authors who understand and speak several languages but do not emphasise this biographical detail. And yet the literary work of multilingual authors can be considered against the background of their own multilingualism – questions can be asked, for example, about how they deal with multilingualism, about their (possible) writing in several languages, about mixing languages, about the reasons and occasions for language change, about statements about multilingualism, etc.

However, multilingual authors often encounter difficulties in the literary field – and this is another dark side of literary multilingualism. This has been analysed for instance in the German-speaking literary field, where publishers of books in German at times do not feel responsible for literary texts produced in German by non-native authors. At times these multilingual authors are not perceived as part of German, Austrian or Swiss literature by literary critics, as interviews with authors (see Sievers et al. 2017; Siller 2023; Siller & Vlasta 2020) and literary sociological studies have shown (see Sievers 2016).

In some contexts, being a multilingual author is in itself a challenge to the traditional concept of (national) literature. This is the case in Japan, for example, where *nihonjinron* writings (i.e. writings on Japan and its national and cultural identity) paint a picture of Japan as "*isoliert* (die Verbindungen zu anderen

asiatischen wie auch den westlichen Kulturen werden geleugnet), *einzigartig* (die Vergleichbarkeit mit anderen Kulturen wird in Frage gestellt), und *homogen* (Japans innere Heterogenität wird negiert)" (Hein 2014, 38, emphasis in the original).[2] Accordingly, Japanese literature is traditionally defined as "superior linguistic expressions written in 'Japanese' by 'Japanese' who were born in 'Japan'" (Komori 1998, 283, cited in Sakamoto 2006, 138). Multilingual immigrant authors such as the US-born Hideo Levy, the Swiss David Zoppetti, the Chinese Yi Yang or the Iranian Shirin Nezammafi, who write their literary works (also) in Japanese, challenge this idea – an aspect that has made it difficult for them to publish and gain visibility in the first place. With the arrival of these authors in the Japanese literary field, also the field itself and the definition of Japanese literature are being transformed.

2.3. Multilingual Literature as Multilingual Texts

Literary multilingualism in the narrowest sense, finally, can refer to multilingual texts. These come in very different forms, and I will therefore restrict myself to some of the approaches that are used to analyse these texts. Giulia Radaelli's (2011) distinction between manifest multilingualism, i.e. multilingualism that is visible on the surface of the text, and latent multilingualism, i.e. only implied multilingualism, is shared by many researchers.

Manifest multilingualism includes both code switching and code mixing (see also Dembeck 2017a and Blum-Barth 2021), i.e. the coexistence of different languages within a text and the mixing of idioms that can produce a new linguistic form. Both phenomena can occur in different forms, for instance code-switching includes single to more-word-interferences as well as intrasentential and

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[2] "Isolated (the connection to other Asian as well as Western cultures is denied), unique (comparability with other cultures is questioned) and homogeneous (Japan's internal heterogeneity is negated)"; if not indicated otherwise, translations are by the author of this article.

intersentential switching. The decisive factor in all these phenomena is the visibility of multilingualism in the text.

By contrast, a text is latently multilingual "wenn andere Sprachen nur unterschwellig vorhanden und nicht unmittelbar wahrnehmbar sind; er weist also auf den ersten Blick eine einsprachige Oberfläche auf" (Radaelli 2011, 61).[3] Radaelli cites translation, language reference and language reflection as manifestations of latent multilingualism. Phenomena of grammatical interference that involve the adoption of structures and loanwords from one language into another can be considered forms of latent literary multilingualism, too.

Natalia Blum-Barth supplements Radaelli's classification with the category of excluded multilingualism, which refers to forms of literary multilingualism that occur "wenn im Text eine andere Sprache erwähnt oder thematisiert wird, ohne dass sie die Basissprache des Textes beeinflusst" (Blum-Barth 2021, 61).[4] For Blum-Barth, excluded multilingualism differs from latent multilingualism in that it "über Mehrsprachigkeit [berichtet], ohne sie *in* der Sprache des Textes zu realisieren" (Blum-Barth 2021, 61; emphasis in the original).[5] She analyses this form of literary multilingualism in Olga Grjasnowa's novel *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* (2017; *City of Jasmine*, 2019).

A particular form of latent multilingualism, that Elke Sturm-Trigonakis has suggested, is metamultilingualism (Sturm-Trigonakis calls it "metalinguism"; 2007). This form includes instances of talking about/reflecting on language, about language learning and about multilingualism in literary texts.

In the following poem by Pat Mora we can see different forms of manifest and latent literary multilingualism at work. There are instances of code-switching

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[3] "When other languages are only subliminally present and not immediately perceptible; it therefore has a monolingual surface at first glance".

[4] "When another language is mentioned or addressed in the text without influencing the basic language of the text".

[5] "reports on multilingualism without realising it in the language of the text".

between English and Spanish as well as metamultilingualism as the speaker reflects on language use in her family in migration and her own language learning.

Elena

My Spanish isn't enough.

I remember how I'd smile

Listening to my little ones,

understanding every word they'd say,

their jokes, their songs, their plots.

Vamos a pedirle dulces a mamá. Vamos.

But that was in Mexico.

Now my children go to American high schools.

They speak English. At night they sit around

The kitchen table, laugh with one another.

I stand by the stove and feel dumb, alone.

I bought a book to learn English.

My husband frowned, drank more beer.

My oldest said, "*Mamá*, he doesn't want you

To be smarter than he is." I'm forty,

embarrassed at mispronouncing words,

embarrassed by the laughter of my children,

the grocer, the mailman. Sometimes I take

my English book and lock myself in the bathroom,

say the thick words softly,

for if I stop trying, I will be deaf

when my children need my help

(Mora 1994, 369; emphasis in the original).

Anna Kim's literary essay *Invasionen des Privaten* (2011; Invasions of Privacy) about Greenland's colonial history and its consequences to this day is another example of manifest as well as latent multilingualism. In addition to many one-word and multi-word interferences, it contains numerous reflections on language,

in particular on Greenlandic, which was suppressed by the Danish colonisers for a long time and has been only "seit Juni 2009 die erste und offizielle Sprache in Grönland" (Kim 2011, 41).[6]

Furthermore, language memoirs represent particular forms of metamultilingualism. Alice Kaplan's *French Lessons* (1993) is an example of this: in the book she writes (in English) about her relationship to the French language. Kaplan is an American scholar of French studies, however, in this book she tells a very personal story about her relation to French. Other authors chose the language they write about also as the medium for their narratives and wrote what Mary Besemeres calls "translingual memoirs" (2002, 2005). Examples of these are Marica Bodrožić's *Sterne erben, Sterne färben* (2007; Inheriting Stars, Colouring Stars), Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation* (1989), Ágota Kristóf's *L'analphabète. Récit autobiographique* (2004; *The Illiterate*, 2014) and Jhumpa Lahiri's *In altre parole* (2015; *In Other Words*, 2016).

Another special form of literary multilingualism is the phenomenon of polygraphic writing or script-switching (see Schmitz-Emans 2014, 2017; Vlasta 2014).[7] Polygraphic texts are not only characterised by multilingualism, but also by the use of alternative writing systems. In these texts, apart from different languages, also different writing systems are mixed, such as the Latin alphabet, Chinese characters, Japanese characters, the Arabic alphabet and the Persian alphabet. Even when using the Latin alphabet (but different languages), situations of script-switching can arise, e.g. when using diacritical marks (such as umlauts in German, but also letters such as å, é, ï, ò, û) or ligatures (such as ß). Not all of these characters will be immediately recognisable to readers of other languages. When completely different writing systems collide, readers will encounter gaps

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[6] "the first and official language in Greenland since June 2009".

[7] See also the recent conference on scriptswitching, organised by the research network LangueFlow in March 2025, https://langueflow.eu [10/07/2025].

and empty spaces in the text, which may prompt them to reflect on processes of (non-)comprehension.

Examples of such polygraphic texts are the novel *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers* (2008) by Xiaolu Guo, where Chinese characters are used in the English text and, among many of her other texts, Yoko Tawada's *Schwager in Bourdeaux* (2008; Brother-in-law in Bourdeaux). In this novel, the German-Japanese writer uses Japanese characters (derived from Chinese *kanji*) in the predominantly German text.

I have now discussed some of the approaches that are used to analyse multilingual literature. When looking at actual texts, we see that the various forms of literary multilingualism cannot usually be clearly distinguished from one another. Metamultilingualism is intermingled with actual forms of code-switching, grammatical interferences contain metalinguistic comments and so on. Giulia Radaelli therefore argues in favour of not isolating manifest and latent multilingualism from each other, but rather thinking them together: "Bei der Analyse eines literarischen Textes sollen vielmehr die zwei Kriterien der Wahrnehmbarkeit und der Diskursivierung miteinander verknüpft werden, um zu beschreiben, wie wahrnehmbar die jeweiligen diskursiven Figuren der Mehrsprachigkeit sind" (Radaelli 2014, 165).[8] Another problem is that attempts to categorise the forms and functions of literary multilingualism are based on the idea of a main language (also referred to as a matrix language in linguistic research) and one (or more) interfering languages (embedded language(s)). This applies above all to the various forms of interference and code-switching, which are usually described as the interplay between matrix language and embedded language (see Sturm-Trigonakis 2013, 122-123; Boumans 1999, 281-301).

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[8] "When analysing a literary text, the two criteria of perceptibility and discursivisation should rather be linked in order to describe how perceptible the respective discursive figures of multilingualism are".

In a literary studies approach we should therefore aim to break up this hierarchical view in favour of a more equal, balanced view of the single languages involved. Furthermore, we need to keep in mind that each literary texts presents its own approach to literary multilingualism and therefore needs to be analysed individually. An excerpt from Sophie Herxheimer's poem *London* illustrates the necessity of an approach that takes into account the plurality of forms (and functions) of literary multilingualism:

> **London**
> Not zo mainy Dais zinz ve arrivink.
> Zis grey iss like Bearlin, zis same grey Day
> ve hef. Zis norzern Vezzer, oont ze demp Street. […]
> I try viz ze Busses, Herr Kondooktor eskink me… […]
> Fess plees? To him, my Penny I hent ofa –
> He notdz viz a keint Smile – Fanks Luv!
> He sez. […]
> Zis is ven I know zat here to settle iss OK. Zis
> City vill be Home, verr eefen on ze Buss is Luff.
> (Herxheimer 2017, no page)

Sophie Herxheimer is an artist and a poet. Her work includes drawings, paintings, papercuts, prints (for instance a hand printed 300-metre tablecloth for the Thames Festival), book illustrations, but also performances. She has exhibited and performed at Tate Modern, Tate Britain, at the British Library and The Museum of Liverpool, amongst others. *Velkom to Inklandt* is her first poetry collection. It contains 30 poems in which the speaker is mainly her German Jewish grandmother Liesel.

For her poems, Sophie Herxheimer draws inspiration from her grandmother's idiosyncratic language, who emigrated from Germany to the UK as a refugee in 1938. The author transcribes her grandmother's heavily accented English

phonetically and uses it to create poems about this woman's way of coping with her life in migration.

In the poem *London* we find multilingualism on different levels and in different forms: there are instances of code-switching (English and German), code-mixing (English and German syntax and other grammatical elements are combined) and latent multilingualism in the form of reflections on language, on the grandmother's language biography, on pronunciation and voice, on the effect and possibilities of reading aloud. Clearly, to be able to analyse this text, we need a plurality of terms and concepts (and need to be open to create new ones).

3. Research on Literary Multilingualism: Terminology and Approaches

The increased research interest in multilingual literature and its authors has brought with it new theoretical categories. Apart from the concrete terms to analyse the forms and function in texts, descriptive models for literary multilingualism have emerged that attempt to capture the complexity of the phenomenon. In this section, I discuss a few of these approaches, though this is not understood as an exhaustive list.

In the late 1960s/early 1970s the German studies scholar Leonhard Forster was one of the first to undertake research on literary multilingualism (see Forster 1970). He presented a comparative survey of multilingual literature from the Middle Ages to the first half of the twentieth century in which he considered both multilingual texts and multilingual authors.

Thirty years later, this project was continued by Steven G. Kellman (2000), who introduced the concept of translingualism to describe authors who write in a language that is not their first language or who write in several languages. There seems to be no reference to the term translingual as it is used in linguistics, where it represents the idea of fluidity between languages, that are no longer seen as clearly distinct entities; in particular, translingual refers to the fact that plurilingual speakers switch between languages and mix them in their production, so that

static categorisations of languages, but also of bilingualism and multilingualism do not seem to be adequate anymore to describe what speaker's actually do (see Schwarzer 2006).

Kellman's approach has led to a more intensive examination of a number of translingual authors (as illustrated, for example, in the handbook he co-edited in 2022). In many of these contributions, literary multilingualism is understood as a primarily biographically motivated element. Other aspects of the phenomenon (e.g. regional literary multilingualism and multilingual literary fields) are considered less often.

In contrast, the Canadian literary scholar Rainier Grutman (1997) has expanded a more traditional understanding of bilingualism or multilingualism to include Mikhail Bachtin's concept of polyphony:[9]

> Der Roman ist künstlerisch organisierte Redevielfalt, zuweilen Sprachvielfalt und individuelle Stimmenvielfalt. Die innere Aufspaltung der einheitlichen Nationalsprache in soziale Dialekte, Redeweisen von Gruppen, Berufsjargon, Gattungssprachen, Sprachen von Generationen und Altersstufen, Sprachen von Interessengruppen, Sprachen von Autoritäten, Sprachen von Zirkeln und Moden, bis hin zu den Sprachen sozial-politischer Aktualität (Bachtin 1979, 157).[10]

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[9] See also the web portal and journal Polyphonie that uses a similarly broad approach: www.polyphonie.at (web portal) and https://riviste.unige.it/index.php/polyphonie/index (journal).

[10] "The novel is an artistically organised diversity of speech, sometimes a diversity of languages and individual voices. The internal division of the standardised national language into social dialects, group idioms, professional jargon, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, languages of interest groups, languages of authorities, languages of circles and fashions, right up to the languages of socio-political topicality". I quote from the German translation of Bachtin's text (and for reasons of coherence with the publication spell his name Bachtin instead of Bakhtin, the form that is usually used in English).

Accordingly, Grutman presents a more comprehensive view of literary multilingualism under the term *hétérolinguisme*, which also includes social, regional and historical language variants. This means that multilingualism is not only understood as the use of two or more different idioms, but the concept of *hétérolinguisme* takes into account also so-called intra-linguistic multilingualism, i.e. the varieties of a language (such as American, British or Canadian English), as well as dialects, sociolects and non-standard language variants. Examples of such forms of literary multilingualism can be found in Eugène Sue and Charles Dickens, but also in poets such as Sophie Herxheimer or Ernst Jandl (who mixed standard German, Viennese dialect, English and other languages and varieties). Another term used in research on literary multilingualism is exophony. It was first used to describe African authors who write in European languages and is now used to describe the strategy of authors "die über mehrere Sprachen verfügen und die in ihren Texten ihre Zugehörigkeit zu bestimmten kulturellen Räumen, in deren Sprachen sie sich artikulieren, zu transzendieren versuchen" (Ivanovic 2008, 223).[11] The concept of exophony was introduced into German studies by an anthology of the same title (Arndt et al. 2007) and is used there primarily for analyses of multilingual authors such as Franco Biondi and Emine Sevgi Özdamar, but especially of Yoko Tawada (see Wright 2008; Ivanovic 2014). It has led to an increased focus on the aesthetic aspect of literary multilingualism and revealed its political potential to break up culturally (and linguistically) homogeneous spaces.

Finally, Till Dembeck has called for a "philology of multilingualism" (Dembeck 2017b), which is characterised by a broad understanding of multilingualism and at the same time takes a presumed basic multilingualism of all literary texts as its starting point. Dembeck exemplifies his approach by the formal analyses of lyrical forms that are taken over from other languages. Furthermore, this approach can

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[11] "who have several languages at their disposal and who in their texts attempt to transcend their affiliation to certain cultural spaces in whose languages they articulate themselves".

also be seen in the handbook *Literatur und Mehrsprachigkeit* (Dembeck & Parr 2017; Literature and Multilingualism), co-edited by Dembeck. The volume focuses on multilingual processes and analyses them not least in their application in various genres and media.

4. Concluding Remarks

In this article, I have considered various approaches, forms and concepts of literary multilingualism. I did so in order to discuss the *status quo* of research on literary multilingualism and to reflect on what I have called the dark sides of multilingualism, i.e. its negative, problematic or difficult aspects that are at times overlooked when multilingualism and transculturalism and the hybridity that often comes with it are idealised. To conclude, I would like to address a few more aspects that I think we should consider more in our research on multilingual literature.

I agree with David Gramling who called modern literature the stronghold of monolingualism. He reminded scholars of literary multilingualism of the monolingual norm that still persists, although "das den alltäglichen Erfahrungen, Repertoires, Referenzen und Praktiken der mehrsprachigen Welt kaum Rechnung trägt" (Gramling 2017, 37).[12] This monolingual norm can still be felt in the literary field where access is regulated for instance by literary prizes, literary festivals, publishers and agents. As has been discussed above, in the case of many of these, (a national) literature is still written in one language, at times in the one that is spoken by a majority, at times in the one that for historical reasons is the dominant one – for instance English and French in postcolonial contexts.

The monolingual norm, however, also has effects on scholars of literary multilingualism: it has shaped our institutions, our research fields and their limits. In the Italian academia, to name an example, this means that transdisciplinarity meets

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[12] "this hardly takes into account the everyday experiences, repertoires, references and practices of the multilingual world".

settori scientifici disciplinari (scientific disciplinary sectors): two ideas that oppose each other. Also, how do we research literature written in more languages if we are supposed to concentrate on one language according to the sector we work in?[13] Furthermore, as the monolingual norm has an effect on schooling and therefore also on scholars' linguistic competences, we often feel our limits when dealing with multilingual literature as we do not have the necessary language skills and must rely on translation.

Finally, there is the question which language(s) we use to talk about literary multilingualism. As academics, we often need to use English as the academic *lingua franca*, both to communicate with our colleagues and to publish our research, like in the present article. But is it possible to write about multilingualism in just one language? What happens to the texts we work on – do we need to translate them into a single language in our publications?[14]

To sum up, research on literary multilingualism has come a long way but the topic cannot yet be considered exhausted: new texts, new authors as well as new historical perspectives are waiting to be explored. At the same time, we need to reflect on our blind spots as researchers as well as consider the dark sides that multilingualism brings with it for authors and their texts.

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[13] It needs to be added that the scientific sector of Comparative Literature (as well as Comparative Literature as a field also beyond the Italian context) does give space to research also across linguistic borders. However, this is only one sector compared to the many linguistic contexts and literary fields in which multilingual literature occurs (and which are often still studied in distinct research fields). I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing this out.

[14] The event series "Offstage. Forum for researchers", organised by the LangueFlow research group, addresses exactly these issues researchers of literary multilingualism encounter. See: https://langueflow.eu/cfp-offstage-forum-for-researchers/ [10/07/2025].

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