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## Introduction: Translingualism and transculturality in Russian contexts of translation

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More and more, scholars have been turning their attention to the fascinating phenomenon of literature written in languages not native to their authors. Although far from new (Kellman 2000; Hokenson and Munson 2007), this kind of translingual writing is arguably more visible than ever before. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, when the German Romantics promoted a language philosophy that defined the mother tongue as the only authentic means of expression, a monolingual paradigm has dominated literary scholarship, as Yasemin Yildiz (2012) shows in *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*. This has led literary historians to sort literatures into the same categories as nation states, and to view the presence of non-native or multiple languages in poetry, prose and drama as an exception, rather than the rule.<sup>1</sup> In reality, a great many people in the world regularly speak and write more than one language, and “living transnationally” is becoming more common (Levitt, DeWind, and Vertovec 2003, 571). As Yildiz notes, globalization “produces a new framework... in which languages circulate, change, and accrue meaning” (2012, 109). In the conclusion to their seminal study on the history of literary self-translation in the West, Jan Walsh Hokenson and Marcella Munson suggest that “we seem to be recreating today the ambient multilingual conditions of earlier periods, when writers routinely elected to write in adopted dialects and languages” (2007, 211). Similarly, Aneta Pavlenko argues:

The dramatic increase of linguistic diversity outside of academia made multilingualism impossible to ignore, while the rise in the number of bi- and multilingual academics ... created a cohort that saw multilingualism as relevant to their daily lives and were ready to take it on (2014, 19–20)

This multilingual cohort of contemporary scholars includes the contributors to this special issue, who offer new perspectives on the significance of translingualism and transculturality to the creation, translation and canonization of Russian literature.

If we go back half a century, we can count language-switching writers with Slavic origins on the fingers of one hand: Joseph Conrad, Irène Nemirovsky, Elsa Triolet, Vladimir Nabokov and Joseph Brodsky. These literary bilinguals are famous for their mastery of an acquired language. Conrad wrote not in his native Polish but in English, while the others – all native Russian speakers – switched to French (Nemirovsky, Triolet and briefly Nabokov) or English (Nabokov and Brodsky).<sup>2</sup> In their own day, such authors

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were categorized as exile or émigré writers; now their works are often seen as belonging to migration literature, diaspora literature or world literature. This reflects changes in the field of literature studies and, not least, changes in the real world brought by globalization and increased migration.

Today there are dozens of writers who have Russian as a native language but write in another one, such as English, French or German.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps more surprisingly, some have switched to languages with considerably smaller readerships. An especially interesting case, examined by Marja Sorvari in this issue, is the work of Zinaida Lindén, who writes in Swedish, which she learned as a student at Leningrad State University before emigrating to Finland in 1991. Although Swedish has the status of an official language in Finland, it is the native tongue of only about 5% of the population. Like the works of several other contemporary translingual writers, Lindén's novels and short story collections have been positively received, garnering critical acclaim and literary prizes. In many cases, translingual works have been translated (or self-translated), crossing in the process more linguistic, literary and cultural borders. As Rita Wilson argues, "translingual narratives transform literary and cultural discourse, not only by relocating it on cultural margins, and by foregrounding intercultural dialogue and translation, but also by drawing discrete literary traditions into contact" (2011, 237). The articles in this special issue examine the implications of such border-crossings in literature and translation.

### A note on terms

There are several terms for the presence of more than one language within a text. For the title of this special issue, I have chosen the term *literary translingualism*, coined by Steven G. Kellman (2000) in his pioneering study *The Translingual Imagination*. While the term *bilingualism* represents language-switching as a binary operation, and the term *multilingualism* indicates the presence of several languages without necessarily specifying their interrelations, the concept of translingualism emphasizes creative interaction between languages.<sup>4</sup> The word *translingual* implies the idea of language going beyond and even breaking free of itself. It captures the desire, expressed by Yildiz, to "*work through* the mother tongue and not simply sidestep its force" (13–14; italics in the original). The term *translingualism* also shares a prefix with the English verb *translate*. As ongoing research in both the fields of translation studies and translingual literary studies makes clear, the phenomena of translingualism and translation are closely interrelated in significant and mutually illuminating ways. The articles in this special issue consider examples of literary translingualism and translation on several levels: that of the author, text, self-translator and reader, as well as that of culture.

The cases of literary translingualism examined here are also closely related to the phenomenon of *transculturality*; that is, "the formation of multifaceted, fluid identities resulting from diverse cultural encounters" (Gilsenan Nordin, Hansen, and Zamorano Llena 2013, ix). As defined by the philosopher Wolfgang Iser (1999), transculturality questions views of cultural categories as stable and given and seeks to overcome the limitations of the theories of multiculturalism and interculturality. Iser argues that transculturality is better suited than traditional monological concepts to describe the interactions of cultures in the contemporary world, which he views as "largely characterized by mixes and permeations" (*ibid.*, 197). As the articles in this special issue show, translingual

literature and the process of (self-)translation bring such cultural mixes and permeations to the fore.

### Translation, translanguaging and transculturality in Russian literature

In *Translation and the Making of Modern Russian Literature*, Brian James Baer calls for us “to study not only *literature in translation* but *translation in literature*” (2016, 16; italics in the original). Like Yildiz, he argues that it is high time for scholars of literature and translation to overcome the continued influence of Schleiermacher, Herder and Humboldt’s idealization of the mother tongue: “to liberate literary studies from the tyranny of the national is to deconstruct the exclusive binaries produced by Romantic nationalism that relegate not only translation to the margins but bilingual identity and multilingual texts, as well” (ibid., 15).

In actuality, translation and translanguaging have been intrinsic to Russian literature from the outset, when Kievan Rus received a written language (Old Church Slavonic) in connection with its conversion to Christianity. As Robin Milner-Gulland points out,

[t]he diglossia between the Old Russian and the Slavonic elements within the written Russian language has led to tensions, uncertainties (particularly in the eighteenth century) and great expressive possibilities for Russian writers, a peculiarly Russian situation that readers of Russian literature in other countries have not always understood. (2001, 20)

During the eighteenth century, translations from English, French and German laid the groundwork for the rich national Russian literature that blossomed in the early nineteenth century, with Alexander Pushkin at the fore.<sup>5</sup> His genius for realizing the expressive possibilities referred to above by Milner-Gulland, as well as synthesizing influences from other languages and literary traditions, helped to usher Russian literature onto the Western literary stage. Nabokov’s commentary to his translation of Pushkin’s novel-in-verse *Eugene Onegin* emphasizes its hybridity. This masterpiece, Nabokov holds,

is not “a picture of Russian life”; it is at best the picture of a little group of Russians, in the second decade of the last century, crossed with all the more obvious characters of western European romance and placed in a stylized Russia, which would disintegrate at once if the French props were removed and if the French impersonators of English and German writers stopped prompting the Russian-speaking heroes and heroines. (1964, 7)

Lev Tolstoy’s novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* reflected the multilingualism of the Russian gentry in the latter half of the nineteenth century through Germanicisms in the Russian, as well as entire passages in French. Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union were multi-ethnic, polyglot empires, giving rise to literary translanguaging both within and without their geographical territory.

Recent and ongoing scholarship reveals the previously underestimated importance of translation and translanguaging in the development and achievements of Russian literature.<sup>6</sup> The articles in this issue contribute new perspectives on the significance of translanguaging in connection with translation in Russian literary contexts. In particular, they focus on issues of self-translation, cultural translation and fictional depictions of translation.

### Self-translation

Transcultural and translanguaging sensibilities become especially apparent in self-translated works. Three of the articles in this special issue examine self-translation as literary practice,

process and product. Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour holds self-translation to be “an essential attribute of the activity of bilingual writers” (1989, 111), even “the key to the evolution of most bilingual writers” (ibid., 163), yet until recently it has received little scholarly attention (Hokenson and Munson 2007, 9; Grönstrand 2014, 119).<sup>7</sup> Literary self-translation raises complex questions about language and cultural identity (Cordingley 2013; Castro, Mainer, and Skomorokhova 2017). By combining the roles of author and translator and blurring the distinctions between the processes of writing and translating, it challenges concepts developed in translation studies, such as equivalence, source language and target language (Hokenson and Munson 2007, 9). Self-translation also defies the traditional dichotomy between original and translation, arguably producing two versions of the same original. The usefulness of national categories wanes when an author-translator transplants a literary work from one language and cultural context into another. Self-translation can be viewed, as Heidi Grönstrand proposes, as “a kind of border-zone activity that reorganises relationships between languages and literary traditions and challenges monolingual assumptions of the literary institution and literary history writing” (2014, 118).

By virtue of a long-standing notion of an author’s textual authority, readers and reviewers of translations tend to grant self-translators more leeway than is usually the case with extraneous translators (Molnar 1995, 333). In “The Poetics of Displacement: Self-translation among Contemporary Russian-American Poets”, Adrian Wanner offers a close reading and comparison of poems by the contemporary bilingual Russian-American poets Andrey Gritsman and Katia Kapovich. Wanner shows how both use self-translation as a means of self-exploration, although they present their self-translated poems to the reader in strikingly different ways (in an *en face* bilingual edition and as English originals, respectively). Taken together, the two versions of their poems – one in Russian, the other in English – can be read as a dialogue between two selves of the poet located in different temporal, geographical, linguistic and cultural spaces. The author-translator revisits not only an earlier literary work, but also oneself at the time of its writing. Wanner argues that, read together, the original poems and their translations provide a meta-commentary on how the self changes as the result of not only the passage of time, but also movement between languages and cultures, thus becoming both the subject and object of translation.

A new perspective emerges on the creative development of the nineteenth-century poet Vasili Zhukovskii in Natalia Nikonova and Yulia Tikhomirova’s study of his translingual oeuvre. In the article “The Father of Russian Romanticism’s Literary Translingualism: Vasili Zhukovskii’s German Compositions and Self-Translations”, they trace Zhukovskii’s transcultural trajectory through an analysis of previously unknown compositions and self-translations in German. Multilingualism was the norm among the Russian gentry in the early nineteenth century, and Zhukovskii knew both French and German well. While he wrote poems in French for the literary circle “Académie des curieux impertinants” in the 1810s, the role of German increased later in his career, especially while living in Germany in the 1840s and 1850s. Nikonova and Tikhomirova identify 4 original poems in German, 17 self-translations from Russian to German and 3 philosophical-political prose works. Their analysis focuses on Zhukovskii’s Russian–German intercultural dialogue, showing how he conveyed Russian folklore to a German audience, how the Biedermeier tradition influenced his work and how the use of German helped him develop

concepts such as *Volks-Souveränität* [national sovereignty]. The article elucidates how Zhukovskii's transcultural experiences in life and translanguaging experiments in literature shaped his contributions to the Russian literary language and literary life.

Mary Besemeres has argued that all translanguaging writing can be seen as a form of self-translation (Besemeres 2002); conversely, self-translation can be seen as a form of re-writing. In the article "Altering Language, Transforming Literature: Translingualism and Literary Self-Translation in Zinaida Lindén's Fiction", Marja Sorvari examines what happens when an author uses self-translation to reach readers in different languages. As a non-native speaker writing and publishing prose in a minority language (Swedish) in her adopted country (Finland), Lindén provides a particularly interesting case of translanguaging literary activity. Following Hokenson and Munson's suggestion that self-translations be analyzed with a primary focus not on discrepancies, but on transculturality and liminality, Sorvari compares and analyzes selected passages in Lindén's debut novel in Swedish *I väntan på en jordbävning* (Waiting for an earthquake, 2004) and its Russian edition *V ozhidanii zemletriaseniia* (2005). In the analysis, Sorvari applies the concept of translanguaging (first developed in bilingual education), which views the bilingual use of different languages as part of "one linguistic repertoire" (García and Wei 2014, 2), as well as Verena Jung's concept of cultural mediation (Jung 2004). According to Jung, the self-translating author adapts the text to the new audience, influenced by an awareness of transcultural and translanguaging factors. Sorvari concludes that the Swedish and Russian versions of Lindén's novel are most productively approached not as an original and its translation, but rather as two culturally mediated originals.

### Cultural translation

Translation can also be a means of defining and shaping the literary canon, as Marijeta Bozovic shows in her article "Nabokov's Translations and Transnational Canon Formation". She exemplifies this with the case of Vladimir Nabokov, whose oeuvre includes not only novels in Russian and English, but also self-translations and a translation with extensive commentary of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. Bozovic reads Nabokov's *Onegin* translation (1964), along with his self-translation of *Lolita* into Russian (1967) and his novel *Ada, or Ardor* (1969), as attempts to preserve the Russian literary tradition (simultaneously ensuring himself a place within it) by transplanting it to the soil of the English language and bringing it into the international literary canon. As a result, Bozovic argues, Nabokov contributed not only to the Russian and English-language literatures, but to the creation of a new world literature. The article aims to fill a gap between translation studies and Nabokov studies, by making visible the implications of Nabokov's translation, translanguaging and transnationalism. Bozovic concludes by examining the role of Nabokov in our own time, considering how and why this "unconventional cultural ambassador" has served as inspiration for prominent contemporary transnational writers such as J.M. Coetzee, Orhan Pamuk, Salman Rushdie and W.G. Sebald. She observes that Nabokov's appeal for contemporary writers and readers alike may be attributed to the way his work challenges cultural essentialism and the hegemonic monolingualization of literature.

Sibelan Forrester's article "Whose Foreign Is Foreign? Form and Norms of Translation of Contemporary Russian Poetry into English" considers how readers' expectations of poetry may influence translators' choices. Forrester begins by noting differences

between poetry in Russian and English, showing how particular characteristics of the two languages have shaped their poetic traditions over the past three centuries. Cultural and political circumstances (such as the “deep freeze” imposed on poetry by the Soviet state) have also led to divergences in the evolution of poetry. Censorship and Cold War ideology had an impact on the production and reception of poetry on both sides of the Iron Curtain, restricting what could be published in the East Bloc and, in the West, influencing what was translated and how it was read. Arguing that the growth of translation studies as a discipline “has come to inform the practice of translators in interesting and sometimes unexpected ways”, Forrester analyzes several recent English translations of Russian poems (from the Romantic Age through the early twenty-first century), as well as translators’ and editors’ prefaces to English-language anthologies. She identifies principles – implicit as well as explicit – that underlie the ways contemporary translators of Russian poetry into English approach the formal aspects of meter and rhyme. Forrester considers the effects of different translation strategies in terms of foreignization and domestication, demonstrating how effects are created not only by choices on the part of translators and editors, but also by anglophone readers’ reactions, which are conditioned in part by the anglophone poetic tradition.

### Fictional depictions of translation

In coining the concept of “the postmonolingual condition”, Yildiz does not mean to say that monolingualism has been overcome (2012, 1–29). Rather, the new perspectives opened up by the multilingual turn that began around 1990 have led to “a field of tension in which the monolingual paradigm continues to assert itself and multilingual practices persist or reemerge” (ibid., 5). She argues that contemporary fiction contributes to the creation of a multilingual paradigm by depicting multilingual protagonists in multilingual worlds. Indeed, many recent novels and films have translation or translators at their center.<sup>8</sup> As Rebecca L. Walkowitz notes in *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature*, “translation functions as a thematic, structural, conceptual, and sometimes even typographical device” in many contemporary novels, which she calls “born-translated” (2015, 4).<sup>9</sup> The “postmonolingual mode of reading” proposed by Yildiz (2012, 6) entails a focus on these kinds of multilingual practices enacted in the fictional world, as well as on the level of the text itself.

Roman Ivashkiv takes such an approach in his contribution to this special issue, entitled “Transmesism in Viktor Pelevin’s *Generation ‘P’* and Andrew Bromfield’s English Translation”. The concept of *transmesism* has been developed by Thomas O. Beebee (2012) in order to elucidate fictional depictions of translation and multilingualism.<sup>10</sup> As Ivashkiv’s article shows, Pelevin’s novel *Generation ‘P’* (1999) is a good example of *transmesism*, as it offers a fictional portrait of a translator who earns a living by adapting American advertising for the Russian market during the first decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The novel is linguistically complex: written in Russian, it contains numerous words and expressions in English, resulting in, as Ivashkiv describes it, a “bilingual and code-switching mode”, which essentially builds a need for translation into the reading process. Translation is thus present on more than one level: that of the fictional characters and that of the reader. Ivashkiv argues that the novel not only depicts, but also performs translation through footnotes and parenthetical comments. The protagonist wrestles with the same

kind of questions as translation scholars: untranslatability, cultural adaptation, and the relationship between original and translation. Ivashkiv goes on to examine the strategies Andrew Bromfield has applied in translating Pelevin's novel into English. The analysis focuses on selected transmetic passages and shows how intertextuality offers creative solutions to translation challenges.

This special issue grew out of the international conference "Translation in Russian Contexts: Transcultural, Translingual and Transdisciplinary Points of Departure", organized by Dr Susanna Witt and myself at Uppsala University on 3–7 June 2014. Twenty articles based on papers presented there have recently been published in the anthology *Translation in Russian Contexts: Culture, Politics, Identity*, edited by Brian James Baer and Susanna Witt (2018), while contributions focusing on translingualism and transculturality are gathered in this special issue. The research network on Slavic translation studies established at the conference has since organized panel series at the annual conventions of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies and the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages, as well as at the Annual Tartu Conference of Russian and East European Studies. The ongoing scholarly dialogue on the many Russian contexts of translation has enriched this special issue, and I am also grateful to the Institute for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Uppsala University for its support of the research network and its projects.

### Note on contributor

*Julie Hansen* is associate professor of Slavic languages at the Department of Modern Languages and Research Fellow at the Institute for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Uppsala University. She is a specialist in Slavic literatures (Czech and Russian) and comparative literature. She received her PhD in Slavic languages and literatures from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA. Her research interests include memory studies, multilingual literature, translation theory and practice, and Russian and Czech modernism. She is the author of numerous articles and co-editor of the volumes *Transcultural Identities in Contemporary Literature* (Rodopi, 2013) and *Punishment as a Crime? Perspectives on Prison Experience in Russian Culture* (Uppsala University, 2014), and the special issue of *Translation and Interpreting Studies* entitled "Contexts of Russian Literary Translation" (2016). She is currently completing a monograph on the theme of memory in recent fiction from post-communist countries.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

### Notes

1. While Yildiz, like many other scholars of literary translingualism, offers a critical view of monolingualism, a more positive appraisal of its role in literary history can be found in David Gramling's *The Invention of Monolingualism*, the aim of which Gramling states in the following way: "rather than hunting down monolingualism like a white-collar crook on the run, this book seeks to venerate it, however briefly, as a scientific aesthetic invention that, in its time, first made the Mercatorian notion of countable global cultures and languages at least provisionally thinkable. Early monolingualism gave seventeenth-century scholars in Europe a way to yoke all of the propositional and social ambitions of Language (*langage*)



- under the proprietary roof of any single language (*langue*) – a powerful and imaginative act of what we today might call (macro-)optimization” (Gramling 2016, 2).
2. For a study of these writers, see Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour’s (1989) *Alien Tongues: Bilingual Russian Writers of the “First” Generation*.
  3. For an overview and analysis of several contemporary translanguing Russian writers, see Adrian Wanner’s *Out of Russia: Fictions of a New Translingual Diaspora* (2011).
  4. Another term is *heterolingualism*; see, for example, Grutman (2006) and Meylaerts (2006).
  5. On Franco-Russian bilingualism in Russia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Offord et al. (2015).
  6. See, for example, Baer (2016) and Baer, Witt (2018) and Offord et al. (2015).
  7. For a regularly updated bibliography of scholarship on self-translation, see Gentes (2018).
  8. Examples include *The Translator* (1999) by the Sudanese-British author Leila Aboulela, in which the protagonist’s daily work as a translator serves as a metaphor for her encounters with a foreign culture; *An Unnecessary Woman* (2015) by the Lebanese-American author Rabih Aladmeddine, in which translation of literary classics is a path to self-understanding for the protagonist-translator; and the Russian novel *Daniel’ Shtain, perevodchik* (2006) [*Daniel Stein, Interpreter*] by Liudmila Ulitskaya. For an analysis of the latter, see Baer (2016, 163–180).
  9. Walkowitz writes: “These works are *written for translation*, in the hope of being translated, but they are also often *written as translations*, pretending to take place in a language other than the one in which they have, in fact, been composed. Sometimes they present themselves as fake or fictional editions: subsequent versions (in English) of an original text (in some other language), which doesn’t really exist. They are also frequently *written from translation*. Pointing backward as well as forward, they present translation as a spur to literary innovation, including their own” (2015, 4; italics in the original).
  10. The term *transfiction* is also used to denote fictional depictions of translation. See, for example, *Transfiction: Research into the Realities of Translation Fiction*, edited by Klaus Kaindl and Karlheinz Spitzl (2014).

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