Point of View

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On reelecting monolingualism: Fortification, fragility, and stamina

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1 Introduction

One of my initial motivations for writing a book on monolingualism was the hunch that all of us—who work with thoughts and ideas, with critiques and texts, and in human communities and cultures—have to contend eventually with the constraining and ultimately irrational effects of monolingualism across the whole range of our everyday experiences: from the most minute logistics of our institutional labor, to the most sophisticated methodological and ethical questions that spark our research or advocacy, from the normative stylistics of academic publishing, to how we recognize and engage the thoughts of our learners in a multilingual classroom—and, of course, in how we make sense of our currently gaslit political and cultural moment in the US, the UK, and beyond.

Yet there's always an ambivalence I feel when, each couple of days, the New Publications information about “monolingualism” rolls in from Google Scholar alerts. It's not just that I know ahead of time that 90% of the publications dealing with things “monolingual” in Anglophone research writeups will inevitably come from computational or forensic linguistics and Natural Language Processing—these being fields whose methodologies evoke in me all the apprehensions that engaging in any kind of “hard” interdisciplinarity always tends to evoke. Beyond this though, these Google Scholar alerts on monolingualism

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remind me that it has always rather been *multilingualism*—civic, aesthetic, political multilingualism, in all of its unwieldy social, aesthetic, and historical forms—that I’ve wanted to be *alerted* to. For me, it has always been the dissident and semiodiverse meaning-making practices that have opened up the world of research, creativity, desire, and friendship so vividly all along, since my youngest days as a language learner. I don’t feel this way about monolingualism: this clinical, unlikeable word, with its quizzical -ism at the end. To borrow a popular War on Drugs advert from the Reagan era, no kid ever says “When I grow up I want to be a monolingualism researcher.”

And yet I’ve found myself spending a good chunk of my early career studying this hungry structure of monolingualism, which I both oppose and practice in various ways. Though I’d often rather this not be the case, part of the stamina required of those of us to whom normative monolingual privilege accrues (whether or not we are indeed “monolingual” on the evidence) includes sticking around long enough not just to criticize monolingualism, but to understand its cunning transformations over time, even when other more interesting and beautiful topics beckon us too. I was recently reading a new manuscript-in-preparation called *Colonial and Decolonial Linguistics* and was so happy to see that the word “colonial” was foregrounded in its title—that it hadn’t been left off, as if “decolonial” were the only part of the story that still needed telling in 2019. In the same spirit, I’m persuaded that all dealings around multilingualism and translation (literary, professional, political, technical) need to save space for a solid, serious position on what monolingualism is and, more importantly, what it does—as that unmarked norm that so often obfuscates or stifles, but sometimes also enables the other forms of linguistic plurality and language friendship we love, model, and practice.

In recent weeks, I’ve begun internalizing the possibility that US Americans in 2020 might indeed reelect a racist real estate mogul, who spectacularly failed up into the nation’s Presidency in 2016, and so I’ve also immiserated myself more generally around this question of why people reelect things they are told have been bad for them, and for which they’ve been scolded routinely. For many of us, it is baffling to have to swallow a scenario in which our fellows, in New Jersey, Arizona, California, Massachusetts, and also in Germany and the UK, may be poised in various ways to go forth and reelect monolingualism in 2020 too—after all of the cognitive, social, political, cultural, moral and (why not?) the commercial arguments *against* monolingualism and *for* various forms of multilingualism. In all likelihood, 2020 will be yet another in a series of moments when language researchers and teachers throw up their hands in frustration at declining language enrollments, while puzzling over the strident, unapologetic monolingualization of international education and scholarly

publishing, despite the evidence of “how absurd this is” (Reagan and Osborn 2019, p. 88, see also the “Monolingual International” issue of the ADFL Bulletin 43.2 from 2015).

Given these apparently darkening skies, I want to take up some of the more lugubrious propositions about our age that I made in my 2016 book *The Invention of Monolingualism*, and think about the extent to which those scenarios seem to be playing out before our very eyes—and yet, also, about why our age in languages seems to be running on much more than mere linguaphobia or ideological monolingualism, in their most recognizable, controversial forms.

2 Ideological thinning, administrative thickening

In the monolingualism book, I parted to an extent with my colleague Yasemin Yildiz who suggested in her magisterial *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (2012), that there is an uneasy *postness* in the monolingualism of our societies and our literatures, a growing sense that the strictures of linguistic nativism, which had directed much thought about linguistic practice in the global colonial northwest throughout the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, were being worn only uncomfortably today, and that this tension between monolingual constraints and multilingual realities has been leading to a greater consciousness in literature and social life about the possibility of an entirely new way of figuring meaning and linguistic practice in the twenty-first century, of thinking and feeling beyond the very integer of “a language” as an individuated, countable entity. And that we can, in the words of the pan-Africanist sociolinguist Sinfree Makoni and the applied linguist Alastair Pennycook “disinvent and reconstitute languages” in new ways (2006).

How could one ever cast doubt on that hopeful and powerful message? And yet: My own gentle response in *The Invention of Monolingualism* was that I believed, and still do, that monolingualism as a political and economic structure is just now really getting going in earnest, particularly in its quest to individuate and then “commensurate” (Hanks 2010) stable monolanguages in relation to one another, for the purposes of global commerce, security/surveillance, and data management. The monolingualization and commensuration process, that of establishing and fortifying a global grid of panfunctional, exchangeable, semantically isomorphic monolanguages—a project I will argue is again afoot around us in the current era since 1990, and is a continuation of some efforts strategically ignited in seventeenth-century London (Holborn) and Port-Royal-des-Champs—can be engineered quite independently of how people like you and

me, and our various familiar and unfamiliar fellows around us, actually speak and teach—and, to a certain extent too, independently of how we write. Monolingualism as an overweening supply-side enterprise can be pursued quite successfully, despite all of the visible social evidence of multilingual practices around us.

I do much of my own work in the southwesternmost US border state of Arizona, which is also northern Latin America and formerly Northern Mexico, and is the current and ancestral Indigenous land of the Tohono O’odham and Pascua Yaqui nations. Any reasonable visitor would expect, then, that there ought to be a great deal of multilingual border thinking and border speaking at the core of our civic communities and institutions in Arizona. And one would further expect that our border thinking-for-speaking (Slobin 1996) would be all the more enriched and joined, of course, by the tens of thousands of multilingual new Arizonans in and around Tucson from Syria, Iraq, Vietnam, Bosnia, Cuba, Somalia, Burma, Bhutan, DR Congo, Sudan and Afghanistan. So when the decolonial feminist philosopher and activist Maria Lugones (2010) talks in her work about the “peopled ground” of decolonial thinking, these are the multilingual speakers who ‘people the ground’ in the border capital of Tucson where I come from, and who hold the potential there to decolonize monolingualism. And yet: monolingualism as a supply-side project of epistemic prospecting and cultural foreclosure is still doing a rather bang-up job in Arizona right now, and it has a rather tight grip on how Arizona’s institutions run, including its schools and universities (Combs et al. 2014). Clearly, monolingualism is still busy fortifying its claim on the future of meaning-making, busy convincing young people to stay in their lane of language use, and telling them what kind of competitive multilingualism they’re allowed to have—and doing so not only in the forms we may most readily identify as ideological.

The 2016 US general election transpired just a few months after *The Invention of Monolingualism* had come out, and it seems I was still too preoccupied with scouring the book for typos to focus on the real question of that moment, which should have been: how monolingualism had been continuing to evolve before our eyes, already since I’d put down my pen on that book in the late days of the Obama era. I’d always intended to have that book be my one saying-my-piece piece about monolingualism. But after 2016, with Trump, UKIP, and Brexit, AfD in Germany, and ÖVP in Austria, it became clear that the book had been only a modest, initial glance at things to come—a first pulling off the bandage of monolingualism, to find the many other bandages beneath it.

And of course monolingualism is no essence or entity; it has no being or substance, it has only powerful and “mythic” effects, in Roland Barthes sense of the word “myth” (Barthes 1957). It is also no uniform structure: Brazilian

monolingualism, which is a strongly expressed ideology too, is quite different in its effects, designs, and ethnicizing/racializing logics than is US American monolingualism or Turkish monolingualism.¹ US American and British enactments of monolingualism, for their part, don't have to contend adversarially with the global hyperobject of English, precisely because they are the primary symbolic matrix of that hyperobject. And expressions of monolingualism differ further in that colonial and settler monolingualisms, like those in the UK and US respectively, don't enjoy the potentially decolonial potency that for instance Bangla, Tamil, Diné, or Kurdish monolingualisms might. So I try to take special care not to conflate different and contradictory local (though often self-universalizing) expressions of monolingualism, as they may reflect divergent critical or hegemonic projects—or sometimes do both at the same time.

I remember for instance reading Orhan Pamuk's novel *Snow* (2002) and thinking about how the protagonist of that book, Kerim Alakuşoğlu, an exile in Germany for 12 years, refused to learn German, as a strategy for saving his soul. Not learning a language, a language that is expected in a country where one currently resides, is of course in no way tantamount to monolingualism per se, though *not* successfully conveying this willingness to learn a state language (an arduous, complex perlocution indeed!) routinely raises the charge of monolingualism against one on the part of state actors. This is a ritual scene of political disciplining that tends to bring all the institutional and ideological weight of monolingualism crashing down on the not-necessarily-monolingual people concerned. I still remember listening to President Obama, that multilingual cosmopolitan raised by the world and around the world, at a Facebook townhall in Palo Alto in 2011, saying that undocumented Americans wishing to stay in the US should *pay a fine and learn English*. And I realized then just how centrist and uncontroversial a stance that proposition had become. The President's formulation itself was a faint and prosaic recitativ of Theodore Roosevelt's stances on assimilationism: his spiteful rebuke of the spectre of his country having become a "polyglot boarding house" (1918). Obama's recasting of this scold into a piece of parental prudence showed how subtle, how understated, how "kinder, gentler," and yet how unquestionable this thickened administrative monolingualism had been able to become around twenty-first-century citizenship, and how these modest-sounding procedural demands to *pay a fine and learn English* rest on officials' self-assured presumption that they themselves are the ones attempting to combat the perils of civic monolingualism in a world they style cosmopolitan after their own monolingual likeness.

Habermas (2011) and other civic theoreticians of communicative competence can also be found hedging toward such a position: suggesting that a common

1 I'm grateful to Stephanie Dennison (Leeds) for this observation.

language—as minimum precondition for public reason—is in fact the primary antidote to monolingualism. In the German case, what is most often presumed to be the problem is Turkish-, Russian- or Arabic-speaking immigrants’ so-called monolingualism, while British or American ex-pat English attracts a categorically different kind of ambivalent censure. There are of course a few problems with this equation: attributions of monolingualism to alloligual others are often falsely mimetic (Shankar 2008, p. 271), based as they are on a notion that people from Turkey, for instance, don’t speak other languages too (like Kurdish(es); Aramaic; Laz; Classical, Modern Standard, and Levantine Arabics; Frenches; and Englishes) or that Latin American immigrants to the US or UK don’t speak Indigenous and other languages in addition to their multiple varieties of Spanish and Portuguese. It is somewhat frustrating to have to point out that speakers cannot reasonably be characterized with the word monolingual just because those who interpellate them as such are comfortable projecting their own polities’ monolingualisms onto those of their post-migrant counterparts.

Secondly, the effect of *pay a fine and learn English* as a performative demand is itself a monolingual one, in that it powerfully monolingualizes public, civic space, even when its announced intent is to promote linguistic plurality and transparency in communication. This performativity is multidirectional and pernicious in complex ways. My colleagues in the UK, for instance, note that the more unequivocal the state demand is that migrants to the UK learn English (Cameron 2013, see also Altherr-Flores 2018 in the US case), the fewer financial provisions there will be, under those successive governments, for new Britons to do precisely this. The mandate on the political level seems not to catalyze such provision or support, as we might wish to assume, but rather to diminish it. Monolingualism remains, as ever, a perfect storm.

But it is simply not enough anymore to address structural monolingualism on this ideological level alone as either a cultural politics of the powerful aggrieved, or as a raciolinguistic (Flores and Rosa 2015) proxy discourse for white supremacy, which it deeply and effectively is. It is also time to think about a political economy of monolingualism globally, and how it is being fortified around us through various local expressions of (translational) monolingualism.

3 Fortifications: Civic, legislative, technological

Fortification, as in fortified monolingualism, is a word I began using shortly after my book on monolingualism came out in 2016, to suggest that monolingualism is not only increasing its ideological power around us, by way of overt

xenophobic nationalism and linguistic racism. The general notion of monolingualism's increasing ideological power is a point about which I already express some differences with other esteemed writers on the topic, who have seen monolingualism as rather in decline. Like them, I am indeed urgently concerned about bouyantly anachronistic, overtly political expressions of monolingualism in national contexts, but along with that increasing ideological power come—as with most any scene where forts and fortifications are being built around existing power (Donald 2009)—always-innovating technologies of security, and economies of dissemination and restructuration that, often despite an accompanying stance of regret and pragmatism, serve to justify not so much a rancorous and ideological monolingualism or frontal linguistic supremacy, but a quite centrist, technocratic, administrative, Obama-style reinvestment in monolingual procedures in the middle of our institutions, one that cannot be pinned on ideological nationalism, racism, or xenophobia as such.

And so it was quite important for me in the book to distinguish monolingualism from other important concepts like linguistic imperialism, linguistic racism, or even linguistic purism and nativism. Monolingualism, like Franz Kafka's Oklahoma Theater—from his *America* novel from 1914 (1983)—is a collaborative pageant that requires hundreds of millions of speakers actively participating in the performance in some way—participating in that performance of *needing no other language but one*—and actively compelling others to participate along with them. I've even thought of it, now and again, as a kind of “fourth unity” of modernity—beyond the three dramatic unities of French Classicism: of action, place, and time. Monolingualism bears all of these dramatic, mythical, and liminal features of collective ritual ordeal, and I'm convinced that nationalists, authoritarians, and cultural conservatives can't maintain the myth of monolingualism alone. It's a multi-partisan, big-tent affair.

As many of us have witnessed in our own work, monolingualism has been able to thicken in the last twenty years not so much in the realm of bald-faced policy propositions about the superiority of speaking one language over others, but rather in administrative and procedural realms that effectively target and isolate particular kinds of speakers and subject them to all kinds of consequential and repeated language ordeals—on paper, in semi-private spaces, and in a comprehensive range of institutional settings. About ten years ago I wrote about the naturalization reforms in Germany that took effect in 1999 during their post-Kohl Red-Green coalition under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (Gramling 2009) and how, though these watershed reforms seemed at the time to be a necessary and progressive move away from models of ethnonational citizenship, they were quietly doubling down on a new kind of “cosmopolitan monolingualism”: a civic vision of a *somewhat* ethnically pluralist society, bound together by a shared

language, an aspirational society where *somewhat* different kinds of persons could and would opt into civic life, primarily by performing command of the German language in recognizable ways. The German federal government had never before been procedurally or politically interested at this scale in what or how immigrants spoke. Of course, many Germans had harbored their own vociferous opinions on this question, but from 1914 all the way through National Socialism and until 1999, never had language proficiency risen to the level of concerted federal policy around naturalization.

With this new model of German citizenship circa 1999—which focused on compelling the voluntaristic acquisition of German, rather than on leveraging the crypto-essentialism of German blood—the problem was not just that German language suddenly held new symbolic power, especially over some racialized immigrants and post-migrants. There was the further, practical issue of what “opting into” German was going to actually look and sound like, and how different speakers’ successes or deficits in that voluntaristic process would be formally and informally evaluated, and by whom. Procedurally, ethnic essentialism had always been brutally exclusionary in its assessments of belonging, but as the millennium neared it was becoming clear that such blood-based citizenship models had very limited capacity to conjure up the newly ascendant neoliberal energies of becoming, achieving, and being-through-performing, so central as these had become to political economies of personhood in the post-1980s era. Part of this about-face in 1999 was thus a total mobilization of assessment, focusing on a certain select group of multilinguals in their dramatic, symbolic process of becoming-eligible for Germanness.

This was one of the ways I saw, ten and twenty years ago now, monolingualism fortifying around ostensibly progressive communicative virtues in Germany. It is hard to characterize this process as oppressive, so dependent as it is on a discourse of encouragement and enfranchisement. I saw it as something between a *ius sanguinis* and a *ius soli* model of citizenship, and called it a *ius linguarum*, as in a “law of languages”: a juridical principle of right that guarded the prospect of belonging to public life in newly intensified ways around how one spoke one’s various multiple languages (see also Leung 2019 for a survey). An alternative concept, say a *ius linguae* (in the Latin singular), would intimate an oppressive linguistic supremacy to German. The *ius linguarum* is rather a bid to manage the effects of linguistic plurality in ways that do not aggrieve the underlying monolingualism of the state—something along the lines of what the educational linguist Robert Moore calls “reactionary multilingualism” (2015).

But, since then, what have joined those civic and juridical forms of monolingualism-as-diversity, for instance in the US and UK, are new legislative and

administrative techniques that have the effect, if not the intent, of reinforcing the effects of monolingualism. State signatories to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees have in fact bound themselves to burdens of listening to claimants in ways that are quite a bit more than monolingual, far beyond those required in normal civil or criminal procedures of evidentiary assessment. This is so, particularly because of the state obligation of nonrefoulement, and the frequent absence of corroborating evidence beyond a claimant's own testimony. And so Refugee Status Determination (RSD) decision-making has by law a higher burden of listening to claimants than in any other jurisprudential realm I know, such that we can really think about it as an important cross-roads in international law between multilingual persons and monolingual jurisprudence.

Refugee Status Determination procedures are one setting where thickened effects of monolingualism serve to dissuade, dispirit, and disqualify claimants with otherwise truly credible stories to tell about the threats against them in the states where they once may have held citizenship (Craig and Gramling 2017). In the main, state practices around RSD are currently hollowing out their obligations to the 1951 Convention by attenuating the procedures necessary to uphold them: cutting provisions for interpreters, searching for ways to disqualify claimants on linguistic or forensic-linguistic grounds, and very frequently succeeding at doing so. No one I know working in the Refugee Status Determination system in the UK right now would go so far as to say that a concerted ideological monolingualism is out to prevent people from availing themselves of international law, or from conveying a credible story—though a stronger case could be made about such a macro-strategy in the US under Trump. But in both of these national jurisdictions, effects of administrative monolingualism increasingly bar the most direly situated claimants foreseen by the 1951 Convention from sufficient standing to make an effective claim in the first instance. This is one of the areas where monolingualism is thickening in violation of international law, and doing so around the most vulnerable multilingual speakers.

Beyond the administrative realm of fortified monolingualism, as it has reached Refugee Status Determination, is the legislative domain where various state legislatures around the United States have seen fit over the period 1997 to 2016 to rebrand bilingual education as multilingual education (Katznelson and Bernstein 2017), and in doing so symbolically take “bilingualism” away from the people to whom it has traditionally belonged—in the US, heritage language speakers (of Spanish and Chinese for instance)—who have often come to regard heritage languages as a source of pride, ancestral connection, and community (Ruiz 1984), and not *necessarily* as a neoliberal asset for global competition. As Flores points out, the education theorist Guadalupe Valdes (1997) foretold this

problem, now 18 years ago, where she sounded a cautionary note about dual-immersion programs in the US, which she saw in some ways as a wealth transfer scheme away from *de facto* bilingual children, toward elite monolingual children, who could eventually use their emergent or symbolic bilingualism as a form of leverage over their Latinx peers. This recoding of immigrant, community, ancestral bilingualism as globally competitive multilingualism has been extraordinarily successful as an ideology in the US between 1997 and today. It has produced in effect what the educational linguists Freire et al. (2017) call a “disinclusion” of Latinx people from state-level language policy and planning about their own languages in US legislatures.

How are these kinds of legislative recodings a fortification of monolingualism? They are in some ways a design for a “multilingualism without people”, a multilingualism without bodies and histories or, certainly, without bilingual Latinx people, in the sense that the virtues and values that had long been developed in activist and educational circles around bilingual pride get disarticulated from those settings and reinvisioned for those who already enjoy normative monolingual privilege. The political challenge of bilingualism, so richly controversial in the US throughout the 1960s–1990s, has become muted in these new discourses. Meanwhile, erstwhile Anglo-monolingual US schoolchildren are now able, at least on their résumés, to “have” both monolingualism and multilingualism at the same time—the credibility and normativity of the one, and the flexible assets of the other—without any of the racialized imputations of deficit that have long readily accrued to so-called bilinguals.

Over that same period, 1997–2016, a third form of fortified monolingualism has also been arising in an ostensibly separate realm, that of advanced algorithmic machine translation platforms that harness the power of large-scale corpora comprising real, printed language-in-use, rather than previous models that relied on rules-based machine translation. Since 1990, these so-called Cross Linguistic Information Retrieval platforms (abbreviated as CLIR) have been under extraordinarily rapid development and innovation, so as to facilitate the fast, if not immediate transfer of “data” commodities from language to language, serving transnational commercial clients in supply-side manufacture logistics. The fact that “Cross-Linguistic” in CLIR is an adjective, and that Information is its operative noun, displays the decentered and vehicular role that language is made to play in an enterprise where precisely language (and not just “data” and “information”) is at the center of the means of production.

This complex multilingual process of CLIR is built however on a need for quite orderly, reliable, constituent monolingualisms or monolanguages that will work in concert in such a way in global circulation so as to not diminish revenue, slow down time-to-delivery, or cause expensive optimization errors

for developers. Text-pre-processing strategies for CLIR include for instance “Lexicon Normalization” and “Noisy Entity Removal,” procedures that Natural Language Processing technicians may utter with a straight face, but applied linguists will likely have at least a few trenchant questions about. This new paradigm of global algorithmic language management is what I call supralingualism (Gramling 2019), a discourse that seeks not to obviate the relevance of different languages entirely, but to manage their plentitude in the most economic and often austere ways possible. Each of us can well imagine what kinds of language and meaning lose out in such a supply-side efficiency model: our treasured local varieties, cryptolects, nuanced and specialized languages, Indigenous knowledges, and counter-languages, which by necessity exacerbate the global just-in-time delivery mandates of commercial multilingualism.

What is particularly breathtaking about this domain of research and development (CLIR and NLP) is its bold reliance on the concept of ‘ontology’ to give order to its various closed sets of variables in algorithmic modeling analysis (see Cross and Voss 2000, for instance, for a forerunner). There’s certainly nothing wrong with using ontology in virtual settings such as this, but to extend the concept into a notion of *cross-linguistic* ontology, i.e. the prospect of an operationalizable closed set of cognates across multiple languages, is a bridge too far—as the last century of anthropology, applied linguistics, translation studies, and literary theory has, in part, been dedicated to showing. Emily Apter et al.’s wonderful *The Dictionary of Untranslatables*, and its French-language predecessor (Cassin 2004), help remind us how and why languages cannot be put in any closed-set ontological relationship to one another, without cleaving off most of the most important, emic meanings that emanate from them. And yet: this kind of virtual, fuzzy ontology-building across languages is the methodological ballast for most prime-mover CLIR innovations over the past two decades. And those methodologies of course don’t stay in the lab. They very quickly make their way onto all of our end-user devices, and they take up epistemic space in the patent market for language-oriented technologies.

Thanks to this new paradigm of CLIR and, its commercial implementation platforms, language(s) have—and this the phrase economists use to describe such a transformation—“crossed the production boundary” in the last two decades from non-productive to productive activity, becoming value-creating commodities in the way that financial commodities had been made to do in the 1970s (Mazzucato 2018). We all are now witnesses to the reckless ruin and violent wealth disparity the recategorization of financial products as “value-creating” has yielded between 2008 and 2019 (Appaadurai 2016). I believe a similarly tumultuous future awaits language too, now that we are no longer just commodifying language, in the pejorative sense we are accustomed to thinking

commodification, but also commoditizing it—in the sense of rendering for clients predictably tradable, switchable semiotic assets for global glossodiversity management. The imprints of this quiet recategorization (and then also financialization) of language as ‘value-creating’ in a Neoclassical economic fashion, and the consequent elevation of language engineering to a form of rent-seeking behavior, are made plain not only in these CLIR methodologies but also precisely in the legislative language by which bilingualism has been rebranded as multilingualism in the US over recent decades.

4 Stamina and fragility

I want to pause here to clarify that this claim, that monolingualism is fortifying in new civic, legislative, and technological ways around us, need not diminish the powerful insights that colleagues have provided us for decades about translanguaging, multilingual subjectivity, code-meshing, code-mixing, translanguism, multiethnolectal linguistic crossing, translation, transduction, etc. The practices that these terms seek to valorize continue to burgeon vividly and powerfully everywhere we speak, everywhere we listen. They are the real world of meaning, the real “peopled ground” of speaking (Lugones 2010). And so, despite the fortifications we are tracking in monolingual procedures, it is not quite a zero-sum game we’re in today, along the lines of ‘When monolingualism fortifies, multilingualism weakens.’ But it is a complex adversarial and structural relationship, and many of the fortifications of monolingualism underway around us are indeed designed and conceived to help obviate the need for translanguaging—and code-mixing—in socio-commercial life. They’re often designed to do so in a way that does not appear to be a frontal attack on people’s linguistic practices, in ways that appear assistive, predictive, unobtrusive. I wrote in the 2016 book that “Monolingualism manages other languages, it does not quite oppose them” (11).

I do believe that radically transformative, effective, and joyous forms of real-world translanguaging will continue to flourish during this period of monolingual fortification I’ve been sketching out. But we would err if we turn our gaze so fast to multilingualism, without taking stock of the structures monolingualism has created and continues to create in this moment. Drawing on Robin DiAngelo’s 2018 book *White Fragility*, ‘stamina’ is a word I use to understand the willingness (among those to whom monolingual structural privilege accrues) to stay accountable for the legacy of the monolingualism that has been constituted in our name over the past four centuries, and realize

that we owe it to a multilingual world to account for the unearned privileges that such monolingual normativity affords us, for the structures monolingualism has created and continues to create in this moment. Such a persistence of critique is a form of stamina, and it is far more valuable than mere remorse and frustration and throwing up one's hands. Critiquing the cunning transformations of monolingualism will be a project that will take decades not years, and it will accordingly be one that needs stamina and accountability rather than fragility, remorse, and exoneration. It's going to be a wild ride, for these two decades 2010–2030 are a decisive time when discourses about multilingualism are being formulated, in similar ways as structuralism and the Linguistic Turn of the twentieth century set the agenda, for better or worse, for much of the linguistic imagination of the second half of the twentieth century in Europe and elsewhere.

If seventeenth-century Northern states and empires engineered monolingualism in particularly enduring ways, such that we're still here carrying out some of their visions, then we are responsible for having the stamina to (a) see clearly how monolingualism works in various settings; to (b) not abandon its workings precipitously for aspirational multilingualism, when that means leaving behind a dangerous edifice for others to break down for us, or to which others remain subjected, and to (c) take part as listeners and learners amid the imagining of alternatives that Global Southern thinkers have been offering all along (Heugh and Stroud 2018). Here I'm thinking, for instance, about the work of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2014) thinking translation through decolonial anthropology and Amerindian perspectivism, of Setiono Sugiharto (2015) writing from the Indonesian higher education context, offering Southern critiques of the notion of a multilingual turn in applied linguistics.

And yet, it is easiest to snap back into forms of monolingual "fragility," a term I also borrow from Robin DiAngelo, who in 2011 coined the term "white fragility" to describe the range of defensive and preemptive responses that white people like myself can be found to employ in interaction, in order to stave off imputations of racist or racializing behavior. Why can otherwise progressive white people seem to become suddenly fragile, or inarticulate, or dramatic around the topic of race, and simultaneously hunger for reassurance that we are doing or saying the right things about race and racism? In so hungering, we white people—so goes DiAngelo's argument—inadvertently but dramatically draw the focus back on us and our predicaments and needs.

Because she's writing specifically about anti-Black racism, DiAngelo does not turn her conception of "fragility" to address phenomena in the domain of monolingualism and multilingualism per se. I do not wish to dilute its primary meaning in her arguments, but I think this concept of fragility can be helpful too

for an ongoing interrogation of the (often racialized) workings and impact of monolingualism—and how we as educators, editors, principal investigators, colleagues, or researchers may find ourselves at times hungering to stave off or preempt the dreaded imputation of “monolingualism” in our ways of working, even in the very moment we are for instance giving a talk entirely in English, or assigning a set of readings entirely in English, or soliciting multilingual contributions to a special issue of a journal, but doing that solicitation only in English, or even in English, French, and German.

One thing I so much appreciate about DiAngelo’s argument is that, though she does provide insight along the way into what white fragility feels like for white people, and how it can seem to manifest so typically in our behaviors, her focus is rather on how that fragility has a pernicious *effect*—cumulatively and situationally impacting People of Color in violent, disorienting, and chaotic ways. This is also a shift the philosopher Kate Manne makes in her 2018 book *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, in which Manne shifts the focus in our general presumptions about misogyny away from how misogynists *feel* and *think*, away from the affective and intentional behaviors of individuals, and toward the aggregated impact that such behaviors, and fractions of behaviors, have on women, on people identified as women, or on people otherwise feminized in some contextual way.

Among academics, imputation of monolingualism have a prejudicial history of focusing on individuals, and so we’ve inherited a discourse that foregrounds monolingual persons as accidental culprits, bad actors, policy adversaries, and deficit languageurs—rather than thinking first about a structural “logic of monolingualism”, to borrow Kate Manne’s syntax, and how monolingualism situationally undermines some people and not others, how it distresses, muffles, muzzles, and disbelieves people, renders them unbelievable, unable or unworthy to be listened to, unprepared or unfit “at this time” for study, for employment, testimony, research, leadership, trust, power, residence, entry, publishability, or political office, etc. It’s so interesting to me that one of the few grand virtues that is ascribed to practices of translanguaging and code-switching—and quite generously and ubiquitously so—is “creativity.” Multilingualism today is reflexively affirmed as creative, but not so reflexively as credible—which brings us back to the question of RSD hearings and multilingual jurisprudence. One of the puzzles we face in the next fifty years is how to make our institutions and curricula take translanguaging, multilingualism, and code-mixing as propositionally *credible*—at least as credible as the least creative forms of monolingualism to which we routinely ascribe credibility.

An inquiry into what “monolingual fragility” looks like in situ is not just a return to the pathologizing discourses about so-called monolinguals from the

1990s, which saw monolingualism as blindness, dis-ease, or something curable. Understanding the phenomenon of monolingual fragility is rather an inquiry into what it's like for most of the multilingual world to *interact* with monolingualism and its fortifying fragilities—including its complex regimes of credibility.

5 Conclusions

More and more, I'm convinced that multilingualism, monolingualism, and translation have become altogether different phenomena than they were only thirty years ago, when the first algorithmic, corpus-based machine translation platforms began their roll-out amid a financially-minded internationalist culture, often called the 'Washington consensus' in the 1990s. In its wake, no longer is monolingualism today merely a nationalist rallying cry, multilingualism a cosmopolitan ideal, and translation a slow artisanal practice. Rather, each has become part of a globally interlocking delivery modality for commercial products, linguistic and material alike. The boom in celebratory thinking about multilingualism, in and outside of academia, has as much to do with this new value-producing matrix as it ever did with shifting political ideas, post-migrational superdiversity, and the so-called decline of the ethnonational state.

I've proposed that the thirty years since 1990—a window spanning the roll-out and ongoing refinement of algorithmic cross-linguistic information retrieval (CLIR) capacities—is a new age in language and meaning-circulation, which I call the *linguacene*. In this age, the ascendant paradigms are the supply-side management of globally translatable multilingualism through constituent prestige monolingualisms, in ways that primarily serve commercial clients, security agendas, and borderless-market stratagems, by reducing the time necessary for translation and other forms of cross-linguistic communication. Untranslatability—or what is sometimes called semiodiversity—is of course a barrier and a nuisance to these commercial purposes, and CLIR platforms accordingly aim to commensurate different languages to one another so as to produce what Yaseen Noorani calls “soft multilingualisms” (2013).

“Linguacene” is a term that obviously shares the -cene suffix with Anthropocene, in part to accentuate how fortified translational monolingualisms tend to accelerate the industrial effects already characteristic of the late Anthropocene: global warming, climate precarity, ecological destruction, and the extraction of symbolic and material goods from local settings. I am interested in how these linguacene effects play out in literary craft as well, a domain that is often held up as somewhat resistant to free-market forces due to its aura of

slowness, its aesthetic particularity, its cultural specificity, and its linguistic, poetic precision. In future work, I'll be looking at an emerging set of literary works I term linguacene literature—primarily novels—that, from their various cultural vantage points in German, English, Danish, Swedish, Portuguese, and Turkish—observe and critique the industrial commercialization of translatability through fortified monolingualisms. Following the lead of Matsuda (2014) among others, I've backed away somewhat from translingual writing as a special category of artistry, in order to focus on literature that—whatever its narrative idiom—intervenes critically in this strange and inopportune myth of monolingualism, so as to minoritize it historically and to render its workings bare. Rather than reelecting monolingualism without question, these works seek to impugn it from within, to show how monolingualism works now—and how it continues to be, in the artist Aleksander Rodchenko's words, “the reminder of the culture we have not been able to create.” (Batchelor 2000: 153)

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