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Anjali Pandey’s *Monolingualism and Linguistic Exhibitionism in Fiction* investigates multilingualism in prize-winning English fiction, and explores the ways in which such fiction reflects and sustains global linguistic hierarchies and asymmetries. More specifically, it examines how literature ‘sells’ linguistic desire (p. 3) and how it seems to value one specific set of languages (Western languages, from the ‘centre’) over another (languages from the ‘periphery’). Pandey’s main goal is to demonstrate how ubiquitous media formats such as the global literary bestseller help to both construct and preserve the linguistic hegemony of, mostly, English, and how this is enabled by the enormous economic and symbolic value that literary prizes have quite recently acquired. Pandey’s approach is both macro- and micro-oriented, focusing simultaneously on the socio-economics of production and on the internal formal and linguistic structure of the novels analysed. The framework adopted is inclusive of orientations in both linguistics and literary studies and is based, mostly, on literary sociolinguistics.

Pandey’s first chapter offers a definition of the post-global world, a striking feature of which, she argues, is that, while multilingualism apparently enjoys an enhanced visibility, it is at the same time reduced to a standardized, monolingual norm: ‘other’ languages are soon made recognizable, equivalent, and transparent to monolingual speakers – most frequently, of English. Such momentary multilingualism Pandey calls ‘linguistic exhibitionism’ or ‘cosmetic multilingualism’ – features which, ultimately, only serve to spotlight the predominance and ubiquity of English across all domains of contemporary life. One such domain is that of literary creation, in which ‘foreign’ words are most often italicized, which makes their otherness visible – but only momentarily, and in a text that is otherwise in familiar, transparent English. Singularity, transparency and cultural equivalency, Pandey claims, are thus privileged over plurality, opacity and semiotic difference (p. 21). The hierarchies of value that such creations encode make perfect market sense, as they allow novels to appeal concurrently to both local and global audiences, the former attracted by an apparent authenticity and visibility, the latter by a trendy standardization and invisibility.

In Chapter 2, Pandey details the workings of the business of literary production, focusing mostly on literary prize-consecration, canonicity, and academic...
capitalism (p. 7). First stressing the role of prize-winning authors in shaping cultural and linguistic preferences, she then highlights the never-ending quest in the book trade for fresh ‘global’ multi-cultural voices that are hoped to generate immediate profits – with the help of centre-located literary prizes. Such prizes are said to increasingly participate in the process of canon formation, guaranteeing a rise in economic and symbolic capital alike. Pandey continues with a discussion of the art-commerce divide and the idea of what she calls “literary brandism” (p. 7) that is increasingly fostered through “transatlantic literary nurseries” involving “prestigious universities, established university creative-writing departments, and well-known literary journals” (p. 59). To Pandey, this literary brandism, as well as the editorial micro-management that authors are potentially subjected to, raises questions as to what exactly authors may be taught to make their novels more lucrative, and might begin to explain this marked preference for what Pandey calls “shallow multilingualism” (p. 45) – a truncated multilingual textuality in which the use of other languages is *told*, rather than *shown*. The author then discusses in more detail “literary outsourcing” (p. 63), or the co-optation, by the centre, of minority voices from the periphery, which serves to both attract new readers and boost profit. India, for example, simultaneously offers a significant number of Anglophone readers and reduced production costs. Pandey thus demonstrates how closely linked Western academia, literary prizes and canonization processes are (p. 71), and questions the imagined authenticity (p. 81) that supposedly peripheral authors exploit. Ultimately, she argues, this literary brandism is partly responsible for the “transparent turn” (p. 7) in prize-winning contemporary English fiction, leading authors to truncate, translate and/or painstakingly explain any and all multilingual inclusions, for the sake of their global readership.

Chapter 3 is the last theoretical chapter and sets out to define and exemplify what Pandey calls “literary exhibitionism”, i.e. the deliberate and superficial use of multilingualism for cosmetic effect, which tends to submit linguistic diversity to normative “anglification” (pp. 83–84). Interestingly, Pandey refuses the frequent conflations of all multilingual inclusions with hybridity. Instead, she urges for “a more nuanced microlinguistic reading of included multilingual content” that would take into account “the macro-contexts of production and the market-metrics of linguistic worth” (p. 84). In order to do so, she adopts an ambitious interdisciplinary approach which she describes as a “literary-linguistic ethno-methodological framework” that borrows terminology from “the related fields of applied sociolinguistics; globalization and linguistic landscape research; World Englishes studies; translation studies; postcolonial studies; and critical multilingualism studies” (p. 87). She then offers a taxonomy of the various strategies of linguistic exhibitionism, and defines them as serving a form of literary “showing off”, as well as a re-colonizing agenda (p. 100) that overtly devalues peripherized
languages. Instead of deeply engaging with multilingualism, then, authors offer an inauthentic exoticism that neutralizes otherness and avoids alienating their monolingual, “lazy” readers (p. 102). On the basis of these observations, Pandey proposes a cline-based framework to assess multilingual inclusions that goes from complete opacity to perfect transparency: at one end of the cline stand “anti-translation strategies aimed at encoding an intentional incomprehensibility” while, at the other end, one finds “linguistic strategies intent on proffering complete cultural and linguistic equivalency”; tagging (Zabus 2014: 104) and nonce-word multilingual inclusions belong to the latter category (p. 108). Interestingly, Pandey continues with the idea that such shallow multilingualism has immense market benefits: as they make the translators’ job easier, authors writing in English now get to reach, through translation, even larger readerships. She concludes the chapter on a pessimistic note: if familiarizing, rather than foreignizing, impulses are winning, it is because they can secure wider markets. And so long to the messy, real multilingualism of 20th century fiction.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 analyse the use of ‘other’ languages in four global works of fiction: Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* (Chapter 4), Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* (Chapter 5), Jhumpa Lahiri’s collection of short stories *Unaccustomed Earth* (Chapter 6) and Salman Rushdie’s *The Enchantress of Florence* (Chapter 7). According to Pandey, they all make use, each in their own way, of various strategies of shallow multilingualism. Aravind Adiga, for example, offers in *The White Tiger* a novel that is almost entirely in English, a language that its characters do not yet speak – but are desperately trying to learn. Indian languages – Hindi or Urdu, for instance – are all invisibilized, rendered via a normative monolingualism that tells of the language switches without ever showing them. The few one-word heterolingual inclusions that do occur in the novel are severely truncated, italicized and painstakingly author-translated or explained. The strategy that Adiga most often uses for that purpose is what Pandey calls “semantic re-looping”, i.e. a continuous repetition of the inclusions that ends up creating enough of a context for “accurate semiotic uptake”, as well as for a feeling of familiarity and, even perhaps, of “participatory bilingualism” (p. 158). But in *The White Tiger*, Pandey argues, English is not just the medium: it is also, and most importantly, the message. Adiga manages indeed to thematize English as the language of freedom, democracy and global access, while Indian languages are constantly conflated with incomprehensibility, social asymmetry, corruption and, in the case of Urdu, violence. Monolingual English is therefore both thematically and formally privileged over Indian multilingualism, which illustrates Adiga’s desire to please his global audience more than his local one. Eventually, Adiga seems to be saying, the forces of globalization that take part in contemporary trends of linguistic abandonment
emerge not only guilt-free, but liberating and beneficial, especially in the face of India’s backwardness.

Monica Ali similarly favours English and monolingualism over Bengali and multilingualism in *Brick Lane*. Just as in *The White Tiger*, English is used to voice a voiceless and invisibilized peripheral language – Bengali – thereby allowing only minimal Bengali intrusions on Ali’s Anglophone monolingual readership. The few one-word inclusions of Bengali that Ali does provide are transliterated for homogenization purposes, marked via italicization, and immediately explained and/or translated via strategies of “cushioning” and “contextualization” (p. 179). The idea is to never alienate one’s readers. English is therefore associated with vehicularity, creativity, power and agency, and Bengali with vernacularity, constraint and disempowerment. Ali goes a step further in invisibilizing Bengali though, as she translates an exchange of letters between Nazneen, located in London, and her sister Hasina, still in Bangladesh, into two different varieties of English: correct and familiar English for Nazneen, broken and almost incomprehensible English for Hasina. Such an alienating device, reserved for women out in the periphery, foreignizes and eventually silences Hasina and reflects the hyper-broken and chaotic Bangladeshi society she belongs to. With this contrast, Pandey demonstrates once more the immense symbolic capital that authors of 21st century fiction allocate to English, via strategies of shallow multilingualism that serve a normative monolingualism.

It is in the same invisibilized and tagged terms, Pandey notes (p. 211), that Jhumpa Lahiri presents Bengali in her collection of short stories, *Unaccustomed Earth*. What Pandey mostly focuses on here is Lahiri’s prominent use not only of English, but of Italian and Latin (a dead language!) to reflect her protagonists’ newly-acquired cosmopolitanism, as opposed to the parochial status Bengali offers them – and that they now reject. Lahiri’s one-word Bengali inclusions are therefore all contextualized, tagged and accounted for – giving the stories the exact amount of exoticism they need, not more – while entire sentences in Italian or Latin remain untranslated and unexplained. Mother-tongue loss is presented, in Lahiri’s stories, as volitional and beneficial, insofar as it allows her second-generation immigrant characters to eagerly adopt new, western codes, unquestioningly appropriating hegemonic monolingualism and western-centric notions of cosmopolitanism. More crucially, multilingualism itself, and not just Bengali, is presented as disempowering: in one of Lahiri’s stories, Pandey notes, two characters are even forced to apologize for being bilingual. *Unaccustomed Earth*, then, as Pandey claims, showcases a form of “elite cosmopolitanism” (p. 233) that considers mother-tongue retention as limiting, rather than liberating. In the end, Pandey argues, Lahiri fails to challenge current perceptions as to the worth and value of different languages (p. 237)
and proves unable to escape western, hegemonic definitions of the cosmopolitan. Pandey implies that, probably, this was never her aim in the first place.

The last analytical chapter, which deals with Salman Rushdie’s *The Enchantress of Florence*, comes to much the same conclusions. Here, too, western languages involve vehicularity, familiarity and intelligibility, while eastern languages are associated with vernacularity, foreignness and incomprehensibility. Pandey here deviates from previous critical discourses that have considered *The Enchantress of Florence* as culturally and politically insignificant: to her, Rushdie, via historical revisionism, revives notions of linguicism (or linguistic discrimination; cf. Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1989; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000) and linguistic imperialism, which, she believes, might partly explain the novel’s success in the UK, and relative lack thereof in the United States. She even goes so far as to wonder whether *The Enchantress of Florence* could not be read as Rushdie’s response to his then-recent knighthood, granted by the Queen in 2007. Despite a substantial amount of italicized multilingual inclusions – 150, according to Pandey’s count – only English, French and Italian see inclusion in syntactic, extended form, and remain either untranslated or foregrounded, while Turkish, Urdu and (reconstructed) Chaghatai are consistently transliterated, anglicized, and explained or translated. And if multilingualism itself is given a more positive valuation than in the previous books under observation, it is because it is considered as a uniquely western strength, the east, in Rushdie’s novel, being monoglot – a historical distortion that Pandey ascribes to the author’s attempt to retain cosmopolitanism as a privilege of the west only. Pandey concludes by emphasizing the role of “‘empire’ writers” (p. 264) such as Rushdie in shaping cultural and linguistic perceptions and preferences.

In her concluding chapter, Pandey insists on the need for an interdisciplinary approach and on the importance of analyses that connect a novel’s macro-context of production with its micro-level processes of inscription at the literary and linguistic levels (p. 270). In other words, she calls for readings of contemporary ‘marketable’ novels that go “beyond mere literal, hybridity-concerns to interpretations inclusive of the market-metrics of literary production” (p. 268). She also acknowledges that her analysis of linguistic diversity in prize-winning fiction of the post-global moment needs to be supplemented by studies that focus on the impact of literary production on cultural *habitus* and linguistic taste. Eventually, she confirms her pessimistic argument according to which an asymmetrical portrayal of linguistic difference is bound to “enhance one-way cultural flows in the post-global era – via a mainstreaming of trending towards transparency and semiotic equivalency” (p. 271). The very last part of her conclusion summarizes the typification strategies she has described in the previous chapters, showing how
celebrated authors such as Rushdie, Ali, Lahiri and Adiga are apparently ‘re-Eng-
lishing’ our world.

As the above summary has attempted to make clear, Anjali Pandey’s Monolingualism and Linguistic Exhibitionism in Fiction provides a much needed metic-
ulous account of the workings of multilingualism in literature. The bibliography covered is impressive, even though one may regret the absence of a number of translation and literary scholars (e.g. Forster 1970; Strutz & Zima 1996; Grutman 1997; Delabastita & Grutman 2005; Lennon 2010) whose work on multilingualism in literature might have been useful here – I’m thinking of Grutman’s notion of heterolingualism, for example, which defines the presence in a text of multiple languages. In her book, Pandey instead uses “multilingualism” and “plurilingualism”, interchangeably. These are, indeed, synonymous words, but it might have been more coherent to decide on one term only. At times, “plurilingualism” even becomes “pluralingualism” (e.g. p. 94), a very uncommon usage or possibly a typo.

The originality of Pandey’s work, however, lies not only in her chosen field of study, but also in the approach adopted: the interdisciplinarity of her book, integrating orientations belonging to both literature and linguistics, has, to the best of my knowledge, not been used much in relation to studies of multilingualism in fiction. And if the study of contemporary Anglophone literature and of its production, marketing and consumption is not new (cf. Todd 1996; English 2005, 2006; Annesley 2006; Brown 2006; Brouillette 2007, 2014; Squires 2007, 2010, 2013; Thomsen 2008; Levin 2014), few scholars have as yet combined macro-context and microlinguistics in such a detailed manner.

The author’s cross-disciplinary approach quite naturally involves a dialogue with numerous other scholars and works; unfortunately, the number of quotations and references within the text often makes the argument quite abstruse and unclear. Pandey’s style would have gained in clarity if she had reformulated more, and quoted less. Also, it would have benefited from fewer repetitions, and better copy-editing in general. Some phrases, sentences or structures see overly frequent reiteration, for instance versions of “what we are witnessing is”, “reflect and sustain” and “in a bid to”. Numerous (typing) mistakes are peppered throughout the seven chapters, e.g. “reflect as the sustain” (p. 8); “have increasing characterized” (p. 17); “a relatively new phenomena” (p. 34); “in Russian prestige in also reported in Ukraine” (p. 36); “Renandot” (p. 36); “where linguistic diversity really exits” (p. 46); “we being to understand” (p. 47); “Kirin Desai” (p. 64); “subjected to logic of” (p. 60); “Thomson” vs. “Thompson” (p. 60); “Nigeria […] the most populous English-speaking county in Africa” (p. 65); “atheortically” (p. 84); “problemetize” (p. 85); “the little know indignant response” (p. 99); etc. Punctuation, too, is somewhat problematic: there is an inconsistent use of commas, semi-colons and colons in in-text references, a misleading and interruptive use of lone dashes, and an
almost systematic addition of commas between subject and verb. More worrying, perhaps, are the mix-ups between the characters of The Enchantress of Florence: Pandey talks about the Enchantress when the example she provides is clearly about the Memory Palace (a different woman!), or about Ago, when the scene she discusses is about Niccolò.

Despite the formal blemishes it is the reviewer’s duty to point out, Monolingualism and Linguistic Exhibitionism in Fiction is a timely, wide-ranging and thought-provoking work that simultaneously reasserts the power of literature and questions its influence on linguistic diversity and (in)tolerance. Because it reminds its readers of the importance of language difference and multilingualism, it will be of interest to a wide range of students and scholars but, as the back cover specifies, it will mostly appeal to those of applied linguistics, multilingualism, stylistics, postcolonial studies and cultural studies.

References


