Translating Multilingualism, Composing Multilingual Translations: Reflections on Practice and Theory

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Abstract

This article examines manifestations of literary multilingualism in a range of contemporary literatures, along with strategies employed in translating literary multilingualism in Indian and Francophone literary texts, and it casts light on their theoretical implications. Recent multilingual translations of multilingual texts, including Heart Lamp (2025), a collection of Kannada short stories by Banu Mushtaq, translated by Deepa Bhasthi, are investigated to explore how they complicate existing models and concepts of translation, and the article investigates how they offer fresh ways of theorising literary translation. The article demonstrates how, in a multilingual translation, the act of translation not only transports the source text forward towards a new text, but may also carry forth the source text languages at times. Consequently, the boundaries between source and target languages can become blurred in a multilingual translation. This article may be of interest to scholars and students of translation studies and literary multilingualism, in addition to practising literary translators working with multilingual texts.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Translation, Francophone Literature, Indian Literature, Kannada.

Introduction

In today's globalised world, shaped by histories of colonisation and migration, literatures are frequently interspersed with multiple languages, which can manifest themselves in a range of ways; such multilingual poetics have been approached creatively in various ways by translators who compose multilingual translations in

response to multilingual source texts. This phenomenon has been explored in various recent works, including Ellen Jones's ground-breaking work, *Literature in Motion: Translating Multilingualism across the Americas* (Jones, 2022), which highlights the similarities and intersections between literary multilingualism and translation. My monograph *Writing between Languages: Translation and Multilingualism in Indian Francophone writing* (Mahadevan, 2025), which builds on the work of Jones, and draws on the concept of literary translingualism pioneered by Steven G. Kellman in *The Translingual Imagination* (Kellman, 2000), explores a range of multilingual poetics in Indian Francophone writing, and investigates the theoretical implications of translating literary multilingualism in relation to this corpus. This article revisits and extends existing research on literary multilingualism and its translation, exploring this topic in relation to a further range of contemporary multilingual literatures and their translations. It seeks to cast light on a range of multilingual poetics in contemporary literatures, how literary multilingualism has been translated, and the theoretical implications of such practices.

The first section of the article examines various manifestations of literary multilingualism in contemporary literatures of various languages, including French and Welsh, and their connections with the process of translation. The second section considers the implications of such poetics for translators, illuminating various strategies that can be employed to translate multilingualism. These strategies are examined through a close reading of translations, translators' notes and interviews. In the final section of the article, recent multilingual translations, in particular, *Heart Lamp* (Mushtaq, 2025), a collection of Kannada short stories by Banu Mushtaq, translated into English by Deepa Bhasthi, are investigated, to demonstrate how the translation of multilingual texts and the composition of multilingual translations can complicate existing models of translation that presuppose a straightforward transfer between source and target languages. I ask: how do such practices challenge existing concepts of translation, and which alternative models and ideas about translation emerge in light of these practices?

Literary Multilingualism: Definitions and Manifestations

As a theorist of multilingualism and translation, Rainier Grutman has suggested, "multilingualism evokes the co-presence of two or more languages (in a society, text or individual)" (Grutman, 2009, p.182). Multilingualism can manifest itself in literature either explicitly or implicitly, as I have suggested in *Writing between Languages* (Mahadevan, 2025). The explicit manifestation of multilingualism might take the form of the vocabulary of two different languages woven into a text. For example, a recent collection of short stories by Pondicherrian writer Ari Gautier entitled *Nocturne Pondichéry* (Gautier, 2021) is composed in French, but is interspersed with Tamil vocabulary, translated into the Roman script; this text is thus explicitly and very visibly multilingual. For example, some chapters have French names, such as "L'exil" (Exile) or "La cage dorée" (The Golden Cage), whereas another chapter title bears Tamil vocabulary: "Mani enna?" (What Time is it?) (Gautier, 2021, p.9).[1]

However, the multilingual poetics of a text may also manifest itself implicitly: the syntax or expressions of one language may subtly shape and mould the main language of the text, such that an expression may appear to be composed in one language, but another language may in fact be lurking behind it; the expression thus inhabits a location between languages (Mahadevan, 2025, p. 114). This additional language may be described as a "ghost language", a term that is inspired by Canadian translation theorist Sherry Simon's description of the presence of another language that lies behind the main language in the work of immigrant writers, presented in the work *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City* (Simon, 2006); in such instances, she notes that "the language of origin haunts the second language" (p. 184).

Simon offers the example of the work of the multilingual writer Abla Farhoud, who migrated from Lebanon to Canada in the 1950s. Farhoud writes in French in the novel *Le bonheur a la queue*

[1] Translations are my own in this article, unless otherwise indicated.

glissante (Farhoud, 1998) (Happiness has a slippery tail), but as Simon observes, this French work is at times shaped by Arabic, and Farhoud presents a glossary of Arabic proverbs at the end of the book "which appear in the novel or inspired the author" (Simon, 2006, p. 184). Simon describes Farhoud's work as an act of "writing as translation" (p. 183). The title of the novel itself, which translates literally into English as "Happiness has a slippery tail", exemplifies this. Although it is written in French, it is in fact a direct translation of an Arabic proverb,[2] although this is only made explicit in an inside title page of the novel, where the Arabic proverb is presented directly in the Arabic script above the French title. The title, therefore, exhibits an implicit form of multilingualism and constitutes an expression which straddles both French and Arabic.

The first chapter of the novel itself is shaped by several such implicit modes of multilingualism, including the following expression, uttered by the protagonist who reflects on her future and fate, and the fact that she is ageing: "Un paysan qui se suffit à lui-même est un sultan qui s'ignore" (a peasant who is self-sufficient is a sultan who is not aware of it) (Farhoud, 2004, p. 9). Again, this expression is a literal translation of an Arabic proverb, which is presented at the end of the book in the glossary alongside its French translation. Arabic, in both these examples, lurks behind the French façade, moulding the French language in unexpected ways to create unusual, implicitly and subtly multilingual expressions. The expressions thus lie at the juncture between languages; they are neither fully French nor fully Arabic. This phenomenon resonates with the words of exophonic multilingual German-Japanese writer Yoko Tawada:

> To me, it's the space between languages that's most important, more than the languages themselves. Maybe what I really want is not to be a writer of this or that language in particular, but to fall into the poetic ravine between them (Tawada, 2025, p. 28).

[2] For this observation, I am grateful to Judith Woodsworth, the Canadian translator of this novel, who discussed this work and its multilingualism in two events on the topic of literary translation that were held at Concordia University, Montreal in 2022, and at Liverpool University, UK in 2024.

As Jones argues, "translation is always to some extent implied in multilingual writing" (Jones, 2022, p. 2), and exemplifying this notion, in Farhoud's writing, it is the process of literal translation, the transfer of Arabic proverbs into French, that frequently generates implicit forms of multilingualism. The work may thus be described as one that is "born-translated", a term that Rebecca Walkowitz uses to describe novels in which "translation functions as a thematic, structural, conceptual, and sometimes even typographical device" (Walkowitz, 2015, p. 4). In *Le bonheur a la queue glissante*, translation is a structural device that is woven throughout the novel.

The notion of a "ghost language" is also thematised in a novel entitled *Cerf Volant* (Eddé, 2003) (Kite) by another Francophone writer of Lebanese origin, Dominique Eddé. One of the characters, Mali, is multilingual and speaks both French and Arabic. When she writes in Arabic, she senses that the French language haunts her Arabic:

> Et lorsqu'elle écrivait l'arabe, c'était encore une lutte intraitable contre les fantômes de la version française. Un obstacle invisible contrait l'élan de sa main trop pressée de maîtriser et de conquérir. Le souvenir des lettres latines brisait le rythme et l'ouverture des lettres arabes qui, couchées ou debout, se heurtaient à des frontières qui n'étaient pas les leurs (Eddé, 2003, pp. 56-7).

In British translator Ros Schwartz's translation, this passage is rendered as follows:

> And when she wrote Arabic, again it was a relentless struggle against the ghosts of the French translation. An invisible obstacle impeded the movement of her hand which was too impatient to master and conquer. The memory of the Roman letters hindered the rhythm and openness of the Arabic letters so that, horizontal or vertical, they came up with barriers not of their making (Eddé, 2018, pp. 55-6).

This may be interpreted as a mirror image of Farhoud's process; if Farhoud's French writing is shaped by Arabic, in Mali's experience, the opposite occurs: when writing in Arabic, her process is haunted by the French language. Both writers, one of fiction and the other

from within the world of fiction, consequently write in a space where languages are entangled and overlap with one another.

Not only is multilingualism a theme in Eddé's novel, but the novel itself is multilingual and is at times interspersed with Arabic, which was very evident for the English translator of the novel, Ros Schwartz, who describes the experience of translating the novel as follows:

> My translation of Lebanese novelist Dominique Eddé's *Kite* was interesting because Eddé writes in French but with an oriental sensibility. It took me way out of my comfort zone, and by the end I had a curious feeling that I'd translated from Arabic, so different is the novel's structure and language from the western narrative tradition (Goldberg, 2019).

The act of translating a multilingual text can therefore lead to the uncanny sensation that one is translating from an additional language interspersed in the text, rather than the primary language.

Literary multilingualism can also manifest itself implicitly in other ways. An example can be seen in the work of contemporary Francophone writer Kim Thúy, who migrated from Vietnam to Canada as a child refugee. The titles of several of Thúy's works are multilingual, and the multilingualism in such titles is frequently contained within a one-syllabic word; the novel *Ru,* for example, has a title which straddles two languages, French and Vietnamese, although this may not immediately be obvious to a French-speaking reader upon viewing the book's cover. However, inside the novel, the plurality of languages and different meanings contained within this one word are made apparent:

> En français, *ru* signifie <<petit ruisseau>> et, au figuré, <<écoulement (de larmes, de sang, d'argent)>> (*Le Robert historique*). En vietnamien, *ru* signifie <<berceuse>>, <<bercer>> (Thúy, 2010, p.7).

In Sheila Fischman's English translation, the passage appears as follows:

> In French, *ru* means a small stream and, figuratively, a flow, a discharge – of tears, of blood, of money. In Vietnamese, *ru* means a lullaby, to lull (Thúy, 2012).

For the multilingualism of Thúy's title to become visible and explicit, and for its various meanings in different languages to be exposed, an explanation and translation are required within the source text itself. If in Farhoud's novel, the act of translation generated multilingualism, here, in an inverse process, the multilingual poetics of the novel generate a process of translation in the source text itself, illustrating the idea that translation and multilingualism "are closely intertwined" (Jones, 2022, p. 2).

A similar phenomenon can be seen in the work of Welsh poet Menna Elfyn, who has recently composed a collection of poetry entitled *Parch* (Elfyn, 2025). The collection comprises poetry written directly in English, poetry written in Welsh that has been self-translated into English, and Welsh poetry translated by others into English. At first glance, to a reader who is not familiar with the Welsh language, the title appears to be a form of an English verb, which is frequently used in the form "parched". However, within the preface of the volume, further definitions of this word are presented, and the reader is informed that "Parch" is also a Welsh word: "The title of this volume is *Parch*, a Welsh word literally meaning respect, but also a title for a spiritual leader in non-conformist chapels ('Parch' meaning 'Reverend' in English)" (Elfyn, 2025, 11). Again, like Thúy's title "ru", which straddles both French and Vietnamese languages, "Parch" straddles both Welsh and English languages, with different meanings in both, but it is the act of translation from Welsh into English in the preface which illuminates the plurality of languages contained within this one word, which might otherwise not be apparent for a non-Welsh speaker. In both Elfyn's and Farhoud's works, translation, then, is a tool which illuminates implicit modes of multilingualism.

Translating Literary Multilingualism

The translator may consider various questions when translating the multilingual text: What is the effect of the multilingual poetics in the source text? Which "foreign" words are to be retained, and why? Do they have a particular political or cultural significance, and how can this be captured in the translation? Are there subtle traces of another language lurking behind the main language, and how will

these be captured? Might it be helpful to collaborate with the author or native speakers of any additional languages that may be embedded in the source text?

Then there is the question: what would it mean to erase the multilingualism of the source text? For example, if one is translating a multilingual postcolonial text, which may be written primarily in the language of the colonizer, but is shaped by the indigenous language in various ways, this may be interpreted as an act of linguistic decolonization; as Paul Bandia suggests, "literary heteroglossia in postcolonial writing can be construed as an expression of resistance to the hegemony of the colonial language" (Bandia, 2007, p. 221). The erasure of such multilingual poetics in the translation can therefore have certain political consequences, and such a translation may even be seen as an act of recolonisation, as Kathryn Woodham suggests, drawing on the work of Bandia (2006, p. 125).

Another question that the translator of literary multilingualism must grapple with is that of italics: should italics be used for "foreign" words in translations? This itself is a complex question, for as Schwartz has pointed out, "there is a big debate around what is foreign" (Mahadevan, 2022a). For example, as Richard Scholar observes in his work *Émigrés: French words that turned English* (2020), there are many French words that have travelled into English and which are used commonly, such that they are frequently seen by English speakers as English, rather than as foreign words (p. 3). And in *Le monolinguisme de l'autre* (1996) (The Monolingualism of the Other), Jacques Derrida offers the following two sentences: "On ne parle jamais qu'une seule langue" and "On ne parle jamais une seule langue" (p. 21), translated by Patrick Mensah as follows: "1. We only ever speak one language. 2. We never speak only one language" (Derrida, 1998, p. 7); as Bandia observes in relation to these sentences and Derrida's work, "the idea of a homogenous monolingual text or language is a fiction in itself. In other words, a language is always already contaminated by other languages" (2012, p. 424). If any language contains traces of other languages, then multilingualism and what constitutes a "foreign" word can be complex to define. Moreover, as I have suggested elsewhere, the

visibility and effects of literary multilingualism, and consequently what is seen as "foreign", may differ between readers of different linguistic frameworks and contexts (Mahadevan, 2025, pp. 31-2).

Broadly speaking, however, in the context of English translations, it may be possible to consider words from other languages that are not commonly used in English as "foreign".[3] While many translators have used italics for such words in their translations, numerous translators have recently criticised this practice, highlighting its potentially problematic and political dimensions. Translator and poet Khairani Barokka, for example, sees "the practice of italicising such words as a form of linguistic gatekeeping; a demarcation between which words are 'exotic' […] and those that have a rightful place in the text: the non-italicized" (Barokka, 2020). And Deepa Bhasthi, translator of Kannada literature, makes her stance very explicit in her translator's note to her recent translation of the multilingual Kannada short story collection *Heart Lamp* by Banu Mushtaq, which has "Against Italics" as its title. She includes words from various languages in her English translation, but writes that:

> I was very deliberate in my choice to not use italics for the Kannada, Urdu and Arabic words that remain untranslated in English. Italics serve to not only distract visually, but more importantly, they announce words as imported from another language, exoticizing them and keeping them alien to English. By not italicizing them, I hope the reader can come to these words without interference, and in the process of reading with the flow, perhaps even learn a new word or two in another language (Bhasthi, 2025, p. 215).

There are also other questions relating to the use of glossaries, endnotes and footnotes in translations that a translator of the multilingual text should consider: how far should these be used to

[3] Of course, this definition, too, is somewhat problematic, since there are multiple forms of English employed in different contexts of the world. In India, for example, words of Indian languages are commonly used in spoken and written English, and will not necessarily be seen as "foreign" words. Similarly, in a multilingual context such as Montréal, where French and English are both commonly spoken, French vocabulary woven into an English text may therefore not be interpreted as a "foreign" language in this context.

explain any "foreign" words that are included in the translation? Or should other methods be employed to convey their meaning? Such words are frequently qualified with a translation or a gloss within the translation itself. This is visible, for example, in *Firebird* (2023), Janani Kannan's English translation of a Tamil novel by Perumal Murugan. Frequently, this English translation is interspersed with Tamil vocabulary that has been transliterated into the Roman script, presented in italics; the Tamil vocabulary is at times immediately followed by an English translation in phrases such as: "He then […] rummaged under the middle bar of the cart for a packet containing *thiruneer*, holy ash" (Murugan, 2023, p. 2). In this instance, the composition of a multilingual translation generates a further process of translation, woven into the translation itself.

In the work *Pyre* (2022), Anirrudhan Vasudevan's English translation of another work by Murugan, Tamil vocabulary is also included at times, and is visible, for example, in the following passage:

> Saroja's collapse panicked Kumaresan, who had caught her in his arms to break her fall.
>
> "Amma, please bring some water!" he shouted.
>
> There was no response from the people outside. Everyone kept looking at his mother in silence (Murugan, 2022, p.14).

Here, however, the Tamil word "Amma" is not translated or explained immediately after its first appearance, but instead, its definition and translation, "mother", appears elsewhere in the text, providing a clue regarding the meaning of the word.

Another technique to convey the meaning of "foreign" words embedded in a translation is visible in Marilyn Booth's *Celestial Bodies* (Booth, 2019), the International Man Booker Prize-winning translation of an Arabic novel by Jokha Alharthi, in which the Arabic word "kummah" is explained through an exegetic translation approach. An additional sentence, which was not present in the source text, has been elegantly added to the translation after the Arabic word "kummah", to convey and explain the meaning and appearance of the Arabic term:

> And she did see him, at the time of the date harvest. He was leaning against a palm tree. In the heat, he had jerked his head forward to shake off his kummah, and now the delicately embroidered headgear sat at his feet (Alharthi, 2018, p.4).[4]

However, there is also the possibility of employing glossaries to explain the "foreign" words in the translation. This is a strategy that Ros Schwartz employs in her translation of Moroccan Francophone writer Tahar Ben Jelloun's novel entitled in English *About My Mother* (Jelloun, 2016), to explain Arabic words that are woven into the French text, and which are retained in the English translation. She highlights the advantages of glossaries as follows:

> The advantage of glossaries is that they are there at the end for readers who want to use them, but they don't interfere with the reading experience. […] You can either decide not to spoon-feed the reader and let them fend for themselves, or help expand their knowledge of the source language culture (Mahadevan, 2022a).

Another strategy employed by certain translators is the inclusion of endnotes to explain "foreign" words in a source text. This is a strategy employed by Canadian translator Judith Woodsworth in her translation of the Francophone novel *Le sourire de la petite juive* (2011) (The Smile of the Little Jewish Girl) by Abla Farhoud, entitled in its English translation *Hutchison Street* (2018). The novel is set in a famous street in Montreal named Hutchison Street, and each chapter is named after a resident on the street. One chapter, entitled Jean-Hugues Briançon, begins as follows, and the French text is ruptured by words of Québécois:

> Depuis son arrivée au Québec, les mots niaiser, maganer, achaler, astiner, enfarger, rapailler, garrocher, baveux, bleuet, bobette, brassière, gougoune, moumoune, guidoune, et tous les sacres typiquement québécois, donc religieux, les bancs de neige, la sloche, la glace noire, la poudrerie, et mille autres

[4] I am grateful to Marilyn Booth for this example and explanation provided during her keynote speech at a Translation Studies Day held at King's College London in 2023, and for her permission to include this example in this article.

> mots et expressions étaient venus enrichir son vocabulaire (Farhoud, 2011, p. 148).

In Woodsworth's English translation, the text appears as follows:

> Since coming to Quebec, his vocabulary had been enriched by countless Québécois expressions: words like *niaiser, maganer, achaler…gougoune, moumoune, guidoune,*[5] and the swearwords so typical of Quebec – all of them related to religion. And then there were the words specifically pertaining to winter, like *bancs de neige, sloche, glace noire* and *poudrerie*[6] (Farhoud, 2018, p. 175).[5]

Certain Québécois words, distinct from standard French spoken in France, are retained in the English translation and are foregrounded through the use of italics, perhaps to convey the sense that these words were once foreign to the character in question. The lexical fields and themes of these groups of words are conveyed in the translation, and translations of the individual Québécois words are provided in endnotes at the end of the book, such that they do not disrupt the fluency of the reading experience:

> [5] Fool around, mess up; bother; flip flops; wuss; hooker.
>
> [6] Snow banks; slush; black ice; blowing snow (Farhoud, 2018, p. 252).

There are translators, however, who avoid using glossaries and endnotes. Daisy Rockwell, for example, whose award-winning English translation entitled *Tomb of Sand* (Shree, 2018) of a Hindi novel by Geetanjali Shree, is very multilingual, opts not to employ a glossary, endnotes or footnotes in this work to explain Hindi vocabulary that is left untranslated in the translation. Rockwell justifies her strategy as follows in her Translator's Note:

> Readers who are not familiar with the South Asian linguistic landscape will find the text packed with words and phrases from Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, and Sanskrit. […] For those who feel overwhelmed by all the Hindi, you will find it's all there on

[5] I am grateful to Judith Woodsworth for discussing this aspect of her translation during an event on translating multilingualism held at Concordia University, Canada in 2022, and for her permission to include this example in this article.

> the internet, often with accompanying images and videos (Rockwell, 2021, p. 742).

It should be noted that a number of these decisions: the extent of multilingualism involved in a translation, and the use of italics and glossaries, are often made in conjunction with publishers and editors. Certain translators have faced obstacles when attempting to employ multilingual approaches. American translator of Hispanic and French literatures, Esther Allen, for example, notes that her composition of a multilingual translation, which combined Spanish with English, was once met with criticism (Allen, 2018, p.76). Nonetheless, many editors appear to be increasingly open to the inclusion of multiple languages, along with explicit and implicit forms of multilingualism in English translations. This is exemplified by the work of numerous translators who have recently creatively composed multilingual translations to capture certain aspects of multilingual source texts. Such translations complicate existing models of translation and offer fresh ways of theorising translation, as we shall now see.

Multilingual Translations and Their Theoretical Implications

One such translation is *A Long Way from Douala* (2021), originally written in French by Cameroonian Swiss Francophone writer Max Lob, and translated into English by Ros Schwartz. As Schwartz has highlighted in an interview, the source text itself is multilingual, containing a hybrid mode of language which may be described as "Camfranglais", a mix of French and English, and also words from local indigenous languages of Cameroon (Wyss, 2020). Schwartz adopts a creative strategy in her multilingual translation to echo the hybridity of the source text. On occasion, she adds vocabulary from a Cameroonian language into her English translation, as she has explained:

> I'd like to give an example of an instance when I translated something that was in French back into a Cameroonian language. In Max Lobe's *A Long Way from Douala,* there is a food called a bâton de manioc, which translates into English as a 'cassava stick.' However, while I was in Yaoundé, Cameroon

> giving a translation workshop, I had the opportunity to see and taste a bâton de manioc, which is not like a stick at all—it's more the oval shape of a piece of sweetcorn. I asked my students what this was called in the local language and they told me it was a bobolo, a gorgeously rounded word that I felt was more fitting than the misleading cassava stick. So I translated the French into a local Cameroonian language rather than into English (Mahadevan, 2022a).

Here, an alternative model of translation emerges: translation is not a direct transfer between the primary source language, French, and English, the primary target language, as one might expect, but instead is a transfer between French and an indigenous Cameroonian language (Mahadevan, 2025, p. 33); in this instance, translation involves the addition of a language to the target text which was not present in the corresponding source text extract.[6]

Another recent example of a creative approach to composing a multilingual translation, which also complicates existing models of translation, can be seen in Deepa Bhasthi's English translation of Banu Mushtaq's collection of Kannada short stories entitled *Heart Lamp* (Mushtaq, 2025), which was awarded the International Man Booker Prize in 2025. At times, the translation is explicitly multilingual, comprising the vocabulary of languages other than English which have been transliterated into the Roman script; the translation thus echoes the multiplicity of languages which shape the source text, including Kannada, Urdu and Arabic, as Bhasthi points out in her translator's note (2025, p. 212).

More implicit modes of multilingualism are also present in the work. At times, Bhasthi infuses the English text with the syntax of and expressions from the Kannada language, laying bare certain aspects of the primary source language. Bhasthi highlights this strategy in her translator's note:

> Kannada, like several other Indian languages, is a language filled with expressions, sayings and phrases that not only sound

[6] This approach inspired my own translation strategy in my translation of an Indian Francophone novel, and similar theoretical implications in the context of that translation are discussed in *Writing between Languages* (2025).

> poetic but also give a wonderful sense of theatre to everyday speech. […] For instance, hyperbole ("let him get married a thousand times") and repetitions of words ("shining-shining" or "dip-dipping") are common in everyday speech. I believe they add a delightful amount of drama to a conversation, and have chosen to retain such quirks in English too (Bhasthi, 2025, p. 214).

This strategy is visible in the translation of the short story entitled "Be a Woman Once, Oh Lord!" The repetition of adjectives for emphasis is common in Kannada and in other Indian languages, and this feature of the Kannada syntax is visible in the following expression from the Kannada source text: "Kappu kappu mōḍagaḷa" (black black clouds) (Musthak, 2025, p. 118). This expression could have been translated as "dark black clouds", but instead, the Kannada syntax and expression is translated literally by Bhasthi into English as "black-black clouds", visible in the following passage of the translation:

> The white cottony clouds, embroidered at their edges by flame-like rays of the setting sun, and, glimpsed through the branches of the lone curry leaf tree in the backyard, the view of roaring black-black clouds that looked like elephants in heat – these I saw from the window in the middle room of the house (Mushtaq, 2025, p. 201).

On this occasion, the act of translation generates a hybrid expression in the translation itself, that is at once comprehensible to English-speaking readers, but is also unfamiliar and foreign, for it is neither fully English nor fully Kannada; it lies at the intersection between these languages, in a space where these languages overlap.

The same short story, in its original form, contains a Kannada idiomatic expression which conveys the emotion of joy: "Om'melē nūrāru sūriya candraru avaḷa kaṇṇalli hoḷedavu" (Mushtak, 2025, p. 120). This literally translates as: "At once hundreds of suns and moons her eyes in were shining". This Kannada expression is translated into English in a relatively literal fashion in the following passage of Bhasthi's translation: "Hundreds of suns and moons shone in her eyes in an instant" (Mushtaq, 2025, p. 204). In this

instance, Kannada functions as a ghost language, haunting the English expression, such that it becomes implicitly multilingual. The expression thus lies in a liminal space suspended between English and Kannada. The borders of the English language are thus interrogated and extended, which resonates with a strategy which Bhasthi describes in an essay entitled "To Translate with an Accent", in which she writes: "I shall argue that we […] should, instead of trying to contort the source language to fit the English idiom, look for ways to stretch English so that it too can speak somewhat with the accent of the original language" (Bhasthi, 2023).

The chair of judges of the 2025 International Booker Prize, Max Porter, has described *Heart Lamp* as a "radical translation which ruffles language, to create new textures in a plurality of Englishes. It challenges and expands our understanding of translation" (The International Man Booker Prize, 2025). This point is worth examining in detail: how might this translation offer new ways of thinking about translation?

Heart Lamp opens up fresh models and concepts of translation and challenges the common assumption that translation involves a simple, direct transfer between source and target languages, but instead demonstrates how translation may involve the transfer of multiple source languages into multiple target languages, and may also involve the transfer of a source text into a space that lies at the juncture between source and target languages. Moreover, the primary source language itself, or at least aspects of it, is retained in the English translation, rather than becoming eclipsed and obliterated by the target language, as is commonly the case in the process of literary translation; this contradicts the idea or expectation that "la traduction constitue aussi très souvent un pur effacement de la langue d'origine" (translation also very often constitutes the full erasure of the source language) (Nepveu, 2025, p. 34). The translation, therefore, not only conveys the meaning of the source text, but it also illuminates, disseminates and preserves various features and aspects of the primary source language. Consequently, not only does Kannada language literature obtain another reader through the English translation, as one would expect, but also, as

Bhashti notes, "Kannada gains another reader" (2023). Literary translation, therefore, takes on an additional and new function in this case; it not only unlocks the source text for readers who cannot read Kannada, but it also exposes them to a new language in the process.

Furthermore, the common assumption that a translation should be fluent is challenged in Bhasthi's multilingual translation, since for some readers, the myriad of Indian expressions and vocabulary of Indian languages that are woven implicitly or explicitly into the translation may be seen to disrupt the fluency of the reading experience; such expressions invite the reader to slow down and appreciate the features and contours of the Kannada language, and other languages imbued in the English text. While this may seem problematic for some – one reviewer of this work, for example, suggests that Bhasthi's translation could be "tighter and cleaner" (Dhar, 2025), perhaps alluding to the multiplicity of languages which rupture the translation – the fact that the translation was lauded by the International Man Booker Prize committee precisely for its multilingual approach demonstrates that there is an increasing appreciation and appetite for hybrid, experimental and multilingual translations.

Finally, it is also commonly assumed that a translation should read like an original work. When asked what makes a good translation, Canadian translator and poet Émile Martel, for example, has suggested that "[t]he reader shouldn't be aware that a translation is a translation. It should read like an original book" (Mahadevan, 2022b). However, Bhasthi's multilingual strategy, which transports the Kannada language over to the English translation, does exactly the opposite, and foregrounds the fact that the work *is* a translation, an intention articulated by Bhasthi in an essay: "But what if we could find a way to retain a phrase here, a word there, to remind the reader that the text comes from another language […]?" (2023).

Conclusion

Literary multilingualism can manifest itself in a range of ways, and as this article demonstrates, numerous translators have approached such multilingual texts with creative and experimental multilingual responses, acting as multilingual writers themselves,

generating multilingual translations that are implicitly or explicitly multilingual, and which frequently involve further processes of translation that are woven within them. In turn, alternative and more complex models and concepts of translation emerge, which complicate the idea that translation involves a straightforward transfer between source and target languages, or the idea that "translation involves a substitution of one language for another" (Grutman, 2009, p.182). The translations by Schwartz and Bhasthi explored in this article demonstrate that translation involves not only the replacement of one language with another, but can also involve the preservation of a language, or languages, from the source text, or the addition of a language into the translation that may not be present in the corresponding extract of the source text. These languages may manifest themselves explicitly through the inclusion of their vocabulary in the translation, or implicitly, in the form of their expressions or syntax, which may subtly lurk behind the English language in the translation, generating a text that lies at the intersection between languages.

Moreover, Bhasthi's translation involves not merely a process of transformation, as is extensively acknowledged in existing scholarship on literary translation, but it also, to a degree, involves a process of stasis and a *lack* of change, owing to the recuperation and retrieval of elements of the original text and languages which are imbued in and remain within the translation. The translation not only transports the source text forward towards a new text, but in so doing, it also carries forth the primary source language at times. Consequently, the primary source language also becomes a target language, and the boundaries between source and target languages become blurred. This counters the notion that "[s]ource languages and texts and target languages and texts are kept separate, each in their own space" (Grutman, 2020, p. 596).

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