

(Review of:) Marianna Deganutti – Johanna Domokos –
Judit Mudriczki (eds.) 2023: *Code-Switching in Arts*

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When we talk about codes, our thoughts might first gravitate towards concepts from technology and data security such as encoding, decoding, and code breaking. But, Roman Jakobson's well-known model connects language and code, where a common code is essential for successful communication. Language is, however, way more complex than simply a collection of codes, even before one considers nonverbal acts, which can be variable, changeable, switchable.

In their book *Code-Switching in Arts*, the editors Marianna Deganutti, Judit Mudriczki and Johanna Domokos attempt to collect and analyze contemporary artistic reflections that can be read from the perspectives of multilinguality, translanguaging, border crossing, multimodality, and others. The 240 pages of the volume give voice to nearly twenty authors, who provide brief and concise papers. Following a general introduction by the editors of the volume, the book contains three sections, pertaining respectively to literary code-switching, code-switching in performative arts, and artistic reflections.

Literary Code-Switching

Helge Daniëls' paper, after a brief but exceedingly useful recap of the base novel, Isabella Hammand's *The Parisian or Al-Barisi*, provides a precise interpretation of code-switching. "Considering the novel through the lens of 'hybrid' literature" – this view prevails throughout the analysis of the multilingual and multicultural characters, places and conflicts of the novel. Daniëls' examination deals with the recipients' potential reaction to code-switching. The following text by Margarita Makarova is a comparatively terse study about interference in the poetic language of French contemporary writers of Russian origin. Malou Brouwer introduces a collection of poems by Naomi McIlwraith, who writes her poems in various languages such as Cree, Ojibwe, Scottish Gaelic, and English. This special book, *kiyâm*, is a multilingual artwork which can help the reader to get closer to the Cree language through paratextual materials such as a guide to pronunciation or readings by the author. While Brouwer focuses on poems which can be read as language lessons for the recipient, Levente Seláf, in the following contribution, is more concerned with the foreign language-learning process of *the author*, presenting the German-language poetry of the French poet Jacques Jouet published within the framework of *projet poétique planétaire*. Seláf introduces the collection of 160 poems as a possible documentation of the author's exploration of the German language.

Code- or language-changing happens not only by choice; there are also massive geopolitical effects which can cause undesired code-switching. With this in mind, Lisa Schantl's concluding treatise of this section focuses on English as a second language (ESL) and deals with intra-sentential code-switching in contemporary texts. The author uses the

classification of code-switching found in the introduction of the volume. In this classification, the first type of code-switching is the “sporadic use of foreign words”; Schantl argues that these words are usually connected to the personal, familiar and spiritual signifiers.

Code-Switching in Performative Arts

Leaving literature behind, the next section deals with performative arts, where code cannot be equated with language, as this would exclude what is communicated through body language, noise, music, facial gestures, etc. Codes in performative arts have always been mixed. After briefly introducing Robert Wilson and his work, Enikő Sepsi leads the reader through the director’s / choreographer’s / artist’s *Oedipus*, which is cardinally different from the original Sophocles drama: “The story is told by two messengers and organized like a movie shot: we get headlines, scenes, etudes, characters play and say the same thing several times”. As Sepsi highlights, Wilson’s direction plays with the connotative possibilities of different languages (French, Greek, English), and this multimodal, multidimensional theatrical experience leads to its uniqueness.

Moving further away from theater, Judit Mudriczki demonstrates a short “case study” on the dubbing of the Michael Hoffman film version of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Her text deviates slightly from the book’s overall structure: it is not segmented, and she understands code-switching more as a problem of translation and dubbing. The study illustrates difficulties of selecting sentences of a proper length in dubbing, and choices to be made between classical and contemporary Shakespeare translations and the authority of the script writer. The following contribution by László Cseresnyési also deals with a film adaptation: that of Haruki Murakami’s short story *Doraibu Mai Kā*. He compares the film version (Ryusuke Hamaguchi – *Drive My Car*) with Anton Chekhov’s *Uncle Vanya* and Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, and details the plot of Murakami’s work to find patterns of intertextuality and other relations between the mentioned works.

The need to speak an unknown language can be challenging, but it can also be seen as an artistic provocation. Attila Molnár’s paper on Sándor Vály’s musical performance *Die Toteninsel* shows an example of this, where speaking an unfamiliar language on stage can be more meaningful than using one’s mother tongue. Molnár guides us through the astonishing rehearsal process and the birth of a theatrical sign in his specific understanding. The following study by Mónika Dánél contains comparable research, though from a historically rooted perspective. Her study deals with Roland Vranik’s film *The Citizen* and reflects on similar problems visualized there, such as cultural differences, national cultural memory, and language barriers. An important focus of the study is accent: “In my view, the accent should be understood as an audible transnational medium of coexistence, an oral medium of the stratified social, cultural, personal, etc. coexisting differences and nuances”.

One exciting aspect of some papers in the book is that the art pieces they are about, such as books, films, or other artistic projects, are available online. This is especially relevant in respect to Judit Nagy’s research on two Korean-Canadian environmental artists. Nagy also operates on the editors’ classification of code-switching and chooses to apply multimodal (4th type) code-switching term to the two artists’ works. In the last text of the second section, Ádám Bethlenfalvy illustrates code-switching in process drama and “meaning-making”. He describes the process of understanding gibberish (or unknown for

the spectator) language on stage as a group of signes, which become motivated codes within the framework of the play. In his opinion, process drama can blur boundaries between students and the teacher, contributing to changing behavioral norms and codes.

Artistic Reflections

I must admit that I was confused by the name of the last section of the book. It is rather unusual in an academic volume that, after many texts labelled as scientific, there are reflections of artists, interviews, art pieces, pictures, and poems. I do not mean to deny the value of these pieces, but an academic volume like this does not immediately seem to be an appropriate home for them. However, one could also say that this unconventionality makes the matter more accessible to readers who can, thanks to them, build a stronger connection to code-switching through artistic reflections. Two poets, Cia Rinne and Tzveta Sofronieva, write about their inspirations, instinctive and uncontrollable multilingualism, and their process of making art. Irén Lovász, who is a cultural anthropologist and also a singer, speaks about her simultaneous role perception and linguistic code-switching at different stages during her artistic career.

Sabira Ståhlberg, “One of the most multilingual poets in the world” (in the words of Marianna Deganutti), contributes a collection titled *desert/ed trail*. These texts combine many languages and codes, occasionally using non-Latin writing systems; obviously, the form is not classical or conventional. The texts are interspersed with photos of landscapes which are signed or scribbled with letters or sentences. This “literary-scholarly journey in the Heart of Eurasia” is introduced by an interview with the author. Marianna Deganutti, the interviewer, asks her about the “hidden side of literary multilingualism”, and how she chooses the particular language for each poem. The interviewee speaks about her multilingualism, and how she became a “language nomad” while growing up in a multicultural context. Finally, Ferenc katáng Kovács interviews Johanna Domokos, who speaks about similar experiences in a Babelian world, but with a focus on research and curiosity pertaining to the origins of one specific language: Hungarian. The interviewer raises a significant question: “How can a reader be prepared for such a writing?” While Domokos speaks about her journey through languages, poetry, and life, she invites the reader to join her on the voyage of understanding multilingual literature.