

# Philology's Jargon: How Can We Write Post-Monolingually?

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*Es gibt eine Nachreife auch der festgelegten Worte.*

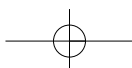
Walter Benjamin: "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers"<sup>1</sup>

*In Berufsgruppen, die, wie das so heißt, geistige Arbeit verrichten, zugleich aber unselbständig und abhängig sind oder wirtschaftlich schwach, ist der Jargon Berufskrankheit.*

Theodor W. Adorno: *Der Jargon der Eigentlichkeit*<sup>2</sup>

The monolingual paradigm—the idea that each individual ‘owns’ the one language in which he or she has been socialized, and that this language therefore offers the best possible opportunities for expression—is becoming increasingly fragile. Scholars have pointed out, and rightfully so, that this idea is a modern Western construction that is meant to produce cultural homogeneity in the service of ‘nation building,’ to create a uniform space of communication. For Germanophone areas, this linkage between language and nation is associated in particular with Jacob Grimm, who invoked this connection repeatedly and emphatically in his many writings. He writes in his *Über den Ursprung der Sprache* (*On the Origin of Language*): “the power of language forms nations and holds them together; without such a bond, they would scatter” (“die kraft der sprache bildet völker und hält sie zusammen, ohne ein solches band würden sie sich versprengen,” 30).<sup>3</sup> Yet, if the monolingual paradigm no longer applies, then what will take its place?

Critics of the monolingual paradigm seem to agree that it is not possible to simply return to some ‘primordial’ multilingual world. Yildiz has written about the “post-monolingual condition,” signalling uncertainty about what would and should take



the place of monolingualism. The sociolinguists Makoni and Pennycook argue that if multilingualism means to supplant the monolingual paradigm, then multilingualism cannot just be the simple pluralisation of monolingualisms.<sup>4</sup> Instead, we must begin “disinventing” linguistic homogeneity. Or, to use a category proposed by Stockhammer and others, one must destabilize the simple ‘linguism’ (“Sprachigkeit”) of linguistic elements and structures, meaning their assignability to *one* language (in the sense of *langue*; see Stockhammer et al.).

The following remarks are dedicated to assessing alternatives to the monolingual paradigm. We use an example that affects us philologists in the emphatic sense of the word: we focus on ‘our’ own language and inquire into the possibility of a post-monolingual *philological* writing. We begin our discussion by first dealing with the reasons for the efficacy of the monolingual paradigm, particularly in the sciences and in philology (section I). Second, we turn to evaluate the relationship of philology and foreign languages, a problem that is particularly well illustrated in the field of translation and the use of foreign words (section II). Third, we return to address our initial question, which explores the limits of and alternatives to the monolingual paradigm in the discipline of philology (section III).

#### **Scholarly Politics of Monolingualism**

Derrida’s famous sentence—“I only have one language; it is not mine” (*Monolinguisme* 1, “Je n’ai qu’une langue, ce n’est pas la mienne,” 13)—suggests that our very own idiolect still remains unavailable to every one of us. Everything that we say is (pre-)formed in its units and structure by other people, and this is not changed by the fact that we appropriate language for ourselves in a unique way and piece it together into ‘our’ language. The monolingual paradigm conceives of monolingualism as a phenomenon located beyond each individual speaker’s unique linguistic competence as well as the idioms of communication in which multiple idiolects enter into play with one another. It ignores how in these situations different linguistic standards grate on each other, and the narrowness of every isolated language, as well as the unambiguous linguism of the structures used, is potentially called into question. The monolingual paradigm would define language as a precisely delimited communal property, free of the effects of idiolects and everyday creolization.

Nevertheless, this line of argument can only scratch the surface of the monolingual paradigm’s social efficacy. This limitation is also due to the fact that this paradigm ‘only’ forms the ideological superstructure for politico-linguistic strategies that have changed the sociolinguistic setting tremendously. In the service of monolingualism, innumerable pedagogical and political institutions have worked, and continue to work, to invent linguistic standards and to sanction deviations. The enforcement of the monolingual paradigm has been and is accompanied by the establishment of linguistic borders and the removal of linguistic variance and transitional

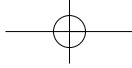
phenomena. A standard language is used in place of every singular language that the individual learns as his or her first language, which for example could also be a variant of a local dialect. This standard language is from then on used as the native language. In the context of the monolingual paradigm, a native language is constituted paradoxically by the suppression and overcoming of the language that an individual first spoke. Because the monolingual paradigm makes one believe that it is not the language of the family, but rather the standardized language of the school that is the native language, speakers of dialect are not the only speakers affected by the suppression or overcoming of the original language. In principle, all speakers are impacted. Yet the care taken by linguists to rescue ‘dying’ languages tends to impose the ‘actual’ native language on speakers who belong to ‘ethnic’ language communities. The language situation in Luxembourg is a recent example of a situation where the status of ‘native linguism’ is anything but clear, yet Luxembourg’s position as an intermediating space of contact between ‘Germania’ and ‘Romania’ reflects “a situation that is shaped by the coexistence of German and its regional varieties, alongside the French language” (“die von einem Nebeneinander des Deutschen, bzw. regionaler Varietäten des Deutschen und des Französischen, geprägt ist,” Gilles et al. 63). The country’s current triglossic situation, meaning the coexistence of Luxembourgish, German and French, raises the question of who can and should speak Luxembourgish—which was elevated to the level of a national language in 1984—as a native language, and which role both other languages assume in this context. Makoni and Pennycook are right to point out that in such situations “rights are attached to languages rather than to their speakers” (149).<sup>5</sup> This mechanism has created and continues to create linguistic realities whose artificial constitution does neither mitigate their tenacity, nor their functionality. It is obvious that there *must* always be tendencies towards the standardisation of linguistic norms if we intend at all to receive answers to spoken statements.<sup>6</sup> If we wanted to take this a bit further, we could on the one hand say that the assumptions behind the monolingual paradigm are simply wrong—there are neither fixed linguistic boundaries and strictly distinct linguism,<sup>7</sup> nor do speakers have access to a native language. On the other hand, unitary languages are something that we have to deal with in a very real sense.

This finding can be explained to some degree by differences of scope: monolingualism is real to the extent that modern so-called national languages represent effectively standardized consolidations of possibilities for verbal expression. These standardisations are successful because they—in reliance on the media available in respective areas—guarantee that language can be used regardless of the situation.<sup>8</sup> Even if these languages begin to fray at the edges or if they host a variety of linguistically ‘alien’ structures, words, sentences and texts can still be regularly classified with a high degree of reliability as part of individual languages, and ‘errors’ made by different speakers can be confirmed unanimously. Whether we see ‘major’ language

units in the sense of the monolingual paradigm, or a colourful chaos of unique idiolects, seems to be a question of how closely we choose to assess language.

It seems, however, that at least 'scientific' approaches to language cannot be content with the fuzziness of such a gradual differentiation: If capturing language unity depends on a perspective that overlooks 'small' differences, how can language itself guarantee precision? The monolingual paradigm's insistence on more clarity vis-à-vis an imprecise description of linguistic standards, can therefore not only be traced back to projects of 'nation building,' but also to the prevalence of 'rationalist' theories of scientific language use—which, at least partly, are also relevant to philological research. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century rationalist models of thought sought to posit the idea that languages can be consolidated as autonomous systems of expression, closed against outside interference, thereby affirming language's ability to articulate truths. In its manifold forms, rationalism assumes among other things that language and thought are equivalent to one another and are fundamentally able to comprehend the world clearly and consistently.<sup>9</sup> Rationalism therefore relies on modes of communication that call for clear descriptions (clarity and specificity) and internal consistency. Against this background, every whiff of idiolect or creolization must be considered a disruption, anomaly or noise because it calls into question the singularity of descriptions.<sup>10</sup> The attempt to monitor language in such a way that it provides precisely one system of expressive options is a correlate of basic rationalist principles—and these fundamental principles are used at least part of the time for scholarly arguments that properly call into question the ability to delimit language features and the other basic principles of the monolingual paradigm. Viewed from this vantage point, the idea of monolingualism seems to serve a regulative role (in Kant's sense) for all communication forms that share basic rationalistic assumptions, especially those of many sciences (Sakai 73–74). We assume that it is possible to isolate unitary languages, even if only the language of mathematics can currently claim that it actually fulfils the requirements posed by a rationalist ideal of communication.

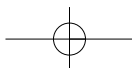
What does this mean for those scholarly disciplines whose inheritance we confront in this volume: the national philologies? We can hold on to two fixed points: first, subjects such as Germanic studies developed in the context of nineteenth-century nationalism. Fohrmann's *Das Projekt der deutschen Literaturgeschichte* (*The Project of German Literary History*) lucidly traces the constitutive efforts of German national philology from the late eighteenth to the nineteenth century, to describe the history of German literature as the entelechy of a national character. The cultivation of a German scientific language was of course one of their central objectives. Jacob Grimm's work on the history of the Germanic languages, among them the previously mentioned *Über den Ursprung der Sprache*, as well as the dictionary project he started in cooperation with his brother Wilhelm, are prime examples of the cultural politics underlying the discipline of *Germanistik* in the 19th century. Second, however,

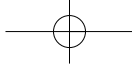


there was a transition ‘from a scholarly community to a disciplinary one,’ as the eponymous title *Von der gelehrten zur disziplinären Gemeinschaft* of an anthology dedicated to the history of German literary studies suggests. This implied a shift towards terminological and methodological standardisation that was meant to guarantee the general accessibility of results. This shift led to a compulsion to cultivate clarity in the sense of a rationalist ideal of communication. Philology increasingly included the production of standardized editions and firmly established traditional contexts, as well as the development of terminologies unique to their specific field of scholarly inquiry. We may still be moving within this context today, at least partially, if we attempt to describe the problem of monolingualism. Our discipline derives at least some of its existential justification from the fact that it lays claim to precise languages of description that are ostensibly better suited to our purposes than other languages—be it analytical sets of text description as provided by rhetorics, metrics, or narratology, or the ‘critical’ concepts of cultural studies.

Two examples can demonstrate how effective the aim of establishing linguistic unity as an epistemological means has been in the recent past of the humanities. Philosophical hermeneutics as developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Wahrheit und Methode (Truth and Method)*, envisions the overcoming of linguistic difference in the process of interpretation. Understanding, he writes, “is not an act of subjectivity, but proceeds from the commonality that binds us to the tradition” (293, “selber nicht so sehr als eine Handlung der Subjektivität zu denken, sondern als Einrücken in ein Überlieferungsgeschehen,” 295, emphasis in the original). By definition, however, the stranger and therefore the foreign language do not participate in such a tradition. Transmission consists here in nothing other than the probative reproduction of limits to understanding—even if these limits are meant to be pushed in the process. Although, as Gadamer emphasizes with a view to the prejudicial structure of understanding, “what leads to understanding [. . .] must be something that has already asserted itself in its own separate validity” (298, “was zum Verstehen verlockt, [. . .] sich selber schon zuvor in seinem Anderssein zur Geltung gebracht haben,” 304), otherness is always only the starting point for a transfer from the foreign to the self. Understanding always remains the notorious process of fusion of “horizons supposedly existing by themselves” (305, “vermeintlich für sich seiender Horizonte,” 311, emphasis in the original). Although the hermeneutic approach’s claim to universality is derived from the constant irritation of the ‘other,’ the other’s status is immediately levelled in the stroke of comprehension. It can be levelled, because the alien must inscribe itself in linguistic—and to Gadamer, this means: *shared*—contexts: “being that can be understood is language” (xxxi, “Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache,” 478, emphasis in the original). Gadamer understands language as such to have no insuperable interior boundaries:

Die Unverständlichkeit oder Mißverständlichkeit überlieferter Texte, die sie [die Hermeneutik] ursprünglich auf den Plan gerufen hat, ist nur ein Sonderfall



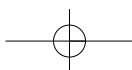


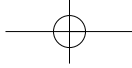
dessen, was in aller menschlichen Weltorientierung als das *atopon*, das Seltsame begegnet, das sich in den gewohnten Erwartungsordnungen der Erfahrung nirgends unterbringen läßt. Und wie im Fortschritt der Erkenntnis die *mirabilia* ihre Befremdlichkeit verlieren, sowie sie verstanden worden sind, so löst sich auch jede gelingende Aneignung von Überlieferung in eine neue, eigene Vertraulichkeit auf [. . .]. Beides fließt zusammen in die eine, Geschichte und Gegenwart umspannende, eigene und miteigene Welt, die im Reden der Menschen miteinander ihre sprachliche Artikulation empfängt. (Gadamer, "Rhetorik" 237)

No less universal is the function of hermeneutics. The lack of immediate understandability of texts handed down to us historically or their proneness to be misunderstood is really only a special case of what is to be met in all human orientation to the world as the *atopon* (the strange), that which does not "fit" into the customary order of our expectation based on experience. Hermeneutics has only called our attention to this phenomenon. Just as when we progress in understanding the *mirabilia* lose their strangeness, so every successful appropriation of tradition is dissolved into a new and distinct familiarity in which it belongs to us and we to it. They both flow together into one owned and shared world, which encompasses past and present and which receives its linguistic articulation in the speaking of man with man. (Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* 24–25)

Certainly, Gadamer does not claim that an appropriation of *all* language differences, and thus the establishment of one universal descriptive language for the humanities could ever be accomplished. However, it is language unity, not language difference that guarantees understanding.

Contrary to this, if only at first sight, our second example celebrates language difference. In the context of the continuing debates about German as a language of scholarship, Ehlich has defended multilingual scholarly discourse against the supremacy of English in several talks and papers since the mid-1990s (see "Deutsch als Medium," "Mehrsprachigkeit," "Deutsch als Wissenschaftssprache"). Ehlich argues against the view that a single language is beneficial to scholarship and that it would be reasonable to agree upon a *lingua franca* to facilitate scholarly progress. Despite first appearance, however, Ehlich's own arguments are shaped through and through by the monolingual—and partly the rationalist—paradigm. Ehlich—relying on a body of thought derived from Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt that typically runs through language debates in a trivialized form—begins with the idea that language not only determines the cultural identity of its speakers, but that language also represents an epistemological framework of conditions. Accordingly, every insight depends on the possibilities inherent in the language in which these insights are rendered. This means in turn that knowledge is always fundamentally shaped by the language in





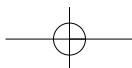
which it is developed—which explains for Ehlich the phenomenon of national cultures of scholarship. Ehlich argues that the attack on these cultures of scholarship is therefore equal to an attack on the diversity of sources for scientific knowledge. This especially holds in the humanities, in which according to Ehlich the central performance of cognition is inherent to the search for proper linguistic expression. In contrast, the disciplines based on mathematics enjoy the option of using techniques of cognitive expression that do not depend on culture or language. If we were to give up the diversity of national scholarly languages, this could lead to the impoverishment of cognitive potential in the humanities. It would even cause an impoverishment of the national languages whose expressive diversity depends upon the preservation and cultivation of a scholarly language. Ehlich shows that scholarship's enforcement of different national standardized languages was a decisive and crucial contribution to the modern age. But ultimately, his promotion of scholarly multilingualism merely duplicates rationalist striving for clear linguistic uniformity. According to Ehlich, every individual language develops its own unique perspective on the world, yet these languages always remain translatable into each other, thanks to their collective orientation towards the truth. It is no coincidence that Ehlich calls for more intense scholarly translation activity.<sup>11</sup>

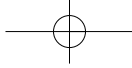
#### **A Postmonolingual Ethics of Translation?**

As far as concepts such as Gadamer's and Ehlich's are still valid, the humanities, and the national philologies in particular, are still indebted both to 'national' language unity and to the postulation of a universal, culturally independent descriptive language, as originating from the rationalist tradition. Nevertheless: the classification of philology among those sciences that harbour the ideal of one unitary descriptive language (or: languages) comes with reservations. In its origins, long before the enforcement of the monolingual paradigm, philology arose in the confrontation with the alien and difficult to understand. Indeed, a philological text, in its original sense, wins its (precarious) unity from the interaction between multiple languages and the crossing of linguistic boundaries that takes place within philology itself. Therefore we must inquire into the degree to which philology can be obligated to a rationalist standard at all, as well as examine what alternatives there are for the establishment of scholarly linguistic standards.

In order to find these alternatives, it is helpful to consider the relation between 'philology,' translation, and the use of 'foreign' words. Friedrich Nietzsche once described philology as

jene ehrwürdige Kunst, welche von ihrem Verehrer vor Allem Eins heischt, bei Seite gehn, sich Zeit lassen, still werden, langsam werden –, als eine Goldschmiedekunst



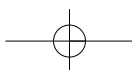


und kennerschaft des *Wortes*, die lauter feine vorsichtige Arbeit abzuthun hat und Nichts erreicht, wenn sie es nicht in *lento* erreicht. [. . .] sie lehrt *gut* lesen, das heisst langsam, tief, rück- und vorsichtig, mit Hintergedanken, die offen gelassenen Thüren, mit zarten Fingern und Augen lesen. (17)

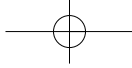
that venerable art which demands of its votaries one thing above all: to go aside, to become still, to become slow – it is a goldsmith's art and connoisseurship of the word which has nothing but delicate, cautious work to do and achieves nothing if it does not achieve it *lento*. [. . .] it teaches how to read *well*, that is to say, to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers. (5)

We are rather certain today that Nietzsche's understanding of philology adheres to neither the national-philological style of the nineteenth century, nor the rationalist tradition. For Nietzsche, who was educated as a philologist, the problematic area of translation was within his professional territory. We should therefore understand Nietzsche's description of philology as a description of the central concern of classical philology. It is not necessarily surprising that questions regarding translation threw a new light on the understanding of philology's proper area of inquiry and of philology as a discipline. The encounter with the strange, the unusual, the new, and thus dealing with linguistic and cognitive boundaries, is precisely what motivates the activity of interpretation in all of its facets, and Nietzsche certainly was willing to have his own writing affected by linguistic estrangement. This he has in common with Jacques Derrida who, in the face of Gadamer's emphasis on linguistic unity, asked whether we really should demand from the stranger, "before and so that we can accept him among us," that he understand us, that he speak our language, in all of the meanings contained in this expression (21, translated from German translation). It is obvious, however, that a person with whom we already share all of that which is part of a language can no longer be properly described as a stranger. He would already be familiar, indigenous, native and *readable* in a specific way. His texture would be clear, his code decrypted and his meaning exhausted. He would cease to irritate us in our 'linguism.' Therefore, Derrida's outlines a form of 'hospitality' which avoids any kind of 'appropriation' of the stranger and of strangeness, and recognizes their irreducible withdrawal from 'our' understanding. This notion of 'hospitality' is certainly also applicable to 'foreign' text if it is object to translation or other philological care.

At first sight, the gesture of translation tends to level linguistic irritations. The intention of a translation is to achieve clarity, the transcription of what is said and what is meant, to the exceedance and overcoming of linguistic boundaries. However, this promise of clarity is deceptive. In fact, a translation that seeks to fulfil this promise has a structurally ingrained problem and is missing an intrinsic dimension of







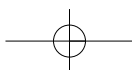
language. Something else must be brought to bear in the act of translation, and we want to illustrate this with perhaps the most canonical work of German literature: Goethe's *Faust I*. At the beginning, in the *Study* scene, the devil—in the form of a poodle—is already on the scene. Faust, still completely immersed in the celebratory mood of Easter, wants to dedicate himself to the challenges of translation: perhaps not the worst moment to take on this challenge.

Wir sehnen uns nach Offenbarung,  
Die nirgends würd'ger und schöner brennt  
Als in dem Neuen Testament.  
Mich drängt's, den Grundtext aufzuschlagen,  
Mit redlichem Gefühl einmal  
Das heilige Original  
In mein geliebtes Deutsch zu übertragen.

Geschrieben steht: 'Im Anfang war das Wort!'  
Hier stock' ich schon! Wer hilft mir weiter fort?  
Ich kann das Wort so hoch unmöglich schätzen,  
Ich muß es anders übersetzen,  
Wenn ich vom Geiste recht erleuchtet bin.  
Geschrieben steht: Im Anfang war der Sinn.  
Bedenke wohl die erste Zeile,  
Daß deine Feder sich nicht übereile!  
Ist es der Sinn, der alles wirkt und schafft?  
Es sollte stehn: Im Anfang war die Kraft!  
Doch, auch indem ich dieses niederschreibe,  
Schon warnt mich was, daß ich dabei nicht bleibe.  
Mir hilft der Geist! Auf einmal seh' ich Rat  
Und schreibe getrost: Im Anfang war die Tat! (43–44)

We pine and thirst for Revelation,  
Which nowhere worthier is, more nobly sent,  
Than here, in our New Testament.  
I feel impelled, its meaning to determine, –  
With honest purpose, once and for all,  
The hallowed Original  
To change to my beloved German.

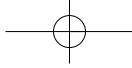
'Tis written: 'In the beginning was the *Word!*'  
Here I am balked; who, now can help afford?  
The *Word?* – impossible so high to rate it;



And otherwise must I translate it  
 If by the Spirit I am truly taught.  
 Then thus: "In the Beginning was the *Thought*."  
 This first line let me weigh completely,  
 Lest my impatient pen proceed too fleetly!  
 Is it the *Thought* which works, creates, indeed?  
 "In the Beginning was the *Power*," I read.  
 Yet, as I write, a warning is suggested,  
 That I the sense may not have fairly tested.  
 The Spirit aids me now: now I see the light!  
 "In the Beginning was the *Act*," I write. (44)

The poodle's cries of lamentation during the course of these reflections show that Faust is certainly heading down the right path. And in fact, this short scene makes it quite clear why the question of translation and its relationship to the original attracts such major interest. Translation aims, in Faust's words, at a (philological) revelation that is not yet visible in the original—and which, in the end, is obtained by departing from it.

More general speaking, every translation, because it broaches the issue of questioning the original, at least implicitly, also addresses the difference between the original and the translation. According to Benjamin, it is precisely in this difference to the original that the constitutive moment of translation emerges. Because "fidelity in the translation of individual words" can almost never fully replicate the meaning of the original, the task of the translator is to change the original (21, "Treue in der Übersetzung des einzelnen Wortes," 17). "A real translation," according to Benjamin, "is transparent; it does not cover the original [. . .], but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium to shine upon the original all the more fully" (21, "Die wahre Übersetzung ist durchscheinend, sie verdeckt nicht das Original [. . .], sondern läßt die reine Sprache, wie verstärkt durch ihr eigenes Medium, nur um so voller aufs Original fallen," 18). Translation is therefore not about the rehabilitation of a meaning established by the original unity of the original, it is about "the liberation of the language imprisoned in a work" (22, "die im Werk gefangene [Sprache] in der Umdichtung zu befreien," 19). This suggests that translation is not just shaped by the aporia between freedom and fidelity to the text; instead, because the translation touches upon the original only in an infinitely small point of meaning, the translation can liberate language as *language motion* in an almost deconstructive gesture. In this way, translation can unmask the original's ostensibly inherent unity of meaning as a mere surface appearance. The original itself seems as though it is shot through with internal linguistic boundaries and is deeply ambiguous in its linguism. It is therefore only logical, as the famous translation scene from Goethe's *Faust* shows, that an adequate



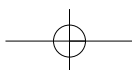
translation of the Latin or Greek text of the Bible cannot be done with fidelity to the word; instead, it has the character of a rewriting, an (alienating) reinstantiation. It is true to the original in that it liberates its own language as well as the language of the original from its inherent limitations, thereby subverting the lingualism of both. It is certainly not by coincidence that the aporetic requirement that a translation must simultaneously ‘domesticate’ the original and ‘alienate’ the target language occupies the centre of recent ethics of translation as formulated, for example, by Lawrence Venuti.

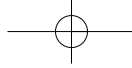
In his essay “Wörter aus der Fremde” (“Words from Abroad”), published in 1959, Theodor W. Adorno argued in a very similar vein when he attributed foreign words with the potential to form “little cells of resistance against nationalism” (186, “[w]inzige Zellen des Widerstands gegen den Nationalismus,” 218, cf. Yildiz 67–108). What is so fascinating about foreign words, according to Adorno, is a certain “exogamy of language” that points beyond the “sphere of what is always the same” (187, “Exogamie der Sprache, die aus dem Umkreis des Immergleichen [. . .] heraus möchte,” 218). The German language assumes a special position, vis-à-vis French, for example, because in Germanophone Europe the “Latinized civilizatory components did not fuse with the older popular language but instead were set off from it through the formation of educated elites and by courtly custom” (187, “die lateinisch-zivilisatorischen Bestandteile nicht mit der älteren Volkssprache verschmolzen, sondern durch Gelehrtenbildung und höfische Sitte eher von jener abgegrenzt wurden,” 219). Because a pax romana was never concluded, the German language is more and less at the same time, as Adorno emphasizes:

weniger durch jenes Brüchige, Ungehobelte und darum dem einzelnen Schriftsteller so wenig Sicheres Vorgebende, wie es in älteren neuhochdeutschen Texten so kraß hervortritt und heute noch im Verhältnis der Fremdwörter zu ihrer Umgebung; mehr, weil die Sprache nicht gänzlich vom Netz der Vergesellschaftung und Kommunikation eingefangen ist. Sie taugt darum zum Ausdruck, weil sie ihn nicht vorweg garantiert. (“Wörter” 220)

less by virtue of the brittle and unfinished quality that provides the individual writer with so little that is firm, a quality that stands out crassly in the older New High German texts and is still evident in the relationship of foreign words to their context; and it is more because the language is not completely trapped within the net of socialization and communication. It can be used for expression because it does not guarantee expression in advance. (188)

Foreign words “stick out unassimilated” in the German language, which is why a carefully chosen foreign word can be inserted like a silver rib into the body of language (187, “unassimiliert heraus,” “Wörter,” 219). In this way, foreign words contribute to overturning the restorative conviction that language is an organic entity or



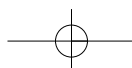


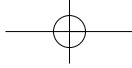
something natural. The latent tension between a foreign word and ‘normal language’ (and how would this be defined?) interrupts the conformist moment and the accompanying reassurance that ascriptions of sense and meaning are to be viewed as safe, stable and uniform. In other words, the discrepancy between foreign word and language steps into the service of an anti-rationalistic Enlightenment. This difference becomes an agent of those truths that appear whenever something we have always known is unmasked as an illusion or ideology. Yet Adorno goes one step further by referring the potential of a foreign word to the promise of language itself. To be more precise, the foreign language exposes how things actually go with all words: “that language imprisons those who speak it, that as a medium of their own it has essentially failed” (189, “daß die Sprache die Sprechenden nochmals einsperrt; daß sie als deren eigenes Medium eigentlich mißlang,” “Wörter” 221). This applies both for every language-related ontological promise of salvation and for the idea that language, as a universal component of a communicative community, is equally obligated eo ipso to the truth.

Das universale System der Kommunikation, das scheinbar die Menschen miteinander verbindet und von dem behauptet wird, es sei um ihretwillen da, wird ihnen aufgezwungen. Nur das Wort, das, ohne auf seine Wirkung zu schielen, sich anstrengt, seine Sache genau zu nennen, hat die Chance, eben dadurch die Sache der Menschen zu vertreten, um die sie betrogen werden, solange jede Sache ihnen vorgespiegelt wird, als wäre es jetzt, hier die ihre. (“Wörter” 223–24)

The universal system of communication, which on the face of it brings human beings together and which allegedly exists for their sake, is forced upon them. Only the word that takes pains to name its object precisely, without having an eye to its effect, has an opportunity to champion the cause of human beings by doing so, something they are cheated of as long as every cause is presented as being theirs here and now. (192)

Adorno’s plea for foreign words is, in the final analysis, a plea for some shocking, inherently suspenseful moment of resistance within language itself that cannot be redeemed by any translation. Instead, such moments must appear in the translation as alien, as the unuttered and unspoken of language. Benjamin writes in “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers” of a “pure language” (“reine Sprache”) that a good translation uses to liberate the original, a process through which the actual essence of the language—one might add: its differential quality *beyond* its seemingly clear linguism—surfaces. According to Benjamin, the task of the translator is therefore “to release [better: redeem] in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another” (22, “[j]ene reine Sprache, die in fremde gebannt ist, in der eigenen zu erlösen,” 19).





Surprisingly, Adorno also arrives at a conclusion very close to this idea—a concept which for Benjamin connotes messianic thought—when he stresses:

Damit können die Fremdwörter etwas von jener Utopie der Sprache, einer Sprache ohne Erde, ohne Gebundenheit an den Bann des geschichtlich Daseienden bewahren, die bewußtlos in ihrem kindlichen Gebrauch lebt. Hoffnungslos wie Totenköpfe warten die Fremdwörter darauf, in einer besseren Ordnung erweckt zu werden. (“Wörter” 225)

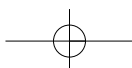
In this way foreign languages could preserve something of the utopia of language, a language without earth, without subjection to the spell of historical existence, a utopia that lives on unawares in the childlike use of language. Hopelessly, like death’s-heads, foreign words await their resurrection in a better order of things. (192)

### Overcoming Jargon?

The use of words like ‘revelation,’ ‘redemption,’ ‘resurrection’—even though the latter term is a not so accurate translation of the German “erwecken”—clearly signals that Faust, Benjamin, and Adorno consider the absolute suspension of linguism to be beyond the limitations of human speech. The juxtaposition of Gadamer’s fantasy of linguistic fusion and Derrida’s objection in the name of hospitality, exactly like Benjamin and Adorno’s ethics of dealing with foreign languages and linguistic boundaries, provide hints to the obstacle that lies in the path of overcoming the monolingual paradigm—also within philology.

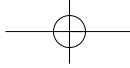
Derrida’s reference to the necessity of recognising the alien as inappropriate, and Adorno’s metaphor of foreign words as ‘hopeless death’s-heads,’ both demonstrate that monolingualism and the variety of monolingual environments cannot be avoided by relativising the basic otherness of other languages. Even if we deconstruct the concept of linguistic borders and of the clear linguism of linguistic structures, this does not mean that all languages actually ‘fuse’ with one another into a new whole. Rather, the idea that foreign languages retain their non-assimilable strangeness must remain intact.

On the one hand, a philological, post-monolingual mode of writing would therefore have to leave behind, in an unmistakable way, the rationalist regulative of a uniform language of description, an idea that, at least to some degree, remains foreign to philology. There are at least two options that are unproblematic in terms of their practical applicability. First, a practice of citation that focuses on reproducing the original language version and considers the problems of each translation cited. Second, an open interaction with ‘foreign language’ terms in the sense of Adorno and Benjamin. Both procedures should not, however, be some simple incorporation or appropriation that impugns the strangeness of the ‘alien’ material—integration must remain ‘hopeless’ in this sense. One could, however, go one step further and pick up on Adorno’s

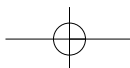
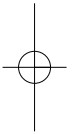
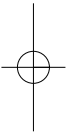


remarks in *Der Jargon der Eigentlichkeit* (*The Jargon of Authenticity*), which although they refer to a very specific historical situation remain quite open to generalisation (see especially 10–11, 14, 51). Adorno points out that jargon is defined as the prevalence of a specific number of individual words that suggest a deeper meaning without truly being integrated into the respective context of speech or without even having to be incorporated into this context due to their seemingly apparent meaning. This description refers not only to one of the risks of using foreign words. It also hints at the fact that significance is not something that results seamlessly from the clarity of the words used, but something that must be constituted anew upon every formulation. Ehlich's observation in the field of cultural studies that the act of formulation already contains the actual act of cognition can be reframed for a multilinguistic philology: if the belief in the unambiguous reliability of words is only jargon, then the philological formulation must always demonstrate its openness to the possibility that the seemingly clear linguism of words that are used shall be called into question. In her analysis of texts by Tawada, Özdamar and Zaimoglu—and she might have added Benjamin here –, Yildiz attempts to do precisely this by introducing at least three strategies for post-monolingual *literary* writing, and these strategies may be of interest for philological writing as well. For all three authors, writing in a post-monolingual manner means making the compactness of *one* language fragile from within, especially in the confrontation with other languages. The intrinsic poly-lingual character of this language thereby becomes visible, an excess that flows beyond the ostensibly strict boundaries of the language without denying its 'alien' characteristics. One might very well imagine that practices like this could also take place in philological texts—even if philologists still resist the idea that many texts by Tawada can already be called prototypes not only of post-monolingual literature, but also philology—see, for example, her reading of Celan.

But still, we feel compelled to ask ourselves what effect such methods may have on philology—and to what extent the utopia articulated by Benjamin and Adorno is compatible with philology's self-imposed disciplinary constraints. An adequate definition of philology, meaning a definition that would take into account the considerations raised by Benjamin and Adorno, would have to view philology as an instance that does not simply describe the relationship of several languages within each individual language and with all other languages—philology would have to *be* these relationships. In that case, philology would be nothing other than—and here we quote Werner Hamacher—"the continued extension of elements of linguistic existence" ("die fortgesetzte Extension der Elemente sprachlicher Existenz," 2). This understanding of philology, which without a doubt fulfils the requirements of post-monolingual processes of composition and comprehension, raises a few systematic difficulties. A conception of philology that understands the discipline as the manifestation of the release of language from language (Hamacher 49) would become art,



an aesthetic gesture without a methodological core. Is this acceptable to philology as a discipline? Is philology able to cope with higher doses of scholars such as Derrida—who certainly qualifies as one of the most important philologists of the twentieth century, yet whose writing style demolished a great many of the discipline's conventions—or would philology begin to lose its contours? Is the inheritance of the rationalist tradition perhaps necessary after all, if philology wants to exist as a science, as a *discipline*, or even as *science*? There does not seem to be an immediate answer to this question. We will have to try it out.



## Notes

1. "Even words with fixed meaning can undergo a process of maturation." Walter Benjamin: *The Task of the Translator*.
2. "In professional groups which, as they say, carry on intellectual work, but which are at the same time employed, dependent or economically weak, the jargon is a professional illness." Theodor W. Adorno: *The Jargon of Authenticity*.
3. If not otherwise indicated, all translations of quotes by Lee Holt.
4. Makoni and Pennycook argue that "there are strong arguments for mother tongue education, for an understanding of multilingualism as the global norm, for understanding the prevalence of code-switching in bi- and multilingual communities, and for the importance of language rights to provide a moral and legal framework for language policies. Our position, however, is that although such arguments may be preferable to blinkered views that take monolingualism as the norm, they nevertheless remain caught within the same paradigm. [. . .] [M]ultilingualism therefore simply becomes a pluralization of monolingualism" (147).
5. For a criticism of 'eco-linguistics,' see Pennycook.
6. Another distinction must be made here. In historical terms, this could be described in a much more nuanced and detailed manner, because of course there are effective cultural policies that enforce linguistic standards and have existed for a long time—for example, for the purpose of preserving 'sacred' languages. What is remarkable about the modern idea of monolingualism is the prevalence of the notion that standard languages are also *embodied* in their native speakers. For more on this topic, especially on Herder's concept of the native language, see Martyn, *Literatur als Zweitsprache*.
7. On the impossibility of counting languages (and for an early deconstruction of the concept of 'native language'), see Thümmel. From the perspective of translation theory, see Sakai. On the problem of delimiting languages by means of correctness, or more precisely, on the fundamental indistinguishability of errors and (rhetorical) figures, see David Martyn, "'."
8. Giesecke analyses the correlation of different language standards to respective leading media technologies, focusing on the development of German-language prose after the establishment of printing (280–334).
9. On the 'axioms' of rationalism, see Bunia, 13–19.
10. It would be worthwhile to take a closer look at the legacy of rationalist thinking in contemporary analytical philosophy in the context of questions regarding monolingualism. Since the appearance of Russell's *Principia mathematica* (1910–13), philosophers have focused their efforts on reducing their arguments to uniform, formal linguistic structures. According to Schnädelbach, the transition to a post-analytic phase in Davidson leads to a "new monism in linguistic dealings with the world" ("ein neuer Monismus des sprachlichen Umgangs mit der Welt," 39).
11. With Pennycook, one could state more precisely that Ehlich conceived of multilingualism as heteroglossia, meaning the diversity of options to express one and the same thing. Gramling points out that the modern (rationalist) concept of monolingualism is directly associated with the idea that statements can be transposed seamlessly into other languages.



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