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INTRODUCTION TO ISSUE 5:1

In the past year, CMS issued calls for dialogue around two topics: The End(s) of Competence and The Critical Translation of Disciplines. We started with the intention of publishing two special volumes, one devoted to each, but as we began to work with potential authors and to come to know their work, the thematic calls began to converge and it became clear that both questions of translation and linguistic competence are often left out of the frame in critical discussions of transdisciplinary work. Disciplinarily, the contributions in this issue emerge from the theoretical and practical arenas of cultural translation and transcultural psychiatry, dialectology and variationist sociolinguistics, communicative language teaching, multilingual literary studies and comparative literature, German and Austrian studies, philosophy of law and ethics, creative arts, English as a Foreign Language, linguistic anthropology, philosophy of multilingualism, Slavic studies, and language policy. Among the research languages animating these contributions are German (in various dialects), French, Italian, Palestinian Arabic, Hebrew, Ukrainian, Surzhyk, Russian, Finnish, Norwegian, and Middle English. One of the resounding questions that spans across this rich array of perspectives is whether competence is indeed an appropriate key critical concept or desirable quality for scholars living and working under the “new world orders” of globalization, neoliberalism and in contexts of vernacular flexibility or precariousness, pressure and pain.

As Barbara Schmenk intricately demonstrates in this issue—in an essay on the history of the “communicative competence” concept that reads, at times, like a gripping detective novel—the concept of competence did not arise in a disciplinary or social vacuum. With an almost forensic attentiveness, Schmenk traces back “communicative competence” to a series of early

moments in the work of Dell Hymes and Jürgen Habermas, both of whom had read one another's work. Both of them disagreed profoundly, though implicitly, with the premises the other held about communication and the normative ideal speech situation upon which it is presumed to be based. In this way, Schmenk's essay, while focused topically on the history of the competence concept (and on the history of its dehistoricization), is also deeply committed to the "critical translation of disciplines"—i.e., a careful and detailed accountability for the ways in which "competence" can easily be stripped of its specific conceptual development when it is traded from discipline to discipline, or from institution to institution, as a kind of magical token. As Schmenk describes, Habermasian philosophy of communication and Hymesian linguistic anthropology developed their concepts and investments upon importantly disparate ends of a spectrum of premises about what constitutes human speech. Beyond simply pointing this out, Schmenk also suggests for us why contemporary disciplines such as applied linguistics, second language studies, foreign language pedagogy, and comparative literature may be invested in *misrecognizing* the disciplinarily ambivalent origins of the competence concept. She thus demonstrates that the critical, and historically contextualized, translation of concepts central to the animus and self-understanding of our disciplines often disrupts comfortable continuities and presumptions about flexible applicability.

A case in point is Grazia Imperiale's action-research study on the endeavor to establish an Arabic as a Foreign Language tele-teaching project in the Gaza Strip, at the Islamic University of Gaza. Imperiale persuasively demonstrates how the competence-driven rationales of foreign language teaching and learning (in North America, the European Union, and the United Kingdom, for instance), are ill fit to foreign language learning in colonized and occupied spaces. Through qualitative data from her Gazan co-teacher colleagues and trainees, Imperiale shows how methods emerging from the "Palestinian art of resistance" movement—as well as those modeled by Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum, and Veronica Crosbie's capability approach—foreground well-being in the face of unfreedoms. Here, Imperiale calls attention to the universalizing concept of "competence" discourses, and how they tend to obscure values like survival, resistance, and critique of violence in favor of more politically unmarked neo- and ordoliberal virtues of communication and collaboration. Whereas Schmenk had characterized "communicative competence" in the Habermasian mode as existing in a kind of Garden of Eden, Imperiale demonstrates how multilingual learning situations emerge in situations of extreme precaritization and privation—thus requiring a new vocabulary of pedagogical and methodological values.

Anna-Louise Milne’s lush and recursive essay, itself also a form of action-research, reports on a “fatally collective” exploratory workshop she designed and conducted in Paris. Milne’s productively yet disorderly heterogeneous translation workshop, comprised of university philology students together with refugees of various legal statuses, expands the aperture on the concept and practice of collaborative translation. No longer merely geared toward literary translation by more than one practitioner at once, Milne’s workshop destabilized comfort, privilege, and power among autochthonous French and American study-abroad students alike, leading to open-ended questions that challenge the optimism of Euro-competence discourses: “We needed to take up our places around the table, a young American sitting next to a young Afghani, and observe what the table—or the text—held for us. And what shape could we give it? The smooth sweep of global social-media speak, as had tended to happen in the groups, or the delineations of in-laid roles? Would we be able to find an alternative between these unpromising possibilities?” The translation process revealed “a panoply of linguistic possibility that ran to and fro between Spanish and Manouche, or Brazilian Portuguese and Mandarin, all negotiated and channeled in the unflustered syncretism of life.” The clean, indeed prophylactic presumptions of competence discourses—averse as they are to tragedy, failure, collectivity, and ambiguity—were of little use in this space which, like Imperiale’s teacher training setting in Gaza, required the difficult, ground-up reconceptualization of ways and means for thriving and well-being in multilingual work.

The Swiss intercultural pedagogy theorist Aline Gohard-Radenkovic’s essay vividly illustrates how the discourses of competence and its assessment have flooded European and extra-European institutional spaces with contradictory demands and models that have, ironically, decompetenced local vernacular teaching spaces such as those attested to by Imperiale and Milne. By tracking one study-abroad or “mobility” student from India in his higher-education pursuits in the Swiss Confederation, Gohard-Radenkovic tells a tragic story of over-assessment and contradictory assessment, one that led to the student’s ultimate abandonment of his studies. In a complementary spirit to Schmenk’s contribution, Gohard-Radenkovic traces the rise of management-driven models of education and language education in Europe since the 1980s, claiming that French, Swiss, and European universities “have passed over their responsibility in evaluation, selection and training to hidden authorities, in the name of imagined ‘good practices’ and fantasized governance.” Gohard-Radenkovic further presents, for a non-Francophone readership, some of the primary theoretical interventions emerging from that scholarly tradition critical of neoliberal

incursions in foreign language learning assessment, including those of Yves Charles Zarka, Françoise Ropé, Bruno Maurer, and Jean-Pierre Le Goff, among others.

Shifting the focus only slightly, Julie Ruck then demonstrates how the question of dialect and regional variation troubles the very practicability of competence-driven models of assessment. After all, as Ruck shows, only very few “highly trained speakers (e.g., news anchors) consistently use Standard German and they produce deviations from the codified norm among every 35th to 40th word.” (Lameli 2004a: 86) Ruck further emphasizes that even the popular pluricentric solution to the question of variation—in which Austrian, German, Swiss, and Luxembourgish varieties of German are taught in parallel—misses the meaningful point of a dialect-conscious foreign language classroom: namely, that the use of regional varieties powerfully indexes social and affective meanings around power, hierarchy, and insider/outsider status that are elided in so-called pluricentric pedagogies. Like Imperiale, Ruck provides practical activities and implications for teachers in the course of her argument. In her case study, Ruck focuses on how teachers of German might effectively use contemporary Austrian television shows to teach learners how to meaningfully acknowledge the practices and politics of regional variation in the course of instructed learning.

Anastasia Lakthikova follows Ruck with an empirically and theoretically incisive study of the untold story of Russian-speaking Ukrainian citizens’ multiply misunderstood passive folk competence in Ukrainian. With urgency and vividness, Lakthikova walks readers through the macro- and microdisjunctive contingencies of a little known landscape of language politics and ideologies, which is troubled by politicized polling, outside meddling, and continuous political upheaval. The presumption that Russian-speaking Ukrainians understand Ukrainian “because they’re similar languages” is toppled, in favor of a much more subtle historical rationale for how eastern Ukrainians come to be potentially but latently competent users of Ukrainian. Like Schmenk’s essay on Hymes and Habermas, Lakthikova’s historical unraveling of long-held myths about monolingualism, bilingualism, and the very nature of a “a” language pulse with an unwillingness to be satiated with easy answers—even those answers most beloved in the central logics of our various disciplines. Like Imperiale, Gohard-Radenkovic, Milne, and Ruck’s pieces, Lakthikova’s essay is clearly invested not only in proposing a new, contextually specific model for the imminent future—one in which a conceit of additive competence will not suffice—but also of alleviating suffering, invisibility, and distress on a large social scale. In dispossessed rural Austria, in suburban transmigrant Paris, in besieged Gaza, and in politicized and neglected eastern Ukraine, these authors demonstrate

how urgent the need is for a discourse that links social survival with the mindful reframing of language education.

Appropriately, then, we close this issue with two theoretical interventions into the ways multilingualism is conceptualized today and how we may be on the verge of new paradigms. In contrast to a competence or capacity-based model, Larissa Aronin's contribution foregrounds an "affordances" approach to what she calls the New Linguistic Dispensation of contemporary multilingualism. Multilingualism today, stresses Aronin, is a matter of 'edgework', in which "Edges [of languages] attract, harbor, or trigger intensive activity. [...] In fact, multilingualism is all about edges. Most well-known multilingual phenomena can be seen as 'edges' or 'transitional entities,' and display the so called 'edge effect'" (see Aronin and Politis 2015). Viewing multilingualism as an edge can invite us to consider fresh affordances, in addition to existing perspectives, for speakers and learners.

The scholarly team of Julia Tidigs and Marcus Huss likewise challenges readers to revise what we consider to be the conceptual underpinnings of so-called "literary multilingualism." Is the reader of a multilingual literary text presumed to be "competent" in all of the various languages evoked in such a text? Tidigs and Huss challenge a "conception of literary communication, [in which] failure to understand or translate the semantic content of 'foreign' words or phrases of the text is, unsurprisingly, interpreted as failure." As with Aronin, Tidigs and Huss are concerned with how readers of multilingual literary texts themselves engaged actively in what Aronin calls edgework, "partaking in the bordering processes of multilingualism, not only in distinguishing between languages, but also in recognizing different kinds of language, and the distinctions between languages and noise." We are thus challenged to question what we consider to be the ideal, i.e. 'competent' reader of one literary text or another. Throughout the contributions to this issue, readers are offered far-reaching and complex case studies in how we may reinvision concepts like 'competence' and 'proficiency' in multilingual readerly settings, foreign language learning settings, and in language education settings more broadly conceived.

Acknowledgements

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accessible to readers while honoring formatting, orthographic, and disciplinary variation in its presentation.

The editors further invite readers of this issue of *Critical Multilingualism Studies* to browse our Reviews section, and to consider contributing to one of the Calls for Contributions appended to this issue. We are happy to announce a new Translations Review Section (edited by Patrick Ploschnitzki) and a forthcoming Special Issue, currently accepting submissions, on “Multilingualism in Contexts of Migration and Refuge” (guest edited by Marianna Pegno and Amanda Snell).