Multilingualism Workshop 25-11-19

I'm very happy to have the opportunity to open this workshop and greet our guests, those who have come to us from the august surroundings of the universities fo Sussex, Bath, Reading, Exeter, UCL, Oxford and the University of Barcelona. I’m delighted to have all of you here. They are joining our Israeli experts from Lewinsky college, Tel Aviv university, the Hebrew university of Jerusalem, Bar Ilan university – it is a great pleasure and real honor to have you .joining us this morning. All of you are joining our in-house, local faculty from Beit Berl college. all of you are prestigious professors of linguistics.so we have here an impressive assembly of distinguished faculty. On behalf of the Faculty of Society and Culture at BBC I am grateful for your presence among us today and we are fortunate in having you here.

I would like to extend special thaks to the organizers. Prof. Anat Stavans and prof. Julie Dockrell. they came up with an intriguing topic, Building the Multilingual Literacy Bridge,

managed to gather here scholars who are exceptionally well qualified to speak on the subject, they put out the invitation that stimulated you all and put up the wonderful program for this workshop. A glance at the agenda is sufficient to indicate that it’s a very thought-provoking one and will bring together here your thoughts and insights. Thank you, Anat and Julie, for engineering this magnificent workshop. I’d like to recognize Mr. John Levy, who is director at Friends of Israel Educational Foundation Academic Study Group. he co-sponsored this workshop and is an ongoing champion and patron of world-class academic exchanges between the UK and Israel. We are grateful for his support and thank him deeply.

This is an expert workshop par excellence,

The topic of your workshop is Building the Multilingual Literacy Bridge. I’m rather a layman in this topic, but it seems to me that it bears particular features whose impact go beyond specific linguistics and language acquisition discourse. Because It’s not just about individuals achieving effective communication in various languages, it’s not just a derivation, an advantage, if not a necessity, of our ever growing globalized world.

It’s also about identities, individual identities, group identities, collective identities, minority and power relations.

Multiligualism has a decisive role in the cultural and creative existence of minorities as well as their identity, dignity and self-esteem. This makes this workshop specifically relevant and pertinent to our college, since we are interested in promoting the research and teaching of multiculturalism, advancing the notion of shared society and advocating such values as diversity, alterity and variety.

Multilingualism in particular is a vehicle for such aims. Multilinguals are able to use their languages successfully across diverse norms and codes, they are able to relate comprehensively for specific content purposes. This is all particularly important in contexts of shared societies, such as Israel who has a large Arabic speaking population as well as other language groups, Russian is chief amongst them. And as we all know, The abundance of spoken languages cultivated in a state guarantees the richness of its cultural landscape.

With your permission, I’d like to elaborate a little on multilingualism from my point of view as a scholar in literary studies. In my field of expertise there is an adjacent phenomenon. This is transligual literature or translingual writers. The term was introduced by scholars as early as the 1970s, but it was Steven Kellman’s book The Translingual Imagination published in the year 2000 that crystalized the term as one pertinent to speaking about writers who switch **their language of writing. Briefly, translingual writers** are authors who write in more than one language or in a language other than their primary one.

In that, these authors free themselves from cultural and monolingual constraints and practice a dynamic and fluid approach to communication. They also blur the dichotomy between native and non-Native speakers and perhaps even undermine it, since some of these translingual writers have provided national literatures with masterpieces of the highest level of proficiency in a language that was not their mother tongue.

The term is applicable to such authors as Josef Conrad, J.M.Coetzee, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov, Salman Rushdie, Nikolai Gogol.

Kellman distinguishes between ‘ambilinguals’ (those who have written important works in more than one language’) and ‘monolingual translinguals’ (who have written only in a language other than their primary one).

Translingual authors were often immigrants, caught up in migrations, displacements and exile. And, nowadays, the revolution in transportation technology that created unprecedented mobility, accounts for contemporary migratory writers such as Julia Alvarez.

Some writers became translingual without ever leaving home. These translingual authors are often those referred to as minor literature writers, I’m employing here the term coined by Deleuze and Guattari. These autors hail from a minority group and chose to write in the major language, the institutional one, the language of the empire. This is the case with Franz Kafka, which is Deleuze and Guattari’s example, but also Chingis Aytmatov, and the Israeli Sayed Kashua.

One might say writers switch languages in order to gain prestige (most switches are into the major colonial languages), to reach a wider audience, to address a more specialized audience, or as a part of personal histories of migration. Few of them became translingual due to a more privileged or generalized imagination. there are cases like Beckett, who ostensibly moved to French in order to obtain a more austere, distanced style.

Translinguals are among the most prominent writers in the Israel, as Israel is an immigration society and the first generations of Israelis were all newcomers from afar and speakers of languages other than Hebrew.

By virtue of their translingual nature, these authors belong to two national literary systems simultaneously. For instance, Vladimir Nabokov belongs to the both Russian and the English speaking literature.

To give evidence to that, I checked in Wikipedia. in Wikipedia in English, and not surprisingly, Nabokov is “a Russian-born novelist, poet and translator. His first nine novels were in Russian but he achieved international prominence after he began writing English prose.” But then I checked Wikipedia in Hebrew, there it said: ”an American author and translator of Russian origin”. In French Wikipedia it’s the same: “un écrivain américain d’origine russe”.

How useful is all this to you, linguists? I think that as a category, translingual literature draws our attention to the fact that multilingualism extends language and reaches questions of politics and hegemony and the advocacy of heterogeneity, diversion and inclusion.

Its practicality was also succinctly phrased in the 2015 introduction to the special issue of L2 journal, dedicated to transligual writing:

**“For the last decade or so, *multilingualism studies* have recognized the growing need for ~~what Alexander Luria called “romantic science,”~~ a view of the multilingual individual as a whole, complementing the traditional scrutiny of tiny particles in the cognitive mechanism. Multilingual identity and subjectivity, psyche and emotionality are now explored across disciplines using non-traditional research methods: via autobiography, literary text, narrative, and arts. ~~On virtual pages of the special issue of~~ *~~L2 Journal~~*, the emerging field of *translingual literature*—~~texts by authors using more than one language or a language other than their primary one~~—contributes to its sister discipline [*multilingualism studies*] a unique lens of literary texts infused by multilingual creativity.”** *L2 Journal* Vol. 7 (2015(

Once again, I extend a warm welcome to you and express my heartfelt gratitude to Anat and Julie who have organized the entire event. I hope, and I’m positive, that you will have a successful workshop. I also hope that you enjoy our college and our country and that you will immediately make plans for a return visit! May your gathering here be a successful and enjoyable one!

**List of books on Translingual Writers**

Beaujour, E. (1989). *Alien tongues: Bilingual Russian writers of the “first” emigration*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Besemeres, M. (2002). *Translating one’s self.* Oxford: Peter Lang.  
Derrida, J. (2006). *Le monolinguisme de l'autre ou la prothèse d'origine*. Paris: Editions Galilée.  
Forster, L. (2010). *The poet’s tongues: Multilingualism in literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Kellman, S.G. (2000). *The translingual imagination.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Kramsch, C. (2009). *The multilingual subject.* New York: Oxford University Press.  
Lennon, B. (2010). *In Babel’s shadow: Multilingual literatures, monolingual states.* Minneapolis: University of

Minnesota Press.  
Pavlenko, A. (2006). *Bilingual minds: Emotional experience, expression, and representation.* London: Multilingual

Matters.  
Pavlenko, A. (2014). *The Bilingual mind and what it tells us about language and thought.* New York: Cambridge

University Press.  
Skinner, J. (1998). *The stepmother tongue: An introduction to new Anglophone fiction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Sommer, D. (2004). *Bilingual aesthetics: A new sentimental education*. North Carolina: Duke University Press. Yildiz, Y. (2012). *Beyond the mother tongue: The postmonolingual condition.* New York: Fordham University Press.

i Russian neuroscientist Aleksandr Luria revolutionized the conventional biology-based study of the brain by complementing it with narratives about his patients as complete human beings, which eventually advanced a more nuanced understanding of neuro-psychology, now enriched by stories about learning, human behavior, and personality. He called this approach “romantic science.”