

# "This is meaningless - It's in Russian" : multilingual characters in mainstream movies

Autor(en): **Bleichenbacher, Lukas**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **SPELL : Swiss papers in English language and literature**

Band (Jahr): **19 (2007)**

PDF erstellt am: **07.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-100053>

## **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Inhalten der Zeitschriften. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern.

Die auf der Plattform e-periodica veröffentlichten Dokumente stehen für nicht-kommerzielle Zwecke in Lehre und Forschung sowie für die private Nutzung frei zur Verfügung. Einzelne Dateien oder Ausdrucke aus diesem Angebot können zusammen mit diesen Nutzungsbedingungen und den korrekten Herkunftsbezeichnungen weitergegeben werden.

Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Die systematische Speicherung von Teilen des elektronischen Angebots auf anderen Servern bedarf ebenfalls des schriftlichen Einverständnisses der Rechteinhaber.

## **Haftungsausschluss**

Alle Angaben erfolgen ohne Gewähr für Vollständigkeit oder Richtigkeit. Es wird keine Haftung übernommen für Schäden durch die Verwendung von Informationen aus diesem Online-Angebot oder durch das Fehlen von Informationen. Dies gilt auch für Inhalte Dritter, die über dieses Angebot zugänglich sind.

# “This is meaningless – It’s in Russian”: Multilingual Characters in Mainstream Movies

Lukas Bleichenbacher

Is Russian dialogue in Hollywood movies typically meaningless? Are German speaking characters necessarily evil, or French speakers refined? While previous commentators on multilingualism in mainstream cinema have focussed on the link between languages other than English and negative stereotyping, closer readings informed by pragmatic and sociolinguistic theories of language choice reveal more complex patterns. On the one hand, non-English dialogue can contribute to positive characterisation and realism in representation, as argued in the example of the action movie *The Peacemaker*. Conversely, the analysis of a scene from *The Pianist* shows how the replacement of all Polish dialogue with English carries questionable ideological undertones. However, an overview of some recent blockbusters shows a tendency towards less replacement and more presence of non-English dialogue. Ultimately, the key to a less biased representation of multilingual realities lies in their normalisation, rather than in the use of other languages merely for aesthetic or narrative purposes.

## *Introduction*

In cultural studies, there is nowadays a consensus that commercially successful English-language mainstream motion pictures or, as they are more commonly referred to, Hollywood movies, are a prime ideological force which both reflect and co-construct the worldviews and shared cultural knowledge of their producers and audiences. From the perspective of linguistic ecology, Hollywood has been one of many factors that have contributed to the spectacular spread of the English language worldwide (Crystal 16f), and in turn, the language used in movie dialogues has had its influence on at least some registers of contemporary

English (McArthur 186). A survey on “Europeans and Languages” showed that the interviewees’ second most frequent context of foreign language use was watching movies and television, after holidays but even before use at the workplace (European Commission 7). In the case of languages other than English and their speakers, Hollywood movies are an important and for some people the only mediator of cultural contact at all. While most social psychologists would disapprove of concepts where people’s minds are seen as empty slates waiting to be filled with “Hollywood ideology”, there are nevertheless ways in which the depiction of societal and individual multilingualism in the movies is not without consequences. The conventions of these representations may not only inform people’s attitudes towards speakers of specific non-English languages, they can also influence the way we reflect on people’s multilingual practices, as tourists, migrants or simply foreign language learners.<sup>1</sup>

The Hollywood industry, as well as other media, have been accused by numerous commentators of underrepresenting or perpetuating stereotypes of, among others, foreigners and members of various ethnic minorities. However, despite frequent reference to the “linguistic turn” in cultural studies, the language-related aspects of these depictions – how movie dialogues contribute to stereotyping in narration and characterisation – have been treated in a disappointingly marginal way. This lack of interdisciplinary work is perhaps not all too surprising, given that dialogue analysis has traditionally been rather neglected in film studies (Kozloff 6ff), whereas linguists have preferred the analysis of real language data to its fictional counterparts. Dialogues from movies or TV shows are occasionally used for purposes of illustration, as in Arditty and Vasseur or Reimer, but they are only rarely placed in the centre of linguists’ or literary scholars’ attention, as in Mares, Coupland, Kobus, or Pablé.

The aim of this paper is to outline a framework for describing and interpreting representations of individual multilingualism and language choice in movies: what typical patterns and functions are observable when movie dialogues deviate from English as their base language, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Some time ago, a Swiss newspaper reported on how the reluctance of primary school pupils in the French-speaking part to learn German is partly rooted in cultural clichés conveyed by war movies rather than real-life experience: whenever teachers of German as a foreign language ask their beginner pupils which German words come to their minds spontaneously, *Heil Hitler* is always a sure bet (Büchi).

to what extent can Hollywood be accused of perpetuating monolingual, anglocentric prejudices and negative stereotyping of other languages and their speakers? This claim has been put forward by a number of commentators: Lippi-Green states that in Hollywood's use of non-standard Englishes, "even when stereotyping is not overtly negative, it is confining and misleading" (101), while Kozloff maintains that although there is some indication for less stereotyping lately, she is "not convinced" (82). Rather severely, Schiffman contends that in the movies "people speaking 'foreign' languages are up to no good."

These charges are by no means self-evident for a number of reasons. First of all, from what is known about textual heteroglossia (the use of different dialects) and multilingualism in literature, negative stereotyping is only one of its many functions, and certainly not the dominant one. In his "Afterword" to a collection of essays on *English Literature and the Other Languages*, N.F. Blake argues that "the more modern a literary work is, the more likely it is that there will also be a serious purpose behind the mixture of languages" (331). One such purpose can indeed be to challenge dominant ideologies of the standard, as Mace concludes from her analysis of regional dialect depictions in 19th century English prose fiction. In a similar vein, Durrer (16ff) points to an interesting paradox in French prose fiction: whereas in novels predating the French Revolution, the direct speech of all characters was largely uniform (despite the fact that only a small part of the population actually spoke Standard French), the work of writers such as Balzac, Flaubert and Maupassant, which postdate the implementation of dialect eradication and standardization policies, display a fair number of carefully selected dialect representations – as a first step towards a more realistic literary rendering of oral language.

Secondly, the very multimodal nature of audiovisual media (see Busch, 281f), where both the images themselves and the option of adding subtitles aid comprehension, can represent and perform multilingual speech more adequately than the written and inherently linear texts of novels and plays, where translations usually result in interruptions. Thirdly, the cinematic media have been marked by multilingualism since their very beginnings, as can be seen from the multilingual modes of production and intertitles in many silent movies, and the enormous extent to which Hollywood has always profited from foreign-language immigrants and other movie cultures. Multilingualism is also a distinctive feature of many contemporary productions outside the Hollywood



mainstream, such as independent movies by directors like John Sayles or Jim Jarmusch, the works by “exilic and diasporic” filmmakers (Naficy), or European co-productions like Cédric Klapisch’s *Euro Pudding* and Jan Sverák’s *Dark Blue World*. Finally, in the past decades the Western world has clearly experienced a shift in both academic (*pace* Samuel Huntington) and public opinion towards a more favourable estimation of at least individual multilingualism, and this shift may well be paralleled and reflected by changing patterns of representation in Hollywood movies.

My method of approach consists in close readings, informed by pragmatic and sociolinguistic theories of language choice, of movies with multilingual settings, with special attention to the fictional nature of my data. The scenes analysed are taken from a corpus of commercially successful mainstream English language movies from the last twenty years, which I have compiled for an ongoing thesis project called *Multilingualism in the Movies*. As common denominators these films share a realistic storyline, feature characters who speak languages other than English, or would do so in real life, and they depict situations of language contact, language choice, bilingual conversations and the use of non-native varieties. Typical genres include action thrillers, historical drama and intercultural comedies. While my thesis will also include quantitative observations on multilingual movie dialogues, this paper is mainly concerned with excerpts from two movies, a spy thriller (*The Peacemaker*) and a World War II/Holocaust drama (*The Pianist*).

### *Learning Russian – speaking Serbian*

I would like to illustrate my approach with an excerpt from Mimi Leder’s 1997 action movie *The Peacemaker*. The movie features George Clooney as the US Army Colonel Thomas Devoe and Nicole Kidman as Julia Kelly, a nuclear arms specialist and adviser to the US government. The two characters co-operate, with some reluctance initially but much romance eventually, in the investigation of an atomic explosion on a train in Central Russia and the ensuing hunt for missing nuclear warheads. A scene early on in the film shows Devoe and Kelly in a D.C. government office processing intelligence on this explosion. They are perusing a list, which has been faxed from their contact in the Russian

army, containing the names of the servicemen on board the train who are reported as killed in the incident:

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| Devoe | Departure orders, forty men on board   |
| Kelly | Mh this is meaningless   |
| Devoe | It's in Russian  |
| Kelly | Èto nichego ne znachit potomu shto zvanija ne ukazny                         |
|       | <i>Subtitle:</i> It's meaningless because they haven't listed anybody's rank |
| Devoe | Otkuda vy govorite po-russki?  |
|       | <i>Subtitle:</i> Where did you learn to speak Russian?                       |
| Kelly | Princeton  |
| Devoe | Mh the blue-blooded backbone of our country                                  |
| Kelly | My father's a mailman  |
| Devoe | You never know   |

Devoe misinterprets Kelly's *meaningless* as her inability to read Russian, whereas what she means is that only the servicemen's names without indication of their ranks are, for some reason, useless intelligence. Although the Russian part of this conversation is very short, it is subtitled in order to convey its content to the audience, or at least to highlight the fact that a code-switch has taken place. Its content is devoid of any vital narrative information: the killed Russian servicemen whose names are mentioned are minor characters, and the nuclear explosion is only one small step in a complicated scheme of nuclear arms theft. Nevertheless, the code-switch is not gratuitous: the first fifteen minutes of the movie have already taken place in Central and Eastern Europe and are almost exclusively in (subtitled) Russian and Serbian; by showing both Kelly and Devoe as proficient users of a Slavonic language, they are characterized as the ideal persons to handle the situation. The characters' code-switching also contributes to one of the dominant comical elements of the movie, namely the ongoing struggle for authority between Kelly and Devoe, which is linked to their gender roles. Devoe is an impulsive macho, somewhat better at taking rapid action than at reflecting on the consequences, therefore he is shown here as naïve and arrogant enough to assume that Kelly would lack the knowledge of Russian that he has. In turn, Kelly's cleverness is illustrated by her quick repartee in that very foreign language, and this confirms her hierarchical superiority. Finally, the American place-name *Princeton* conveniently serves as a trigger for Kelly to switch back to English. Devoe accepts this, but retorts by la-

bellling Kelly's competence as a kind of learned *élite* bilingualism, a stereotype which she powerfully subverts by referring to her unspectacular social background. The implications are of an interesting kind: foreign language skills are framed as an aspect of the American dream.

Further on in *The Peacemaker*, we are introduced to the main terrorist character, a Bosnian Serb<sup>2</sup> called Dusan Gavrich (Marcel Iures). Gavrich is shown at home in his flat in Sarajevo, giving a piano lesson to a school girl and telling her in subtitled Serbian: "Music should be like a language. Joy, sadness, changing a single note can turn joy to sorrow." While this is arguably not the most brilliant metapoetic content ever uttered, it is nevertheless remarkable and unusual that a "bad guy" should speak such lines – after all, Gavrich's and his comrades' plan is the detonation of an atomic bomb in Manhattan, to express their frustration with UN peacemaking in former Yugoslavia. Still, the effect of this dialogue is to create some sort of empathy with the character; he is depicted as a thinking and feeling human being, rather than stereotypically as a brute monster. To the same effect, the audience is treated to an explanation of his frustration later on in the movie: a flashback scene shows how his family is killed in a sniper shooting in Sarajevo; frantically shouting for help in English, he fails to get assistance from the UN troops present. Crucially, Gavrich's dialogue renders his character more human simply by showing a non-Anglophone character saying normal things in his own language – which is after all what one would expect realistic movies to do.

### *Multilingualism in the movies: form and functions*

When accounting for the phenomena of multilingualism in fictional texts in a systematic way, commentators<sup>3</sup> usually distinguish between formal aspects (for instance, the length and position of the deviations from the text's base language) and functional ones (the narrative or

---

<sup>2</sup> In one scene, Gavrich deconstructs the strict and mutually exclusive ethnic categories created during the Civil War in former Yugoslavia by stating that "I am a Serb, I'm a Croat, I'm a Muslim." Nevertheless, I choose to label him as a Bosnian Serb, since while he lives in Sarajevo (Bosnia's multiethnic capital), his collaborators are mostly seen in Pale (a centre of Bosnian Serbs), and unlike the Croats or Bosnian Muslims, they use the Serbian Cyrillic alphabet throughout the film.

<sup>3</sup> Some standard works include Forster, Goetsch, Hoenselaars and Buning, Sollors, Brugnolo and Orioles, and Schmitz-Emans.

aesthetic purpose underlying these deviations). Two major functions of these deviations have been illustrated by the dialogues from *The Peacemaker* mentioned above: realism on the one hand, and specific narrative and aesthetic functions on the other. These include the creation of certain moods and atmospheres, such as humour, alienation, or exoticism, and the functions of characterisation. In the latter case, screenwriters exploit the sociolinguistic notion of indexicality: the fact that the way people speak allows their hearers to make rapid inferences about their social background. The extent to which this does not only flout the requirements of realism, but may also lead to stereotyping has not passed unnoticed in non-academic film criticism, as illustrated by this ironic comment from Ebert's *Bigger Little Book of Hollywood Clichés* (64): "Hardest word in the English language. No matter how well a foreigner speaks English, he will never be able to master 'yes,' and will invariably be forced to rely on its equivalent in his native tongue." Thus, the code-switching of bilingual movie characters is not represented realistically as an in-group mode of communication, but as a manner of language mixing which is employed irrespectively of the communicative context. Crucially, while real-life bilinguals tend to reduce or avoid code-switching in the presence of out-group monolinguals, their Hollywood equivalents perform the reverse.

The notion of realism, then, implies that multilingualism appears in any given text simply because the author's aim is to represent language contact as realistically as possible: if there would have been code-switching in real life, it must also happen in the fictional dialogue. How often and to what extent the other language is used depends, among other factors, on how multilingual the intended readership is expected to be, which is why many authors choose not to deviate from the base language at all. In a useful formal taxonomy, Mares conceptualises these two options as the endpoints of a continuum between the absolute *presence* (Russian *prisutstvije*) of the other language – which may or may not be translated for the benefit of a monolingual audience – and its complete *elimination* (*eliminatsija*). In the latter case, the replaced language is either unknown to the reader, or only inferable by extralinguistic hints such as foreign-sounding proper names, filmed writing, or the setting of the story. In between *presence* and *elimination*, Mares posits a third strategy, *evocation* (*evokatsija*), where the other language is evoked by a variety of the base language which is characterised by interference from or short switches into the other language. The interference can be of dif-

ferent kinds (e.g. phonological, grammatical, or idiomatic), whereby the advantage of movie dialogues over written texts is that they can reproduce non-native accents more conveniently, since there is no risk of alienating the readership by violations of orthography.<sup>4</sup>

Replacing the other language by means of elimination or evocation appears most sensible when all or most of the story takes place in a context where the base language would not realistically be present at all. Although these strategies distort the linguistic reality to a great extent, they have been largely uncontested throughout the history of literature. Few commentators in Medieval Studies have objected to, say, the *Beowulf* poet's elimination and replacement of Old Norse varieties with Old English, nor has there been an intensive critical debate among Renaissance scholars about Shakespeare's reluctance to write *Hamlet* in Danish, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Greek or *Romeo and Juliet* in Italian. However, the replacement strategies are also an option when texts contain only one or few passages where the other language would realistically be used, typically in monolingual settings. Thus, the Soviet characters in McTiernan's Cold War thriller *Hunt for Red October* speak English for most of the film although, contained in their submarines, it is clear that in reality they would have spoken Russian. They only "revert" to this language once they are intercepted by their American counterparts: as the speech situation ceases to be monolingual, the strategy of presence is drawn upon to make this shift obvious.

#### *Ideological implications of the evocation strategy*

It does not come as a surprise that public and critical debate is especially intensive in the case of filmic representations of World War II and the Holocaust. In movies set in Nazi Germany or the occupied parts of Eastern Europe, the strategies of elimination or evocation are typically used to replace German, Polish and other local languages with English – but the exact patterns of this replacement seldom pass uncommented by the audience. In the case of Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, Lippi-Green (102f) quotes a study by Goldstein who found that while the

---

<sup>4</sup> See Sebba for an interesting discussion of this problem in the context of the representation of code-switching between Standard British English and Jamaican Creole in Anglo-Caribbean writing.



characters' English was marked by German or Yiddish accents to evoke their respective ethnicity, there was an obvious and highly questionable tendency for sexually more attractive female characters to display less marked accents, and vice versa. In another study of *Schindler's List*, Stahlecker (106) expresses his preference for the version dubbed into German, since the "grotesque" German accents in the original are indicative of a "Nazi officer stereotype" which Spielberg had criticised himself with respect to his earlier movies.

How can this unease with the evocation strategy be explained, and where exactly does its potential for problematic ideological undertones lie? In the following, I will analyse a scene from a more recent Holocaust movie, Roman Polanski's *The Pianist*. My aim is twofold: firstly, to demonstrate how evocation appears ill suited for depictions of speech situations which are multilingual to start with, and secondly, how the practice of fictional representation follows ideological patterns similar to those found in the real world. To this purpose, I propose an adaptation of Irvine and Gal's influential theorisation of the three processes underlying ideological representations of linguistic differences, namely iconisation, fractal recursivity, and erasure. Here is how the three processes are defined:

*Iconization* involves a transformation of the sign relationship between linguistic features (or varieties) and the social images with which they are linked. Linguistic features that index social groups or activities appear to be iconic representations of them, as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group's inherent nature or essence. [ . . . ] *Fractal recursivity* involves the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of relationship, onto some other level. [ . . . ] *Erasure* is the process in which ideology, in simplifying the sociolinguistic field, renders some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena) invisible. (37ff)

Based on a true story, *The Pianist* narrates the life of a Jewish pianist in Warsaw, Wladislaw Szpilman, from the beginning of the Nazi occupation in 1939 until the arrival of the Red Army. Unlike his other family members, Szpilman manages to escape deportation, and has to rely on the help of his non-Jewish friends in order to hide outside the Ghetto. In real life, Polish would have been the language used in most of the interactions represented in the movie; however, this language is replaced by English in all dialogue (but not in any visible writing); some dialogue also takes place in German and Russian. The scene in question shows Szpilman with a group of Jewish slave labourers on a Warsaw building



site. They are working under extremely miserable conditions and are in constant fear of being deported, when they are addressed by a German SS officer (Peter Rappenglück) who seems to be offering them a deal:

SS officer     I have good news for you. There are rumours go around that we will like to er Umsiedlung resettle you. I promise you that now and in the future nothing else is planned. Ja? For this reason we put information posters on the wall to show you our good will. You should vote one of you who be allowed to go in town daily and bring three kilos Kartoffel potato ja and one loaf of bread for each of your workers. So why should we do something else like this if we would resettle you? You can make good business out of the things you don't eat. Isn't that something where you Jews are good in, make money? Weitermachen.

Irvine and Gal's second process, *fractal recursivity*, is evident in the representation of the SS officer's performance as a multilingual individual. Since the officer is speaking English in the dialogue, we must assume that in real life, he would not have spoken his native German, but a learner's variety of Polish – which is, understandably, hard to reproduce in English. Still, from the interferences, mistakes, hesitations, and the word-finding code-switch (*Kartoffel*), one gets the general idea that this is somebody struggling with a foreign language. Thus, the opposition between a native and a learner variety of Polish is projected recursively onto the opposition between native English and the variety of English spoken by the SS officer, and made very obvious on different levels of linguistic performance. In phonology, there are a marked German-Bavarian accent and mispronunciations, such as the avoidance of the second consonant cluster in *planned* [plæned]. Morphological mistakes include the hyper-correct past tense *allowded*, the absence of plural marking in *potato*, and wrong auxiliaries in “we *will* like,” “who *be* allowed,” and “if we *would*”. Furthermore, the officer's wording is all too vague – does “nothing else” refer to the resettlement, in which case he would contradict himself, or to the status quo of the slave labourers? Finally, although his speech contains one request for confirmation (*Ja?*) and two rhetorical questions, the officer's addressees remain silent. He clearly fails to interpret this dispreferred response, which causes him to abandon his strategy of linguistic accommodation and to switch to German for his final order, *weitermachen* (“carry on”).

The process of *iconisation* becomes apparent from the fact that the SS officer is really the only Nazi character in the movie who accommodates to Jewish interlocutors by speaking Polish at all, which rules out any

comparison of his dialogue with other scenes. Still, there is a clear sense in which his interlanguage does not simply reflect, in a recursive manner, the way he would have spoken Polish; moreover, it points directly to his very character traits. He is either despicably evil, or at least ridiculously naïve, depending on whether we assume that he knows himself that the content of his message is a lie. His bad character is iconically reflected by the totality of his interferences, mistakes and code-switches – not to mention his utter pragmatic incompetence, when he actually expects his Jewish audience to react to his cynical and anti-Semitic rhetorical question. From there, it is only a small step to the association of L1 interference or lack of idiomaticity in non-native speech with undesirable behaviour and attitudes, a process which is all the more powerful because it is not so easily discernible.

Finally, how obvious is it really that (and also why) the SS officer would have spoken Polish in reality? It may be for some European or better-informed members of the audience, but certainly not for everyone. As mentioned above, the replacement strategy is largely unproblematic in clearly monolingual contexts – but not so in inherently multilingual settings, for which the pre-Holocaust Jewish societies in Central and Eastern Europe (Myhill 136ff) are a paradigmatic example. In *The Pianist* however, Polish appears to be the only language used autochthonously by all inhabitants of Warsaw, which shows Irvine and Gal's third process, *erasure*, in action. Crucially, the more remote in time and space the setting of a movie is, the less clear it becomes even for a well-informed audience which are the actual languages that have been replaced. Thus, Mares's concept of evocation appears as a fluid rather than fixed formal strategy, the correct interpretation of which depends largely on the audience's world knowledge and capability to process the evoking hints in a meaningful and coherent way.

#### *A trend towards more presence of other languages*

One finding from the corpus of recent Hollywood movies is that there has been a clear trend away from the replacement of other languages towards the strategy of presenting them whenever their use would seem plausible. This can be illustrated by a parallel shift in two series of spy movies, namely the *James Bond* movies based on the British MI6 agent created by Ian Fleming, and the films featuring his CIA counterpart Jack

Ryan, in the adaptations of novels by Tom Clancy. Whereas in the 1980s Bond movies and up until *Goldeneye* (1995), there was at least a partial replacement of other languages (mostly Russian and Spanish) with English, this has no longer been the case since *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997). Likewise, in most of the dialogues of the Jack Ryan movies *Hunt for Red October* (1990) and *Clear and Present Danger* (1994), English replaced Russian and Spanish, respectively. In *The Sum of all Fears* (2002), however, as many as five other languages are present – in one scene, Jack Ryan even expresses his surprise at the fact that his fellow CIA agent speaks only Russian and not Ukrainian as well.

A second, related observation is that languages other than English have become present in more and in longer dialogue scenes than previously, which goes hand in hand with a more liberal use of subtitles. Apart from the already mentioned *Peacemaker*, this tendency is illustrated by films such as Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* (which includes French dialogue), Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic* (Mexican Spanish) and, most strikingly, Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (Aramaic and Latin), probably the first mainstream (and commercially successful) Hollywood movie with no English dialogue whatsoever. Although *The Passion of the Christ* represents a special case in that dialogue is rather sparse and the Passion narrative is well known by large parts of the audience, the way is certainly paved for more multilingual movies in the near future.

### *Conclusions*

What appears to be problematic about certain Hollywood depictions of multilingualism is not so much the fact that certain characters have marked accents whereas others don't, nor that some are rhetorical geniuses who speak five languages whereas others are portrayed with broken English only, nor even that no movie ever shows Richard Coeur de Lion speaking Norman French. After all, there is no doubt that in real life, there are considerable interindividual differences of multilingual acquisition, competence and practice. Gauvin (11f) suggests that fictional texts should refrain from representing multilingualism in an ethnographic sense of strictly faithful mimesis, in order to avoid a simple perpetration of diglossic or polyglossic hierarchies in society. However, if film producers, directors and screenwriters decided to erase these differences in their representational practice by screening all dialogues in a

single standard variety only, this would hardly be appreciated by critics, linguists and the general audience. The discussion of *The Pianist* shows how a simplification of the multilingual reality reinforces rather than questions problematic linguistic divisions. Moreover, what does come across as a questionable strategy in many Hollywood movies is the frequent representation of multilingual discourse phenomena as narrative devices with very specific and often negative connotations. This is not to say that authors of fiction should refrain from these devices, as Lippi-Green observes:

It seems that even the highest standards in film making cannot be free of the social construction of language. And perhaps there is nothing that can or should be done about this process in its subtlest form. It is, after all, part of the social behaviour which is of interest to art as the representation of the human condition. (103)

Still, if other languages served the aims of realism to an equal extent, this would result in a more accurate reflection of real-life multilingual realities. The demand for realistic representation by members of minorities is not a new phenomenon, as Ross notes about a black television audience in the UK:

What black minority viewers want is not something huge and extravagant but something small and relatively easy to provide: the opportunity to see themselves, in all their diversity, portrayed credibly on that most powerful of media – television. (146)

The tendency towards showing more non-English dialogue mentioned above should then ideally be combined with a *normalisation* of multilingual speech situations in the movies – more normal and everyday uses of non-standard, non-native or non-English varieties. This recommendation is by no means limited to multilingualism in fiction; rather, it tallies with conclusions drawn from other areas of multilingualism research. From the perspective of language economics and policy analysis, Grin defines and advocates normalisation as “*making the use of a particular language ‘normal’*” (201ff; Grin’s emphasis), while Kelly-Holmes, in her analysis of multilingualism in advertising, criticises the absence of characters who “speak some other language with no explanation, just as one randomly picked member of the greater public” (175). In this spirit, what one would like to see more often in the movies are certainly more Mexican friends recalling their dreams in Spanish, as in *Traffic*, possibly

more French women discussing the virtues of attractive Scotsmen in French, as in *Braveheart*, and definitely more piano lessons as in *The Peacemaker*, where Serbian piano teachers instruct their pupils – in Serbian.



## References

- Arditty, Jo and Marie-Thérèse Vasseur. "Que font les gens de leurs langues?" *Plurilinguisme = Mehrsprachigkeit = Plurilingualism*. Ed. Lorenza Mondada and Simona Pekarek Döhler. Tübingen: Francke, 2003. 111-122.
- Blake, N.F. "Afterword". *English Literature and the Other Languages*. Ed. Tom Hoenselaars and Marius Buning. Amsterdam; Atlanta, Georgia: Rodopi, 1999. 323-341.
- Brugnolo, Furio and Vincenzo Orioles, eds. *Eteroglossia e plurilinguismo letterario II: Plurilinguismo e letteratura*. Roma: Il Calamo, 2002.
- Büchi, Christophe. "Sisyphus im Klassenzimmer: Weshalb Deutsch in der Westschweiz schlecht gedeiht." *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 1 December 2003: 21.
- Busch, Brigitta. *Sprachen im Disput: Medien und Öffentlichkeit in multilingualen Gesellschaften*. Klagenfurt/Celovec: Drava, 2004.
- Coupland, Nicolas. "Stylised Deception." *Metalanguage: Social and Ideological Perspectives*. Language, Power and Social Process 11. Eds. Adam Jaworski et al. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998. 249-274.
- Crystal, David. *The Language Revolution*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004.
- Durrer, Sylvie. *Le dialogue dans le roman*. Paris: Nathan Université, 1999.
- Ebert, Robert. *The Bigger Little Book of Hollywood Clichés: A Greatly Expanded and Much Improved Compendium of Movie Clichés, Stereotypes, Obligatory Scenes, Hackneyed Formulas, Shopworn Conventions, and Outdated Archetypes*. London: Virgin, 1999.
- European Commission. *Europeans and Languages: a Eurobarometer Special Survey*. 2001. [http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang-policy/consult/ebs\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang-policy/consult/ebs_en.pdf).
- Forster, Leonard. *The Poet's Tongues: Multilingualism in Literature*. Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1970.
- Gauvin, Lise. "Introduction." *Les langues du roman: Du plurilinguisme comme stratégie textuelle*. Ed. Lise Gauvin. Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Québec, 1999. 7-14.
- Goetsch, Paul, ed. *Dialekte und Fremdsprachen in der Literatur*. Script-Oralia 2. Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1987.
- Grin, François. *Language Policy Evaluation and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Hoenselaars, Tom and Marius Buning, eds. *English Literature and the Other Languages*. Amsterdam and Atlanta, Georgia: Rodopi, 1999.



- Irvine, Judith T. and Susan Gal. "Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation." *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*. Ed. Paul V. Kroskrity. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2000. 35-83.
- Kelly-Holmes, Helen. *Advertising as Multilingual Communication*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Kobus, Isabel. *Dialog in Roman und Film: Untersuchung zu Joseph Loseys Literaturverfilmungen The Go-Between und Accident*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998.
- Kozloff, Sarah. *Overhearing Film Dialogue*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- Lippi-Green, Rosina. *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Mace, Renate. *Funktionen des Dialekts im regionalen Roman von Gaskell bis Lawrence*. Script-Oralia 3. Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1987.
- Mares, Petr. "Mnogojazychnaja Kommunikatsija i Kinofilm." Transl. Ju. E. Stemkovskaja. *Jazyk kak Sredstvo Transljatsii Kultury*. Ed. V.A. Vinogradov and A.I. Novikov. Moskva: Nauka, 2000. 248-265.
- McArthur, Tom. *The Oxford Guide to World English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Myhill, John. *Language in Jewish Society: Towards a New Understanding*. Multilingual Matters 128. Clevedon etc.: Multilingual Matters, 2004.
- Naficy, Hamid. *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Pablé, Adrian. "Archaische Dialekte im Vergleich: Das Frühamerikanische in filmischen Adaptionen von Nathaniel Hawthornes *The Scarlet Letter* und Arthur Millers *The Crucible*." *Dialektübersetzung und Dialekte in Multimedia*. Ed. Irmeli Helin. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004. 75-92.
- Reimer, Robert C. "Self-Inflicted Wounds? Why German Enrollments are Dropping." *Globalization and the Future of German*. Ed. Andreas Gardt and Bernd Hüppauf. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004.
- Ross, Karen. "In whose Image? TV Criticism and Black Minority Viewers." *Ethnic Minorities and the Media: Changing Cultural Boundaries*. Ed. Simon Cottle. Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2002. 133-148.
- Schiffmann, Harold. "Linguistics, Anthropology and Popular Culture." 2001. <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~haroldfs/popcult/moviestuff-/KINGVOL3.HTM>.

- Schmitz-Emans, Monika, ed. *Literatur und Vielsprachigkeit*. Hermeia 7. Heidelberg: Synchron, 2004.
- Sebba, Mark. "Writing Switching in British Creole." *Multilingual Literacies: Reading and Writing Different Worlds*. Ed. Marilyn Martin-Jones and Kathryn Jones. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2000. 171-187.
- Sollors, Werner, ed. *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- Stahlecker, Markus. *Steven Spielbergs "Schindlers Liste": Eine Filmanalyse*. Aachen: Shaker, 1999.

### Relevant Films

- Braveheart*. Dir. Mel Gibson. Screenplay by Randall Wallace. Icon Productions, 1995.
- Clear and Present Danger*. Dir. Phillip Noyce. Screenplay by Donald Stewart. Paramount Pictures, 1994.
- Dark Blue World*. Dir. Jan Sverák. Screenplay by Zdenek Sverák. Biograf Jan Sverák et al., 2001.
- Euro Pudding*. Dir. Cédric Klapisch. Screenplay by Cédric Klapisch. Bac Films et al., 2002.
- Goldeneye*. Dir. Martin Campbell. Screenplay by Jeffrey Caine and Bruce Feirstein. United Artists, 1995.
- The Hunt for Red October*. Dir. John McTiernan. Screenplay by Larry Ferguson. Paramount Pictures, 1990.
- The Passion of the Christ*. Dir. Mel Gibson. Screenplay by Benedict Fitzgerald and Mel Gibson. Icon Productions, 2004.
- The Peacemaker*. Dir. Mimi Leder. Screenplay by Michael Schiffer. DreamWorks SKG, 1997.
- The Pianist*. Dir. Roman Polanski. Screenplay by Ronald Harwood. Studio Canal +, 2002.
- Schindler's List*. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Screenplay by Steven Zaillian. Amblin Entertainment; Universal Pictures, 1993.
- The Sum of All Fears*. 2002. Dir. Phil Alden Robinson. Screenplay by Paul Attanasio. Paramount Pictures, 2002.
- Tomorrow Never Dies*. Dir. Roger Spottiswoode. Screenplay by Bruce Feirstein. United Artists. 1997.
- Traffic*. Dir. Steven Soderbergh. Screenplay by Stephen Gaghan. Initial Entertainment Group, 2000.