

Representing and Experiencing Transnationalism: Germanic Languages and Cultures in Global Perspective

Conference Report (UW-Madison, 25-26 March 2010)*

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The 2-day conference *Representing and Experiencing Transnationalism: Germanic Languages and Cultures in Global Perspective* was held at the University of Wisconsin. Madison, organized by Kristine Horner (University of Leeds) in cooperation with Cora Lee Kluge (Director of the Max Kade Institute, University of Wisconsin-Madison), Venkat Mani (University of Wisconsin-Madison), Antje Petty (Max Kade Institute, University of Wisconsin-Madison), Joseph Salmons (University of Wisconsin-Madison) and the Max Kade Institute.

The conference addressed the phenomenon of rapid movement of people and information which has in recent years exerted an increasing pressure on the nation state, together with ideals of linguistically and culturally homogeneous societies. The broad scope for interpretation which the central theme offered, was reflected in the diversity of methodological approaches, with papers exploring transnationalism from a theoretical perspective as well as case-studies from linguistics, film and literary studies. The conference raised issues about the relationship between language, culture and transnationalism – with specific reference to Germanic languages – bringing together scholars in the fields of sociolinguistics, social anthropology, social geography, film studies, cultural studies and literary studies.

In the introduction JOE SALMONS (University of Wisconsin, Madison) stressed that the analysis of language contact phenomena which result from processes of migration and go along with identity shifts has a long tradition within the department's research practice. VENKAT MANI (University of Wisconsin, Madison) added that transnationalism is not to be understood as a recent phenomenon, as the exchange of narratives took place before the nation state made its appearance. As a result, processes of globalization and decolonization serve as an impetus for critique, for stepping out of the restrictive frame of the nation state and upsetting its monolingual order. KRISTINE HORNER (University of Leeds) emphasized that transnationalism can be understood as a research paradigm which offers insights into the scope of the nation state and the ways in which it is called into question by sustained ties of persons, networks and organizations across the borders of multiple nation states.

The first session concentrated on Language, Education and Transnationalism. In the first paper CAROL PFAFF (Freie Universität Berlin) demonstrated a number of preliminary results from a recent research project on later language development of children with and without 'migrant' background. Among the most frequent language contact phenomena in the texts in three languages, Turkish, German and English written by secondary school pupils Berlin were attrition phenomena in Turkish and a transfer from German orthographic conventions to Turkish. In contrast, few language contact effects were to be observed in English, apart from transfer from German orthography, word order and lexicon which occurred in texts written by students with a

German as well as a 'migrant' background. Further analysis of the research data will include a quantitative analysis of linguistic and social factors.

JANET FULLER (Southern Illinois University, Carbondale) presented the findings of her study of a group of pupils from diverse national and ethnic backgrounds in a German-English bilingual program in Berlin. Her paper highlighted how such phenomena of elite bilingualism in a country which otherwise upholds a normative ideology of mono-lingualism affect the social identities of children. One of the most frequent phenomena she observed was a flagged code-switching and a self-conscious use of English which served the children as a means to demonstrate their status as a 'good student' and thus reinforced the ideology of mono-lingualism.

The second session which examined instances of transnationalism in contemporary literature and film was opened by VENKAT MANI (University of Wisconsin, Madison) who explored the complicated relation between anti-colonial nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Mani argued that in recent understandings of cosmopolitanism as conceived by Jürgen Habermas and Ulrich Beck the focus on 'space' and 'manner' has led to a regressive treatment of time. Due to the fact that the frame of reference for cosmopolitanism is the nation state, theorists fail to consider what it could mean for those for whom the nation state does not (yet) exist. These considerations were illustrated by a case study of the writings of Indian revolutionary Har Dayal (1884-1939) whose declarations of the superiority of British imperialism and colonialism over German and his simultaneous critique of pan-Islamism as organizational principle of transnational polities are at odds with traditional concepts of colonialism and its cosmopolitan critique.

HELEN FINCH (University of Leeds) examined instances of queer transnationalism in the works of East German author Antje Rávic Strubel. While traditional cosmopolitanism as epitomized by Thomas Mann's *Gustav Aschenbach* celebrates a utopian position of aesthetic spectatorship, the boundary-transgressing character of queer transnationalism such as in Rávic-Strubel's novel *Kältere Schichten der Luft* can destabilize hetero-normative concepts of gender as well as national identity. In this way, Finch, argued, the frequent geographical border-crossings in the texts serve as tropes of a form of disinheritance of the German uncomfortable past while avoiding the trap of affirming a new, queer, post-national identity and maintaining the tension between utopia and a troubled past.

In his paper on contemporary German literature and transnationalism STUART TABERNER (University of Leeds) argued that recent analyses of writers as transnational agents focus more often than not exclusively on 'minority writers' who are perceived as transnational per se. At the same time, a considerable number of texts by 'German-German' authors journeying back and forth between an imagined Germany and imagined spaces elsewhere is neglected. Based on this observation, Taberner suggested a number of aspects and phenomena which require further research: Germans traveling to places which are linked to Germany and the German colonial past / German diasporic consciousness; Germans traveling outside (as a means of dealing with the German past?); Transnational values: can German culture travel and what happens to it when it is 'translated'? Is there a German literary *Sonderweg*? Where does German literature locate itself between the universal and the particular?

PETRA FACHINGER(Queen's University, Kingston) analyzed representations of the Vietnamese in contemporary German culture. Drawing on texts by Yoko Tawada, Judith Hermann and Jana Hensel as well as the film *Lost Killers*, Fachinger analyzed how the stereotypical imagery which conceives of Vietnamese as predominantly connected to organized crime can be understood as a projection of German fears of change in the years following unification. These images as well as stereotypical perceptions of Asian women as exotic submissive sexual objects contribute to the construction of the Vietnamese as the inscrutable ultimate other to Western consumer culture in the German cultural imaginary.

In a case-study CHRIS HOMEWOOD (University of Leeds) examined Uli Edel's film *Der Baader-Meinhof Komplex* as an example of a recent tendency towards a trans-national orientation of German cinema. Traditionally linked to art house film making, German cinematic productions since unification steer towards an appropriation of Hollywood aesthetics and reduce their 'German-ness' in order to make their products more appealing to an international audience. Homewood explored how *Der Baader-Meinhof Komplex* makes use of prosthetic memory by tapping into a transnational pool of memories of 1968, thus minimizing the role of the Nazi past as well as blanking out ethical issues linked to terrorism.

A second paper on the transnational turn in German cinema was presented by PAUL COOKE (University of Leeds). He explored new transnational modes of film production in Europe and highlighted how issues of identity politics, ethnicity and national allegiance have become a major concern in contemporary European cinema. Using Fatih Akin's *Gegen die Wand* as a case study Cooke argued that German film makers have started to re-imagine the nation state, giving rise to more hybrid formations of identity. Akin's film is in the tradition of Fassbinderian melodrama but the film deconstructs its own melodramatic form by playing two traditions against each other. The musical performances in front of the skyline of Istanbul serve as Brechtian distancing effect and thus provide a commentary on a clichéd picture of a Western gaze on Turkey, an exoticism that is no longer sustainable in the face of transnational realities in Hamburg. Yet Cooke suggested that the reception of the film showed that even if films transgress the national paradigm they are often received within it, so that the success of the film provided an opportunity to show off the credentials of Germany as an enlightened multicultural society.

The fourth session focused on Language Contact and Transnationalism. ROBERT HOWELL (University of Wisconsin, Madison) examined how traditional language histories tend to neglect the influence of immigration on the development of modern varieties. Howell demonstrated how in the case of Dutch, language historians only considered Southern Dutch immigrants to Amsterdam while ignoring Scandinavian, German and Northern Dutch immigrants. As a result of this single-minded focus, certain language features such as the German / eastern Dutch reflexive pronoun 'zich' were only ascribed to borrowing from privileged texts. These notions of a 'language change from above' served to create the myth of a Dutch standard language that evolved exclusively from Dutch or 'high' influences from other languages.

In a collaborative paper, JOSEPH SALMONS (University of Wisconsin, Madison), MARK LIVENGOD (University of Wisconsin, Madison) and MIRANDA WILKERSON (Vinnyskiy In-Service Teacher Training Institute) presented findings from their collaborative research on how the German-speaking immigrant community in Wisconsin negotiated the learning of

English and the loss of its imported language over time and space. Using U.S. Census data on reported language ability from 1910 to 1920, the researchers constructed a cartographic representation of language ability and tracked changes over this period.

MARK LOUDEN (University of Wisconsin, Madison) examined in the last paper of the session the shared characteristics of 'safe' minority languages such as the languages of conservative religious sects (all derived from German) that are not conceived as 'endangered languages'. These minority languages are vibrant, growing and widely spoken although they do not enjoy any legal protection or official status. Louden argued that what these languages have in common is that they are highly charged markers of (religious) group identity that is seen as threatened by a worldly outside. While these minority languages are immune from prescriptive norms of linguistic purity, they serve the respective religious groups as tangible markers of their distinctiveness in the diverse societies in which they reside.

In the fifth session, two papers examined instances of transnationalism and cultural production. LORIE A. VANCHENA (University of Kansas) concentrated on the elegy 'Der Untergang' by Prussian-born historian and journalist Reinhold Solger (1817-1866). Having participated in the revolutionary movement of 1848-49 Solger fled to England and eventually emigrated to the United States. His didactic poem in the tradition of Hesiod predicts the demise of Europe due to its political backwardness and praises America as a promise of freedom, thus providing a valuable insight into processes of cultural transfer of political ideas.

A second case study of phenomena of cultural transfer was presented by STEVEN HOELSCHER (University of Texas, Austin) who examined ethnic landscapes and, in particular, the Swiss heritage culture in New Glarus 'Little Switzerland'. Hoelscher suggested that these hyper-realist displays of ethnic heritage are no mere ersatz but rather sites of ongoing construction in which immigrants develop their own aesthetic values rather than measuring things against the standards of their 'point of origin'. In this way, the trans-national ethnic landscapes are the contingent result of processes of negotiation of what is authentic.

The last session explored European phenomena of transnationalism. JANE WILKINSON (University of Leeds) examined two examples of cross-border cultural production in the German-Polish border region, the literary cruise along the Oder in 2004 and the annual street theater festival ViaThea in the border towns of Görlitz and Zgorzelec. Based on Bhaba's concept of the liminal space which opens the possibility of a cultural hybridity beyond fixed identities, Wilkinson argued that both cultural events play with the idea of a borderless space but actually fail to transcend or remove the borders.

Linking scholarship in language policy to citizenship studies KRISTINE HORNER (University of Leeds) discussed language testing as a transnational phenomenon in the final paper. Horner explored the significance of shifts in language policy and citizenship requirements in trilingual Luxembourg where a recent discourse of endangerment has led to efforts to construct Luxembourgish as the language of integration. Learning Luxembourgish has thus been constructed as a right for the citizens but a duty for immigrants. This process has been accompanied by a shift in official policy: the aim of assimilation has been replaced by a duty of integration that immigrants have to fulfill. These recent shifts in immigration policies reflect the

fact that transnationalism and flexible citizenship remain bound up with the negotiation of fears of losing of what is perceived as the 'autochthonous' culture.

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