



Un, Dos, y Juntos: Interpretation, Incommensurability, and Linguistic Evolution in Juana Adcock's "Thirteen Ways of Inhabiting a Language"

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ABSTRACT

Domínguez, Saussy, and Villanueva have commented that "To think for too long about macaronics and creoles causes one to doubt that languages [...] exist. Perhaps between any two languages there is a zone of mutual borrowing, a zone where translation is superfluous or always erroneous" (87). The Wave model of linguistic development proposed by Schuchardt and Schmidt suggests that we should understand languages not as discrete entities evolving through divergence from common ancestors, but as connected points on a spectrum stretching across the world. Like the people who speak them, languages are always in dialogue with each other as they develop through their interactions with the Other. This development through interaction often comes in the form of acts of non-translation as much as translation. We see this in the continuous historical exchange of loan words between languages, which sees a glacial non-translation gradually alter a language as new words and phrases are incorporated. It is partly for this reason that theorists such as Emily Apter have argued that non-translation has an even greater capacity to build bridges between languages, and thus people, than translation, as subjects are forced to engage with the foreign directly rather than experience it after it has been made familiar.

This article explores two models for linguistic development (the Tree and Wave models) as well as currents in so-called "non-translation studies" through a close reading of "Thirteen Ways of Inhabiting a Language" (2019) by the Mexican poet-translator Juana Adcock. In particular, I argue that Adcock uses non-translation to demonstrate the extraordinary interconnectedness of languages and the impact this has on the way they develop and relate to one another. Ultimately, I conclude, in agreement with Domínguez et al., that the borders between languages (like many borders) are socially constructed and that embracing the entangled nature of human languages through non-translation can be immensely productive.

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Due to the historical presence of Gaelic, Scots, and English, the linguascape of Scotland has long been multilingual. The three languages have, however, rarely coexisted in simple harmony. Roderick Watson writes that

questions of language and identity still haunt the work of contemporary Scottish writers. One might even argue that the linguistic pluralism inherent in Scottish cultural identity [...] made writers in Scotland peculiarly sensitive to how subjectivity is simultaneously constructed and undone in the precisions of language and in the tangled translations and transitions [...] between utterance and reception. (163)

Moreover, he notes that there is a “growing recognition” that “‘Scottish’ literature might even be written in languages other than English, Gaelic or Scots” (163). Though there is an ever-growing list of writers in Scotland pushing beyond the restrictions of monolingualism (and indeed traditional bi- and trilingualism), this article focuses on the case of poet and translator Juana Adcock.

Adcock’s background as a multilingual and professional translator has influenced the manner in which her writing interrogates the themes that Watson identifies of subjectivity’s close ties with language, and the influence of the, at times, troubling gap between utterance and reception on the forging of relationships between subjects. In her second collection, *Split*, in particular, Adcock employs translingualism (“the practice of writing in more than one language or in a language other than one’s native tongue”; Kellman vii) and non-translation (the strategic refusal to translate) to explore the interconnectedness of languages and the ways they develop through the interconnectedness of the people who speak them. In what follows I use Adcock and her work – in particular her poem “Thirteen Ways of Inhabiting a Language” – to highlight the presence in Scotland of writing in languages beyond our historical trilingualism, and demonstrate the complex analytical avenues that the study of contemporary translingual Scottish poetry offers.

I begin by providing some context for Adcock and her writing. I argue that her background as a translator is tightly woven into her approach to languages and poetry. In the three sections that follow I work through some examples from “Thirteen Ways of Inhabiting a Language” to highlight how Adcock’s translingual poetry offers exciting insights into her conception of language, particularly in a Scottish context. First, I discuss how the poem unpicks the relationship between sign and referent to foreground the presence of interpretation in all communication. I then move on to analyse how the poem suggests that absolutism regarding the separation of languages and their positioning in a hierarchy of validity (frequently manifesting in assertions of “right” ways of speaking) emerges from fears regarding the perceived incommensurable gap between some languages. In this poem and Adcock’s wider work there are moments when misaligned interpretations and the breakdowns they cause in communication have the potential for violent ends. I finish, however, by examining how – despite acknowledging the observable divisions between them – the poem ultimately presents a vision of languages (and their speakers) as more connected than they first seem. In this outlook the aforementioned gaps become opportunities to shift perspectives rather than obstacles blocking our view of other ways of understanding the world.

ADCOCK: TRANSLATOR AS POET, POETRY AS TRANSLATION

Juana Adcock was born in the West Midlands of England to a Mexican mother and an English father. At the age of 6, she and her family moved to Monterrey, Mexico, where her father worked as a translator. Adcock would follow in his footsteps, working both for his translation agency and as a freelance translator. It was in her freelance work that she began performing literary translation. This work has ranged from translations of novel-length texts such as Julia Navarro’s *Historia de un canalla* (as *The Story of a Sociopath*); co-translations alongside Lucy Greaves and Sophie Hughes; and, most recently, a translation of *The Dogs Dreamt* by the Mè’phàà poet Hubert Matiúwàà.

She moved to Glasgow to complete the Creative Writing MLitt at Glasgow University, citing, among other things, the aforementioned “linguistic variety of Scotland” (Rothlisberger) as a reason for moving. She has remained in the city ever since. Once in Glasgow she began

experimenting with the Scots language, notably in her collection of Spanish translations of poems by the Scottish poet and translator Alexander Hutchinson, *Gavia Stellata* (2015), which was published just days before Hutchinson died of pancreatic cancer. The literary encounter between these two poet-translators (particularly its situation in the Scots language) provoked Adcock to question her approach to languages and translation: “he had this really over-the-top, maximalist, humorous, amazing way of piling things on top of each other and creating this amazing music. Translating that, I found myself wanting to invent a new kind of Spanish language” (Brown). Thus Adcock drew on her own north-eastern Mexican dialect, which she describes with an ambivalent equivocation, characteristic of her work more generally: “it’s just a way of talking, like the way your aunties would talk, and the way they would maybe not pronounce certain syllables, or use certain turns of phrase, or the accent itself has a certain sing-songyness to it as well” (Brown). The limitations of standard Spanish that she encountered in trying to translate Hutchinson’s Doric (a north-eastern dialect of Scots) saw Adcock utilising dialect, vernacular vocabulary, and changes in register to capture the linguistic nuances of the source text in her translation. Adcock’s deployment of multiple languages in her poetry makes it easy to define as multilingual, but the capacity she sees in Hutchinson for linguistic variation even within one language (Scots) taps into the notion (as argued by Steven G. Kellman) that most writers are multilingual, or at least isolingual (writing in a single language/register but with access to others), rather than purely monolingual (Kellman 10–11). Hutchinson’s poetry can be viewed as multilingual even as he remains within the bounds of Doric because of the capacity for linguistic variation to exist within the language.

Though she was already playing with translingualism, Adcock’s first collection, *Manca* (2014), was written in Spanish. This collection, written from Scotland in response to the violence of Mexico’s war on drugs, was Adcock’s attempt to process “a tremendous sense of impotence, and some amount of guilt as well, for being somewhere that was safe and relaxed and nice, while all my friends and family were immersed in this completely different reality” (Brown). In this regard, *Manca* allowed Adcock to translate the chaos of Mexico’s war on drugs and the complex feelings it stirred in her from across an ocean into something expressible.

It was a small attempt to understand that reality and transform it, if only on the page [...] Poetry is a good tool for dealing with what doesn’t make sense and therefore cannot be spoken of in logical terms, or cannot be put into a narrative with a neat and tidy ending. (“An Interview”)

Adcock attempted to translate the senselessness of the violence into something meaningful by pinning it down in poetry or, more accurately, by using the open-endedness of poetry to escape the need to pin it down.

Her English-language debut, *Split*, was published in 2019. Meditations on the meaning of violence in Mexico’s war on drugs are still present here, particularly in poems such as “Juárez / Ecatepec” which confronts the crisis of femicide (in Mexico and worldwide) as well as the dehumanisation required to inflict mass violence: “Wake up grandmother / wake up grandfather / wake up 43 / wake up 49 / wake up 22 / wake up 72 / wake up 193” (43). This collection is far more explicitly concerned with language and Adcock’s relationship to it as both a translator and a poet. *Split* begins with “The Serpent Dialogues”, inspired by a real confrontation with a snake that provoked Adcock to think about her relationships with various Others and the (in)commensurability of communication that characterises them. Elsewhere the translator side of her poet-translator title is more emphatic, such as in “The Task of the Translator”, which adapts Walter Benjamin’s essay of the same name. Adcock uses poetry to touch on the purpose of a translator in a more open-ended manner than is possible in more rigid scholarly writing. Here we once again see Adcock using the medium of poetry as a tool of translation, this time translating sentiment from academic to creative writing.

Of course, Adcock’s poetic translation of Benjamin’s essay almost entirely transforms it (semiotically, at least), and we should remember that as soon as any translator becomes involved in the communicative process they have an influence on the meaning being transmitted, because translation is “an interpretive act” that involves “the inscription of one interpretive possibility among others” (Venuti, *Translation* 4). Adcock’s “The Task of the Translator” foregrounds this active participation on the part of the translator in the generation of meaning by emphasising the choices being made in any act of translation: “One day: try / words on / one after the other / like rings; / another day: the first / ring chosen / a perfect fit” (85).

Venuti has rightly noted that the choice of ring (to continue Adcock's metaphor) is not always a decision made consciously. He writes, "Translators do in fact make many decisions automatically, without any critical reflection on the norms that constrain their work [...] translating will proceed amid conditions that remain preconscious or subliminal, even entirely unconscious" (*Translation* 99). Elsewhere, however, Venuti is sure to acknowledge that the translator's non-conscious choices are only part of the "full complexity of human behaviour" involved in the act of translation; an act that includes both "intended actions" and "a self-reflexive monitoring in relation to rules and resources (e.g. translation norms)" (*Translation* 7). Regardless, Adcock's careful approach to word choice in her translations is carried over into her poetry. Her immersion in the field of translation lends her a nuanced perspective on the relationship between words and meanings both within and between languages. As we will see, she is keenly aware of the fact that "Meaning is a plural and contingent relation, not an unchanging unified essence" (Venuti, *Translator's Invisibility* 14). As poet and as translator, Adcock understands that no language is a monolith when it emerges from many mouths. Her fascination with the ways a single language can be used variously by different speakers is seen foremost in *Split*'s final poem, "Thirteen Ways of Inhabiting a Language", but the poem is also interested in the ways that any individual can use one language in various ways.

"Thirteen Ways of Inhabiting a Language" is built of fourteen sections: the opening, labelled "on listening to my friends read Janet Paisley's poems in Scots" (94), followed by thirteen parts exploring the titular thirteen ways of inhabiting a language. Each of these parts is labelled in Scots, from "Yin: tae rest on" (95) to "Thirteen: fur witches, blue muins an baxters' add-ons" (102). As the opening suggests, this poem was written in response to Adcock asking her Scottish friends to send her WhatsApp voice messages of them reading Janet Paisley's Scots poems. She notes, "All hailing from Glasgow, and a lot more Scottish than I, / they read with a tentativeness that gives me permission to be playful" (95). The hesitancy of her Scottish friends to speak Scots released Adcock from her own anxieties about working with and in the language. She has called "Thirteen Ways of Inhabiting a Language" a "love poem to the Scots language" (Alberoni), but the poem also uses translanguaging to expose the artificiality of all language and, in doing so, detaches language from any national ownership. Adcock has as much right to use Scots and push it beyond its limits as her Glaswegian friends. If, as James Costa argues, "The main issue in contemporary Scotland as far as language is concerned is to determine who has the right to impose their own linguistic taxonomy" (5), then "Thirteen Ways of Inhabiting Language" is an important intervention. What emerges from the poem is a permissive rather than a possessive approach to language, an approach which, through the poem, Adcock suggests has always been key to the evolution of human communication.

INTERPRETATION: AGAINST SEMIOTIC/SEMANTIC SIMPLICITY

Throughout the poem's thirteen sections, Adcock playfully explores different ways of inhabiting a language while tracing the often dubious borders that separate one language from another. To achieve this she employs translanguaging to slip between languages both between and within lines. The first instance of this fluid combination of languages is found in the opening line of the first section, "Yin: tae rest on", where she writes "Uno: tae restar el resto. / Rest the rest y descansar" (95), in which she draws attention to the similarities between words in different languages such as "rest" and "restar". While (despite their semiotic similarity) "to rest" and "restar" are not semantically equivalent, the translation of "restar" as "to wrest" continues the pattern of phonetic equivalence from English to Spanish and back to English in an implied triple entendre. Additionally, Adcock highlights the homonymous relationship between the English verb "rest" and the noun "the rest" while comparing it to a similar relationship in Spanish between "restar" and "el resto", which, unlike the English, share phonetic and semiotic characteristics while remaining semantically distinct. This is a characteristic of translanguaging poetry identified by Alice Loda and Antonio Viselli, who write that "by choosing to cross languages, the poet shifts the focus away from conventional meaning and towards other methods of signification such as form and sound" (28). In playing with the phonetic similarities of these words across and within languages as well as showing how different words can share meanings, Adcock begins to unpick the connection between the semantic and the semiotic.

Due to the disconnect Adcock identifies between a word and what it refers to – that is, due to the fact that there is no inherent connection between any sign and its referent – our communicative process, like translation, is one of constant interpretation. As George Steiner puts it in *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, “a human being performs an act of translation, in the full sense of the word, when receiving a speech-message from any other human being” (48). No language, even if it is shared, can flawlessly convey meaning from one subject to another, because language itself is a flawed method of communication reliant on mimesis, on representation. Languages are systems of signs which indirectly represent the referent; thus those we speak to must interpret meaning from the words we use and the context in which we use them; they must translate it from us to them, even within a shared language. As Adcock puts it, “what we say isn’t actually contained only in the words. It’s not just the words, it’s actually the whole context surrounding the words [...] they contain so much more than what is just written on the page” (Rothlisberger). She uses these lines of “Thirteen Ways of Inhabiting a Language” to demonstrate why she believes that context is more important than text, namely because the former gives the latter its meaning.

She continues in this vein as she writes, “To forget one’s yang and reach / instead for yon” (95). Through reference to the Chinese “yang” Adcock implicitly conjures its counterpart, “yin”. She alters the Scots word for “one” (used in the title of this section) by recontextualising it and, in doing so, detaches the signifier from the signified. This again reduces the word to a noise, one made on opposite sides of the world to mean different things. Adcock removes ownership of the sound by flitting between both uses and reveals how arbitrary the connection between signifier and signified truly is. Here we can recall Mikhail Bakhtin’s image of the signifier/referent relationship as that of a ray of light being cast upon an object. As the ray of light (the word) moves towards the object (the referent) at which it is cast, it passes through a social atmosphere “filled with alien words, value judgments and accents” (Bakhtin 276). By the time the ray of light hits the object it has interacted with, it has been changed by the social atmosphere it passes through – Adcock’s “whole context surrounding the words”. Thus,

each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions [...] language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else’s. (Bakhtin 293)

In reaching for “yon” we leave ourselves and stretch out into that Other, to “That, those, yonder [...] a person or thing at some distance in time or space” (Dictionary of the Scots Language). The act of inhabiting a language (rather than simply translating it into our own) allows us to mingle with other ways of being and get closer to contexts outwith our own.

We do not need to go so far beyond our own way of perceiving the world when we are communicating in a language and register we are familiar with. In such situations our focus will be on the connotations of words or subtle nuances in enunciation, rather than the fundamental decoding of semantic meaning. The more separated we are from the Other with whom we are engaged in communication (be that by “Time, distance, disparities in outlook or assumed reference”; Steiner 48), the more difficult that reflexive translation becomes, until it requires a conscious effort, most obviously when we run up against the wall of a foreign language which we do not immediately understand. The more intimate we are with our communicative partner (the closer we are to yon), the easier the process becomes, as we are increasingly able to use a shared shorthand to communicate. In any act of communication we need not ask *if* translation is occurring, but *how much* or *what* is being translated.

INCOMMENSURABILITY: BORDERS AND CHECKS

The fact that translation is needed at all is proof that there exist between communication systems gulfs so great that a mediator is required in the form of a translator. The idea of monolingualism itself suggests that multilingualism exists – you cannot know that you exist in one language without also acknowledging the fact that there must then be other languages in which you *could* exist. As Kellman and Bakhtin suggest, any individual’s language always exists in relation to that of an Other. Just as the Self recognises itself in relation to the Other, “the unity of a language is represented always in relation to another unity. It is never given in and

of itself, but in relation to another, transreferentiality, so to say” (Sakai 83). So, we accept that multiple languages exist and that the translator must make choices about how to reconcile the differences between them, as well as whether the source or target language should be altered in the act of translation so as to preserve the meaning in and the experience of reading the original.

However, as Adcock explores in detail in *Manca*, these interpretive gaps that necessitate the existence of translation can prove dangerously incommensurable. This term was first introduced by the philosophers Paul Feyerabend and Thomas Kuhn to challenge previous understandings of scientific developments throughout human history. Contrary to the belief that scientific knowledge developed continuously as one large and internally coherent movement, Kuhn argued that the history of science was in fact characterised by periods of normalcy interrupted by revolutions that cause “paradigm shifts”. These revolutions create “incommensurable” gaps between those operating on the basis of what was understood before and after them (such as in the turn to heliocentrism after the Copernican revolution). Kuhn believed that in such instances, pre- and post-revolutionary scientists had such radically different understandings of the world that they were no longer able to productively communicate with one another:

Communication across the revolutionary divide is inevitably partial [...] the proponents of competing paradigms practice their trades in different worlds [...] practicing in different worlds, the two groups of scientists see different things when they look from the same point in the same direction. (Kuhn 149–50)

The relevance of this to our current discussion is that a similarly incommensurable gap is also often understood to exist between certain languages. These gaps are seen to cause interpretive breakdowns that derail the possibility of communication and mutual understanding.

Adcock explores how the semantic volatility of languages can lead to misinterpretation in “*Twa: tae be at odds, richt or wrang*”. This section begins, “In the old joke, being right was just a meringue” (96), a reference to the Scots pun: “Is that a cake or a meringue?” By punning on the English “a meringue” and the Scots “am a wrang?”, the joke sees the usually subordinate language toying with the dominant one. If the sentence is heard rather than read, then it becomes polysemic. Its meaning is indeterminate until we have checked whether the speaker is using Scots or English or, indeed, both. In reference to the opening line of Hugh MacDiarmid’s “The Bonnie Broukit Bairn” – “Mars is braw in cramassy” – Robert Crawford has noted that “the words ‘Mars’, ‘is’, and ‘in’ must be recognized by most readers as ‘Standard English’” (7), even though they are simply signs shared between English and Scots (here we might recall my assertion above regarding the labelling of the sections of Adcock’s poem that “Thirteen” is a Scots word). More specifically, and drawing from Bakhtin, Crawford argues that these shared Scots/English words “become double-voiced” (7) in the context of MacDiarmid’s poem. In “Thirteen Ways of Inhabiting a Language”, given the overtly translingual context, we could even go so far as to say that “meringue” becomes triple-voiced, since it is a loan word (on which more below) from French rather than a word native to English.¹ Perhaps more accurately – or, at least, more in the spirit of Adcock’s poetry – we might say that the translingual context that “a meringue” finds itself in totally removes it from association with any language in particular.

This potential for slippage between English and Scots highlights their entanglement; however, Adcock demonstrates how complacency regarding their mutual intelligibility can lead to confusion in the gap that Watson notes between “utterance and reception”. Despite their similarity, if you were only familiar with English, the Scots pun would be missed. As the pun requires knowledge of both Scots and English, it upsets the dominance of the latter. Moreover, the previous abstraction of phonetic signs from their national linguistic context also encourages us to consider the geographical and linguistic roots of these so-called “English” and “Scots” words. The interplay in the poem between the similarities and differences in Scots and English – the dialogue between them – subverts the established hierarchy and causes those paying attention to question the relationship between the languages; to ponder the possibility that “What we are dealing with, when considering Scots and English, are not two monolithic and

1 A similar argument could be made about “Mars” in MacDiarmid, given that it is a proper noun in Scots and English lifted verbatim from Latin.

distinct systems, but a range of varieties which sometimes diverge but nevertheless have much in common” (Corbett 6). Here we see why Loda and Viselli write that “trajectories of resistance and liberation” are at the core of translingual poetry (22).

Sometimes interpretive confusion is intentional and has low stakes, such as in a pun; however, on other occasions disruptions in the communicative chain through perceived incommensurability can be deadly. Adcock goes on:

But other days
 when the wrong ran and rang louder
 rancio de rigoris mortis:
 qué afán de estancias tersas
 dos al son
 de quién tiene la razón
 de quién tiene la canción
 más desdichada. (96)²

As this stanza continues we see that the alternative to communication is violent confrontation that can leave us “rancio de rigoris mortis”. When we focus on what we unreservedly believe to be right or wrong – be that a way of speaking, a way of seeing the world, or a way of living life – it can cause divisions between us that prove irreconcilable. Dialogue, on the other hand, can help us to get on to the same wavelength as another person, as in the phrase “dos al son”. This is exemplified in the next stanza as Adcock continues the sonic imagery, writing:

One two one two
 check check check
 yin twa yin twa
 check check check
 un dos un dos
 together
 un dos un dos
 juntos juntos juntos (96)

The Self and the Other; one language and another; un and dos collapse, leaving themselves “juntos”, “together”. They become more than the sum of their parts as thesis and antithesis join together in synthesis. Importantly, the fact that un and dos can join together does not mean that they are or have always been the same. Kuhn labels “the transfer of allegiance from paradigm to paradigm” a “conversion experience” (151). Like paradigm shifts in the sciences, the movement from one side of a seemingly incommensurable linguistic gap to another also involves a conversion experience that sees a transition from one (way of seeing/speaking about the) world to another. However, unlike in the case of scientific revolutions, having crossed that gap the knowledge of the new world does not negate the existence of the old. Rather, understanding the world through inhabiting (and shifting between) different languages opens us up to the idea that there is no single, authoritative way of viewing reality.

The notion that two languages can merge together in Adcock’s (or anyone’s) mind might suggest that languages are more fundamentally similar than different. Thus, the question becomes to what degree are languages separated at all? Or, as Naoki Sakai puts it, “Is language a countable, just like an apple or an orange and unlike water? [...] how do we allow ourselves to tell one language from others” (73). This will be different depending on which languages are being compared and how closely related they are in the first place. However, the way we differentiate between languages is often based on fictions of nationalism and the desire to consolidate identities. Translation can build walls around national identities and cultures as much as it can act as a bridge between them. It can sanitise and protect a reader from fully engaging with a foreign culture, like wearing a spacesuit to protect oneself from the noxious atmosphere of an alien world. In this way, counterintuitively, “translation is not only a border crossing but also and preliminarily an act of drawing a border, of bordering” (Sakai 83). In some cases translation can in fact reinforce incommensurability by stopping people from making

2 “But other days / when the wrong ran and rang louder / rancid with rigor mortis / what a desire for smooth stays / two people on the same wavelength / of who has the reason / of who has / the most miserable song”. Spanish translations from *Split* were graciously provided by Misha C. Gramelius.

the journey from one world to another themselves. Moreover, as Emily Apter notes in relation to Erich Auerbach's involvement in the Europeanisation of the Turkish humanities curriculum, the choice to translate can come from a logic of imperialism that seeks to institute one language, one way of viewing and living in the world, over another (194–5). As we will now see, however, Adcock complicates the idea that any language should be dominant over another by highlighting the fluid, interwoven manner in which they have developed throughout history.

EVOLUTION: WHAT IS LOST AS WE WANDER (AND WHAT IS FOUND)

At the heart of the debate between two of the major models for constructing the histories of linguistic development – Stammbaumtheorie (the Tree model) and Wellentheorie (the Wave model) – is a tension between division and conflation. The first model was developed by August Schelicher and takes the form of a family tree in which languages evolve from one generation to the next in a genealogical sequence. While still useful, this arboreal model has been criticised for viewing linguistic development solely through the lens of separation, as languages become isolated both from their progenitors and others which developed from the same roots. Alexandre François has commented that “trees exclusively represent language divergence, and fail to take into account contact-induced change, or convergence when reconstructing language history” (166). This focus on divergence means that cladistic tree models are not very good at representing similarities between languages except through common ancestors. The nodes on the tree become static, independent units that do not interact with each other except to divide. It is hard to represent the connections between languages that develop from shared retention (known as symplesiomorphy), parallel innovation (homoplasy), or contact-induced change (also known as horizontal transmission), which François calls “a powerful force of language change” (166). The genealogical model can reinforce a reductive view of the relationship between languages and vernaculars. Different languages (distinct despite their dialogic relationship with each other) are at risk of being framed in a hierarchy inherent to the arboreal metaphor of Stammbaumtheorie. Scots, for example, has been viewed as a subordinate offshoot of the dominant English language or, as James Costa – leaning into the genealogical metaphor – puts it, “the half-blood Prince, the shameful cousin of English whose legitimacy constantly needs to be proven or reasserted” (2). Stammbaumtheorie's understanding of linguistic development obfuscates the dynamic and perpetual development of any language in relation to others and the myriad ways each language is spoken in the mouths of each individual speaker.

This complexity is better captured by the alternative model (Wellentheorie), which was proposed by Hugo Schuchardt and Johannes Schmidt, and “questions the concept of separate languages with hard-and-fast boundaries and suggests something more like language as a continuum of dialects, each merging into the other” (Young 1211). This model was further developed by later theorists such as Nikolai Trubetzkoy, who believed that “all the languages of the world form an uninterrupted network whose links merge into one another – something like a rainbow” (Young 1215). Wellentheorie sees all languages as relating to each other, but not in a genealogical form of stadial evolution from a common ancestor as seen in Stammbaumtheorie. Wellentheorie depicts the interaction between and development of languages as dynamic, chaotic, and constant. Languages are not discrete and separate nodes restricted by nation but fluid, ever-changing things that reach across and dismantle borders. They do not simply develop by breaking off from one another, and even when they do separate they still mingle, moulding and influencing one another. This is because, as noted by Bakhtin, languages are driven by the people who speak them, and so change as they do – “it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!” (294). On a smaller scale each person's idiolect (“the linguistic competence of an individual speaker at a certain point in time”; François 168) influences those around them. Linguistic innovation occurs when individuals adopt new terms or manners of speaking into their own idiolect and then pass those on to others. Popular innovations will be adopted by more and more idiolects, until entire dialects and languages have been changed in a phenomenon called “propagation” or “linguistic epidemiology” (François 168). This process of innovation occurs between dialects and languages too, as changes shift across them like dominos falling or a wave passing through a body of water.

Towards the end of “*Twa: tae be at odds, richt or wrong*”, Adcock explores this capacity for people and languages to develop through their interaction through a discussion of her struggle to translate the Italian “confronto”:

There’s a word in Italian which I always struggle to translate: confronto. Sounds so much like confrontation which sounds so much like anger which sounds so much like a bull charging against the red. But in Italian, confronto means something midway between compare and contrast [...] In context: father and son had a lot of good confronto. Translation: they talked a great deal after dinner. Not in order to find out who was right, but in order to grow. (96–7)

The un and dos of the father and son join juntos via confronto. Through a discussion with the goal of growing rather than dominating, both emerge stronger than they entered. The incommensurable gap is bridged without forcing their difference to collapse into homogeneity. This can be seen as a microcosm of what, according to Wellentheorie, occurs when languages interact with one another. It is also relevant to note that this portion of “Thirteen Ways of Inhabiting a Language” is formatted as a block paragraph rather than a series of lines, breaking with the traditional typography of poetry. While describing her struggles with translating “confronto”, Adcock cannot help but draw aspects of the prosaic form into her poem, allowing the mediums to engage in confronto of their own. The poem’s formal pliability reflects that of languages themselves. That “Thirteen Ways of Inhabiting a Language” is improved – perhaps we should say, it is made more interesting – through the combination of forms reflects what Adcock suggests about the benefits of viewing languages as part of a swirling dialogue rather than a static, cladistic evolution.

Wellentheorie rejects the rigidity of Stammbaumtheorie and sees deviation from linguistic norms as vital for the continued development of a language. While “the discussion of good and proper language has never failed to be oppressive towards minorities who are perceived to deviate from the ‘standard’” (Sakai 74), the reality is that there is no objective right or wrong way of speaking. Indeed, it is in breaks from the “standard” (often following confronto with alternative ways of speaking) that a language grows. When we believe that acceptance into a national community should be conditional on the fiction of speaking or using a language the “right” way, we restrict ourselves and oppress others.

Adcock, however, is cynical about the somewhat idealistic notion that people might refrain from placing restrictions on the unconditional acceptance of the Other. She continues, “Who Are You? asked the caterpillar. But no, really, who *are* you. I’m very interested in *not* projecting my fantasies all over you, said no one ever” (97, emphasis in original). Translation, as noted by Venuti, could be seen as a form of projecting one linguistic system on to another, of “forcible replacement of the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text with a text that is intelligible to the translating-language reader” (*Translator’s Invisibility* 14). By refraining from translating certain words, Adcock allows her poem to become macaronic, letting the reader begin to cross over into new languages and ways of thinking by forcing them to engage with the contexts of alien words. Additionally, her attempt to translate “confronto” foregrounds its own failings. She acknowledges that her translation will only ever be partial and, having given an extended explanation for the word rather than an interlingual translation into a single word in English, she resorts to macaronics with “had a lot of good confronto”. This form of poetic translation is reminiscent of poems by Jen Hadfield such as “Gish” and “Hüm (noun)” (36, 38), which use poetry to offer more open-ended, emotional translations of words from Shetland dialect which she encountered in the mouths of those she met while living there. Adcock’s poem promotes translation’s ability to facilitate communication while also acknowledging its role in building barriers between people. Paradoxically, through her macaronic style and revelling in the failure to translate, she turns her entire poem into a form of extended translation.

César Domínguez et al. argue that “To think for too long about macaronics and creoles causes one to doubt that languages [...] exist. Perhaps between any two languages there is a zone of mutual borrowing, a zone where translation is superfluous or always erroneous” (87). As we have seen in Crawford’s example, this “zone of mutual borrowing” is particularly evident in languages that inhabit geographically intimate spaces such as Scots and English, but in “*Five: kin git the wark done*”, Adcock teaches the reader about how languages can interact across distances that may surprise us. “The Spanish word for work: *trabajo*, is to travail: to toil, labour,

laborar, lavoro. A traversing of fields of effort and pain. The word *travelling* [...] comes from the same root as *travail*" (98, emphasis in original). As she has previously, Adcock highlights the similarities between words in various languages (here English, Spanish, and Italian), but as she goes on, she suggests how those similarities came about. "The word *travel* replaced the Old English *faran* [...] A word literally travelling to its own demise via the pilgrimage routes [...] Words are such good travellers / they pick up meanings as they go" (98, emphasis in original).

This process of exchange can be seen in the adoption of loan words from one language to another:

If the foreign word subsequently takes, if it becomes the word in language B for the item we were trying to translate from language A, we speak of it as a "loan word".

The term is significant, because it is a lie: a loaned object is one you sooner or later have to give back to the giver. (Saussy 221)

However, when words are loaned from one language to another (such as "meringue"), they have a habit of staying there. Saussy believes that "Loan words are an opposite to translation in the following sense: with translation, interpretation always precedes the restatement; but with loan words, incorporation occurs without interpretation" (222). In this way loan words see languages influence each other through a form of glacial non-translation as they incrementally exchange words fully preserved in their original form. By avoiding the interpretive part of the communication process, loan words can more efficiently convey meaning. They are an embodiment of non-translation as a form of border crossing, as we see words literally moving across linguistic cultures. This capacity for incorporation without interpretation is why Kuhn "distinguish[ed] understanding what is said in a foreign language from translating it into one's own" (Sankey, "Incommensurability" 416). Using Adcock's terms, we might say that this is the distinction between inhabiting a language and having it translated for you. In later years Kuhn softened his incommensurability thesis to suggest that, while there was no neutral language able to mediate between paradigms, understanding was still possible between them (Sankey, "Kuhn's Changing Concept" 771). Paradigms could thus be both separate and connected; archipelagoes isolated above but connected below.

This is not to say that the process is a simple one. Saussy notes that "As long as it is still recognizable as such, the loan word is mildly shocking; it sticks out like a sore thumb, an *italicized* word or a new penny" (221). Once again, in "Thirteen Ways of Inhabiting a Language" the typography on the page reveals more about what is being discussed in its contents. Loda and Viselli write that in translingual poetry, the "ecology of the page can also enact a relationship of power between various elements [...] the presence of a *foreign* word can symbiotically complement and supplement meaning within a text, but it can also drastically eat away at its very core signification" (27). Unlike in her discussion of "confronto", the foreignness of these words (*trabajo*, *travelling*, *travail*, *travel*, *farán*) is emphasised through their italicisation. Having been met on a literal journey into the unfamiliar, they do not immediately assimilate nicely into the English that drives the poem. They shock, as they should, for they are not simply adding something new to the language but eating away at what is already present.

Moreover, simply adopting a word into one's idiolect does not make it our own. As Bakhtin put it, "the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language [...] rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own" (294). Therefore, it is possible that a freshly loaned word may "stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them [...] as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker" (294).³ This is because "Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others" (294). We might see this in a parent's attempt to use the youthful dialect of their child, or the presence of the word "woke" in the mouth of a GB News host as opposed to in its original African-American Vernacular English context.⁴

3 Note again the reference to typography and its capacity – literally or figuratively – to foreignise words, in this case through "quotation marks".

4 For a more detailed account of the latter, see Allen and Smith et al.

“Five: kin git the wark done” wonderfully explicates the notion of propagation in linguistic development by emphasising the material reality of language transmission and the grounding of any language in the real human beings who use it. Idiolects influence each other both within and between larger linguistic systems, because people are not restrained by the borders of nations that are often also used to define the borders of languages. As Robert C. Young argues, “Languages are borderless” (1212). Diana Sorenson has noted the fact that people are not static, but dynamic creatures (264). As we move, we bring things with us, from objects and beliefs to languages and viruses. Indeed, the rate at which COVID-19 was able to spread globally foregrounds exactly how easy this is in the twenty-first century, and brings new connotations to the description of propagation as linguistic “epidemiology”. Just like a language, it moves along trade routes and other major migratory passages; it spreads across imaginary borders; and as it mixes between different people it develops variants. Sorenson writes that “Objects have a dynamic social life that is not determined by their inanimate condition [...] Things may appear to be stable, but their meaning changes according to their location and to the relationship they establish with the subject” (266–7). Similarly, the language we take with us as we travel will change with us as we share it with others and have their language shared with us. Like words, we “pick up meanings as we go”.

CONCLUSION

“Thirteen Ways of Inhabiting a Language” could only have been written by Juana Adcock. It is saturated in her particular context: written in the languages she knows; influenced by her unique position as a poet and translator; and inspired by her personal preoccupations. Those who share her interests and experiences can find familiarity in the poem, but this is the familiar tinged by the foreign, by the alien context of an Other.

As Adcock demonstrates, the same is true of language. Inhabiting Scots – in her work with Alexander Hutchinson’s poetry for instance – forced her to rethink her approach to translation and changed how she viewed the language; both its relationship with other languages and the relationships between its various dialects. But her inhabitation of Scots alters the language too; Adcock’s presence within Scots infuses it with her comparative lens for viewing languages and positions it not as a dialect of English or an isolated Caledonian tongue, but as a dynamic language which stands alongside, influences, and is influenced by the languages encountered by Scots speakers today and throughout history. Inspired by the freedom granted to her by her Scottish friends’ hesitancy to use Scots, Adcock’s poem removes ownership over words and languages. They become decentralised and communal, setting the stage for her playfulness. Indeed, playful experimentation is, for Adcock, how languages grow in the first place; through the confidence of various speakers to experiment with and use language in their own way without fear of somehow erring.

Translingualism enables Adcock to unmoor words from their linguistic context and demonstrate the arbitrariness of the signifier/referent relationship. By breaking the semiotic/semantic binary she emphasises how vital interpretation is to any act of communication. Yet she refuses to be drawn into utopianism. Influenced again by her own experiences, she highlights how seemingly incommensurable gaps between selves can lead to violence. Interestingly, given her occupation, she does not shy away from discussing how translation can validate these gaps and reinforce them by stopping people from inhabiting unfamiliar contexts. She uses macaronics and non-translation to offer an alternative approach which encourages readers to reach for yon through a lot of good confronto. Indeed, in *“Thirteen Ways of Inhabiting a Language”* human history appears as an ongoing cycle of confronto, of exchange. Language development is understood as a constant process of revision and propagation driven by the movement of people and their encounters with alien contexts.

“Thirteen Ways of Inhabiting a Language” emphasises how both translation and non-translation can be acts of understanding and connection rather than simply acts of assimilation or isolation. Adcock’s perception of language is transgressive and permissive, and the poem is radical in the way it invites us to reconsider ourselves. Adcock foregrounds the fact that to read is to enter a dialogue with something outside ourselves. She reminds us that the division between Self and Other, between un and dos, is in many ways an illusion beneath which we are all, ultimately, juntos.

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