



## Metaphors of Multilingualism: Changing Attitudes Towards Language Diversity in Literature, Linguistics and Philosophy

by Rainer Guldin, London and New York, Routledge, 2020, pp. vii + 283, ISBN 978-1-138-60750-7 (hbk), £120.00/\$160.00

Natasha Lvovich

To cite this article: Natasha Lvovich (2021) Metaphors of Multilingualism: Changing Attitudes Towards Language Diversity in Literature, Linguistics and Philosophy, Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 42:6, 579-580, DOI: [10.1080/01434632.2021.1926832](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.1926832)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.1926832>



Published online: 25 May 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 14



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

## BOOK REVIEW

**Metaphors of Multilingualism: Changing Attitudes Towards Language Diversity in Literature, Linguistics and Philosophy** by Rainer Guldin, London and New York, Routledge, 2020, pp. vii + 283, ISBN 978-1-138-60750-7 (hbk), £120.00/\$160.00

The study of multilingualism and the discussion of multilingual identity and creativity – notably in literature and art – may not be possible without metaphor as a conceptual framework. Cognitive linguists have suggested that the human mind is naturally metaphorical, and that it creates conceptual blends when two cultural narratives are brought together, often idiosyncratically. We are aware of metaphors in diffuse contexts, niches and compartments of our interdisciplinary field. In a survey of foreign-language students, Claire Kramsch presented an array of metaphors of second-language learning, speaking and writing. These included exploring new dimensions of the body, acting out a role, and exploring strange terrains, cliff edges, caves and secret doors. As well, most of us are familiar with the autobiographical narratives of translingual writers that describe their mother and other tongues, often with the use of vivid metaphors – amputated limbs, skin grafts, and self-perceptions as lovers and adulterers among them.

In a work which is at once a monograph, a reference book and an encyclopedia of concepts, Rainer Guldin systematises, classifies, analyses and synthesises such metaphors of multilingual expression. He weaves together literary examples from many cultures with relevant philosophical perspectives, to produce a taxonomy of metaphor which is divided into categories dealing with bodies, family ties and spaces. Each is given a section of the book.

In Part 1 ('Bodies: Speaking in Tongues'), code-switching, code-mixing and literary multimodality are addressed from several perspectives. Special attention is given to the metaphors of 'mother tongue' and 'stepmother tongue', and to the concepts of native language and native speaker – now controversial subjects in the field. Guldin takes the matter back to the sixteenth century, and then on to the later work of Wilhelm von Humboldt, who connected language, nation and territory, and who saw national language as a circle, from which one can step only into another circle. Some attention is given here to Vilem Flusser's description of amoebae feeding on their surroundings, which echoes Adorno's ideas about foreign-derived words. As well, Guldin discusses Elias Canetti's autobiography, *Die Gerettete Zunge* ('The Rescued Tongue', or 'The Tongue Set Free'), which – besides the more obvious connotations for a multilingual writer – also describes a childhood fear of having one's tongue cut out. Other 'tongue stories' mentioned here include *The Woman Warrior* by Maxine Hong Kingston, Emine Sevgi Özdamar's *Mutterzunge*, Yoko Tawada's *Überseetzungen*, and *Borderland / La Frontera* by Gloria Anzaldúa. The 'eyes of language' are discussed in connection with Herta Müller's translingual work, where the metaphor captures her experience with the Romanian secret police.

A special place in this section is devoted to the description of a 'multimodal biographical approach' to language learning investigated by Brigitta Busch and Hans Jürgen Krumm. Here, 'language portraits' draw upon the metaphorical perception of colours by students, who are asked to colour a human figure based on their socio-cultural and linguistic identities. This kind of metaphor, blending colours with other senses, is called synaesthesia – exemplified in the case of the German-French writer and translator Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt, who spontaneously saw his languages in specific colours. Besides this example, however, Guldin does not discuss neuro-psychological synaesthesia in his book, which nevertheless is a creative feature for some multilingual writers, including Vladimir Nabokov (see the detailed discussion in Lvovich, 2012).

Part 2 ('Family Ties: Infidelity, Bigamy and Incest') takes us to an analysis of the relationships linking 'mother' and 'stepmother' tongues, national languages and territoriality. Guldin presents

some shocking information about the Third Reich, where the Nazis promoted the idea of a metaphorical connection among mother's milk, body and mother tongue, such that mother, child and language could only be protected by the powerful father(land). This dense metaphorical cluster has echoes in other nationalistic contexts; it can be seen, for instance, in the propaganda of the 'great and mighty' Russian language which began during the Soviet era but which remains popular today.

Other metaphors in this section involve grafting, hybridisation and the painful experiences of the discord, division, 'bi-gamy' and 'poly-gamy' experienced by multilingual writers. Here, Guldin emphasises two major works. One is Elizabeth Beaujour's seminal *Alien Tongues: Bilingual Russian Writers of the First Emigration*, with its interesting discussion of Elsa Triolet – a Russian married to a Frenchman – who saw her bilingualism in terms of betrayal and adultery, and who refused to have 'two husbands'. Similar concepts of linguistic adultery are discussed in Steven Kellman's analysis of the multilingual life of Ariel Dorfman, who (like Nabokov) wrote his memoir (*Heading South, Looking North*) twice: in his case, once in English and once in Spanish. Among the romantic and erotic metaphors discussed in this chapter are those found in Abdelkébir Khatibi's *Amour bilingue*, Julien Green's *Le langage et son double*, Raymond Federman's *Double or Nothing*, and in Nabokov's treatment of promiscuity and incest discussed by Beaujour.

Finally, in Part 3 ('Spaces: The Seas of Plurilingualism'), Guldin directly addresses the most essential metaphors of territoriality and national languages. He starts with the 1539 Ordinance of Villiers-Cotterêts, which called for the exclusive use of French in official legislation (versus Latin, that is), an effort supported by the writers and poets of *la Pléiade*. The thrust was reinforced after the revolution and remains in place. The dichotomy of centripetality and centrifugality in national languages, theorised by Karl Vossler and developed by Mikhail Bakhtin, is demonstrated in the context of Franz Kafka's talk on Yiddish and 'minor literatures' – where the latter are seen as the works of minority-language writers using 'major' languages in subversive ways. Many 'minority' writers who lived and wrote in the languages of empires produced such literatures.

In the work of Édouard Glissant, the Martinican philosopher and literary critic, the concept of an archipelago of creolisation stands for a new relational identity emerging in the varied cultural landscapes of the Caribbean and Central America. In this chapter we also learn about the coral imaginary, about mangroves and banyan trees, about sea and water metaphors. One significant 'vertical' metaphor, the familiar Tower of Babel, is reflected in the insightful title of an article by Alphons (or Alfons) Knauth: 'Reversible Figure: Ruin and Construction Site of Multilingualism' – which makes a perfect concluding line for my review of Rainer Guldin's fine book.

## Reference

Lvovich, N. 2012 "The 'Gift': Synesthesia in Translingual Texts." *L2 Journal* 4 (2). <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0k59250t>

Natasha Lvovich  
Kingsborough Community College, CUNY  
 natasha.lvovich@kbcc.cuny.edu

© 2021 Natasha Lvovich  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.1926832>

