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**Insights in Transnational Translation:
A case study in Robyn Rowland's Poetry
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Abstract

Robyn Rowland's poems about Turkey and its history are unique in their representations of a poet's perspective both from outside Turkey and from within the country as a foreign observer. Rowland's poetic depictions of the country she travels intensively are not only vivid presentations of landscape but also personal reflections on its history and culture. Although her poetry on Turkey functions as a passage to Turkey for readers in English, it also appeals to Turkish readers who wish to read about Turkey from a Western point of view, particularly in her poems on the Battle of Gallipoli, which depict historical events of great importance to both Turks and Australians. This study is an analysis of the process of translating Robyn Rowland's poems from English into Turkish in order to demonstrate the delicacy and particularity of translation, both linguistically and culturally. Poetry translation is not only the process of transferring the lexical meaning from one language to another; it also entails transferring the cultural and emotional meanings in the poetics of the target language. The objective of this study is to present analytically the translation of Robyn Rowland's poems into Turkish from syntactic, semantic and cultural perspectives.

Keywords: Robyn Rowland, poetry, translation

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Learning from a colleague that an Irish-Australian poet wanted her poems about the Gallipoli experience to be translated into Turkish, I first met Robyn Rowland via email in 2013. She sent me some of her poems that were not about the Great War, including "Bus Across Night to Göreme", "The Stretch of Love" and "Say Istanbul"¹, all of which are included in her recently published *Under this Saffron Sun /Safran Güneşin Altında*, her second bilingual book which I also translated.² With my first drafts of the poems she sent me completed, we met at a hotel in Tophane region in the city of Bursa. During our conversation on the choice of words

to properly convey the concept of love in one of her poems, which took up the entire afternoon, I told her I wanted to find her voice in Turkish, which, as Rowland told me later, marked the moment she decided I was the right person to translate her poems. This started the long process of translating two of her collections of poetry into Turkish.

This article aims to introduce and analyse the process of translating selected poems from *Under This Saffron Sun* and *This Intimate War Gallipoli / Çanakkale 1915* by studying the translations from linguistic, literary and cultural perspectives. This underlines the mutual semantic effect of translation on the poems in the different languages, and demonstrates that translating them is interwoven with a form of rewriting for both translator and poet. Poets are magicians of words. They have a passionate relationship with words and the world of meanings words evoke. Poets can create new worlds through poetry even when they write about something the reader already knows and experiences. At times, the reader's own experiences and emotions can appear, through the words of the poet, as if they come from a new or different place. This is how I felt when I read Robyn Rowland's poems on Turkey. Her observations and feelings during her travels introduced a new country to me. My homeland, where I was born, bred and where I live, became into a fantastic new world full of history, civilizations, immensely beautiful landscapes, love and friendship.

Readers of poetry often need a sense of observation almost equal to that of the poet. They also need the ability to grasp the meaning and connotations of the words that the poet uses. The multiplicity of meanings that a reader discovers is in no doubt dependent on the readers' world knowledge and experiences, as well as the background of their reading experience.

Above is my personal attempt to define how poetry is written, read and understood. Or at least, that's how I saw it until I read Robyn Rowland's poems. My intimate knowledge and experience of the land I thought I knew was not sufficient to understand what Rowland depicted in her poems on Turkey. Her poetry offered me a dual perspective: not only did they present a foreigner's viewpoint, but they also encompassed the standpoint of someone who could *feel* like a local. As a poet, Rowland writes both from outside and from within, and this dual perspective showed me the peculiar parts of culture I could not see in the land I live in.

Translators not only need an insightful knowledge of the language in which the poem is written both linguistically and culturally, but they also need to be fully acquainted with the target language culturally. Yet, to be conversant in both languages does not prove any efficiency in poetry translation. To be culturally conversant and acquainted with the poetry of two cultures is one of the fundamentals of poetry translation. My first venture into poetry translation was timid attempts to translate short poems from English into Turkish. As an academic in the field of English language and literature, I relied on my research background in English literature and my personal interest in Turkish poetry. This went on for some years as a pastime.

Poetry translation is a learning process. Once the translator has found the echo of the poet's voice in the target language, the rest is a struggle with grammar, the lexical meanings of words and syntax. Then there are the particular difficulties created by the differences in the morphological and syntactic structures of English, an Indo-European language, versus those of Turkish, an Altaic language. While English is categorised linguistically as an isolated language in which all the smallest morphological units of grammar, such as articles, participles, prepositions, auxiliaries and conjunctions are independently functional, and written and pronounced separately, Turkish is an agglutinative language in which all the

morphological and syntactic units, the participles, prepositions, articles and even conjunctions in some cases are spelled together, which may create sentences in one word:

e.g. What are you doing?

Ne yapıyorsun?

A four-word question in English above is translated in two words in the above example. The relation between the morphological units can be graphically shown as:

What are you do - ing?

Ne yap - (i)yor - sun

(i) functions as the blending sound between “yap” and “yor”

I am not a grammarian, but as a natural consequence of my interest in literary translation, I have attempted to draw the diagram above to visualise one of the simplest differences in the word order of both languages. As can be seen in the above example, when there are longer sentences and/or phrases, the shifts in the order of the words may be more complicated. Hence, it requires considerable effort and attention in poetry translation to use the right words in the same line of the poem to accurately convey meaning. Sometimes the number of the words and syllables might be lower or higher in the target language or the appropriate words and concepts could fall into different lines. This is where the learning process in poetry translation comes in. Each time I translate a new poem, the process teaches me, or rather forces me, to find new ways of placing the words in as close to the same line in the original as possible.

To begin with “The Stretch of Love”, the following is an attempt to analyse the translation of the first stanza of the poem:

When you were young and he said love is elastic
but everything has its breaking point, you decided to stay.
University was another world. He must have been thinking
of fishing-line, being a fisherman from the Island.
Strong, it can bear great weight but if the line is
caught around a rock or the current too fierce, it snaps.
He didn't want to lose you into the wide expanse
of land-locked towns. You knew a *great love* like yours
would never fail you. But his family had the sea
in their blood – being captains – and a fisherman's wisdom.

Sen gençken, aşk bir lastiğe benzer derdi
oysa her şeyin vardı kırıldığı bir yeri kalmaya karar verdin.
Bambaşka bir dünyaydı üniversite. Onunsa aklında
oltalar vardı, bir balıkçı olmak adada.
Güçlü bir olta, ağır yükler taşırdı, ama eğer olta
takılırsa kayalıklara ya da bir güçlü akıntıya, kopardı.
Seni yitirmek istemezdi geniş bozkırlarında
kıyısız kasabaların. Sen de bilirdin, seninki gibi bir *sevda*
yolda koymazdı seni. Fakat bütün ailesinin aklında balıkçılık
kanlarında deniz vardı, hepsi de – kaptan olarak – bilge birer
balıkçıydı. (Rowland, “Under This” 80–81)

In this poem Rowland recounts the love story of a couple from Bozcaada³ that highlights the importance of love in one's life-changing decisions. The first line begins with a conjunction: “When you were young”, which is translated as “Sen gençken”. The agglutinative structure of the Turkish language eliminates the conjunction “when”. It simply turns into “iken” which loses the initial letter when it is attached to “genç” (young). Hence, the three-word phrase “when you were young” turns into a two-word phrase “sen gençken” in Turkish.

During the translation process of Rowland's poems, I wanted to be as loyal as possible to the structure, as well as trying to echo her voice in Turkish. Thus, I attempted to keep each word on the correct line. Yet, loyalty does not always function to keep the words on the correct line, and keeping them in their original order was impossible due to the differences in the syntax of

both languages. This difficulty means making changes during translation to maintain the English lineation of the poem in the Turkish. Thus, opting for the translation of the idea instead of the lexical meaning was the best alternative. For instance, the phrase at the end of the third line “he must have been thinking” is translated as “onunsa aklında”. The analysis of this translation indicates the translation of the idea:

“He must have been thinking”; literal translation: “düşünüyor olmalıydı”.

“He must have been thinking”; published translation: “onunsa aklında”.

The preferred phrase “onunsa aklında” means “he had in his mind”, because the translation of “thinking” as “düşünüyordu” needs to be preceded by what one has been thinking about. Therefore, in the literal translation “of fishing line”, which appears in the fourth line, would have been moved to the third line. Instead, the preferred translation in its published form appears like this:

University was an - other world. He must have been thinking
Bambaşka bir dünya - (y) - dı üniversite. O - nunsa aklında
of fishing-line, being a fisherman from the Island.
oltalar vardı, bir balıkçı olmak adada

Translating the idea rather than the literal meaning at some points gave me the opportunity to place the words in same line as in the original. Despite this, it was not always possible to keep words in the same line. Below is the analysis of the seventh and eighth lines:

He did [not] want to lose you into the wide expanse
Seni yitirmek iste - mez - di geniş bozkırlarında
 of land-locked towns. You knew a great love like yours
kıyısız kasabalar - in. Sen de bilirdin, seninki gibi bir sevda

In the above example, “a great love”, which does not appear at the end of the line in the original poem is placed as the last word of the line in the translation. The reason is that “gibi”, the translation of “like”, follows the word whereas “like” precedes it. That is, “like yours” has to be translated as “seninki gibi” and this whole phrase functions as an adjective defining “a great love”. As an adjective, it has to precede “sevda” (a great love). Hence, the result is:

“Sen de bilirdin, seninki gibi bir sevda”

which would read literally like

“You knew, yours like a great love”.

Such differences in the word order of both languages add to the difficulty of placing the words in the same line as in the original. However, as translating Rowland’s poems turned into a passion for me, I also began to take pleasure from new inventions. In the eighth line, “land-locked” is translated as “kıyısız” which literally means “shore-less”. My preference to

do this stemmed from the word “karasal” which is a rough translation of “land-locked”, but “karasal” would not meet the sense of “kıyısız” (shore-less). The word “kıyısız” carries the sense of having no horizons, no hopes, no future prospects, and thus, I thought, it matches the required meaning in Turkish.

Another significant poem, “Bus Across Night to Göreme”, reflects how Rowland was impressed by the country, its culture and people during her travels across the land of Anatolia. In this poem, she describes a night journey on a bus in Turkey, which is a very common form of travel, since the country is vast and people prefer to travel overnight to save time the next day. The poet’s experience on a bus journey to Göreme overnight intensifies her relationship with the country’s culture, especially in her depiction of the bus journey itself and of intercity bus stops on the motorways that reflect the uniqueness of the experience:

Always happy moving toward, happy moving,
I am grateful for the tall young son beside me
full of the history of Troy, of hot *gözleme*,
fresh orange juice from road stops, where
the bus is washed clean as a mountain spring.
The steward has served cake and apple tea.
Tonight children on the bus speak quietly.
This is a place of patience and respect, for now,
as other country spaces once were. On this
overnight ride, no mobile phones, just silence,
faint hum of wheels, chirring engine vibrations.
Sleeping bodies bounce over potholes on soft springs.

Hep mutluyuz giderken, ileri giderken
minnettarım yanımda Truva tarihiyle dolu uzun boylu oğlum
her otobüsün dağ pınarlarında yıkanır gibi temizlendiği
duraklardan alınan sıcak gözleme ve portakal suları.
Kek ve elma çayı ikram etti muavin.
Bu gece çocuklar sessizce konuşur otobüste.
Burası sabır ve saygının yeri şimdi,
bir zamanlar başka köylerde olduğu gibi.
Cep telefonları yok bu gece otobüsünde.
Sadece sessizlik, tekerleklerin homurtusu, motorun titreşimi.
Uykulu gövdeler sarsılıyor su dolu çukurlardan geçerken.
(Rowland, “Under This” 32–33)

Here, another difference in the word order is observed. The first line fits into Turkish word order and presents no problems at all in the order of the words in the translation. However, the second line describes “the tall young son” who is “full of the history of Troy”. The phrase “full of the history of Troy” is an adjectival clause, which could follow the person that it describes when it is conjoined with a relative pronoun “who”. On the other hand, the adjectival phrase in Turkish must precede the person that it describes. Hence the result is:

I am grateful for the tall young son beside me

Minnettar - im yanımda *Truva tarihiyle dolu uzun boylu oğlum*

In the above example, the Turkish translation of the second line includes the phrase “full of the history of Troy” (italicised in the Turkish translation) that does not appear in the English line. The third, fourth and the fifth lines are translated in two lines in Turkish. This can be schematised as below:

full of the history of Troy, of hot *gözleme*, (translated as “*Truva tarihiyle dolu*” in the second line)

duraklardan alınan sıcak gözleme ve portakal suları.

fresh orange juice from road stops, where

the bus is washed clean as a mountain spring.

her otobüsün dağ pınarlarında yıkanır gibi temizlendiği

The linguistic variations between the two languages cause inevitable changes in the word order and sometimes in the order of the lines as seen above. Rowland’s poem depicts the unity and harmony of the ancient history with the Turkish local food “gözleme”, a kind of traditional pastry cooked on a pan, commonly sold at the intercity bus stops. Therefore, in the

translation, care was taken to reflect the break at a bus stop on a night journey where buses are washed by cleaners quickly, the smell of pastry wafts through the doors of the bus, the voices of the tea spoons inside the tiny tea-glasses are heard; a vision that most travellers in Turkey are familiar with. Rowland feels the atmosphere as a foreigner, but her reflection of it is not that of an alienated traveller who is surprised by an unfamiliar culture but that of a traveller who feels immediately and comfortably settled. Thus, her depictions are vivid in reflecting the unique harmony of ancient history, Turkish history, traditional culture and food of the locals in modern Turkey:

... Past sugar
mountains twisted into delight, past scarlet flags,
star and crescent, past Atatürk a thousand times.

Tatlı tatlı kıvrılan şeker dağlarını geçtik,
Kızıl bayrakları geçtik, ay ve yıldızı,
binlerce kez Atatürk'ü. (Rowland, "Under This" 32–33)

Robyn Rowland reflects in this part of the poem above how the visitors to Turkey see Atatürk's picture everywhere. Her poem combines the local food, vegetables, fruits, traditional culture and ancient history, which are all crowned by Atatürk, the founder of the modern Republic of Turkey. The tone in her poem conveys her pleasure with this harmony of antiquity, tradition and modernisation, which constitute the uniqueness of the country from her perspective. Rowland asserts her love for the history of the Ottoman Empire and also her admiration for Atatürk who she describes elsewhere as an "astonishing leader" who "created an extensive education system, opened up the lives of women and girls", giving women the right to vote and banning the "wearing of the Fez and of the headscarf in public institutions" in order to modernise Turkish clothes (2016, 178).

The cultural admiration that dominates the poem is followed by an intimate, emotional and personal reaction to the people in the country. The attraction, then not only stems from the history and culture of the country, but also from the people who are involved with that culture, the people who both the poet and the narrator of the poem associate with the country's cultural and historical harmony. The poem shares the traveller's account of how she feels looking into eyes of the stranger, a male co-traveller, who also wishes to admire the rising sun at the same time as the narrator of the poem:

He's going home, the signs are there –
his body ready in anticipation, his wakefulness.
I muse a little in envy that someone loves
that curl of his greying hair, the wave it took
to reach its crest, faint creases round his eyes,
his wrist at rest, fingers strong and rough-edged,
lands reached after a long journey, after longing.

Evine gidiyor, her halinden belli
bedeni beklenti içinde hazır; uyanık.
Kıskanıyorum sanki kırışan kıvrıcık saçlarını seven kişiyi,
tepeye doğru yükselen dalgasını;
kaşlarını çevreleyen kırışıklıkları;
bileğini dayamış koltuğa, parmakları güçlü ve nasırlı,
memlekete çıkıyor uzun yolculuklar, özlemlerden sonra yollar.
(Rowland, "Under This" 34–35)

What makes the poem intriguing linguistically is the translation of the phrase "the signs are there" at the end of the first line. The translation is as follows:

the signs are there → her halinden belli

Lexically, none of the words in the translated line matches the phrase in the original phrase in English. It could literally be translated as:

the signs are there
işaretler orada

But this kind of translation would have been an adequate cultural translation, although the Turkish readers would have understood its meaning. Therefore, I opted for a more cultural expression to describe the stranger who is clearly a local. Culturally, people would not use a phrase like “işaretler orada (the signs are there)” to refer to someone’s feelings and excitement that can be observed from outside. Instead, “her halinden belli (it is clear from all your/his/her looks)” is a culturally more comprehensible phrase. During the translation process of Rowland’s poetry, I preferred such cultural contextualisation, because in the two Robyn Rowland books I have translated from English to Turkish, the settings of the poems are Turkey. Thus, by this preference, I aimed to construct a bridge between the cultures of the two languages and to reflect Rowland’s intimate relationship with both the Turkish language and its culture.

In one of her poems that focuses on the imperial history and multiculturalism of Istanbul, Rowland ends the poem by declaring that the differences in the city dissolve under the full moon, the light of which is reflected on the Bosphorus and the domes of the mosques. The poem’s final stanza below ends the narration of a night full of local flavours and drinks shared with new friends, and the various cultures of the city that have been residing together throughout history since antiquity. The conclusion of the poem emphasises the idea of sharing in the city that brings these cultures closer to one another, as well as the poet’s communion with it:

Our fingers begin to freeze at the end of raki-fluid limbs.
Under a blood full moon, rising whole, uncut by cloud,
waves of light are thrown onto river and dome.
This moment difference dissolves. A warm union binds us.

Rakının aktığı kolların ucunda parmaklar donmaya başlıyor.
Bulutlarla bölünmeden doğan kanlı bir dolunayın altında,
nehre ve kubbelere düşüyor ışık dalgaları.
O an, farklılıklar eriyor. Ve bizi sıcak bir birliktelik sarıyor.
(Rowland, “Under This” 20–21)

Rowland changed the last line a number of times reaching for her exact meaning. Her initial preference instead of the word “dissolve” was “collapses” when she first sent the poem to me for translation. After reading the poem, I translated “collapses” as “eriyor” which means “dissolves” or “melts”. I told her that it made me think of dissolving as that would refer to the idea that when differences dissolve, they cohere and become friends with each other. She loved the idea and changed “collapses” into “dissolves”. As a result, the final line of the poem becomes tangible evidence of collaboration and mutual influence between the poet and the translator.

During Rowland’s visits to Turkey, we worked together diligently to overcome the difficulty the semantic and syntactic differences between the two languages posed. A similar collaborative process occurred during the translation of “Different Ways With Love”, where Rowland explores the richness of the different words for love in Turkish compared to English; the poem is a testament to how poet and translator can together discover the best way to translate a poem. Translation thus becomes a process of re-writing in both languages.

Tell me again the different words for love in Turkish, Mehmet,
so I can name this, anchor it in my history — but not his,
my new friend. He lives in that other country, youth. This feeling
might need a new word, a meaning more complex than
impossible love, *imkansız aşk*; or a kind of forbidden love,
yasak aşk. No. Find me words that expand loving.

Aşk için Türkçe kelimeleri bir daha söyle bana, Mehmet
söyle ki isim bulayım buna, kendi tarihime kazıyayım - onunkiye
yeni arkadaşşıma değil. Başka bir ülkede yaşıyor o, gençlikte. Bu
duyguya
yeni bir kelime lazım, daha karmaşık bir anlam
imkansız aşktan; ya da bir tür *yasak aşktan*,
yasak aşk. Hayır. Aşk genişleten başka kelimeler bul bana.
(Rowland, “Under This” 100–101)

In the first stanza of “Different Ways With Love”, Rowland mentions the name of the translator from whom she asks for the different Turkish words for love. This marks not only a

unique professional experience for me as a translator, but also a very memorable personal experience. As seen in the photo that the poet included in the recent edition of *Under This Saffron Sun*, during our work together we had long hours of discussions at Şiir (Poetry) Hotel, a hotel in Denizli, Turkey, among other places. This hotel names each room after a different poet and has included a room named after Robyn Rowland, as well as exhibiting personal items from her in their museum of poets.

The translation of this particular poem was a challenging one as the original poem includes Turkish words Rowland wrote into the poem, while the verse navigates the nature of different ways of loving. As Rowland has done previously done with Irish in her poems about that country, she translates the Turkish words into English in the poem itself:

English: might need a new word, a meaning more complex than

Turkish: *yeni bir kelime lazım, daha karmaşık bir anlam*

English: impossible love, *imkansız aşk*, or a kind of forbidden love

Turkish: *imkansız aşktan; ya da bir tür yasak aşktan.*

The difficulty of translating the above lines arose from the fact that the line includes Turkish words for “impossible love”. When translating it, I had to emphasise in italics that the phrase “*imkansız aşk*” as its translation, was a foreign expression for the readers in English. So I italicised it, but had to drop the English phrase “impossible love” in the Turkish version, which made the line fall a bit shorter than the original. Yet, this difficulty was overcome by the use of a synonym in Turkish on another line. In the final line of the seventh stanza, Rowland uses the translation of “passion”:

Tutku. Passion. Cruel love. Once in a lifetime, no more.

Tutku. İhtiras. Acımasız aşk. Ömürde bir gelir, yaşanmaz bir daha. (Rowland, 2019, 102–103)

The Turkish word “*tutku*” is translated as “passion” by the poet in the original poem. However, to overcome the repetition of “*tutku*” and to match the number of the words, I preferred to use “*ihtiras*”, the synonym of “*tutku*” and, thus, together, we created a powerful emphasis on passionate love through our collaborative work.

The final example I will analyse is from *This Intimate War: Gallipoli / Çanakkale 1915 – İçli Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915*.⁴ One of the most touching poems in the book is “Children of Gallipoli” in which Rowland depicts an intense form of the sorrows of war in its most intensified form. Her poems in this collection are written from the stories, images and documentary history of both the Turks and the Allies. Children called to the front from various countries at a very young age are depicted as innocent and ignorant victims of the war. During the process of translating these poems, cultural distinctions worked advantageously. For instance, when Rowland wrote about the history of Turkey, a country and culture in which I share a collective unconscious, some expressions found direct equivalences in the target language. In “Children of Gallipoli”, there is a scene where the children sing for courage, remembering their hometowns:

then suddenly one boy started singing loudly about his country

and they all sang it over and over ...

hele aniden söylemeye başlayınca bir memleket türküsü içlerinden biri
hepsi de tekrar tekrar söyledi türküyü ... (Rowland, "This Intimate War" 44-45)

In this quotation, the English version of the poem describes a boy's singing about "his country." However, as the boys in question are the Turkish boys, they are not supposed to be singing "songs"; they are supposed to be only singing "türkü"s, since most of those boys came from the rural regions of the country. "Türkü"s are the anonymous folk songs known by most Anatolians and they are stored in the collective unconsciousness of the society. In addition, when a "türkü" is about one's country or hometown, it is commonly called "memleket türküsü (a homeland folksong)". Therefore, in the Turkish version of the poem, "memleket türküsü" is used instead of "singing loudly about his country".⁵

As seen in the previous examples, matching the rhythm of the poems in Turkish was another issue. The variations in the word-order patterns in Turkish function to create a poetic rhythm as close as possible to the poem in English. For instance, "Sevil's Gift: Turkey", the first poem of *Under This Saffron Sun*, is almost like an introduction to the book and it relates the story of how Rowland became acquainted with Turkey and its culture through her brother's wife, Sevil. The first line of the seventh couplet is an example of how Turkish word order might be changed to provide a rhythm:

English: You said, *Go sister. Wash fear from your blue eyes;*

Turkish: Dedin ki *Git. Yıka mavi gözlerindeki korkuyu;* (Rowland, "Under This" 16-17)

Here, "you said" is translated into Turkish as "dedin", but the verb "dedin" must follow what the speaker says in the grammatical rules of Turkish: "*Git dedin*", which would change the rhythm significantly from the original English. I tried to comply with the original rhythm as much as possible. Therefore, I used a grammatical demonstrative "ki" in the Turkish translation. This is a demonstrative of Persian origin and it helps the verb "dedin" to be uttered before, as in English. This demonstrative is helpful in changing the word order of the Turkish. With the help of such variations in Turkish grammar, I was able to change the places of the words in Turkish and create a similar rhythm to that of the English.

Translating the poems in *This Intimate War* and *Under This Saffron Sun* has made me develop as a translator through having to observe nuance as well as the literal. The intense emotions that the poems convey and the delicacy of the language meant that the process became an exploration of my own culture as well as the linguistic and emotional possibilities of a language. Translating these works required creativity on my part as well as Rowland's. As I worked with Rowland, we both became emotionally disturbed by the histories of our nations. During our poetry reading performances of the war poems⁶, it was not just the audience that became deeply moved - Rowland and I could also hardly hold back our tears.

In addition to the intimacy of these translation projects, the technical details and the literary value of the poems have been acclaimed. Rowland's rigorous historical research means that she is able to give voice to the previously voiceless in Gallipoli: soldiers, munitions workers, doctors, nurses, women at home, composers, musicians and artists. Most importantly perhaps, particularly in Turkey, *This Intimate War* represents a bridge of peace between the two nations, as evidenced by the financial sponsorship of the book by the Municipality for Çanakkale.

In both of Rowland's bi-lingual collections, her poems reflect her experiences and observations sifted through the perspective of history and culture. But her poetry is not only concerned with landscape, history and friendship during her travels in Turkey. The subjects of her poems include the refugee crises, domestic violence against women, the complicated future of the young. She writes about the sunken refugee boats, single shoes left in the sand, pieces of worn clothes on the beach, the remains of the lives of the refugees who struggle to across the Aegean Sea to get to Greece.

Robyn Rowland's poetry is universal. Even though the two books, *This Intimate War* and *Under This Saffron Sun* are located in Turkey, the commonality of the feelings, behaviours and interactions she depicts can be widely appreciated. As narrative poems, they contribute, to poetic and translation studies through their intense and profound analyses of human nature and their representations of the possible unity of the human soul, nature and landscape.

Notes

¹ My translation of "Say, Istanbul" as "Söyle, İstanbul" was published in *Sözcükler Dergisi*, Issue 49, May/June 2014/3, 94–97.

² Rowland, Robyn. *Under This Saffron Sun / Safran Güneşin Altında*. Turkish translations / Türkçeleştiren Mehmet Ali Çelikel. Knocknaron Press, Ireland, 2019.

³ Bozcaada, an island on the northeast Aegean Sea, 6 km off the southwest coast of Çanakkale, where the poet has many friends whom she visits regularly.

⁴ Rowland, Robyn. *This Intimate War: Gallipoli/ Çanakkale 1915 — İçli Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915* Turkish translations by Mehmet Ali Çelikel, published by Five Islands Press: Melbourne, Australia, 2015 and Bilge Kultur Sanat: Istanbul, Turkey; Republished Spinifex Press, Australia 2018. This book was published bilingually and simultaneously in both Turkey and Australia in 2015, the 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli War. Robyn Rowland and I were invited to do a reading from the book at the VIP breakfast on 24 April 2015, after the Anzac Day Dawn Service in Gelibolu, Çanakkale.

⁵ For a more detailed discussion on this, please see: Çelikel, Mehmet Ali. "Intimacy of Poetry Translation: Translating Gallipoli War in Robyn Rowland's *This Intimate War: Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915*". *B/Orders Unbound: Transgressing the Limits in Arts and Humanities*. Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Language, Literature and Culture, Süleyman Demirel University, Isparta, Turkey May 7-8, 2015. Edited by Ş. O. Uzun & M. Kirca. Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi: Isparta, Turkey. pp. 126–130.

⁶ We held fourteen readings, between March 2014–May 2019 in Denizli, İzmir, Muğla, Çanakkale, Malatya, Ankara and Fethiye. At most of these readings, we read poems including "Children of Gallipoli" from *This Intimate War*.

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Earwitnesses

Suzanne Hermanoczki

Abstract

Having an accent in spoken English is a common linguistic reality for many migrants and their subsequent generations. In reality, having a linguistic variation can result in "othering", prejudice, discrimination, and racism. I wanted to explore and respond to what it means to have an accent, for both speakers and listeners. This essay includes moments of the personal with cultural, critical, and contemporary responses; poetic interruptions and instances of first language loss; of how accented language *can* be used to exclude and identify, but *should* be used to include.

Keywords: Creative Writing, accents, racism, migrants, Latinx

*

"I... wanted to put a person with an accent – i.e. me – in that space not as an object or even a subject but as an interpreter. Interpreter as a translator but also as someone who works at the level of meaning, not merely experience..." (Tumarkin)

I have been a long-time admirer of Maria Tumarkin as a person, as an academic, as a writer. I have worked with her, shared coffees and conversations. I've had the privilege of hearing her give powerful, boundary-pushing public talks and yet... I always find myself inwardly flinching whenever she has interrupted herself to apologise to her audience for speaking with an accent.

Aurally yours
 -for Maria T and my mother-
In another language I am matter's light.
Shadow's light.
The future, not the past.
 (Dominique Hecq, *Hush: A Fugue*, 2017)

This is an aural apology

for all you native English speakers in the house—
 for the mis-representation of my sounds
 for abusing my vowels and
 for the un-intentional
doble sentido doble sonido
 behind my words
 but most of all
 my sincerest of all dis-culpas
 to you dear listeners
 for your dis-comfort
 and the blatant audacity of
 my off-ending
acento.

I've often returned to these moments in Maria's speeches and wondered, who is this apology for? Why is there even a need to apologise? Is it for the listener's benefit or the speaker's? On Australian SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) TV, the use of accented English in its news, ads and shows has now become the norm. However, on Australian mainstream TV, apart from Miguel Maestre in *The Living Room* or Manu Feildel in *My Kitchen Rules*, or the stereotypical voices, like the no longer acceptable "softly-racist" Hank Azaria-voiced Indian-English accent of Apu, the convenience store owner from *The Simpsons*, hearing or having a pronounced "other/different" accent still doesn't seem to fit into the majority, dominant, Australian English-speaking norm.

See, I grew up surrounded by people speaking with accents, each with their own unique version of English. It's only when a speaker's accent is brought to my attention like this, that I truly begin to listen. I home in on it, note the particularities of their intonation, the lengthened or shortened vowel sounds, the final consonant stops that are cut off, the troublesome consonant clusters or blends. I note the interplay of their first language on the latter. I'll search for first-language traces, tonal inflections – accentuating, colouring, contouring, shaping and shadowing, the otherwise standardised and homogenised English language I have become so proficient in and attuned to.

In 2017, I was incredibly moved by poet Dominique Hecq at the launch of her book *Hush: A Fugue* held at The Alderman bar in the old migrant neighbourhood of Brunswick in inner-city Melbourne. Hecq introduced herself, her family and her many ties and linguistic complications. Now Melbourne-based, but originally French-speaking, Belgian-born. She spoke in accented English about writing, trauma, loss and death; her work is about her baby dying and being unable to express this in her original mother tongue. The pain of hearing those words was audible, visceral and visible.

Mother's lost tongue

*All this is at the expense
 of losing your mother tongue*

and cracking your own voice...
(Dominique Hecq, *Hush: A Fugue*, 2017)

... yo me llamo ...

What happens when
you lose your mother tongue?
Where does it go?

There are stages of learning a language, of having an accent and, if your age is right, you are fortunate and work hard enough, you can make it disappear. There's also losing one's mother tongue to gain another. For me, all I've ever felt is loss. Opening my mouth to speak my first tongue, only to find the words broken or gone. The pain. Sorrow. Knowing, I've done it to myself. My own hands reaching into my mouth, tearing that first tongue out to attach this one. I still bear the scars.

Who picks it up
and brushes it off?

I've seen people completely shut down when they hear someone speaking with an accent. They simply cannot or refuse to comprehend. Any variation to their spoken language, their body stiffens. Their face freezes. The lip curls: downwards sneer; or upwards into an in/outward, pained/strained smile.

Or once gone
does it stay hidden,
lost for
ever?

In her memoir *Unpolished Gem*, based on her Chinese-Cambodian childhood in the 1980s and 1990s, writer Alice Pung describes the kind of language spoken in the markets in her suburb of Footscray, Melbourne, where she grew up: "'You wanna dis one?... 'How many you want hah?' To communicate... does not merely mean the strumming and humming of vocal cords, but much movement of hands and contortion of face" (2). Here, Pung already describes a more tolerant youth in Australia, "where full sentences are not necessary" (2) and where her family's broken-English was acceptable.

I grew up a generation earlier, in the 1970s and 1980s in pre-multicultural Brisbane at the tail end of the White Australia Policy and race-based immigration. Communication with Native English Speakers and people from my Non-English Speaking Background community was fraught with judgement, intolerance and humiliation. If Native English Speakers did respond, it was to mimic (us) the Non-English Speakers (badly). It was always us (Non) that would have to understand *them* (Native). The gesticulations. The extra vowels added at the end of words, "Ohkaay - ah.

Yoouu (finger point) unn-der-staaaand?" The slowed down, choppy speech. The exaggerated mouthing. The ee-nuunn-cii-aa-tioonn. The nodding. Or fake smiling. Words said LOUDER. Or repeated. The under breath insults. "*Stupid wogs.*" The sounds of English splintering as it finally breaks you.

... tú te llamas ...

What happens
when you rip
your mother's tongue
out of your bloody mouth
and replace it
with a new foreign tongue
a nice silky smooth one
a red white and blue one
a whitewashed wishy washed one?

Spanish was my first language then, code-switched Spanglish, before it was replaced with English. I say "was" because as a kid in pre-multicultural Brisbane, as soon as I opened my mouth, I was made to shut it — fast. Made to feel instantly ashamed of this "other" language. The openly racist "*bloody wog*" taunts spat at me, my siblings, my parents, our community. Ethnic shame forced me to stop speaking my language outside. Many migrant kids we knew, eventually refused to speak at all; this caused major conflicts at home. Some parents were unable to learn English and only able to speak their first language. Their kids had to translate for their "wog parents" on the phone, at the shops, at doctor's appointments, at the dole office. At school, these kids were forced to assimilate and deliberately told to "forget" their first tongue; told by their indifferent teachers to only "speak English". Imagine several generations living under the same roof, but no one understanding one another – the rifts, the tension, the mega-fights. The second-gen kids discriminated against, changing or having their given names changed to easier to pronounce, nick-namey Anglo ones; swapping their tongues, erasing their past and families from other countries. For their migrant (often traumatised refugee) parents, there was no further education. There were no English lessons, only hard lessons.

...él se llama...

I say,
What did you say
to those English-speaking natives
(strangers, adults who you didn't know) who spat their words at you
'What's that you f*ckin' wog? In this country, we speak English!'

In an interview on Channel Nine's *The Today Show*, responding to the outbreak of COVID in Melbourne public housing, One Nation Party leader, Pauline Hanson, retaliated to the suggestion of supplying the Non-English Speaking residents with special government announcements in their own languages: "Why should we put everything out in someone else's language when you come to Australia... Learn to speak English when you come here to this country. That's a big problem that we have in Australia... these people are from non-English speaking backgrounds, probably English is their second language..." (Mazzoni). If only "these people" had passed a dictation test.¹ It's never that simple. To escape trauma, poverty, disadvantage, then intolerance and discrimination, let alone flick on that language code-switch.

Words stuffed in a bottle,
 fuelled and lit with hatred
 hurled so hard and fast
 that you s h a t t e r e d
 when you first used your new tongue.

In 2016, *The New Yorker* ran a special series called "Childhood Reading". In his piece titled *Surrendering*, Vietnamese-American author and poet Ocean Vuong explained how learning the English language as a child was like "immigrating all over again... I had become fluent – but only in speech, not the written word." (Vuong). As kids, we too spoke Spanish, but couldn't write it. When my mother learnt they were giving Spanish lessons at the local high school, she signed us up. The classes were open, but were really meant to be an initiative for us kids and our migrant community. Until Kerry turned up, that is, with every right to be there, perhaps even more so than us.² She was a white Anglo-Aussie girl from a "good" suburb with well-educated, middle-class, Aussie parents.³ The teachers fell over themselves always praising how "good" Kerry's Spanish was. How great she was learning this language. Not us; we gringos were never told how "good" we spoke it. We could hear Kerry's English acento tainting every word she uttered. It was like banging on a tin can. Our Spanish was smooth like seda, like silk. We soon began to hate Kerry and the classes. Not because Kerry was a girl who wanted to learn Spanish; rather, because she took over a space that was meant to be ours. We migrant kids were all forced to make way; resigned once again to the back row; to become the secondary, café con leche-coloured students to her immediate, unearned white privilege.

Say Nothing. Nothing. I said nothing. Not a thing.
Nada. Na-da.

Kerry used us to practice her Spanish, then ignored us once she stepped beyond those gates. Outside, we became los invisibles again. One Saturday, some visiting Spanish teachers and a government official came to observe our classes. They awarded Kerry "the best student". They gave her a family block of Cadbury Dairy Milk. Kerry claimed her prize as she took our language,

our teachers' admiration, our classes. After a term, these community classes ran out of funding. Kerry left. She never kept in touch. She never even shared her chocolate with us.

...ellos se llaman...

I say,

What didn't you say
to those Spanish-speaking natives,
(extranjeros, adultos who you didn't know) who often spoke
down to you and your little chico face?

Kerry, I heard, went on a language exchange to El Salvador for a year – to learn how they lived over there and to practice her Spanish. Travelling to Argentina was my linguistic dream. But that Spanish class was as close as I got. My parents came after the White Australia policy on the “merit-based” Migration Act of 1966. Categorised as “labour immigrants”, they were classified unskilled (a) because their English language was poor, and (b) their previous profession was not recognised in Australia (they'd have to relearn it in English). Being low-skilled working class, they couldn't afford to take a day off work, let alone take us on holidays, not even to the Gold Coast. A return trip to the motherland was out of the question.

¡Ay nena, que feo que hablas el español!
[how bad/ugly you speak your first language!]

For a migrant not fully able to speak English, their lack of skill is considered a disability (tick the NESB box), but an educated white/Anglo, Native English Speaker (or Kerry) learning or attaining another's language – this is considered an advantage, a rewarded privilege.

How you went ahead and warped your little Spanish words
with English sounds
until they were all twisted around
and pierced to the tip of your old mother tongue.

Even in our Spanish speaking community there was tension. The superior (regardless of education) Spaniards (the colonisers) versus the lowly (regardless of education) Sudamericanos aka “Sudacas” (the colonised). Sudacas became a derogatory term used by the Spaniards to describe those Latin American “wetback” economic migrants who went to Spain in the 80s, with the implication “they had come for their jobs”. Much like the ethnic slur “wog”, originally meant “to describe southern European Australians” (Cole 16), I was called wog as a kid, even though my father was Eastern European, and my mother was Latin American and I was born in Australia. The terms “wog” and “Sudaca”, much like J.K. Rowling's “mudblood”, were and continue to be insults. Like Eltit and Ramsdell explain of its literary and Latinx use; to call someone a Sudaca is to

"cannot[e] that which is south, below, inferior, distasteful, backward, left open to exploitation" (118).

Still now, I'll be reminded of this positionality by Spanish speakers (in their thick, textured accents), if I mention that my mother is from Argentina (I've learnt not to say this in Spanish anymore). "Oh, dey [*los Argentinos*] speak funny." *What's funny?* I want to ask. Instead, I'll bite my tongue. *Is it my mother or her country?* If I do speak, they'll remark about my Spanish or its brokenness. Worse, is witnessing when they correct my mother's speech and her "funny" way of speaking Spanish.

Say Nothing

Nada Nada Na-da

Go Swim

Swim Away

I remember a few years ago, the culmination and implication behind an altercation at the Brisbane Spanish Club, between a Spanish neighbour we knew, *una conocida*, and an older, educated woman from Bolivia. The Spanish lady shouting at her, "You should be grateful that we (Spaniards) came along and 'plucked' that feather from your head." The Bolivian lady responding fiercely, "That feather belonged to *us*. It was never yours to take."

...ellos no se llaman...

And yet-

there are those who still say

you speak with un acento

when you know there isn't one (there anymore)

Within the Latinx community, there's also discord and discrimination. Free economic migrants versus later political refugees. Old migrants (Non-English Speakers) versus the new (skilled migrants). There's a familiar scene in Idris Elba's semi-autobiographical comedy, the TV show *In the Long Run*. Set in London in the mid-1980s, a well-meaning white colleague introduces Agnes from Sierra Leone to a fellow office worker from Jamaica, with the skin colour assumption they'll "*you know...*". Much like the point of this episode, just because to others you may "look" similar or speak the same language, (don't get me started on different Argentinean barrios or South American countries), or that your mother countries are neighbours, this does not necessarily mean you'll *get along*.

cos you deliberately lost it

threw it away

quietly mourned for it

when you buried it

(deep down underground)

cos you know, *you know*
 your old mother's tongue is long
 gone.

I grew up listening to so many accents. I grew up immersed in so many variations of languages and "ishes". The standout ones being Hungspanglish (Hungarian + accented Spanish + broken English, which was how my father and many of our '56er family friends spoke) or Hunglish (Hungarian + English) and Ukrainish (our elderly neighbour's Ukrainian + broken English).

I'll notice an accent as someone else might admire another's dress, hairstyle, tattoo. But when a stranger questions *my* English or "hears" an accent, I am left speechless. It's a trigger. A verbal injury. An attack. I'll get defensive. I'll put on my best yeah-nah tonally-rising nasal Queensland whine and my broadest Paul Hogan, ocker-slang-laden-"Strine"-accented English. I'll retaliate by interrogating *them* to "please explain". I'll get them to describe what they think they heard.

Your accent

You speak with an accent.

No, I don't.

Yes, you do, I can hear it.

But I was born here

grew up here

Most listeners will probably not register the purpose behind Maria Tumarkin's apology about her accent, but I feel it's important to try and understand it in my own way. Perhaps by prefacing the accent, it's a way of asserting or pre-empting the remarks of "Oh, you speak so well" or "Where are you from?". In drawing attention to one's accent and how one speaks, it's asking listeners to take care, be aware, there may be problems ahead. This is a powerful stance of taking ownership; a stance of – this is how I speak, take it, and now focus on the content and meaning, leave my speech and me alone.

I swapped my old tongue

at primary school

for this new one,

I only use this one now

to speak

to write

to think

to dare

to dream

so how,

how can that be?

Most likely, I had an accent as a child, but I swear I don't anymore. That, however, can still depend on who I am speaking to. If that someone happens to overhear me in conversation with my Latina mother, or has a closer look at my non-Anglo features or attempts to say my surname, then I do. The reaction goes something like this: *What's that?* – I don't hear anything. *Hang on... (cup hand to ear)... I hear something.* –What? What is it? *(cock head)... Yes, thought so. It sounds like good old racism.*

Notes

¹This is an indirect reference to the dictation test in the "Australian Government's Immigration Restriction Act 1901", which was: "An Act to place certain restrictions on Immigration and to provide for the removal from the Commonwealth of prohibited Immigrants." The Act could prohibit (under Section 3) "(a) Any person who when asked to do so by an officer fails to write out at dictation and sign in the presence of the officer a passage of fifty words in length in an European language directed by the officer." The racially motivated dictation test was applied to exclude non-white immigrants.

²Kerry is not her real name.

³American academic Robin Di Angelo is a leading researcher in the field of Whiteness Studies and Critical Discourse Analysis where, in her work, she explains "how whiteness is reproduced in everyday narratives" ("About Me"). In her article *White Fragility*, she discusses the use of the term "good" (58); when used to describe schools and neighbourhoods for white people; this is equated and related to the absence of people of colour. In my childhood experience of pre-multicultural Brisbane, this idea of "good" extended to preferential treatment of white-Anglo people who came from certain suburbs; people who came from working class suburbs with higher proportions of non-White or migrants, were "bad" (59) or inferior in comparison.

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