Theorizing about Translation of Multilingual and Multiscriptal Texts: David Albahari's "Learning Cyrillic" and Its Translation by Ellen Elias-Bursać

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ABSTRACT

Albahari's short story "Learning Cyrillic", translated from Serbian into English by Elias-Bursać, combines three languages – Serbian, English, and Blackfoot – and two scripts – Latin and Cyrillic. This article uses the story and its English translation to examine the destabilisation patterns in the concepts of *intra*- and *interlingual translation* that occur in a multilingual text. The paper argues that translational relations are not given but rather contextually determined in each case. Elias-Bursać's multilingually and graphically aware translation disrupts the traditionally predictable behaviour of 'source' and 'target' by obscuring the presumed one-to-one correspondence between them. In arguing for a scalable minimal unit of translation, the paper adapts Jin's (2017) metonymic approach to 'close' and 'distant reading' to fit the translational agenda. The asymmetry between the 'source' and 'target', along with a scalable minimal unit of translation, reinforces the pertinence of a contextual framework in the study of multilingual literature's translational relations.

KEYWORDS: *intralingual translation*; *interlingual translation*; source/target language; literary translation; minimal unit of translation.

Introduction

"[A]ll too often", Jacques Derrida maintains, "[theories of translation] treat the passing from one language to another and do not sufficiently consider the possibility for languages to be implicated *more than two* in a text" (1985:171; emphasis in the original). David Albahari's multilingual short story "Učenje ćirilice" ("Learning Cyrillic", 2003), from the collection *Drugi jezik* (*Second Language*, 2003), along with its multilingual and multiscriptal translation by Ellen Elias-Bursać ("Learning Cyrillic", 2012),[1] defy the presumption of monolingualism.

[1] The English translation of Albahari's short story "Učenje ćirilice" ("Learning Cyrillic") was published in the eponymous selection of Albahari's short stories *Learning Cyrillic* (2012), translated by Ellen Elias-Bursać and published by the Belgrade-based publishing house Geopoetika, as part of their *Serbian Prose in Translation* series. For the complete list of titles in this series, see the publisher's official website, available at: http://www.geopoetika.com/edition.php?id=884.

These two literary texts could serve as a starting point in revisiting Roman Jakobson's widely accepted classification of translational relations in light of multilingualism and multiscriptality. Proposed in his seminal essay "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" ([1959] 2012), Jakobson's typology distinguishes among *intralingual*, *interlingual*, and *intersemiotic translation*. Of particular interest to this article are the notions of *intra*- and *interlingual translation*.

Provisionally, the story's original text is the point of intersection between three languages – Serbian, English, and the Blackfoot[2] indigenous language of North America – as well as between two scripts – Latin and Cyrillic. I say *provisionally* because English is represented with the help of fictional multilingualism; in other words, it is not seen in the source text, but only referred to. In Elias-Bursać's translation, all three languages physically dwell in the text; the two scripts are retained too. The goal of this article is to use Albahari's linguistically heterogeneous work to study the destabilisation patterns of interlingual relations on the level of a text, arguing that translational relations are not given but contextually specified in each individual case. Close reading and comparative translation discourse analysis will be employed in combination to account for changes in translational relations that derive from the text's own hybridity.

The body of this article consists of five parts. The first part presents a review of current literature on the topic. The second part concerns methodology. The third part gives the story's general background, placing it in the context of post-Yugoslav migrant writing, as a prelude for the examination of the languages coexisting within "Learning Cyrillic". Most importantly, the third part studies the story's linguistic relations in Albahari's original. The fourth part also studies the story's linguistic relations – but in Elias-Bursać's translation. The fifth part enters the theoretical realm in contemplation of how multilingualism functions in a translational perspective and how the literary interplay of heterogeneous languages affects the establishment of translational relations, that is the notions of *intra*- and *interlingual translation*.

[2] The Blackfoot language is also known as the Siksiká language.

Literature Review

Jakobson's "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" (1959) has been discussed, with relative constancy, for more than three decades, attracting a wide range of commentators: Jacques Derrida (1985) and Gideon Toury (1986) in the 1980s, John Sturrock (1991), Anthony Pym ([1992] 2010), and Theo Hermans (1997) in the 1990s, Omar Calabrese (2000), Peeter Torop (2002), Umberto Eco (2003), Dinda Gorlée (2010), Özlem Berk Albachten (2014), Kathleen Davis (2014), Zhonglian Huang (2015), Hongwei Jia (2017), and Henrik Gottlieb (2018), and Višnja Krstić (2020) in the new millennium.

Theorists have approached "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" (1959) from a vast range of perspectives. Sturrock (1991), Calabrese (2000), Torop (2002), Gorlée (2010), Huang (2015), Jia (2017), Gottlieb (2018), and to a large degree, Eco (2003) proceed in the semiotic tradition of the original text; Toury (1986) expands the semiotic perspective by combining it with a cultural one; Pym's ([1992] 2010) study is almost exclusively rooted in culture; Hermans' (1997) mainly sociological viewpoint is occasionally intertwined with a cultural one; Albachten's (2014) article is predominantly sociologically oriented; Krstić's (2020) doctoral thesis combines sociolinguistic, cultural, and multilingual perspective; Davis (2014) looks at the issues through the lens of history; Derrida (1985), however, positions his discussion within the philosophy of language.

This variety of perspectives and their combinations have been used to highlight different issues emanating from Jakobson's framework. In rough terms, six dominant lines of critique can be singled out. The typology has been under scrutiny for the following reasons: its putative relationship with interpretation; its scope; not taking into consideration the complexity of translating polysemiotic media; disregarding the difficulty of determining linguistic borders; implying that *word* is the minimal unit of translation; presupposing the monolingual nature of content. In addition, multiple re-divisions based on Jakobson's typology have been attempted (Toury 1986; Torop 2002; Gorlée 2010; Huang 2015; Jia 2017; Gottlieb 2018).

The probing question of what should be taken as a primary unit of translation, discussed by Sturrock (1991), Eco (2003), Calabrese (2000), and Pym ([1992] 2010), will be one of the major issues raised in this article. The debate has been left almost fully open as neither of the theorists explores alternative minimal units, nor the relationship between different levels, nor the possibility of destabilisation in hybrid contexts. The discussion on the minimal unit of translation will be used as a starting point for investigating the notions of 'source' and 'target', the tentative nature of which has been shown in Gottlieb's (2018) study. This article will try to analyse certain hybrid instances – the existence of which Gottlieb acknowledges but chooses not to systematise or deliberate in much detail.

The least developed analysis with regard to Jakobson's concepts of *intra*- and *interlingual translation* seems to be the one pertaining to multilingual content. Notwithstanding the plethora of studies dealing with multilingualism, to my knowledge, the notions of *intra*- and *interlingual translation* have not been explored through the prism of this phenomenon. The closest they have been brought together is in Derrida's brief comment calling for a more considerate treatment of multilingual texts in a translational perspective (Derrida 1985:171), placed in the same publication where he revisits Jakobson's tripartition. This article will try to connect translation studies and multilingualism studies, in the hope the publications of the latter discipline – although written in slightly different contexts – could prove invaluable in casting a new light on Jakobson's typology.

Methodology

Multilingualism's diverse occurrences – be they in an individual, society, or in art – have been explored beyond the narrow confines of a single framework. Aronin and Jassner, whose paper systematises the broad spectrum of methodologies adopted in multilingual studies, note that such pronounced methodological openness proceeds from the multiplicity of perspectives employed – citing psychological, educational, social, cognitive, emotional, and political perspectives in particular (Aronin and Jassner 2014:57). What makes these approaches inadequate for the study of literary multilingualism is their preoccupation with the individual and its position within society. As neither of these streams elucidates multilingualism's artistic dimension, the research of literary multilingualism may benefit more substantially from the application of traditional philological methods.

This article illustrates the instability of *intra*- and *interlingual translation* by concentrating on a multilingual text that combines several languages. When dealing with hybrid writing, the preliminary step involves identifying the delicate interrelations between the languages in the original. Prior to any considerations of the translation process, the researcher needs to understand the function that each individual language performs in the given piece. Further important elements to be taken into account include power relations within the text, their wider implications, and stylistic effects. If polyglossic insertions into the dominant lect occur in more than one language, their roles should be assessed separately rather than in conjunction, to prevent lapsing into generalisations. In pursuance of these steps, I suggest approaching the problem from a purely literary perspective through the widely established practice of close reading.

The latter half of this article's analysis embraces a comparative view in the attempt to sketch the ways in which the relations between languages change in the translation process. Even though close reading and translation can go hand in hand quite nicely (Culler 2010:24), the monolingually oriented practice of close reading does not suffice in this case. More suitable, I deem, would be to build up on the practice of close reading by introducing what Alexander Burak formulates as 'comparative translation discourse analysis'. This extended application of discourse analysis is dedicated to conducting "detailed comparative dissections – or 'deconstructions' – of the text at different levels of analysis (semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic)" (Burak 2013:2; brackets in the original). This comparison of individual parameters "should form the foundation for an informed view of how a translated text works, with reference to its original, in its new sociocultural setting" (ibid.). Although this approach was tailored to tackle "different translations of the same material" (Burak 2013:1), it could be fruitful even for those studies that do not involve retranslations but discuss possible alternatives to the existing solution.

Multilingualism of Albahari's "Learning Cyrillic"

Hybridity can be identified as a watermark of postmodern writing (Baer 2014:158). The acceleration of movement, affecting both people and ideas, has fostered cross-cultural germination and encouraged the traversal of traditional linguistic and literary borders. Notwithstanding the correlation between hybridity and postmodernism, hybrid literary expression boasts a long history, which has been somewhat obscured as a result of national romanticism and the associated ideas that one nation should have one language. In the English-language tradition, modernists have been celebrated for their extensive mixing of forms (Taylor-Batty 2013). Long before them, experimentation of the kind is to be found in the legacy of the English early modern period – most splendidly, perhaps, in William Shakespeare's oeuvre (Delabastita and Hoenselaars 2015).

Multilingualism in literature can be closely related to hybridity in form, where mixing of two or more languages occurs. Such hybrid, multilingual expression is no stranger to Serbian literary tradition. Early in the twentieth century, we find, for example, an impressive palette of international and local languages in Jelena Dimitrijević's travelogues (Bulatović and Krstić 2019). A substantial body of Serbian multilingual literature, however, revolves around more permanent kinds of relocation. Some famous examples of diasporic writing are to be found in the works of Miloš Crnjanski, Borislav Pekić, and David Albahari.

David Albahari epitomizes a contemporary post-Yugoslav writer caught in the liminality of diaspora and his forsaken homeland. He continued to write in the Serbian language upon his 1994 relocation to Calgary in the Canadian province of Alberta. Albahari contemplates his career pathway in a wider framework:

> U slučaju Josipa Novakovića, kao i u slučaju bosanskog autora Aleksandra Hemona, koji živi u Čikagu, prihvatanje engleskog jezika je bio prirodan izbor, jer su oni počeli ozbiljnije da pišu tek kada su došli u Ameriku. Drugim rečima, nisu imali formiran stil koji bi im zapravo onemogućio, kao u mom slučaju, dublje uranjanje u jezik nove zemlje. Pisanje je potraga za stilom, i onog časa kada pisac pronađe svoj stil, jezička promena postaje nevažna ili nemoguća. To potvrđuju brojni primeri pisaca koji su živeli u okruženju drugog jezika, a nastavili su da pišu na svom maternjem jeziku: Isak Baševis Singer, Česlav Miloš, Josif Brodski, Slavomir Mrožek, Josef Škvorecki, te mnogi pisci stare i nove srpske književne dijaspore. Oni su, u stvari, dokaz da životno izmeštanje ne mora nužno da dovede do jezičkog izmeštanja[. . .]. (2019:166)

> In Josip Noваković's case, as in the case of the Bosnian author Aleksandar Hemon, who lives in Chicago, accepting the English language was a natural choice, for it was only after the relocation to America that they started writing more seriously. In other words, they did not have a fully formed style that would prevent them, as in my case, from immersing more deeply in the language of the new land. Writing is a search for style, and the moment the writer finds their style, the linguistic

> change becomes irrelevant or impossible. This is confirmed by numerous writers who lived surrounded by a second language: Isaac Bashevis Singer, Czesław Miłosz, Iosif Brodsky, Sławomir Mrożek, Josef Škvorecký, as well as many authors of old and new Serbian literary diaspora. They are, in fact, the proof that a real-life dislocation need not necessarily lead to a linguistic dislocation [. . .]. (2019:166; my translation)

Even though Serbian has remained the language of Albahari's fiction, would it be fair to say the relocation has left no trace whatsoever on his literary production? What differentiates the Canadian phase from the Serbian one is, most notably, the growing prominence of multiculturalism and multilingualism.

The evidence of exchange is palpable in "Learning Cyrillic", as the short story is composed of two parallel storylines, which intermittently converge to create a vivid dynamic. What unites the two lines is the main protagonist, an unnamed teacher of the Serbian language, working in a church-based language school somewhere in North America, most likely in Canada, given the snowbound surroundings and the presence of a Blackfoot character. The first storyline follows the evening classes with second-generation Serbian migrants, held in the complex of an Orthodox church (Albahari 2012:75-76; Elias-Bursać's translation). In this emigrant/immigrant (depending on the perspective) setting, Serbian, which is supposed to be the children's first language, diminishes to a second language – extinguished by the host language of English, which the young second generation speaks as their first. The children's lack of enthusiasm for learning on Friday evenings is juxtaposed to the elation of their parents, who use this time as an opportunity to socialize with their own ethnic group, in their first language (Albahari 2012:84; Elias-Bursać's translation). The source of the teacher's anxiety can be found not only in his pupils' poor motivation but also in their linguistic preferences. Judging by the teacher's words, the overall situation seems quite discouraging:

> The kids who come to the church, regardless of age, speak only Serbian with me. The minute they stop talking to me and turn to talk to each other they switch to English. It is enough for me to turn my back for a moment to start writing something on the board or to look for something among the books and papers, and

> the room where we work is filled with English words. (Albahari 2012:91; Elias-Bursać's translation)

When the teacher tries to encourage them to speak Serbian among themselves (Albahari 2012:91-92; Elias-Bursać's translation), the children's narrow active vocabulary and basic grammar errors become painfully salient.

The second storyline follows a series of encounters with a First Nations man called Thunder Cloud, whom the protagonist eventually befriends. This unusual friendship with a member of the Blackfoot tribe opens a whole new window into a culture completely unknown to the Serbian teacher. It is through the conversation with Thunder Cloud that the pertinence of translation comes to light. This cultural collision turns the protagonist teacher of Serbian into a part-time interpreter (Albahari 2012:87; 88-89; 98-99; Elias-Bursać's translation).

English in the Source Text

Albahari's protagonist patiently mediates between the English-speaking First Nations friend, on the one hand, and either the Serbian-speaking Orthodox priest or the Serbian-learning children, on the other. It is precisely through the protagonist's interpreting that the English of his First Nations friend and, more broadly, of his host country resides in the text. This English is immaterial yet clearly present. Not a single word appears in English – despite the frequent interruptions of the Serbian narrative, aimed to suggest that a certain portion is originally in English or a translation from English. Albahari's story, hence, exemplifies what is commonly termed "fictional multilingualism" and "fictional translation".

While fictional multilingualism can perform a number of functions, in Albahari's "Learning Cyrillic" fictional intrusions in English primarily serve to establish the story's Anglophone ambience. The precarious position of the Serbian language in this community is illustrated by the evening classes. Neither the Serbian nor the First Nations character is a "native" speaker of English, yet it is precisely English that allows them unrestrained communication. For one, it is the language of the colonizer; for the other, it is the language of the host. Rising above the story without ever being physically in attendance, English is not concretely in evidence in the story, but only represented through the Serbian text. English's absence then, can be read as an act of resistance rather than denial – same as Albahari's deliberate choice to remain faithful to the

Serbian language upon his relocation to Canada. In the face of contiguity, one could argue, the insistence on Serbian in the English-dominated environment poses a marked choice. When two or more languages occupy the same locale, then even the retention of the commonly unmarked monolingual paradigm ceases to be a neutral act and turns into a powerful literary device.

Serbian in the Source Text

Serbian is the most substantially present language in Albahari's short story "Learning Cyrillic". Script-wise, the real-life situation with Serbian is somewhat complicated owing to the phenomenon called "synchronic" or "active digraphia". Namely, Serbian is said to be a unique example of "active digraphia" – that is, "the use of two different scripts for the same language" (Ivković 2013:337). The Cyrillic and Latin alphabet are in use simultaneously, albeit not interchangeably:

> While in Russian and Greek the use of the Latin alphabet is an instance of latinization, the use of the Latin alphabet in Serbian may rather be considered an alternative orthographic practice, since in this language the Latin alphabet is already one of two officially recognized scripts. In this regard, Serbian is comparable to Latin-alphabeted languages, for example, French, Portuguese, Spanish or Czech, which use diacritical markings, such as accents, tilde or haček. (ibid.)

Terminology on the matter is far from uniform. Daniel Bunčić, for example, reserves the term 'digraphia' only for the scenarios where writing systems compete with each other privately, either on the basis of writer's social background, register, medium, or conditions of communication (2016:56-59). For this reason, Bunčić does not qualify Serbo-Croatian[3] (which he treats as a single pluricentric language) as an example of digraphia but, rather, of 'scriptal

[3] The Serbo-Croatian language (also Serbo-Croat and Croato-Serbian), the standardization of which began in the mid-nineteenth century, served as an official language of Yugoslavia for most of the twentieth century. This polycentric South Slavic language had two standard varieties, Serbian and Croatian. When Yugoslavia collapsed in the early 1990s, inducing a series of independence wars and ethnic conflicts, not only the joint country split into multiple nation states but also the Serbo-Croatian language became the subject of alternations. Multiple successor languages emerged: Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Montenegrin. Whether Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, and Montenegrin are one language or four separate languages in their own right is a highly sensitive political question. In 2017, a number of linguists from Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro, the four successor states where Serbo-Croatian was spoken, signed the so-called "Declaration on the Common Language", a petition calling for all successor languages of Serbo-Croatian to be recognized as one ('Deklaracija o zajedničkom jeziku' 2017).

pluricentricity' – for the two writing systems are distributed *equipollently*, that is equally but along certain borders, be they national, ethnic, administrative, regional, or confessional (2016:59-60). The borders that Bunčić mentions refer to those between Croatian (only the Latin script is in official use) and Serbian (both Cyrillic and Latin script are in official use). What is important for this analysis is that, in Serbian, the choice between the Cyrillic and Latin script is entirely optional; in a non-literary context, the only condition is that the selected writing system has to be used consistently throughout the text. Of course, different speakers of Serbian value the two scripts differently and there are differences based on age, region, and so forth.

As books can be published in both scripts, a crucial question arises: who chooses which script to use? Quite often, the author does not have specific requirements in regard to the choice of a writing system and would agree to the one preferred by the given editor, book series, and so forth. Sometimes, however, the author may have died long ago, so the choice of the script automatically becomes the publisher's responsibility. In some cases, of course, the preferences of a late author are well known and more-or-less respected – Miloš Crnjanski's legacy is a case in point (Francuski 2013). Nonetheless, explicit preferences are more of an exception than the rule. Whether the author is alive or not, a work of art results from a collective effort:

> [N]ot only the writer [. . .] create[s] the fiction, but all those involved in the producing and ordering of that fiction; the typist, the editor, the typesetter, the printer, the proofreader, and of course the reader. (Federman 2001:70)

The artistic freedom of these mediators is somewhat of a grey area. Ideally, it would be the editor's task to recognize the works where the choice of a script is a tool in the writer's arsenal. Where positively so, the choice of a script should be free to depart from the publishers' guidelines.

Whether Stubovi kulture, the first publisher of Albahari's short story "Learning Cyrillic", was sensitive to these orthographic matters is unknown to me. Whether Albahari himself gave explicit instructions with regard to the choice of a script is also unknown to me. In the two editions I consulted – Stubovi kulture's *Drugi jezik* (*Second language* 2005), which is a reprint of the first edition published in 2003, and Čarobna knjiga's *Izabrane priče* (*Selected Stories* 2015) – the text is entirely in the Latin script, with no artistic mixing of the two. Neither publication comments on the choice of script. *Drugi jezik* (*Second language* [2003] 2005) by

Stubovi kulture begins *in medias res*, containing no preface, introduction, or note that could resolve the dilemma. Stripped of extralinguistic assistance, we have little choice but to resort to the text itself. Was Albahari aware of the script's importance for the story's interpretation? I believe the answer is yes. For, the story's very title, together with its delicate multilingual interplays, indicates the eventual choice of the Latin script for the Serbian text was more probably deliberate than haphazard.

Blackfoot in the Source Text

Finally, the otherwise Serbian text contains occasional traces of the Blackfoot language. Chances are an average Serbian reader is not even vaguely familiar with the specificities – neither linguistic nor cultural – of the language that belongs to the Algonquian language family (Frantz and Russel [1989] 2017:xiii). In a modern geopolitical atlas, its distribution is split between Canada and the US:

> The language here referred to as "Blackfoot" is that spoken on three Southern Alberta reserves: Blackfoot [Siksika] Reserve, centered about one hundred kilometers east-southeast of Calgary; Blood [Kainaa] Reserve, covering a large area between Cardston and Lethbridge; and Piikani (AKA Peigan) [Apatohsipikani] Reserve, west of Fort MacLeod; as well as on the Blackfeet [Amskaapipikani] Reservation in Northwestern Montana. (ibid.; round and square brackets in the original)

Many indigenous languages of North America classify as vulnerable or endangered. The position of the Blackfoot language is also precarious, considering the constant decline in the number of fluent speakers. Nevertheless, it is estimated that several thousand people still speak the language (ibid.).

Important for our understanding of Albahari's multilingualism in "Learning Cyrillic" is the Blackfoot's orthography. The systematisation of writing comes quite late on the trajectory of this language: it was only in 1975 that the Roman-based orthography was officially approved (Frantz and Russel [1989] 2017:xix). The Blackfoot Latin alphabet, composed of only twelve letters, seems much simpler in comparison to those of English (twenty-six letters) or Serbian (thirty letters):

> Though it makes use of twelve letters which are also in the English alphabet, plus an apostrophe, it must be emphasized that these letters represent distinctive sounds of Blackfoot and not English sounds (though many Blackfoot sounds have close approximations in English). (ibid.)

In Albahari's short story, the Blackfoot vocabulary items appear in the Serbian Latin transliteration, without accents or double letters. Devoid of italicisation or any other form of graphical emphasis, they harmoniously blend in with the surrounding Roman alphabet of the Serbian text.

The primary purpose of the Blackfoot words in Albahari's short story, I hold, is *not* to "exoticize" the text. Rather, the idea is to use the foreign vocabulary to complement the portrayal of the unfamiliar culture-specific concepts. For instance, the conversation about *tipi*, between a Serbian-learning pupil and Thunder Cloud illustrates this point:

> The girl gets up, coughs, and asks, "Why do Indians [sic] live in those round, tall tents, and not in a house?" "Because," answers Thunder Cloud, "the devil can chase you into the corner of a house, but in our tent, that we call a tipi, there are no corners, so the devil stays away". (Albahari 2012:89; Elias-Bursać's translation)

Multilingualism of Albahari's "Learning Cyrillic" in Elias-Bursać's Translation into English

As argued on the example of Crnjanski's *Roman o Londonu* (*A Novel of London*, 1971), when tackling multilingual content, a literary examination of the original must precede any discussion of its translation:

> It must be underscored that each language performs a different function within the text and should be approached separately. [. . .] Hence, the first step prior to formulating translation strategies for each language embedded in the Serbian text is to reassess the relations among them in the original from a purely literary perspective, mindful of changes that will take place in the translation process. (Krstić 2018:191)

Elias-Bursać certainly did not skip this step while preparing her translation of Albahari's "Learning Cyrillic". The section at hand will try to demonstrate why her decisions concerning multilingualism are not only well informed but belong to a strategy to render the story's multilingualism more visible.

English in the Target Text

In Elias-Bursać's translation, the English language no longer intertwines immaterially but physically dominates the text. The substitution of English *in absentia* with English *in propria persona* is of little surprise considering the English's status as the designated target language of the translation. Cases where the target language is physically incorporated into the source text, as in Crnjanski's *Roman o Londonu* (A Novel of London), are problematic on account of the originally multilingual intrusions' blending into the target text, which produces a homogenous translation (Krstić 2018:191). In "Learning Cyrillic", the target language is fictional, making the translator's job somewhat easier.

Fictional in place of actual multilingualism is usually employed to help the author incorporate a longer portion of text allegedly in a certain language. What prevents the author from utilizing concrete multilingualism is the idea that it might affect comprehension of the whole work. Nevertheless, some writers, such as Yoko Tawada, boldly leave longer chunks untranslated – yet in search of a different effect (Brandt 2015), the discussion of which lies outside our focus. Albahari's ultimate goal is to portray English as the language of communication between the Serbian and Blackfoot communities, so when, in Elias-Bursać's translation, English becomes the target language, the story's need for its fictional representation terminates abruptly.

Serbian in the Target Text

Elias-Bursać leaves intact Albahari's indicators signalling the language currently in use. By virtue of the story's frequent linguistic alterations, such indicators are hardly avoidable. In spite of the fact that the formerly fictional English becomes real in the English translation, it is the Serbian language that suddenly becomes fictional – with the notable exception of few simple sentences in the Cyrillic script, which will be discussed shortly. With respect to the fictional representation of Serbian, I wish to draw attention to a single trace of English syntax hidden in the originally Serbian text that seems to have slipped Elias-Bursać's attention. In the episode where the teacher forces his students to speak Serbian among themselves, the story offers a unique insight into the level of students' proficiency in Serbian:

> "But why" I ask them, "How can it be that you are unable to speak with your friends in your native language?" They look at me, say nothing, blink. "Come on", I say to the boy with the curly hair, "ask your friend something, but in Serbian!" "He is not my friend", says the boy with the curly hair. "Ask him something anyway", I say. The boy with the curly hair stares at the boy next to him. "How are you", he finally says, in Serbian. "I am fine", says the other boy, also in Serbian. Both of them look up at me, as proud as if they had been reciting *Hamlet*. (Albahari 2012:91; Elias-Bursać's translation; italics in the original)

The boy's response in the Serbian original is: "Ja sam dobar" ("I am good"; Albahari [2003] 2005:189). As it is, it means more "I am a good boy" than "I am feeling good". If one wants to refer to well-being rather than to ethical conduct, the adverb *dobro* (good) is used in lieu of the adjective *dobar* (good). What is more, Serbian is a pro-drop language – meaning that it has the ability to leave out pronouns where their meaning can be inferred either grammatically or pragmatically. This is a marked difference in comparison to English, which is not a pro-drop language. The personal pronoun "I", mandatory in English, becomes redundant in Serbian. An idiomatic response would, therefore, be: "Dobro sam" ("*Good am"). The boy's answer "Ja sam dobar" ("I am good"; ibid.) exposes that his English interferes with his Serbian even on the most basic level of communication. Even though Elias-Bursać's translation "I am fine" to a degree eliminates the awkwardness of the expression originally used, which replicates English syntax, she eschews the use of a contraction "I'm", which would be natural in spoken English, giving the boy's response a somewhat robotic, or perhaps bookish, sound in English. The story's clue as to the students' fluency in spoken Serbian is hinted at, suggesting the boys are not actually fluent, just capable of repeating set phrases. The response without contractions sounds formal, which makes the exchange appear as a dubious proof of the boys' ability to produce utterances in Serbian.

Even though the Serbian edition does not combine the Cyrillic and Latin script, the translator has recognized the artistic potential of Serbian orthography's dual nature. In Elias-Bursać's translation, a few short sentences are provided in the Serbian Cyrillic script:

> The little ones are working on their Cyrillic. I print the letters out on a smooth whiteboard with a wide, blue, felt-tip pen. Then I dictate short sentences for the practice of Cyrillic: "Лела љуља Љиљану: Lela rocks Ljiljana. Ђак носи џак: The pupil carries a sack. And Ћира има чир: Ćira has an ulcer." (Albahari 2012:76; Elias-Bursać's translation)

In Elias-Bursać's translation quoted above – unlike in the Serbian original – the promise of Albahari's suggestive title is fulfilled: not only the fictional migrant children learn the Cyrillic letters, but the reader too gets a glimpse of a Cyrillic font. Acquainting the Serbian audience with the Cyrillic script is highly superfluous, which explains why Albahari refrained from any graphical interferences of the kind. Transliterating the sentences practiced in a Serbian-language class, however, amuses the English readership as the curious shapes of the Cyrillic script materialize before their very eyes. To English-speaking readers, the inclusion of the Cyrillic script could also highlight the difficulty for the pupils brought up in an English-language environment and an English-language school they attend on weekdays. Elias-Bursać chose to supplement the dictated sentences with an English translation. Her choice not to completely give up the semantic for the sake of the graphic may have missed the opportunity to diversify the uses of heterolingualism. For, as Esther Kilchmann argues on the example of Herta Müller's writing, "heterolingualism is more than a stylistic device, it is a method to generate alienation and de-automatization, and thus to prevent an all-too easy understanding of the text" (2015:78). With a ready translation provided in immediate proximity, however, Elias-Bursać shows the sentences are hardly present-day language relevant to the children's day-to-day life. Nevertheless, by using the Cyrillic, the English reader may miss the fact that these sentences have a phonic quality that seems to trump their denotative meaning, especially the first one, which may be considered a tongue twister: Lela ljulja Ljiljanu. This sentence may be used for pronunciation practice, illustrating the difference between a non-palatalized "l" and a palatalized "lj". Rather than an English translation, Elias-Bursać might have included a Latin transcription to make that visible. She chose instead to use this as an occasion to introduce Cyrillic script, which suits the context of the novel's multilingualism.

Blackfoot in the Target Text

The Blackfoot phrases are transliterated – or, more precisely, back-transliterated. The shift, however, does not operate between different scripts but between two ways of spelling the same script: the Serbian Latin and the Blackfoot Latin alphabet. For example, the lexemes for "wolf", "summer", and "moon" are reversed to match the spelling of Blackfoot standardized Roman-based orthography:

"makoiji" (Albahari [2003] 2005:186)
"makoiyi" (Albahari 2012:89; Elias-Bursać's translation)

"nipo" (Albahari [2003] 2005:186)
"niipo" (Albahari 2012:89; Elias-Bursać's translation)

"kokomikisom" (Albahari [2003] 2005:186)
"kokomikisomm" (Albahari 2012:89; Elias-Bursać's translation)

While, in all likelihood, Elias-Bursać is not fluent in the Blackfoot language, she conducted ample research to spot Albahari's Serbian transliteration, intended to accommodate the Serbian reader. Her systematic back-transliteration once again reinforces the idea that her whole translation of Albahari's "Learning Cyrillic" is committed to bringing out the story's multilingual context. How such handling of different languages affects translational relations will be discussed in the following section.

Translational Relations of Multilingual Content

Multilingualism and translation are inextricably intertwined. The bond that links the two phenomena – as well as the respective disciplines that study them – feels naturally strong. Yet, in disciplinary terms, it is translation studies, the older sibling, that plucked multilingualism studies from obscurity:

> In today's world, talk of multilingualism no longer raises eyebrows but is seen, quite matter-of-factly, as a sign of the times. Whether this is due to Deleuze's and Guattari's work on the "deterritorializing" powers of language, or Bakhtin's

> forceful critique of "monologic" and "monoglossic" tendencies in Western thought, or the "hybrid" character of postcolonial texts and cultures, or all of the above, the times they are indeed a-changin'. *Translation studies* can justifiably be said to have been in the forefront of this paradigm shift. (Delabastita and Grutman 2005:11; my emphasis)

A range of issues emanating from the so-called "post-monolingual condition", which tellingly marks our era, has been tackled in Till Dembeck and Georg Mein's article "Philology's Jargon: How Can We Write Post-Monolingually?" (2015). The authors argue the difficulty of reversing the monolingual trend lies in the unprecedented complexity and hybridity of new forms (Dembeck and Mein 2015).

Source and Target Language(s)

Albahari's short story "Learning Cyrillic" defies the habitual labelling of languages in multiple ways; consequently, translational relations too become susceptible to interrogation. Employing the traditional terminology of 'source' and 'target' might prove helpful in approaching this issue. These two widely accepted yet somewhat controversial terms can be used in collocation with 'language', 'text', 'discourse', 'culture', and so forth. The term 'source' was coined as an alternative to the loaded term 'original'. Nowadays, 'source' and 'original' are often treated as synonyms, although their implications might be slightly different.

Henrik Gottlieb[4] (2018) proposes a new typology of translational relations, based on several parameters, in an attempt "to provide conceptual tools for dealing systematically with any type of translation encountered in today's communicative landscape" (2018:46). Despite this taxonomy's advertised sensitivity to the complexities of a modern-day expression and particularly to "the possible differences in semiotic composition between source and target texts" (2018:47), Gottlieb's taxonomy is of little use for linguistically heterogeneous texts. That is *not* to say that Gottlieb's taxonomy cannot be applied to multilingual texts, inasmuch as nothing prevents us from classifying Elias-Bursać's translation by Gottlieb's standards (as *intrasemiotic, isosemiotic, verbal,* and *conventional translation*). But when it comes to the relationship between the 'source' and the 'target', Gottlieb's semiotically oriented taxonomy

[4] Terminology-wise, Gottlieb (2018) does not question the notions of 'source' and 'target'; he uses 'original' interchangeably with 'source'.

concentrates solely on the changes in the number of semiotic channels, which is less relevant for our understanding of how linguistically heterogeneous literary texts upset translational relations. To this effect, the core problems radiating from multilingual experimentations remain unaddressed.

Toury[5] maintains that "linguistic translating does *not* require the existence of any defined relationships between the respective languages and/or textual traditions" (1986:1117; my emphasis). By contrast, Toury explains, a fixed relationship becomes unavoidable where a "secondary" code derives from a "primary" with mediation of certain previously established rules; the example provided is that of writing down oral material (ibid.). This "primary–secondary" relationship does not occur in linguistic translating for the following reasons:

> [T]he [unidirectional] relationships established between the target and source texts are not a function of any other set of relationships that has logical priority over them, but a result of the interplay of *all* the cultural, textual and linguistic factors involved in every single act of performance, hence not necessarily the same in all cases. (ibid.; square brackets and emphasis in the original)

Departing from the premise that a translation is not a secondary derivative of the primary text, Toury further infers that,

> innumerable different acts of translating may be performed on one and the same source text, each one yielding a different product, in (target) linguistic substance and textual identity (function) as well as in terms of its relationships to the common source text. (1986, 1119; brackets in the original)

Insofar as the qualifiers "source" and "target" do not condition or regulate the translation process itself, the relationship between them emerges as arbitrary (1986:1117); thereupon, the two terms ought to be used descriptively rather than prescriptively (ibid.). Ultimately, this signifies that 'source' and 'target' should by no means be established beforehand but only *after* the translation process is completely finished.

[5] Toury (1986) does not question the very terminology of 'source' and 'target'. It should be added that he uses 'source' consistently.

In 'source' terms, Toury's suggestion that "innumerable different acts of translating may be performed on one and the same source text" (Toury 1986:1119) implies that the source text is a fixed and durable structure. An earlier section of this article dealing with the main features of Albahari's multilingual experimentations in "Learning Cyrillic" has underscored a series of uncertainties surrounding the authoritative version of the source text. Two graphical specificities of the source text have been identified as particularly vulnerable: the choice of the Latin script for the Serbian text in face of active digraphia; and the Serbian Latin transliteration of the Blackfoot intrusions. The thought that – in the biscriptal environment of Serbia – a different edition could cyrillicize the story without blinking an eye, brings into question our perception of the source text as absolutely fixed. In deliberating about what he terms *autobiographical input* – that is a mode of reading which acknowledges and values personal interference – Clive Scott tries to counter the widespread apprehension of the source text as an ultimately rigid and unchangeable structure:

> [T]he ST [source text], as we have it before us, is in fact not in a suspended state, but at the intersection of three durations: the process of the work's composition and revision, a process which has within it the potentially infinite extension; the process of the ST's post-publication life, in the minds of countless readers, in different editions, imitations, adaptations, merchandising, and so on; the process of the ST's existing and becoming in the mind of any *individual* reader. (2012:2-3; emphasis in the original)

In modern literature, where the notion of authorship figures strongly, it is not at all too obvious that a source text is in fact a consensus – prone to variation and transformation.

In "target" terms, Toury's suggestion that "innumerable different acts of translating may be performed on one and the same source text" (1986:1119) allows for multiplicity through retranslation. In spite of the fact that no other translation of Albahari's "Learning Cyrillic" has been published (which, of course, does not imply that no other translation exists or could exist), in the discussion of translational relations, Elias-Bursać's rendering should be treated only as one manifestation, one performance. In future translations of Albahari's multilingual story, the relations between languages could easily change for a number of reasons – ranging from those creative, intimate decisions of a translator to external forces, such as fluctuating power relations between languages.

Elias-Bursać's multilingually and graphically aware translation disrupts the traditionally predictable behaviour of 'source' and 'target'. A call for a more flexible definition of 'source' and 'target' comes from Reine Meylaerts (2006), who – albeit through a sociological perspective – points in the direction similar to that indicated by Toury (1986) and Gottlieb (2018) – that "[t]exts and discourses can cross so-called linguistic and cultural boundaries, shaking up the analytical pertinence of a clear-cut distinction between 'sources' and 'targets'" insofar as there are "numerous past and present contexts in which the ideal Western nation-state's one-to-one relationship among territory, language, literature and people has been blurred" (2006:75).

The body of literature on and by the post-Yugoslav émigré community in North America certainly shuffles these nation-based categories. There is no absolute one-to-one correspondence between the source language of Albahari's "Learning Cyrillic" and the target language of Elias-Bursać's translation. As a result, the dynamic relationship between the source and target conditions the identification of translational relations. So, is Elias-Bursać's translation of Albahari's "Learning Cyrillic" *interlingual* or *intralingual*? Tempting as it may be to define it as an *interlingual translation* from Serbian into English – such qualification would be only partially true. Albeit predominantly an *interlingual translation*, it is important to acknowledge that both *inter*- and *intralingual* processes are in operation.

Let us tabularly break down the relations between the story's multifarious languages – be they *fictional* (physically absent from the text) or *concrete* (physically present in the text). Table 1 represents the languages in the source and target text, specifying whether the relation between them is *inter*- or *intralingual*.

Table 1: Translational relations of Albahari's "Learning Cyrillic" in Elias-Bursać's translation.

Source text		**Target text**	**Translational relations**
Fictional English (expressed by **concrete Serbian** in the Serbian Latin alphabet)	→	**Concrete English** (English Latin alphabet)	***Interlingual translation***
Concrete Serbian (Serbian Latin alphabet)	→	**Concrete English** (English Latin alphabet)	***Interlingual translation***
		Fictional Serbian (expressed by **Concrete English** in English Latin alphabet);	***Interlingual translation***
		Concrete Serbian (Serbian Cyrillic alphabet)	***Intralingual translation***
Concrete Blackfoot (Serbian Latin alphabet)	→	**Concrete Blackfoot** (Blackfoot Latin alphabet)	***Intralingual translation***

The examples of *interlingual translation* presented in Table 1 require little explanation. More worthy of additional commentary are the instances of *intralingual* relations in the otherwise *interlingual* surroundings. To clarify their appearance and behaviour, the analysis ought to be turned towards the graphical facet.

Despite the increasing attention that multilingualism as a phenomenon has started to receive in theoretical circles, the study of alphabetical alternations has remained quite peripheral. When addressed, the graphical aspect is usually examined in the contexts of logographic writing systems, such as Chinese or Japanese (e.g. Brandt 2015). Perhaps on the grounds of the Roman alphabets' global dominance, the Cyrillic script – used in Eastern Europe and Asia – passes unnoticed in Western academia. Even though Albahari's "Learning Cyrillic" is monographic in that it utilizes only the Serbian Latin alphabet, the story's very title hints at the text's inner tension between the language's two parallelly used scripts. By infusing an all-Roman matrix with several sentences in non-Roman symbols, Elias-Bursać unlocks the creative potential of intermixing different scripts. The translator of Albahari's short story decided to keep certain sentences in the Serbian language but opted to transcribe their originally Latin-spelled words into the Cyrillic script. Having placed these Serbian words in the midst of an English text, Elias-Bursać effectively embedded *intralingual* relations into what is contrary an *interlingual translation*.

The second example of *intralingual* interruption lies in a sporadic retention of the Blackfoot phrases. As the Blackfoot words stand out in Albahari's chiefly Serbian text as well as in Elias-Bursać's generally English translation, their transfer could be characterized as *intralingual*, inasmuch as it remains in the domain of the Blackfoot language. In saying so, we should not disregard the fact that slightly complicates the situation with the renderings in the Blackfoot language – that the Blackfoot lexical items were originally written in accordance with the Serbian Latin orthography rather than the standard Blackfoot writing system, which was amended in Elias-Bursać's translation.

Minimal Unit of Translation

As *intralingual* relations are scattered across a predominantly *interlingual* setting, it emerges that we cannot mark a *whole* translation of a multilingual text as solely *intra*- or *interlingual*. The intermingling of *intra*- and *interlingual* relations foregrounds the issue of the minimal unit of translation. If we go back to Jakobson's essay "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation"([1959] 2012), which introduces the concepts of *intra*- and *interlingual translation*, we notice that Jakobson cites only word-based examples. Such a narrow approach has been heavily criticized by Sturrock (1991:311) and more recently Berk Albachten (2014:575).

Sturrock (1991), motivated by his search for equivalence, criticizes Jakobson's fixation on the word-level and suggests focusing on the sentence-level instead. Interestingly, Sturrock's own analysis – preoccupied with the matters of synonymy between rather limited elements – falls into the same trap. Sturrock firmly maintains that "the smallest unit of equivalence in any translation *must* be the sentence" (1991:318; my emphasis), thereby dismissing his colleagues' advocacy for much larger units that go "beyond even whole texts to the cultures those texts are part of" (ibid.); we shall encounter some of these examples soon. Nevertheless, I concur with Berk Albachten's assessment that, while effectively challenging Jakobson's narrow approach, "Sturrock also fails to see that the problem of translating is more than one of 'determining synonymy', and the question of equivalence (and synonymy) in current translation theories is a controversial one" (2014:575; quotes and round brackets in the original).

Eco (2003) and Calabrese (2000) also embark on a search for the minimal unit of translation. Calabrese negates the possibility of an all-encompassing theory of translation; his claim rests on the assumption that translation is an "individual" and "textual" phenomenon, which ought to be conceptualized "locally" in lieu of globally (2000:102). Owing to the mutual incommensurability of systems, a translation theory based on the system as a whole is bound to fail (ibid.); the minimal unit imposing itself is a *text*. Yet, Calabrese clearly states that *texts* too can, under certain conditions, simultaneously operate as individual systems (Calabrese 2000:103), which somewhat weakens his argumentation. Of a similar attitude is his colleague Eco in *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation*:

> Translation is a phenomenon which does not concern the relationships between two languages or two linguistic systems – except in the rare cases in which one asks native speakers or interpreters how they would translate a given term in their own language [. . .]. Rather, translation is a process that takes place between two *texts* produced at a given historical moment in a given cultural milieu. (2003:25-26; my emphasis)

Neither Calabrese nor Eco define what they mean by "text".

The aforementioned ideas of a minimal unit are much more restricted than that of Pym ([1992] 2010). He dismisses both "language" and "community" as insufficient criteria ([1992] 2010:25): namely, these two terms do not necessarily correspond to each other, insofar as "there are many more languages in the world than countries to house them" and "numerous languages are spoken in more than one community" ([1992] 2010:24). As a substitute, Pym proposes "the suitably vague term" – "culture" ([1992] 2010:25).

In a nutshell, no consensus has been reached pertaining to the minimal unit of translation. Seeing that all of the previously outlined positions have their strengths, this article suggests a reconciling tactic by arguing in favour of a *scalable* basic unit of translation. Namely, Jay Jin's (2017) idea of synecdochic and metonymic approaches to 'close' and 'distant reading' could be adapted to fit the translational agenda. In this way, the imperative to predetermine what should operate as a unit of translation ceases to exist. With a scalable unit of translation, the researcher would no longer be forced to commit to a single unit; what is more, the analysis could freely travel between the very small and the very large without producing incommensurable results. The greatest benefit of a scalable approach, I believe, lies in stressing the importance of contextual and extralinguistic factors, which need to be taken into consideration when attempting to theorize translational relations.

Contextual Framework

From a wider perspective, the asymmetry between the 'source' and 'target' language along with the minimal problematic unit of translation reinforces the pertinence of a contextual framework in the study of multilingual literature's translational relations. As previously mentioned, Toury asserts that the relationship between a source and target text results from "the interplay of *all* the cultural, textual and linguistic factors involved in every single act of performance, hence not necessarily the same in all cases" (1986:1117; emphasis in the original). Hence, the specific way in which Elias-Bursać rendered Albahari's multilingualism, keeping the Serbian and Blackfoot elements in the otherwise English text, should be understood in terms of uniqueness rather than universality. This article's study of translational relations on the example of "Learning Cyrillic" has demonstrated that the act of translation investigated is only one possible manifestation and that nothing prevents translational relations from shifting in any of the prospective (re)translations. This supports the argument that translational relations are not given but contextually determined in each individual case that involves multilingual content.

Conclusion

This article has drawn attention to the specificities of multilingual literature. Although multilingual literature boasts a long history, it is the modern era that has galvanized people into a new mode of multicultural contact and active exchange. Albahari's "Learning Cyrillic" is not only a linguistically hybrid text but a piece that creatively engages with translation matters. It is thanks to the protagonist's fictional interpreting that a greater number of languages figure in the text – not all of which are materially present. In the source text, the generally Serbian

writing is interspersed with concrete traces of the Blackfoot language, whereas English, albeit physically absent, dwells in the story with the help of fictional multilingualism.
Having examined the relations between the three languages in Albahari's original from a purely literary perspective, the article has proceeded to invigorate the discussion on translation of multilingual fiction by immersing into the graphically and linguistically diverse world of Elias-Bursać's translation. Her translation of "Learning Cyrillic" into English not only preserves the Blackfoot phrases found in the original but leaves a couple of short sentences in the source language of Serbian as an illustration of the Cyrillic content that pupils study at the evening classes. To that end, Elias-Bursać's translation is attentive not only to the role of multilingual insertions but to the aesthetic capacity of the Serbian dual orthography – which simultaneously utilizes both the Cyrillic and Latin alphabet.

"Learning Cyrillic" – seen through the prism of Albahari's and Elias-Bursać's version – manifests the complex relationship between multilingualism and translation. In order to detect translational relations, it is necessary to first pinpoint the so-called 'source' and 'target' language(s) involved in the process. As multilingual writing resists the customary identification of languages, in that one language is insufficient to cover the whole text, the text needs to be carefully dissected with a view to identifying 'source' and 'target' language(s). As the degree of multilingual elements varies greatly – ranging from a single word to much more substantial portions of a text – this article advocates the introduction of a scalable minimal unit of translation. The proposition, which looks up to Jay Jin's (2017) idea of scaling the research tools so as to bypass the unnecessarily prescriptive nature of one-fits-all models, could alleviate the problems of multilingual literature's shuffled translational relations. A scalable unit of translation could be tailored in accordance with the project's specific needs.

All things considered, we arrive at the conclusion that in a multilingual environment, the 'source' and 'target' language(s) can only be identified locally. As a result, the translational relations need to be defined anew again and again. This brings to light the importance of establishing a contextual framework. For, translational relations are not pre-given but, rather, contextually determined in the analysis of each individual case.

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