MONOLINGUALISM AND LINGUISTIC EXHIBITIONISM IN FICTION
BY ANJALI PANDEY

Monolingualism and Linguistic Exhibitionism in Fiction, Anjali Pandey. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. $100.00. ISBN: 9781137340351.

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At the heart of Anjali Pandey's examination of linguistic multilingualism in contemporary fiction lies a simple question: 'Why are books so important in the 21st century?' (52). Specifically, Pandey focuses on a corpus of prize-winning fiction written between 2003 and 2014 that features what she calls 'linguistic exhibitionism', the usage of various multilingual strategies intended for 'cosmetic effect'. Grounding her inquiry in the work of four Anglo-Indian authors, Pandey contextualizes multilingualism in a world of the post-global turn characterized by 'the inherent tension between the push and pull of, on the one hand, monolingualism, and on the other, multilingualism. (10) In this world, Pandey argues, examination of fiction reveals that in spite of the 'seeming' presence of linguistic diversity, monolingual forces of English and other dominant European languages continue to shape readers' tastes and influence literary canon formation.

In many ways, Pandey's interdisciplinary methodology makes her a trail blazer in linguistics. She aims to fill a gap in the current studies of multilingualism that are skewed in favor of spoken rather than written language. As Mark Sebba states in his introduction to the edited collection *Language Mixing and Code-Switching in Writing* (2012), since 1970s studies of multilingualism were primarily focused on spoken data, the 'conversational code-switching' (1). Pandey's project is both a manifesto and a proposal for an independent theoretical framework in addressing the understudied phenomenon of written literary multilingualism, and she follows Sebba's recommendations for establishing such a framework. Pandey situates her study within a broader field of post-global studies in the 21st century; she approaches written code-switching in 'the context of literacy *practices* of which they are a part', the prize-winning novels themselves; and, finally, she looks at the visual and spatial characteristics of written text, examining the use of font, italicization, and other markers (Sebba 2).

The first half of the book contextualizes Pandey's project within a 'post-global' world, introduces the prize-winning industry of transnational writing, and provides a definition of linguistic exhibitionism. In the first chapter, Pandey sketches the remit of her project, situating it in a world characterized by a semblance of an 'increasing presence of multiculturalism in the domain of English fiction' (2). 'Seeming' is an often repeated descriptor in Pandey's discussion, since the motivating force in her investigation is to uncover how, far from fostering true visibility of multilingualism, publishing houses and prize selection committees deliberately use token multilingualism as a successful marketing ploy to privilege English. The second chapter sets up the tension between the macro-operations of book commerce and micro-forces of multilingual appropriation within global literatures. Pandey is careful to point out that prize-winning literature by 'avant-garde artists', which forms the focus of her study, does not necessarily mean bestsellers (54). Although the two are not exclusive, prize-winning literature, via its visibility promoted by the big publishing houses in the West, is especially influential in shaping readers' tastes and academically-endorsed canons (71). The third chapter establishes the project's interdisciplinarity, which combines linguistic and literary perspectives and aims for a 'scalar' (as opposed to the binary) framework. The chapter presents Pandey's taxonomy of multilingual use that is 'dynamic rather than static; data-derived rather than atheoretically

listed; continuum-based rather than category-oriented; and explanatory rather than descriptive' (84). The gist of this taxonomy is also presented graphically as a tree diagram (97), a handy reference map to the many linguistic strategies discussed in the book. Overall, the interdisciplinary novelty of Pandey's work justifies the space she dedicates to introducing her methodology and prepares the readers for a more in-depth, 'micro-linguistic' account of specific literary works and authors in the following chapters.

Pandey begins this detailed examination with Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008 winner of the Man Booker Prize), arguing that Adiga's contrived use of 'shallow' multilingual strategies in his treatment of Hindi contribute towards 'thematic privileging of English' instead of highlighting non-English linguistic diversity (126). By employing first-person narration, Adiga uses his protagonist, Balram Halwai, to deploy linguistic tagging and semantic re-looping (explanation of Hindi terms for the benefit of non-Indian readers) in order to 'English' the entire work and promote 'linguistic non-worth of India's multilingualism in light of its access to English' (128). Pandey clearly establishes Adiga, and not Balram, as the main agent in such Englishing, and urges for a more 'overtly complicit role of the author in his portrayal of 21st century linguistic currency values' (126).

The following chapter, on Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (shortlisted for the 2003 Man Booker Prize) continues to set up the author as the primary agent in establishing English's visibility, this time at the expense of 'invisibilized' Bengali. Pandey writes that 'the power of linguistic exhibitionism is most apparent' in Ali's work (166), which successfully transliterates the experience of Nazneen, a Bengali-speaking woman transplanted into cosmopolitan London. Most effectively, Ali experiments with vernacularization, the uses of 'unorthodox English' of her Bengali-speaking characters to illustrate the 'aesthetic capital' of 'correct English' (194). Thus, the novel sets up English as a language of 'comprehension' amidst the multilingual 'cacophony' of London (173), a desirable language of power. As a result, the actual use of Bengali is minimized and readers 'encounter minimal linguistic hardships', reading on with a comforting illusion of multilingual 'knowingness' (168).

The analysis of Pulitzer-winning author Jhumpa Lahiri and her short story collection *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) is of particular interest, since it highlights the asymmetries in tokenized usage of Bengali with that of Italian (as well as French and Latin) instead of English. Pandey questions Lahiri's 'unquestioning appropriation of cosmopolitan hegemonic monolingualism' (204) and depicting European languages as the languages of high desirability. Thus, Lahiri's strategy of translating Bengali into English and leaving Italian non-translated suggests that the former is exotic, unknowable, while the latter's familiarity does not require further elucidation. Pandey's is a nuanced and well-organized analysis of Lahiri's short fiction (not an easy task, considering the variety of settings and characters in the collection). However, by this point in her work, the criticism of prize-winning authors as contributing (if not primary) agents responsible for the popularity and dissemination of linguistic exhibitionism begins to conflict with her stated goal of primarily investigating 'multicultural rendition' in the novels and starts to sound precisely like the aesthetic criticism she is trying to avoid (ix). Moreover, the influence of publishing practices described in the beginning of Pandey's book recedes the more she represents the examined authors as qualified, albeit unwilling, agents of change in combating cosmetic use of multilingualism. Undeniably, the elevation of a European language at the expense of a more exotic tongue in fiction is a problematic practice in the 21st publishing; however, it also reflects the writer's personal preferences on which she bases her craft. In the case of Lahiri, the 2016 publication of her memoir, written in Italian and translated into English by Ann Goldstein, was meant as an open love letter to Italian and a significant departure from the stories of Bengali immigrants to the West in the Pulitzer-prize winning *Interpreter of Maladies* (2000). The bilingual Italian-English edition came out too recently to be included in

Pandey's discussion and readers familiar with the memoir are left to guess as to how Pandey would have responded to this addition in Lahiri's oeuvre. My intuition is that Pandey would have viewed it as an opportunity to affirm her point about the need for a literary representations of cosmopolitanism that are 'situated outside of a western-paradigm' (205).

Pandey continues the discussion of cosmopolitanism in her chapter on Salman Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008), a novel that features 'copious italicized multilingual inclusions', from nine different languages. Rushdie is perhaps one of the most famous contemporary representatives of transnational fiction – a triple shortlisted and Man Booker Prize-winning author (for *Midnight's Children,* 1981) known for incorporating multilingualism into his work. At this point in Pandey's book, the manifestations of linguistic exhibitionism are well familiar to the readers, and reinforced by Rushdie's packaging of his polyglossia: the asymmetries between the 'erotically appealing' Romance languages and the ostensibly 'less attractive', oriental ones (244); the erroneous identification of polylingualism with the West (249); the externalization of Eastern languages in characters' speech, and not in thought (248); and the tendency (also found in Lahiri) to translate the exotic tongues and leave Italian untranslated (255). It is surprising that Pandey does not dedicate more time to the discussion of the controversies that Rushdie's novels generate (she only mentions *The Satanic Verses* controversy briefly in the concluding chapter), since his high media profile lends even more visibility to the 'shallow' multilingualism and facile version of universalism in *The Enchantress*.

To return to the question of the importance of books in post-global world, Pandey's work convinces that they matter precisely because of their power to either reinforce or challenge readers' worldviews about the extent of actual multilingualism and linguistic diversity. In her conclusion, she acknowledges that this project only marks the beginning of a structured linguistic inquiry into this important dimension of 21st century fiction and that future work may benefit from adopting a less qualitative approach and include other linguistic regions. Her rationale for limiting her present inquiry to writers originating from the Indian subcontinent, that all of them address the post-global themes of 9/11 and the 2008 financial crisis, deserves perhaps an earlier placement and more space in the book. Overall, Pandey's work is an eloquent and meticulously researched call to interdisciplinary action, to 'implicat[e] literatures in the *habitus* towards linguistic worth' (270). And, even though it is not entirely clear what the object of such inquiries should be – the spotlighted authors, publishing industry practices, or academic 'faddism' that responds to the pressures of the market – Pandey's work should interest any scholar concerned with the future of multilingualism in the post-global world.