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**THE CITY IN TRANSLATION: URBAN CULTURES OF CENTRAL EUROPE**

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**ABSTRACT**

In the spirit of the ‘enlargement’ of the field proposed by Tymoczko (2007), this article argues for the city as an object of translation studies. All cities are multilingual, but for some language relations have particularly intense historical and cultural significance. Translation studies can illuminate the nature and effects of these interactions. The cities of Central Europe and in particular Czernowitz offer rich case studies. A thorough investigation of translational culture between 1880 and 1939 can help to provide a nuanced understanding of the nature of literary relations which prevailed before the violence of World War II.

**KEYWORDS**

Translation Studies, cities, Central Europe, Czernowitz, Celan, Manger.

**Introduction: the translational city**

No city is monolingual. While this generalization could possibly be contradicted by a reference to some ancient Greek city state where foreign languages were prohibited by law, the exception would confirm the rule: the spirit of the urban has to do with contact and mixing—and languages are part of this mix. Diversity, transfer and circulation among languages are part of all ‘natural’ urban life. And as global migration increases, the realities of urban multilingualism have become all the more evident in cities around the world, whether it be through shouted conversations on cellphones, multiple scripts on storefronts and on the screens of bank machines, or the texts of public art.

But the city is not only multilingual: it is translational. What is the sense of this distinction? Multilingualism calls up a space of pure diversity, a proliferation of tongues and of parallel conversations. It is the multilingual New York praised by Eugene Jolas in the early twentieth century, as a chorus of languages, which together make up the soundscape of an immigrant world where all languages are equally strange to one another:

“We listened to the choral voices of Manhattan

All the languages were melting one into the other

Toutes les langues fêtaient des épousailles

We saw the dance of the words of corbyantic names

A storm of words organed catitatas over the city

Antique rune-words wed French syllables

Anglo-Saxons sounds mingled with Yiddish vocables

Dutch vowels embraced the Spanish verbs

A Flemish word fled into Italian nouns

The lexicon of Hell’s Kitchen melted into Portuguese

White Chapel cockney united with Broadway double talk

A Luxembourg dialect fused into Louisiana French

Paris argot joined the slanguage of the Rialto

All the vers of the world flowed gently into each other

In a miraculous music of incantations”. (quoted in Apter 2006: 117)

By contrast, the translational city is a space of connecting and of converging communities, of directionality and incorporation. Relations between languages are indicators of the extent to which the city’s languages participate in the more general conversations of cultural citizenship. Citizenship requires, first and foremost, engagement with other people in the creation of shared social spaces. For nonofficial languages to have a right to expression, they must be translated into the official tongue. Translation, over and above individual multilingualism, is the key to citizenship-- to the creation of communities across languages in the public sphere.

In this article, I wish to contribute to the debate about the reach and diversity of translation studies by proposing as a ‘known unknown’ the topic of the city in translation. The city has gained power as a site of inquiry over the last decades, as an arena of discussion focusing on issues of citizenship, public space and the reshaping of community. How do the physical spaces of the city encourage or impede the formation of community? How do globalization, virtual space, and diasporic networks affect communication among neighbours? There is a long history connecting the idea of the public realm in the city with the Greek *agora*, the physical space of conversation where citizenship, governance, and community were intertwined. Whereas the languages of foreigners, of what were known as *barbarians*, were excluded from the Greek *agora*, today’s public spaces must include them. Public space in migrant societies, says Michael Cronin, is translation space, and this includes “[e]verything, from small local theatres presenting translations of plays from different migrant languages to new voice recognition and speech synthesis technology producing discreet translations in wireless environments to systematic client education for community interpreting to translation workshops as part of diversity management courses in the workplace”. (Cronin, 2006: 68).

The translational city offers a new view onto city life, but it also introduces new perspectives on translation. Maria Tymoczko has been eloquent in showing how the basic premises of translation studies have been based on Anglo-American models of linguistic ‘(in)competence’, assuming that individuals are monoglots and that translation serves to communicate across cultures which are both distant geographically and cognitively foreign one to the other. Such assumptions are belied, in particular, by multilingual cities. (Tymoczko, online: 4-5) The city questions received ideas of “foreignness”, because members of diverse cultures become neighbours and share a single territory. This means that the frames which dictate the flow and analysis of language exchange must be recast to respond to more subtle understandings of the relation between language and identity. The recognition will put pressure on the traditional terminology of translation studies, in particular the idea relation of *source* to *target.* As Reine Meylaerts asks: what happens when translations take place among communities that share geographical and cultural references? How do the competition and animosities that inevitably flourish in multilingual geopolitical contexts shape translation? (Meylaerts 2004 :309) Translation practices in the city indeed partake of the ‘plurilingual layering’ described by Tymoczko, shaped by the realities of multilingualism on common terrain. The city is a network of differences across small spaces. To discuss translation in the city therefore is to investigate the ways in which proximate differences, often conflictual, are negotiated.

To introduce translation into the study of the city is also to enrich the the notion of the “urban imaginary”. While there has been an explosion of writing on the city since the 1980s by authors such as David Harvey, Saskia Sassen, Edward Soja, Alan Blum, Iain Chambers– writing activated in large part by the new importance given to space in the human sciences– there has been a remarkable absence of attention to language. In the huge library of studies and books which have appeared on cities, little attention has been given to the public presence of language in cities or the translation zones that they foster. For Werner Sollors, “Language is the blind spot in the debates about multiculturalism in the United States. Though perhaps the most significant and fascinating form of ‘diversity’, and certainly the single most important medium for literary expression, the multitude of languages in which literature of the United States has been written has rarely if ever been made the centre of readers’ attention so that the history and continued existence of multilingualism in the United States remain virtually unexplored.” (Sollors1997: 5). Though this blindspot has been partially addressed by the recent writings of a group of committed American scholars-- Emily Apter, Doris Sommer, Mary Louise Pratt, Domna Stanton, Werner Sollor, Marc Shell, Edwin Gentzler– all drawing attention to the plurilingualism of the American literary past, this attention has not extended into the realm of cities. Indeed, despite the research of urban sociolinguists, who have much to say on the ways in which the city has influenced the interaction among languages, much of the literature in urban studies ignores language, even when language issues figure prominently in that city’s life.

**Patterns of circulation: the dual city**

To make sense of what seems like the shapeless and inchoate wanderings of languages through the streets and neighbourhoods of the city, it is necessary, then, to hear these conversations as part of a historical soundscape. Languages and texts do not circulate freely in the city, but follow pre-established paths, logics of circulation. “Information or cultural expression does not simply blow weightlessly through the city, but becomes a pretext for the building of structures and the organization of space, for the fixing of interfaces”, says Will Straw. (2010 : 5) Translation and the city are linked through “cultures of circulation”, that is pathways which are at once technological, material and cultural. Circulation has a shaping force; practices of communication determine the ways that knowledge is received and transmitted, shaped, developed, organized and passed on. The borders between neighbourhoods are sometimes as effective as the borders between nations:

“The circuitous routes traveled by literary texts across various borders, checkpoints, blockades and holding pens should finally, once and for all, lay to rest the romantic notion that such texts announce themselves and arrive simply by virtue of their inherent qualities as literature. Nothing could be farther from the truth: like any commodity, literary texts gain access through channels and furrows that are prepared by other means. Fashion, chance encounters, fortuitous circumstances, surrogate functions, political alliances and cataclysms events such as war or genocide are much more certain and constant catalysts than judgment based on actual literary history or cultural importance.” (Alcalay, cited by Grossman, 2010: 55)

Each city shapes its own specific patterns of circulation. And the cultural meanings of these transactions emerge through the ongoing conversations and narratives, the aesthetic traditions and collective imaginaries of the city, its symbolic sites, its spaces of communion and conflict. The interplay of languages within the city contributes to its distinctive feel, its particular sensibility, to the ways in which knowledge in the city is continually formed and reiterated. And languages in turn become modes of representation of the city, part of an aesthetic tradition which they embody, and which continually reinterpret its meaning. The city also offers a panoptic view of language interchange, crossing lines which have conventionally separated cinema from theatre, performance from the novel, the courtroom from the high-tech office, the free-lance translator’s office from the university classroom, and allowing an understanding of the prevailing logics which motivate these activities. Adopting Doris Sommer’s arguments for the beneficial effects of “cognitive dissonance” through

language contact and following Claudio Magris’ lead in investigating cultures of mediation, I am looking to investigate activities that cover a broad spectrum of language interactions and cultural mediations, from transfer to creative interference.

While all cities produce cultures of translation, there are some cities where these cultures have been a particularly salient element of urban history. In *Cities in Translation* (Routledge, 2011), I introduce the category of the dual city, where two historically rooted language communities feel a sense of entitlement and lay claim to the territory of the city. I show how colonial Calcutta, Trieste, Barcelona and Montreal all exemplify this duality in different ways, building their distinctive cultures of translation. One might want to call such cities bilingual, but the term is misleading. Languages that share the same terrain rarely participate in a peaceful and egalitarian conversation: their separate and competing institutions are wary of one another, aggressive in their need for self-protection. Other languages also enter the conversation. Trieste, for example, is a city of three languages, its Slovene population at times as numerous as that in Ljubljana itself.

Movement across languages is marked by the special intensity that comes from shared references and a shared history and indeed translation becomes the very condition of civic co-existence. Cultures of mediation, in dual or multilingual cities, are immersed in the social and political forces that regulate the relations among languages. Translation can be seen to express two kinds of social interaction: *distancing* (translation as the expression of the gulfs which separate languages and cultures, with its most extreme form being over-writing or the effacement of one language), and *furthering* (translation as the vehicle of esthetic interactions and blendings). Distancing is what happens when translations serve to underscore the differences that prevail among cultures and languages, even when the gap may be the small distances of urban space. Distancing occurs when authors are treated as representatives of their origins, of their national or religious traditions, when translation is undertaken for ideological reasons, either in a mood of antagonism, of generosity or simply of politeness.

Furthering, by contrast, involves what Edith Grossman calls the “revivyfing and expansive effect” of translation, one language infusing another ‘with influences, alterations and combinations that would not have been possible without the presence of translated foreign literary styles and perceptions, the material significance and heft of literature that lies outside the territory of the purely monolingual.’ (Grossman 2010: 16)

**Cities of Central Europe**

In this essay, I would like to expand and broaden the notion of the dual city—and the conflictual forces of translation-- by focusing on the cities of Central Europe as a particular historical and geographical configuration of the city in translation. In the spirit of the theme of ‘known unknowns’, this exploration will be preliminary, general and speculative. Since 1989 the cities of Central Europe have reemerged as sites of historical interest, in particular for their multilingual and multicultural heritage.

By Central Europe, I mean that vast region of eastern Europe where the German language exercised cultural influence for several centuries. (Cornis-Pope, Neubauer, 2002: 29) Cornis-Pope and Neubauer offer an illuminating discussion of the terminological controversies over the terms ‘Mitteleuropa’ and ‘Central Europe’, showing how different historical moments and perspectives have informed an understanding of the cultural geography of this vast region—as well as the meanings given to ‘Germanness’ by the Prussian and Habsburg empires. Claudio Magris, the Triestine essayist, has become the most eloquent exponent of the idea of Mitteleuropa as a mélange of cultures, centred around the Danube.

It is the river along which different peoples meet and mingle and cross-breed, rather than being, as the Rhine is, a mythical custodian of the purity of the race. It is the river of Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest, Belgrade and of Dacia, the river which—as Ocean encircled the world of the Greeks—embraces the Austria of the Hapsburgs, the myth and ideology of which have been symbolized by a multiple, supranational culture...The Danube is German-Magyar-Slavic-Romanic-Jewish Central Europe, polemically opposed to the Germanic *Reich.*(Magris, 1990: 29)

In his voyage along the Danube, from its source to the Black Sea, Magris is highly mindful of the perversions which Nazism inflicted on German culture, and his account is punctuated by memories of the scars it has left behind. Nevertheless he reminds us of the ‘great chapter in history’ which the pre-Nazi German presence in Central Europe brought about. ‘Its eclipse a great tragedy, which Nazism cannot make us forget.’ (32) Magris’ literary heroes, Singer, Roth, Kafka, Musil, Svevo, are all products of that great chapter of history, which involved the fertile interconnections between German and the many other languages of Eastern Europe.

Much of the flowering of which Magris speaks took place in cities, in the very particular microcosms of Central European cities. Although the language combinations, ethnic tensions and territorial shifts varied considerably across the territory, the reality of Central Europe as the encounter of myriad national languages with the proto-colonial vehicular language of German –until 1918 and to some extent until 1945--is a constant. One might see the Mitteleuropean city as a variation on the colonial city --and indeed, there has been a burgeoning field of reflection on the resemblances between imperial and more recognizably colonial forms of occupation. (Feichtinger 2003) It is this broad pattern that I want to explore here—the idea of the Central European city as a multilingual city in translation, whose literatures were a product of contact and multiplicity. By very broadly evoking the cultural patterns of the Central European city, I wish to investigate one particular pattern of multilingualism, one which has great relevance for today’s cities, even though the model itself has disappeared.

A genuinely German transnational culture went up in smoke at Auschwitz. But it was alive from the Baltic sea to the Danube delta, with centres in Prague, Lemberg, Budapest, Cernowitz, Vilnius, and elsewhere. That culture, epitomized for us by the names of Franz Kafka and Franz Werfel, Paul Celan and Rosa Ausländer, Elias Canetti, Joseph Roth and Karl Franzos, Sholem Aleichem, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Robert Musil, also included hundreds of newspapers, journals, theaters, and cultural societies. German, and especially German-Jewish culture acted as a glue, an integrating force, among the various ethnic groups. (Cornis-Pope and Neubauer 2002:9)

Today’s Central Europe has been emptied of the two languages most active in this exchange: German and Yiddish. (see Stenberg 1991)

My point of entry into the Mitteleuropean city is a remarkable series of volumes, *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe*, edited by Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer (2000-2008) which brings together a wide range of scholars from different institutions across Europe to redefine the literary history of the region. [[1]](#endnote-1)Rather than presenting parallel narratives of national cultures, the volumes propose the investigation of ‘literary interfaces’ which provide a fresh angle of investigation into the interchanges so crucial to its cultural development. Volume II proposes an unusual and fascinating perspective on the ‘nodal city’ as one such interface, the site of hybrid literary identity and cultural production. Separate essays on Vilnius, Riga, Czernowitz, Danzig, Bucharest, Timisoara, Plovdiv, Trieste, Budapest and Prague offer the possibility of comparisons among cities whose language overlays were different in nature, and yet which all reflect the special character of multilingual cities in a time of competing nationalisms. These ‘relays of literary modernization and pluralization’ (Cornis-Pope and Neubauer, 2006: 9), whether provincial cities like Czernowitz and Bratislava or metropolitan centres like Prague or Budapest, participate in a plurality of language traditions and histories.[[2]](#endnote-2) In some ways prefiguring the multifaceted and decentred Western city of immigration, East-Central European literary representations offer ‘paradigms of plural societies that give insights into crucial questions of our time—questions concerning the preconditions for the fruitful interaction of peoples from different ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural backgrounds as well as questions concerning the causes of violence and war in communities that had enjoyed peace for centuries’. (Cornis-Pope and Neubauer 2006: 11)

What kinds of translation are possible across the fragmented language worlds of Central European cities? For the cities of Mitteleuropa, translation in the twentieth century must first and foremost be identified as a form of violence and coercion. Caught between the opposing forces of the Soviet and German empires, the cities of Central Europe were subject to successive takeovers, and the conflict of both World Wars resulted in widespread suffering and death. World War II saw the extinction of Yiddish-language culture in Eastern Europe. The very names of these cities reflect the power of translation as effacement and makeover. Vilnius-Wilno-Vilna; Czernowitz-Cernauti, Chernovytsy, Chernivtsi, Czerniowce; Danzig-Gdansk—each variant of the city name stands for a transfer of political and linguistic power. The city that is called Bratislava today had three names that were used throughout the period 1867-1914: Pressburg (German), Pozsony (Hungarian) and Presporok (Slovak). To refer to the city by each of these names (including today’s ‘Bratislava’ which was a name given to the city only in 1918) is to project a different historical view of the city. The paradoxes of naming are especially acute in Bratislava, because Pressburg was largely a German and then a Hungarian city—until industrialization in the 1890s encouraged an influx of Slovak migrants from the countryside. Since the end of World War I, the city has been remade to reflect a retroactive Slovak identity. (Babejovà 2003: 17) Translation has the force of coercion, then, when it participates in the violence of over-writing, of sponging out, of renaming. City streets are renamed as old heroes are disqualified, as new icons are glorified. Sometimes entire cities are covered over in a new language, as though the decor were being changed. This pattern of shuffled borders and city renamings was repeated countless times across the expanse of Central and Eastern Europe.

**Czernowitz**

The city of Czernowitz, subject of a several recent studies, notably Hirsch and Spitzer (2010) and Colin (1991 and 2006), provides a rich case study of the ways in which mediation can be understood as a feature of Central European urban life, before the Second World War. ‘For most readers, darkness and forgetting conceal Czernowitz, capital of the Bukovina and Celan’s birthplace, which at one time produced a richly diversified German, Ukrainian, Romanian and Yiddish literature.’ (Colin 1991: 4) Looking at the history of the interwar years, and the conditions which led to the singular poetic work of Paul Celan, can be revealing of the ways in which translation indeed worked through the life of the city.

Situated in Bukovina, the most easterly lands of the Austro-Hungarian empire, Czernowitz was called ‘the Vienna of the east’ for its passionate adherence to ideals of Viennese culture. Joseph II had deliberately turned the easternmost frontier of his empire into a buffer zone—in an effort to protect his territories from the Russian and Ottoman expansion—by actively promoting the settlement of Germans and later Jews to the area. By 1918, 47 percent of the population of Czernowitz was Jewish. (Colin 1991 : 6-7) [[3]](#endnote-3) While in 1910 less than a quarter of the monarchy’s inhabitants used German as their principal language (Hirsch and Spitzer 2010: 37) in multilingual Czernowitz where Jews were the largest ‘national’ group, assimilated German-speaking Jews were the dominant cultural influence. They remained attached to the canons and standards of the German language, and to a nostalgic affection for the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The interwar culture of the city was dominated by what Hirsch and Spitzer call the ‘idea of Deutschtum’, an ideal of Germanness which imposed itself with increased intensity even as the city itself was brought under the authority of Romanian cultural nationalism. Bukovina German had its own character, its own palette and special resonance. This is why the writers of the interwar city were drawn to hypercorrect and outmoded versions of German literature. Made insecure by their physical distance from the centres of German-language culture, they strove even more diligently to attain mastery of literary codes which had already been disqualified in Berlin and Vienna.

Paradoxically, it was precisely in the interwar period that Bukovina’s German literature, in particular its Austro-Jewish component, reached a pinnacle. So strong was the attachment of Jewish poets to the Austro-German culture that they continued to write in German in spite of their growing isolation in a Romanian-speaking environment. Even those who later settled in English- or French-speaking countries remained faithful to the German language and culture...Margul-Sperber, Rosenkranz, Kittner, Ausländer, and Kamillo Lauer, as well as the much younger generation of Weissglas, Gong and Celan refused to give up their mother tongue. Most of them (but not Celan) continued to cherish a German classicist style. Such traditionalism was not due to a lack of innovating power, but rather the result of their unusual situation as German poets in a multilingual surrounding. (Colin 2006:73)

As Colin explains, their isolation created a sense of insecurity and resulted in a strong attachment to values associated with poetry and language. Many Bukovinian writers were proud of their ‘high’ German, unadulterated by the influences of neighbouring languages. They were attracted to literary figures like Rainer Maria Rilke, Georg Trakl, Franz Werfel, Stefan George, and especially Karl Kraus, who instilled in his readers a deep respect for the power of language.

For Hirsch and Spitzer, this adherence to German was a core ingredient of what they call ‘the idea of Czernowitz’. That idea was expressed in the ‘identification of many middle-class and working-class Jews of the interwar generation with a Habsburg world of yesterday and with a contemporary Austro-German Kulturkreis—a ‘Deutschtum’ to use Karl Emil Franzos’s term—from which they were geographically and politically removed’. (Hirsch and Spitzer 2010: 89) It is important to emphasize, however, that ‘German’ Czernowitz, for them, quite naturally included the multicultural and multilingual flavour that had always animated the city’s public life: the mixture of languages (German, Yiddish, Romanian, Ruthenian, Russian) that resulted in a characteristic local jargon; the intersection of West and East, urban and rural, modern and traditional.’ (Hirsch and Spitzer 2010: 89) Indeed, ‘an unusual interplay between nationalism and receptiveness to various cultures left its imprint upon Bukovinian literature of the nineteenth century, anticipating the political and literary developments that followed World War I.

Language loyalty was complicated in cities like Czernowitz by competing movements of national revival. German-language literature competed with the promoters of the newly valorized vernacular languages which in Czernowitz included Romanian, Ukrainian but also Yiddish. Czernowitz was the site of the famous 1908 Congress on Yiddish, whose aim was to consecrate Yiddish as the sole national language of the Jews. This movement was analogous to the many other attempts at language revival and modernization in Eastern Europe.

**Culture of Mediation**

The literary culture of Czernowitz, like that of other Mitteleuropean cities, included a culture of mediation. This culture of mediation has been most effectively investigated and discussed in relation to Prague by Scott Spector in his *Prague Territories.* (Spector 2002) Detailed analysis of the cultures of mediation of other Habsburg cities have only begun to be envisioned, but such research will surely yield results which will be useful in understanding the degree and nature of interlinguistic contacts. ‘The dream of a ‘universal German language’ was a wish deeply rooted in the Bukovinian habit of mediating between different languages and cultures. There was an unusually high number of authors who engaged in translation. Margul-Sperber made German translations of poems by Robert Frost, Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, Wallace Stevens, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and e.e. Cummings, as well as American Indian texts. He was the first German translator of Guillaume Apollinaire’s *Caligrammes*, T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, and Gérard de Nerval’s works. Weissglas translated Eminescu’s famous poem ‘The Morning Star’ and Grillparzer, Stifter and parts of Goethe into Romanian. The important Ukrainian novelist Kobylyanska wrote first in German then translated herself into Ukrainian. Romanian poets were also influenced by German authors. ‘Authors writing in German often used motifs from Romanian and Ukrainian folklore and translated important historical and literary texts from one language into the other: the poet and historian Franz Adolf Wickenhauser, who initiated studies on the history of Bukovina, translated 800 documents from Church Slavonic, Romanian and Latin into German. The half-German, half-Ruthenian Ludwig Adolf Simiginovich-Staufe wrote poems in German, Romanian and Ruthenian and translated Romanian and Ruthenian texts into German’. (Colin 1991: 11) Many writers began writing in German, then turned to their ‘national’ language—Ukrainian, or Yiddish. Such was the case, for example of the Ukrainian writers Felix Niemchevski, Osip Juril Fed’kovych, Alexander Popovich and Isidor Vorobkevich, sometimes combining motifs from German Romanticism with images from Ruthenian folklore.’ (Colin 1991: 11) as it was the case also for the Yiddish-language writer Itzik Manger. (Starck-Adler 2007: 124-32)

The writer who is at once exceptional and yet who best exemplifies the culture of mediation which issued from the multilingual matrix of Czernowitz is Paul Celan. Alexis Nouss has written what will perhaps become the definitive account of Paul Celan’s wrestlings with translation in its various permutations. In *Lieux d’un déplacement* (2010), sites of displacement, the idea of movement is treated both literally (Celan as an inhabitant of Czernowitz, Celan as refugee and exile) and metaphorically (Celan’s language itself in movement against its origins). Celan’s relationship to German emerged out of the distinctive patterns of the Czernowitz experience: ‘the celebration of German as transhistorical, pure, and redemptive, on the one hand, and the consciousness of German as the language of increasing prejudice, irredeemably sullied, on the other. (Hirsch and Spitzer 2010: 263) Translation was an avenue towards the work of other poets but also a means of opening up his own language, of making it ‘strange to itself’, permitting the Holocaust survivor to simultaneously use and transform the German language. Celan produced a considerable number of German translations of Romanian, Hebrew, French, Russian, English, Portuguese, and Italian poems. (Colin 1991:19) His trajectory moves from being a poet ‘at home in the German language’, a poet embedded in the Czernowitz milieu, to being a poet who detaches himself from tradition and distances himself from what has become a damaged tongue.

Detailed research could establish not only the direction and intensity of translation (into and out of German) but the nature of interactions (self-translation, for example) and the effectiveness of the connections established. Here the notions of ‘distancing’ and ‘furthering’ would come into play. Were translations undertaken with the primary goal of reinforcing the nascent national languages? Did translation result in the creation of new forms of literary expression (for instance the reinvention of the ballad in Yiddish (Starck-Adler 2007))? In particular, this study would provide useful ground for exploring the double myth of Czernowitz as a city of passionate literary spirit as well as a city with a history of rich conviviality. (Menninghaus 1999)

In view of the events of World War II and the Holocaust, it is difficult to define translation in the conflictual cities of Mitteleuropa as resulting in a fruitful interchange. The political tensions of the 1930s and their outcome make it impossible to speak of enduring interconnections. At the same time, translation can only serve as a useful instrument for analysing contact and interrelations if it takes into account the diverse historical impulses which sustain it—including coercion and competition.

It is also important to avoid retrospective readings which deny the alternative histories that might have grown out of the charged spaces and multiple marginalities of the city. In this context, the city of Czernowitz offers a rich area of investigation. As a crossroads of languages, a ‘liminal location’ between shifting national borders, the site of rich literary developments in several languages, and a place where the German language was intensely translational, Czernowitz is an important city to explore from the point of view of translation.

**Conclusion**

The longliving power of literary German, in dialogue with Yiddish, Romanian and Ukrainian in Czernowitz presents one particular pattern of language relations. In other cities, the writing of history across languages takes different forms: the competition between national and proto-national languages in Montreal and Barcelona, the anti-colonial and post-colonial language revivals of Dublin or Kolkata, the post-conflict dynamics of Beirut or Johannesburg. To discuss cities as a translation space is to use language passage as a key to understanding political and cultural tensions as they play themselves out in relations of conflict and dialogue.

Language competition in the city is often impelled by a drive towards territorial reconquest, the linguistic conversion of urban space as well as movements of literary modernism. The confrontation of languages results in entanglements which are both conflictual and productive. If modernity means that the very terms of knowledge or the values of esthetics are revealed to be positional, then translational cities are privileged sites for the modern.

Translators are a key to investigating the passages across the city. Following the traces of important mediators in their cities and studying their cultural projects often means giving a broad understanding to the notion of translation. In translational cities, writing often takes place on the border between languages, carrying traces of this origin. And so one could encounter implicit translational patterns such as reading in one language, writing in another. Writer-translators are privileged informants, guides to the spaces of their cities and to the evolution of its cultural history.

As models of plurality, all cities provide insights into the evolution of today’s global cosmopolis, contributing to an understanding of meaningful interaction among its diverse communities and heightening awareness of the precariousness of coexistence. Many cities of the past have been caught in the midst of historical forces which were literally beyond them, and yet they did for a time become the theatres of a richly complex culture of circulation. Cities propose a geometry of divided and contested space, where language relations are regulated by the opposing forces of coercion and resistance, of wilful indifference and engaged interconnection. To attempt to understand some of the elements which create both the appeal of cities and their terrible fragility is a task that can be taken on by Translation Studies. It is not simply the presence of languages that count, but the forces which direct the flow of language traffic and the mood which animates life at the intersection. The intersection is the symbolic centre of the city’s imaginative life—it is a site of opportunity and danger, of hopeful encounters and disappointed miscommunication. The kinds of translation that arise there are various, unpredictable and richly formative.

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1. This volume, an initiative of the International Comparative Literature Association, is one of the valuable literary historiographies produced over the last decades as a result of innovative attempts to escape the limitations of national history. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. In his detailed historiography of social democracy in Bratislava, Van Duin emphasizes the fact that he has consulted sources in half a dozen languages, including Slovak, Czech, German, English and Hungarian. Rare would be the scholars who could tell the story of any Central European city from the perspectives of all its various language communities. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Gregor von Rezzori in his *Memoirs of an Anti-Semite* gives a revealing view of the conflicting senses of belonging in a city like Czernowitz. Rezzori’s opinions on language are particularly noteworthy, his family defending rigour in the use of German.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-3)