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Waking unknown languages? James Joyce's *Wakese* challenge

James Joyce claimed to be fluent in roughly five or six languages. These were Latin, German, French, Norwegian, Greek and Italian (but also Triestino, the dialect of Trieste, a city in which he spent 16 years). However, in his last work, *Finnegans Wake* (1939), scholars identified up to seventy languages arranged in multiple different ways in the text. By taking advantage of wordplays, puns, which combined double or multiple meanings of words, neologisms, portmanteaux, ambiguities, alliterations, experimentations with sounds and spellings, unhyphenated compounds etc., Joyce managed to exploit his linguistic repertoire to its full extent. This happened thanks to the languages he mastered but also to the ones he only partially or limitedly knew and did not know, such as Arabic, Sanskrit, Chinese, Japanese etc. All these languages contributed to create the so – called 'Wakese', *Finnegans Wake's* 'language', or a variable idiolect which defamiliarized both known and unknown tongues.

In my presentation, I will explore Joyce's quest for unknown languages from which his work was generated. In more detail, I will investigate Joyce's linguistic sources – how he practically tapped into unknown languages; whether, for instance, these languages are more frequently combined with other known or unknown languages and how they are accommodated in *Finnegans Wake's* narrative; what functions they play in the text etc. By doing that, my aim is to understand the linguistic unknown from the writer's rather than from the reader's perspective – a highly understudied topic which deserves further developments and attention.