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Heterolingual Quotation and Cultural Transfer

Quotations are among the most prominent features of (literary) texts that allow us to trace and reconstruct cultural transfer, particularly if the source text and the quoting text are at some linguistic distance from one another. This contribution aims, firstly, at giving a theoretical account of such heterolingual quotations, based on the results of recent scholarship in literary multilingualism. This, secondly, gives the opportunity to ask in how far heterolingual quotations imply elements of a theory of culture.

According to literary multilingualism scholarship, it is not sufficient to analyze how literary texts make use of 'multiple languages'. Texts must not only be granted the capacity to make use of various linguistic repertoires on different levels of linguistic structure, but also the potential to alter these repertoires. This view of linguistic diversity challenges a (post –)Saussurean paradigm of langues in the name of a Bakhtinian notion of speech governed by centripetal and centrifugal forces.

Applied to heterolingual quotation, this description of linguistic diversity also enriches Bakhtin's description of intertextuality. There are considerable degrees of freedom when it comes to preserving the wording and the 'lingualism' of quoted text, i.e., the degree to which it adheres to an identifiable idiom (Sprachigkeit). Text can be adapted, translated, alienated or otherwise altered, and all these techniques always imply statements concerning its significance, i.e., its cultural value. The same holds regarding the accuracy of the reference. Mere allusions to the source give different connotations to the cultural relation thereby established than exact citations. Taken together, all these techniques, which will be presented using examples from European literature from Montaigne to recent pop – novels, provide a toolbox for modelling cultural relations, both concretely (with regard to 'the cultures' associated to the respective texts) and on a more general level (concerning 'culture' as such).