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Listen to the Land's Language. Learn to Translate, again.

Alison Phipps

I am sitting in one of those few rare places of gathering where you can quietly drink coffee or tea whilst listening to the hum of conversation. There is gentle chattering in the servery and clatter of crockery, people are saying 'hello' and saying 'thank you'. There is no piped music, no one else's playlist to endure. The tables are wooden, and there is a distant sound and rhythm under the floor boards of the water wheel at this, the last working water mill in Scotland, turning and turning. It's been a dry winter and spring, and there isn't much water for milling. I'm distracted by conversation. One table, which I register, effortlessly, as southern English, middle class in accent, are pulling apart the wedding they have been at the day before. Others are speaking in Swedish, French, German. There are footsteps on the wooden floor and the door swings open and closes again, as walkers, locals, visitors, tourists pass through, some for coffee, some to collect the warm bread that has arrived from the bakery next door. Every now and then you can hear the train at the station nearby, and when the door opens, the water running by.

I chat to the people who keep this place of hospitality alive. We catch up on family news. I hear where their daughter is about to travel to, to teach for year overseas. She's going to be great. "She knows where she is going. She's started learning the language online. It's not a very common one." "Does it have a different script?" "I ask", "I'm not sure" comes the reply and we laugh in the common knowledge of all we don't know and our admiration for this moment of youth when this language adventure will open up so much and change so much for so many.

In front of me, is the introduction and manuscript for this collection of essays. I probably couldn't be writing this any further away in the world than the editors of the volume. Dunedin to the Perthshire Highlands is about as far as we can stretch, without literally being pole to pole. I'm at a line of latitude at 56.7682 degrees North, 3.8434 degrees West and the authors of the introduction, at 45.8788, degrees South and 170.5028 degrees East. To stretch between these places takes technology, and relationship. It takes search engines and ways of relating which are chopped up into binary code and algorithms, which are pixelated and may need to wait for the 'wheel of death' – 'loading'... 'loading'..... still '...loading'. It takes exploited and slave labour digging in the mines of the earth, mostly in sub-saharan Africa, for the components of our technologies, at the behest of governments far, far away, re-engineering the colonial exploits where others have gone before. Or it takes aviation fuel, and the expenditure of many planets-worth of our share of carbon-quotas for us to sit, face to face, in a room together, and talk about important things, with critical or creative intent.

All of this goodness, the good work between the pages of this book, and the ways in which its been produced are tinged with the grief and collective guilt of ecocide, as are the conversations in the mill about that almost lost language being learned, for the purposes of co-habitation for a gap-year, in the Global South.

For the last few months school children have been leaving their classrooms on Fridays, and following the call of climate activist Greta Thunberg, as their response to what they see as the failure of the generations older than their own, to make the changes which would mean the future for many species and for life on earth is secure. They are demanding we change our language from the language of 'climate change' to that of 'emergency', 'crisis', 'collapse', 'catastrophe'. Mostly they are activating across the compromised technologies I too am using now, through English medium social media. And this raises many questions in the face of the gorgeous diversity and heart-breaking precarity of linguistic hospitalities which sweep through this book.

I type on. In English. As I do so it feels like I am dully hearing the calls for language change, through these many pages of pain-staking academic endeavours, and yet here I am refusing to switch codes,

engage in linguistic humility, and stop producing yet more academic words in English. What would it actually take, what kind of apocalyptic discourse of emergency, of linguistic genocide, of multilingual crisis, for our journals and conferences and academies to pluralise their linguistic practices and forms of representation, in the face of lingua-cide and the concomitant epistemicide. How might we find the kinds of courage being show to us and asked of us, globally, by the young people's climate strikes and by movements like Extinction Rebellion, for us to listen inclusively, and create representations of the world which genuinely engage in the kinds of translations and intercultural worldings which the research in this volume determines as vital?

In outlining the purpose of this volume, Viv and Henry ask "In an increasingly diverse, 'white-settler' nation, founded on a (mis)translated agreement between Māori and the British Crown, key questions for education include: which languages are privileged in education settings, and for what reasons? How are indigenous histories remembered or rendered invisible through course content and school curricula? How are migrant histories and experiences acknowledged and remembered at all levels of education? How are intercultural encounters translated within educational discourse? Whose epistemologies and identities are privileged in educational policy, pedagogy, and research?"

I should, by rights call Viv and Henry, Anderson and Johnson, but that seems to also fly in the face of the relationships which are wrought through post-cartesian forms of scholarship, such as those in these pages. It feels like an awkward mistranslation in itself, back from conversations, on boats, up inlets, to view migrant bird colonies, and from introductory explorations within the migrant ecologies of the city of Dunedin, Ōtepoti where it is through our given names that we meet and think and exchange together. And I can't somehow think about writing this response without hearing the sea, the 'te moana Pacific', Pacific Ocean, the sharp southerly winds, the tangle of salted hair in my face. Perhaps this is where to start, not with the geometries and metrics of geographical planetary coordinates, but with the sea. And the way her strong swell, and the crash of her waves and the faithful rhythm of her tides, and her smell, and tang and aching immensity, are enough to silence our chatter, and thoughts, and to make us pause. Perhaps this is the kind of 'transformative disruption' as Michael Singh puts it in the first chapter of this volume, that needs to be brought to my own English language dominance.

Silence in Between

Perhaps silence in between
is the true point of healing
Perhaps wounds will never form scars
through the labour of the voice
Perhaps in the end all we have is the air
The ground beneath our feet
The saltsea on our skin
And the daily promise of light
Of sunlight
Of light
Light
Darklight
Of Lines
Tide,
Tidelines.

Halt. Pause. Interrupt. Silence.

In his essay on Brecht, who I do not know as Bertolt, written by Benjamin (Benjamin 1966), who I do not know as Walter, but who knew each other as Bert and Walter, Benjamin points to the central importance of Brecht's use of the 'Halt' – the 'pause', in his theatrical practice. The pause, often followed by a commentary by a character setting out of role, to reflect with the audience, critically, upon the behaviour and actions of the character, interrupted the dramatic flow and was a constituent part of creating epic theatre.

Epic theatre, for Brecht, was fundamentally opposed to dramatic theatre and he distinguished the two forms in these ways.

Der Zuschauer des dramatischen Theaters sagt: Ja, das habe ich auch schon gefühlt. -- So bin ich. -- Da ist nur natürlich. -- Das wird immer so sein. -- Das Leid dieses Menschen erschüttert mich, weil es keinen Ausweg für ihn gibt. -- Das ist große Kunst: da ist alles selbstverständlich. -- Ich weine mit den Weinenden, ich lache mit den Lachenden.

Der Zuschauer des epischen Theaters sagt: Das hätte ich nicht gedacht. -- So darf man es nicht machen. -- Das ist höchst auffällig, fast nicht zu glauben. -- Das muß aufhören. -- Das Leid dieses Menschen erschüttert mich, weil es doch einen Ausweg für ihn gäbe. -- Das ist große Kunst: da ist nichts selbstverständlich. -- Ich lache über den Weinenden, ich weine über den Lachenden.

The spectator in the dramatic theatre says: yes, I have felt that already. That's how I am. This is only natural. It will always be this way. The suffering of this human being shakes me to the core, because there is no way out for them. That is great art. That is nothing of the ordinary. I laugh about the one who is laughing and I weep about the one who is weeping.

The spectator in the epic theatre says: I would not have thought that. That's not something you should do. That is really peculiar, you almost can't believe it. That has to stop. The suffering of this human being shakes me to the core, because there is a way out for them. That is great art. That is nothing of the ordinary. I laugh about the one who is crying and I cry about the one who is laughing.

(Brecht 1978: 987) [translations my own]

Both men were writing, drama, poetry, and philosophy at times which are repeatedly compared, along with others, to our own, in the present moment. The rise of National Socialism creating human suffering, blitz bombings destroying whole towns and cities the archive footage of which stands in parallel to that of Homs, Yarmouk, Gaza today. In trying to interrupt the language of drama and catharsis Brecht developed the *Lehrstück*, a form of pedagogical theatre which could educate people as to the suffering and material basis of that suffering for common people world-wide. And he did so, according to Benjamin, by means of interruption and the 'Halt, the pause.

It's easy, in our nostalgia, to hark back to never-really-existing golden ages of higher education when we could sit and listen to the silence of libraries and monastic-cell like offices, such as are still part of the architectures of the world's ancient universities, in Bologna, Oxford, Cambridge. Times when thought within the institution was a little like that of the watermill, where I'm writing just now. It's certainly the case that in the days of elite higher education the staff student ratios, and the material wealth of staff and students granted access meant the *scholare*, as Bourdieu describes it (Bourdieu 2000), was freed from much of the paraphernalia of neoliberal higher education and the constant responsive-mode, alienations of our labour. Others, often labouring in similarly exploitative conditions across the British and other Empires, ensured that a small number could have the luxury of thought and wealth, freed from manual labour and production.

The pain-staking transcriptions, the grammars and dictionaries, the codifications and linguistic taxonomies of the world's many languages are vainglorious cathedrals to linguistic anthropology. Their often, arbitrary dividing lines of sounds spoken by indigenous peoples, into texts which named them, and took, and announced as 'new language', to be taught to others in the education systems to

come (Anderson 1991). These new, seemingly unstoppable genealogies of linguists and language learners, themselves caught in throes of these colonialising practices and epistemicides, are with us still - learning English as a Foreign or Other Language, all across the globe, required to do so increasingly, as the new symbol par excellence, of their 'integration'. These industries of linguistic dominance, as the chapters in this book show repeatedly, have become the ground for disruptions, interruption, and resistance. What does it take to interrupt these abstracted genealogies, these constructions, this dominance?

In thinking about migration, education and translation abstracting this thought from the context of these times is not an option. Nor do we have the luxury of uninterrupted thought. Just over a week ago Viv wrote to me with a revised version of the introductory chapter of the book. Like a good scholar, having at last carved out the time to read, and concentrate, and write, I compare the versions. My breath catches in my chest. A lump forms in my throat. If I had wanted to speak, my tongue would have stumbled into tears, into the salt water, like the sea.

However, migration, education and translation are themes with relevance beyond language per se, and beyond formal educational institutions. We write this editorial in the wake of three hate-inspired attacks on innocent people in mosques in Aotearoa New Zealand, churches and hotels in Sri Lanka, and a synagogue in the United States of America.

The interruptions of violence. The interruption that is mourning. The time when no words, in any language, are strong enough to hold.

We are long latitudes away from each other, yet here in Scotland I held people close in the suddenness of grief, refugees themselves who had lived and worked alongside those caught up in the mosque shootings, and through the lotteries of resettlement had parted, with papers which took them to New Zealand, or to Scotland. In my messages on my connecting, comprised phone, which makes my hand shake with its vibrations, are friends and colleagues, in Aotearoa, holding fast to the te reo words 'aroha nui' – which might be well translated as 'humble love'. English as a language, yes, of great beauty, but also of perpetuating and perpetual violence, and specifically of the violence of the mosque attacks, is muted, silenced, replaced, by the very languages it over-wrote, through the times of settler-colonialism. And it's making my hand shake.

Across my feeds then are the words of the Premier of Aotearoa New Zealand, interrupting again, "we are a proud nation of "We are a proud nation of more than 200 ethnicities, 160 languages and amongst that diversity we share common values" this time, interrupting the silence, in English, to proclaim the linguistic diversity and pluralism; interrupting again to wear the traditional symbols of mourning in Islam; interrupting again to weep with those who weep, and mourn with those who mourn.

My friends who are intimately connected to Sri Lanka reach towards me, electronically, and I lean towards them. We touch, in pictures, of cherry blossom petals on the ground, and statues of Ghandi. What we write, paradoxically is; "No words. Pause. No words."

Listen to the Land

In linguistic anthropology and the history of the evolution of human speech, there is the theory that it was through mimesis, through the mimicking and making of sounds like those heard in the environment, from the creatures of the air, water and land, and from the tidelines, the rivers and the rocks that humans, with their expanding phonetic physiologies and neurologies, come to shout, cry, sing and speak (Ingold 1994, McWhorter 2002, Anthony 2007, Ingold 2011). This is a fascinating strand of scientific scholarship and it's beyond the scope of this reflection to enter into it in anything but this cursory detail. But I mention this, to connect the failings of dominating languages in the face of human suffering, and human violence perpetrated against fellow human beings, and that of the violence, in the Anthropocene, of human kind against the planet, and the species who enable our co-habitation.

In the face the impossibility of our work being able to occur in a vacuum, and with the overwhelming evidence of our interconnectedness and interdependence, perhaps one of the ways in which the dominance of English and the dominance of human speech might be disrupted and transformed, is through listening first to the land, again.

Listen to the River, Let the Language Fall.

We followed the sound of the river
up into the high meadow
where it met the curlew,
and they sang from their rapids,
and their rippling wings to the earth,
to the wind, to the rocks, to sky.

And wildly
where the song fell:
flowers.

Across my feeds are short clips of the haka, bringing this cultural form of defiance and grief to the places violated. Across my feeds are the Easter prayers from Sri Lanka, across my feeds are the candles lit for the Jewish Sabbath, across my feeds, the Muslim refugees bury their dead. And there are tears. And there is silence. And there is song. And it is not in English.

These interruptions of the violence are these necessary, critical pauses. These moments are moments when speech leaves us because in being creatures of speech our proximity to suffering, affective or actual, renders us mute. Words literally fail us, and it to poetry, and to older words that we turn, words not of what Simone Weil has called the ‘middle range’ (Weil 1997)– words which are ephemeral, outdated, passing away like ‘productivity’ or ‘diversity’ or ‘democracy’, or ‘sustainability’, or heaven – forbid – ‘climate change’.

Kia kaha, kia mahia, kia manawanui.

Perhaps it is from the failing of words, from words falling away into silence, into ceremony, into forms of embodiment, like dance, like song, like chant, at candlefall, from within the critical soul-searching provoked by the perpetuation of violence, that room can made in humility for other words, languages and forms to grow back.

During my first stay as a visiting professor in Aotearoa New Zealand, I was asked to sign a contract, and amongst the elements I was assenting to was the upholding of a (mis) translated document, the Treaty of Waitangi. I’ve written about what this provoked in other places (Phipps 2019), but for the purposes of this reflection on the challenge of this volume, Chapter 15, by Karyn Parangatai brings me up short, again, as did the contract from the University of Waikato in 2014.

I teach a Māori performing arts course at the University of Otago (Dunedin), New Zealand’s oldest and only residential university. The city’s Scottish colonial influence has had a defining impact on the development of the university where historically many of the pedagogical approaches employed and the design of the university have reflected those of Scottish universities (Leoni, 2011, p. 32-33). However, all aspects of the curriculum and pedagogies of the performing arts course have emerged from Māori ritual and ceremony.

The settler colonialism of the Scots can be found across the British Empire, famously, from the so-called “Scottish Colony” of Malawi, and in concentrated form in parts of India, then in waves of migration following the Clearances, and periods of economic distress and industrial decline, to Canada, and Australia, and New Zealand. In the strivings towards nationhood and inclusion of present

day Scotland, there is a fraught relationship to these histories, an easy telling of them and insistence on the guilt and blame of colonial settlement practices and at the same time an insistence on the freeing of the histories of the ‘colonial oppressors’ from the England and lowland Scotland, of the Gaels and the Highlands, and of a insistence on the renewal of the Gaelic language (Hunter 1995, MacDonald 1997, McIntosh 2001, 2005, Phipps and Fassetta 2015).

The first signs of the renewal of Gaelic, disrupting the priority given to English is in the dual language use of railway station signs and road signs, the green of Gaelic, or it’s italicisation, bringing it, albeit in ‘bowed’ unemboldened form, to sight. The Gaelic Language Act of Scotland (2005), has brought a public duty to Scotland, to listen again to the land, first through the place names, then through the gradual reintroduction of Gaelic into public life and public duty. For te reo, this work is, comparatively, well-advanced in education though there is clearly a great deal more to do in the plurilingual, Māori, settler, migrant, refugee, language-scapes which are the evolving indigeneity of Aotearoa New Zealand.

In my attempts, for a month, to uphold the Treaty of Waitangi, and the paradoxes of it’s mistranslation, I took lessons in te reo, according to Māori language education practices. (Nock 2005, Nock 2009). This involved listening, and not just to all the many new words, but first and foremost to karakia, and whakapapa, and to the names of places both in Aotearoa and to those of where I live. They involved listening to how others had named the land, and reproducing it myself, as mihi, as greeting.

*Te Whakapapa o Alison
Tēnā koutou katoa e te whānau whānui
Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou katoa i tēnei wā o te tau.
Ko ‘Calmac’ tōku waka
Ko Clyde tōku awa
Ko Maunga Lomond tōku maunga tapu
Ko Yorkshire-Scottish-Blen tōku iwi
Ko Phipps-Swinfen-Andmariam tōku hapū
Ko West End tōku marae
I te taha o tōku papa ko Fred rāua Gertrude ōku tīpuna
I te taha o tōku māmā ko Leonard rāua Annie ōku tīpuna.
Ko Roy rāua ko Anne ōku mātua.
Ko Rima taku tamāhine whāngai
Nā reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa*

Viv and Henry end their introduction, with necessary, and thoughtful humility:

We are also mindful of our book’s incompleteness —many places, historical realities, and linguistic and epistemological traditions are not represented here. However, despite these limitations, we offer the book as an exercise in “complex communication” (Lugones, 2006) — it represents our collective efforts to explore the connections between migration, education, and translation in places shaped by specific linguistic, political and historical realities, and to grapple with some of the tensions inherent in doing so.

In gathering together the threads in this volume of migration, education and language I have attempted a form of both paradoxical and complex communication myself, forged from the collective efforts of those writing the chapters which make the whole, and shaping these in an editorial endeavour. I’ve tried to breach and break, in places, with the English dominance, and to disrupt some academic conventions, to offer up memory, and to take my line of argument for a wander, rather than drawing a line from ‘a to b’. I’ve let the immense difficulty of colonial-settler-migrant-refugee-displaced-person,-indigenous-person,- person of privilege, person in pain be present to and even in the writing, in places, and I have turned away from academic prose, as is my practice, to poetry, insisting on the co-habitation in a text, of both forms.

Why have I done this? Well, it is to echo what is the hope and practice of each chapter, and of the editors, but also the attempt to respond, justly, to the tough questions for education, which relate to privilege, which are posed at the outset of this volume. In the face of a mistranslated Treaty, “which languages are privileged in education settings, and for what reasons? How are indigenous histories remembered or rendered invisible through course content and school curricula? How are migrant histories and experiences acknowledged and remembered at all levels of education? How are intercultural encounters translated within educational discourse? Whose epistemologies and identities are privileged in educational policy, pedagogy, and research?”

Gather round.

The water wheel is turning. The floor boards creek. I can hear my fingers flying over the keyboard, and black letters in English growing longer on the screen in front of my eyes. Still the people murmur away in conversation. There is very little Gaelic to be heard but it can be seen, on the walls and tables. But there is modern Hebrew, and Arabic, and French and what sounds like a Yorkshire accent. In a year to come I'll no doubt return and meet with the miller's daughter and hear her speak in a new tongue, to which she has been granted hospitality.

The water wheel thuds, and turns and turns, adding rhythm to the music of sounds all around. Offering hospitality, of land, of people.

Listen. Gather round. Let the wheel turn, and the birds tell their stories, their way. Make room, give way. Let the cups chink, let the fingers fall silent on the keyboard. Let the world interrupt in her own ways, let the body be nourished again. Let others be nourished. By sound.

Let the fingers

Fall

Silent.

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