

The background is a vertical gradient from light purple at the top to light blue at the bottom. It is decorated with several realistic water droplets of various sizes. Some droplets are at the top, appearing to fall or have just landed, while others are at the bottom, appearing to be on a surface. The droplets have highlights and shadows, giving them a three-dimensional look.


MULTILINGUIISM AS A WAY TO MAKE DISTANT ISSUES YOURS

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SHOW, DON'T TELL...

To begin this presentation, and since theatre is the
art of the here and now,
let's sum up the need of this three days'
colloquium with a single scene from a play.



L'EUROPÉENNE

- By David Lescot, published in 2007
- Pitch : the European Union has gathered artists from different countries and languages in the hope that through art, they will find a way to transcend their language differences. They are supervised by a linguist and an administrator from the EU.
- Opening scene : the linguist and the administrator enter the stage. The linguist is surprised by the crowd (=the public). The administrator explains that they are the official interprets of the EU and begins to introduce them. All of them. ALL of them. Like really, this goes on forever and ever...

Albine degryse : mais c'est une foule. Vous les connaissez tous ?

Norma gette : celui-là par exemple c'est le suédois qui traduit l'allemand. À côté de lui il y a le suédois qui traduit l'anglais, et à côté la suédoise qui fait l'italien. Ça c'est le slovène qui traduit le portugais, et ça la française qui traduit le castillan, elle est assise près du polonais qui traduit le tchèque, mais le tchèque qui traduit du polonais il est là-bas, loin, on leur a demandé de se mettre à côté pour simplifier mais il n'a pas compris. L'estonien qui fait le lituanien est à côté du lituanien qui fait l'estonien, ça c'est bien, le grec qui fait l'italien n'est pas à côté de l'italienne qui fait le grec qui est là-bas, pareil pour espagnol-portugais-portugais-espagnol, tant pis, voilà le letton qui traduit le slovaque et là je reconnais la hongroise qui traduit le français, elle est entre le finlandais qui traduit l'allemand et l'anglaise qui traduit le grec moderne, d'accord il n'y a qu'estonien-lituanien et lituanien-estonien qui se sont mis à côté comme il faut ce n'est pas grave. Monsieur c'est danois-néerlandais, là c'est espagnol-maltais, maltais-finnois, allemand-polonais, hongrois-slovène, letton-allemand, grec-danois.

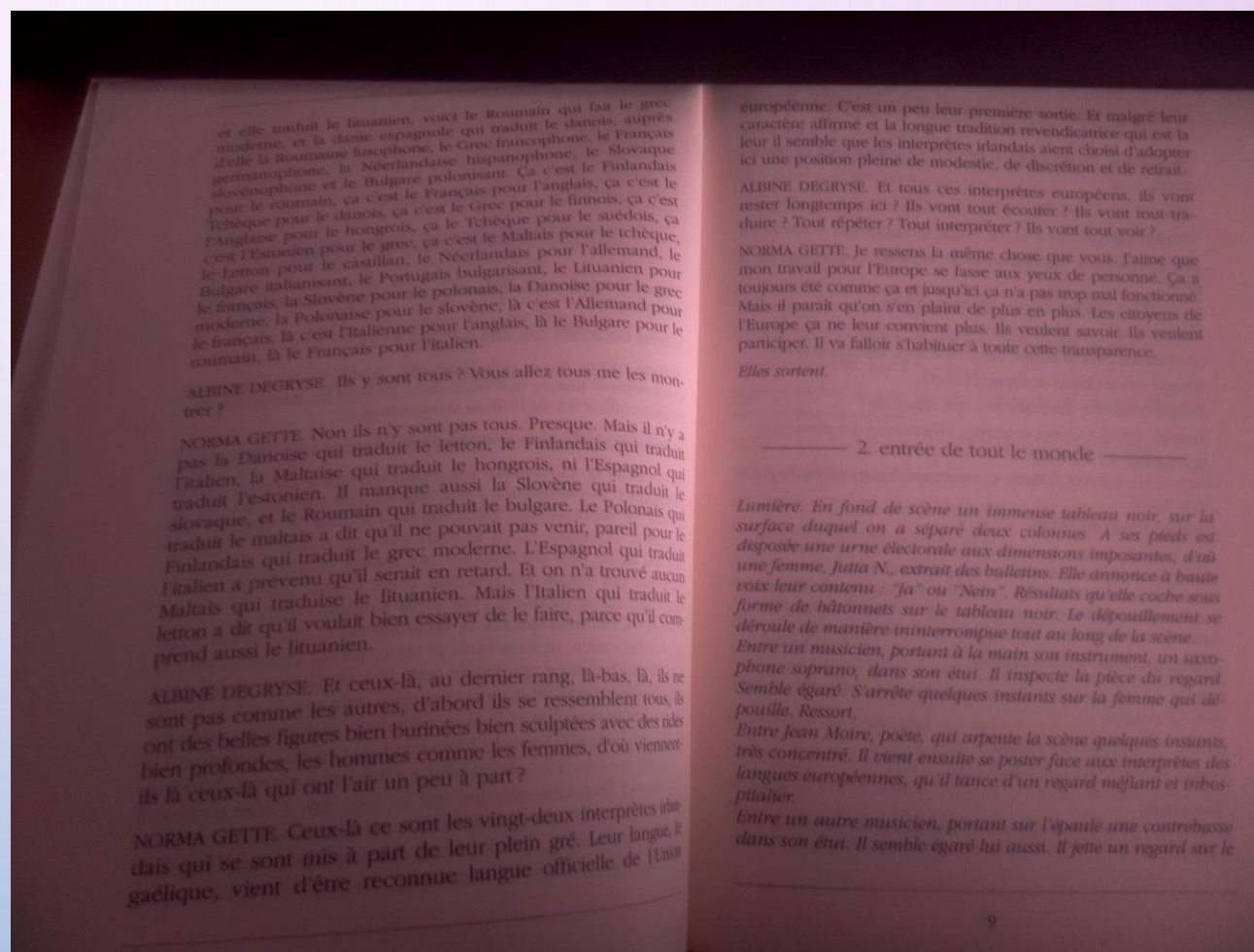
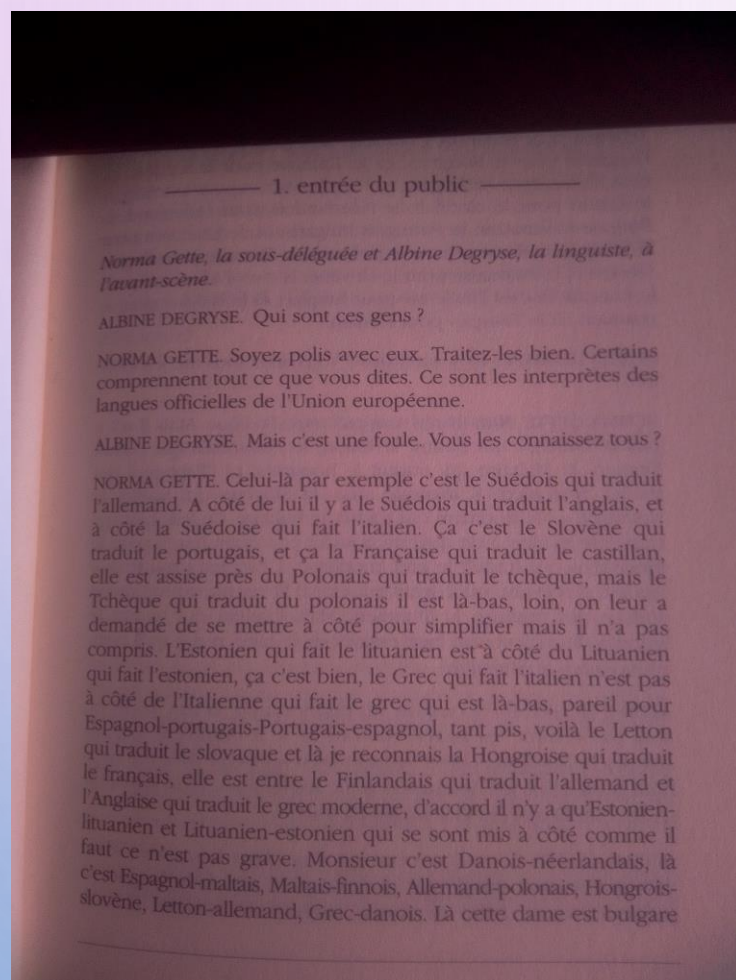
[Original text]

Albine degryse : but it's a crowd. Do you know them all ?

Norma gette : for example this one is the Swedish who translates German. Next to him there is the Swedish who translates English, then the Swedish who does Italian. Here is the Slovene translating Portuguese, and here the French translating Castilian, she is sitting close to the Polish who translates Czech, but the Czech translating Polish, he is over there, far away, they were asked to be sit together to make things easier but he didn't understand. The Estonian taking care of the Lithuanian is next to the Lithuanian taking care of the Estonian, that is good, the Greek taking care of the Italian is not next to the Italian taking care of the Greek who is over there, same thing for Spanish-Portuguese-Portuguese-Spanish, nevermind, here is the Latvian translating the Slovak and here I recognize the Hungarian who translates French, she is between the Finnish who translates German and the British who translates modern Greek, okay only the Estonian-Lithuanian and Lithuanian-Estonian sat next to each other as it should, it is not a big deal. Mister is doing Danish-Dutch, here it's Spanish-Maltese, Maltese-Finnish, German-Polish, Hungarian-Slovene, Latvian-German, Greek-Danish.

[Personnal translation for non French-speaking audience]

TOLD YOU, IT'S GOING ON FOREVER...



THEATRE AS AN ART IN THE FLESH

You could say « there are so many languages in the EU that the need for interprete is gigantic. »...

... but it's more effecient to fill the theatre with place-holder interpretes and spend ten minutes
presenting them.

➔ Embodiement of a problem. Suddenly, you can *experience* it and what it means.



From multilingualism as the *subject of the play*:

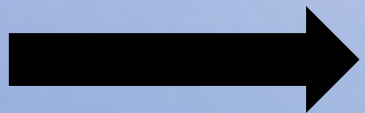
put characters speaking a whole bunch of different languages in the same place and wait for them to find a solution. ➡ A multilingualism mimicking reality.

To multilingualism as a *dramatic tool* :

What's important is not what you say, but *how* you say it.



A multilingualism with the same stature as the costumes, the sets, the way the actors play.



What do we say when we stop saying it in a sole language?

How multilingualism can help individual absorb complex collective issues ?



THE GREAT DISASTER

- By Patrick Kermann, published in 1999
- Pitch : Giovanni Pastore is a shepherd from Italia. He left his farm in the mountain to find out if the grass was greener elsewhere. Spoiler alert : it was not. He wander through France and Germany before finally ending up to land in the Titanic as a clandestine spoon washer. And... well, you know how this story ends right ?
- Dramatic specificities : versified text, non linear story with a confused and blurry timeline (these sorts of things happen when you spend years and years rambling your thoughts alone in the depth of the Atlantic ocean)

CHANGING COUNTRY, CHANGING LANGUAGE... CHANGING NAME.

- moi **Giovanni Pastore**
un jour suis descendu de ma montagne
- moi **Jean Berger**
les pieds dans l'eau et rien ne m'est arrivé
- en automne moi **Johan Schaeffer** me tapais aussi le
houblon
et la patronne quand le patron ronflait en cuvant sa bière
- alors après aux states
John Shepherd n'aura pas de problèmes pour les dollars

[original text]

- me **Giovanni Pastore**
one day went down my mountain
- me **Jean Berger**
feet in the water and nothing happened to me
- in the fall me **Johan Schaeffer** was also doing the hops
and the lady boss when the boss was snoring sleeping
off his beer
- then in the states
John Shepherd will have no problem for the dollars

[personal translation]




Seems anecdotic but, the new names are translation of the original name:


From the character's point of view:

- A will to fit in
 - Change his name but stay the same
 - Plurilinguism makes him different and not different at the same time
- ➔ Adaptation to his environment


From a dramatic point of view:

- Marker of time and space
 - The storyline is blurry, name tells you when and where he is
- ➔ Only reliable markers in a confused story
- 

THE PARADOX OF MULTILINGUIISM:



It creates landmarks for the audience. Thanks to language, we can know the place and date of the event



It also creates confusion. The absence of other markers and multiplication of linguistic clues make them not always relatable

Language is an extra information
Too much information is not realistic information...

...it opens space and time to build a new reality
(or new ways in/around it)

BLURRY MEMORY : EUROPE AS THE TITANIC ?

et s'ils comprennent pas

vietato entrare

défense d'entrée

Eintritt verboten

no access

c'est ça l'Europe

les riches en haut

les pauvres en bas

[original text]

and if they don't understand

vietato entrare

défense d'entrée

Eintritt verboten

no access

that's what Europe is about


rich at the top

poor at the bottom

[personal translation]



These are supposed to be signs inside the titanic

- We cannot be sure. What language(s) was used in the Titanic? Were they really displayed in several languages?
 - Could it be his failing memory? The languages are shown in the order of Giovanni's trip through Europe. A trip where he was rejected over and over.
- 

MULTILINGUIISM AS EMBODIEMENT OF AN ISSUE

- At the end of the story, that's all he remembers : access denied.
 - It shows the resemblance beyond the apparent differences. ➔ resemblance in exclusion
- ➔ If we take a step back: maybe it's not just Giovanni's story, but the story of a clandestine migrant dying in a sinking boat after being rejected from everywhere in Europe.

By opening time and space, multilinguism hides more general issues behind the character's plot. It embodies a silent problem. Another paradox: multilinguism is used not to tell but to show.

FUCK YOU EU.RO.PA

- By Nicoletta Esinencu, published in 2007
- Pitch : an unnamed female narrator has to take part in a contest by answering this question « What has my country done for me, and what will I do for it ? ». The only problem is : she has no country. In a letter to her father, she explained how she grew up in what could be Romania or Moldavia, dreaming of Europe. Once again, a story of how the grass was not greener elsewhere.
- Dramatic specificities : punctuation is an option, you have to love lists a lot, supposedly addressed to her father, this language is not PG13

ONE FAMILY, DIFFERENT LANGUAGES, DIFFERENT ALPHABETS

Il paraît que je n'ai pas eu de pays dans mon enfance.

Ensuite à l'école, nous avons commencé à écrire dans un autre alphabet.

Des lettres que je connaissais depuis longtemps par maman.

Quand grand-mère entendait maman me parler de ces lettres elle se mettait à jurer dans une langue que je ne connaissais pas.

Grand-mère était une communiste ukrainienne, grosse et bête.

La nuit du réveillon, toute la ville était illuminée par les feux d'artifices. On entendait des pétards. C'était la fête.

"Les Roumains viennent reprendre leur terre", dit-elle, puis elle ferma les yeux pour toujours.

[original text]

They say I had no country during my childhood.

Then at school, we began to write in another alphabet.

Letters I knew for a while thanks to my mother.

When grand-mother heard mum talking to me about these letters she would start swearing in a language I didn't know.

Grand-mother was a Ukrainian communist, fat and stupid.

The night of the new year's Eve, the whole city was enlightened by the fireworks. We heard the firecrackers. Huge celebration.

"The Romanians are coming to get their land back", she said, then she closed her eyes for ever.

[personal translation]

ONE FAMILY, DIFFERENT LANGUAGES, DIFFERENT ALPHABETS

- The story of the USSR is made of big population displacements → families are composed of different nationalities *and* languages.
- The mother and the grand-mother comes from different countries, which are also not the same as the narrator's.
- When the mother speaks about her language to her daughter, the grand-mother is pissed and swear in, again, another language. → languages in this family shapes the underlying tension between them.

→ Language is seen as a threat to the unity of the family. And it's also true outside the family.

MULTILINGUIISM AND SWEARING TO FREE YOURSELF

“Bonjour, dis-je. Au rez-de-chaussée ?

_Chto ? me demande-t-elle sans comprendre.

Mojno po ruski ?

_Oui. Je peux le dire en russe, et en anglais, et en français... *idi na hui*. Va te faire enculer. *Fuck you !* Mais je préfère le dire dans ma langue.

Du-te în pizda ma-tiiiiii ! Va te faire foutre.”

[original text]

“Hello, I say. To the ground floor?

_Chto ? she asks me without understanding.

Mojno po ruski ?

_Yes. I can say it in Russian, and in English, and in French... *idi na hui*. Va te faire enculer. *Fuck you !* But I rather say it in my language. *Du-te în pizda ma-tiiiiii !* Go fuck yourself.”

[personal translation]

MULTILINGUISM AS A REBELLION

- As soon as there are different languages, a hierarchy is created where one language is worth more than the other. Here, the neighbor simply refuses to answer a simple question if not in Russian
 - ➔ not speaking the right language can lead to social punishment
- The narrator start swearing and cursing in every languages she can. It's a double rebellion :
 - ➔ verbal violence to escape the social politeness (which only *looks* polite)
 - ➔ multilinguism to escape the obligation to speak Russian

MULTILINGUIISM AS FREEDOM

- Multilinguism is... fun. Remember that moment when you're young (or less young) and you start learning a new language and start with all the insults? Here the narrator opposes to a forced language the pleasure of wandering through language. → creative use of languages.
- Multilinguism here also shows how politeness is a social construct : the narrator was polite and nice, but was blamed for using the wrong language. It is more about *appearance* than real relation.
- In the play, it is unclear if this event truly occurred as the narrator explained, or if this answer is what she dreamt she would have answered. Here again, multilinguism feels like an exit to a dull reality.

→ What happens when multilinguism is no longer an option ?

MONOLINGUIISM AS THE DEATH OF FREEDOM

Fuck you, Amérique !

Fuck you, Europe !

Fuck !

Pourquoi fuck ?

Tu ne jures même plus dans ta langue.

Va te faire foutre, l'Amérique !

Va te faire foutre, l'Europe !

Va te faire foutre, espèce de fuck !

[...]

Papa, il faut, il faut que je te dise quelque chose...

Je ne peux pas rester ici.

Demain, on va t'enterrer.

Et après-demain, je rentre... chez elle, papa...

Fuck you, Europa ! Fuck !

Tu marches dans la rue et il n'y a rien dans quoi flanquer un coup de pied.

[original text]

Fuck you, America !

Fuck you, Europa !

Fuck !

Why fuck ?

You don't even swear in your language anymore.

Va te faire foutre, l'Amérique !

Va te faire foutre, l'Europe !

Va te faire foutre, espèce de fuck !

[...]

Dad, I need, I need to tell you something...

I can't stay here.

Tomorrow, you'll be buried.

And the day after, I'm going back... to her, dad...

Fuck you, europa ! fuck !

You walk in the street and there's nothing to kick.

[personal translation]

DISENCHANTMENT AND ANGER

- The narrator spent her childhood dreaming of Europe and its promises. But once there, the disenchantment is complete. She still has no country, no feeling of belonging somewhere. → anger.
- But, after all this time in Europe, she only has one language left : English. There is no exit anymore. No option. No fun. Just *fuck*. To the point where even the word *fuck* doesn't make much sense.
- Monolingualism here is shown as a self-betrayal *and* self-loss : by losing her other languages, she lost the ability to express herself, and more important, to rebel the events she has to face.

TO CONCLUDE...

Multilingualism is a dramatic tool which can be used to:

- Express the wandering of the characters, their feeling of (self) loss in a world too big for them.
- Give the characters the power to fight or embody these issues.

Multilingualism when used as a dramatic tool is *not* a curse, it's a freedom of creation which opens new ways into reality. It embodies the confusion, the wandering, the anger and the urge to say.

Multilingualism in theatre tells a lot of things, but most of all, it shows them.