

Leseprobe

Julia Andres / Brian Rozema /
Anne Schröder (eds.)

(Dis-)Harmony

Amplifying Voices
in Polyphone Cultural Productions

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Illustration on the Front Cover:

Eye Catcher (The EYE filmmuseum, Amsterdam), © Helge Dörrie, 2017.

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Table of Contents

Prelude

Julia Andres, Brian Rozema & Anne Schröder 7

Plucky Tommies, Angelic Nurses and the Others: Identity Constructions in Hegemonic and Antibegemonic Discourse of First World War Songs

Franz Andres Morrissey 9

In/Visibility, Silencing, Gaining Voice and Agency in Visual Discourses on Refugees and Forced Migration

Silke Betscher 35

Identities without Alterity? Linguistic Varieties in Eddie Izzard's Stand-up Comedy Shows

Alexander Brock 51

Two Hundred Plus Years of Dialect Representation in English Literature

Stephan Gramley 67

"No One Talks Like That. Sorry." What Are People Doing When They Discuss Film and Television Accents?

Jane Hodson & Kate Hunter..... 101

Identity through the Looking Glass: Voices of Drag in Past and Present

Sven Leuckert & Ashleigh D. Moeller 117

"Let's Get Ready to Rumble": Sport Language and Fan Identity

Emalee Nelson 137

The Manifold Facets of Linguistic Contact: Giving Voice to the Multicultural Fabric of the French Caribbean in Literature

Paula Prescod 147

Teaching World Englishes with Films

Marion Schulte & Peter Schildhauer..... 167

Reggae and Dub Poetry: Teaching a Different "Riddim"

Laurenz Volkmann 185

Negotiating Cultural Identities in Interactions about Turkish TV Series

Kristin Weiser-Zurmühlen..... 199

<i>The Voice of GDR-English</i> Göran Wolf	219
<i>The Fictiolects of Child Narrators: Adult Constructions of the Child's Voice</i> Tyll Zybura & Katharina Pietsch	241
Biographical Notes on the Authors	265

Prelude

JULIA ANDRES, BRIAN ROZEMA & ANNE SCHRÖDER

With Jane Hodson's (2014) seminal publication, the representation of dialects in literary and film production has come further into focus, drawing "on ideas and approaches from the discipline of linguistics in order to investigate the ways in which [...] dialects of English are represented in a range of films and literary texts" (2014: 1). With this fruitful combination of linguistic analysis and literary study, Hodson intended "to move from a practical investigation of the mechanics of analysing dialect in film and literature, to a broader and more theoretical analysis" (2014: 16). However, as the author herself concedes, "there is a lot of exciting work still to be done" (2014: 238).

This is where the present volume sets in, as it enlarges the type(s) of language variation investigated from English dialects to language variation in English and other languages and to multilingualism in more general. It also includes more varied types of media and cultural production (stand-up comedy shows, drag shows, musical genres, TV series, sports commentary, to name some), and takes concepts of language contact, identity/alterity, cultural mobility, cultural appropriation, and resistance as well as aspects of foreign language teaching into account.

With this we explore and expand the concept of polyphony as it was famously employed by Mikhail Bakhtin in 1929 in his discussion of Dostoyevsky's novels. Bakhtin found a more democratic usage of narrative dialog that was less conclusive in terms of which ideology to favor. Bakhtin argued that unlike other writers of the 19th century, Dostoyevsky did not let two sides debate only to inevitably have one overpower the other and thus add to the master narrative of the time, culture, and society. What Bakhtin found in Dostoyevsky's work is an instance of polyphonic dialog that "allows the voice of the narrator to reside beside the voices of the characters, bestowing no greater authority on that voice than on any of the others. Voices intersect and interact, mutually illuminating their ideological structures, potentialities, biases and limitations" (Brandist n.d: n.p.).

Now almost a hundred years old, Bakhtin's concept of polyphony has been much employed in literary and cultural studies, to the point that it has been declared dated, meaningless, or obsolete. An indiscriminating representation of voices with one just as loud and powerful as another has been declared utopian by some – an idealistic harmony – and conceived as unbearable racket by others – an indecipherable dissonance (for an overview see Pearce 2006). We believe the concept still has its merits, criticism notwithstanding, when theorizing polyphony not as a finite state but as a dynamic process of claiming and giving voice that creates harmony at certain points and disrupts it shortly after. For this volume, then, Alvina E. Quintana's image of a musical fugue is particularly fitting. It might also inspire readers to think of this collection's structure as fluid.

[A] musical fugue [...] employ[s] polyphony, with separate voices maintaining comparative integrity throughout a composition. A fugue begins with a theme, or ‘subject’, on which each voice enters in turn, as if ‘imitating’ the preceding one. Each voice follows the subject with a ‘countersubject.’ The opening, called the ‘exposition,’ introduces the main material and all the voices. Then comes a ‘development,’ in which there are many ‘episodes,’ introducing new material, playing the voices against each other in various combinations, transforming the themes rhythmically and harmonically, taking the music far from the opening key or tonality. (Quintana 1996: 36)

In this volume, scholars from various disciplines – from literary or cultural studies, from linguistics, language teaching, and media studies – contribute to a fugue, a (dis-) harmony of voices, identity formation, (media) representation, power distribution and awareness. They look at the (linguistic) representations of (marginalized) groups or communities in films, TV series, novels, songs etc. and some include the analysis of the language(s) and language varieties used. They discuss the visibility, agency, empowerment, stereotyping or ridiculing of different social groups and treat issues of authenticity, (self-)identity formation, style-shifting, audiences, media types and genres. Each contribution can be seen in Quintana’s sense as an ‘episode’ in its own rights that introduces ‘new material’ and opens up a new perspective on the overall theme, the amplification of various voices in cultural productions. But since we, as editors, would like to refrain from setting up an artificial order or from implying any hierarchy, we have arranged these contributions alphabetically according to the authors’ names.

Returning to Hodson’s prognosis of the “exciting work still to be done” (2014: 238) in field of representational language studies regardless of the individual scholar’s disciplinary affiliations, the editors invite the reader to examine the directions each scholar in this volume has taken with the initial theoretical impetus. Like music, language is a beautiful and powerful tool used to convey the intricacies and complexities of the human experience. We hope the reader will find the variations on the theme of language presented here both useful and inspirational for a continued exploration of how language influences and is used to influence the human experience.

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In/Visibility, Silencing, Gaining Voice and Agency in Visual Discourses on Refugees and Forced Migration

SILKE BETSCHER (BREMEN)

1. Introduction

Photographs are central elements in media discourses (Paul 2016). In the digital age, their distribution has increased exponentially and media rely heavily on the emotions and statements evoked by images. ‘A picture says more than a thousand words’ is the everyday understanding of the significance of photographs. But this position was fundamentally questioned by Visual Culture Studies (cf. Mirzoeff 2012). What does a picture really ‘say’? Regarding the fact that images neither function in an argumentative nor a linear but in an associative and simultaneous way (see Müller 2003: 9), can we even use the concept of ‘statement’ in the sense of discourse theory? If so, which statements are immanent to a picture and how are statements produced? What is the role of the linguistic and multimodal publishing context, in which images mostly stand?

If we argue with the photography theorist Gertrud Koch that “the perspective shows the attitude” (“Die Einstellung ist die Einstellung”, Koch 1997), statements are produced by the selection of the motif, the chosen perspective, the details, the design and the multiple ways in which conventions, norms, attitudes and values are expressed. Moreover, it is produced by the relationship in which the photographer sets himself/herself to the subject depicted. In this sense, an image ‘speaks’ about the photographer, the image politics, the discourse formations and the visual conventions of a specific time. Simultaneously, the image produces effects in discourses and is perceived in a specific way by viewers. According to Rose, it is the reproductions and reconstructions of social power relations and asymmetries contained in the motifs and design of the images that establish specific scopic regimes (Rose 2006). And these scopic regimes in turn configure the depicted, speakers and viewers as social positions.

With a view to the history of photography, this becomes particularly clear. After portrait photography initially reproduced conventions of representation that originated in portrait paintings of the rich and powerful, social documentary photography at the beginning of the 20th century (e.g. by Jacob Riis or Lewis Hine) explicitly aimed to question and criticize existing social relations with the help of photographic representation (Stumberger & Glatzer 2012). In these pictures, marginalized people often looked into the camera and the impetus of the photographer to give these people voice through visualization is clearly recognizable.

The aim of this article is to discuss the complex entanglements between visualisation, invisibilisation, speaking position, voice, silencing and agency that shape visual discourses on refugees and forced migration. Therefore, I will use a poster which was distributed in all German cities in the course of the ARD series “Tolerance” 2014 and a press photograph from a refugee accommodation published in the TAZ in 2015, which acts as a representative single image (Pilarczyk & Mietzner 2005: 133ff.) and

simultaneously started a longer debate on the placement of refugees in a local newspaper, that was accompanied by a series of press images showing the struggle for better living conditions simultaneously as a fight for having voice and being visible.

2. Epistemological Functions of Voice and Silencing in the Context of In/Visibility and Image Politics

The concept of ‘voice’ as a form of self-empowerment originates in pedagogical discourses and has found its way into feminist and anti-hegemonic debates in the sociology of knowledge. ‘Voice’ literally and figuratively means to express situated knowledge and collective experience, to make oneself audible and visible (Giroux 1988).

Applied to the visual discourse, ‘voice’ can be conceptualized on at least three different levels: as access to the visual means of representation of a society (Rosler 1999), as a speaker’s position that becomes directly visible (e.g. politicians and experts’ images) and as a meaning of an image in which the subject position of the depicted is expressed through the choice of motif, the image design and the intention of the photographer.

Opposed to having or gaining voice, silencing occurs as a counter-concept and a powerful practice in which voices, situated knowledge and positions are made unspeakable or unheard. The mechanisms involved are manifold: Dotson argues that in addition to intentionally applied strategies, silencing is also an effect of structural conditions and epistemic violence (Dotson 2011). Regarding the situation of people forced to migrate silencing structural conditions can be seen in the camps, places that Vicki Täubig has called ‘places of organized disintegration’ (Täubig 2009). And silencing can also be seen in the fact that situated knowledge of refugees is not included in the canon of recognized knowledge in the Western World.

By investigating silencing within verbal-communicative situations, Dotson stresses the mutual dependencies between speakers and audience. Referring to Hornsby, she underlines that a “successful linguistic exchange” depends on “reciprocity”. “Reciprocity requires that an audience understand a speaker’s word and understand what the speaker is doing with the words (Dotson 2011: 237).” That is to say, reciprocity requires an open attitude and emphatic listening and the honest will to understand. However, if this is denied, according to Dotson often mechanisms of silencing are set in motion, causing the speaker to limit himself/herself in his/her narration.

Unlike Dotson’s subject of investigation, I am not dealing with direct linguistic exchanges and interactions, but with discourses, especially visual discourses. Moreover, in the field of public discourses on refugees and forced migration reciprocity exists, if at all, then only between the media, in which migrant positions are neither represented personally nor by content (cf. *Neue Deutsche Medienmacher*) and a predominantly white-privileged readership. Therefore, the first question has to be, whether it is even possible to transfer Dotson’s approach to this field? What are the mechanisms of silencing here and what could reciprocity and understanding mean regarding visual discourses?

Although having/gaining voice and silencing occur as contradicting concepts, it is not possible to draw a direct line between voice and visibility on the one hand and silencing and invisibility on the other hand. I argue that visibility, voice, invisibility and

silencing are entangled in a more complex way. Because visibility can contain a dimension of silencing and invisibility can also be understood as a practice of resistance, e.g. to protect private spheres or to refuse depiction true to the humiliating motto 'Look, they are human like we are!'

3. A Key Picture Carrying Centuries of Global Inequalities and Power Relations

ARD, the largest public television broadcaster in Germany, conducted a theme week in November 2014 entitled "Tolerance". On this occasion, large-scale posters were published nationwide that took up the topic with very different references and deliberately provoking questions about the relationship of society in dealing with children ("nag or future?"), with gays ("normal or not normal?"), with disabled ("outsider or friend?") and with refugees ("burden or enrichment?"). The pointed questions were each illustrated with large-format photographs of individual persons or a gay couple. The ARD defended the campaign against massive criticism, in particular from interest groups representing gay and disabled people (see <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/medien/kritik-an-plakataktion-einfach-sportlich-sein-1.2217446>) and declared that the provocation inherent in this poster campaign was deliberately used to trigger social debates.

However, the intended crossing of discursive boundaries as a result of a longer and conscious decision-making process in preparation of the theme week has to be seen in a wider socio-political context. The poster series not only made things sayable and depictable in a way that was previously problematized and tabooed not without reason. The act of violating discursive borders, which was a well-known strategy in the field of commercial advertising (cf. e.g. Benetton Campaign of 1994) for a long time, gained a stronger foothold in the socio-political arena with the 2014 state election campaign of the AfD (Alternative for Germany). The use of this strategy at the end of 2014 by the ARD, as the epitome of serious reporting, normalized it and transferred it into the realm of mainstream media.

The headline "Burden or Enrichment?" referred to and thereby reanimated outmoded utilitarian patterns of argumentation which had been established in the context of discourses about labour migration in the 1950s and 1960s (Herbert 2001; Bade & Oltmer 2004). At least since then the public discourses on migration to Germany were connected with the narrative of an imagined and quantifiable limit of burden (Link 2006). But there is an important difference since the public debates on quantifiable limits is mainly combined with groups and numbers of refugees in abstract way, frequently visualized in infographics or in pictures of masses. By visually associating the question with a concrete individual represented by his (in the case of Picture 1 below) over-sized face, complex power-ethics connections that are integrated into historically grounded global power relations occur. The viewer is assigned the role of the decision maker on the fate of one individual. Therefore, the poster leads the debate about upper limits back to what it means concretely in practice: that individual human beings make deeply existential decisions about other individual human beings. This could be one interpretation intended by the ARD. But I will demonstrate that the poster also provided a framework for the discourse that would follow in 2015/16 in

which a separation between civil war refugees from the Arab states of North Africa and from Syria and Iraq on the one hand, and black refugees, mainly from the West African states on the other hand was made. Whilst in the media the former were portrayed more as educated and innocent victims of the (civil) wars by publishing numerous articles about individual life stories, black refugees remained an anonymous mass of people in a desperate search for better living conditions.



Picture 1: Image picture for the ARD theme week on “tolerance” 2014, photographed by the author

Although the depicted man serves as a visual pars pro toto for the refugee figure in general, I would argue that the fact that the man is black and is depicted in a specific way opens up a field for ambiguous interpretations with references to colonial images and white-and-black power relations wherein questions of voice and silencing are negotiated in a specific way.

The larger-than-life close-up of the man's face, who is photographed slightly from above creates a communicative space. The man seems to look directly at us as viewers. But actually his view passes us slightly to the left. He looks very insistently, as if he wants to communicate something. However, not alone due to the slightly elevated viewer perspective, the power of interpretation lies with us. What do we see in this person? Do we feel addressed by his gaze? Are we putting something in that look? And if so, what?

The result is a pseudo-communication between viewer and black person in the public space. We look at his almost bald skull with a vein running across his head. "Burden or enrichment?" is written directly over his forehead, so that the black skin serves as a contrasting background for the white writing. What is happening here has to be grasped in its (not only symbolic) depth layers of meaning. The utilitarian question defined by the white speaker position is written on and inscribed into the black body, calling up different colonial subject positions with historical-medial and discursive contexts.

3.1. Figure of the Black in Public Spaces

The publication context with the poster genre refers to the hegemonic representation of black people in public space. For a long time, black people could be seen on billboards in German and European city centres almost exclusively in the course of donation campaigns for Africa (cf. film *White Charity*, <https://www.whitecharity.de/de/film/> and campaign "Africa for Norway", <https://www.radiaid.com/>).

These pictures of black people "render an epistemically disadvantaged identity" (Dotson 2011: 243) that is defined by the white post-/colonial view. They always show the black subject in need of white help and charity. And at the same time, the implicit white subject position is invisible and thereby normalized: it recalls the white subject as the one being not in need, having resources to help others, deciding how and whom to help or rest in ignorance and privilege.

"Even though these bodies are deeply political, in that they emerge at the intersection of corporeal and geopolitical relations of power between the West and the global South, they lack civic status; their dehumanisation is, in this sense, an effect of these very power relations that claim to sustain them as human bodies, in the first place." (Chouliaraki & Stolic 2017: 1168) This entanglement of discursive humanitarianism and dehumanization is one of the perfidious inventions of colonial 'knowledge'.

3.2. The Prototype of the Refugee and the Colonial Figure of the (Challenging) Black Man

It is not only that the refugee figure is depicted in a specific way, the refugee also has to express him/herself along a discursive agenda. The visual figure of the 'refugee' requires the physical representation of vulnerability together with the expression of fear in order to be assigned a protection status. "If an individual does not express a well-founded fear, which propels them into homelessness and helplessness, they cannot

expect to acquire protection. This would suggest that any form of agency on their part could be viewed as detrimental to the attainment of refugee status.” (Mannik 2012: 264)

Although the protruding vein, the gaunt face and the slightly reddened eyes can be seen as signs of exertion, the body of the man depicted is not wounded, he shows no visible traces of being-in-need. It is the haunting gaze of the man that indicates urgency and a silent accusation from which the viewer cannot escape. At the same time, it is this gaze that produces ambiguousness, because it could also be regarded as a reactivation of the colonial figure of the demanding black man. And this recourse to colonial imaginary worlds combined with the absence of the classical attributes of body-in-need or the refugee performing the gratefulness, ‘allows’ ARD to assign the man to the utilitarian question of a white dominant culture of the global North “Burden or enrichment?”. Thus this form of visualization is to be understood as a symbolical and material practice of redoing colonialism.

3.3. Images as an Expression of Powerful Decision-Making Practices within a Space of Possibilities

In order to understand (visual) discourses and visual regimes, not only the question of what is shown is relevant, but also the question of what could have been shown. In other words, what events were there that could have been depicted and which forms of depiction had already been established? In general, which forms of visual representation are conceivable in a specific historical moment?

The ARD poster appeared at the end of 2014, after refugee protests in 2013 and 2014 played a central role in mainstream media coverage and therefore after refugee self-organisation and political demands had already been translated into public space and discourse (cf. Bhimji 2016: 442). Through the political activism of refugees and supporters, in which the production of media-effective images played an important role, the Lampedusa group in the St. Pauli Church in Hamburg, the tent city on Oranienplatz, the activist Napuli Langa on the tree after the eviction of the square by the Berlin police or the images of activists on the roof of the Gerhard Hauptmann School became symbolic images of the protests. Besides the aim to fight for the right to stay and better living conditions, the chosen forms of political action anticipating the image politics of the mainstream media also made refugees visible as political actors and subjects.

The pictures of the tree occupation at Oranienplatz, as well as the occupied roof of the Gerhard Hauptmann School, testify above all the assertion of a visible subject position with the aid of a dual strategy of appropriation of space in a concrete material-geographical and a medial sense. “Thus refugees, asylum seekers, and destitute individuals who are ‘uncounted’ acquire visibility through challenging the same social mechanisms, which control their freedom within and across states. It is this visibility that in turn transforms their politics into discourse.” (Bhimji 2016: 448)

What is shown here is that at the time of the ARD campaign, the mainstream media had long been aware that there was self-organization on the part of refugees in Germany, that there were representatives who acted as spokespersons, that there were interlocutors on the refugees’ side for the journalistic covering of the topic of forced migration.

Only against this background can the image on the poster of the ARD theme week be understood in its deep layers of meaning. Due to the close-up perspective, the man depicted appears without surroundings and thus without a place. Placelessness contains a conceptual dimension which is interlinked to not having a speaking position. As shown before, the man's face is supposed to represent the prototype of the black 'refugee'. Regarding the alternatives mentioned above, the message is: 'As much as you (black people and refugees) try hard to make your voice heard, we, the German, white hegemonic media, keep reducing you to the question of what benefit you bring. With this, we, the white German society, have the power of definition over you, your bodies and your being in general.' Here the mechanisms of silencing come into place in (visual) discourses, which repeatedly demonstrate to the non-represented, in a violent act of power expression, that they are the 'Others', that they do not belong to the society, and that they have no place for public speaking.

It turns out that having a voice and silencing have intertwined discursive, visual, spatial, historical, medial and practical dimensions. Therefore, I argue that we should not only look at the surface of the (visual) discourse in terms of motifs we see, but should implement the complex and heterogenous social practices of producing in/visibility, of taking and selecting pictures, of showing, looking at and perceiving photographs. Only the discourses together with these social practices shape epistemologies as systems of knowledge.

Visual voicing and visual silencing are functional mechanisms and inverse strategies in visual regimes. To understand invisible voices as well as invisible silences also means to critically reflect on epistemologies of ignorance in a double sense. What we do not see is not only the refugee as a political and social subject. What we also do not see is the unmarked position of the white, privileged subject of the global North which is inscribed in these images as well as in the practices of the visual regime. These double invisibilities reproduce and actualize historical and global relations of dominance, power and hierarchies. This aspect has so far been underestimated in research on the visual representation of forced migration and refugees.

4. Invisibilisation and Desubjectivation in Images of the "Refugee-Crises" in German Newspapers

The research literature on images in the discourse on migration and refugees and on the so called 'refugee crises' has dealt extensively with pictorial icons and their productions of meaning (Betscher 2018, 2017; Chouliaraki & Stolic 2017: 1164). The pictures of the refugee boats on the Mediterranean, which were ubiquitous especially in 2015, and the picture of the dead Alan Kurdi on the beach of Bodrum were two of the central motifs. All research comes to the consistent conclusion that massification and desubjectivation, dehumanization and passivization characterize the discourses as well as the ambivalent tension between refugees as potential danger or as humanitarian body-in-need (Chouliaraki & Stolic 2017: 1163). Chouliaraki and Stolic suggest a typology of visibilities of the 'crisis', each of which situates refugees within a different regime of visibility and claim to action. They point out five categories within the visual regime: "i) visibility as biological life, associated with monitorial action; ii) visibility as empathy associated with charitable action; iii) visibility as threat, associated with state security; iv)