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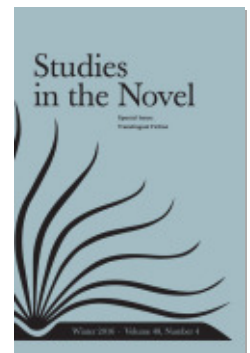
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Studies in the Novel, Volume 48, Number 4, Winter 2016, pp. 407-426 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sdn.2016.0046>



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BILINGUAL OBSCENITIES: JAMES JOYCE, *ULYSSES*, AND THE LINGUISTICS OF TABOO WORDS

MARIA KAGER

In a letter to Nora Barnacle, one of the infamous “dirty letters” James Joyce sent her from Dublin in the winter of 1909, Joyce wrote: “As you know, dearest, I never use obscene phrases in speaking. You have never heard me, have you, utter an unfit word before others. When men tell in my presence here filthy or lecherous stories I hardly smile” (*SL* 182).¹ This from the same man who wrote *Ulysses*, the book that was banned on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean for its professed obscenity. Yet where his work is concerned, at the time of this letter to Nora he was right: there had been little obscenity in his writings so far. In fact, there is little obscenity in any of Joyce’s writings until *Ulysses*, apart from the private, sexually explicit letters he wrote Nora. Printers and publishers had objected to the word “bloody” in *Dubliners*, where, after endless negotiations with the publisher, it appears four times, and to words like “fart” and “ballocks” in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and they had refused to set in print a large section of *Portrait*’s chapter three, in which Stephen thinks about his wanderings around Dublin’s red light district (Potter 28). Yet these instances are tame compared to some of the language in *Ulysses*, especially in the “Circe” and “Penelope” episodes.

The language of *Ulysses* was so sexually explicit and blasphemous that it was not just considered obscene by law, but by many of Joyce’s literary peers as well.² The book “raised a blush” upon the cheeks of Virginia Woolf (231), who complained to Lytton Strachey: “First there’s a dog that p’s—then there’s a man that forths, and one can be monotonous even on that subject” (234)—too much of a prude to write the words pee and fart; Katherine Mansfield found it “so repellent” that “it was difficult to read it,” as she wrote to Sydney Schiff: “It shocks me to come upon words, expressions and so on that I’d shrink from in life” (432); and Arnold Bennett claimed that “*Ulysses* is not pornographic, but it is more indecent, obscene, scatological and licentious than the majority

of professedly pornographic books” (qtd. in Potter 96). Even D. H. Lawrence, himself no stranger to allegations of obscenity and a recurrent user, in his works, of bad words such as “fuck,” “cunt,” and “balls” (all of which *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* uses more frequently than *Ulysses*, according to British prosecuting counsel Mervyn Griffiths-Jones [qtd. in Conley, “Joyce’s Bad Words”]), wrote in horror to his wife: “The last part of it [“Penelope”] is the dirtiest, most indecent, obscene thing ever written. Yes it is, Frieda. It is filthy.... This *Ulysses* muck is more disgusting than Casanova” (qtd. in Meyers 362).

This repellent, licentious muck was written by a man whose young alter ego, Stephen Dedalus, had been shocked “to read the word *Foetus* cut several times” in a school desk in *Portrait of the Artist*, where the obscene word “startled his blood” (89) and disturbs him profoundly. If the earlier and later of Joyce’s works are indeed “a meeting of extremes... between the early romantic phase in which Stephen Dedalus vowed to forge the ‘uncreated conscience’ of his race, and the monumental profanities of the later Joyce” (Parrinder 13), then what gave rise to this dramatic shift in style?

At least in part, a cause may be found in Joyce’s increased involvement with Italian during the eleven years, from 1904 to 1915, he spent in Pola, Rome, and Trieste. During this period of his life, Joyce gained an almost native competence in Italian. As I will suggest in this essay, his fluency in Italian had important consequences for his writing, especially with regard to his use of obscene language. Psycholinguistic studies of language emotionality suggest that late bilinguals (people who, like Joyce, become bilingual as adults) process emotional words differently in their respective languages. Linguists have found that affective processing is deeper in the native language than in languages that have been learned as adults. This is particularly true for what is generally considered “bad” or obscene language: experiments that measured the electrical conductivity of the skin showed that taboo and swearwords elicit considerably stronger physical reactions in the native language than in languages learned later in life. A second language provides “greater emotional distance” than a native language (Pavlenko, “Poetry”), which makes it easier to employ indecent language. This is an interesting find with regard to Joyce, who, as we will see, was much more comfortable using “bad language” in Italian than in English. Yet his greater profanity in Italian came to affect his use of written English. His fluency in Italian allowed him to distance himself from “the English he found so constricting” (Bosinelli 404-05), to defamiliarize a language he already experienced as “so foreign” (Joyce, *Portrait* 189), and to use it with fewer restrictions and inhibitions, resulting in an increased use of obscene language in the works he wrote during and after his Italian period.

Although it is common knowledge among Joyce scholars that Joyce had an excellent command of Italian, scholarship regarding Joyce’s language use and his linguistic abilities tends to be focused on his multilingual literary experimentations,³ rather than on the significance of his fluency in Italian.

Joyce did indeed know and use a number of different languages in his works—most notably in *Finnegans Wake* where there may be over seventy different languages present and played with.⁴ By his own count, he spoke “four or five languages fluently enough” (*JLL I* 167),⁵ and probably meant Latin, French, Italian, German, and Danish.⁶ He briefly took Irish lessons while a student in Dublin but dropped the classes because he disliked the prejudice of his teacher, the famous Patrick Pearse, against the English language. While working on *Finnegans Wake*, he also studied several of the languages he would include in the book, such as Russian, Albanian, Yiddish, Welsh, Hungarian, and Dutch. These languages all left traces in his writing, but none of them influenced the actual crafting of his work as profoundly as did his fluency in Italian.

Bilingual writers are usually understood to be writers who compose literary texts in two (or more) different languages.⁷ In literary studies, Steven G. Kellman’s term “translingualism” is often used, referring to “authors who write in more than one language or at least in a language other than their primary one” (ix). At first glance, Joyce does not seem to belong in this category of authors as he never wrote fiction in a language other than English. Yet when we take into account his adoption of Italian as a family language together with his journalistic writings in the language and the myriad letters he wrote in Italian to his children, I believe that Joyce too can be regarded a bilingual, or translingual, writer. Moreover, he may not have written fiction in Italian, but his fluency in the language had a lasting and significant impact upon his literary use of English.

Although initially a foreign language he studied at Belvedere College and, later, at University College Dublin, Italian changed from being an acquired tongue, “dutifully studied” like his other languages (Conley, “Language and Languages” 312),⁸ into something much more personal: the chosen language of his family. The fact that the Joyces espoused Italian and kept it as their family language long after they left Trieste is well known, but the importance of this for Joyce’s writing has not received much critical attention.⁹ This is curious, as it seems to me remarkable that a writer, especially a writer who, perhaps even more than most writers, is sensitive to language, would by choice speak a foreign language, Italian, with his family and would keep this up consistently in letters to his children, even twenty-six years after leaving Italian-speaking territory. The wealth of over seventy as yet unpublished Italian letters from the recently surfaced Jahnke bequest in the Zürich James Joyce Foundation shows that although Joyce might not have switched language “Conradically” in his fiction (Nabokov 57), in his family life and letters he had.

When Joyce first arrived in Pola, in 1904, he quickly discovered that his university Italian might have been sufficient for reading d’Annunzio in the original, but was much less suited for everyday use.¹⁰ Joyce’s friend Alessandro Francini Bruni recalls being amused at Joyce’s odd, archaic Italian. He did not, for instance, use the modern word for sister, “sorella,” but the antiquated

“sirocchia,” and when “Francini corrected him, Joyce replied with spirit, ‘I learned my Italian from Dante’” (Ellmann 193). According to Francini, Joyce spoke a “crippled Italian full of ulcers,” “an only child language,” a “dead language” (12): “He could quote Dante etc. from memory. But if he had to speak the language he got nowhere. His syntax was so garbled that he sounded like an escapee from the madhouse” (40). But Joyce, unaware of the “ulcerations,” spoke them with confidence (12). He was, however, an assiduous student. He had a notebook entitled “Italiano,” full of exercises, vocabulary, idioms, and standard phrases (McCourt, *Years of Bloom* 76), and he quickly picked up contemporary and more colloquial Italian. So much so that Francini says of Joyce’s later Italian: “English speakers in Italian will never be able to mask the hissing ‘s’ typical of their language. But Joyce pronounced Italian in a way that would deceive others about his foreign origin” (44).¹¹

Nora fared less well. On arriving in Pola she did not know a word of Italian. After nearly a year she could scarcely “speak about thirty words of Triestine dialect” and could not accomplish much by herself (*SL* 64). Nevertheless, she did improve eventually. A year later Joyce was able to announce to his students that his wife had learned enough Italian “to enable her to run up debts comfortably” (Ellmann 224), and the collected letters show that she would sometimes cable Joyce in Italian. Yet as commentators have observed, while Joyce and his children consistently spoke Italian among themselves, Nora was the only one who would still occasionally make use of English.¹²

This suggests that adopting Italian as the family language must have been a gradual process, since upon arrival in Pola, and later Trieste, Joyce’s Italian was insufficient and that of Nora nonexistent. Joyce himself gives a hint concerning the manner in which Italian took over. In a letter to his daughter-in-law Helen, the wife of his son Giorgio, Joyce once wrote, apparently in answer to a complaint from her:

Dear complimentary but most suspicious daughter in law. The reason I write in Italian to Giorgio is not to conceal anything from your keen swift flashing and infallible eye but because when he was introduced to me 30 years ago by Dr. Gilberto Sinigaglia I said: Toh! Giorgio! To which he replied: Baa Boo. Our conversation has continued in that tongue. (*JLL* I 380)¹³

This indicates that Joyce spoke Italian to his children from the moment they were born, something already inaugurated by his giving them Italian names. Francini reports that although guests to the Joyce household “selected their own language for conversation,” there were two things which were never allowed to be translated: “the children’s names. They were always Lucia and Giorgio” (45). And Joyce always addressed them in Italian. In fact, this seems to have been almost a matter of pride with him. In a letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver from 1934 (nineteen years after the Joyces left Trieste), he describes a conversation he had with Lucia and adds: “of course it was in Italian” (*JLL* I 353).

Joyce's letters show that he kept this up consistently throughout his life and reveal his thorough bilingualism in English and Italian. We have many of the letters he wrote in Italian to his children—especially to Giorgio—but even the letters written in English are full of Italian words, expressions, and entire sentences. To give just a few examples from letters to Nora: “La nostra bella Trieste! I have often said this angrily but tonight I feel it true” (*SL* 170); “I am dreadfully nervous from all the worry and pensieri I have had” (171); “What nice talks we had together this time, had we not, Nora? Well, we will again, dear. Coraggio! Please write me a nice letter, dear, and tell me you are happy” (173); “Addio, mia *cara* Nora!” (176); “Never mind Eva but you might see that Stannie looks after himself. I hope he is better now. Addio, Giorgino e Lucetta! Vengo subito! And addio, Nora mia!” (177); “O how supremely happy I shall be!! God in heaven, I shall be happy there! I figlioli, il fuoco, una buona mangiata, un caffè nero, un Brasil, il Piccolo della Sera, e Nora, Nora mia, Norina, Noretta, Norella, Noruccia ecc ecc...” (191).

The opposite occurs as well. In Joyce's Italian letters to Giorgio and Lucia there are numerous switches to English, as, for instance, here:

Caro Giorgio: Buona fortuna! Or su! Corajo! Avanti, Savoya! Salutami il piccolo.
Remember! Remember!! Remember!!!
The 2nd of February [Joyce's birthday]
is
COMING
Mi spiego? Tante belle cose
Babbo (*L III* 342)

Occasionally, the switches between Italian and English occur so frequently in letters to his children that it is hard to say what the “base” language of the letter is, Italian or English. These apparently arbitrary alternations from one language to another are what linguists call code-switching. Code-switching is often regarded as sub-standard language use, “bad language” (Myers-Scotton 327), a grammarless blend of languages. There is a general notion that bilinguals engage in code-switching because they are unable to express themselves sufficiently in one language and have to look to their “other” language in order to be able to continue a conversation. “This may be true to some extent,” writes the socio-linguist Li Wei, “when a bilingual is momentarily lost for words” (13). But, Wei continues, “code-switching is an extremely common practice among bilinguals and takes many forms.”

Rather than a sign of linguistic incompetence, recent studies show that code-switching is an indicator of bilingual skill, involving the “skilled manipulation of overlapping sections of two (or more) grammars” (Wei 15). While less fluent bilingual speakers tend to only switch languages *between* sentences, fluent bilinguals will also switch *within* sentences. This kind of

“intrasentential” code-switching requires more fluency because it demands that speakers shift to the syntactic rules that govern the other language in the middle of a thought or sentence (Zirker 11).¹⁴ Both early and late bilinguals, such as Joyce, will engage in intrasentential code-switching: what matters is not so much the age at which the second language has been acquired as the command the speaker has over both languages.

A good example of intrasentential code-switching can be found in a letter from the aforementioned Jahnke bequest, written by Joyce from Zurich in 1932 to Giorgio and Helen. I cite the opening section of the letter, which, at six pages, is too long to quote in full here:

Vi ringrazio della lettera alquanto scortese in prompt reply to my telegram of a fortnight ago. Mi rallegro della buone notizie determin[??] di Stefanuccio and also of the other members of the colony. La condizione peggiorata del mio occhio destro (quello non operato da Vogt) is not due to excesses in connection with wine, woman and/or song, ma al fatto che ho pensato agli interessi altrui instead of thinking of myself first. Non sono tornato da Vogt ancora because I am awaiting a reply from Collinson (English physician consulted in London) about the glaucoma complication, cosa che mi sorprende molto perché non me ne sono mai accorto....As regards Lucia I cannot give any advice salvo che sua madre pensa la migliore cosa è di scriverlo ogni tanto in a natural and unexaggerated tone. Comunque sia è rimasta colà 15 giorni e forse resterà fino a 7tembre after which, according to the Jolases, instead of marrying Ponisowsky or returning to my movable home, la sua intenzione è di mettere qui casa a Parigi coll'infermiera.¹⁵

The letter continues in this way, randomly jumping back and forth between Italian and English and back again to Italian.

It is tempting to try to analyze Joyce's switches, to find a reason why he shifts to the “other” language at the points that he does. Yet there does not seem to be a visible reason for the switches to occur when they do. Linguists have attempted to discover a grammatical formula to capture code-switching behavior, to formulate constraints stating where code-switches could occur in a sentence, but it appears impossible to find one “fitting” grammar to describe all types of code-switching. Constraints tend to depend more on the code-switching community than on any general regulations, and bilinguals will “break various kinds of ‘rules’...if those rules get in the way of their combining what they want to combine” (Gardner-Chloros 106). Describing a recorded conversation of a bilingual speaker of French and Alsatian full of random moves back and forth between the two languages, Penelope Gardner-Chloros comments: “No rhyme or reason appears to govern the points at which he passes from one language to the other” (1). Similarly, no rhyme or reason seems to rule Joyce's switches. Rather, Gardner-Chloros explains, each of a bilingual speaker's languages has an “‘activation threshold’ which depends on how often, and how recently, they have been used” (129-30). The system of

activation and its opposite, inhibition, does not simply function like an “on/off switch” (129). Instead, it can be compared to “‘holding down ping-pong balls in a bucket of water’—where occasionally, however hard one tries, some will pop to the surface” (Gardner-Chloros, citing K. De Bot, 129). This might be what is happening in Joyce’s letter too. Writing in Italian, a word in English pops to the surface and the sentence continues in that language until a word in Italian comes more readily and the writing continues in Italian—et cetera.

The system of activation and, especially, inhibition tends to fail—that is, ping-pong balls will pop up to the surface more frequently—“when the speaker is tired, stressed, etc.” (Gardner-Chloros 131). We obviously cannot know if Joyce was tired when writing his letter to Giorgio and Helen, but the subject matter is such that Joyce might have been agitated. In the section I quoted above, Joyce describes the worsening condition of his eyes, a source of constant anxiety, pain, and endless operations and treatments over the course of his life. He also mentions Lucia and her increasing mental disorder, another painful topic, and encourages Giorgio to write her letters “in a natural and unexaggerated tone,” probably so as not to upset her. In the remainder of the letter he discusses, among other things, his worries about *Finnegans Wake*, which nobody seems to understand. (“Also in talk with Borach a few nights ago I found out che anche lui non comprende niente di quello che scrivo.”) This causes him to doubt his own writing and he broods: “Is it all pretence and notoriety. Ne ho le tasche piene ad ogni modo—o piuttosto vuote.” (Punning on the Italian expression “averne le tasche piene,” literally “to have one’s pockets full of” and meaning “to be fed up with.” Joyce here replaces “pieno,” full, with “vuoto,” empty, suggesting his feeling of “empty-handedness,” of failure, with regard to his *Work in Progress*.) In short, the letter is filled with “worry and pensieri,” and it is possible that these cause the “failures of the inhibitory system” in Joyce (Gardner-Chloros 131).

Interestingly, it is in letters to intimates that code-switching occurs most frequently. This suggests that code-switching has become, for Joyce, a natural way of speaking, thinking, and writing. As a participant in a recent linguistic study of code-switching, a bilingual speaker of German and English remarks: “I find it sometimes very strenuous to strictly keep to one language” (Dewaele, *Emotions* 203). Instead, she prefers to “speak to people who are multilingual too and I enjoy switching languages even just for a more colourful word or because one word occurs to me first in another language.” She adds: “I therefore feel more comfortable and at ease speaking with other multilingual friends because I can relax and don’t have to think about what exactly I am saying.” This seems to be a common sentiment among bilinguals and it is likely that Joyce, too, felt more comfortable when he was able to freely mix his languages. This notion is supported by the fact that he engages in code-switching only with people who, like him, know both English and Italian and, moreover, with people whom he knows well, such as his children, his wife and

brother, or close friends. When writing an official Italian letter to the mayor of Florence, for instance, he does not switch to English, nor when he writes to Italian friends whose English might not be sufficient. He does not shift to Italian when writing business letters in English, or when writing to friends and relatives who do not understand Italian. This indicates that he is perfectly able to keep his languages separate when he has to. With people with whom he has a close relationship, however, he is able to “let go,” as it were, and write in the spontaneous mix of languages that is natural for a bilingual language user.

Although Joyce never composed fiction in Italian, his letters are not his only Italian writings. From 1907 onwards Joyce lectured regularly in Italian at the Università del Popolare in Trieste, and, moreover, he wrote a number of essays for *Il Piccolo della Sera*, the main daily newspaper of Trieste.¹⁶ Roberto Prezioso, the editor of *Il Piccolo* and a former student of Joyce, had solicited these pieces and then asked Silvio Benco to correct Joyce’s articles, but Benco later recalled that there was “very little” that needed to be changed in the articles: Joyce’s Italian “was a bit hard and cautious, but lacked neither precision nor expressiveness” (52). Corinna Del Greco Lobner reflects that this was in fact “a standard criticism of Triestine writers often guilty of *ipercorretismi*, the overly correct use of language” (25). Thus, paradoxically, Joyce’s cautiousness might in fact be a sign of his fluency as a Triestine writer. It leads Lobner to conclude, “Italian for Joyce was not a foreign language but a creative tool he used with skill and originality” (1).

Similarly, Giorgio Melchiori has written:

The fact is that for at least five years of his life Joyce was exclusively an Italian writer. From 1907 to 1912 all his public pronouncements (lectures and articles) were in Italian. His children were being brought up to speak Italian as their first language, while his creative writing in English was limited to the re-elaboration of the first three chapters of *A Portrait* (which he tried to destroy in 1911). It is easy at this point to see a linguistic dichotomy. For Joyce English is the language of creation while Italian is the language of everyday life and of his production in the fields of history, politics and literary criticism. (109)

“In those years,” Melchiori adds, “when his creative powers were at low ebb, Italian prevailed.”

Joyce also finished “The Dead” over the course of 1907, the longest of the *Dubliners* stories and arguably the best, and rewrote the first chapters of *A Portrait of the Artist*, perhaps not so much a minor feat as significant creative work in English. Otherwise, however, Melchiori is right: after the Joyces’ return, in March 1907, from their ten-month stay in Rome practically all Joyce’s nonfiction writing is in Italian. The language for fiction, on the other hand, remained English, in spite of the fact that Joyce was thoroughly immersed in Italian otherwise. Even the short *Giacomo Joyce*, with its partly Italian title and

its thoroughly Triestine subject matter, written at the end of these five years, is still in English—although it is interspersed with considerably more Italian words and phrases than Joyce’s previous works.

It is remarkable that Joyce never tried his hand at writing fiction in Italian during this time. We know of his profound love for English, “that best of languages” (Ellmann 397), but we also know that during this “Italian” period Joyce threatened to unlearn English and write in French or Italian instead, as Stanislaus Joyce recounts in a diary entry of April 1907 (Ellmann 397). Moreover, in a letter from 1918, he declared that writing “in English is the most ingenious torture ever devised for sins committed in previous lives” (*SL* 230). It is well-known that Joyce inhabited English uneasily. He regarded the Irish as “condemned to express themselves in a language not their own” (*JJII* 217) and, writes Rosa Maria Bosinelli, it is this “estrangement of the word that sets the tone for Joyce’s use of language” (396). Joyce communicated his sense of distance from English through Stephen Dedalus. In *A Portrait of the Artist*, Stephen muses that English, a language “so familiar and so foreign,” would always be for him “an acquired speech” (189). In the famous “funnel” passage, he reflects:

The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home*, *Christ*, *ale*, *master*, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language. (189)

Considering the sense of alienation Joyce experienced with regard to English and his fluency in Italian, writing in Italian would have been an obvious step for Joyce, yet he never made good on his threat.

However, his shift to Italian was significant for his work in other ways. Where Joyce experienced an emotional detachment from English because of the politically and historically charged linguistic situation in Ireland, this detachment increased even further through his intense involvement with Italian. By speaking Italian with his children, by making Italian the language of family affection—not a common step: psycho-linguistic studies show that adult bilinguals will usually choose their first language to interact with their children¹⁷—Joyce distances himself further from English. Italo Svevo hints at this in an essay he wrote about Joyce: “S’intende come a noi triestini sia concesso di amarlo come un poco nostro. E anche come un poco italiano. Nella cultura di Joyce c’è qualche inclinazione decisamente italiana, forse più accentuata per il desiderio, vivo in certi periodi della sua vita, di sentirsi meno inglese” (qtd. in Zanotti 118). (“One can understand how we Triestines consider him to be a bit ours. And also a bit Italian. In Joyce’s nature there is a decidedly Italian tendency, perhaps strengthened by the wish he possessed, during certain periods of his life, to feel less English.”) Melchiori observes

something similar: “Joyce uomo privato, il padre di famiglia, è, dal punto di vista linguistico, italiano” (qtd. in Zanotti 115). (“Joyce the private man, the head of his family, is, from a linguistic point of view, Italian.”)

It seems that this private, Italian Joyce was not the same man as the English speaking one: his manner of talking was different in Italian, less encumbered than in English. Wyndham Lewis recalls, for instance, the Latin passion with which Joyce and Giorgio would argue in public:

Joyce turned to his son, and speaking very rapidly in Italian, the language always employed by him, so it seemed, in his family circle, he told him to go home: he would inform his mother that his father would not be home to dinner after all....But the son very hotly answered his father back, at this, after but a moment's hesitation on account of the company: evidently he did not by any means relish being entrusted with messages....Having exchanged a good number of stormy words, in a series of passionate asides—in a good imitation of an altercation between a couple of Neapolitan touts, of the better order—Joyce, père et fils, separated. (Ellmann 508)

Joyce does not just speak Italian, he behaves like an Italian as well.

Others too noticed Joyce's different bearing in Italian. Francini describes that Joyce and Stanislaus would frequently exchange insults in Italian, something Joyce never did in English—as John McCourt reminds us, “it is useful to recall his own Victorian prudery with regard to curses and oaths shouted aloud and in public” (“Il Bel Paese” 63). Francini concludes: “Apparently they found English a less effective instrument than Italian for venting their emotions” (43). Yet the Italian profanities of the Joyce brothers are not so much attributable to the innate swearability of Italian compared to that of English but, rather, to Joyce's lack of inhibition in Italian. Joyce's biographer Richard Ellmann observes:

His speech in Italian was freer than his speech in English, and gradually became more so. At first Francini could still shock him when, for instance, he said of the dog which, to Joyce's dismay, skulked around the Scuola Berlitz, ‘Il cane ha pisciato nell'anticamera e ha lasciato uno stronzolo davanti alla tua aula.’ [‘The dog pissed in the hall and left a turd in front of your lecture room.’] Joyce laughed and blushed like a girl. But soon Nora said to him, ‘Since you've come to know Francini, I can't recognize you anymore.’ (215)

Psycho-linguistic studies of emotions and multilingualism would suggest that it is not so much, or at least not just, Francini's influence that changes Joyce, as the language they speak. Linguistic analyses have shown that late bilinguals experience visible “differences between levels of emotionality” depending on which of their languages they are using (Pavlenko, *Emotions and Multilingualism* 168). This seems to be true especially for the “emotionally charged domain of taboo words.”

Taboo and swearwords, it appears, are a separate class of words in what linguists call the “mental lexicon.”¹⁸ They are represented, processed, and recalled differently from concrete and abstract words. Experiments using electrodermal monitoring, a lie-detector technology that investigates psychophysiological associations of language by recording skin conductance responses (such as the sweating of fingertips and palms), have shown that among monolinguals, taboo words generate greater skin conductance responses than neutral words.¹⁹ Taboo words, in short, are “the most emotionally evocative of language stimuli” (Pavlenko, *Emotions and Multilingualism* 168).

For late bilinguals, it seems that swearwords in the mother tongue have a much stronger effect than those in a language learned later in life. The same type of electrodermal recording showed much stronger physiological responses for taboo words in a bilingual speaker’s first language than in a language learned after the age of twelve (Harris et al, “Taboo words” 574). Because words such as “piss” or “shit” become taboo “through links to social experiences of prohibition, punishment, and stigmatization” (Pavlenko, “Emotions and Emotion-laden Words” 156), taboo words are “more anxiety provoking and embarrassing” in a language learned in childhood than in later life (Dewaele, *Emotions* 145).²⁰ Here it is interesting to note that the punishment book of Clongowes Wood College, which a very young Joyce attended from 1888 to 1891 and which features heavily in the first chapter of *A Portrait of the Artist*, suggests that Joyce was pandied at least once for using vulgar language. This is precisely the sort of occurrence that might have made him reluctant to “use obscene phrases in speaking”—or at least in speaking English.

Using a language learned later in life allows a bilingual speaker to use taboo and swearwords without experiencing the feelings of guilt and embarrassment internalized in childhood (Pavlenko, “Emotions and Emotion-laden Words” 159). An English-German bilingual research subject remarked on this topic: “My parents were quite strict and I still have the phrase ‘I’ll wash your mouth out with soap and water’ in my head! I’d never swear in English (or only mildly) and so German offers me the chance of getting annoyed easier!” Other bilingual subjects have also observed that they “were often reluctant to utter taboo words in the native language, but did not experience the same anxiety when using L2 taboo words” (Pavlenko, *Emotions and Multilingualism* 169). A German-English bilingual woman, for example, “had difficulties saying out loud L1 German childish terms for defecating, urinating, and the genitals.” Another German-English patient was afraid of obscene German terms such as “Nachttopf” (chamberpot) and “Onanie” (masturbation). She observed: “A chamberpot becomes alive when you say ‘Nachttopf.’ It is ugly and disgusting and smells bad. In English, a chamberpot is much cleaner.” Similarly, an English-Italian research subject reflects: “I prefer to express anger in my L2 Italian because I do not hear the weight of my words so everything comes out quite easily” (Dewaele, “Emotional Force” 214). A Spanish-English bilingual

subject remarked: "I never swear in Spanish. I simply cannot. The words are too heavy and are truly a taboo for me," whereas an English-Spanish bilingual said: "It is easier to shout and get excited in Spanish. It's possible to say things that would be unacceptable in English."

As a consequence, a bilingual speaker can feel like a different person in his different languages, as if, by speaking a new language, he takes on a new identity.²¹ Pavlenko investigated whether bilinguals have the feeling that they become different people when they change languages and found that a majority of the study's subjects did feel they had a different identity in each of their languages. As an English-French research subject stated: "Yes. I feel like I have a different personality in French," and an English-Italian bilingual noted that she is "more emotional" and uses her hands more when she is speaking in Italian (Pavlenko, "Bilingual Selves" 12). A participant from another study that analyzed whether bilinguals feel different when they speak in their "other" language comments: "It's kind of liberating. You can reinvent yourself and be what you want to be or who you really are" (Dewaele, *Emotions* 24).

The different self that bilingual speakers detect in their second language can impact their sense of self in the first language. Research suggests "that one's language ego in a first language is shattered in the face of an empathetic relationship with a foreign language" (Dewaele, *Emotions* 9). Pavlenko explains that the bilingual mental lexicon is a "dynamic phenomenon—its conceptual configurations are dynamic, rather than static" and "some conceptual representations may display evidence of restructuring" ("Emotions and Emotion-laden Words" 155). As a result, the second language can impact a speaker's performance in his first language. This is true especially for people who, like Joyce, reside in the country where their second language is spoken. Pavlenko gives as an example of such a shift the memoir of a Japanese-American writer, Kyoko Mori, who moved from Japan to the US when she was twenty. When returning to Japan for a visit, "Mori realized that her emotion scripts...differ from those around her" (154). Or, as Christina Kotchemidova has put it, "The very language I am using has changed me" (qtd. in Besemeres 34).

The English writer Tim Parks describes a similar experience. Like Joyce, Parks moved to Italy in his twenties. He married an Italian woman and wrote a book, *An Italian Education*, in which he portrays the gradual changes his personality underwent as a consequence of his being submerged in Italian. In this book, Parks describes himself "as changing, however reluctantly, under the influence of the language and the culture he now lives in, 'becoming a little bit more Italian' as he takes over, or gives in to, certain key idioms" (Besemeres 46).

Unlike Parks, Kotchemidova, and Mori, Joyce never explicitly commented on his own "case," yet it is not hard to appreciate the relevance of their observations for Joyce's situation. As we saw above, Joyce too was changed by

his use of Italian, from a prude Victorian who disliked cursing and shouting in public to a “Neapolitan tout” who, in Italian, passionately and publicly argued with his son and freely used vulgar language.

Joyce’s correspondence supports this view. His letters in English are, apart from an occasional use of “bloody” (a word he considered “neither indecent nor blasphemous” [SL 85]) or “damned,” very chaste. We find almost nothing in the realm of taboo words. The erotic letters to Nora are an exception, but these serve a particular function. Joyce writes in one of them: “I have written and said things to you that my pride would never again allow me to say to any woman” (SL 183), and Ellmann comments: “He likes to boast of his prudishness with men, at whose dirty stories he never even smiles, to give a greater secretive value to his outspokenness with her, and to indicate that this erotic singleness must prove the essential innocence of his nature” (SL xxv). By showing Nora that for her alone he is willing to violate the unwritten rules of “proper” linguistic behavior, he proves his devotion to her and to their union.

When the need arises to use a taboo word in letters he substitutes the Italian equivalent. In December of 1906 he writes to Stanislaus, for instance:

I have seen a lot of Romans now and if anyone asks you what I think of them you may say that so far as I can see their chief preoccupation in life is the condition (to judge from their speech) broken, swollen etc of their *coglioni* and their chief pastime and joke the breaking of wind rereward [*sic*]. This kind of mechanical obscenity is damnably tiresome. (SL 135)

A few months later, he describes a conversation with “one or two Italians”:

One of them told me that many Italian women wear a cazzo as a trinket and after that they talked to their heart’s content about cazzo and Co—a topic which, in my opinion, it requires a great deal of talent or else a great deal of courage to render in any way interesting. When I enter the bank in the morning I wait for someone to announce something about either his cazzo, culo or coglioni. This usually happens before a quarter to nine. (SL 152)

Joyce here prefers to use the Italian “coglioni,” “cazzo,” and “culo,” rather than the English “balls,” “penis,” and “anus,” as when he writes that he made “a *coglioneria*” or “ball-up” of something and signs off, “Your *coglionato* brother” (SL 150-51). It was clearly easier for Joyce to use taboo words in his second language, as when he exchanged insults in Italian with Stanislaus.

Interestingly, in *Ulysses* as well Italian is often used to utter taboo words. Bosinelli notes that “erotic allusions surround most quotations in Italian” (403) and Marisa Gatti-Taylor, in her analysis of the use of Italian in *Ulysses*, observes that Stephen uses Italian “several times as a medium for blasphemy and obscenities” (142). It seems that Stephen too prefers to use bad language in Italian rather than English, when, for instance, he refers to “the lord of things as they are whom the most Roman of catholics call *dio boia*, hangman god”

(*Ulysses* 9.1049), an expression that, Gatti-Taylor writes, “elicits shock among most Italians” (142).

The most sustained piece of Italian dialogue in the novel would probably too. It occurs in the “Eumaeus” episode, where we find “a group of presumably Italians in heated altercation” (*Ulysses* 16.310). The dialogue is vulgar, full of Italian obscenities such as “Puttana madonna” (whore of a blessed virgin), “culo rotto” (literally “broken arse,” Gatti-Taylor explains that it connotes a homosexual prostitute [143]), “Farabutto” (crook), and “Mortacci sui” (an oath against someone’s dead family members) (*Ulysses* 16.314-18). Discussing Joyce’s use of Italian in *Ulysses*, Bosinelli observes, reinforcing the linguistic studies cited above, “what cannot be said in public can more easily be uttered in a language other than one’s mother tongue,” since “we are freer to curse, swear, and utter prohibited words in a foreign language rather than in our own” (401).

However, elsewhere in *Ulysses*, and especially in “Circe” and “Penelope,” we encounter plenty of obscenities in English as well. The change that can be detected in Joyce’s personality under the influence of his new language gradually seems to have impacted not just his spoken use of English, but his writing as well.

Joyce’s subject matter had always been risqué. The masturbating old man in “An Encounter” and Stephen’s visits to prostitutes in *A Portrait of the Artist* are perhaps not so very different from Bloom’s matter of fact defecation in the “Calypso” episode, his masturbating on the beach in “Nausicaa” in view of the adolescent Gerty MacDowell, or Molly Bloom’s adulterous musings in “Penelope.” But, as I mentioned before, the language of *Ulysses* is infinitely more scatologically and sexually explicit than that of the earlier works. The characters in *Ulysses* swear freely and the book includes what Rachel Potter calls “an encyclopaedic collection of obscene and blasphemous words, including ‘fuck,’ ‘cunt,’ ‘gleet,’ and ‘figged fist’” (94), leading Robert Graves to conclude that *Ulysses* “could be studied as a complete manual of contemporary obscenity” (89).

There are passages in *Ulysses* that are impossible to imagine in the earlier works. Towards the end of the “Circe” episode, for instance, Stephen is involved in a drunken argument with two soldiers. One of them, private Carr, threatens Stephen in increasingly vulgar terms, from “I’ll wring the neck of any fucker says a word against my fucking king” (15.4598-99), to “I’ll wring the neck of any fucking bastard says a word against my bleeding fucking king” (15.4644-45), to, finally, “I’ll do him in, so help me fucking Christ! I’ll wring the bastard fucker’s bleeding blasted fucking windpipe!” (15.4720-21). And “Circe”’s Prison Gate Girls croon: “If you see Kay/ Tell him he may/ See you in tea/ Tell him from me” (15.1893-96), euphemistically transforming “fuck” and “cunt” into a seemingly innocent air (preceding Britney Spears’s “If U Seek Amy,” the song that shocked American audiences in 2009, by nearly a century).

In the final episode, “Penelope,” a half-asleep Molly Bloom is contemplating her sexual exploits with the virile Boylan, who “must have come 3 or 4 times with that tremendous big red brute of a thing he has” (18.143-44), in language that leaves very little to the imagination. She gets so excited as she ruminates on her failed sexual relations with Bloom and the possibility of rekindling them that she imagines she will “let out a few smutty words smellrump or lick my shit” (18.1531-32). Reflecting on her marriage with Bloom, whom she suspects of being aware that she has been unfaithful to him, she thinks:

Ill let him know if thats what he wanted that his wife is fucked yes and damn well fucked too up to my neck nearly not by him 5 or 6 times handrunning theres the mark of his spunk on the clean sheet I wouldnt bother to even iron it out that ought to satisfy him if you don't believe me feel my belly unless I made him stand there and put him into me Ive a mind to tell him every scrap and make him do it out in front of me serve him right its all his own fault if I am an adulteress (18.1508-16)

“Circe” and “Penelope” contain a multitude of such explicit references to sex and excrement, using the type of obscene words one generally encounters on the street and not in literature. As Potter observes, what made Joyce so radical and *Ulysses* so disturbing to many of his contemporaries is that he casts “obscene slang into the language of literature” and in this way challenges “the idea that literature could be divorced from the language of the streets” (107).

“Circe” and “Penelope” contain by far the most vulgar language, the greatest number of taboo words in all of *Ulysses*. Other episodes too include taboo language: many of the book’s characters are frequent and enthusiastic users of “shite” and the men gathered in “Cyclops” can hardly form a sentence without taking the Lord’s name in vain (here is the narrator paraphrasing the Citizen: “By Jesus, says he, I’ll brain that bloody jewman for using the holy name. By Jesus, I’ll crucify him so I will” [12.1811-12]). However, in these episodes taboo words are used much more sparingly. The most obscene words, such as “fuck,” “gleet,” “spunk,” “bumgut,” “sowcunt,” et cetera, occur only in “Circe” and “Penelope.” What these two episodes have in common is that both take place below full consciousness. Joyce referred to the “technique” of “Circe” as “hallucination,” and indeed, many of the characters are drunk and rationality is completely absent. The episode dramatically performs what happens in the mind side by side with the “real” actions of the characters and has a grotesque, nightmarish quality. In the case of “Penelope” we should remember, first of all, that Molly is *thinking* her obscene notions, not expressing them out loud in public—unlike, for instance, the cursing Italians from the “Eumaeus” episode. We have no way of knowing whether she will actually tell Bloom to lick her shit. More importantly, however, Molly is drifting in and out of sleep during her contemplations and it is in a state of near unconsciousness

that she so freely ponders her sexual past and her erotic fantasies. Thus, in both episodes, the inner censor has withdrawn.

It seems, therefore, that where Joyce uses Italian taboo and swearwords openly, *en plein public* as it were, English obscenities often occur away from the censor, in the shadow of the English language, hidden in the (semi-) unconscious. This idea is supported by a quick look at the use of profanities in *Finnegans Wake*. *Finnegans Wake*, which is considerably more obscene than *Ulysses* and has vulgar puns (“Fik yew!” [469.27]) on nearly every page (but, Potter observes, “could not be legally judged as obscene because so few readers understood it” [197]), also takes place below consciousness. Where “Penelope” ends with Molly Bloom falling asleep, *Finnegans Wake* (probably) takes place entirely in the sleeping mind of its protagonist, Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker. Like “Circe,” *Finnegans Wake* occurs in a strange, nightmarish dream world and its use of obscene language and taboo words therefore also belongs to the world of sleep, to the multilingual language of the dreaming unconscious.

The fact remains, however, that in *Ulysses*, and especially in “Circe” and “Penelope,” Joyce incorporates obscene language into the texture of English in a way he had not done before, a change in style that was facilitated by his fluency in Italian. Where living in Trieste gave Joyce a physical distance from English, speaking in Italian gave him an emotional distance. In *Languages of the Night*, Barry McCrea writes: “In moving to the Continent and speaking Italian even with his own children, Joyce cut himself off from Dublin English as a living, breathing, changing idiom” (134). The distance from English that his bilingualism in Italian gave Joyce allowed him to treat English as a “thing,” as something he could regard and use with an emotional distance. In this way, Italian gave him the tools to dislocate the English he inhabited so apprehensively. Incorporating language so obscene that it shocked even his most rebellious contemporaries allowed him to further defamiliarize an English which already felt “so foreign” (Joyce, *Portrait* 189).

In his diary, Stanislaus has written: “Jim is thought to be very frank about himself, but his style is such that it might be contended that he confesses in a foreign language—an easier confession than in the vulgar tongue” (81). English, if not literally foreign, at least had become something frozen in time, something estranged so thoroughly that it could be used by Joyce without constraints and inhibitions. “I have discovered I can do anything with language I want” (Ellmann 661-62), Joyce once bragged to Samuel Beckett, and it is, at least in part, his complete bilingualism in Italian that allowed him to subject English to his whims.

NOTES

¹ References to Joyce's *Selected Letters* will be cited parenthetically in the text as *SL*.

² For more on this, see Rachel Potter's excellent study *Obscene Modernism: Literary Censorship and Experiment, 1900-1940*.

³ Most recently by Juliette Taylor-Batty in *Multilingualism in Modernist Fiction*.

⁴ Cf. Laurent Milesi in "L'diome Babelien," 173. John Bishop gives a slightly lesser count. According to him, Joyce used between 60 and 70 languages in *Finnegans Wake* (xi). Joyce himself called *Finnegans Wake* "a tower of Babel" where "all the languages are present" (qtd. in Anderson 33).

⁵ References to the three volumes of Joyce's letters will be cited parenthetically in the text as *JLL I*, *JLL II*, and *JLL III*.

⁶ Danish and not, as some critics write, Norwegian (cf. O'Neill: Joyce "taught himself Norwegian in order to read Ibsen in the original" [4]; Melchiori, who writes that Joyce "learns Norwegian" in order to write to Ibsen [20]; or Faerber and Luchsinger, who quote Budgen saying Joyce "turned his attention to Norwegian which he has studied to this day" [178]). Joyce was indeed inspired to study the language of Ibsen, the "Master Builder," but although Ibsen was Norwegian by nationality, he wrote in Danish, which at that time was the official language of Norway.

⁷ In fact, in the literature on bilingualism and multilingualism, bilingualism is often used as an overarching term, which includes multilingualism, or the two terms are used interchangeably. The linguist Li Wei writes, for instance, that some researchers "use 'bilingualism' as a general term to include multilingualism as well, while others prefer to maintain a distinction between the two. More research is needed to understand how bilingualism and multilingualism differ from each other" (8). Similarly, Penelope Gardner-Chloros notes: "Instead of bilingualism being seen as one possible case of *plurilingualism* or *multilingualism* (which, in theory, appears logical), the term 'bilinguals' is often used to subsume 'plurilinguals'" (16).

⁸ John McCourt remarks that although Joyce was "gifted in languages" he also put in "hours of study" (*Years of Bloom* 77).

⁹ It is interesting to note here that there are differing opinions on whether it was Italian or Triestino that the Joyce family employed *in casa*. Francini writes that it was Italian, and so does August Suter, who remembers that Joyce "used to speak Italian to his children" and that "his Italian was melodiously articulated and musical" (65). Frank Budgen too writes: "At the door of the flat one heard the clear shapes and metallic tones of the Italian language. Italian was the house language" (36); and in *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway recalls:

We were hungry again from walking and Michaud's was an exciting and expensive restaurant for us. It was where Joyce ate with his family then, he and his wife against the wall, Joyce peering at the menu through his thick glasses, holding the menu up in one hand; Nora by him, a hearty but delicate eater; Giorgio thin, foppish, sleek-headed from the back; Lucia with heavy curly hair, a girl not quite yet grown; all of them talking Italian. (53)

The Triestine Silvio Benco, conversely, writes that the Joyces "all speak our language, taking pleasure in preserving the harshness of the local accent" and remarks on the curious contradiction, later, between their luxurious Paris apartment and the speech of the Trieste slums that filled it (49). Similarly, Nino Frank recalls Nora addressing Joyce "in the lisping speech of those who dwell in the shadow of San Giusto" (83). (San Giusto is the Cathedral of Trieste.) It seems likely that in reality they used a mixture of both. Joyce's essays and letters show, however, that he had no trouble keeping Italian and Triestino apart. Lobner points out that although Joyce appreciated the "humorous possibilities" of the dialect, he "never let it interfere with *regnicolo*, the peninsula's formal Italian language" (28). And indeed, whenever Triestino appears in the letters, it is clearly for comic effect, cf. for instance McCourt (*Years of Bloom* 53).

¹⁰ Richard Ellmann recounts that something similar occurred when Joyce moved to Paris to study medicine, but upon arrival "was discouraged to find his French inadequate for the highly technical lectures" (117).

¹¹ And he was critical of those who could not. In a letter to his brother he wrote:

Last night I went into an evangelical hall. The minister was English. Is it affectation or impotence of the English that they can make no attempt to pronounce any language but their own. He spoke fluently and correctly enough but it had no resemblance to Italian in sound. I can easily distinguish the English accent, talking Italian. Candidly, I don't know whether they assume it or not. (*SL* 128-29)

¹² Cf. for instance Nino Frank 89.

¹³ Baa Boo sounds like a distorted version of "Babbo," Italian for "dad" or "daddy," which is how Joyce always signed his letters to Giorgio and Lucia.

¹⁴ Cf. also Shana Poplack's pioneering study on the topic, "Sometimes I'll Start a Sentence in Spanish Y TERMINO EN ESPAÑOL: Toward a Typology of Code-switching."

¹⁵ Letter from 19.7.1932, Jahnke Bequest, Zürich James Joyce Foundation. I would like to express my thanks to Fritz Senn for giving me access to these letters.

¹⁶ Years later, in 1937 and while living in Paris, Joyce also translated the "Anna Livia Plurabelle" section of *Finnegans Wake* into Italian, together with his friend the Italian writer Nino Frank.

¹⁷ Cf. for instance Pavlenko, "Emotions and Emotion-laden Words" 157.

¹⁸ Cf. for instance Pavlenko, "Emotions and Emotion-laden Words" 147. In fact, this applies to emotion and emotion-laden words in general.

¹⁹ Harris et al., "Taboo words" 562, and Pavlenko, *Emotions and Multilingualism* 168-69.

²⁰ Cf. also Harris et al., "Emotion-memory Effects" 291: "Anxiety-arousing stimuli such as taboo and sexual references are more easily expressed in the second language."

²¹ Cf. also Dewaele's article "Why Do So Many Bi- and Multilinguals Feel Different When Switching Languages?"

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