

In the Limbo of Languages: Linguistic Change in Seamus Heaney

Dillerin Arafında: Seamus Heaney'de Dilsel Değişim

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Abstract

The language issue ensuing from English colonialism in Ireland has had a wide treatment in the poetry of Seamus Heaney, a distinguished representative of contemporary poetry. Discussing for the great erosion in Irish language, the poet has underlined the historical reasons and emphasised the results of language loss. It is seen that Heaney, who is indebted in his artistic achievement to the pioneers of English literature, vacillates between the language used by his literary ancestors and that of his biological ones. However, he eliminates this dichotomy by asserting that the English spoken in Ireland has some distinctive features from the English spoken in London. His acceptance of the absolute supremacy of artistic language is the product of the last stage he has reached in tandem with gaining universality. From this point of view, English is no longer the tongue of the colonizer as it appears in his early poems, but a sublime language open to change, enriched by the opportunities offered by various languages and improved through his poetic contributions.

Keywords: Seamus Heaney, Poetry, Language Loss, Polylingualism, Irish Language, Ireland.

Öz

İngiliz sömürgeciliğinin sonucu İrlanda'da yaşanan dil sorunu, çağdaş şiirin seçkin temsilcilerinden Seamus Heaney'nin yapıtlarında geniş yer bulmuştur. Ozan, İrlanda dilinde görülen büyük aşınmayı ele alarak sorunun tarihsel nedenlerine vurgu yapmış ve dilsel yitimin sonuçları üzerinde durmuştur. Sanatsal başarısını İngiliz yazınının öncülerine borçlu olan Heaney'nin, biyolojik ataları ile yazınsal atalarının kullandığı dil arasında kaldığı görülür. Ancak, bu açmazdan, İrlanda'da

konusulan İngilizce ile Londra'daki arasında belirgin farklılıklar bulunduğu sonucuna vararak kurtulur. Sanat dilinin salt egemenliğini benimsemesi evrensellik kazanmasıyla birlikte ulaştığı son aşamanın ürünüdür. Bu yönden bakıldığında, İngilizce artık ozanın ilk şiirlerindeki gibi sömürgecilerin dili değil, farklı dillerin sunduğu olanaklarla zenginleşen ve onun poetik katkılarıyla gelişen, değişime açık yüce bir dildir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Seamus Heaney, Şiir, Dil Yitimi, Çokdillilik, İrlanda Dili, İrlanda.

Introduction

The Elizabethan conquest in the 16th century is mostly regarded as a milestone in the history of Ireland. From this date on, the destiny of the island rapidly changed and Irish language and culture increasingly faded away. This was a process of assimilation carried out politically through plantations and culturally by poets of the time. Among these literary figures Edmund Spenser, one of the greatest English poets of the century, took the lead and showed great effort to wipe out the indigenous culture with the purpose of "reducing that nation to better government and civility" (Spenser, 1849: p. 479). To create a cultural and linguistic amnesia among the native population, the English left no stone unturned and substantially destroyed all traces, however trivial, that might evoke Irishness. As a result of political pressure, as well as the ravage of the Great Famine in Irish-speaking areas, only a quarter of the population was recorded as speaking the language after 1851 (Kiberd, 1996: p. 21). In 1891, the census figures for the thirty-two counties indicated that 855 people in every 1,000 were unable to speak

Irish (Hugh, 2007: p. 140). The fact that some signatories to the Proclamation of 1916 spoke no Irish is a dramatic irony and marks the irrefutable triumph of the English language.

Today the vacillation of modern Irish literature between two cultures and two languages is rooted in that tragedy. As a matter of course, Irish men of letters have not been blind to the issue and endeavoured to convey it in their works. In the context of contemporary poetry, 1995 Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney, a member of a Catholic-Nationalist community by birth and a constant inhabitant of the Republic of Ireland since 1972, discusses linguistic and cultural trauma stemming from colonial past throughout his poetry.

Colonialism and Linguistic Erosion

The poems, especially in *Wintering Out and North*, underline Heaney's passionate odyssey regarding Irish history. The poet, in these volumes, works to renovate the public memory and to address the main reasons of the conflicts between the Catholic-Nationalist minority and the Protestant-Unionist ascendancy in contemporary Northern Ireland. He is well aware of the fact that the literary figures in the past worked as bearers of colonial policy with the intent of dispatching conceited enemies and converting them to faithful subjects. Therefore, Heaney centers upon Edmund Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, a book suggesting the destruction of the entire culture and language of the indigenous people in order to establish absolute hegemony. What Spenser proposes is to use scorched earth tactics and doom the Irish to hunger, taking as example the late wars in Munster (1849: p. 510). Heaney, in 'Bog Oak', as if intending to take inventory after the great loss, cites Spenser's aforementioned work:

Perhaps I just make out
Edmund Spenser,
dreaming sunlight,
encroached upon by

geniuses who creep
'out of every corner
of the woodes and glennes'
towards watercress and carrion. (1972: p. 4-5)

In point of fact, Spenser is used as a vivid example of colonial solidarity, for he was both a poet praising Elizabeth I and the Tudor Dynasty in his *The Faerie Queene* and a vigorous advocate of the imperial centre. He was a witness as well as an executor of linguistic and territorial pillage.

Heaney, to lay the colonial view bare, introduces another significant figure into his poetry: Sir Walter Raleigh, a poet and explorer who took part in the suppression of the Desmond Rebellions in the last quarter of the 16th century and acquired a vast amount of property as a reward for his efforts. In 'Ocean's Love to Ireland', which is an allusion to Raleigh's long poem 'Ocean's Love to Cynthia' written to praise Queen Elizabeth I, Heaney makes use of sexual metaphors:

Speaking broad Devonshire,
Raleigh has backed the maid to a tree
As Ireland is backed to England

And drives inland-
Till all her strands are breathless:
'Sweesir, Swatter! Sweesir, Swatter!'

He is water, he is ocean, lifting
Her farthingale like a scarf of weed lifting
In the front of a wave. (1975: p. 40)

In the relationship which has been going on for centuries between two countries, two cultures and two languages, Heaney defines Ireland and the things belonging to that island as the colonized, passive and feminine, and England and the things concerning it as the colonizer, active and male. However, there is neither love nor mutual consent in these lines; quite the opposite, it is a definite ravishment, a rape at knifepoint and a sign of sensual and mental violence. As Moloney ascertains "both personal and large-scale levels of rape operate in Heaney's 'Ocean's Love to Ireland,' a brief but poignant introduction to an Irish fallen world" (1991: p. 274). The poet reflects the double life of Raleigh both as writer and man-of-action in the way that Ireland is overrun not just by English occupying forces but also by iambic pentameters (Quinn, 2008: p. 133). Therefore, after the rape "The ruined maid complains in Irish," and "Iambic drums/Of English beat the woods where her poets/Sink like Onan" (p. 41).

What Heaney points out is that the Gaelic poets, who had maintained bardic tradition under the aegis of their patrons up until then, remained unproductive after the loss of their chieftains due to the change in power. The result was a case of an absolute onanism, a concept referring to Onan who was commissioned by his father Judah to marry his widow sister-in-law so as to “raise up seed to [his late] brother” (Genesis 38-8: 77). Neither would the offspring be Onan’s nor would the poems written by Irish poets be Irish. Even though the bardic laments could be found in 18th century poetry, Irish poets had already started composing in English. Heaney, denoting this fact, says “Ulster was British, but with no rights on/The English lyric” (1975: p. 60) in order to reveal the literary de-territorialisation of Irish men of letters.

He more clearly puts forth the transformation of this relationship in ‘Traditions’ with “an overt symbol of colonisation in sexual terms” (O’Brien, 2003: p. 17) in the following lines:

Our guttural muse
was bulled long ago
by the alliterative tradition,
her uvula grows

vestigial, forgotten
like the coccyx
or a Brigid’s Cross
yellowing in some outhouse

while custom, that ‘most
sovereign mistress’,
beds us down into
the British Isles.

We are to be proud
of our Elizabethan English: (1975: p. 21)

The poet clarifies the point in a more naked sense by drawing attention to the relation between Gaelic, symbolized by ‘*guttural muse*’, and Elizabethan English, represented by ‘*alliterative tradition*’, since the most conspicuous characteristic of Anglo-Saxon literary tradition was the wide utilization of alliteration. For Heaney, as the invaders were dominating and violating the lands via their plantations politically, English changed the speech patterns of Irish likewise and

became a quasi-traditional institution. ‘Bulled’ is, in the poem, used to reinforce the idea of sexual intercourse, but on the other hand connotes an animal harshness suggesting force, rape and insemination which is supported by the line ‘We are to be proud’ which is not the same as ‘we are proud’ (Tamplin, 1989: p. 43). The case was involuntary submission and the people remained linguistically dispossessed. ‘Midnight’ touches on that loss by equating the period with the extinction of wolfhounds and the destruction of forests in Ireland:

Since the professional wars-
Corpse and carrion
Paling in rain-
The wolf has died out

In Ireland. The packs
Scoured parkland and moor
Till a Quaker buck and his dogs
Killed the last one

In some scraggy waste of Kildare.
The wolfhound was crossed
With inferior strains
Forests coopered to wine casks. (1972: p. 35)

Under colonial rule, the animal resulting from cross-breeding was no longer the one which had hunted wolves in moors or forests. The wolfhound, here, reflects the hybrid nature of Irishness being a perfect example which gathers the plurality of identity in the contemporary world. From Heaney’s point of view, for all intents and purposes everything was intertwined each other. The destruction of forests diminished the living space of wolves and their dying out precipitated the vanishing of the wolfhound. Emphasising this idea, the poet uses another analogy in telling the tragic story of Gaelic through the flight of a snipe in ‘The Backward Look’:

A stagger in air
as if a language
failed, a sleight
of wing.

A snipe’s bleat is fleeing
its nesting ground
into dialect,

into variants,
transliterations whirr
on the nature reserves-
little goat of the air,
of the evening,

little goat of the frost.
It is his tail-feathers
drumming elegies
in the slipstream

of wild goose
and yellow bittern (1972: p. 19)

The snipe, one of the smallest of marsh dwellers, makes an excellent bleating sound with its tail-feathers over its nest, mostly at night. From this distinguishing feature, ‘*gabhairin*’, an Irish word, was derived. The translations of the word are borrowed from John Braidwood’s *The Ulster Dialect Lexicon* where he writes “some of the most imaginative bird names are translation loans from Irish- *Little Goat of the Evening* [*gabhairin oidhche*] or *Air Goat* [*mionnan aeir*] for the snipe, from its plaintive call (in Munster it is called *gonreen-roe* [*gabhairin reo*, little goat of the frost])” (Quoted in Hart, 1993: p. 59). In Heaney’s poem, the word represents death of the native linguistic milieu and its resurrection in a foreign context after a transliterative metamorphosis. On the other hand, the snipe is too difficult to shoot even for a very skilled hunter, since it is capable of changing its route unpredictably. However, ‘a stagger in air’ implies it is unable to fly high and is badly wounded. For this very reason, in his flight with the snipe Heaney takes wing from the nesting ground of native Irish language with all its richness including its dialects and variants; it is a panorama of a complete linguistic and cultural journey, at the end of which comes a fall.

The transition from presence to absence signifies the failure of Gaelic. The elegies the snipe drums with its tail-feathers to the flight of wild geese symbolize the pathetic groans of those Irish people who were dispossessed and forced to emigrate from their homes like migratory birds. Therefore, the bleat of the bird can be considered a scream in response to the long colonial history during which anything that might bring the Irish back was forbidden by the imperial centre.

Finally, the bird disappears “among/ gleanings and leavings/ in the combs/ of a fieldworker’s achieve” (1972: p. 20). Through these lines Heaney shows the brutal dimensions of extinction and designates the scholar as the only person who can bring them to light and elucidate the forgotten linguistic past by focusing on the map of lexical transformations. It goes without saying that the poet is one of them.

Surmounting Linguistic Amnesia

To tell the colonial story Heaney addresses the anglicization of Ireland with some words chosen from Gaelic. The words he focuses on have two main aspects, evoking the Irishness and as O’Brien suggests signifying “a dialect, a movement between languages which is creative of a new sense of English with an Irish influence” (2003: p. 17). Such expressions can be considered as an effort to contribute to the Irish identity with surviving fragments. The poems within this scope are descriptions of facing the reality and seeking an answer for the hybrid identity of the geography on linguistic ground.

In doing this, Heaney hopes to find solutions to the chronic problems of his land and he draws support from etymology, which in his hands “lays bare the poetic fossil within the linguistic ore” (Hart, 1993: p. 61). Concordantly, he is able to present a view of a nation by dividing sentences into words, words into syllables, syllables into sounds and sounds into vowels and consonants. To him “words themselves are doors; Janus is to a certain extent their deity looking back to a ramification on roots and associations and forward to a clarification of sense and meaning” (1980: p. 52). The reader can find the Janus-faced image of words, their uniting and divisive aspects across Ireland in his poetry. The poet opens *Wintering Out with* ‘Fodder’, a poem that touches on a word harbouring both nationalist tendencies and the split consciousness of the country:

Or, as we said,
fother, I open
my arms for it
again. [...] (1972: p. 3)

The word which in Heaney’s childhood years once symbolized the rural life and was regarded as an image of cultural distinctions, now beneath the surface,

seems to forge another bed for its flow. ‘Fodder’ or ‘fother’, food for cattle and other livestock, with two different styles of spelling and pronunciation, can give clues about the identity of the speaker. And ‘fother’ here, of course, is used as a key symbol for Irishness, which signifies an absolute divergence from the language of the politically dominated group. Despite all imperialistic attempts, Irish people have found a way to categorize themselves. Even though they speak a non-native language, and aren’t able to change it completely, they can add their characteristics to it and adapt it according to their patterns. In this connection, language becomes “a preoccupation for Heaney, a result of the historical suppression of Gaelic as a language and as a signifier of identity” (Dau, 2003: p. 36).

A similar desire to distinguish from the English and an eagerness to identify himself with his core tradition can be seen in ‘Broagh’. This title-word, an anglicized version of Gaelic ‘*bruach*’, is directly translated in the very opening word of the poem:

Riverba[n]k, the long rigs
ending in broad docken
and a canopied pad
down to the ford. (1972: p. 17)

Heaney reinforces his theory with three words from the most deeply-rooted traditions in Ireland: the Gaelic (*bruach*, a riverbank), the Scots (rigs, a planter word for a riverside field), and the Anglo-Saxon (docken, an Old English plural for the dock plant) (Parker, 1993: p. 99). Choosing central words from distinct linguistic origins, Heaney presents a picture of richness which implies all those things contributing to the cultural variety of the country. Therefore, it would not be wrong to suggest that this poem portrays the speech community of Northern Ireland (Kennedy, 2002: p. 304).

However, words to be considered as indicators of common wealth, sometimes may transform into means of disintegrations and calls for a community to revert to its true roots. They can supply a social consciousness via etymons as well as articulating patterns. What Heaney wants to show here is that the language used in Northern Ireland indicates a different identity, which is not English, rather than a different language. Aware of this fact, Heaney draws attention to it at the end of his poem, diagnosing:

... that last
gh the strangers found
difficult to manage. (1972: p. 17)

Indeed, it is definitely true that the way of using words and pronouncing guttural sounds can enlighten the ethnic roots of the speaker, just as dialects demarcate the boundaries around people, no matter where they live. Heaney’s guttural muse gives him opportunities to detach himself and his nation from the English, divided from them by sea and sound, as it were (Murphy, 2000: p. 27). However, the poem also enables us to consider those in Northern Ireland who can articulate and pronounce such words duly as not strangers but intimates, a part of the nation. In an interview, Heaney speaks along these lines:

[T]he melodies of poetry which most people in my part of Ireland, the Northern part, picked up in their education were the melodies of the English line; and insofar as one speaks English that melody is part of the inheritance. It seems to me a mistaken approach toward being an Irish poet to dismantle the melodies that are already in English. I mean, our own natural way of speaking English in Ireland is what we should be true to; we should refine our ear to pick up that key which we are tuned to. (Kinahan, 1983: p. 405-406)

Heaney seems to be enough of a realist to know that the Irish language is a charming dream left behind. The reason he prefers to use the Gaelic elements in English must have to do with this fact. Furthermore, although place names can be seen as both markers of Irishness and of division in Northern Ireland in his poetry (Nash, 1999: p. 464), it appears clear that those poems probably serve the same purpose. As known, along with the colonial settlements and the Act of Union of 1800, the Ordnance Survey of 1824 is considered a fundamental stage in the raid of Irish language, because under the new regulations, after this date, the boundaries were redrawn and place names anglicized; and the vision of Ireland as a barbaric cultural wasteland was codified by the English imperial centre (Tobin, 1999: p. 71).

To shed light on this fact, the poet celebrates his Irish roots as he refers to a traditional poetic genre called ‘*dinnseanchas*’, “poems and tales which relate the ori-

ginal meanings of place names and constitute a form of mythological etymology” (Heaney, 1980: p. 131). Therefore, in ‘Anahorish’, a phonological as well as physical topography (Foster, 1995: p. 34), he explains the title’s meaning, an anglicized version of the native ‘anach fíor uisce’, immediately at the very beginning of the poem: “My ‘place of clear water’”. The possessive ‘my’, here, signifies the link between the poet and his locale. Anahorish, lost Eden of Heaney’s childhood (Hart, 1993: p. 61) and “a landscape politically British in its legal demarcation but linguistically Irish in its nomenclature” (Burris, 1990: p. 12), is the “soft gradient/ of consonant, vowel-meadow” (1972: p. 6). It’s just like a living organism, a melting pot blending consonants (English) and vowels (Irish) in a quite pacific fusion.

Similarly, ‘Gifts of Rain’ tells the story of a river with the lines “The tawny guttural water/spells itself: Molyola” (1972: p. 15), which is the Gaelic form of the poem’s title. Needless to say, when Heaney speaks in ‘Toome’, an adapted form of ‘Tuaim’ meaning ‘tumulus’ and a small town in County Antrim, “My mouth holds round/the soft blastings,/Toome, Toome,/ as under the dislodged/slab of the tongue” (1972: p. 16) he points out “for both plosives and fricatives [in Anglo-Irish dialect] affricate consonants with slow separation of the organs of speech, are often heard” (Quoted in Foster, 1995: p. 34). In almost the same way, Heaney mentions the brotherhood of vowels and consonants in ‘A New Song’:

But now our river tongues must rise
From licking deep in native haunts
To flood, with vowelling embrace,
Demesnes staked out in consonants. (1972: p. 23)

What Heaney seeks is the union of two traditions, (Irish and English, Catholic and Protestant) represented by vowel and consonants. The poet once again releases a dilemma of being on borders, belonging to one tradition in terms of identity but also at the same time to the opposite side in literary maturity. The ambiguity of the language-poems reflects correlatives of ambivalence for which Foster discovers “the archetypal sound in his work [...] is the guttural spirant, half-consonant, half vowel; the archetypal locale is the bog, half-water, half-land; the archetypal animal is the eel [...] half-mammal, half-fish” (1995: 36).

Absolute Superiority of Artistic Language

It is possible to see the poet’s split inheritance in ‘Traditions’ as he ironically quotes from Shakespeare, the representative of English literary heritage, and Joyce, the voice of the divided Irish mind. When a barbaric Irishman, Mac Morris from Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, asks “What ish my nation?” (1998: p. 32), it is Joyce’s hero from *Ulysses* answering it in the final section of the poem:

And sensibly, though so much
later, the wandering Bloom
replied, ‘Ireland,’ said Bloom,
‘I was born here. Ireland.’ (1972: p. 22)

The protagonist of the novel, Leopold Bloom, definitely knows the geography he belongs to but like his Jewish relatives wandering around the world as a result of the diaspora and unable to find a home to dwell in free from troubles, he mentally quests for his promised lands. Even though he is from Ireland, he walks as a man without land in the streets of his country. From Shakespeare and Joyce, Heaney wishes to show the validity of a pluralistic paradigm of identity and remain open to the voice and language of the other (O’Brien, 2003: p. 18). This is actually what Joyce persistently seeks throughout his works, because the English that eroded Gaelic is also “the language through which Joyce gave voice to a new sense of Irishness, a new song in which Irishness became redefined” (O’Brien, 2003: p. 18). The condition is the same for W. B. Yeats, a nationalist and a separatist; despite the fact he suffers from the linguistic dichotomy in Ireland, he gives the English literary heritage its due:

No people hate as we do in whom that past is always alive, there are moments when hatred poisons my life and I accuse myself of effeminacy because I have not given it adequate expression.... Then I remind myself that though mine is the first English marriage I know of in the direct line, all my family names are English, and that I owe my soul to Shakespeare, to Spenser and to Blake, perhaps to William Morris, and to the English language in which I think, speak, and write, that everything I love has come to me through English; my hatred tortures me with love, my love with hate. (Yeats, 1961: p. 519)

Telling how he embarked on his artistic journey, Heaney concedes “[he] began as a poet when [his] roots were crossed with [his] reading” (1980: p. 37). This explains well the reason for his spiritual and ideological intimacy with Yeats and Joyce, for both have had a wide coverage in his readings since childhood. To survive as a poet and to prevent his language to go ‘whoring/ among the civil tongues’, as he indicates in ‘The Last Mummer’ (1972: p. 9), he has been obliged to adopt the language of his English Masters (Parker, 1993: p. 97). From this point of view, it is easier to understand Heaney’s state of mind when he says “I speak and write in English, but do not altogether share the preoccupations and perspectives of an Englishman. I teach English literature [...], but the English tradition is not ultimately home. I live off another hump as well” (1980: p. 34). In parallel with the poet, James Joyce has his protagonist Stephen in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* speak about this pluralistic belonging, both literarily and geographically:

The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are words **home, Christ, ale, master**, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.” (1996: p. 215)

All three men, seemingly, suffer from the colonial process during which their native language was dispossessed. And it may well be that they try to establish a new sense of identity through a brand-new tongue, an effort to decolonize the mind. Notwithstanding that the intent of English policy was “to create a new England called Ireland” (Kiberd, 1996: p. 15) and its enormous success, Irish men of literature can form a new language through their works. We see Heaney saying “I seemed always to be a little displaced; being in between was a kind of condition, from the start” (Corcoran, 1986: p. 13). However, he was able to get rid of that narrow linguistic elbowroom following Joyce and changed that condition from a worse fate into a realm offering new opportunities. The old master was keen of creating “one sublime language that would transcend all others” (Klitgard, 2005: p. 116), a language to which all will do service, which is what Heaney is already in search of as well. Therefore, as a loyal disciple, he gives an ear to his master in the twelfth section of ‘Station Island’:

... ‘Who cares,’
he jeered. ‘any more? The English language
belongs to us. You are raking at dead fires,

a waste of time for somebody your age.
That subject people stuff is a cod’s game,
Infantile, like your peasant pilgrimage.

You lose more of yourself than you redeem
doing the decent thing. Keep at a tangent.
When they make the circle wide, it’s time to swim

out on your own and fill the element
with signatures on your own frequency, (1984:
p. 93-94)

Joyce, who is called “Old father, mother’s son” (p. 93) in this long poem, leads Heaney to a space and a language that would transcend all others. He gains a state of equilibrium where he may find the occasion for shattering ordinary literary structures and traditional linguistic approaches. This is the kingdom of art he is able to reach by escaping from linguistic dichotomies and deleting the signs of the dispossessed:

When I landed in the republic of conscience
it was so noiseless when the engines stopped
I could hear a curlew above the runway.

...

No porters. No interpreter. No taxi.
You carried your own burden and very soon
your symptoms of creeping privilege disappeared. (1987: p. 14)

Heaney’s not obsessing about using the tongue of the enemy and in his aim to create a language above all others essentially brings the reader to a multilayer polylinguistic style, especially in his later poems. ‘Known World’ from *Electric Light* indicates that kind of artistic change:

I kept my seat belt fastened as instructed,
Smoked the minute the *No Smoking* sign went off
And took it as my due when wine was poured
By a slight *de haut en bas* of my headphoned head.
Nema problema. Ja. All systems go. (2001: p. 27)

The poem reflects the impression Heaney got after visiting Belgrade with the intent to attend the Struga Poetry Festival in 1978. Former Yugoslavia in many respects resembles Ireland. The geography, the western part of Balkans, includes a wide variety of ethnicities: Macedonian, Croatian, Serbian, Slovene, Bosnian; of religions: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Orthodoxy, Judaism; and of languages: Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian, Macedonian, Albanian, and Bosnian. The enmity among the communities of the region, undoubtedly, reminds of the relationship between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland. When Heaney says "In Belgrade I had found my west-in-east" (2002: p. 23), he emphasises such similarities. Not only do the expressions in the above lines (from different languages of the region) address a Northern Ireland in Balkans, but they show the polylinguistic stage the poet has managed to reach as well. 'No Smoking' is English; 'Nema problema' means 'no problem' in Slavic languages, 'de haut en bas' is a French expression for 'from top to bottom', and 'Ja' is 'yes' in Germanic languages. Anyway, everything is ok because 'all systems go'. He apparently has grown in maturity of using all languages in service to his sublime art.

Conclusion

Heaney's poems about language loss can be evaluated in three different but complementary stages. First, he begins with the poems in which he suffers from the lost Gaelic language and appears to be in search for answers to his linguistic amnesia. Second, the poet writes to solve the said quandary and works to surmount the wreckage of the colonial past. That the English spoken in Northern Ireland has some distinct differences from the language of the imperial centre builds up his main arguments. From this point of view, English in Northern Ireland signifies a resistance and an authentication code against the central authority. Finally, he composes poems to reveal his declaration of the absolute superiority of artistic language. When this is the case, English is no longer the tongue of the colonizer, but a sublime language open to change, the one enriched on the opportunities offered by various languages and improved on his poetic contributions.

Last but not least, Heaney is an Irish poet writing in English. That he does so is an act of choice but this choice serves to cement a second facet of the issue that draws his attention, which is "the active mastery of the conqueror's language by the colonized" (Tobin, 1999: p. 72). Therefore, he puts aside the linguistic fanaticism and tends to the creation of an artistic realm. In his poetic journey it is seen that the more distance he covers in the name of universality, the better and clearer his style becomes. The result is the acceptance of poetic heritage as universal alongside artistic language.

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