Polyphonic Encounters
Negotiating (Mutual) Understanding in the Context of Multilingual Liturgies

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1 Introduction

This chapter explores multilingualism in Christian worship and liturgy. It is based on a qualitative empirical study in two congregations in the Basel area of Switzerland, the *New Covenant Fellowship* (NCF) and the *Mitenand Bewegung*.[1] The study is part of the research group "Conviviality in Motion. Exploring Practices and Theologies in Multiethnic Christian Congregations in Europe"[2].

During the years 2021 and 2022, I conducted interviews and recorded field notes from participant observation, thus over the course of a year and a half, I visited the two congregations regularly. As the following examples show, I had many language-related encounters. The first time I attended a Sunday service at *New Covenant Fellowship*, the pastors were expecting me, but the members of the congregation did not yet know me. I was sitting in the pew waiting for the service to begin when a woman approached me and greeted me by asking: "What language do you speak?" I learned from the beginning that in this congregation people are expected to speak another language than German, which is the local language in Basel (Protocol NCF 1_4. April 2020). On another occasion I was talking to a man after the church service. He speaks Zaza as first language, but also speaks Kurdish, Turkish, and a little bit of English and Italian. He is currently in Switzerland in the asylum-seeking process and is learning German. He showed me a little notebook and asked me to dictate a sentence, any sentence, in German that I thought would be helpful for him to learn (Protocol NCF 7_31. January 2021).

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1   An English translation of this could be "together movement" or "with-ness movement."

2   (SNSF 100015_192445). For further information: https://theologie.unibas.ch/en/research-project-conviviality-in-motion/. Under the title "Unbedingte Konvivialität? Austauschdynamiken in multilingualen Gemeinden in prekären Kontexten" my dissertation project focuses on precarious living conditions and how they are addressed in the Christian communities I have studied.

During a vacation week, which was organized by the *Mitenand Bewegung*, I spoke to a Spanish-speaking couple and mentioned that I had once learned a little bit Spanish and was hoping to brush up on it in the future. The next day, we were sitting next to each other in a workshop and they asked me to translate for them. However, I quickly realized that they understood German much better than I could speak Spanish. It seems they still enjoyed the interpretation I was trying to give. I felt that this interpretation was more about perceiving each other and building a relationship than about understanding (Protocol Mitenand 30_7.-15. October 2022).

Through many encounters like these, I realized that multilingualism is not just an unintended side-effect of these super-diverse communities. Instead, it is a critical practice through which diversity and difference are understood and negotiated and therefore a major theme of conviviality (Bieler in this volume).

2   Multilingualism as a Research Field

Research on multilingualism is found in a variety of literature. The "Handbuch Mehrsprachigkeit" (Földes/Roelcke 2022) summarizes, with a focus on Germany, the different interdisciplinary methods that examine levels of multilingualism. They distinguish between the term "multilingualism" on the societal level and "plurilingualism" on the individual level (Roelcke 2022: 5). In this chapter, I concentrate on experiences of societal multilingualism.

The phenomenon of multilingualism is increasing worldwide due to mobility, migration, globalization, and technological developments in communication, and has led to a wide range of political debates and research projects (Backus et al. 2013: 181). Especially in the field of pedagogy there is a growing academic discourse on multilingualism. For example, Thije et al. (2007) discuss new pedagogical concepts that promote receptive multilingualism in a European context. Dirim/Mecheril (2018) address migration-related multilingualisms from a perspective that critiques power structures and systems.

Both Backus et al. and Dirim/Mecheril, point out that the problem underlying many of today's language learning concepts in Western societies is the idea of languages as entities. This belief underlies the assumption that languages are learned in their standard forms within closed systems (Dirim/Mecheril 2017: 457, Backus et al. 2013: 184–185). Backus et al. aim to instigate a paradigm shift in language learning policy in the EU to emphasize communicative skills over linguistic ones. This means moving away from the grammar-centered learning of standard languages towards the integration of different communication strategies such as English as lingua franca, regional lingua franca,

lingua receptive,[3] code-switching,[4] and mediation by translation and interpretation (Backus et al. 2013: 190).

In the field of practical theology, multilingualism is most often considered when congregations that use different languages occasionally worship together. The typical situation seems to be that of communities that celebrate separately and only occasionally gather together for a joint service that entails extensive preparation by representatives of the congregations. Rubio (1998: 23–26) provides a checklist for multilingual worship in these situations for the *Journal of the Liturgical Conference*. His recommendations address congregations that usually celebrate monolingually but that join with other congregations for multilingual services on special occasions like Easter and Christmas or for intercultural services. He asserts that there are parts of Christian worship that should be understood by all. Other parts that people know by heart, such as some prayers, might be in only one language. This obviously refers to worship services in which all those present are socialized in the Christian tradition. Also, his requirement can only be met if the worship services are carefully planned and rehearsed. He recommends that representatives from all congregations take part in the planning and preparation, that everything is practiced beforehand, that texts are printed, and that the liturgy uses familiar practices versus introducing new material or content (Rubio 1998: 25–26).

Also "The Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe" (CPCE) has reflected on the theme of church, liturgy, and multilingualism at their meeting in Cluj (Romania) in 2022. They refer to multilingualism as finding "a balance between the need for a sense of home and depth of faith, which can best be fulfilled in the mother tongue, and the desire for missionary openness, so that as many people as possible can be addressed and included" (CPCE: "Liturgie in Zeiten von Mehrsprachigkeit und Multikulturalität"). The CPCE webpage summarizes in their conference review from the concluding presentation by Ralph Kunz: "[D]iversity and inclusion" are "a fruit of the Gospel," however multilingual worship should not become the rule, because it makes it more difficult for some people to feel that they are at home. In addition, the Christian liturgy offers many other "bridges of understanding", such as kneeling together, praying, singing, being silent together, or breaking the bread together.

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3   Lingua receptiva "entails that partners each use a different language or variety when conversing, but nevertheless mutual understanding is achieved, as each has sufficient receptive skills in the partner's language. (…) [T]he basis of the mutual understanding is bilingualism rather than mutual intelligibility of the languages" (Backus et al. 2013, 198).

4   For this chapter I work with the following definition of code-switching: "Briefly, the framework of interactional sociolinguistics as developed by Gumperz allows us to describe two ways in which language alternation can be seen as a conversational strategy. In the first case, referred to as situational codeswitching, participants use language alternation as a strategy for negotiating a shift in specific aspects of the speech situation. In the second possibility, known as metaphorical code-switching, language alternation is used to communicate meanings other than ideational by drawing on the symbolic value of the language switched to. Under this second category, Gumperz includes other aspects of strategic language choice which, as the discussion above shows, do not actually fit well in the model. It is such limitations which have motivated later models of language alternation" (Gafaranga 2008: 289). Language alternation I use as a more generic term for the changing of languages.

This brief overview shows that multilingual liturgy touches on the following dimensions: the welcome and closing of the service, the inclusion of a broad repertoire of practices from the (Christian) tradition, an emphasis on the theological significance of celebrating within diversity, embracing the religious significance of not understanding, and addressing questions about the negotiation of power and representation.

3   Multilingualism in the Swiss Context

"Multilingualism is an essential part of Switzerland's identity," (FDFA: "Language – facts and figures") writes the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs on their webpage. This is not only because Switzerland is quadrilingual, i.e. it comprises four language regions (German, French, Italian, Romansh), but also because it has become increasingly multilingual due to migration movements and globalization (Lüdi 2007: 163). Switzerland's quadrilingualism leads to a special legal situation: "Each language group has the right to communicate in its own language" (Art. 70FCSC from 2021). This means, among other things, that all official federal documents (legislation, reports, websites, brochures, and building signage) must appear in the primary national languages (these are German, French, and Italian). In addition, contact with the national languages, for example in television news broadcasts, on public transportation, and through advertising, is a defining feature in Swiss society. According to the Swiss linguist Georges Lüdi (2007: 162–163) linguistic diversity is deeply rooted in the Swiss identity. However, he adds: "But even if every adolescent in Switzerland has acquired a basic knowledge of one of her/his neighbouring languages, we can hardly speak of bilingualism, let alone multilingualism." (ibid: 161) In his opinion, the so-called "Swiss model" corresponds more to a "receptive bilingualism" than to multilingualism. This means, each person speaks in their national language. In his studies, Lüdi concluded that even when receptive language competence is present, individuals use numerous other communicative strategies in cross-linguistic encounters. It is not the case that each person speaks only in their own language. For example, individuals say different portions of their communication in each language or switch completely to the other person's primary language when that person's competence is lower. In addition, authority figures influence the languages spoken (Lüdi 2007). Lüdi comes to the following conclusion:

> Even if we find similar tokens of multilingual behaviour in many other parts of the world, it still seems legitimate to speak of a 'Swiss model.' In fact, one cannot deny that external conditions exert an influence on the speakers' behaviour. We think that long-term Swiss experiences in language use in French–German intercommunity communication contributed to the construction of a communication culture which might entail a higher acceptance of 'mixed' speech than in other countries. Thus, an existing system of linguistic values determines which 'linguistic capital' the knowledge and use of one or the other variety convey. (Lüdi 2007: 173)

While Lüdi refers to "a higher acceptance of 'mixed' speech" he is only talking about national languages. Thus, the "linguistic capital" is not the same for every language and in

particular languages of migrant populations often have lower capital. Dirim/Mecheril (2017: 459) show how the school system and educational practices in Germany and Austria position migrant languages as less valuable or honorable than national languages. It stands to reason that the same would be true for Switzerland. Thus, the statement about multilingualism being part of the Swiss identity falls short when considering racism and marginalization. There is still a low level of public awareness about structural racism in Switzerland (Dos Santos Pinto et al. 2022: 11). Switzerland is seen as a case of "colonialism without colonies" (Purtschert 2014) and racism is subject to "extraterritorialization" (Dos Santos Pinto et al. 2022: 18). From this perspective, racism is a problem of the "defeated" countries in the Second World War and of former colonial powers who are confronted with processes of decolonization. Meanwhile, there is a growing number of studies that demonstrate Switzerland's symbolic and economic participation in the colonial project. These studies also show how structural racism and discrimination are part of Swiss society. Michel (2022: 115), for instance, refers to the concept of "racelessness" to show a circular logic of unspeakability and insensitivity to experiences of racism in Switzerland. Therefore, speaking about multilingualism in the Swiss context in terms of national languages is not enough. There needs to be a deeper discussion on the meaning of languages and social inequality when it comes to "linguistic capital".

But a person's "linguistic capital" is not just about how languages are valued in society. Minority language speakers are particularly disadvantaged in schools and education, but also in all other places of social diversity. While people who speak a dominant language (e.g. a national language or English) can use their entire linguistic repertoire, bilinguals or multilinguals are always restricted to half or even less of their resources. García/Li use the term "translanguaging" to describe that a bilingual speaker's full linguistic repertoire "could never be split into one or another language." (García/Li: 42) They describe the boundaries between languages as socially and politically constructed, while for bi- or multilingual individuals different "languages" form one single universe of meaning-making.

Li introduces the concept of "translanguaging space" to analyze how multilingual practices create a sense of connectedness. He points to the critical and creative potential of multilingual practices in "pushing and breaking the boundaries between the old and the new, the conventional and the original, and the acceptable and the challenging" (Auer/Li 2011: 1223–1224). A translanguaging space is thus a space where the individual's linguistic repertoires are appreciated and are understood as crucial to building up new networks and as a benefit for the whole community. In this chapter I argue that the Christian congregations I have studied – although part of society and therefore not outside structural racism – also create the possibility of a safe space for minority language speakers by developing a multilingual liturgy and thus creating some sort of translanguaging space.

4   Narratives of Multilingual Congregations

In the following sections, the two congregations in my study will be briefly introduced with regard to their multilingual liturgy.

4.1   *Mitenand*: Multilingualism as Identity

The *Mitenand Bewegung* is located in a neighborhood where there are a large number of people with migration backgrounds and also low-income households. About thirty years ago a local pastor and his wife started to invite people who arrived in Basel as refugees to their church program. Since it seemed difficult to integrate these people into the Sunday worship service for various reasons, they started a worship service in partnership with a Catholic priest at a nearby Roman Catholic church. Over time, the *Mitenand* service developed into an ecumenical, participatory, and easily accessible celebration. Ten years ago, the congregation also started a social outreach, which is also funded by the local Protestant State Church.

For over thirty years the *Mitenand Bewegung* has been being church together with a diverse, multilingual community. One person who has been actively involved as a leader in the *Mitenand Bewegung* for many years describes why living together in this community of diversity works:

> I think a lot of things worked out because they all took the troubles of interpreting and translating a lot into different languages. So, you know, they always made an effort to understand each another. […] And there was never, I think that the Mitenand Bewegung never had the temptation of a, you know, what in the political discussion is a 'leading culture' (dt. Leitkultur), when people think they need a leading culture and the others have to adapt to it, but […] Peter and Lena [the pastor and his wife] did something extremely generous. (Interview Martin_20. April 2021, Pos. 52)[5]

This person speaks of the first years of the *Mitenand Bewegung* and how the effort to use many languages created a welcoming community. There are now many international congregations in Basel. Despite cooperation with and appreciation of these new international congregations, this development is also regretful for the *Mitenand Bewegung* (Interview Thomas_17. December 2020, Pos. 20). Even if most people gathering in the congregation on Sunday understand German, when the idea of using one language is discussed, there is resistance from leading members of the congregation. During a team meeting a pastor argues: "But it must remain bilingual!" A woman asks: "Why?" and he explains: "It is a part of the *Mitenand* idea, this idea of Swiss and migrants together, that's why it has to be bilingual," he replies (Protocol Mitenand 18_10. August 2021, Pos. 13).

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5   Quotes from my data set have been translated from Swiss or Standard German to English. The quotes have not been corrected in grammar or style after been transcribed from audio recordings.

Another person reported in an interview that the people who attend the *Mitenand* service are looking for multilingualism: "They just always want the Bible to be read in another language, they love the diversity, the interculturalism" (Interview Beritan_21. June 2021). Many other people in their interviews described the reading of the Bible, singing and praying, and dramatic performances in different languages as one main characteristics of the *Mitenand* service.

4.2 New Covenant Fellowship: Language as a Resource, or: Language as a Means

The origins of the *New Covenant Fellowship* stem from bilingualism. Two bilingual couples found there were no bilingual worship services in Basel that corresponded to their religious tradition. In response, they founded the *English Charismatic Fellowship* (Interview Bert_22. March 2022). This congregation began inviting migrants some years ago, at a time when asylum seekers received less organized support (such as accommodations) from the state than they do today. What began rather coincidentally at that time grew to become a focus of the congregation. Every weekend, members of the congregation go out into public places and invite people to their Sunday services. Among those invited are also a lot of people from the nearby asylum centers. In addition, the congregation regularly hosts people in their rented church space, where they worship on Sundays, run a café, and serve lunches during the week for guests from the local area as well as the private school which is in the same building. As a result, these services are extremely multilingual. There are usually ten or more languages represented by the attendees, and most of the time there is no single language that is understood by everyone in attendance. However, according to the pastor, multilingualism is not a requirement for this congregation:

> But it is not [...] fixed. If it happens, at the bible study for example, that only German speakers are here, then it is only in German. But [...] as I said before, I don't see the congregation as a congregation for migrants or as a mixed congregation. It is a community and it is people, and their backgrounds actually play only a small role. (Interview Bert_22. March 2022)

Through this statement it becomes clear that even though bilingualism has played an important role in the formation of the congregation, and even though multilingualism is very present in the services today, these occur for pragmatic reasons for the congregation rather than being an important part of their identity.

5   Lingua Franca and Standard Language

To analyze multilingualism in the congregations, I first refer to the framework of Backus et al. Their concept of inclusive multilingualism emphasizes that people in multilingual settings use a variety of communicative skills to achieve mutual understanding. This can also be observed in the *Mitenand Bewegung* and the *New Covenant Fellowship*. Both congregations combine different strategies and modes to achieve participation and under-

standing. The people who participate regularly in the worship services have developed a variety of skills to communicate the same things in multiple ways. A young man who often preaches at *Mitenand* says: "We want to be a place that welcomes all people. Of course, for people with a migration background, especially those [...] who don't know the language. It comes up again and again: we interpret and translate [...] the sermon, we don't want a highly theologically complex sermon, we want to work more with visual language." (Interview Stefan_20. December 2021, Pos. 24) For example, a bible text may be illustrated with a drama or in pictures. A song is not only sung, but also led with movements. In addition, rituals and films are often part of the services. Shared meals are also a central part of it. These services and events are conducted with simple language through short sentences and basic vocabulary.

Regarding lingua franca there is another special feature particular to the Swiss-German region where the congregations are located: The bilingual[6] context involving the local Swiss dialect and Standard German. Swiss German is the largest language group in Switzerland. It is a collective term for numerous, and sometimes very distinct, dialects. Standard German, also called High German, is learned in formal educational settings and is used for written communication and at formal events. It is not generally used for ordinary conversations, unless it is necessary for intelligibility (Lüdi 2007: 160; Oberholzer 2017: 1). Migrants are usually taught Standard German, not Swiss dialect, because it is difficult to learn. There is no orthography, hardly any courses, or few grammar books.

Oberholzer (2017) conducted a study among pastors to examine how they use Standard German and their Swiss dialects in their professional practice as well as where they stand on the question of whether Standard German is a foreign language. Oberholzer points to numerous studies on worship services in Switzerland in recent decades where dialects have been shown to displace the standard language, while in her sample about half of Swiss services are primarily in standard language (ibid: 129; 136). She concludes that switching between Swiss dialects and Standard German serves multiple functions in liturgy. This code-switching (switching between the two varieties of German) often indicates a change of perspective or a shift from one's own words to written texts (such as biblical texts, prayers such as the Lord's Prayer, etc.) and is thus a communication strategy (ibid: 133–135). Most pastors who took part in this study characterize dialectical language as close, emotional, and a language of the heart, while standard language is characterized as precise, distant, and the language of writing (ibid: 145). However, some also refer to the integrative potential of using Standard German (ibid: 142;146).

According to Oberholzer the question of whether to use Swiss dialect or Standard German in a worship service is often a choice between emotional closeness for people who use a Swiss dialect as their first language versus intelligibility for everybody, regardless of language ability. The two congregations I observed use only Standard German in their services. Once I did hear a prayer in Swiss German at the New Covenant Fellowship, when a person accompanying a guest speaker that day prayed in his dialect. The Swiss German prayer felt like a disruption in the service, and reinforced for me that the Swiss dialect is not usually spoken (Protocol NCF 17_21. November 2021). The consistent

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6   Some authors also use the term "diglossic" for the Swiss context, cp. Sridhar 2005: 55.

use of Standard German speaks to the special quality of these Sunday services. For example, in the *Mitenand Bewegung* the team meetings are sometimes held in Swiss dialect if everybody understands it well. But the Sunday services and other public meetings are held in Standard German. The congregations' decisions to use only the standard form of German points to their self-understanding as churches open to people who have migrated to Switzerland. These two communities do not use the communicative resource of code-switching between Standard German and Swiss German, instead they forego code-switching in favor of inclusion.

Besides using Standard German as a regional lingua franca, both congregations also use English as a lingua franca. The use of Standard German bears similarities to the use of English as a lingua franca. English as a lingua franca and Standard German are not necessarily oriented towards the German of Germany or the English of English native speakers. It is a German or English that is adapted in speed and pronunciation. Often, different statements are paraphrased several times and loops are built in to check if it was understood. This is done proactively (Backus et al. 2013: 194–195). Both the use of a standard language and English as a lingua franca afford flexibility. The congregations have to sacrifice elaborate formulations in favor of achieving understanding, and communicating simply, partly because they have to constantly translate while speaking.

In the following section, both communities will be examined with regard to their special characteristics in terms of multilingualism.

6   Ritualizations of Language Alternation

The *Mitenand Bewegung* has been celebrating a multilingual worship service every Sunday for thirty years. A typical Sunday liturgy can be described in the following way based on my observations.

Mitenand services are held on Sunday evenings in an old church with a beautiful interior. The atmosphere in the church is often quiet before the service begins. The ringing of the bells can be heard in the room. Many people are already sitting in the wooden pews, talking quietly, or enjoying the stillness. Other people are moving around the room. Often, at the last minute, the liturgist asks people if they would like to read the Bible text for today's reading in their own language or in another language.

The liturgist greets the congregation after an introductory song, usually in both English and Standard German. The English sections are usually condensed versions of the German, translated by the liturgist. During this greeting, it is asked who is attending the worship service for the first time. People who raise their hands are then welcomed with a drum roll and applause.

Then the liturgist asks who needs a language to be spoken other than English or German. These additional interpretations are organized as a "whispered translation" in the back rows of the pews. Often, however, no need is expressed, which may be because the interpretation was already organized before the service. Once, the sermon was interrupted shortly after it began because a family arrived late and needed a translation to be organized.

Usually many Taizé songs are sung, which have lyrics in multiple languages, as well as other songs in different languages (Hoffmann in this volume). These songs are chosen beforehand, so the languages of the songs are not necessarily first languages of the attendees of the service. Instead, the goal seems to be more broadly about fostering an atmosphere of multilingualism. Yet sometimes people are invited to present a song in their first language with the goal of engaging different people in the worship service.

Reading the Bible in multiple languages is also a central part of the service. Two to five people come to the podium together and read the day's Bible passages in different languages, one after the other. German and English versions are always included. Often Spanish, French, Kurdish, or Turkish versions are also read. Here, too, multilingualism addresses different concerns regarding participation. On the one hand, including multiple languages is a matter of making Bible texts accessible to different people in their first languages. On the other hand, reading in different languages empowers the participation of many people in the worship service.

An essential aspect of the identity of *Mitenand* is their multilingual dramas, where biblical stories are performed in such a way that everyone speaks their own first language or a language of their choice. This means that no one in the audience understands everything that is spoken. Nevertheless, they can follow the plot through the acting, the sections they can understand, and possibly through their own knowledge of the biblical story. One person who has been leading these dramas for many years explains:

> The drama, sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. I have an idea in my head and they do it differently, that's just the way it is, that's part of it. And then everybody speaks their own language. But what is always very important to me is that they identify themselves, that they put themselves into the role. So if someone is playing a disciple, then they should play this disciple as they imagine it. I'm not the one who tells them how — and then you also get something of this worldwide discipleship, you get something of the worldwide church, and as I said, in Latin America I didn't necessarily feel comfortable in every church service, but who am I to presume to say what church is? (Interview Lisa_27. April 2021)

The drama was introduced by the founding couple to provide an alternative to the sermon for people who understood little or no German, or any other language into which a reliable translation could have been made. But it has grown into much more. Being open to multilingualism has opened up a wider space for sharing experiences. The inclusion of different languages also led to a very participatory liturgy. Through the drama group, many people are involved in the preaching, bringing their perspectives on the biblical texts into the service. Sometimes the drama is rehearsed shortly beforehand and everyone in attendance can participate.

The importance of these dramas has a great influence on the selection of sermon texts. The liturgy team exclusively chooses scriptures that can be dramatized. And some preachers preach spontaneously in response to the drama instead of delivering a written sermon. The sermon, like the rest of the liturgy, is delivered with consecutive translation from English to German or vice versa. Often images are also projected on a screen.

The intercessions are arranged in such a way that the microphone is available to any-one and people are encouraged to share their intercessions freely and in their own lan-guage. Finally, after the blessing by the liturgist there is a communal blessing sung in four languages to the melody and slightly adapted text of "Shalom Chaverim". The song is concluded with the blessing "Shalom-Salam" spoken by the entire congregation.

Multilingualism is present throughout the whole service and creates different expe-riences. The multilingual service, as presented by *Mitenand*, does not correspond to the recommendations in Rubio's "Checklist for Multicultural and Multilingual Worship"[7] dis-cussed in the introduction. For Rubio, the different languages should be kept in separate segments and that "(a)ll parts of the celebration that are in one language need to make sense and be able to stand alone" (Rubio 1998: 24). He suggests that the service should be prepared in detail by representatives of the language groups and only generally known passages like the "Our Father" should remain untranslated. In *Mitenand*, on the other hand, there are various language changes and the languages are not limited to separate segments. In the case of individuals, language switching has been well studied and is usually referred to as code-switching. In pedagogical contexts, there are objections to a seemingly unorganized mixing of languages. The meshing of languages is often den-igrated and seen as a fault, as a sign of not knowing the correct word, or as laziness and a lack of self-control (Runcieman 2021, S. 139). Yet, in multilingual settings, code-switching, where members of a group switch at will among different languages without translation, is a widespread practice (Sridhar 2005: 58–59). Recent research now indi-cates that code-switching has very specific functions and serves the purposes of bolster-ing group belonging and social cohesion. This finding is drawn primarily from studies of peer groups and adolescents but is not limited to them; it can also be understood as operating within other multicultural communities (Backus et al. 2013: 201, Sridhar 2005: 59).

Code-switching is normally practiced when everyone in a group has mastery of the different languages (Sridhar 2005: 59). This cannot be said of *Mitenand*, since there are more than two or three languages, and the group is too diverse for broad mastery of all the languages. Moreover, *Mitenand*'s multilingualism is not only a matter of code-switching practiced by individuals who are bilingual, but of a collective practice of language alter-nation. Most of the people stay with their language, but as a community they are using different languages without translating everything. Hence, I argue that the practice of language switching as a community also helps to "break down the barriers between lan-guages" (Backus et al. 2013: 200–201) and create social cohesion, as described in code-switching for individuals.

Sociolinguists distinguish between "situational and metaphorical code switching". In situational code-switching, the external circumstances are the most important factor in communication choices. In metaphorical code-switching, the important factor is the content or the intention of the communication, e.g. a change in tone "from the serious to the comic" (Gafaranga 2008: 289; Sridhar 2005: 56). For the *Mitenand Bewegung*, I would like to suggest that they engage in a ritualized and communal form of language alterna-tion (Walthert in this volume). In the services, languages are mixed and spoken one after

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7   See "2. Multilingualism as a research field."

the other without being translated, because the experience of not understanding – for example in the intercessions or dramas – also carries a theological message: The communion of the congregation transcends human boundaries through the celebration and experiences of belonging, even without being able to understand every word. Here, too, language alternation has a cohesive effect.

Whereas in metaphorical code-switching, described by Sdridhar and Gafaranga, the chosen language reflects the intended message, here the *very fact* that languages are mixed is symbolic. The drama, that is intended to build bridges of understanding, also produces and contains incomprehension. It does not aim for maximum understanding. Instead, the confusion of language is purposely built into the drama. This is also true of singing when congregants sing in languages unfamiliar to them, including not knowing the correct pronunciation. This experience can also touch on experiences of shame and requires a certain adaptability. It would be a stretch to say that someone singing a song in an unfamiliar language or watching a drama where they do not understand everything puts them in the same position as people who encounter unfamiliar languages every day and where comprehension is necessary to ensure their survival. These liturgical forms of multilingualism can also have an exoticizing effect when someone whose first language is Arabic, for example, is invited to perform a song in their "mother tongue" or to interpret a sermon into Arabic instead of English, whereas German-speaking people are not (Interview Leonie and Samir_12. July 2022). In this way, multilingualism as a means of participation and belonging can also have limits. I would argue, however, a multilingual liturgy is at least an attempt to facilitate diverse experiences and promote openness to and tolerance of ambiguity. In this sense, it is also possible to speak of a multilingualism as solidarity (Dirim/Mecheril in this volume): To embrace the experience within religious practice of not understanding, yet still belong. Ritualized multilingualism is a symbol of openness and inclusion and is present throughout the entire service in both congregations. It is a liturgical element that is intended to make a theological statement about how difference should be perceived and negotiated. At the same time, multilingualism is not always equally emphasized, it can be in the foreground or background during different parts of the service.

7   Interpreting for (Mutual) Understanding

Different conditions and strategies for dealing with multilingualism are found in the *New Covenant Fellowship*'s Sunday worship service. The congregation was established as a bilingual church. This has attracted people who speak or understand little or no German. Every Sunday there are people who speak different languages, and usually there is not one language that everyone can understand.

However, because of the church's evangelical focus (Hoffmann in this volume) it is important for the congregation that the service is not just a pleasant event; they also want to be sure that their message is comprehensible. This is why interpretation plays such an important role in the services. The reasons for using different language skills are never value neutral. In history and still today languages play a crucial role in trade and travel, but many language contacts came also through missionary or colonial activities (Klippel

2022). In what follows, however, I want to focus on the effects of multilingual liturgies on the religious practice of the congregation, rather than the other way around.

In the *New Covenant Fellowship* congregation there is both consecutive interpretation from the microphone at the front and simultaneous interpretation in small groups. The consecutive translation is often German to English or English to German, depending on who is preaching. However, it also occurs that a different language is interpreted consecutively from the microphone. There will also be different groups in the room, depending on who is in attendance, for simultaneous whispered interpretation.

Usually, the interpretation needs are identified just before the service begins. People attending for the first time are approached by members of the congregation and asked which languages they understand or speak. This is not done in an organized way, but rather spontaneously as people arrive.

This small microcosm on a Sunday morning sometimes reflects global events and the political and social situations in Basel. For example, during the time that I was attending Sunday services at *New Covenant Fellowship* a law changed in Basel. Begging was no longer punishable by fine as long as it was not organized by gangs. Therefore, in the following weeks and months there was an increase in travelers arriving from Eastern Europe to solicit money on the streets. This coincided with an extremely cold winter, with temperatures as low as -10 degrees Celsius, and many of the newcomers spent their nights on the streets. Due to the cold, some of them found temporary accommodations at the *New Covenant Fellowship*. So, for a few weeks the worship services were interpreted from German or English into the languages of the newcomers or into bridging languages such as Italian. These language choices are often not decided until the service begins. It is part of the liturgy of worship to make such decisions.

The following is a summary of my observations on the first part of a specific Sunday service at the *New Covenant Fellowship*, which illustrates several important multilingual aspects. On that Sunday, there was a larger group of migrants from Afghanistan invited to the service.

> The pastor and a young man from the congregation come forward, each taking a microphone. The pastor greets the congregation with "Good morning!" and "Chadofesh!" then asking: "Is this correct in Farsi?" Several people nod or murmur in agreement. She continues to speak in English, very clearly and slowly, while the other person interprets into German. She asks for someone who speaks Farsi and English to offer an interpretation. For Kurdish, Romanian, and French speakers the same procedure is followed. At the end she asks: "Who speaks German?" Hardly anyone raises a hand. The Farsi-speaking group is now too large for a whispered interpretation, so there is some deliberation as to whether German is needed at the service at all. Finally, it is decided and the sermon is delivered in English and Farsi. Finding someone to interpret into Kurdish proves to be difficult. There are some people who understand and speak Kurdish, but not another language – or maybe no one wants to do the interpretation? The pastor asks a member of the congregation to reach out a particular person and ask him or her to come in to provide interpretation. It is then organized that each language group will form a circle around the person who offers the interpretation.

> The pastor speaks to the congregations about the flow of the service and makes expressive gestures, such as putting her hand on her chest when she says "I" or pointing to the ceiling/sky when she says "God."
> She then leads a song that has only one line of German lyrics, followed by a "Hallelujah". She organizes the singing in the form of a canon and forms two groups in the room. Later she adds a bit of movement. The ensemble moves quickly, with the two groups now standing up and then sitting down. Even though some people do not sing, the volume is quite loud and everyone gets involved in movement. The two groups split the congregation, including dividing language groups. People who sit next to each other with no common language now do something together in this choreographed movement song. A strong energy can be felt in the room.
> Afterwards, the pastor offers a special word for the people of Afghanistan. She says: "I know your country is going through very difficult times. God has brought you here. We are glad that you are here. We pray for your country and for you." She also addresses other groups with a specific speech. After these prayers, there is another song sung in Farsi. It has relatively few words and is often sung by the congregation. The man doing the Farsi interpretation sings along loudly and stands up. (Protocol NCF 15_05. September 2021, Pos. 5–8)

The purpose of identifying language competence is to enable understanding. But it leads to much more. It can also be understood as a liturgical element because it is an essential part of the service. It represents diversity in the space. This perceived diversity is also linked to the broader experience of each group of people. This became clear in the pastor's speech when she addresses the political situation of those from Afghanistan. It is also evident in the response from a congregant when I asked her about the meaning of multilingualism in the congregation:

> And of course, it is always interesting on Sunday morning, when the pastor asks about the different languages: Who is here? And you realize where these people come from, so you can imagine a little bit about their backgrounds and so on. It also sometimes goes a bit beyond the 'imagination horizon'. You really have no idea what they've experienced, where they come from. (Interview Nina_21. August 2022, Pos. 185)

On the other hand, this special address marks some as *one* group within the present congregation. The organization of interpretation in the congregation presupposes that people identify as members of a linguistic group and that they arrange as a group in the space. "National and ethnic boundary-making" (Wimmer 2008) become spatially and physically visible.

The aim of the interpretation is for everyone to be able to follow the service and that no one is excluded. At the same time, the focus on interpretation also has the effect of reproducing ethnic boundaries. On the one hand, the differences created by distinct languages are supposed to be "bridged" by the interpretation. On the other hand, the translation itself creates the very difference it hopes to overcome.

This contradictory nature of translation becomes apparent in the process of interpretation. Translation is based on the paradoxical assumption that the boundaries of

meaning can be crossed while at the same time these boundaries remain (Dinkelaker 2023: 10–12). Therefore, interpretation is always about negotiating boundaries. The question, though, is how interpretation happens. For the *New Covenant Fellowship* it can be said that the national origins of attendees become visible to the congregation when the language groups are identified. In doing this, images are also evoked that characterize the places and situations that different people come from. This can lead to either reactivating clichés or stirring up empathy – and it is possible that these go hand in hand. The woman quoted above goes on to explain how when she engages people in a conversation after the service it can be an eye opener for her to learn about where people come from. In traditional Protestant services in Switzerland these experiences normally happen in a more mediated way at the very end of a service, as part of the intercession. But at *New Covenant Fellowship* they occur at the very beginning of the service when people from different parts of the world are invited to say what language they speak. The whole service takes shape against the backdrop of these perspectives on different living conditions.

The language groups are mixed in other interactions in the course of the service. There are usually songs in the liturgy that invite participation from all. These may be songs, as described above, which include movement. There is a sense of belonging, of being part of what is happening, which goes beyond the language groups. Depending on the song, this may be influenced by a certain religious affiliation, which may not be shared by everyone.

An essential aspect of this cross-lingual strategy is that it relies on specific individuals who are proficient in both the regional language and the second language. Backus et al. refer to numerous studies on interpretation that occur during interactions at, for example, police stations, immigration offices, community centers, or hospitals (Backus et al. 2013: 202–203). Although religious, ecclesiastical contexts are not included here, the findings about interpreters are also applicable to the context of the *New Covenant Fellowship*. The interpreter needs to be accepted as an independent party by all who are involved. Therefore, the social status of the interpreter and the way of dealing with social status in the group are crucial. In particular, the interpreter must be trusted by both sides. They must be both familiar with the culture of the receiving language as well as attuned to what is happening in the congregation as a whole. It is not necessary for the interpreter to give an exact translation of what is spoken, yet it is important that the purpose of the interaction is achieved. Of course, this purpose can be the subject of different interpretations on both sides. All the attendees in the service also bring their own agendas, as is evident from the experiences of a young translator who become a permanent member of the congregation. He initially joined the church program because he wanted to learn German and make social connections with locals. He explains:

> I lacked […] social contact at that time. Where can I go, how can I go? I don't know anyone, I have no friends, no […] acquaintances, nothing. […] No language either, these two. And that was […] almost at the beginning of the Corona time, Corona two years ago. And then I thought, how can I learn the language when all the schools are closed and there are no courses? If I study at home, […] if I have a question about the language, whom should I ask? On the street I could, wanted to ask people: 'You speak German, can you please tell me the answer to this grammar problem?' So,

the language [...] I just tried to talk to people on the street. But that didn't work either, because people kept their distance because of Corona. [...] People didn't want to. I didn't have the language to talk to them properly, to address them properly. [...] Yes, that was normal. And then I soon learned the language and got the social contact through the congregation here, I was able to learn the German language very quickly, very quickly. (Interview Andreas_3. October 2021)

It is very interesting to consider how positions of power are distributed. On the one hand, the congregations serve as the hosts and set the scene. On the other hand, the person who acts as interpreter is not always part of the congregation. There is often no time for the congregation to get to know or instruct the interpreter. The congregations thus give up some control. So-called world languages such as French, English, and Spanish are often attractive in Western European society while other languages are often seen as less valuable (Dirim/Mecheril in this volume). While the local regional language is important to the congregation, as well as English and Standard German, other languages are also needed. These are often undervalued and marginalized languages such as Kurdish, Arabic, Farsi, and Urdu. A person who speaks one of these languages and understands sufficient English can attain a certain status in the community. Yet, ultimately, of course, the congregation establishes the framework of worship and the person who provides the content (such as the pastor) also sets the tone for the service.

8   Considering Multilingual Liturgies

"Doctor Esperanto", L. L. Zamenhof, once had an idea to create an artificial language, which would be easy to learn due to its structural simplicity and regularity, and which would help to overcome ethnic boundaries and exclusion. Without being a dominant language of an imperialist power "Esperanto" would contribute to world peace and harmony. The reason why this and other artificial languages have generally failed to take off is that there is no community that speaks such a language that others could join (Edwards 2008: 456). Ideas of unity emerging amidst societal differences have been the subject of many theories, including in the field of sociology (Walthert in this volume). From the perspective of conviviality, there is another perception, as this chapter has shown in the context of multilingual liturgies. Different forms of inclusive multilingualism support developing practices to deal with language diversity, without creating a homogenous (language) group but opening up translanguaging spaces.

The practice of translation and interpretation remains ambivalent. It oscillates between enabling a sense of belonging and national and ethnic boundary-making. The formation of language groups is necessary so that language barriers can be overcome and all people can understand what is said and thus participate in the community. Interpretations are boundaries and bridges at the same time.

These limitations and paradoxes of translation and interpretation touch on another point in the dynamics of the liturgy. Not understanding and not being able to put into words what happens in a religious experience is symbolically represented in a worship service where not everything is cognitively understood. The experience of singing and

praying together in a service, without understanding all parts of what is said, makes room for a spirituality that involves bodies, feelings, and atmospheres and thereby shows that the transcendent is not mainly accessible through cognition, but through the whole being.

The convivial practice of interpreting and translating provides the insight that one's own perspective is always only one piece of the puzzle. Even if the intention of a multilingual service might come from a missionary goal and therefore follows a logic of convincing, I argue that the practice of multilingual liturgies nevertheless enables people to become accustomed to celebrating their faith together, even if they do not have the same religious traditions, and in doing so feel connected.

On the other hand, the necessity for the use of *linguae francae*, as well as interpretation, encourages people to use a kind of language that is easy to understand. In this way, the various spoken contributions are connected to everyday life. A first assumption might be that this results in a kind of simplified sermon. But on the other hand, to ask oneself: "What am I really trying to say? What exactly does it mean?" can also lead to authenticity and deeper reflections on theological issues.

A sense of with-ness is also fostered by the many opportunities for participation in the liturgy. The decision to make different languages audible offers many opportunities for different people to become co-producers of the service, be it in drama, prayers, or songs. The preaching is thus shared between many people and heard in many different languages and voices.

Multilingual worship allows for a different sense of church as people share their life stories or their interpretation of a biblical text. Engaging with people from different backgrounds also deepens the sensitivity of those present for the global church and for people in precarious situations due to migration.

Marginalized languages will be paid special attention in multilingual services, either because they are needed for interpretation or because a special appreciation of them is expressed in the service, which can also lead to stereotyping. From a critical perspective there needs to be an awareness of power dynamics when celebrating multilingual services. There is a tendency that the possibilities for some people to contribute often remain in the creative mode (e.g. songs) or in the receptive mode, i.e. mainly interpretation of other content. The productive contribution (e.g. a sermon) tends to remain with people who speak a dominant language.

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