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“A STROLL DOWN THE HOIL FOR A FRY OF MOGS AND SKEDS” – THE STORNOWAY VOICES OF IAN STEPHEN’S *A BOOK OF DEATH AND FISH* IN GERMAN TRANSLATION

This paper investigates regional variation in a contemporary Scottish novel and its translation from a theoretical as well as a practical perspective, combining textual analysis with examples from my own translation practice. Ian Stephen’s unusual novel *A Book of Death and Fish* (2014) is an homage to the Isle of Lewis, in particular to the town of Stornoway and its people and voices. The narrator, sea-obsessed Lewisman and raconteur extraordinaire Peter MacAulay, combines colloquial Scottish English, Hebridean dialect, Stornoway vernacular and Gaelic terms to an idiosyncratic blend. When asked about the language in his novel, Stephen stressed that he aimed to give Stornoway’s linguistic community and the Hebridean (English) voice more generally a written form, as others had done for the urban voices of the Central Belt (Kaye, 2015). This paper will explore the idiosyncratic voice of this narrator, a “Stornowegian” born and bred who does not hold back with opinions and comments about the cultural and linguistic characteristics of his hometown. Combining Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of “heteroglossia” with sociolinguistic categories, this presentation will first discuss the heterogeneous narrative voice, illustrating the “internal stratification” and “ideological saturation” of the novel’s language. Secondly, it will explore the challenges this multi-faceted literary voice presents for translation. Using examples from my own rendering of the novel into German, translation strategies seeking to retain the different facets of this Hebridean voice will be discussed. In doing so, this presentation aims to shed light on heteroglot voices in contemporary Scottish literature and on the particular challenges arising in their translation.

References

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