

# *Translation Theory: Monolingual, Bilingual or Multilingual?*

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## *Abstract*

The monolingual ideology of the United States implies a society that integrates all languages and cultures into one inclusive, monolingual culture. That which does not fit is relegated to the margins, left-over, or left out. In this paper I argue that the two are not mutually exclusive: monolingualism always includes multilingualism, albeit deceptively, because it hides the very multilingual fabric upon which it rests. I look at the multilingual fabric of the United States, focusing on periods of colonization and immigration, showing strong traditions of multiple languages and translation. I then turn to Derrida's (1998) *Monolingualism of the Other* in which he discusses the impossible-forbidden, presence-absence of translation in any monolingual culture. In terms of translation theory, the kind of translation Derrida discusses is not the conventional, interlingual, type, but another, partially "mad", quasi-schizophrenic, psycho-social kind of translation that underlies any given cultural condition. I then turn to China and give a few initial impressions of how such a psycho-social definition of translation might apply. I suggest that such research on how translation operates in and among multiple language communities may reveal more about culture in the United States and/or China than more traditional translation theories.