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of Linguists

For the love of languages – A life in languages

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Conference 2026

Today's linguists, Tomorrow's world

17 April 2026



Key take-aways

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- **Why languages matter**
- **The bilingual brain, education and lifelong learning**
- **Why respect for languages and cultures has never been more important**



Maria-Elena Metaxas
BA (Hons) MCIL
CIOL Education Society
Steering Group Chair

- Raised bilingually in Greek and English.
- Taught French, German and Spanish.
- Used languages in a variety of business sectors
Currently within healthcare market research.
- Dedicated to bilingual communication using CLIL
(Content and Language Integrated Learning).
- Researches effective pedagogical methods
supporting language and grammar proficiency.

Why languages matter

Why languages matter

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LANGUAGES
Shape How We Connect
& Understand the World



Connect
People

- Share ideas
- Build trust
- Express self



Preserve
Culture

- Traditions
- Identity
- History



Shape
Thought

- Concepts
- Expression
- Perspective



Open
Opportunities

- Education
- Careers
- Global reach



Sustain
Diversity

- Endangered
- Heritage
- Knowledge

- How does language function in human society?
- How does language create meaning?
- Does it shape the way we think, or simply reflect the world around us?



- **Multilingual world** - more than 7000 spoken or signed languages
- **Cognitive, economic and social benefits** protecting knowledge, identity and human connection.
- **Bridge between the brain and society**, reflecting and structuring knowledge.
- **Words and grammar** are tools to engage with the world and construct meaning, identity and participation in society.
- **Multilingual workforces** drive innovation, inclusion, critical thinking, problem solving and adaptability

- **Ferdinand de Saussure** - language a system of signs. Words don't have fixed meanings—they exist only in relation to other words.
- **Noam Chomsky** - universal grammar. Humans are born with an innate ability to learn language and all languages follow common patterns.
- **Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf** showed how language and culture are deeply connected.

Critical thinking abilities

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Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/critical-thinking/>

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Questioning abilities

Imaginative abilities

Inferential abilities

Experimenting abilities

Observational abilities

Argument analysis abilities

Consulting abilities

Judging skills and deciding skills

Emotional abilities

Multilingual education

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- **Switzerland** - 10% of GDP attributed to its multilingual heritage, French, German, Italian, and Romansh.
- **Mozambique** - bilingual education expanded to 25% of schools with a new teacher training curriculum. Children performing 15% higher in basic reading and mathematics under bilingual curriculum.
- **The Pacific** - 25% of the world's approximately 6,000 languages. Enhanced performance when concepts are explained in terms of personal context and experience.
- **Countries promoting multilingual education** benefit from enhanced innovation, improved employability, and increased global economy participation.

The elements of a successful CLIL lesson based on the 4Cs curriculum **Coyle 1999 & Coyle 2008**

- **CONTENT** – progression in knowledge, skills and understanding, related to specific elements of a defined curriculum.
- **COMMUNICATION** – using language to learn whilst learning to use language.
- **COGNITION** – developing thinking skills which link concept formation (abstract & concrete), understanding and language.
- **CULTURE** – exposure to alternative perspectives and shared understandings, which deepen awareness of otherness and self.

- **American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)**, students learning a 2nd language perform 14% higher on standardized tests compared to monolingual students.
- **Fluency in more than one language boosts cognitive development.** Bilingual students outperform monolingual students in critical thinking, memory, and multitasking due to constantly switching between languages, thus enhancing executive brain functions.

Skill	Improvement (%) in Bilingual Students
Critical Thinking	10-15%
Memory Retention	20%
Cognitive Flexibility	18%

Diverse markets

- **McKinsey & Company** - teams with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds outperform those without diversity by 30% in creative and problem-solving tasks.
- **Duolingo**, over 50 million US users. Promoting language diversity, opened revenue streams in language education, travel, tourism, and job markets that benefit from a linguistically diverse workforce.

Company	Primary Language Markets	Revenue (2023)
Duolingo	English, Spanish, French, Japanese	\$400+ million
Microsoft	120+ languages supported	\$198+ billion
Amazon (Multilingual Support)	Multilingual AI & support systems	\$500+ billion

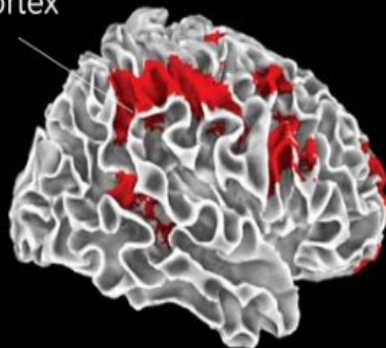
Gray-matter volume in bilinguals vs. monolinguals

Bilingual: Spanish and English

Monolingual: English only

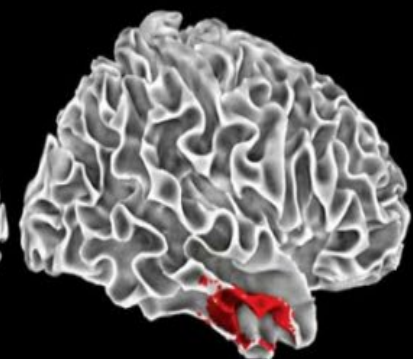
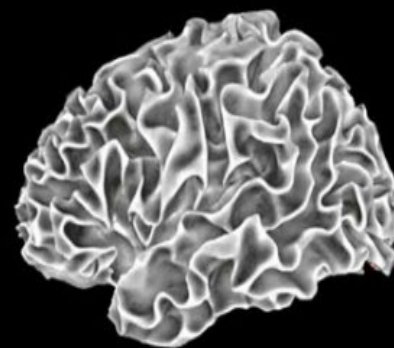
Prefrontal
cortex

Parietal
cortex



Left hemisphere

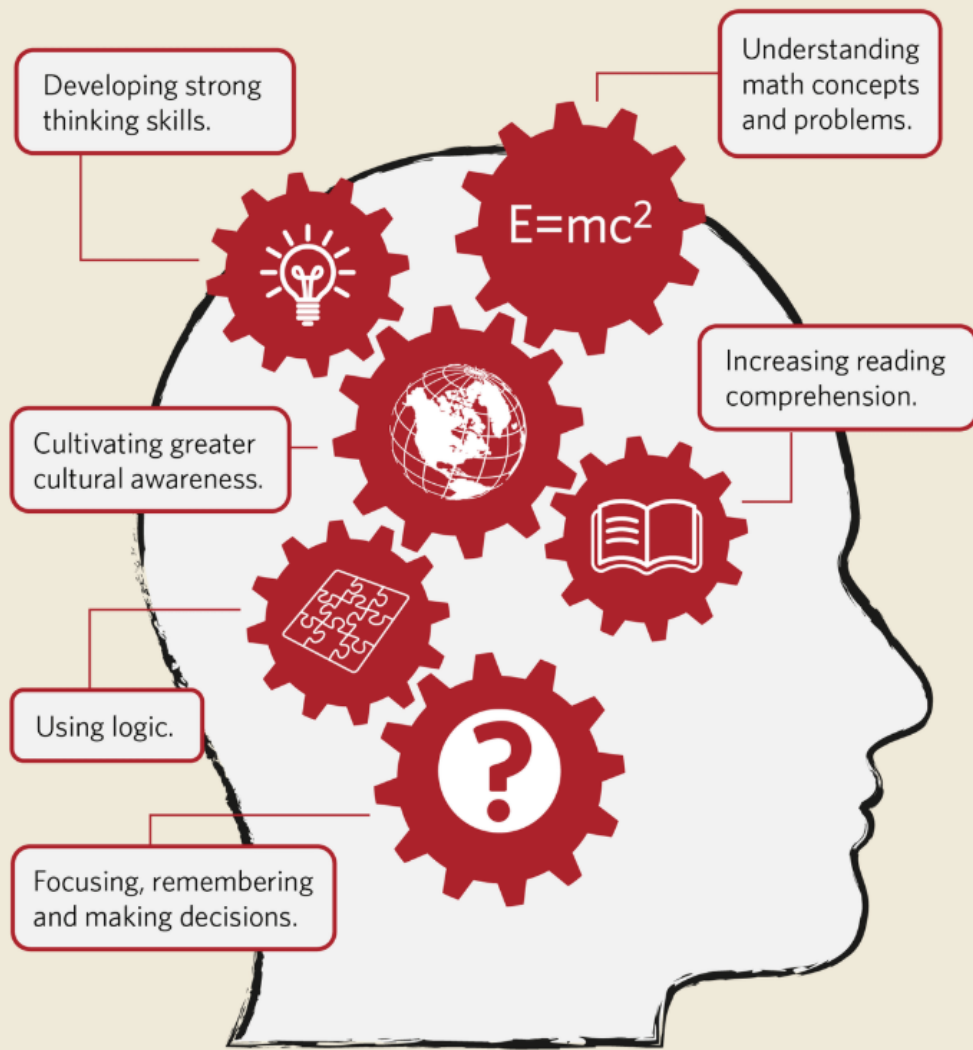
Right hemisphere



Left hemisphere

Right hemisphere

Research shows that **bilingual people** have an easier time with these key brain functions:



Mental Health

A multilingual brain is quicker, nimbler and more resistant to Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.

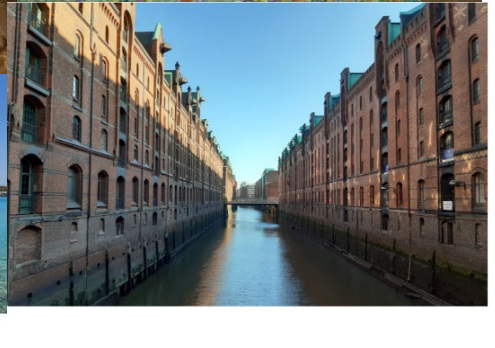


Academic Performance

Students in dual language programs consistently outperform monolingual peers on state-mandated tests, regardless of demographic.

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The bilingual brain, education and lifelong learning

Language in the Brain

Research also shows that the brains of bilingual people are more developed in areas that organize and process speech.

Wernicke's Area



Language sounds are processed in this area.

Auditory Cortex



Auditory stimuli is received and forwarded to Wernicke's Area.



Motor Cortex



This area controls the lips and mouth in actual speech.

Broca's Area



The brain organizes language for active speech in this area.

- **Process and store** relevant information.
- **Working memory** – allows learners to use newly stored information (Legault et al., 2018).
- **Data** - includes vocabulary, grammar rules, syntax, phonology & other linguistic irregularities.
- **Switch** from one language to the other. Reaction to different language inputs (Legault et al., 2018).
- **Retrieve** and organise information.

A toddler's tale

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- Greek since birth
- English at nursery but couldn't speak. Silent phase.
- Interacted with other children through play.
- Months later, communicated with peers in English.
- Students learn grammar but do not fully understand rules. Repetition ingrains the language.
- Poem every night x10 for 5 to 6 weeks. Builds habit, like song lyrics for longer poems.
- Learn sections and add symbols to support memory retention. Gradually learn the whole thing.

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- **Neuroplasticity** enables the brain to adapt to the complexities of language learning by rewiring neural pathways and forming new neural connections.
- **Synaptic plasticity** is vital in language acquisition and retention, as it enables the encoding and retrieval of language-related information.
- **Younger learners** display higher levels of neuroplasticity.

NEUROPLASTICITY

THE ABILITY OF THE BRAIN TO REORGANIZE ITSELF,
BOTH IN STRUCTURE AND HOW IT FUNCTIONS

Scientists used to believe the brain was hardwired. We used to think after childhood, you could not repair, regenerate or replace damaged brain cells. Now, we know the brain can change its structure based on how we use it, the structure of the brain and the nutrition we provide.

HOW THE BRAIN CHANGES



NEUROGENESIS

Continuous generation
of new neurons in
certain brain regions



NEW SYNAPSES

New skills and
experiences create
new neural connections



STRENGTHENED SYNAPSES

Repetition and
practice strengthens
neural connections



WEAKENED SYNAPSES

Connections in the
brain that aren't used
become weak

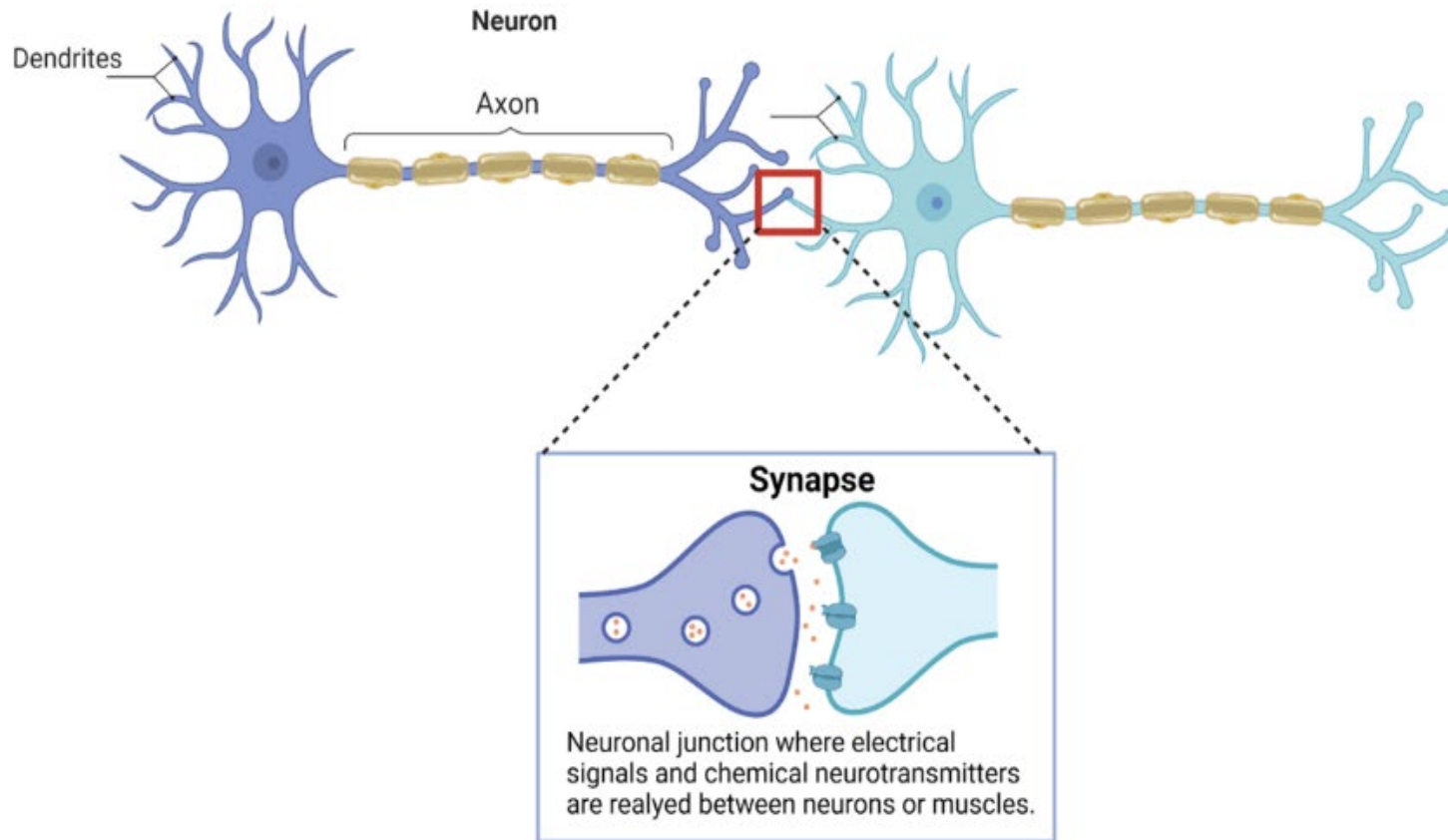
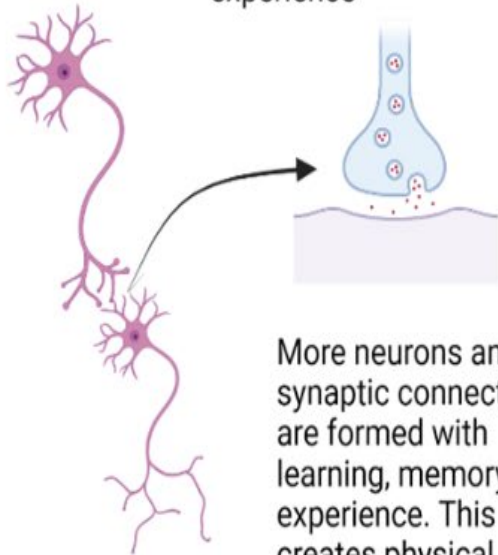


Figure 1 Structure of neuron and synapses. Image created with Biorender.com.

Structural Neuroplasticity

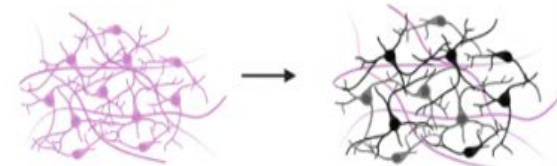
Ability of brain to physically change brain structure due to learning and experience



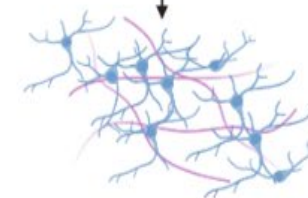
More neurons and synaptic connections are formed with learning, memory and experience. This creates physical changes in brain tissue.

Functional Neuroplasticity

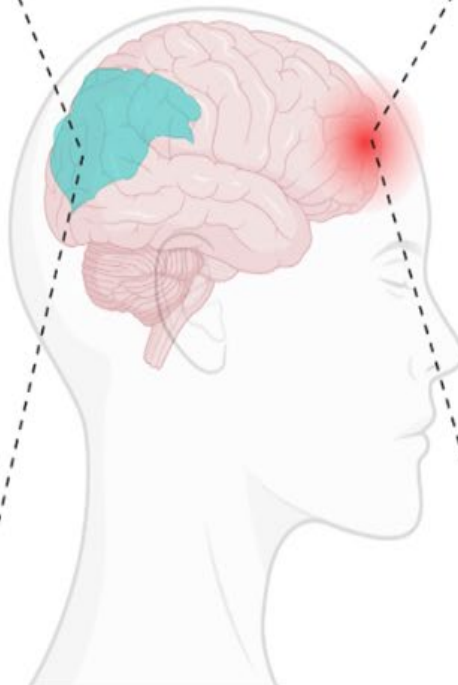
Synaptic remodeling following brain dysfunction or injury



Pre-existing neurons begin to die.



New neurons form synaptic connections over time to recover lost functions.



- **Speak English one day** and the native language the next.
- **3rd language incorporated at 10 months** using flashcards, direct communication and technology.
- **Native language at home** and English at school.
- **Create a need** to speak the language.
- **Have fun** through extracurricular CLIL activities.

- **Spend time** with other multilingual families and children.
- **Live** a multilingual lifestyle. Embrace technology.
- **Natural** part of everyday life.
- **Avoid forcing** the language. Reward active use.
- **Avoid punishments** if code mixing/switching occurs.
- **Encourage** siblings/peers to communicate with each other.

Achieving fluency

1

- Practice and challenge
- Check for accuracy

2

- Evaluate performance
- Time and speed

3

- Feedback
- Consistency

**Why respect for languages and cultures has
never been more important**

CORE PRINCIPLES OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION

**Cultural
Preservation**



**Global
Competence**



**Cognitive
Development**



GUIDING COMMITMENTS

**Language
Equity**



**Inclusive
Curriculum**



**Community
Engagement**



Good rhetoric

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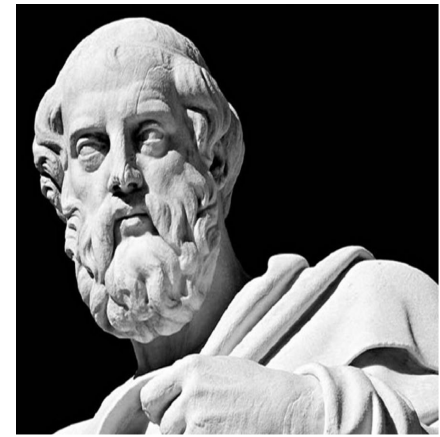
Plato defined rhetoric as a persuasive tactic used to convey logic and reason from one man to another, or to a group of peoples via:

➤ Ethos

➤ Logos

➤ Pathos

– modes of persuasion first defined by Aristotle.



Linguists as diplomatic influencers



- **Cleopatra VII** (69 BCE – 30 BCE) believed to speak 9 languages. Did not require interpreters to converse with foreign dignitaries.
- **Sir Richard Francis Burton** (1821–1890): British explorer, translator, and diplomat. Mastered 29 languages and used his skills to understand the cultures of the Middle East, Asia, and Africa.

Linguists as diplomatic influencers



- **Emil Krebs** (1867–1930): German diplomat, interpreter and polyglot. Mastered 68 languages and worked in over 100 languages. Decorated by the Chinese Emperor for his skills.
- **Ban Ki-moon**: Former UN Secretary-General from South Korea who used his proficiency in Korean, English, and French to aid global diplomatic initiatives.
- **Kofi Annan** (1938–2018): Former United Nations Secretary-General from Ghana, known for his ability to use English, French, and several African languages to foster peace.

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ΓΙΑΝΝΗΣ ΡΙΤΣΟΣ
ΕΠΙΤΑΦΙΟΣ

ΤΕΣΣΕΡΑΚΟΣΤΗ ΔΕΥΤΕΡΗ ΕΚΔΟΣΗ



ΕΚΔΟΣΕΙΣ ΚΕΔΡΟΣ



- 100 poetry collections,
 - 4 theatrical plays,
 - 9 texts (*Iconostasis of Anonymous Saints*),
 - 12 books containing translations,
 - 1 collection of essays,
- while many remained unpublished after his death.

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Γιάννης Ρίτσος

<p>1956</p> <p>1956</p>	<p>1975</p> <p>1975</p>	<p>1977</p> <p>1977</p>	<p>1979</p> <p>1979</p>	<p>1984</p> <p>1984</p>	<p>1986</p> <p>1986</p>	<p>1989</p> <p>1989</p>	<p>Βραβεύσεις & διακρίσεις</p> <p>Awards & distinctions</p>
<p>1972</p> <p>1972</p>	<p>1976</p> <p>1976</p>	<p>1977</p> <p>1977</p>	<p>1979</p> <p>1979</p>	<p>1985</p> <p>1985</p>	<p>1987</p> <p>1987</p>	<p>1989</p> <p>1989</p>	<p>Βραβεύσεις & διακρίσεις</p> <p>Awards & distinctions</p>

NATURE

PERSONIFICATION

METAPHOR

VIVID LANGUAGE - THE WHOLE THING

POLITICAL

26

ΕΠΙΤΑΦΙΟΣ

Most of this page talks of continuing his political tendencies + fighting the enemy

XX

✓ Γλυκέ μου, ἐσὺ δὲ χάθηκες, μέσα στὶς φλέβες μου εἶσαι.
Γιέ μου, στὶς φλέβες ὀλουῶν, ἔμπα βαθιὰ καὶ ζῆσε.

Δές, πλάγι μας περνοῦν πολλοί, περνοῦν καβαλλαραῖοι, — ὄλοι στητοὶ καὶ δυνατοὶ καὶ σὰν κ' ἐσένα ὠραῖοι.

Ἀνάμεσά τους, γιόκα μου, θωρῶ σε ἀναστημένο, — τὸ θῶρι σου στὸ θῶρι τους μυριοζωγραφισμένο.

Καὶ γὼ ἡ φτωχὴ καὶ γὼ ἡ λιγνή, μεγάλη μέσα σ' ὄλους, μὲ τὰ μεγάλα νύχια μου κόβω τὴ γῆ σὲ σβώλους

Καὶ τοὺς πετάω κατάμουτρα στοὺς λύκους καὶ στ' ἀγρίμια πού μοῦκαναν τῆς ὄψης σου τὸ κρούσταλλο συντρίμμα.

Κι ἀκολουθᾷς καὶ σὺ νεκρός, κι ὁ κόμπος τοῦ λυγμοῦ μας δένεται κόμπος τοῦ σκοινοῦ γιὰ τὸ λαιμὸ τοῦ ὄχτροῦ μας.

Κι ὡς τῆθελος (ὡς τῆλεγος τὰ βράδια μὲ τὸ λύχνο) ἀσκῶνω τὸ σκεβρὸ κορμί καὶ τὴ γροθιά μου δείχνω.

Κι ἀντὶς τ' ἀφταιγα στήθια μου νὰ γδέρνω, δές, βαδίζω καὶ πίσω ἀπὸ τὰ δάκρυα μου τὸν ἥλιον ἀντικρύζω.

Γιέ μου, στ' ἀδέρφια σου τραβῶ καὶ σμίγω τὴν ὀργή μου, σοὺ πῆρα τὸ ντουφέκι σου· κοιμήσου, ἐσύ, πουλί μου.

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(Θεσσαλονίκη. Μῆς τοῦ 1936. Μιά μάνα, καταμεσίς τοῦ θρόνου, μοιρολογεῖ τὸ σκοτωμένο παιδί της. Γύρω της καὶ πάνω της, βουίζουν καὶ σπάζουν τὰ κίματα τῶν διαδηλωτῶν — τῶν ἀπεργῶν καπνεργατῶν. Ἐκείνη συνεχίζει τὸ θρήνο της):

I

✓ Γιέ μου, σπλάχνο τῶν σπλάχνων μου, καρδούλα τῆς καρδιάς μου, πουλάκι τῆς φτωχειᾶς αὐλῆς, ἀνθὲ τῆς ἐρημιᾶς μου,

✓ Πῶς κλείσαν τὰ ματάκια σου καὶ δὲ θωρεῖς πού κλαίω καὶ δὲ σαλεύεις, δὲ γροικᾷς τὰ πού πικρὰ σοῦ λέω;

Γιόκα μου, ἐσὺ πού γιάτρευες κάθε παράπονό μου, πού μάντευες τί πέρναγε κάτω ἀπ' τὸ τσίνορό μου,

Τώρα δὲ μὲ παρηγορᾷς καὶ δὲ μοῦ βγάζεις ἄχνα καὶ δὲ μαντεύεις τίς πληγῆς πού τρένω μου τὰ σπλάχνα; *used 3 times*

Πουλί μου, ἐσὺ πού μοῦφερνες νεράκι στὴν παλάμη πῶς δὲ θωρεῖς πού δέρνουμαι καὶ τρέμω σὰν καλάμι;

Στὴ στράτα ἐδῶ καταμεσίς τ' ἄσπρα μαλλιά μου λύνω καὶ σοῦ σκεπάζω τῆς μορφῆς τὸ μαραμένο κρίνο. - *paradoxes to do with funerals*

Φιλῶ τὸ παγωμένο σου χειλάκι πού σωπαίνει κ' εἶναι σὰ νὰ μοῦ θύμωσε καὶ σφαλιγμένο μένει.

Δὲ μοῦ μιλεῖς κ' ἡ δόλια ἐγὼ τὸν κόρφο, δές, ἀνοίγω καὶ στὰ βυζιά πού βύζαζες τὰ νύχια, γιέ μου, μπήγω. } *paradoxes distraught*

Lots of bird references
σπλάχνα - lots of repetition
lots of...ακι - makes it sound more pathetic

Diplomacy

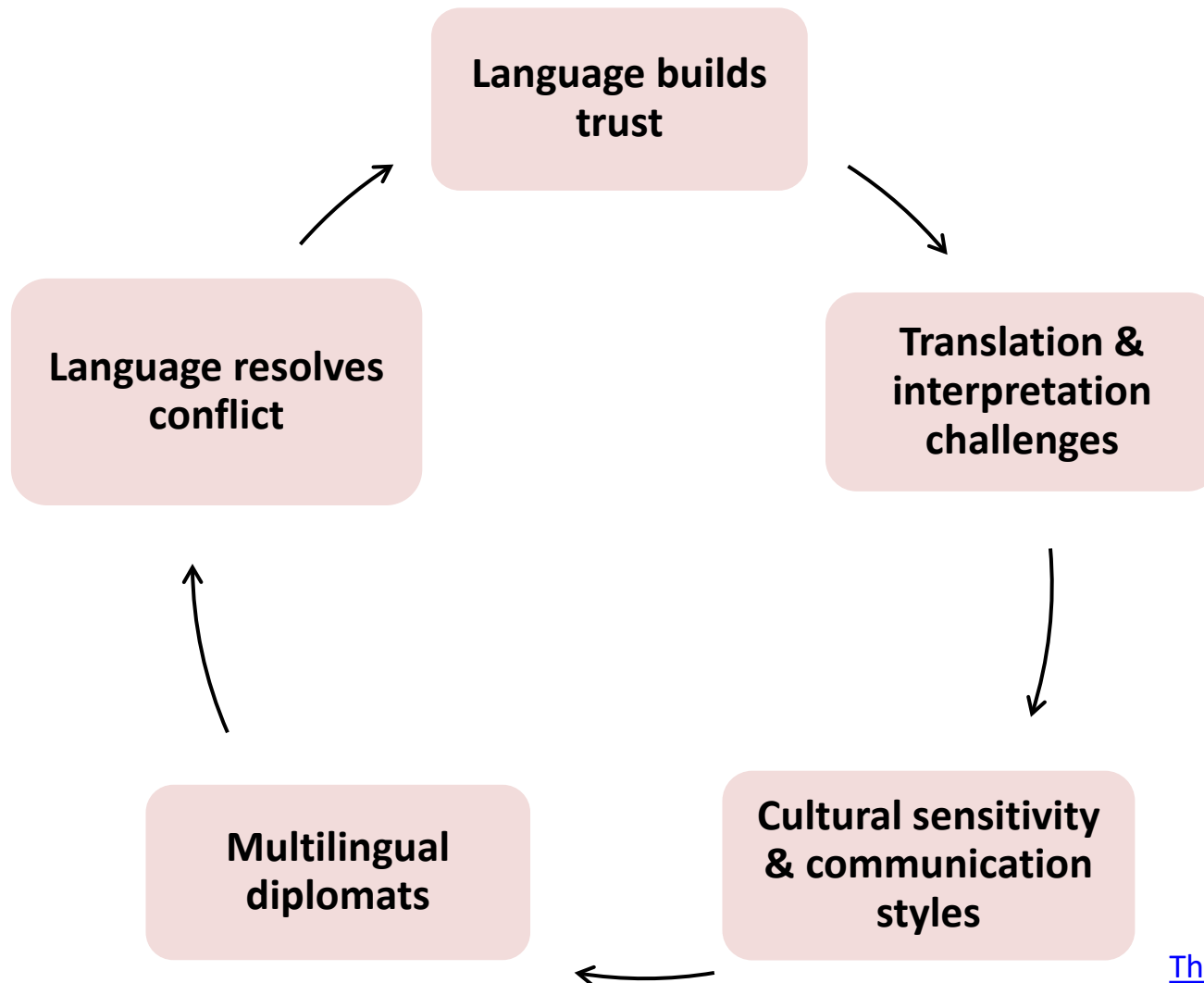
- Builds relationships
- **Fosters understanding**
- Understand cultural contexts and non verbal cues.
- **Bridges gaps between diverse nations.**
- Language allows relationships to flourish.
- **Cultural sensitivity, especially during conflict.**
- Cultural nuances to achieve common goals via multicultural conversations to communicate ideas, values, and intentions.
- **Understanding the subtleties of language critical for trust in multicultural conversations.**
- Translation includes interpreting the meaning, tone and intent behind words.

- Interpretation is not translation; it is transformation.
- Having an accent is an asset.
- Don't just learn languages; learn cultures.
- Multilingualism is a tool for justice.
- Between every language lies a choice.

Multilingual diplomacy

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Q & A

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Ευχαριστώ
Thank you
Gracias
Merci
Danke

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