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CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF LINGUISTS

The Linguist

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Shifting stories

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COURT OF JUSTICE
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Permanent open competition of the Court of Justice of the European Union seeking freelance translators for translation into English

The legal translation service is responsible for translating **legal documents** of the Court of Justice of the European Union. The service translates a wide variety of legal texts including procedural documents, opinions of Advocates General, judgments, orders, etc. It ensures the efficient running of judicial proceedings and the multilingual dissemination of the Court's decisions, giving all EU citizens access to justice and case-law at a European level, whatever their language.

Around one-third of texts are translated by external collaborators (freelance translators). These can be natural or legal persons with which the institution enters into a contract, on the basis of strict confidentiality rules, and with which it maintains close working relations. Translations are expected to be of very high quality and freelancers receive appropriate support and assistance from the Court's translation service in order to achieve this objective.

The English translation unit translates legal texts into English and works with numerous freelance translators who are selected by means of contract notices. The Court has an ongoing procurement procedure to select freelance translators for translation into English. Selection will be on the basis of translation tests (which are completed remotely) and new contracts will have a duration of up to four years.

Interested translators can familiarise themselves with the rules and procedure by consulting the Court's website (https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/jcms/p1_268713/en/). Under the current tender, the English translation unit is seeking translators working into English from the following languages: **Czech** (CS), **Danish** (DA), **German** (DE), **Greek** (EL), **Spanish** (ES), **French** (FR), **Irish** (GA), **Italian** (IT), **Lithuanian** (LT), **Dutch** (NL), **Polish** (PL) and **Swedish** (SV). Translators may apply for one or for several language combinations (lots). The Court publishes new tenders at periodic intervals, at which point new lots may be introduced. **Please visit our website regularly for updates on the launch of new procedures.**

Requests for further information can be sent to: **FreelanceTenderEN@curia.europa.eu**

The Linguist

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News & editorial

Features

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Opinion & comment

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S NOTES

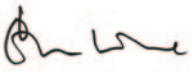
As the summer gives way to autumn, a new academic year begins for those of school and university age in many parts of the world. The formal study of languages continues to decline in the UK. We saw this in a recent report from the Higher Education Policy Institute (Hepi), which I wrote about in the CIOL Voices section of our website (https://cutt.ly/HepiReport). Less than 3% of A levels taken in 2024 were for languages and language teacher recruitment is well below UK government targets. The uptake of language degrees has continued to decline each year since 2020, and since 2014, 17 UK universities have lost their modern languages degrees. A sad state of affairs.

But of course, there is another side to this story. The English language, which all CIOL members share, continues to be a global lingua franca. It is one of the main reasons linguists in the UK and around the world choose to join our community – they are deeply and rightly proud of their excellent English. More and more CIOL members have English as a 'language of qualification', including over 70% of new members in the last two years. This is one of the reasons we were keen to develop CIOL Certified English, to enable more professional-level speakers to showcase their skills to employers, as well as to demonstrate them for CIOL membership purposes.

The balancing element is that many English speakers who live in the UK are not being adequately recognised for their home, heritage and community languages. This includes hundreds of thousands of people with good Arabic, Polish, Punjabi, Romanian, Urdu and many more languages. CIOL's Language Level Assessments could help here. These are for adults who want to prove their standard of speaking skills in a wide range of languages, including Arabic (MSA), Bengali, Cantonese, French, German, Italian, Mandarin, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish, Turkish and Urdu.

Mapped against the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and CIOL's own Language Level Frameworks both Certified English and Language Level Assessments enable people to better understand and demonstrate their current level of spoken fluency. We all know that a big part of speaking languages is having enough confidence to do so; knowing your language level can help unlock that confidence and, with it, greater career and life opportunities. It also helps employers to understand to what degree a person may be able to take on additional roles, such as meeting and greeting, presenting, public speaking, negotiation, dealing with stakeholders and clients, and international liaison.

There is huge opportunity here for budding linguists. So while the start of a new academic year rightly occupies our thoughts, it is important to recognise what we all share, and sometimes take for granted, in the value of excellent spoken English, as well as the many home, heritage and community languages that anglophone education systems fail to nurture. I hope CIOL can help more people find their language level and grow their confidence in this way.



John Worne

EDITOR'S LETTER

One of the things I love about my job is that I get to interview people whose language skills have been instrumental in their (often adventurous) careers. Sometimes it's a recognisable face; often it's someone who's quietly getting on with innovative work behind the scenes. For this issue, CIOL member Fateemah Yoosuf-Ibraheem told me about her work to make education more inclusive for disabled people, and to address some of the gaps in language service provision (p.27).

When discussing their language learning experiences, interviewees often say that speaking another language feels like a form of acting, especially at the start, when it helps to pretend you are already a speaker. Research has, unsurprisingly, found positive outcomes in the use of drama in language teaching. I spoke to LegalAliens Theatre founder Lara Parmiani about the company's work in this area, both with school children and with refugees and migrant actors (p.20).

Elsewhere in this issue, we have articles looking at the challenges of translating *The Canterbury Tales* and other historical fiction into French (p.9) and Arabic short stories into English (p.18). It is interesting to see similar challenges when approaching fiction from a very different time period on the one hand, and from a very different literary tradition and language on the other.

Our interpreting stories present more of a contrast, highlighting differences in expected conduct in legal settings, where interpreters are strong-armed to break ethical codes (p.16), and in healthcare, where breaking aspects of the current codes might be fitting (p.22).

Miranda Moore

Share your views: linguist.editor@ciol.org.uk

News *The latest from the languages world*

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Languages future

Two new education reports could lead to positive change for languages, says Philip Harding-Esch

The publication of Hepi's report spelling out the "catastrophic decline in formal language learning" comes at a significant moment for language education policy in England. Hepi (the Higher Education Policy Institute) paints a sobering picture of the state of language skills in the country, against a background of course closures in universities and sixth forms. This has led to 'cold spots' in HE provision in large parts of the UK and threatened the very existence of languages as a subject at A level and even at GCSE for many young people.

Meanwhile, the Curriculum and Assessment Review is putting the finishing touches to its final recommendations to government which will define the place of languages on the formal curriculum in the coming years. Many of the recommendations distil priorities that are already well understood by policymakers and stakeholders. For example, the shocking imbalance in take-up between affluent and deprived areas has been growing over many years, and was the main finding of this year's Language Trends annual survey of schools.

The attention of such an influential think tank as Hepi is welcome, grabbing headlines and allowing stakeholders like the Russell Group to get their voices heard. It is also encouraging to see that there are pathways to make some of the recommendations a reality. For example, the advice to revitalise language hubs will be reflected this autumn when the DfE-funded National Consortium for Languages Education publishes its national online CPD offer for language teachers, facilitated by regional schools-led networks.

There are live policy discussions across government departments on qualification pathways, cross-departmental coordination of language policy, teacher recruitment, nurturing multilingualism and more. The problem is translating this into action. Some challenges are evolving so fast it is hard for policy to keep up. Universities can implement closures within weeks. In the case of teacher recruitment, international relocation payments may not be enough when the biggest emerging challenge appears to be visa costs and eligibility rules.

Progress is also hampered by the slow pace of system change. For instance, the long-promised introduction of the British Sign Language (BSL) GCSE has been delayed again and is now expected in 2028 at the earliest.

The future of languages as a subject is likely to be clearer after the publication of the Curriculum and Assessment Review, which will define the relative urgency of the priorities set out by the Hepi report. It is worth sharing those findings widely as there is no substitute for public awareness (https://cutt.ly/TrDBSyB5).

What the papers say…

The Guardian

The Big Idea: Could the English language die?, 11/5/25

The Egyptian language survived the arrival of the Greeks, the Romans and Christianity, but not that of Arabic and Islam in the seventh century AD. No one quite knows why… Even if we can't predict *how* English will change, we can be sure that it will, and that not even the world's first – and for now, only – global language is immune from extinction. Both Latin and Egyptian were spoken for more than 2,000 years; English has been going strong for about 1,500.

B24/7

New Festival of Translated Literature for Bristol, 10/2/25

'Translated By, Bristol' is… set to include in-depth conversations with translators, conversations between renowned authors and their translators, and discussions of the translation/publishing process… Organisers are enthused about the opportunity afforded by this inaugural event, which is underpinned by a clear mission "to acknowledge the role and contribution of translators across the world".

BBC NEWS

Rare Welsh Bible from 1588 Displayed for First Time, 16/6/25

The book was translated in the year of the Spanish Armada – when Elizabeth I was monarch – by Bishop William Morgan as part of an effort to bring scriptures to people in languages they understood… The Right Rev Dorrien Davies, the Bishop of St Davids, said: "It is a special treasure of the Welsh language and we are honoured to have it in St Davids Cathedral."

News

Signs of change?

Are there reasons to be cheerful about the future for language skills in the UK? We often read about low uptake in schools, university closures and the seemingly rampant adoption of AI language tools with little regard for human mediation, but there is evidence that decision makers are having second thoughts about this direction of travel.

In higher education (HE), the British Academy published a new report reevaluating the importance of multilingualism for the scope and impact of UK research across all disciplines. Although there has been an acceleration of university course closures in recent years, with the latest announcements concerning Bangor University and Nottingham University Language Centre, similar proposals are being reappraised. Cardiff University partially rolled back plans to close its language department. And Aberdeen University conducted a review into its plans to close languages, which were also partially reversed, and found the plans to be 'rushed'.

In the schools sector, it was significant that the government halted plans to scrap the Mandarin Excellence Programme in schools, which has funded intense study of Mandarin for thousands of state school pupils since 2016. This came following the direct intervention of the Foreign Secretary David Lammy, who explained that Mandarin was "hugely important to invest in at this time" for national security reasons.

As for AI, there is tangible evidence that stakeholders are beginning to understand the limitations. NHS England has just issued guidance on the risks of using AI language services, and the TUC (Trades Union Congress) has commissioned a report on the impact of AI on those who speak a minority language. It is good to see sector leadership beginning to understand the complexities surrounding the use of AI, which points to a future where the technology is deployed for productivity gains but the risks that come with it are understood and managed.

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Afghan interpreters data breach

A major Ministry of Defence data breach, which revealed the details of nearly 19,000 Afghans who worked with the British forces, became public knowledge in July. The announcement had terrible consequences for Afghan interpreters and their families still in Afghanistan, as the evacuation routes open to them were closed at the same time.

The accidental leak, which happened in 2022, had been subject to a super-injunction. In 2024, the government established a secret Afghanistan Response Route to bring some of the affected people to the UK. This has now been dissolved, along with another relocation scheme, despite an estimated 80,000 people remaining at increased risk in Afghanistan.

In the media

PHILIP HARDING-ESCH

Two major reports this summer brought the challenges facing the study of languages into the headlines. The British Council's annual Language Trends report indicated a deepening divide between the state and private sectors when it comes to uptake, and showed that Spanish had overtaken French at GCSE for the first time. While a report by Hepi on the decline in language study was covered widely, including on Radio 4's *Today* programme.

SchoolsWeek featured a report from FFT Datalab which found that languages are consistently graded more harshly than other subjects. This added to concerns that severe and unpredictable grading at GCSE and A level is putting pupils off.

Northern Ireland hit the headlines for all the wrong reasons, as an official review found that the time its pupils spend learning languages is "the shortest in Europe". A more positive regional development saw Sheffield declared a City of Languages. It joins eight other UK cities in what is a growing grassroots movement to promote multilingualism and language learning through partnerships with city councils, universities, schools and community groups.

The BBC reported a significant milestone in Scotland, as MPs unanimously voted in the Scottish Languages Bill, establishing Gaelic and Scots as official languages. In the US, a row broke out as US envoy Steve Witkoff, tasked with brokering an end to war in Ukraine, was accused of breaking protocol on a visit to Russia. *The Telegraph* printed allegations that he had used Kremlin interpreters instead of his own.

In language industry news, *Slator* published research showing a majority (55%) of interpreters are now using AI tools more often, although this still lags behind translators at 76%. Taking the AI biscuit, leading Chinese tech giant Baidu filed a patent for a system that will use AI to translate animal sounds into human words. What is your pet saying, indeed?

Philip Harding-Esch is a freelance languages project manager and consultant.

Inside Parliament

The cross-party group had two key meetings this summer, considering AI in public services and the curriculum review. Philip Harding-Esch reports

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Modern Languages held two important meetings this summer. On 23 June, it revisited the issue of AI translation in public services, specifically the NHS and social care, but extending to immigration and asylum, and the criminal justice system. There were presentations from CIOL's John Worne and Dom Hebblethwaite, Dr Lucas Nunes Vieira of the University of Bristol, Dr Stephen Hibbs of the Wolfson Institute of Population Health at Queen Mary University of London, and Professor Federico Federici of UCL's Centre for Translation Studies.

CIOL has commissioned research from Dr Nunes Vieira looking at how AI is being deployed in healthcare settings. Dr Hibbs and Dr Federici shared their own experiences of the high stakes involved when using AI translation in critical settings. Examples included a patient whose misunderstanding of their post-operative treatment plan led to their organ transplant failing; and incorrect numbers being given for dosages and other data.

The discussion showed that understanding at decision-making level has been evolving

AT WESTMINSTER

St Stephen's Hall in the House of Commons

and that leaders are now better placed to manage AI in a risk-balanced way. This involves recognising that the use of powerful, universally available tools can bring huge benefits, but only if risk is properly managed. For example, frontline staff need to be empowered to make key decisions, and attention must be paid to specific 'anchor points' (such as standardised documents) where gold-standard translation should always be recommended.

Representatives from several government departments attended the meeting. They demonstrated that work on understanding these issues is advancing at pace across the civil service.

In July, the APPG held a special session to consider the sector response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review's interim report. Its final report, due this autumn, is expected to define the place of languages in the school curriculum and, ultimately, its long-term survival as a core subject.

The main concerns of the sector were explored and clear policy asks were identified. This was counterbalanced by some powerful examples of success within the current system, not least Hounslow's Languages for All project in which the local council, schools, colleges and Royal Holloway University of London collaborate to provide promising students with a supported languages pathway to A level and beyond. A level entries have already doubled. This echoes the success of Hackney's Spanish First initiative, which has seen a similar jump in entries at GCSE and A level.

This adds to the evidence that while structural and systemic challenges hold languages back, innovation and collaboration can tap into students' inherent enthusiasm for languages.

TL Philip Harding-Esch works on behalf of CIOL to provide the secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages.

Equality at sea

Norway's consultation on changes to its maritime language offers insights into the practical complications of going gender-neutral

ANDREW DRAPER

The Norwegian Maritime Authority (NMA) has proposed a change of the language and titles it uses to make them gender neutral, e.g. removing *mann* from terms like *mann-over-bord-situasjon* ('man overboard situation') and replacing it with *person*. The consultation, which closed in March, drew a wide range of comments, mostly supportive, though some expressed concern over choice of terms and loss of maritime identity. At time of printing, the NMA was still considering the responses.

The Language Council of Norway, an expert government body aimed at strengthening the Norwegian language and enhancing linguistic diversity, argued that while it is fine to come up with gender-neutral terms for titles, such as *sjømann* ('seaman') and *styrmann* ('officer'), it is not necessary otherwise. It warned against excessively long new terms.

"Words depicting a boat, a technical installation or organisation do not relate to anything with a biological sex," it said in its submission. "Language as a system is by nature conservative and has many traits of earlier times' language use. It is to be expected that expressions which can be regarded as denoting gender will live on for a long time. This is not something that can be avoided by changing regulation texts."

The maritime trade unions all expressed support for the idea of change. Many favoured terms that are in line with international terminology in maritime conventions, especially when it comes to safety and competence, and stressed that change should not introduce ambiguity.

One training ship for female cadets conducted a survey which found that the majority do not support changing traditional terms. Many of the women feel a sense of status from being able to call themselves *styrmann* or *motormann* ('motorman'), and do not see a problem that the title contains the word *mann*. "It was also pointed out that the changes will not necessarily contribute to strengthening the position of women in the industry, but might lead to irritation and resistance among those already working there," said Gunvor Amalie Bruvik, a cadet on the ship.

The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud agreed that the shipping industry would not become more neutral just because titles change, though they pointed out that language change is a significant signal. This was echoed by the Norwegian Maritime Officers' Association (NSOF), which said more inclusive and attractive workplaces for women are key – and that includes changed attitudes, legal entitlements and PPE that fits women.

Kurt Inge Angell, leader of the Norwegian Seafarers' Union (NSU), outlined why language choice is so important: "Language is power and we should never forget that. Titles in our maritime industry are therefore not incidental. They often say more about the industry, both now and in the past, than we initially realise. The maritime industry has historically been very male-dominated and that is the reason why many titles have naturally been something with 'man' in them. But do we also want that to shape the maritime Norway of the future?" The union is fully behind the development, and the battle against discrimination, bullying and harassment, but unsure about altering some terms, for example changing *sjømann* to the non-specific *arbeidstaker* ('employee').

Similarly, despite its overall support, the NSOF objected to selected terms. It does not agree with replacing *overstyrmann* ('chief officer') with *sjefdekksoffiser* ('chief deck officer') as the current Norwegian title is associated with identity and position, or replacing *MOB* (from *mann-over-bord*), which appears in software menu functions and on console buttons. As *MOB* exists on hardware and software, it makes the task of changing it more complicated.

TL Andrew Draper MCIL is an editor, journalist and translator from Scandinavian languages into English.

*Trans*versing *time*

Tamer Osman's tips for bridging historical and cultural gaps when translating historical fiction like *The Canterbury Tales*

The act of translating a text from a distant historical epoch is fundamentally an encounter with alterity. A profound temporal dissonance permeates the process, arising from the inevitable evolution of language, radical shifts in socio-cultural norms, and the loss of shared contextual knowledge.[1] The translator's task is akin to facilitating a conversation across centuries, fraught with the perils of misinterpretation and oversimplification.

The ethical imperative is paramount: "To translate history is to converse with ghosts – respectfully, but without ventriloquism."[2] We must render the voice of the past audible to the present without distorting it to conform to contemporary sensibilities. When it comes to a text as temporally distant as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400), the translator is faced with language that is drastically different to Modern English.

There is significant semantic drift (in Middle English 'nice' implies foolishness), while some grammatical structures and lexical items have vanished altogether (e.g. 'eke' meaning 'also'). One example is the distinct second-person pronouns for informal singular ('thou/thee/thy') and plural/formal singular ('ye/you/your'). A pronoun shift can signal social tension, such as in 'The Miller's Tale' when Alison switches from intimate 'thee' to formal 'you' when rejecting Nicholas: "'Why, lat be!' quod she… 'Do wey youre handes, for youre curteisye!'" It can also convey satire (the overly formal 'thee' for

POETIC GREATS
Ford Madox Brown's 'The Seeds and Fruits of English Poetry' (1845) depicts renowned British poets with Chaucer in the middle

flawed characters such as the Doctor); intimacy or romance (the Squire's use of 'you'); and aggression or conflict (the Wife of Bath's use of 'you'). For French translators, this poses little difficulty, since the distinction is mirrored in the *tu/vous* system of both Old French and Modern French.

Phonological and prosodic elements crucial for poetry add another layer of complexity, often sacrificed in prose translations. Beyond language lie vast differences in worldview, social structures and material realities. Chaucer's depictions of pilgrimage, feudal hierarchies and medieval religious practices presuppose a cultural literacy largely inaccessible to the modern reader. Translating the satire directed at the Monk or the Pardoner requires conveying not just the words, but the specific social and religious critique inherent in 14th-century England.

Chaucer uses multiple techniques to expose the venality, worldliness and doctrinal corruption festering within certain echelons of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. He mocks individuals who flagrantly violate their sacred vows (the Monk's pursuit of fine living and hunting); criticises a church structure where offices like that of the Pardoner can be purchased; highlights the susceptibility of the populace to manipulation by charismatic yet fraudulent religious figures; and utilises contemporary details (hunting practices, specific relics) that would have resonated with the growing anti-clerical sentiment of the time.

The translator must constantly negotiate a cognitive tightrope. On one side lies 'hermeneutic fidelity': the commitment to accurately represent the source meaning, intent and historical situatedness. On the other lies 'readerly accessibility': the need to render the text comprehensible and engaging for the target audience.[3] This is not a binary choice but a spectrum demanding constant, informed judgement. How much historical context is essential for understanding? When does explanation impede narrative flow? How is irony, humour or polemical force preserved without resorting to contemporary analogues that distort the original effect?

Preserving irony across centuries

André Crépin's seminal translation *Les Contes de Canterbury* (2000) exemplifies the struggle to preserve Chaucer's masterful blend of realism, satire and poetic virtuosity for a modern Francophone audience.[4] He often opts for slightly archaic or regionally tinged vocabulary to echo the historical flavour (*goupil* for 'fox' rather than the standard *renard*), yet avoids constructions that would feel artificially antique or obscure.

His syntactic choices aim for clarity while attempting to retain some rhythmic complexity reminiscent of Middle English verse forms. The semantic shifts are particularly volatile: translating the Wife of Bath's assertion that "Experience, though noon auctoritee/ Were in this world, is right ynogh for me" requires conveying both the literal meaning and the subversive challenge to male scholarly authority ('auctoritee'). Crépin navigates this by finding French equivalents that maintain the defiant tone: *"L'expérience, sans qu'aucune autorité/ N'existe au monde, me suffit amplement."* (Modern English: 'Experience – though no authority whatsoever existed in the world – suffices abundantly for me').

Chaucer's irony, often subtle and dependent on character juxtaposition and understatement, is paramount. The description of the Prioress's fastidious table manners ("At mete wel ytaught was she with alle") and her tender-heartedness towards mice contrasts sharply with her lack of compassion elsewhere. The translator must render these details without over-emphasis (which kills the irony) or under-emphasis (which loses it entirely).

Crépin relies on precise diction and the cumulative effect of description, trusting the modern reader to perceive the implied

(RE)CREATING CHARACTER
Ezra Winter's 'Canterbury Tales' mural (1939)

critique while avoiding anachronistic interpretations of medieval piety. Consider his translation of "And whan he rood, men myghte his brydel heere/ Gynglen in a whistlynge wynd als cleere/ And eek as loude as dooth the chapel belle" as "*Et quand il chevauchait, on entendait son frein/ Tinter dans le vent sifflant, aussi distinct/ Et aussi fort que la cloche de la chapelle*" (Modern English: 'And when he rode, one might hear his bridle/ Jingle in a whistling wind as clear/ And also as loud as does the chapel bell').

Translating 'rood' as *chevauchait*, which in medieval contexts often implied riding for martial or hunting expeditions rather than mere travel, subtly evokes the Monk's preferred secular pursuits, contrasting with the stillness of monastic life. This is reinforced by the use of *tinter* (for 'gynglen'), which typically describes the sound of small bells (like those on a bridle) and is a more specific choice than the generic *faire du bruit* ('make noise'). Its precision immediately conjures the quality of the sound – bright, conspicuous, even festive. The fulcrum of the implied critique comes with the simile 'as loude as dooth the chapel belle', which Crépin renders with precise equivalence. The cumulative effect ensures the message is unambiguous for target readers.

Immersion in the source era

Crépin's work demonstrates how immersion in the source culture allows the original artistry and social commentary to emerge afresh. He engages deeply with Middle English's phonological evolution, semantic shifts and syntactic structures to understand how the connotations of words shifted across registers (courtly, religious, colloquial) and contexts. For instance, translating 'pitee' requires knowing its range from 'divine mercy' to 'courtly compassion' to 'sexual vulnerability'.

Immersion in medieval culture involves understanding the expectations and subversions of its genres: romance, *fabliaux* (i.e. humorous metrical tales), saint's life, sermon. The translator must engage with the period's worldview – the intricacies of church hierarchy, feudal obligations, guild regulations, legal systems, astrological influences, and concepts of sin, grace and fortune.

Understanding the material culture is equally important – the significance of specific fabrics (the Wife's 'coverchiefs ful fyne'), heraldic symbols (the Knight's 'fustian' tunic), food (the Franklin's 'snowed' meat) and architectural details (the Carpenter's house). This knowledge informs precise choices (e.g. the correct term for a garment or weapon) that evoke the tangible reality of 1380s England.

Chaucer's work is saturated with allusions: biblical, classical (Ovid, Boethius), continental (Dante, Boccaccio) and contemporary (Gower, *Le Roman de la Rose*). Identifying these intertexts and recognising the deliberate deployment of register is vital. Crépin replicates these nuances by identifying equivalent sociolects, ensuring the Miller's coarse vernacular or the Pardoner's oily rhetoric lands with period-appropriate force.

Footnotes vs embedded explanations

The perennial methodological debate in historical translation revolves around how best to provide essential contextual anchoring: explicatory footnotes (or endnotes) or embedded explanations within the text itself. Each approach carries distinct advantages and perils, often dictating the reading experience.

Proponents of embedded explanations prioritise readability and engagement, not least for narrative texts or works targeting broader audiences. They argue that constant flipping to footnotes disrupts the reading experience. Embedding context subtly – through carefully chosen synonyms, slight expansions or appositives – can create a smoother flow. Adaptations of *Beowulf* for young adults often employ this strategy. Translating 'Hrothgar' as 'Hrothgar, the Danish king' clarifies his role without requiring a note. Rendering 'mead-hall Heorot' as 'the great timbered hall Heorot, where warriors feasted on mead' integrates essential cultural context.[5]

The choice is rarely absolute but depends on the text's nature, the translation's primary purpose and the target audience's expected knowledge. A hybrid approach, using footnotes for substantial contextual or interpretive issues, and minimal, judicious embedding for immediate comprehension, is often the most effective strategy. Embedded explanation is Crépin's dominant method, but he uses footnotes selectively to provide citations, elaborate on tangential points and offer additional scholarly commentary.

An ethical approach

Mitigating the risks of cultural bias and of imposing modern concepts demands a principled approach grounded in contextual transparency, cultural humility and audience awareness. The translator must acknowledge the historical and cultural context of the source text, resisting the urge to 'clean up' language or viewpoints now deemed objectionable.

Translating 'The Prioress's Tale' means recognising its antisemitic tropes, rooted in Marian legends, and conveying problematic ideology without sanitising it. Ethical practice involves rendering such terms accurately, often accompanied by paratextual material that critically examines their historical usage.[6]

Cultural humility entails recognising the inherent limitations of one's own cultural perspective and doing rigorous research to grasp the nuances of social structures, belief systems and aesthetic values that shaped the original text. It also means accepting that some concepts may resist perfect translation and that the translator's understanding is always partial and situated.

Ethical translation necessitates conscious consideration of the target audience. Is the translation intended for scholars, students or the general public? What prior knowledge can be assumed? At the same time, this should never justify distortion or the suppression of uncomfortable historical truths.

The translation of historical texts is a complex act of temporal and cultural mediation – a form of intellectual time travel. The translator functions as a 'chrononaut', tasked with reanimating history. In an era characterised by accelerating cultural change and fragmented historical memory, the translator's craft becomes an indispensable act of preservation and reclamation. Historical texts are not inert relics; they are repositories of human experience, wisdom, folly and aspiration. When rendered inaccessible by the passage of time, a vital conduit to our collective past is severed.

Mastering the delicate interplay of past and present is to wield immense power to ensure the lessons and legacies of the past remain potent forces in the present. Embrace this noble charge and ensure the ghosts of history speak not in whispers lost to the wind, but in voices that continue to shape the future.

Notes

1 Venuti, L (1995) *The Translator's Invisibility: A history of translation*, Routledge

2 Stagg, A et al (2013) 'Academic Style with Substance: A collaborative screencasting project to support referencing skills'. In *The Electronic Library*, 31(4), 452-464

3 Berman, A (1992) *The Experience of the Foreign: Culture and translation in Romantic Germany* (Heyvaert, S, trans.), SUNY Press

4 Crépin, A (2000) *Geoffrey Chaucer: Les Contes de Canterbury*, Gallimard

5 Drout, MDC (2006) *Beowulf and the Critics by J.R.R. Tolkien*, Arizona State University

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Making it official

Jim O'Driscoll argues that the decision to make English the US's official language is the wrong solution to a non-existent problem

Since he became president of the USA again this January, Donald Trump has been signing lots of Executive Orders. These are decrees he is allowed to issue without first getting the approval of the country's legislature (Congress). One of these (Executive Order 14224) designates English as the US's official language. This is the first time in the country's 250-year history that any language has been accorded such a status.

What, you may ask, does this mean? English is already the main language of the US. Why did Trump bother? Was he just trying to bring the country into line with the rest of the world? Most countries have official languages specified in their constitutions or laws. But neither the US's original constitution nor its subsequent 27 amendments make any mention of a particular language or languages.

Why this omission? Perhaps it is partly the Anglo-American tendency to view languages as 'natural' things, interference in which could be regarded as an infringement on liberty. (Britain and Australia also have no designated official languages.) But more likely it is due to the country's history. When its Founding Fathers got together to draft a constitution for their new country, the English language was the most practical choice for their proceedings and documents. But it certainly wasn't the only language around.

100 years previously, Manhattan Island alone had been home to users of more than 20 different languages. In the colonies of New York and Pennsylvania, copies of the draft constitution were also distributed in German and Dutch, so as to ensure full participation in discussion of its details. English was also the language of the oppressor whose yoke they were throwing off (Britain), so to give it any kind of official status, still less a preeminent one, would have seemed wrong.

The US's immigrant history during the ensuing 19th and 20th centuries continued to militate against fixing on an official language. To do so would have been both divisive and impractical. In fact, several of the new states that joined the Union in that period published their own constitutions in more than one language. Some comprised territories in which Spanish, not to mention Native American languages, had been spoken long before anybody had heard a word of English there.

In the present century, the country continues to be vibrantly multilingual. There are still more than 100 Native American languages in use. New York City is now home to speakers of an estimated 800 languages. More than a fifth of the population currently uses languages other than English at home.

However, there is a feeling among many that all this multilingualism is divisive and inefficient. For several decades now, a number of organisations, chief among them US English, have been lobbying for English to be made the sole official language of the Union. Until 1 March this year, their efforts had been successful only at state level, with 32 of the 50 states designating English as official. Trump's Order means they have now largely achieved their aim (although, ideally, they want an amendment to the federal constitution).

The argument is that a single official language is needed for national unity. Here is how the Order explains its motivation: "The United States is strengthened by a citizenry that can freely engage and exchange ideas in one shared language… a policy of encouraging the learning and adopting of our national language will… empower new citizens to achieve the American dream. Speaking English not only opens doors economically, but it also helps newcomers engage in their communities, participate in national traditions, and give back to our society."

Well, yes. Obviously, life is more efficient and cohesive when people understand each other. And for anybody who wants to get on in life in the US, it makes sense to become proficient in the country's dominant language. But the overwhelming majority can understand each other already. English has long been the country's de facto official language. So, why proclaim it official now? We might presume the Order is intended to help the 8% of the population with limited English proficiency to learn it better. That is, after all, more than 20 million people.

The Order asserts: "Establishing English as the official language will not only streamline communication but also reinforce shared national values, and create a more cohesive and efficient society." No, it won't. Merely decreeing that a particular language is the official one won't make people magically able to understand it. What is to be done to help those 20+ million people? Nothing. In fact, even less than before. The only substantive element in the Order is to revoke an earlier one from the Clinton era that required government agencies in receipt of federal funding to provide assistance to those with limited ability in English (e.g. interpreting, translation, signage, multilingual documents).

The new Order does not actually prohibit federal agencies from offering services in other languages (to do so would probably contravene aspects of the constitution); it only relieves them of the obligation to do so. However, several federal agencies have already been required to alter their website texts regarding matters of diversity and inclusion. There is going to be pressure on these agencies to withdraw their language services too, and it would be popular with those who see the current provision as a waste of money. Individual state bodies may find themselves pressured to follow suit.

The effects could be disastrous. For people with limited English ability, things like school registration, driver's licence applications, testifying in court, reporting crimes, access to healthcare services, access to information in emergency situations and voting registration would become more difficult, even impossible.

These people would (to use the words of the Order) "engage in their communities" and "participate in national traditions" *less* than they do now. The only communities in which they would be able to participate would be ghettoised ones. In this way, the withdrawal of these services would have the opposite effect to the unifying one purportedly intended.

It is to be hoped, therefore, that the Order turns out to have only a symbolic effect. In California, for example, which adopted official English in 1986, it is still possible to take your driving test in any of 32 different languages. But even in this best case scenario, the Order will still have socially divisive effects. It means that people whose social status in most cases is already low are positioned even lower. They no longer have the right to assistance with participation in everyday public life; instead, they have become supplicants for this assistance, dependent on the grace and favour of the agencies who (might) provide it.

The withdrawal of these services would have the opposite effect to the unifying one purportedly intended

So, we return to the question: why did Trump bother with the Order? The answer, sadly, is that it chimes with his anti-immigrant agenda. In a speech earlier this year, he derided immigrants who speak "languages that nobody has ever heard of", adding that "it's a horrible thing". The Order panders to a section of the anglophone American population who feel threatened, even offended, when they see or hear other languages around them. Some feel especially phobic about Spanish, which is used at home by around 14% of the population.

In a presidential candidates' debate in 2015 Trump asserted: "This is a country where we speak English, not Spanish." To oppose the two languages in this way is indicative of a fundamental misconception about language and languages. Linguistic ability is not a matter of either/or. Around 50 million people in the US speak both English and Spanish well.

Unfortunately, though, this monolingualist ideology – the assumption that proficiency in language X is an obstacle to proficiency in language Y – is quite widespread throughout the anglophone world. It is a belief that flies in the face of reality. What's more, research has consistently found that plurilingual ability is good both for individuals themselves and for society.

In this political context, Trump's assertion can be seen as a declaration that Americans *should* not speak Spanish. It is here that the truly insidious nature of his Order lies. Its text encourages the 'adopting' of English which, given the context, can be interpreted as code for giving up your own language. That is certainly how some people in authority have seen it. They take the monolingualist belief further, assuming that if one language is ordained as the one you should use, you shouldn't ever use another. In this century, in parts of the US with laws designating English as official, there have been cases of school pupils getting into trouble for speaking another language – not during class, but merely on school premises.

Trump's Order finishes with a reference to it being 'implemented'. But as it contains no provision for any implementation, it is easy to imagine that those who are upset when they hear other languages being used will take it as an opportunity to indulge in a bit of ad hoc implementing themselves, by demanding that only English be used in public/communal spaces, that non-English signage be removed, and that local government documents appear only in English.

A person seen or heard to be using another language will open themselves up to the accusation of being 'un-American'. Trump's Order further marginalises, and may well stigmatise, those not already fluent in English. It will lead to further divisions and antagonisms in American society – and inefficiency.

A longer version of this article first appeared in the summer 2025 issue of *Babel: The language magazine*.

Wikipedia: Editing the narrative

Why each language version tells a different story, and the power dynamics behind the platform. By Guilherme Fians

Few would disagree that the airplane is one of the great marvels of modern engineering – and we could confidently call that a consensus. But consult Wikipedia about who invented it and the answer depends on the language you read. On the English-language Wikipedia, the Wright brothers reign supreme in the article titled 'Airplane'. On Wikipedia in French, the article 'Avion' celebrates Clément Ader as the pioneer responsible for inventing the airplane and coining the term 'aviation'. In Portuguese, the 'Avião' page cites the Wright brothers but gives prominence to Alberto Santos Dumont, who made the first self-propelled flight without the assistance of a catapult.

According to Wikipedia, it seems, the airplane has multiple inventors, each neatly aligned with linguistic boundaries. What began to me – a digital anthropologist interested in sociolinguistics – as a search for information quickly became a journey around one invention loaded with many origin stories. So, who is right? The short answer: it depends on the language you speak – and the Wikipedia you are reading.

Crowd-sourced or chaotic?

Labelled "the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit" and available in over 340 languages, Wikipedia is intended to produce a "summary of all human knowledge". But behind this noble mission lies a messy, multilingual reality. After all, the internet – and knowledge production, for that matter – is not as English-centred as algorithms and social media might lead us to believe.

By inviting 'anyone' to edit its content, Wikipedia's founders and editors seek to democratise knowledge, which sets this online platform apart from less accessible sources of information like expensive learning materials and news websites behind paywalls. This DIY, user-centred functioning leads to fascinating variations in how historical and scientific facts are narrated. And the multiple language versions of Wikipedia inevitably add curious pieces to this intricate puzzle. This gives us clues about why the airplane has different inventors on different Wikipedias. But what does it tell us about who can produce knowledge online? Ultimately, what is the role of translation in this multilingual platform?

What I found in my ethnographic research on multilingual spaces online is that digital media labelled 'global' cannot be understood by exclusively analysing the English versions.[1] This leads to a crucial reminder: an attention to language and translation – or lack thereof – can change how we perceive the internet.

Multilingual selective storytelling

Many English speakers might assume that the Wikipedia page on the airplane in French is simply a translation of the English one. Not really. While Wikipedia editors may take inspiration from other language versions, each version works semi-independently, and volunteer editors often draft articles from scratch. This is where things get interesting: since Wikipedia content must be supported by reliable sources, editors understandably draw on references in the languages they know best. Sources, in turn, reflect the curricula of countries where the language is spoken, popular historical narratives and even geopolitical sensitivities.

Take, for example, the phrase 'attempted to fly' to describe Clément Ader's 1890 flight. While technically accurate, this expression appears diplomatically dismissive. The French version, instead, honours Ader's coining of the word 'aviation' as a semantic achievement in itself, and acknowledges his flying machines as early aviation milestones, whether or not they meet modern definitions of 'controlled flight'.

While the English article endorses the Wright brothers with several bibliographical references, the French article supports Ader's pioneering contributions with sources exclusively in French – perhaps the only language in which he is systematically recognised as a key figure in this story. In Portuguese, the references that most prominently celebrate Santos Dumont's near-mythical status are, unsurprisingly, in Portuguese. What does this tell us?

First, there might be an element of selective storytelling that privileges a historical narrative in line with readers' expectations. Since most readers and editors of the French-language Wikipedia are based in France, a story that celebrates a French pioneer suits this readership well, and the same could be said about Brazilian readers who feel represented with Santos Dumont rising to glory in the history of aviation.

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Second, while different speech communities might highlight different protagonists based on national pride or on what they learnt at school, these competing historical narratives also stem from the availability of sources in that language. This uncovers a matter of missing translation: hardly any Brazilian, Portuguese or Mozambican book about aviation would mention Clément Ader – and what does not get translated is just as important as what does.

Who gets to write history?

Wikipedia is among the most multilingual platforms on the internet. However, being multilingual does not mean being equitable. Many of Wikipedia's templates, plug-ins and editing tools are only available in English, and largely draw on English-language coding conventions. In other words, while anyone can edit, those who are fluent in English often find it easier to participate in this space. This sets up a subtle but significant form of gatekeeping. If you are not confident with the platform's English-centred backend, your contributions might be limited or never be made at all – which is a real problem for a platform entirely based on user-generated content.

What is at stake, then, is who gets to write history and produce knowledge. In many countries, Wikipedia is among the most accessible sources of information available and a first stop for students, journalists and curious minds. But if its articles differ drastically by language – whether in tone, emphasis or even fundamental 'truths' – we are faced with the question: whose knowledge are we accessing?

The airplane is not the only example of this phenomenon. Another fascinating case is Wikipedia's coverage of the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas War. While the article in English refers to an 'Argentine invasion', the Spanish page speaks of a 'British occupation'.[2]

A similar pattern emerges in articles about Vladimir Putin. Wikipedia in Ukrainian devotes two of its four introductory paragraphs to detailing how Putin has been condemned by the UN, the US and the International Criminal Court. The article in Russian, by contrast, mentions these sanctions and arrest warrants in only one of six introductory paragraphs, subsequently focusing largely on his career and political achievements. Meanwhile, the English page has long been under extended confirmed protection, a response to the heated 'edit wars' that broke out after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.[3]

These contrasting accounts are not just a semantic matter; they reveal deep geopolitical and ideological divides that carry over into editorial decisions. And this pattern repeats across topics, from science and history to pop culture, which hints at how the national origins of editors and the availability of sources in certain languages help shape knowledge on digital media.

Multiple inventions, multiple wars

Disagreements between Wikipedia editors – which can be observed by peeking into the 'Talk' and 'View history' metapages accompanying each article – are not just about facts, but about the kind of story each editor wants to tell. In a world where disinformation spreads fast and where tech companies increasingly use AI to translate content automatically, understanding the limits of language – and of translation – becomes key.

Wikipedia shows that every verifiable historical fact is a mosaic of situated knowledges and linguistic power dynamics. While this can be frustrating for those seeking 'the one right answer', it is also what makes Wikipedia remarkable: it is an archive of human perspectives permanently under construction – and, almost certainly, already different from the moment this article was written. So next time you search for who invented the airplane or who won a war, consider reading these articles in another language. You might find a different hero. And you will definitely find a different story.

Notes

1 Fians, G (2024) 'After All, Who Invented the Airplane? Multilingualism and the grassroots production of historical knowledge on Wikipedia'. In *Language and Communication* 99, 39-51

2 Góngora-Goloubintseff, JG (2020) 'The Falklands/Malvinas War Taken to the Wikipedia Realm: A multimodal discourse analysis of cross-lingual violations of the Neutral Point of View'. In *Palgrave Communications* 59 (6), 1-9

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Beyond the call of duty

Should legal interpreters be going the extra mile? Sue Leschen considers the professional implications

An interpreter has been booked by the court to interpret in a bitterly contested family law case involving estranged parents fighting over contact rights to their children. Unfortunately, "due to an oversight", the mother's solicitors haven't booked their own interpreter for their client consultations in the adjournments before, after and mid hearing. However, all is not lost, the judge has a bright idea – the mother can use the court interpreter. Problem solved!

The somewhat surprised interpreter starts to protest. This is outside their job remit – the court, not the mother's solicitor, has booked them to interpret in the hearing room itself when the parties and witnesses are testifying. Interpreting separately for one of the parties would mean a potential conflict of interest in their role as court interpreter. The interpreter adds a personal, self-care concern about fatigue (interpreting a full-day hearing on their own is hard enough).

Unfortunately, the protest goes unheeded – the (now irate) judge orders the interpreter to interpret in the mother's solicitor-client consultations. Our brave interpreter stands their ground, saying they will report the situation to their professional membership organisations and the National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI). Not to be outdone, the judge retorts that if the interpreter refuses to comply, she will find them in contempt of court.

During the lunch break the father approaches the interpreter in the public waiting room to say he doubts they will be able to remain impartial as they are now "working for the mother". This sort of interaction can occur because interpreters, unlike lawyers, do not have separate waiting rooms in most courts. Privately the interpreter has some sympathy with the father's misgivings.

In a consultation with the mother's solicitors (which reduces the interpreter's lunch break to 10 minutes), the interpreter gleans a lot more information about the facts of the case than has yet been disclosed to the court. They are now au fait with the relevant terminology in the mother's evidence, as well as her lawyer's tactics for tripping the father up in court. The interpreter no longer feels that they are as neutral and objective as they should be.

This scenario highlights the sort of ethical, contractual and practical issues that can arise when an interpreter is railroaded by a judge into conduct that doesn't sit well with their Code of Conduct but leaves them with nowhere to go, and undermines them personally and professionally. It is a classic example of the result of judicial ignorance (some would say arrogance) as to the role of the court interpreter and their terms and conditions of business.

> When unprofessional working conditions become the norm it is almost impossible to challenge them

How 'bad practice' creeps in

When unprofessional working conditions become the norm it is almost impossible for court interpreters to challenge them. We work on our own (with the exception of British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters, who work in pairs), often interpreting for more than two hours at a time, depending on the judge's discretion. While this is wrong and unprofessional, it is the status quo.

In the Spring issue, Sangi Gurung highlighted another worrying trend whereby interpreters are pushed into unprofessional situations in tribunals.[1] In the context of extreme time pressures, it has become standard for judges to ask interpreters to summarise speeches in tribunals, particularly when they are lengthy.

What is disturbing about this practice is that the onus is on the interpreter to choose which parts of the speech to summarise. In effect this incorrectly puts the interpreter into the driving seat, and is thus a legal and ethical minefield. Where the interpreter lacks

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a legal background, how on earth can they know which part of the speech to include and which to exclude? If the speech is likely to upset or offend a party, might they be tempted to only summarise the 'nice bits'?

What can the interpreter do?

If situations like this arise, the interpreter should ask the judge to provide a summary, which they can then interpret. Alternatively, an experienced and skilled interpreter who has been able to take down accurate notes could provide an oral summary *in English*. This would only be interpreted into the other language once the judge had confirmed it was correct, and there were no additions, omissions or misunderstandings. However, if the interpreter is unlucky enough to get a judge who orders them to provide a summary in the target language only, they may have no choice but to comply.

In the family court scenario at the start of this article, the interpreter had reasonable grounds for withdrawing from the case under their Code of Conduct. However, they quickly dismissed this as a solution as they were threatened with contempt of court and didn't trust the judge not to make a professional misconduct complaint against them.

The phrase 'unlevel playing field' springs to mind, something the judge would also be aware of. Interpreters are low in the pecking order of professionals in the court room, even though the hearing can't proceed without us. It is telling, for example, that at no time did the judge criticise the mother's solicitors for not booking an interpreter, or adjourn proceedings so they could source one (whether in-court or remote).

Could the interpreter make a complaint about the judge to the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office (JCIO)? Unfortunately, the JCIO does not deal with complaints about judges' decisions or about how judges manage cases. The interpreter turns instead to the Ministry of Justice's language service provider (MoJ LSP), which booked them. Their response is that, given the judge's order, the interpreter will just have to "grin and bear it". To make matters worse, the LSP won't compensate them for any extra time worked because they are already being paid to be present in court, and (most galling of all) because they are not contracted to interpret for any other parties.

With the right judge, in the right circumstances, the interpreter's attempt to educate and advocate for their profession might be enough. This is really all we can do while we are on assignment, and some judges will respond and try to come up with appropriate solutions. In this case, the judge could have told the solicitors to source an interpreter as the problem came to light in the morning and the language concerned was a common one.

These examples should be a call to action for shared CPD between the two professions, something that many of us have been campaigning for over several years. Both court interpreters and the judiciary operate in blissful isolation and ignorance of each other's practices, and as a result much of their training is needlessly duplicated. It also means that situations like these are not uncommon.

Where possible, training should be shared for mutual benefit. For example, I attended a legal conference for BSL interpreters in Birmingham last year, where not one but two judges gave talks about their roles in the family court and mental health tribunal. They even ate lunch with us in the hotel dining room, where discussions continued – a shining example of inter-professional collaboration.

Interpreters could do more to help themselves in these difficult, conflict-ridden situations. We can offer to speak at judges' CPD events and explain the often impossible pressure we are consciously (and, I suspect, subconsciously) being subjected to in court settings. We can do a lot more to publicise our codes of conduct as regards conflicts of interest, to get legal professionals over the 'interpreters are just a conduit' myth that many seem to subscribe to. We want to be taken seriously as the professionals we are, and be treated with the respect we deserve.

Notes

1 Gurung, S (2025) 'A Summary Trial?' In *The Linguist*, 64,1

Telling tales

Are you sitting comfortably? Eyhab Baden Eddin on the challenges of translating Arabic short stories

Translating literature is never just about words – it is about carrying stories across cultures without letting their essence fall through the cracks. Arabic short stories come wrapped in centuries of oral tradition, poetic turns of phrase, vivid cultural references and emotional undercurrents that do not always travel easily into English. So how do translators stay faithful to the spirit of the original while crafting a version that feels natural to English readers?

Some of the biggest hurdles facing literary translators working between Arabic and English include stylistic choices, gendered language, idioms and diglossia (i.e. code-switching between standard and regional dialects). This challenge is particularly acute in short stories, where the limited narrative space demands that every word carry layered meaning. Because short stories rely heavily on condensed and context-rich linguistic cues, such as regional dialects, it is essential to convey these complex elements in translation.

Stylistic fidelity

Arabic literary styles often include elaborate descriptions, rhythmic repetition and complex sentence structures. In English, however, excessive ornamentation can feel pretentious or disrupt the narrative flow. This makes it hard to maintain stylistic fidelity while ensuring the translation reads naturally. For instance, the 19th-century Egyptian writer Yusuf Idris often employs layered similes and poetic repetition that create a lyrical rhythm. Translating this into English requires careful restructuring to retain the tone without overwhelming the reader.

A similar challenge is found in the work of fellow Egyptian Zaki Mubarak. Translating his

WORLDS AWAY
Illustration by Willy Pogany (left) for More Tales from the Arabian Nights *(1915); and short stories bring joy and wisdom (right)*

hemistich وجههُ البدر في ليلة التمام literally as 'his face was like the full moon on its brightest night' might sound awkward or clichéd. A more context-sensitive rendering, such as 'his face shone like a full moon', retains the metaphor, captures the mood and tone, and carries poetic weight while keeping the flow uncluttered for English-speaking audiences.

When translated directly in English, the long opening sentence structures commonly found in classical Arabic storytelling may feel unwieldy or syntactically unfamiliar. Breaking sentences into shorter, more digestible units can improve clarity while preserving narrative elegance. This process involves artistic judgement: choosing what to retain, what to rephrase and what to omit. Take this example:

و في يوم من أيام الشتاء الباردة، بينما كانت الرياح تعصف
خارج النوافذ، جلس الشيخ على سجادة قديمة في زاوية الغرفة
يتأمل في الحياة وأحوال الدنيا، ويفكر في شبابه الذي ولى،
وذكريات مضت لا تعود

A literal translation may feel overwhelming due to its length and pacing: 'And on one of the cold days of winter, while the wind was howling outside the windows, the old man sat on an old rug in the corner of the room contemplating life and the state of the world, thinking of his youth that had passed, and memories that would never return.' A more natural translation could break it up for clarity: 'One cold winter day, as the wind howled outside the windows, the old man sat on a worn rug in the corner of the room. He was lost in thought – reflecting on life, his fading youth and memories that would never return.' This maintains the mood and meaning while offering better rhythm and readability.

Idiomatic expressions

Idiomatic expressions are a central feature of Arabic literature, reflecting cultural norms and everyday wisdom. The idiom رجع بخفي حنين meaning 'he returned empty-handed' (lit. 'he returned with Hunayn's sandals') comes from Al-Hariri's *Maqamat*, a classical collection of

BUILDING WORLDS
Illustration by Maxfield Parrish for Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves *(1906)*

50 short stories. A literal translation would confuse most English readers, so the translator might paraphrase or use a footnote.

Arabic short stories often contain culturally specific terms that resist direct translation. Expressions like *mashallah* (ما شاء الله; used to ward off envy or express admiration) and *wasta* (واسطة; 'personal connections/influence/nepotism') are embedded in social context. Translators must decide whether to retain the original term, explain it through a footnote or substitute it with an approximate equivalent.

The short nature of the text heightens the translator's responsibility to convey meaning both efficiently and evocatively. When every word is carefully chosen, culturally embedded terms carry disproportionate weight in constructing character, setting and social context.

While footnotes or paratextual explanations may be acceptable in longer texts, they often disrupt the flow and immersive quality of short fiction. Translators must often rely on subtle in-text strategies, such as brief contextualisation or near-equivalence with cultural hints. Keeping the term *wasta* with a brief explanation might preserve authenticity, while translating it as 'he got the job through connections' would communicate meaning but lose cultural nuance. *Mashalla* might also be kept, with 'touch wood' given in brackets.

Literary tone and voice

Emotional restraint is another hallmark of many Arabic short stories, which often convey emotion through understatement, indirectness or poetic imagery. In English, where clarity and directness are more typical, this can result in a tonal mismatch. For example, Zakaria Tamer's 'My Lord is Great' (ربي كبير) is about a young boy in a poor neighbourhood who faces hardships yet holds on to his faith and hope. He repeatedly says ربي كبير as an expression of his trust in God. Translating this literally may lose its emotional weight, as the underlying firm faith emerges from the fact that God is greater than sorrow. This can be explained in a footnote as 'God would never abandon me' or 'There's a higher power watching over me'.

Intense feelings such as grief, longing and joy may be implied through silence, gesture or sparse description, reflecting a literary tradition that values subtlety over dramatic disclosure. Such restraint is not incidental; it aligns with a broader cultural tendency to convey emotion with dignity and inwardness. Thus, preserving the economy of expression is essential. The translator must resist the urge to over-explain or dramatise a line like سكتت، ودمعةٌ على خدها ('She fell silent, a tear on her cheek'), or expand it ('She broke down in tears, unable to speak from the pain'), as doing so would risk flattening the emotional nuance.

Gender and social dynamics

Short stories in Arabic often contain subtle linguistic cues reflecting class, social dynamics and gender. Translating these markers into English, which lacks Arabic's gendered structure and social honorifics, is complex.

Diglossic shifts between Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and regional dialects mark character, mood or setting, often reflecting a shift in the emotional, spiritual or narrative tone. A colloquial dialect may indicate regional identity or lower social class, which can be hard to render in English without stereotyping. Dialects also carry connotations of intimacy, informality or marginality, while MSA is formal.

In Naguib Mahfouz's stories, a character may speak in Egyptian dialect to show familiarity then switch to MSA in moments of solemnity. One strategy is to use more casual or fragmented English for dialects and more polished, structured English for MSA. For example, عاوز أروح دلوقتي could be rendered as 'I wanna go now', while أرغب في الذهاب حالاً might become 'I wish to leave immediately'. In some Palestinian short stories, characters shift from colloquial Arabic to Quranic expressions signalling a move from everyday banter to spiritual reflection. Capturing this in English might involve changes in rhythm, vocabulary or tone to mimic the formal elevation.

In addition, Arabic often encodes gender through verb forms and adjectives. The description هي مجتهدة ('she is diligent') uses a gendered adjective that subtly emphasises her role as a hardworking woman. In translation, this nuance might be lost unless it is contextually emphasised, for example by adding 'despite expectations, she proved to be exceptionally diligent'.

Translating Arabic short stories into English is never a straightforward linguistic exercise – it is a subtle, deeply intuitive craft that calls upon the translator to become both cultural mediator and literary artist. We are tasked with reshaping the narrative to speak meaningfully in a new tongue, and in doing so, the translator steps into a creative space that is neither wholly Arabic nor entirely English.

Yet within these complexities lies a rare and rewarding opportunity: to produce a version of the story that does not merely replicate the original, but reawakens it for a new audience. In an age that often prizes speed over subtlety, the translator of short stories quietly defends the value of nuance. Their work reminds us that stories are not bound by language alone – and that when carried with care, a voice can cross borders not as a stranger, but as a guest, fully seen and heard.

Stage support

Lara Parmiani explains how her LegalAliens Theatre supports migrants with language learning and more

Tell us a bit about your background and your interest in supporting migrants...
I come from a family who had experienced displacement. My grandmother was a Jewish refugee from Hungary and my mum's family moved from a poor village in southern Italy to the industrial north, where they were called names for being southerners. So the migrant experience is in my blood.

I moved to London from Milan with a degree in dramaturgy and training as an actor, full of excitement about joining what I thought was going to be a vibrant, international, multicultural theatre scene. But the reality was different. I quickly realised that 'multiculturalism' was often surface-level, and that migrant voices, particularly those with accents, non-traditional backgrounds or different training, were rarely centred.

At first, that felt disorienting. But over time, I embraced my identity as a migrant artist. It became a political and creative position. Rather than trying to 'fit in', I began to explore what it means to speak from the margins, and to build spaces where others could do the same. Supporting migrants isn't just something I care about, it's woven into who I am and how I work. I know what it means to navigate a new country, language and system while trying to stay connected to your own voice. Theatre became my way of doing that, and now I try to offer that space to others.

So how did your company, LegalAliens Theatre, come about?
I started it as a response to this feeling of 'non-belonging'. There was no theatre company representing people like me. It was a way to say: 'No, we're not going to erase who we are to belong. We're going to create a space where migrant artists start from who they are, where multiple languages, histories and identities are not barriers but the material.'

In a nutshell, we make international, multilingual, politically engaged theatre, always collaborative, always rooted in the lived experiences of migration and displacement. We work with professional artists and community members, side by side, across genres, borders and forms. LegalAliens was never just about producing shows; it was about building an ecosystem where migrant creativity could thrive on its own terms.

How do you choose your productions?
We're drawn to stories that challenge clichéd narratives, explore identity across borders or respond to urgent social and political questions. We often adapt or devise rather than 'perform plays' in a traditional sense. We're interested in voices that haven't been heard in English, or at all.

How do you make decisions about aspects of production such as style, interpretation and staging?
Our process is collective and fluid. We don't start with a fixed 'concept'; we start from the body, from images, from questions. Our aesthetic is influenced by some of the great practitioners of the 20th century – Brecht, Peter Brook, Anne Bogart, Eugenio Barba – directors who treated theatre as a physical, visual and political medium, not just a vehicle for text. We love working with multimedia, strong visual metaphors, movement and humour, even when the themes are heavy. Humour is a powerful tool for survival and disarming the audience.

UNITING WORK: *Lara Parmiani*

In *The Flowers of Srebrenica*, we worked from a book by Irish academic Aidan Hehir, but we framed it to a chorus of women who are not in the book. So we transformed it into a multi-voiced, multidisciplinary piece combining text, movement and personal testimony. We were working with difficult material (genocide, trauma, memory) so it was essential not to make it a didactic experience. We challenged the linear narrative because that's how memory and grief often work.

Why is it important for you to offer free drama classes to local migrants?
Because access matters. Many refugees and migrants face barriers, not just in language but in confidence, networks, time and money. We want to create a space where they can explore their creativity freely, reclaim their voice and find community. It's not about training people to become actors (though some do go

INSPIRING DRAMA
LegalAliens' 'Tugging at the Sea' production

on to pursue that), it's about dignity, visibility and agency. We aim to build confidence and encourage self-expression in a supportive environment where stories and languages can be shared on equal terms. Our Tottenham Project is funded through a mix of small grants, community funds and in-kind support, and we also encourage people to donate.

How do you teach language via drama?
We don't 'teach language'; we encourage people to practise it in a non-formal setting. Through improvisation, scene work and physical storytelling, participants engage with vocabulary in context, practise real communication and build confidence without the fear of making mistakes. Acting helps overcome inhibition. It allows people to feel the language in their bodies, not just study it intellectually. We focus on interaction, rhythm, tone and gesture – tools that make language alive, embodied and relational.

Do your English Through Theatre and Foreign Languages Through Theatre workshops require different approaches because the first are mainly for adults and the latter for school pupils?
The core philosophy is the same – learning through doing, speaking, performing and playing – but the structure differs. With adults, the focus is on language in context, cultural exchange, pronunciation and confidence. In schools, we tie workshops into curriculum goals and focus on making foreign languages fun, memorable and emotionally engaging. Both approaches use theatre tools, but we adapt tone, pace and outcomes to the group.

How does your Theatre Passport programme help international actors navigate UK theatre and film?
Migrant artists face obstacles including lack of access to networks, cultural expectations in auditions, visa restrictions and the industry's often narrow view of 'casting type'. Accents remain a huge barrier. Many talented actors are told they're 'not native enough' or are limited to stereotypical roles. There's also the challenge of understanding tone, subtext and cultural references in English scripts. Theatre Passport gives them the tools to navigate these obstacles and connects them with peers facing the same struggles.
legalalienstheatre.com

Workshop participants

Tottenham Project student, Davood Mahoozi
When I came to London I faced many challenges. As an asylum seeker you have plenty of time but you have no job and money so you're stuck. I was alone, feeling lonely and vulnerable, when I discovered the Tottenham Project. I found myself in a room with welcoming people who had created a really inspiring artistic environment.

I had always wanted to explore acting but it had never been an option for me growing up in Iran. The first session was very affirming. Although I was apprehensive, I immediately felt like I had become part of a family and the feeling of being alone was not there for the first time in a very long while. Although my level of English was already good, it has helped me to be more confident with speaking English, reading scripts and performing with expression. I was part of a small production for refugee week, which gave me a real sense of achievement.

English Through Theatre teacher, Mags Brady
In 2004, I set up the support group PBIC for Polish migrants in the UK. The poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid was a huge inspiration; he presents art mixing with 'practicality', and we embedded this ethos in our work with vulnerable migrants. Art is a powerful gate for communication and theatre is one part of that. It's a space where learners can start discovering not only an additional language, but also the power of their presence and physical communication.

There are many things participants can take away from drama-based workshops, which is why we are eager to train PBIC teachers in this area. It can increase self-esteem, which is much needed for displaced people. Nine members of our team are involved with LegalAliens' Bedford Project. Its workshops have brought another dimension to our communication and have helped me to develop as CEO.

CENTRING EMPATHY

Interpreters are taught how to detach from traumatic assignments, but medical settings often require compassion over objectivity, argues Sangi Gurung

Empathy is at the core of health services and, in the last decade or so, it is increasingly being recognised as an essential element to foster a therapeutic relationship between doctor and patient. Empathy humanises medical practices, promotes patient trust, reduces misunderstandings and ensures accurate communication in medical settings.[1] It involves taking a patient-centred approach and understanding them without forming an emotional bond.

In the UK, the Interpreters' Code of Ethics governs how we must work. When it comes to medical settings, 'empathy' as a term is not clearly spelt out in the code. It is, however, embedded in ethics relating to respect, sensitivity, cultural appropriateness and patient advocacy. Empathy is an overarching principle in medical settings; this is also what starkly distinguishes interpreting in medical settings from interpreting in legal settings. Nevertheless, interpreters sometimes misunderstand and unintentionally overlook empathy in the guise of impartiality and professional detachment. On various interpreters' platforms, the principles of professional detachment and objectivity are a recurring theme.

SHOWING CARE
Interpreters may be a source of comfort (above) through hours of chemotherapy (top)

In recent years, a number of academic research studies have explored the dynamics of empathy in medical interpreting.[2] They collectively emphasise the pivotal role of fostering empathetic communication, highlighting both verbal and non-verbal strategies that bridge linguistic gaps between patients and healthcare providers. They vouch for the need to incorporate empathy in training to enable interpreters to deal with the complexities of emotionally charged interpreter-mediated interactions.

WHY MEDICAL INTERPRETING IS DIFFERENT

With remote phone interpreting now prevalent in medical settings, face-to-face interpreting is usually scheduled only for hospital-based invasive medical examinations, procedures, treatments and consultations for a diagnosis or terminally ill patient, if not for patients on long-term medications with serious medical issues. For most appointments, the interpreter is required to wait with a patient due to constricted waiting areas and a lack of designated areas for interpreters. Empathy in a medical setting goes beyond the act of interpreting during consultations alone. It reflects on how one converses and deals with a patient for the entire interaction.

Raffaela Merlini and Mariadele Gatti argue that context-specific empathy enhances communication and patient care.[3] Interpreters employ 'situational integration', adapting and responding to the needs, emotions and behaviour of a patient and service provider, and engaging as a situated participant in the emotional and relational atmosphere of the medical encounter. Their presence may make them mirror emotions and adjust their voice accordingly, requiring emotional intelligence.

Nicole Lan and Ester Leung demonstrate how trainee interpreters use non-verbal cues to convey sensitive issues through voice modulation, silent pauses, facial expressions and body orientation, signalling attentiveness and compassion.[4] For example, while working with terminally ill patients, interpreters may follow cases for months, spend hours in sessions of chemotherapy or other medical procedures, and interpret discussions of the prognosis, including the likelihood of end of life, as well as gently informing the patient that treatment options are palliative.

In chemotherapy sessions, interpreters are left with patients during intervals between one station and the next until the treatment is completed for the day. It is not uncommon for health professionals to tell interpreters to 'have a chat' with patients in situations such as this. An empathetic approach may involve engaging in innocuous conversation or simply listening, offering the patient a sense of solace without breaching ethical boundaries, especially by refraining from offering recommendations and advice. It is of paramount importance to distinguish this from legal settings, where having a chat is deemed inappropriate and may have unwarranted influence over the interpreting or lead the interpreter to form prejudice, as well as constituting a potential breach of professional ethics.

EMPATHY IN PRACTICE

As opposed to the outdated and rigid conduit model of conveying messages from A to B and vice versa, medical interpreting is not about staying completely detached and speaking only during consultations or when directly required. Small talk could be culturally appropriate and make a patient feel comfortable in using an interpreter.

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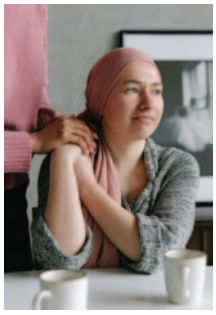
To help clients gain confidence in the use of a third party, interpreters should always introduce themselves and their role as interpreter, emphasising communication and confidentiality. If they are unable to do so when the consultation begins, they can rectify this at the first available opportunity. The significant idea here is to put the patient first. It is for the patient that the interpreter is appointed to work. It is the patient who decides what questions to ask. The patient is at the core of the service.

It is common for patients to ask interpreters questions while waiting for appointments. This could be avoided by informing them that medical questions must be asked of the health professionals involved, and assuring them that they will get ample opportunity to do so during their consultation. During one assignment, a patient asked me, "Am I allowed to ask many questions? The previous interpreter told me only to listen and not ask questions." It is not unusual to have a misunderstanding like this, but it is in the interpreters' interest to ensure that all the patient's questions are asked.

When patients get nervous and worried, I attempt to interpret as calmly as I can, making sure they understand the procedure as clearly as possible. On one assignment, an elderly patient insisted that I stay both pre- and post-heart surgery. In such cases, the patient may require our services to sign consents, have brief consultations with surgeons, anaesthetists and physiotherapists, and



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IN SAFE HANDS

A compassionate approach is vital as interpreters sit with patients while waiting for appointments or between treatments

ensure everything about the procedure and recovery is explained.

I was once waiting with a patient post-surgery and it was clear from her expressions that she was in excruciating pain. She hinted that she needed medical attention several times, so I informed nearby medical staff. On a different assignment, I sat next to the patient while she was having a caesarean section and kept chatting with her, as asked, to ensure she was ok. The patient talked about not feeling anything, telling me how terrified she was and hoping her baby would come out ok, while half her body was curtained off. In these cases, what I was doing was much more than interpreting in the strict sense of the word.

A PROGRESSIVE ROADMAP

When the interpreters' Code of Ethics was formed decades ago, it was to establish a set of guiding principles for this emerging profession to maintain a high level of professional integrity and standards, accountability and ethical decisions. It attempts to mitigate and address the risk of malpractice in a scenario where an interpreter is possibly the only person in a position to communicate to the parties involved. The understanding was that the role should have no room for subjectivity, emotions or undue interference.

Although our ethical codes have been updated over the years, their core values remain largely unchanged. With an increasing awareness of the need for incorporating empathy in medical interpreting, it is perhaps time to revise the current codes to be relevant, effective and in alignment with best practice in the medical field, so that interpreters can make informed decisions in any given situation. A qualified interpreter in a medical setting should be able to practise empathy at work by listening and interpreting patiently, and adopting a patient-focused approach, while complying with appropriate ethical codes.

Notes

1 Eby, D (2018) 'Empathy in General Practice: Its meaning for patients and doctors'. In *British Journal of General Practice*, 68 (674), 412-413

2 Lan, NW and Leung, ESM (2021) 'Empathy as Embodied in Medical Interpreting: A case study of medical interpreter-trainees' turn-taking management'. In Moratto, R and Li, D, *Global Insights into Public Service Interpreting: Theory, practice and training*, London: Routledge, 25-47; Krystallidou, D et al (2018) 'Investigating Empathy in Interpreter-Mediated Simulated Consultations: An explorative study'. In *Patient Education and Counseling*, 101 (1), 33-42

3 Merlini, R and Gatti, M (2015) 'Empathy in Healthcare Interpreting: Going beyond the notion of role'. In *The Interpreters' Newsletter*, 20, 139-160

4 *Op. cit.* Lan & Leung

Supporting inclusion

Could language teachers save time with a free online curriculum? Oak National Academy's Alice Harrison on their accessible resources

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Every child, regardless of background or prior attainment, deserves access to strong language teaching. But the reality is that, for a number of reasons, provision varies nationally. Effective curricula are crucial, providing a pathway to building knowledge, confidence and cultural meaning. That's simple enough to describe, but really hard, not to mention time-consuming, to get right.

As a publicly-funded provider of free, adaptable curriculum materials, the Oak National Academy

(www.thenational.academy) aims to help teachers strengthen their practice and claw back precious working hours. Originally set up in response to the pandemic, we have been working with expert schools and organisations to develop resources to support teachers in delivering well-sequenced, high-quality lessons across all areas of the national curriculum. As part of this work, we've released languages curricula in partnership with the Cam Academy Trust, a family of state schools in East England. Funded by the UK Department for Education (DfE), these cover French and Spanish for Key Stages 2-4 (ages 7-16) and German for Key Stages 3-4 (ages 11-16).

Design considerations

Oak's languages resources concentrate on the building blocks of language: vocabulary, phonics and grammar. To enable learners to construct their own sentences fluidly, high-frequency vocabulary, function words and phoneme-grapheme correspondences are a focus. This empowers pupils to communicate independently and creatively early on, rather than relying solely on rote-learnt phrases.

Grammar is explicitly taught, as recommended by research, and introduced systematically. Pupils revisit and build on prior knowledge in structured ways. For example, the French grammar thread 'Nouns and Determiners' begins in Year 3 with basic singular forms, and expands to partitive articles and prepositions by secondary. This careful layering allows pupils to integrate prior learning with new content, deepening understanding over time. Our approach reflects influential models such as Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory, Mayer's Principles of Multimedia Learning and Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction.

Languages live through the people who speak them, so it's important to showcase characters, places and texts from a range of countries and cultural backgrounds. In Oak's Spanish lessons, pupils encounter characters from Spain and Latin America; in French, they meet speakers from Europe, North Africa and the Caribbean; and in German, they learn about the experiences of people with Turkish and Polish heritage. This approach fosters cultural awareness and helps pupils appreciate the richness and global reach of the languages they study.

A central aim of the national curriculum is for pupils to develop appreciation of writing in the languages they study. To support this, Oak materials include authentic texts, such as poems by Antonio Machado and Goethe, as well as non-fiction texts exploring topics like Oktoberfest, the French Resistance and human rights activism in Guatemala. Accompanying audio files recorded by native speakers help pupils tune in to authentic pronunciation, rhythm and intonation.

To aid coherence and continuity, the resources are organised around 'threads': key areas of knowledge and skill that are built on over time. These include grammatical concepts, skills (e.g. reading comprehension, writing) and cultural understanding. The thread 'Questions', for instance, maps how pupils go from asking basic queries in primary school to more nuanced, extended exchanges at Key Stage 4. These threads help teachers to navigate the curriculum and dip in and out of the resources, using them for specific grammar points or cultural contexts.

Making languages accessible for all

Inclusion is non-negotiable. Oak lessons are designed with accessibility in mind – from the fonts and colour contrasts to the chunking of content into manageable learning cycles. Unnecessary visuals that might distract from learning are avoided. The resources support pupils with special educational needs (SEN) by incorporating frequent checks for understanding, clear modelling and revisiting of key vocabulary across contexts. We have removed age-specific year labels so that resources can be used flexibly, according to individual readiness rather than just by year group.

By making these adaptable resources freely available, we hope to remove barriers to great teaching, support workload reduction and enable more pupils to experience the joy, purpose and power of learning another language. In doing so, we aim to nurture the next generation of confident, culturally curious linguists, empowered to participate fully in a connected world.

HIGH WORKLOAD

Lesson prep can be a time-consuming headache for time-poor teachers, especially those working in under-served communities

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A naming of nouns

David Crystal considers the origins of English collective nouns, from a murder of crows to a clutch of mechanics

DAVID CRYSTAL

I imagine all languages have ways to talk about groups of animals, people and things, but I doubt any can match English for the range and variety of collective nouns that it has accumulated over the centuries. Some, such as a flock of birds, a herd of cows and a swarm of bees, date from Anglo-Saxon times. There weren't many of them then, so the ones that existed were used for all kinds of things – for instance, people talked about a herd of cranes, wrens, deer, swans, gnats and more.

These old collectives are so familiar now that we don't think twice about them. But we do think twice about the unexpected ones that were coined later, such as a murder of crows, a parliament of owls, and an unkindness of ravens. They have an obscure origin. Many are recorded for the first time in *The Book of St Albans,* one of the first English printed books, dated 1486. It was compiled by Dame Juliana, the prioress of Sopwell nunnery near St Albans in Hertfordshire. It contains a list of some 200 collective nouns.

Playful inventions

Some are traditional expressions, but most seem to be playful inventions. This is where we find a watch of nightingales, a charm of goldfinches, a muster of peacocks and dozens more. And the list goes well beyond animals. We find a doctrine of doctors, a superfluity of nuns, a sentence of judges and a diligence of messengers. Several others appeared in 15th-century hunting manuals. Many of these expressions still appear today – particularly in literature and journalism – and of course what would a British pub quiz be without reference to an obscure collective noun or two!

Why do I call them 'playful'? Because coining collectives is a game people still happily play today, and human nature hasn't changed that much in 500 years. A great deal of entertainment can be derived from thinking up the funniest way of describing a group of 'X' – where X can be anything from astronauts to zoologists. What's the best collective noun for politicians, or undertakers, or estate agents? Competitions have produced some fine examples.

Language games

I collected as many as I could find a few years ago for my *Story of English in 100 Words*. The winners include an absence of waiters, a rash of dermatologists, a clutch of car mechanics, a vat of chancellors, a bout of estimates, a mass of priests and, my favourite (for its simplicity), a lot of auctioneers. And still they come. More recently I've encountered a crash of software, an annoyance of mobile phones and a bond of British secret agents.

Now the linguists are playing the game. Last year, the Chartered Institute of Linguists launched a competition to find a collective noun for linguists. What began as a light-hearted competition, inspired by Honorary President Jean Coussins, culminated in a celebration of linguistic creativity, as CIOL members, the wider public and readers of *The Linguist* sent in their entries of words to describe language professionals.

BEYOND THE FLOCK: *A 'murder of crows' (above) is a favourite among language lovers*

Here are just a few of the entries: an alphabet, a babble, a Babel, a chatter, a lexicon and a polyphony of linguists. The winner was a glot of linguists. While not as lyrical as some, it has good roots – the Greek for 'tongue' – and it already describes linguistic groups, as in the multilingual polyglots and the lonelier monoglots.

CIOL can be proud of the fact that they have created a collective first. You'll have noticed that all the examples above are whole words. In the formula 'an X of Y', X is always a noun, in the singular, in its full form. There has never, to my knowledge, been a case where X is a part of a word. 'Glot' is what in linguistics is called a combining form. These are word elements that have a specific meaning but don't occur on their own, such as bio- and tele- initially, and -graph and -scope finally.

A glot of linguists. It rolls off the tongue very nicely, with the repeated 'l' sound, and it has a neat semantic association with lot – which is what collectives are all about. A good choice.

TL CIOL Vice President David Crystal is a lecturer, broadcaster and writer. Known for his English language research, he has written over 100 books.

Meet our members

Fateemah Yoosuf-Ibraheem

The founder of Educom Africa discusses her work, from making communication inclusive for disabled people to education advocacy

You do a lot of work in education – could you tell us a bit about your own schooling?
I grew up in Nigeria, where English was the primary language of instruction, but Yorùbá – my native language – was the heartbeat of daily life. This duality shaped my linguistic consciousness from an early age. While school championed formal English grammar, at home and in the community Yorùbá carried our identity, humour, history and soul.

Today, I work across systems – British, African and international – where language instruction is increasingly multimodal and tech-driven. Unlike my own teacher-centred school experience of rote memorisation, my work now integrates inclusive, culturally responsive and technology-enhanced learning strategies. Whether I'm developing educational programmes for Educom Africa or training ESOL learners in the UK, my approach humanises language education, making it relevant and empowering for diverse learners.

So when did you decide you wanted to work with languages?
Language chose me. My childhood exposure to public speaking events, such as children's advocacy parliaments, ignited my passion for language and communication. After high school, I earned a national diploma in English Language Education, and started teaching high school students and helping people with Developmental Language Disorders (DLD).

Early on, I sensed that words carried more than meaning – they carried power. Over time, I realised that what truly transformed lives was communication: inclusive, intentional, liberating communication. My journey took shape as I taught English at secondary and tertiary levels, trained educators, assessed national exams, and supported people with communication needs and learning difficulties.

Do you get to use Yorùbá in your work?
Absolutely – in language assessment, cultural localisation, tech review, content creation, translation and interpretation, especially for public services. I manage projects based on Yorùbá for tech companies and other clients. As a language access advocate, I also support heritage learners and diaspora communities reconnecting with Yorùbá, such as through my recently launched Linguistic Pathways.

Could you tell us something about Yorùbá that might surprise non-speakers?
One fascinating feature is its tonality – a single word can mean completely different things depending on pitch. Take *igba*: it could mean 'time', 'thirty' or 'garden egg' depending on tone. This musicality brings depth but also complexity in translation, especially when conveying cultural nuances. You're not just converting words; you're conveying worldview. Concepts like *àṣẹ* or *ọmọlúàbí* don't have direct English equivalents; they carry layers of spirituality, morality and communal identity.

In 2018, you founded Educom Africa (www.educomafrica.com). What does it do?
It's not just an education consultancy; it's a mission. We support schools, train educators and develop context-sensitive digital resources. I founded it to address a critical gap: access to quality, equitable education for African learners regardless of geography or socio-economic background. Our work aligns with the African Union's Agenda 2063. We are especially focused on talent discovery, global opportunities and digital upskilling across under-served communities.

How difficult was it to establish a business on such an ambitious scale?
The vision was clear, but the path was complex. It demanded not just pedagogical expertise, but business literacy, management skills, strategic networking, core skills and relentless adaptability. I trained in project management, PR, digital media, and even coding basics. My experience in education technology helped, as did my life coaching background, but more than anything, I had to master the art of listening – to stakeholders, to communities, to the silent gaps in the system.

Educom Africa was also the official Nigeria partner of the World Cognition Project…
Yes. That was one of the world's largest ever longitudinal studies on human cognition.

Technology

Battle of the apps: round 2

Anna Rioland trials three more popular language learning platforms

I was a fellow research associate, collating data from students, parents and teachers, and sharing insights on cognition issues in the region. My focus was on discovering the natural abilities in African learners and how these can be harnessed in global education systems to fully develop potential.

Could you tell us about developing inclusive language learning resources?
I draw on adaptive pedagogies where inclusivity is not an afterthought – it's the design principle. I create visual-rich materials for dyslexic learners, audio content for the visually impaired, and step-by-step scaffolding for learners with cognitive delays, towards attaining the same measured learning objective. I integrate multimodal tools (closed captions, culturally affirming examples, voice control, speech-to-text) and, most importantly, I co-create with learners and educators to ensure real needs drive the design.

What one thing do you think would most help disabled people with limited skills in English to access UK public services?
I would institutionalise funded, certified language mediation services within public systems, especially for people with both language and cognitive/physical disabilities. Too often, access is reduced to a leaflet or an overworked interpreter, and that's not enough. Inclusive communication is a human right. We need trained professionals who understand both the linguistic and the disability dimensions of service access.

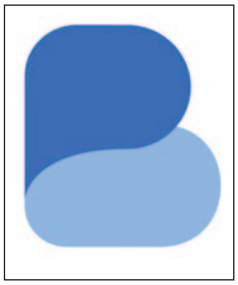
The situation is even worse with languages considered 'rare', such as Yorùbá. I understand the struggle in finding skilled and certified interpreters in these languages, and this is part of what I want to address through Linguistic Pathways (linguisticpathways.com). The platform's resources empower immigrants to monetise their native language skills with step-by-step strategies to become language tutors, interpreters, translators and AI data trainers.

How does AI support access?
AI is a game-changer, especially in real-time translation, voice synthesis and accessible learning design. Tools like NLP engines, chatbots and voice assistants can bridge communication gaps instantly. CAT tools are helpful for facilitating interlanguage communication, while psychometric tools are useful for analysing human features. I integrate AI in my Unlockstar Club projects, for instance, to scale cognitive assessment through interactive, multimodal prompts. However, AI has limits. In my work, especially with vulnerable populations, it must support, not replace, human judgement and empathy.

Do you ever have light-hearted moments in your work? Can you share one?
Once, when I was helping an elderly woman understand her treatment plan, the doctor mentioned a 'referral' to a specialist. I interpreted in Yorùbá using the correct clinical term. The woman looked at me sternly and asked *"Ṣé wọn fẹ tà mí lọ ni?"*, which roughly means 'Are they trying to sell me off?' Everyone burst into laughter. It was a playful misunderstanding and a reminder that even when we think we've interpreted correctly, meaning is never just linguistic – it's cultural, emotional, and sometimes misunderstood. These are the moments that make language work not just impactful, but human; not just meaningful, but delightfully unpredictable.

Please tell us about a project you are particularly proud of…
Two projects remain deeply personal milestones in my professional journey. The first is Ruby Bounty (rubybounty.com), a publishing imprint under Educom Africa, which has a growing catalogue of over 50 publications, ranging from bedtime stories to activity-based literacy resources for children, teens and adults. But perhaps the most transformative project I've led is Unlockstar Club (unlockstarclub.com) – a personalised, tech-enabled platform designed to help parents uncover and nurture their children's strengths. It emerged, in collaboration with CRACSLab, from insights gained through the World Cognition Project.

Both platforms stand as proof that education is not just about access – it's about agency. And that's the golden thread running through all my work: empowering people to recognise their own voice, realise their full potential and use language – not just to communicate, but to rise.



Busuu
14 languages, Free (limited access); premium from £2.25 pcm (12-month subscription)

Pimsleur
51 languages, From £18.45 pcm (with 7-day free trial)

Rosetta Stone
25 languages, From £44.85 for 3 months/ £131.40 pa/ £199 lifetime access (with 30-day trial)

Once upon a time, learning a new language meant signing up for evening classes, memorising verb tables and lugging around hefty grammar books and dictionaries. Today, the process is decidedly more digital. With a few taps on a phone or clicks on a laptop, learners can now access a wealth of online tools promising to teach them Spanish on the bus, Mandarin over lunch, or French while walking the dog.

But with this convenience comes a new challenge: which platform is really worth your time? In the last issue, I compared the popular apps Duolingo, Memrise and Babbel. Now it's the turn of three other top players in the 2025 learning landscape: Busuu, Rosetta Stone and Pimsleur. Each offers its own recipe for linguistic success, from AI-generated study plans to time-tested audio drills, but which one might become your new virtual language coach?

Busuu

Founded in 2008 in Madrid by Bernhard Niesner and Adrian Hilti, the platform takes its name from the Busuu language, an endangered language spoken in Cameroon. It is a structured language learning app combining self-paced lessons with community interaction. It has been based in London since 2012 and now boasts over 100 million users worldwide.

Busuu offers bite-sized lessons focusing on vocabulary, grammar, reading, writing and conversation practice. Lessons are aligned with CEFR levels (A1-C1, depending on the language). Learners can watch videos, and complete dialogues, gap-fill exercises, audio lessons, grammar reviews, spaced repetition exercises and pronunciation practice.

There are also some specialised courses, for example 'Learn Spanish with El Pais', 'English for Essential Business Skills', 'K-Drama' (for the Korean language) and even some exam preparation courses. A notable feature is the community correction tool: learners submit written or spoken exercises, which are corrected by native speakers within the Busuu community.

The platform's blend of structured coursework with community-based feedback makes it stand out. It fosters active use of the target language through peer corrections, which can build confidence and offer real communicative practice. The lessons are concise but cumulative, reinforcing previous content through revision cycles. Unlike other apps that focus solely on self-study, Busuu integrates social learning by allowing users to interact with and learn from native speakers. This feature replicates elements of a classroom exchange while maintaining the convenience of an app.

Pimsleur

The Pimsleur Method was developed in the 1960s by Dr Paul Pimsleur, a linguist and researcher in language acquisition. Originally published as cassette tapes and later CDs, its audio-based system is now available through the Pimsleur app and digital subscription service.

The platform focuses on spoken language proficiency through audio lessons designed to develop listening comprehension and speaking skills. The main idea is to practise speaking a language after you hear people speak it. Lessons are based on real-life conversations and use Graduated Interval Recall (a form of spaced repetition) and back-and-forth dialogue to build conversational fluency.

Pimsleur also uses the principle of anticipation, where learners are prompted to recall and produce responses before hearing the correct answer, actively engaging memory and reinforcing retention. Premium subscriptions include additional features such as reading lessons, flashcards, role-play scenarios and vocabulary games, but the core method remains audio-centric.

The platform excels at developing oral fluency and pronunciation from the outset. Its method allows learners to practise speaking naturally without reading or writing first, which is particularly effective for auditory learners or those preparing for travel and real-life interactions. Unlike most apps, which emphasise reading and typing, it prioritises listening and speaking. It is one of the few platforms that can be used effectively while commuting, exercising or multitasking, making it a practical option for learners with busy schedules.

Rosetta Stone

One of the oldest platforms around, Rosetta Stone was founded in 1992 by Allen Stoltzfus and initially designed as CD-Rom software for immersive language learning. It was one of the first digital platforms to use image-word associations rather than translations to teach vocabulary and grammar. Today, Rosetta Stone remains a recognisable brand, having transitioned fully to online and app-based formats.

It employs the Dynamic Immersion® method – teaching entirely in the target language without translation. Lessons consist of matching images to words and phrases, pronunciation practice using speech recognition technology, and interactive

Books

exercises that reinforce listening and reading comprehension. The platform is structured by topic rather than grammar level, but learners progress naturally through increasingly complex material.

Rosetta Stone's strength is in building intuitive language comprehension through immersion. The consistent use of the target language from the start helps learners think directly in the language rather than mentally translating. Its polished interface, clear visuals and focus on pronunciation make it accessible, particularly for auditory and visual learners. The no-translation method is distinctive. It mimics the way children acquire their first language – through association and repetition – but this approach may not suit learners who prefer explicit grammar instruction or fast-track translation drills.

Which app to choose?

Each app brings something different to the table. Busuu is optimal for social, interactive and structured learners; Pimsleur is great for auditory and verbal learners; and Rosetta Stone works best for visual and contextual learners. We can enjoy a variety of features, such as videos with native speakers, game-like lessons that keep you hooked, immersive dialogues that mimic real life, and audio methods that train your ear and memory.

For linguists, translators and teachers, these tools are powerful allies – but like any resource, they work best when paired with real conversations, classroom interaction or hands-on practice. Your in-person learning experiences may also impact your choice, as you may look for a digital platform that best complements your human interactions and fills any gaps.

No app is a magic solution. The smartest path to language mastery is a blended one, combining the convenience of digital learning with the unpredictability and richness of real-life communication. Ultimately, learning a language isn't just about useful new skills – it's also a proven way to sharpen the mind, build resilience and enhance well-being.

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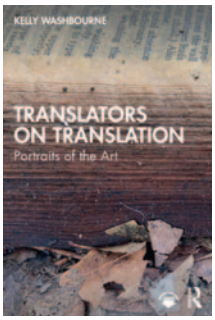
Translators on Translation: Portraits of the art

Kelly Washbourne



Routledge, 2024, 250 pp; ISBN 9781032845463 Paperback
£36.99

Translators on Translation: Portraits of the art is a collection of essays on writers and translators mostly working in the second half of the 20th century. The term 'portraits' is used judiciously, since each chapter provides us with a well-crafted outline of a specific practitioner, including details of their background, literary output and opinions.

The book takes a commendably broad approach in terms of the languages translated and the literary materials involved, as well as in relation to the subjects' own biographies. Some, like Vladimir Nabokov or Seamus Heaney, are among the great literary figures of the last century, while others will only be familiar to assiduous translation scholars.

There are also notable contrasts in the amount of creative effort each of them devoted to translation. Characters like the above-mentioned Nabokov and Heaney, along with the novelist Ursula Le Guin and the poet William Carlos Williams, logically spent less time on translation than on their own literary output, while others (the celebrated Anthea Bell among them) were full-time translators.

We can thank the editor, Kelly Washbourne, for finding space to discuss some of this field's most interesting personalities. These include the groundbreaking African American writer Langston Hughes, whose translations covered works by the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca; and the sinologist David Tod Roy, born in Nanjing in 1933, who spent 30 years translating a single work (*The Plum in the Golden Vase*) from 17th-century Chinese to English.

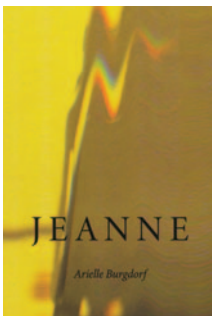
As might be expected, this group of brilliant and often headstrong characters frequently failed to see eye to eye on what constitutes good translation practice. Anthea Bell, for instance, defended the translator's 'invisibility' while Vladimir Nabokov advocated just the opposite. For her part, Ursula Le Guin happily flouted the dictum that one should never translate from other people's translations, producing a widely admired English version of the classic *Tao Te Ching* knowing hardly a word of Chinese.

Such contrasting views highlight the complexity of translation as both an art form and an intellectual pursuit, and contribute to the vibrancy and richness of the book as a whole. It is no exaggeration to say that *Translators on Translation* is an essential read for anyone interested in the theory and practice of literary translation.

Ross Smith MCIL CL

Jeanne

Arielle Burgdorf



Moist Books 2025, 246 pp; ISBN 9781913430191 Paperback
£12

"…The role of a translator is sacred, somewhere between conspirator and midwife." There is an inherent wisdom to this description of the translator's duty, which acts

as a form of prognosis for the eponymous protagonist in Arielle Burgdorf's spellbinding novel *Jeanne*.

The book begins with a brief insight into 'present-day' Jeanne, who has journeyed to Montreal, her home city, to escape her husband and take on a mysterious translation project. However, we are soon catapulted back in time as Burgdorf charts a journey through the tumultuous odyssey of Jeanne's past: the beginnings of her relationship with her husband, the early days of her role as translator of her husband's poetry, and her struggle with her identity as a queer person.

Jeanne – also referred to as Jean and John – has an intricate inner world, which is perforated by the outside forces of her abusive husband and the judgement of society. As the novel goes on, she becomes increasingly vulnerable, delving even further into her private world and the language in which she finds solace, evoking the idea of translator as conspirator.

At the same time, Burgdorf's voluptuous prose, which constantly evokes the sensual in both captivating and disturbing ways, mirrors the visceral process of birth. Yet in this novel, it is the birth of words that the author is interested in, which the composite translator/midwife makes possible. Despite this, *Jeanne* is not a novel which limits itself to one subject.

'Identity' is a key word which comes to mind – that most slippery of words, which seems to mean both everything and nothing at the same time. We are privy to the constant transformation of Jeanne's identity – her reinvention of herself, the exploration of her relationship with the French language, her role as wife, her role as conspirator and midwife of language.

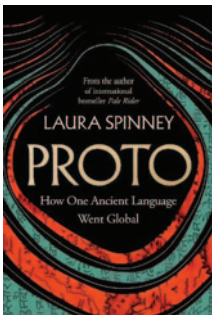
At certain points, we doubt the trustworthiness of Jeanne's point of view, as Burgdorf carefully inserts untranslated passages in French and Russian, playing with punctuation and perspective to communicate just how unravelled the protagonist's identity has become. And yet, as the novel lapses into more of a thriller towards the end, we feel as if she has triumphed, in more ways than one.

As you might expect of a novel written by someone so clearly versed in the ethics and intricacies of literary translation, language is the thread which runs through Arielle Burgdorf's narrative, but it is by no means the only marker of identity within it. *Jeanne* takes on abuse, heritage, queer identity and literary influence, and does so in a resoundingly compelling manner, which makes the novel impossible to put down.

Amy Lawson

Proto: How one ancient language went global

Laura Spinney



William Collins, 2025, 352 pp; ISBN 9780008626525 Hardback
£22

In 1786, Sir William Jones, the pre-eminent Oriental linguist of his age, declared of Sanskrit, Greek and Latin: "no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source which, perhaps, no longer exists." Words for animals, foods and family members from the three languages appeared to show more than mere passing resemblance. Could languages from as far apart as the Himalayas and the Atlantic coast be related?

Proto: How one ancient language went global tells of the debated origins of a prehistoric language that mobilised, mutated and has lived on in a multitude of variants and strains spoken by nearly half of the world's population. The Steppe theory proposes that the predecessor to all existing and extinct Indo-European languages was spoken by nomadic herders in the heartland between the Dnieper and Don rivers 6,500 years ago: Proto-Indo-European (PIE).

Aridisation prompted the pastoralists to disperse to the Balkans, Caspian Sea and the Baltic coast. As they travelled, settled and bred, they seeded new branches and vulgates in the language tree. By 2,000 BCE the linguistic and social influence of the men and women from the Steppe had reached as far west as Ireland.

How did PIE migrate from eastern Europe to India? Common sense suggests an eastern trajectory, via the Caucasus and Persia. According to the Loop conjecture, however, some of the original herders who had travelled north-east to the Urals later embarked on a journey south, through the 'stans and into India. Their language, Baltic-Slavic, and Indo-Iranian shared 55 words. Languages spoken on the direct route to India showed no such correlation.

Another viewpoint, 'Out of India', asserts that the prevailing direction of travel was westwards – not from the Steppe at all. Its appeal is strong among Hindu nationalists. As Laura Spinney observes: "At different times in different places, the Indo-European story has been beaten like warm copper to fit a political mould… Today, the story is still being beaten out of shape… but the beating is most energetic on the subcontinent."

What of PIE itself? Historical linguists subject corpora, syntax trees and phonetics to big-data sifting and harvesting techniques to identify patterns in an ancient language and possible core features in its *proto*language. Word lists based on 'controlled speculation' containing around 2,000 words and stems have been reverse-engineered, e.g. *pésk* ('fish'), *hérmos* ('arm'), *swésōr* ('sister').

The linguistics in *Proto* is supported by archaeology and genetic science. It is a very thorough undertaking. Nevertheless, "the picture is patchy" in places. Some of the story we know, there is postulation, and the rest will remain unknown.

Graham Elliott MCIL

A cultural bridge

Why hybrid languages like Gujlish do not dilute the source languages, but preserve cultural connections

LAKSHMI-RAJ JESA

The Gujarati language is an Indo-Aryan language spoken primarily in Gujarat. It has over 60 million speakers worldwide, including large communities in the US, UK and East Africa, due to historical migration. Gujlish, a hybrid language which combines words and phrases from Gujarati and English, is often used in informal settings and everyday speech both by British Indian Gujaratis and by those in Gujarat who are exposed to it through social media.

In an increasingly globalised world, hybrid languages are becoming more popular. They reflect people's complex and multifaceted cultural identities, fostering a sense of community and belonging, and are particularly favoured by younger generations. Technology has influenced both the development and spread of these languages. By helping to document them, it has contributed to them being taken more seriously. Through social media, they reach a broader audience faster than they may have done otherwise, contributing to their normalisation and acceptance. Features such as memes and hashtags often employ hybrid languages, for example the Gujlish *#nashtatime*, meaning '#breakfast time'.

There is much debate about whether hybrid languages harm the languages on which they are based by diluting them, potentially even causing them to become extinct, or whether they are simply a natural evolution of language. While some argue that the use of hybrid languages erodes the cultures associated with them, as a speaker of Gujlish, I feel they play a significant role in cultural preservation.

I was born and raised in the UK and, for me, using Gujlish facilitates communication with my grandparents and other relatives, who primarily speak Gujarati. When they speak to me, my grandparents (who also live in the UK) pepper their Gujarati with English words, either to help me understand or because there is no appropriate word in Gujarati. I respond in Gujlish, which mixes the two languages equally, for example *Chokro jump nath kartho* ('the boy is not jumping') or *teacher angry che* ('the teacher is angry'). Gujlish also uses Gujarati verbs with an English verb ending, as in *He is herraning me* (*herran* meaning 'to bother').

Speaking Gujlish allows people like me to communicate and be largely understood by Gujarati speakers, helping to preserving our culture. It has enabled me to access, enjoy and participate in traditions, festivals and religious occasions such as Navratri, Holi and Diwali, which are often conducted in Gujarati.

Hybrid languages also make sense in a country which has 123 major languages according to the last census (2011) and around 1,600 others, with Hinglish (Hindi and English) a popular example. In this context, they provide common ground for us to understand each other to some degree, serving as bridges between communities and allowing smoother communication among speakers of diverse native languages.

Why not just learn Gujarati?

There are several reasons why an individual might learn Gujlish over Gujarati. There are many dialects of Gujarati, so if someone living outside India were to learn a dialect to communicate with their elders, they might struggle to converse fully with those who speak a different dialect. This could limit communication just as much as Gujlish might.

I belong to the Maher community, located primarily in Porbandar, so the Gujarati my family speaks is related to the Kathiawari dialect of this region. To complicate matters, my grandparents' Gujarati is infused with Swahili words (e.g. *sufuria* for 'pan'), as they migrated to Uganda before coming to the UK, so they are sometimes misunderstood by other Gujarati speakers.

There are many words in Gujarati that are specific to life within India, and to make them more relevant or appropriate to life in the UK, we may substitute them with an English word. This is one of the reasons why some people who speak fluent Gujarati also use Gujlish.

Language is moulded by our environments and, naturally, hybrid languages have developed to make our languages more relatable to us, with word selection informed by our surroundings and the idiosyncrasies of our communities, allowing us to express ourselves more effectively. For example, in Gujarati we might say *Ba puja kareche* ('Grandma is doing *puja*' – an act of

worship); in Gujlish, this might become *Ba pray kareche* using the English word 'pray'.

Speaking Gujlish can also help motivate new speakers to continue learning Gujarati. There is often an assumption that every person of Gujarati origin born and raised outside India can easily learn the language, but it can be challenging for some, given how different it is from English and the lack of learning resources available.

Falling standards?

There are concerns that hybrid languages could lead to reduced fluency in both of the languages on which they are based. Research indicates that learning multiple languages from a young age does not impact or hinder language development.[1] However, with hybrid languages caution should, perhaps, be exercised due to the lack of research in this area. Similarly, using hybrid languages in education can be problematic with regard to the standardisation of assessments.

Understanding Gujlish

Gujlish	English	Gujarati
Yes ame meeting forward layavyeh.	Yes we will bring the meeting forward.	Ha ame meeting aagad vadhari su.
It's pakka.	It's been confirmed.	Temani pusthi thay gay che.
'Off' thaygya.	He has passed away.	Temnu avashan thayu che.

Critics have suggested that hybrid languages create divisions within communities. I would argue that this issue already exists in India due to dialects, which often indicate the caste or community someone belongs to. This creates a hierarchy within the language, as some dialects are considered superior to others – e.g. the Amdawadi Gujarati of the Nagar Brahmins of Ahmedabad. Broadly speaking, hybrid languages allow us to reject the rigidity of 'pure Gujarati' and recognise the fluidity and creativity inherent in language. In this way, hybrid languages and the languages they come from can coexist without creating social divides.

Speaking Gujlish with family and friends helps me connect with both of the cultures that have influenced my life. While I may not always be *fully* understood by those in India who speak Gujarati, I am *largely* understood and this is important. I am also able to communicate with other British Indian Gujaratis, whose families have had similar migratory experiences and therefore speak Gujlish too.

The development of Gujlish is a natural adaptation of the Gujarati language to accommodate the influence of English. Languages evolve, particularly as their speakers move to different countries, and this natural evolution should not be halted. Languages don't exist in a vacuum. In an ever-changing and increasingly globalised world, hybrid languages should be embraced.

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CULTURAL ACCESS

The Gujarat dance garba is traditionally danced at the Hindu festival Navratri, which is often conducted in Gujarati

Notes

1 'Why Speaking Different Languages at Home is Great for Your Young Child'. In *BBC: CBeebies Parenting*; www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people/ articles/zn73f4j

TL **Lakshmi-Raj Jesa is an author based in London. She studied History at SOAS and has a postgraduate qualification in International Relations of the Americas from UCL.**

Letters

Email linguist.editor@ciol.org.uk with your views

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Literary translation: is it a closed club?

Helen Vassallo's illuminating article ('Breaking into the Book Club', *TL*64,1) addresses many of the questions I have about the lack of diversity and inclusion in the field of literary translation. Personally, I have found that trying to enter well-known translation prizes, such as the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation, which requires the support of an 'established publishing house', or the Scott Moncrieff Prize, where the same translators tend to win year after year, feels like breaking into an exclusive club – almost impossible without an existing track record and publishing contacts.

While the author rightly celebrates the increase in translated works by female authors, her broader question about the lack of racial and geopolitical diversity is particularly relevant. Her focus on the Pen Presents initiative, launched by English Pen in 2022, highlights what genuine inclusion looks like in the form of translation grants designed to promote diverse languages and literature rather than reward existing insiders.

She makes an important point about looking beyond the numbers to examining barriers to participation. The translation prizes I have navigated prove her point: without overcoming these barriers, increased representation may simply mean the same established translators working on more diverse texts. Initiatives like Pen Presents offer hope by showing that when we actively dismantle exclusionary practices, we can genuinely transform the landscape for all translators.

Bokani Hart MCIL CL

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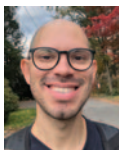
Dr Eyhab Bader Eddin MCIL CL is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at Dhofar University, Oman. A scholar in translation and applied linguistics, he has a broad portfolio of research and publications, and is also a mentor for the next generation of translators and linguists. *See p.18*

Guilherme Fians



Dr Guilherme Fians is a digital anthropologist working at the University of Manchester. His research on multilingual knowledge production, authority, authorship and language activism has appeared in English, Esperanto, French and Portuguese. His latest book is *Esperanto Revolutionaries and Geeks* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021). *See p.14*

Sangi Gurung

Dr Sangi Gurung MCIL CL is a practising public service interpreter in the UK. She is passionate about her work and committed to delivering high-quality service in every assignment she undertakes. She also enjoys writing about interpreting and translation practices. *See p.22*

Alice Harrison

Alice Harrison is Subject Lead for Languages at Oak National Academy, with over 30 years' experience in languages education. A former Chair of NALA, she has led language teaching at school, regional and national levels. She is passionate about social justice and closing the disadvantage gap through education. *See p.24*

Sue Leschen

Sue Leschen FCIL CL is a well-known lawyer-linguist who has married together her twin passions of law and languages. She is the director of niche-market company Avocate Legal French Services (www.avocate.co.uk), which also provides mentoring for language professionals in business skills, legal terminology, and legal and business English. She is a member of CIOL's Interpreting Division Steering Group and Professional Conduct Committee. *See p.16*

Jim O'Driscoll

Jim O'Driscoll is a teacher and researcher who has held posts in six different countries and is the author of *Britain: For learners of English* (Oxford, 2009). His research straddles several aspects of language-in-situated-use. He is Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Politeness Research* and author of *Offensive Language* (Bloomsbury, 2020). He is currently working on a book advocating greater use of linguistics in public life. *See p.12*

Tamer Osman

Tamer Osman MCIL CL is a Canadian linguist, translator and Senior Lecturer at Shanghai International Studies University. Fluent in English and French, with additional proficiency in Spanish and German, he researches phonology and language acquisition. He holds memberships in major global linguistic organisations, and is widely recognised for his academic publications, international conference presentations and extensive cross-cultural linguistic research expertise. *See p.9*

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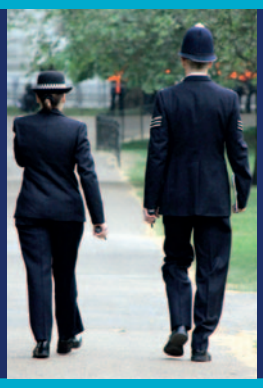

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