

# Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies



## CASE STUDIES 2016-2020



## **The Pop-Up World of Languages: Bringing Languages to New Audiences**

### **Project/Impact Summary**

The UK has museums for lawnmowers and dog collars, yet none devoted to languages or multilingualism, despite languages being central to who we are and how we view the world. We therefore created a *Pop-Up World of Languages*, the first UK language museum, comprising fifteen innovative and family-friendly games, split into three zones ('Languages and me', 'Languages around me', 'Languages in the world'), all underpinned by MEITS's research. The museum celebrated the languages around us and encouraged visitors to take up new languages by showing that languages are fun, and not as difficult as people sometimes think. Popping up in central venues in Cambridge, Belfast, Edinburgh and Nottingham (October-December 2019), the museum was extremely well received with a total of 3108 visitors (general visitors first, school visits second): Cambridge (1666, 60), Belfast (245, 185), Edinburgh (464, 85), Nottingham (138, 265). The activities invited the public and schoolchildren to engage with the concepts of multilingualism, leading to new discoveries and changed attitudes and thinking: 'I am now inspired to learn a not so popular language and about its culture'; 'I had preconceived ideas about languages and being involved in those games/activities changed my perceptions'. There was clear evidence of stimulating conversations within families and groups and appreciation of interaction with the team and their 'enthusiasm' and 'knowledge'. One team member recorded a memorable moment with a Finnish speaker who said she never really wanted to tell her friends that she spoke Finnish at home because she didn't want to be different, but now felt it was something she should be proud of.

### **Background**

It is well known that language learning in UK schools is in decline. Whilst the UK is richly multilingual – c.20% of children starting school in England has a home language other than English – speakers of community languages are sometimes viewed negatively. Demonstrating the value of languages to key issues of our time (including social cohesion, conflict resolution, soft power, health, wellbeing) is a major challenge requiring an interdisciplinary approach. From the outset, the MEITS team aimed to bring the outcomes of its six interlocking research strands to new audiences. 'Non-threatening' locations such as empty shops were chosen, attracting a different demographic from previous events on university property. We identified the museum as a way of reaching audiences otherwise difficult to access. Our promotion targeted areas of multiple deprivation and free transport for schools visits was arranged.

### **Methodology**

Each activity was led by a PDRA/PhD student, allowing them to showcase their research strengths and demonstrate the multiple benefits of language learning. Cambridge expertise in applied linguistics and education was complemented by Belfast's work on the multilingual city, Nottingham's strengths in Chinese studies, and Edinburgh's expertise in the cognitive benefits of language learning.

The museum was developed over a number of iterations, with activities piloted at the Festival of Ideas (2017, 2018), Cambridge Ethnic Forum Diversity Day (2017, 2018) and with local pupils (2018). This iterative reflective process, unusual for the preparation of exhibitions, undoubtedly greatly enhanced the museum's final impact.

### Outputs/Impact/Sustainability

The museum received considerable attention, featuring in the *Times*, *Tes*, and *Independent*. Comments from pupils underlined the positive impact of the museum in making them aware of the career opportunities languages bring, the cognitive benefits of language learning, and the threat to linguistic diversity.

A sustainable legacy will be achieved through an on-line presence; there is already a [film](#) about the event (1732 views to date). The material is available to take to schools, youth clubs, etc. (the whole museum packs into a transit van). Since it is modular, sections can be selected to suit the location/demand.



## Language Policy: Moving Languages Higher Up the Political Agenda

### Project/Impact Summary

MEITS has worked to move languages higher up the political agenda, to show the relevance of languages to key issues of our time, to embed language policy across government, and to establish champions for languages. The PI, Wendy Ayres-Bennett, has co-organised with the AHRC Modern Languages Leadership Fellow, Janice Carruthers, three policy workshops on languages and social cohesion (Cambridge 2017), educational policy across the UK (Belfast 2018) and language, business, trade and innovation (House of Commons 2020). Each brought together policymakers, key stakeholders and academics and led to a policy briefing. The policy briefings have been widely cited including in *Language Trends* (England and NI) and *Towards a National Languages Strategy: Education and Skills* (July 2020). Following a successful cross-OWRI event in Parliament in 2018, Wendy Ayres-Bennett was invited to make the case for languages to top civil servants. As a result, there is now higher-level strategic engagement with the importance of languages in government and beyond, led by senior civil servants in GCHQ and the Cabinet Office, and the strengthening of cross-government networks and support for civil service language skills. Carruthers and Ayres-Bennett held a meeting with the Head of the NI civil service and, following this, were invited to offer training to all policy champions in NI about embedding languages into their policy development.

MEITS has further launched an open-access online journal, [Languages, Society and Policy](#), which publishes concise jargon-free contributions based on peer-reviewed outputs and offers clear policy recommendations. The 18 policy papers published as of 2.12.20 are achieving significant global reach with 85,055 unique pageviews, from readers in 216 countries, including the US, India and China, as well as across Europe. Targeted publicity to stakeholders/policymakers has assured impact: for example, a paper by Florence Myles on primary languages was promoted by the Association for Language Learning, which supports language teachers' professional development.

### Background

Modern linguists have traditionally been slower to engage with policymakers than, for example, historians. The focus has been almost exclusively on engaging with the DfE, despite the importance of languages to key issues of our time such as integration and social cohesion, diplomacy and soft power, health and well-being, business and innovation and the building of 'Global Britain'. In 2015 the MEITS PI organised the first national languages policy workshop, co-chaired with Baroness Coussins, which called for greater collaboration across government and more champions for languages both within and without government.

### Methodology

The MEITS team has worked to establish good relations with policymakers both in Whitehall and the devolved administrations. This has been facilitated by having four Policy Fellows associated with MEITS through the Cambridge Centre for Science and Policy Fellowship programme that 'delivers opportunities for decision makers from government and industry to forge useful and lasting connections with researchers'. These have come from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Department for Education, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Northern Ireland Executive, and each has provided channels into government, contributed to the organisation of meetings and workshops and to the policy briefings. Individual strands have also worked with

policyholders to disseminate their research. For instance, Strand 3 provided the DUP with a briefing about legislation for minority languages.

### **Outputs/Impact/Sustainability**

Three policy briefings (Ayres-Bennett/Carruthers):

*Policy Briefing on Community Languages and Social Cohesion*

<http://www.meits.org/publications/policy-documents>

*Policy Briefing on Modern Languages Educational Policy in the UK*

<http://www.meits.org/publications/policy-documents>

*Policy Briefing on Languages, Business, Trade and Innovation*

<http://www.meits.org/publications/policy-documents>



Wendy Ayres-Bennett

Janice Carruthers

## **Policy Briefing on Community Languages and Social Cohesion**

This briefing document provides core information and details of resources on Community Languages for academics, policymakers and practitioners and highlights ways in which policy might support Community Languages. The term 'Community Languages' is used here to refer to the languages of the various immigrant communities in the UK, both longstanding and more recent. The term 'Heritage Languages' is sometimes also used for this purpose.

## **MEITS Strand 1**

### **Understanding ‘Digital Nation-Building’ in Ukraine**

#### **Project/Impact Summary**

Nations are commonly understood as ‘imagined communities’ whose symbolic boundaries are defined by a particular set of myths, narratives and languages. Today they are just as likely to be shaped by posts, shares, likes, and comments on the Internet. Digital media connect people as one global community of users, but they are causing the boundaries of national identities to expand and contract and to bend and harden in unexpected ways. Focusing on the linguistic and cultural behaviours and views of Ukrainians and Ukrainian diasporas, this study examined the ways online activity is inflecting national identity in a country affected by revolution and war. It employed a combination of online and offline methodological techniques: qualitative content analysis of online groups and in-depth interviews with artists alongside participant observation of cultural events. It revealed that the diverse functionality of new Internet media promoted multilinguality and a greater exposure to and understanding of other languages and re-enforced a decoupling of language and national identity in Ukraine. At the same time, it identified inflection points and patterns when events of revolution and war returned linguistic identities to their traditional roles as key markers of political belonging and allegiance. With a series of academic and non-academic publications, conference presentations and community events, this project delivered an urgent and nuanced exploration of linguistic and national boundary-making in the Digital Age.

#### **Background**

A single Facebook post in 2013 by Ukrainian journalist Mustafa Naiem helped spark a revolution in the largest country within Europe. Throughout Ukraine’s ‘EuroMaidan Revolution’ of 2013-14, an intense interplay between online and offline activity powered public mobilisation against the regime of President Viktor Yanukovich, which collapsed in February 2014. The Russian Federation exploited this moment of political and social instability and seized Ukraine’s Autonomous Republic of Crimea by force of arms, annexing it in March 2014 in contravention of international law. Russia then backed an anti-state uprising in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, which has led to an undeclared international armed conflict that has killed over 13,000 people. Although there have been no major military offensives since 2015, a war still simmers along the contact line, claiming daily casualties. These dramatic events have had a profound effect on the Ukrainian national project – an effect that been made manifest in digital activity on social media and especially in linguistic practice both online and offline.

#### **Methodology**

Using qualitative content analysis of textual and visual materials, online data was collected from 12 social media groups dedicated to the language, national history and culture of Ukraine. This online data was combined with the data collected offline via 32 in-depth interviews with Ukrainian artists or ‘cultural producers’ (writers, poets, theatrical and film directors, etc.) and via notes from participant observation of cultural events (literature forums, theatrical plays, public debates, etc.). The analysis of this diverse and rich qualitative data revealed different social and cultural boundary-making mechanisms.

#### **Outputs/Impact/Sustainability**

The outputs of this study included two papers in peer-reviewed journals, one chapter in an edited volume, an op-ed article, two public lectures and four conference presentations. Notably, this study

also featured an innovative public lecture entitled 'Languages and Humour in the Digital Age', which brought the cases of 'secession' in Catalonia and Ukraine into a comparative frame. The lecture examined 'meme culture' in both contexts and explored the ability of humour to boost national solidarity, challenge power structures and deepen national and linguistic divisions within online spaces.

## **MEITS Strand 2**

### **Making and Breaking Rules: Exploring Multilingualism, Language Standards and Inequalities**

#### **Project/Impact Summary**

Linguistic diversity can lead to inequalities and discrimination of the kind typically associated with race, gender, disability or class. Our project has examined one key factor in such inequalities in multilingual contexts: the belief in the importance of establishing and maintaining a single national “standard” language. Our work has yielded three major insights. First, we have uncovered ways in which this standard language ideology, originally associated with major European languages and nation-building, has been adopted and adapted not just for other world languages, but also for minoritized and regional languages like Breton and Catalan, and for dialect communities. Second, by looking beyond the ideology of a single national language, we have uncovered previously hidden instances of multilingualism, past and present, in Europe and China, in contexts as varied as the Dutch-German borderlands in the nineteenth century, twentieth-century Inner Mongolia, and present-day Shanghai. Third, in the UK, we have worked with stakeholders to raise awareness of how the standard language ideology may disadvantage multilingual citizens in their access to law, health, and education.

#### **Background and Methodology**

To explore how linguistic standardization and the ideology of the standard applies in settings previously little researched, we have employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, drawing on historical sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, linguistic ethnography, and variationist sociolinguistics – the latter little used, for instance, in Chinese language contexts.

Our consideration of major non-European languages, as well as regional and minoritized languages and varieties, has produced evidence of the benefits and challenges associated with standardization. For example, our conference on Asian standards and variation held at Nottingham’s Ningbo campus showed that in Asia, as in Europe, language standardization may be hailed as a saviour of minority languages, empowering local communities to document and safeguard their languages, as in southern Thailand. But elsewhere, as in parts of India, the very act of codifying a language may be felt as a blow to the vitality of the vernacular.

We have also explored how people draw conclusions from speakers’ use of language, making assumptions not just about their knowledge of the “rules”, but also about their intelligence, their suitability for employment or study, their likability, etc. In China, we have, for the first time, examined such attitudes among a new generation of students in China’s east-coast cities, for whom it is becoming the norm to speak not just the traditional local variety learnt at home and Mandarin, but also English.

#### **Outputs/Impact/Sustainability**

Here in the UK, too, beliefs about language and languages determine many decisions about people’s access to health, education, work and the law, and their experience when they access them. Our *Language Rules* conference in Nottingham (leading to a special issue of *Language, Society and Policy*) explored some of these challenges with local, regional, national and European stakeholders.



For example, how do we prepare speech therapists to work with children whose home language they don't speak at all, or whose home variety might not be the standard? Does a speech therapist work with a child to "correct" their pronunciation of "th" if their local variety doesn't have "th" and uses "f" instead? Maybe not, but what if the child's parents *want* them to? Being aware of the linguistic assumptions we make in defining both "correctness" and "good enough" will equip practitioners to deal better with the linguistic diversity they encounter every day.

### **Selected Publications**

Ayres-Bennett, Wendy, and John Bellamy, eds. 2020, forthcoming. *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Standardization*. Cambridge: CUP.

McLelland, Nicola, ed. 2021, forthcoming. *Language standards, Standardisation and Standard Ideologies in Multilingual Contexts*. Special issue. Six papers, with an introduction by the editor. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*.

## **MEITS Strand 3**

### ***Turas*: Language Learning and Crossing Boundaries in a Divided City**

#### **Project/Impact Summary**

Strand 3 of MEITS, 'Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Multilingualism: Identity, Diversity and Social Cohesion', has been working on France and Ireland. As part of our research on Northern Ireland, we have been investigating how learning and sharing a minoritized language can help to build cross-community cohesion in a divided society. The recent publicity surrounding Irish language rights has had an impact on the growth of curiosity in relation to the language; this is clear from interviews with people from the Protestant-Unionist-Loyalist (PUL) community who have decided to learn the language at *Turas* ('Journey'), an Irish language project which aims to reconnect people in east Belfast and beyond with the Irish language. Our research has discovered that the profiles for these learners, while different from those traditionally associated with Irish, may also not be typical of the broader PUL community. Although a very significant change in attitudes is developing, our data reveals that it is still very much the beginning and that there is more to be done to root the language in this community more deeply. On the other hand, our fieldwork also reveals extremely positive benefits for learners: the realization that Irish had been shared by communities in the past, removal of the fear of parts of Belfast city which had previously been out of bounds, and the ability to form friendships across the divide. The 'journey into language' has been accompanied by the freedom to travel across boundaries in a divided city.

#### **Background**

Contested loyalties, British and Irish, have been at the core of the Northern Ireland conflict since the foundation of the state in 1921. Traditionally, the Irish language has been championed by the Catholic-Nationalist-Republican community and eschewed by the PUL community. However, since the advent of the peace process, the potential of language diversity in developing deep levels of cultural understanding and building relationships across the community has increasingly been seen as crucial. What has been particularly significant has been the recent growth of interest in the Irish language in parts of the Protestant community. *Turas* was first established in 2012 in the 'belief that the language belongs to everyone' and can be 'a mechanism of reconciliation' (<https://www.ebm.org.uk/turas/>). In the words of its founder, Linda Ervine: 'Turas was always a journey into a language. But it has become more than that. It's a journey that is changing mindsets and softening hearts, gradually eroding long-held negative attitudes and providing a new context for Irish as a language of healing and reconciliation.' (**How Languages Changed My Life**)

#### **Methodology**

This part of our research used ethnographic methodologies and, in particular, focus groups with learners of Irish in *Turas* and across Belfast, to explore questions of language and identity. These are sensitive subjects, and in seeking to create more nuanced categories rather than perpetuate blunt divisions, we used 'visual analogue scales' so that interviewees could position themselves on a spectrum in terms of their identity and views. The data has been digitized and annotated using NVivo software.

#### **Outputs/Impact/Sustainability**

In terms of academic outputs, we will have published two articles in this field, as well as two on multi-ethnolects in France and one comparative article on language policy in France and Ireland. Outside the academy we have been working closely with Co-operation Ireland on a project around Irish and loyalist community, and have engaged in the political debate through articles in QPol and

*The Conversation.* Our partnership with the East Belfast Mission is one where we look forward to future long-term collaboration.

## MEITS Strand 4

### **“We Are Multilingual”: An Innovative Pedagogy to Enhance Language Learning in Schools**

#### **Project/Impact Summary**

[“We Are Multilingual” \(WAM\)](#) is a series of innovative teaching resources developed based on research from the Education strand of the MEITS project. This project involved over 2,000 students and their languages teachers in secondary schools across the East of England and London. The aim of the resources is to help learners to identify as multilingual with a view to improving motivation and achievement in school and promoting greater engagement with language learning. We found that as a result of taking part in the WAM lessons, students reported:

1. More positive views about the value of languages
2. Higher enjoyment of language learning
3. Greater self-efficacy in relation to language learning
4. A higher likelihood of continuing with language learning in the future

We also discovered a link between identifying as multilingual and academic achievement across a range of subjects in school.

#### **Background**

This study is set against a backdrop of, on the one hand, increasing linguistic diversity in UK schools due to a rise in migration and transnational mobility and, on the other hand, declining interest in the study of languages beyond the compulsory phase. This raises crucial questions about the way in which schools can address the links between multilingualism (both in relation to students’ home languages and foreign languages studied as part of the curriculum) and engagement and achievement. The overarching aim of the Education strand of the MEITS project was therefore to explore the transformative power of multilingual identity, that is learners’ understanding of themselves as users of more than one language, no matter what their proficiency levels ([Fisher et al., 2018](#)). The premise is that, whatever their linguistic profile, if learners can be helped to identify themselves as multilingual and to view this as a positive construct, this can enhance language learning in school. The research therefore explored the potential of the classroom as a site for identity construction.

#### **Methodology**

The WAM resources are developed based on a longitudinal, mixed methods study involving over 2,000 secondary school students and their languages teachers across seven schools in the East of England and London. In addition to achievement and demographic data collected from schools, students’ multilingual identity was captured via a constellation of methods exploring their experiences of languages and language learning, their evaluations (both self and other) and their emotions. Methods included questionnaires (incorporating a visual analogue scale), drawing tasks, metaphor elicitation and interviews. Initial findings were used to develop the WAM resources in collaboration with experienced teachers of French, German and Spanish. The team also drew on research from other strands of the MEITS project when developing the resources (e.g. data on the cognitive benefits of language learning). The resources were initially trialled with eight classes across four schools and the students’ multilingual identity construction and achievement were tracked over the course of an academic year in order to assess the effectiveness of the resources.

## Outputs/Impact/Sustainability

The resources are now available for teachers to download free at [www.wamcam.org](http://www.wamcam.org). These are currently targeted at secondary school teachers of French, German and Spanish and have been downloaded by over 400 teachers to date. Two sets of additional resources one aimed for use in primary schools and one targeted at the whole school (e.g. to be incorporated into the PSHE curriculum) will be launched in 2021.

The screenshot displays the WAM (We Are Multilingual) website. At the top is the logo, which consists of a red speech bubble containing the word 'WAM' and the text 'We ARE Multilingual' in a colorful, multi-colored font. Below the logo is a navigation menu with the following links: WE ARE MULTILINGUAL, LANGUAGES TEACHERS, WAM MATERIALS, WHOLE SCHOOL, WHOLE SCHOOL MATERIALS, and CONTACT US.

The main content area features a large graphic with a blue speech bubble on the left containing the text: 'OUR VISION: To encourage everyone to recognise the languages they have and be able to say: "WE ARE MULTILINGUAL"'. To the right of this is a photograph of a young man in a school uniform standing in front of a whiteboard that says 'Ser multilingüe', with several students in the foreground pointing at the board.

Below the photograph is a large orange graphic with a jagged bottom edge, containing several white speech bubbles with the following text:

- I am learning a language at school
- I can speak emoji
- I speak a home language
- I speak different languages with different people
- I can use sign languages
- I can use computer code
- I learned a language at school
- I speak a dialect (e.g. Brummie, Geordie, Glaswegian)
- I read books or watch videos in other languages (e.g. anime?)
- I can communicate through non-verbal signs (for example when I'm playing football)

In the center of the orange graphic is the text: 'Can you say "YES" (or Oui/Si/Ja/Shi/Tak/Hanji etc) to any of these?'

On the right side of the orange graphic is a small box with the text: 'MULTILINGUALISM: Empowering Individuals Transforming Societies'. Below this box is a paragraph of text: 'WAM arises out of the work on multilingual identity carried out by the Education Strand of the MEITS project (Multilingualism Empowering Individuals Transforming Societies). Visit our main site here [www.meits.org](http://www.meits.org)'.

## **MEITS Strand 5**

### **Any Time Is a Good Time to Learn a New Language**

#### **Project/Impact Summary**

This project set out to identify how factors such as language typology, age and context of learning as well as quality/quantity of input shape the learning of additional languages. Our findings showed that learning a language typologically closer to those one already knows facilitates various aspects of acquisition at different stages. Younger and older learners are good at doing different things and the quality/quantity of input is a crucial factor. Most importantly, it is never too late to learn a new language.

#### **Background**

Learning a new language is thought to be affected by the similarities and differences between languages, age of onset, context of learning (e.g., naturalistically or instructed), and quality/quantity of input. We examined these issues in an integrated study, from two perspectives. On one hand, we looked at how English children and adults learned French (typologically close) and Mandarin Chinese (typologically distant) as a foreign language in their school or university in the UK. Specifically, we compared whether learners, given comparable amounts of input, were more successful in primary or secondary school or at university. On the other hand, we compared the initial and developmental stages of learning Mandarin as a second, a third or a heritage language.

#### **Methodology**

Learners at different ages, in different contexts and at different proficiency levels were included to capture both their developmental trajectories and their attainment. To tap into learners' implicit knowledge of aspects of grammar and usage, a wide range of test measures were employed (e.g., acceptability judgement, forced imitation and guided narrative tasks, self-paced reading tasks, listening/reading tasks, etc.)

#### **Outputs/Impact/Sustainability**

We found that typological similarities between languages do facilitate learning but at different learning stages. Given similar amount of input, younger and older children do not necessarily differ much in learning the vocabulary of a foreign language. Structural similarities between a previously learned language and the target language facilitate learning at early stages, but semantic, discourse and stylistic similarities do not have a facilitative role until later. Child learners seem to implicitly acquire grammatical rules whereas adult learners require explicit instructions. However, older children and adults are more adept at correctly retaining/imitating pieces of language and at producing extended narratives in their foreign languages than younger learners. This is because older learners have more developed cognitive capacities and mature knowledge of their first language. Heritage language learners are more fluent in the target language than adult second/third language learners, but the latter are more bi-/multi-literate than the former.

As to the wider implications of our findings, language teaching and learning should ensure quality/quantity of input in addition to early age of onset. Language teachers should know 1) what younger children are better at doing and learning compared to older children and vice versa, 2) of

the positive role of learners' first or previously known language(s) in learning new ones and 3) of the importance of developing bi-/multi-literacy as well as bi-/multi-lingualism.

## **MEITS Strand 6**

### **Psychological Effects of Language Learning: Comparison of Classroom and On-line Delivery**

#### **Project/Impact Summary**

Strand 6 focussed on the effects of learning new languages on cognition and wellbeing. Originally, the research concentrated on cognitive functions, such as attention, but as the project progressed, it became clear that other psychological aspects, such as new social contacts established through language courses, might be equally important.

In March 2020, the sudden lockdown due to the CoViD-19 pandemic made the continuation of face-to-face courses impossible. This required a radical change to both the delivery of language courses and the assessment of their psychological effects. However, this challenge offered a unique opportunity to compare the psychological effects of traditional classroom teaching with on-line delivery: a question of considerable social relevance, especially as on-line delivery may continue to be the main channel for delivering language courses for the foreseeable future.

Participants who started the courses face-to-face were grateful for their continuation on-line but perceived the new format as inferior to their face-to-face experience; given the chance, they would prefer to return to the original version. By contrast, those who started their courses on-line were very positive. Many pointed out how much they enjoyed having a class consisting of participants joining live from all parts of the world, an experience they would not have had in the traditional classroom setting. Moreover, as in the traditional classroom groups, the students learning on-line formed personal bonds with each other, exchanging contact details, forming What's App/Facebook groups and remaining in touch after the course ended. The high student satisfaction for the on-line courses was further confirmed by the low drop-out rates, which were lower than for the traditional classroom courses. Although some older participants were less familiar with working on-line, they soon caught up and enjoyed the courses as much as their younger counterparts.

The teachers, originally sceptical about virtual delivery, discovered that on-line technology can offer them new opportunities. In the Chinese writing class, for instance, it is possible for a teacher to monitor in parallel students' progress more efficiently than through the traditional "rounds" of going from one student to another in the classroom.

#### **Methodology**

From March 2020, Spanish and Chinese courses continued on-line in a form as similar to the previous classroom courses as possible (frequency, duration, timing, topics, teachers and teaching materials). In the case of a course on written and spoken Chinese, the lockdown coincided with a 2-weeks break between the first and the second part of the course, allowing us to compare different teaching formats with the same students. All assessments were also moved on-line, from quantitative cognitive tests to questionnaires and qualitative data collection from focus groups.

#### **Outputs/Impact/Sustainability**

A paper has been published in a special issue of the International Journal of Chinese Language Teaching, dedicated to the digital future of teaching Chinese. The data from other studies are being analysed and prepared for publication. On-line delivery is likely to continue as the main form of language teaching until the CoViD-19 pandemic is brought under control and might be necessary again in case of new pandemics. Our results suggest that it is feasible, has the potential to be



successful and should not be treated as a mere surrogate for the traditional classroom courses. Compared with face-to-face teaching it has specific strengths and limitations and can be seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. We are currently working, together with partners including the Open University and the social enterprise Lingo Flamingo, on new grant proposals, including ESRC “Research and Innovation Ideas to address CoViD-19”.

**MEITS Flexible Funding Awardee: Claire Gorrara (University of Cardiff)**

## **Disseminating The Findings Around a Digital Language Platform and Its Success In Improving The Uptake of GCSE Languages in Wales**

### **Project/Impact Summary**

This project was instrumental in informing the wider public (via a **two-minute film**) and policy makers (via a **policy report**) of the impact and further potential of a digital platform (Digi-Languages) supporting the uptake of GCSE languages in 18 secondary schools in Wales. These outcomes allowed the project to become visible to other UK organisations (The Department for Education in England) and beyond the UK (the Castilla Y Leon region of Spain), leading to further funded projects.

### **Background**

This project supported the dissemination of the impact of a digital languages platform that is improving the uptake of languages at GCSE in Wales. Funded by the Welsh Government, the Digi-Languages platform works to tackle the chronically low uptake of modern languages at GCSE in Wales: in 2018, this was 18.6% of the total GCSE cohort in state-maintained secondary schools (compared to 46% in England). Via a language-rich online mentoring experience, this programme has doubled, and in some instances tripled, uptake of modern languages at GCSE in partner schools. The digital project builds upon the success of the face-to-face mentoring model, in operation in Wales since 2015.

### **Methodology**

This project enabled the production of a **two-minute film** about the Digi-Languages project, using qualitative data derived from *two planning workshops with Digi-Languages mentors* that took place in January 2018 and a *group review workshop after the first cycle of Digi-Languages* in June 2018. The latter was recorded via graphic facilitation. This qualitative data was also used in the production of a co-written project report authored by the PI (Gorrara), Project Coordinator (Jenkins) and Lead Learning Technologist (Mosley).

### **Outputs/impact/Sustainability**

The project **two-minute film** was screened as an 'exhibit' at the peripatetic 'Pop up' Museum of Languages developed by the MEITS team in 2019. The **project report** was submitted to the Welsh Government's 'Global Futures' Steering Group which oversees Wales' national strategy for languages (2015-2022). The policy report was subsequently redrafted and published as a policy article in the online journal *Language, Society and Policy* : <http://www.meits.org/policy-papers/paper/modern-languages-and-mentoring-lessons-from-digital-learning-in-wales>. An **additional short-form scholarly article** was published by the Project Coordinator, Lucy Jenkins, 'Engaging Welsh Modern Language Learners in Secondary Schools: Mentoring as a Proven Practice', *Scottish Languages Review*, 34 (2018): 17-28 [https://www.scilt.org.uk/Portals/24/Library/slr/issues/34/34-02%20Jenkins\\_V2.pdf](https://www.scilt.org.uk/Portals/24/Library/slr/issues/34/34-02%20Jenkins_V2.pdf). **Further impact** from the dissemination of the Digi-Languages project can be traced to the decision of the Department for Education in England to pilot the Digi-Languages model in South Yorkshire (Sheffield) in 2018-19 as 'Language Horizons'. This funding pilot was extended to an East Midland hub (Warwick and Coventry) in 2019-20. See <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/news/view/1757479-language-mentoring-project-goes-from-strength-to-strength>

The partnership work from this project also informed European partnership working with the regional government of Castilla y Leon and a multi-lingual exchange project between Cardiff School of Modern Languages and the Regional Education Directorate in Valladolid:

See: <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/news/view/1537864-european-partners-eager-to-learn-from-language-mentor-successes>

## **MEITS Flexible Funding Awardees: Peter Auger & Sheldon Brammall (University of Birmingham)**

### **Recovering Early Modern Multilingualism**

#### **Project/Impact Summary**

The study of European literature tends to divide into disciplines defined by individual nations and languages. However, literary works have always been places where multiple languages and cultures meet. This is especially true of the early modern period (c. 1500-1700), when schooling was based on learning foreign languages, and literary practice was shaped by translation, multilingual imitation, and international communities.

Our symposium and subsequent co-authored book have brought together leading scholars working on all aspects of early modern multilingualism (from disciplines such as English, Modern Languages, Neo-Latin, and Classics) to initiate dialogues between them and researchers of modern sociolinguistics. We also contributed expertise to an activity for the MEITS project's Pop-Up Museum of Languages that showed how language learning has been central to school curricula for centuries.

#### **Methodology/Events**

We held a [symposium](#) at the University of Birmingham on 10-11 January 2019 that advanced new perspectives on how early modern individuals and communities moved between languages. The symposium examined topics including multilingual print publications, multilingualism as creative practice, and multilingual practices in cities, schools and courts. Plenaries at the end of both days placed these discussions within current research in sociolinguistics and literary studies. The MEITS project in particular helped us to recognize the value in initiating an interdisciplinary conversation with colleagues who have made important contributions to sociolinguistic research on multilingualism.

#### **Outputs/Impact/Sustainability**

Following on from the conference, we developed a station for the MEITS project's Pop-Up Museum of Languages. It was called 'The Amazing Language Skills of Elizabethan School-Children', and showed how language learning has been central to English school curricula for centuries. It thus aimed to promote a knowledge of the rich multilingual history of England. Students would learn, for example, how Elizabeth I—a figure nowadays associated with quintessential Englishness—was so successful as a monarch in no small part due to the extraordinary linguistic skills that she developed through years of intensive study.

The symposium has led to a co-authored volume that will feature contributors from seven countries, and an afterword from a contemporary sociolinguist. It will be the first volume to look at early modern multilingualism as a general phenomenon, and will establish a shared framework for multilingual literary studies. The collection will address research questions such as how institutions and social settings generated distinctive multilingual practices, and how hierarchies of languages were constructed. It will also point to historical precedents for multilingual practices that are observed today, such as how individuals use multiple languages as part of a single communication system.

Our hope is that this research will be a foundation for further individual and collaborative research that responds to multilingual approaches to literature. Sheldon Brammall wrote a report on the symposium that is available [online](#). *Multilingual Practices in Early Modern Literary Culture* is due out with Routledge Critical Studies in Multilingualism in 2021.

**MEITS Flexible Funding Awardee: James Kent (Royal Holloways, University of London)**

***“¡Yo soy Fidel!”: Post-Castro Cuba and the Cult of Personality: New Approaches To Exploring Photographic Language and Identity***

**Project/Impact Summary**

Following Fidel Castro’s death in 2016 and his younger brother Raúl’s retirement as president two years later, 2018 marked the end of their near six decade-long leadership of Cuba. At the beginning of the post-Castro era, therefore, this practice-based project explored the presence of iconic revolutionary images and the role of documentary photography in contemporary Cuban society, focusing on the relationship between photographic language and identity. The project facilitated challenge-led collaborative research around the themes of photographic language and identity and encouraged new and innovative approaches to curatorial and photographic practice involving academics, curators, photographers, students and visual artists in both the UK and Cuba. Drawing on fieldwork and practice-led research, the major exhibition *This is Cuba: Documentary Photography after Fidel* (Royal Holloway, University of London, April–June 2019) represented one of the most innovative aspects of the project due to its transformative impact. The exhibition brought into focus the challenges faced by Cuban photographers, and exhibition-related workshops engaged participants in thinking about questions surrounding photographic language and identity.

**Methodology**

Kent worked with Cuban academics, curators and photographers to explore the links between photographic language and identity, developing collaborations, carrying out interviews and recording footage of Cuban photographers at work.

**Outputs/Impact/Sustainability**

Over the course of its three-month run, *This is Cuba* was visited by over 3,000 people, including academics, curators, diplomats, filmmakers, journalists, photographers, students, school children, TV presenters and visual artists. It was accompanied by a wide-ranging events programme that included several private views, masterclasses with the Cuban photographer Raúl Cañibano and curator’s tours. The programme also included other events with a specific focus on inclusivity, such as a Creative Audio Description workshop for blind, partially blind and sighted participants. Exhibition-related events such as these enabled gallery visitors to respond creatively to the exhibition’s overarching themes.

Following the success of the exhibition, Kent worked as Exhibition Liaison for Cuban photographer Raúl Cañibano’s first UK solo exhibition *Raúl Cañibano: Chronicles of an Island* at The Photographers’ Gallery, London (September–November 2019) (approx. 25,000 visitors). This allowed him to explore the broader themes of the “*¡Yo soy Fidel!*” project with a wider audience in public events held at the gallery.

Kent has given several academic and outreach talks relating to the project in the UK and Cuba. Additionally, networking meetings and workshops in Havana funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) have enabled him to share good practice, skills and experience relating to the project in the international context. This research project also had a pedagogical impact on the student experience at Royal Holloway in that it has provided the basis for research-led teaching on undergraduate courses in the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures.

GCRF-funded networking meetings and workshops in Havana have represented an opportunity to

further explore the project's main themes and promote challenge-led interdisciplinary research. In collaboration with Professor Hannah Thompson, Kent co-organised the GCRF-funded photography workshop "Beyond the Frame: Innovative approaches to curatorial and photographic practice in Havana, Cuba" (December 2019). The workshop represented an extension of the exhibition-related events held at Royal Holloway that aimed to address specific United Nations sustainable development goals and bring together British and Cuban experts, researchers and practitioners. Participants explored ways of thinking creatively about producing, curating and talking about photographic language and identity. This project will provide the basis for potential follow-on funding (a more substantial GCRF funding application) which will involve the delivery of workshops that will ultimately impact positively on the personal and social wellbeing of Cuban school children, socio-economically marginalized groups and disabled people on the island.

**MEITS Flexible Funding Awardee: Erika Fülöp (University of Lancaster)**

## **The Creative Web of Languages: Linguistic Hybridity and Creativity in Digital Networks**

### **Project/Impact Summary**

How do digital networks and technologies impact linguistic creativity, in particular where two or more languages are at play? The conclusion we can draw from this project is that digital tools both facilitate and counter linguistic inventiveness and hybridity. Our studies and creative experiments demonstrated that while the use of natural language processing by dominant players of the Web such as Google and Facebook have a normalizing effect on languages by recycling dominant patterns, digital networks also provide space for creative experimentation with mixing and reinventing languages, both in everyday communication and in artistic projects. While individual and artistic modes of resistance to linguistic capitalism may seem quantitatively insignificant to counter AI power, we must encourage them as they represent those grains of sand in the system that can save us from a total Orwellian linguistic dystopia.

### **Background**

While the Internet initially gave hope for a worldwide communicational utopia, this faded with the development of powerful digital data collection and analytics tools. A handful of multinational companies have monopolized our digital communications and we pay with our (primarily linguistic) data for their services. One of the main objectives of recent digital literary experiments has been to find ways of resisting linguistic exploitation through new linguistic forms that defy algorithms. At the same time, multilingual artists and individuals take advantage of the digital medium's flexibility in accommodating code switching and non-standard linguistic hybrids. These also carry a political significance in opposing reductive approaches to (linguistic, cultural, gender, etc.) identity. With the two major contemporary threats of digital surveillance and populist xenophobic politics, it is crucial to raise users' awareness of the risks and modes of resistance.

### **Methodology**

The programme of this collaborative and multidisciplinary project consisted in a combination of an academic symposium and conference, a translator residency, digital art performances, a virtual exhibition, and a digital writing workshop. The academic events presented research on relevant literary experiments and initiatives across platforms and linguistic and cultural areas from Latin-America to China and the Arab world. A number of multilingual artists and authors also presented their work and experience living and working between languages and the role of digital tools in their practices. We placed much emphasis throughout on the dialogues and cross-fertilization between the scholarly and the artistic and between the scholarly-artistic discourses and everyday concerns.

### **Outputs/Impact/Sustainability**

The public events confirmed the general audiences' interest in the dangers and creative linguistic potentials of digital tools. An additional temporary digital exhibition was available in ZeTMaG (*Lang(u)age(s)-(E)Space(s)*, June 2019-Dec. 2019). Video recordings of the academic events are available on YouTube, and a selection of articles will also be published in the English-French bilingual journal Hybrid (Autumn 2020). The project furthered research especially on multilingual digital authorship, Facebook as a hybrid creative linguistic space, and digital literature as a form of resistance to linguistic capitalism. Three new collaborative projects have emerged from it: a bilingual interview series on digital authorship (forthcoming in 2021); a translation and monograph project on

the work of Hungarian-French experimental and digital poet Tibor Papp; and an ITC Discipline Hopping project on coding as cultural and linguistic practice (EPSRC bid submitted in March 2020).



## **MEITS Flexible Funding Awardee: Sarah Dodd (University of Leeds)**

### **Space to Speak: Non-Han Fiction and Film in China and Beyond**

#### **Project/Impact Summary**

This project examines how contemporary authors and film-makers in China's borderlands are negotiating with standardized Mandarin and their own minoritized languages in their work, in order to find their own linguistic and artistic space. The project's key element was a [symposium](#), held in September 2018, which brought together authors, translators, academics and publishers, providing a rare opportunity for dialogue and discussion between those working in different areas and linguistic contexts, including Mongolian, Uighur, and Tibetan. The symposium provided the foundation for building up a network of practitioners and academics working in different aspects of non-Han fiction and film, as well as broadening the existing network of the Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing, which, previous to this project, had been limited to Mandarin Chinese contexts. This is a vital critical intervention at a time when popular and academic interest in translated Chinese fiction is growing, but at which the work of non-Han authors is still under-represented.

#### **Background**

Emerging from the work of the Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing at the University of Leeds (which itself grew out of the AHRC-funded 'Writing Chinese' project), this project broadened the focus of the Centre's work to engage more deeply with China's complex multilingual contexts, and to give a space to voices from beyond the Han Chinese mainstream. This project is particularly important at the current time, in which Chinese government-funded policies are subsidising the translation and publication of non-Han authors, yet the crackdown on minoritized languages and people in regions such as Xinjiang is critically affecting the ability of people in these areas to tell their own stories and experiences.

#### **Outputs/Impact/Sustainability**

The creation of this network led directly to the organising of a public event, in February 2019, on [new writing from Tibet](#), featuring three Tibet scholars, and a collaboration with Columbia University Press, focusing on their publication of a collection of Tibetan short stories. The event drew an audience from the University and the general public, thus allowing for an opportunity to engage with broader audiences in Leeds and beyond.

The focus on fiction beyond the Han context and the Chinese mainland has been continued in a translation competition based around Hong Kong fiction, the winning translation of which will be published in *Pathlight*, a well-established magazine of new writing from China. A number of non-Han authors have also been featured on the Centre's [book club](#), which provides a valuable and sustainable resource for scholars and teachers of Chinese, and for a general public keen to discover the variety of contemporary writing from China.

Leading on from these events, the [Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing](#) has begun working with the White Rose University Press to publish a new academic journal, which will focus on contemporary fiction from various linguistic context from around the Chinese world. The journal, alongside the Centre's website, will provide a sustainable resource for the creative and critical work which this project has explored.

**MEITS Flexible Funding Awardee: Rachel Haworth (University of Hull)**

**Watching the Transnational Detectives: Exploring British Audience Responses to Themes of Identity, Internationalism and Language Learning in International Crime Television**

**Project/Impact Summary**

‘Watching the Transnational Detectives’ explores how British audiences have reacted to the recent boom in foreign language television programmes that are available in the UK across a variety of platforms and services. Six popular international crime dramas have been the central focus: *Spiral*; *Inspector Montalbano*; *Falke*; *Mafiosa*; *Maltese The Mafia Detective*; and *Dark*. The project asks: whilst we are viewing these favourite crime shows, what else are we discovering about the country we are seeing and the people we are hearing on screen? Does our viewing influence our attitudes about languages and encourage us to embark on learning a new language? The research thus reveals how these series impact audience’s perceptions of nationhood, foreign languages and cultures, and language learning, and the extent to which such programmes in fact promote multilingualism and multiculturalism in contemporary Britain.

**Background**

It is against the recent political back-drop of the UK, with increasingly common calls for isolationism and cultural protectionism and the recent vote to leave the European Union, that this project examines the case for multiculturalism as it is portrayed on television through international crime dramas, and the extent to which audiences are receptive to such discussions and open to viewing more such programmes. The case study audience for this project is from Yorkshire and Humberside, an area of the UK that voted largely in favour of Brexit in 2016. The research findings will be presented to national broadcasters as a way of informing future programming and scheduling choices.

**Methodology**

Six screenings were held between September and November 2018 with approximately 50 members of the public in attendance. After each screening, the researchers led a discussion with participants, asking them to comment on: what the programmes revealed about the host culture, what was culturally specific to what they had seen, how important the language was to the show, and whether watching the programme made them want to visit the country they had seen and/or learn the language they had heard. What emerged was that whilst cultural specificity for these programmes varies from show to show, language is of fundamental importance to the viewing experience and the pleasure of watching. For nearly all members of the audience interviewed, it would have been impossible to watch any of these shows with the sound off. The sound of the language itself is crucial to understanding some of the cultural specificity of these programmes and grasping the elements that are specific to locations and nations.

**Outputs/Impact/Sustainability**

The project has generated the following outputs: six public screenings; an academic conference to explore the themes of identity, internationalisation, and multilingualism in international crime television; a partnership with the video-on-demand service, *Walter Presents*; and the UK premiere of *The Mafia Only Kills in Summer*, hosted at the University of Hull with *Walter Presents*.

In addition, a report for television broadcasters and industry professionals on the reception of international crime drama amongst the British audience, with data that can inform broadcasting and commissioning agendas is being prepared for publication in 2020. This will be complemented by a special issue of *Modern Languages Open*, with academic articles focusing on the reception of international crime television in Britain.

**MEITS Flexible Funding Awardee: Helena Miguélez-Carballeira (Bangor University)**

## **The Translations of T. Ifor Rees: Approaching Welsh-Hispanic Cultural Relations in the Twentieth-Century**

### **Project/Impact Summary**

The project looks anew at the literary work of career diplomat T. Ifor Rees (1890–1977) who, while best known for his Latin America travel books, lavishly illustrated with his own photographs, also left behind a rich legacy of multilingual translations (from French, English and Spanish into Welsh). Studying these will provoke new understandings of how translation across many languages influenced discourses of language preservation and the exotic, both in Welsh-language culture and further afield.

### **Background**

The researchers Diana Luft and Leusa Fflur Llewelyn have studied various aspects of T. Ifor Rees' fascinating biography and cultural activities, including his travel books and photographs while serving as Ambassador to the British Foreign Office in several Latin American nations in the 1930s and 1940s. Their research has tended to take Rees' Welshness as its main focus, where Rees remains the metaphor of a minority culture under siege, and his cultural and literary activity while in Latin America a quaintly exotic gesture towards language preservation in twentieth-century Welsh literary culture. The project rethinks the critical perspectives from which Rees' cultural writing have been studied, creating new understandings about constructions of the exotic in transnational settings through translation.

### **Methodology**

The project has multidisciplinary and multilinguistic methodologies at its core, including historical research on Mexican and Welsh modern literary cultures, archival research (in Welsh publishing houses records; Mexican International Relations Office), interviews with relevant figures (e.g. relatives of Mexican International Relations Minister Eduardo Hay), comparative translation criticism of original and translated texts, comparative translation criticism of various Welsh translations of the *Rubaiyat*, and critical interpretation of documented translation strategies.

### **Outputs/Impact/Sustainability**

The project has been met with a very positive response from the Fundación Casa-Museo Zenobia Camprubí-Juan Ramón Jiménez (Juan Ramón Jiménez's House-Museum in his native town of Moguer in Spain). Before the coronavirus crisis, preparations were under way for a public talk by the PI to mark the donation of the Welsh translation of *Platero y yo*. This will have to be postponed for the foreseeable future. When the event is reorganised, it will be included as part of the annual activity programme of the Cátedra Juan Ramón Jiménez (held jointly by the University of Huelva and the Centro de Estudios Juanramonianos based at the Casa-Museo). As regards research-led teaching materials, Bangor University's module LXE3101 Approaching Translation, open to all students of modern languages and cultures at the School of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics, now includes the Welsh translation of *Platero y yo*, *Platero a Minnau*, as one of the case studies that students may select for the "Translation and Commentary Assignment". Ongoing discussions to increase Welsh-medium provision across the School of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics have included consideration of this research project and its potential contribution to existing and new modules.

### **Further academic and non-academic dissemination**

The project has already had its first published output:

Miguélez-Carballeira, Helena (2020) “Chwilio am T Ifor Rees, Llysgennad Ei Fawrhydi: Safbwynt Mecsicanaidd”, *O’r Pedwar Gwynt*: 21–22.

The article, published in one of Wales’ foremost literary magazines, *O’r Pedwar Gwynt*, examines the history of the first Welsh-language book ever published in Mexico, T Ifor Rees’ Welsh translation of the *Rubáiyát* (1939), from a Mexican perspective, placing it in the historical context of the strained British-Mexican relations after president Lázaro Cárdenas’ expropriation of foreign oil in 1938.

The main activity for this project is a one-day symposium on the uses of translation in Welsh twentieth-century literary cultures, originally planned for March 2021. Owing to the COVID-19 emergency, the event will be rescheduled for summer 2021.

## **MEITS Flexible Funding Awardee: Delphine Grass (University of Lancaster)**

### **Translation as Creative Critical Practice**

#### **Project/Impact Summary**

‘Translation as Creative Critical Practice’ is a practice-led research project that investigates the potential for translation to stimulate creative approaches to the reading and interpretation of texts. It does so through a series of workshops and the development of different creative translation methods across media (poetry, literature and film). The project’s impact has been principally on the writers/translators who were invited to create and perform works of creative translation and on members of the public who participated in the creative-critical translation workshops prior to the evening performance. The project also aims to have a more lasting educational impact through creative-critical translation teaching packs, devised in partnership with Sophie Lewis (translator and co-founder of the translation educational platform Shadow Heroes) and Ines Labarta (writer and graphic artist).

#### **Background**

Creative criticism is an innovative and burgeoning field at the crossroad between research and creative practice that seeks to use a wide range of genres and media to engage with writing about art and literature. Since the process of translation requires both critical distanciation from and artistic engagement with its source text, literary translation is naturally at the crossroad between creative writing and criticism. Although some scholarship on the practice of creative-criticism and creative translation exists, there has so far been little attempt to develop pedagogical tools around these practices. This is what this project is set out to do.

#### **Methodology**

The methodology of this project is both practice-based and practice-led, in that it seeks to gain new knowledge by means of the practice of creative-critical translation which will have operative significance for modern languages and literary studies overall.

#### **Outputs/Impact/Sustainability**

##### ➤ Impact on Artists and Creative Outputs:

Several creative outputs have been produced as part of this research project, some of which have been published:

Ulrike Almut Sandig and Grigory Semenchuk, ‘Needle’, a creative translation of ‘Magnetic’, a poem by Emma McGordon on *Soundcloud* <<https://soundcloud.com/ulrike-almut-sandig/landshcraft-needle-into-the-nature-feat-emma-mc-gordon>>

Ulrike Almut Sandig, ‘In die Natur’, a creative translation of Emma McGordon’s poem ‘Magnetic’, *Schoeffling & Co* (20 May 2020), <<https://quarantaenelyrik.wordpress.com/2020/05/20/ulrike-almut-sandig-in-die-natur/>>

Noémie Lefebvre and Laurent Grappe, ‘We are We’, trans. By Sophie Lewis and introduced by Delphine Grass, *Words Without Borders* (26 April 2019).

Emma McGordon, ‘Magnetic’ (2019).

Emma McGordon, 'Lexus', a creative translation from the Ukrainian of Lexus by Grigory Semenchuk.

Ines Labarta, a Spanish writer and graphic artist, produced a comic strip about the event as a result of her involvement where she also reflects on her creative-writing practice as a non-native English speaker. See my MEITS blog entry: "[Found in Translation: Literary Dispatches from the Peripheries of Europe](#)" (13 December 2019).

➤ Educational Impact & Impact on the Public

The impact on the public arose through our workshops and evening performances, which received very positive feedback. Overall, around 60 people participated in the workshops or the evening performance. Dissemination through publications in *Words Without Borders* and through the artists' publications and websites can be accessed and enjoyed by a wider, more international audience. Further educational impact will emerge from the creation of teaching packs, which I have started to design with Ines Labarta and Sophie Lewis.

➤ Academic Impact & Output

- 1) Delphine Grass, 'Translating the Archives: An Autotheoretical Experiment', in Theano Petrou; Florian Mussgnug; Mathelinda Mabugodi (eds), *Critical Creativity: Artistic Form and Cultural Agency in Comparative Literature* (London: Peter Lang, 2021).
- 2) A new teaching module "DeLC425: Translation as Creative-Critical Practice"
- 3) Delphine Grass, 'A Case Study of Teaching Translation as Creative Critical Practice' (in progress – this paper will be based on my experience teaching the new module cited above.)

**MEITS Flexible Funding Awardee: Joel Chalfen**

## **Polyphonic: Researching Multilingual Identities Through Participatory Theatre**

### **Project/Impact Summary**

Participatory theatre practices are recognised as an effective mode of social research as well as public engagement, especially in the context of working with migrant and marginalized communities. This project focused on an emerging practice, “Raw Theatre”, and its particular methods of collective creation and performance. Taking the question of ‘Where is home?’ as its starting point, the group – comprised of 15 people from different cultural backgrounds and a range of mother tongue languages - developed a series of multilingual, physical performances telling the participants’ personal stories. The play grappled with and revealed the way language becomes entangled in the decentred identities, the public and private relationships, the fears and dreams of those with multiple places they call home. As well as engaging participants across a 22-month rehearsal period, the performance reached an audience of 254 people in three presentations.

### **Background**

[Polygon Arts](#) was funded by MEITS to run a theatre project as part of its public engagement programme. Based on work carried out some years earlier and collaborating with local theatre company, [Acting Now](#), the project sought to develop a community performance that would itself both empower participants and engage various publics in MEITS’ research themes. The value of a participatory project was particularly accentuated as the timing coincided with Brexit. Taking place in Cambridge, a highly international city surrounded by strongly ‘Leave’ rural communities, there was an urgency felt by those who had personal stories to tell of movement and migration within Europe and beyond to both celebrate and interrogate their experiences.

### **Methodology**

In collaboration with educational and cultural partners across the world, Acting Now has evolved what its artistic director, Marina Pallerès Elias, calls “The Theatre of Yes” or “Raw Theatre”, which draws on choral, physical and therapeutic techniques. The technique seeks to strike a balance between the social relevance of the dramatic content and achieving a high quality performance with non-professional actors. Marina proposed the enactment of an emotional piece showcasing often hidden, untold or overlooked personal stories. The performance is intended to spark collective catharsis in both the performers and audience. For this production, emphasis was given to the multilingualism of the group and hence the physical performances were complemented by the use of mother-tongue languages of the actors.

The initial performance (October 2018) was developed in workshops over six months in which participants developed a shared theatrical language. A further two, revised, performances took place in May and July 2019. A fourth could not proceed because of COVID-19. The creative work and performances were supported with feedback questionnaires and interviews.



## Outputs/Impact/Sustainability



The workshops and performances identified how interwoven our linguistic and emotional lives are. Touching on themes such as loneliness, guilt, dislocation, as well as the cultural differences and values in new and old relationships, the work was an interesting process of translation in itself. The live event served as an opportunity for public conversation; the recorded material as an archive for further analysis; and the work itself informs theatre as research practice.

The primary impact was on the performers, who were mostly first-time actors. All articulated significant impact on their confidence, and sense of belonging and empowerment. The process gives voice to experiences that can be both marginalized and overly-scrutinized in public discourse. The group continues to meet but awaits further funding before moving towards further production.

Audience feedback was informative with the social impact of the experience alongside the stories themselves acknowledged as the most valuable aspects of the performance event. Comments drew particular attention to the emotional power of the contrasting stories and languages and how they lead to a recognisable and accurate picture of reality for immigrants.

## MEITS Flexible Funding Awardee: Joel Chalfen

### Polyphonic in School: Exploring Children's Ideas of Language and Home through Theatre

#### Project/Impact Summary

Taking place in a Cambridgeshire School where for nearly 50% of pupils English is not their first language, the participatory theatre programme played with the question 'What is home?'. Through the use of Image Theatre and techniques from 'Theatre of Yes', participants aged between 9 and 11 years old collectively told their own stories of multilingual identities. Allowing for personal difficulty to be explored as well as the exciting aspects of cultural diversity, group exercises and performances revealed the complex intertwining of social and political concerns with experiences children had of connecting to different cultural and linguistic homes. The pupils discovered and were able to express that home is not only a physical place but one where they can feel warmth, be safe and where they can express themselves freely. Reflections relating to identity, culture, beliefs, languages, communication and inclusion versus exclusion were also portrayed.

#### Background



As part of MEITS, [Polygon Arts](#) was approached to run a theatre project that would contribute to the outreach public engagement programme. Based on work carried out some years earlier and collaborating with local theatre company [Acting Now](#), the ensuing project sought to develop a community performance that would itself both empower participants as well as engage various publics in the research themes. The schools' programme grew out of this community creative work and set out with the following objectives:

- To provide tools to combat youth exclusion and conflict resolution;
- To create a reflective space to explore youth's issues around identity, "home" and migration;
- To promote teamwork;
- To increase communication and self-esteem;
- To support participants to take ownership of the process of creating their very own theatre piece;
- To improve the participants' ability to analyse conflicts and complex social situations;
- To allow the participants to learn about other languages and share their own mother tongue;
- To harness the creative and analytical abilities of the participants.

#### Methodology

With training in the Lecoq pedagogy combined with acquired experience, we were able to develop a form of theatrical language that combines beauty with the exploration of social and personal difficulty. In this world that we inhabit, where people at risk of social exclusion do not have a way to express their voices, the theatre, especially in its physical mode, can offer a creative space to do that. There, participants are free to articulate any idea and transform it however they want. Not only that, but such a nuanced theatrical language also allows the development of rich plays out of complex personal stories.

#### Outputs/Impact/Sustainability

The reach of the project was curtailed as a result of COVID-19. Whereas the plan was to create an exchange between participating schools, in the event it took place in just one school but had, by the

end of the project, already engaged more classes than planned. It reached 94 pupils across 3 year groups through six hours of workshop with each participating class. The devised pieces, shared within the School, touched upon a broad range of topics finding that the question of 'home' was answered through a range of social and personal themes as well as language diversity.

The project introduced children and teachers to new techniques of theatrical creation as well as facilitating an opportunity to explore personal stories and address common issues. A positive relationship was established with the School and will hopefully lead to further collaborations. It is also intended to return to the original plan of establishing an exchange between different schools.