

Translation AND **Translanguaging:**

Investigating linguistic and
cultural transformations in
superdiverse wards in four UK cities

Birmingham



Arts & Humanities
Research Council



Translation and
Translanguaging

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

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Foreword

Professor Charles Forsdick,
AHRC Theme Leadership Fellow
Translating Cultures



'Translating Cultures' is one of four thematic programmes currently supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). In a world increasingly characterized by transnational mobility and globalized connections, the theme foregrounds the importance of understanding communication within, between and across diverse contexts. 'Translating Cultures' addresses this challenge by studying the role of translation, understood in its broadest sense, in the sharing and interpretation of languages, values, beliefs, histories and narratives.

The theme includes a portfolio of over 100 grants, focused on key concepts such as multiculturalism and multilingualism. It explores the zones within, across and between which translation occurs, and encourages understanding of the role of those intermediaries who perform translation work. Central to this activity is a cluster of three large grants, of an unprecedented scope and scale for the AHRC, to which 'Translation and Translanguaging' (TLANG) belongs. In its study of four multilingual cities, this project has made an invaluable contribution to our theme. The emphasis on translanguaging has revealed the innovative modes and practices on which everyday translation depends; and the focus on co-produced research with partners from museums, libraries, law, sport and business has shown the complex linguistic ecologies of contemporary British cities. The linguistic ethnographies of 'Translation and Translanguaging' provide a striking illustration of the dynamic, creative multilingualism of the UK, reminding us of the importance of languages in everyday life, and presenting linguistic diversity as a major resource and not an impediment to social cohesion. I welcome this report, and hope that it will inspire future work in collaboration with a wide range of community partners.

THE TLANG PROJECT

Professor Angela Creese,
Principal Investigator,
TLANG Project



The aim of the TLANG project is to understand how people communicate multilingually across diverse languages and cultures. We define ‘translation’ as the negotiation of meaning through different modes (spoken/written/visual/gestural), where speakers have different proficiencies in a range of languages and varieties. When speakers do not share a common language they may rely on translation by professionals, friends or family, or by digital means. Such practices occur in ‘translation zones’, and are at the cutting edge of translation and negotiation.

We view ‘cultures’ not as fixed sets of practices essential to ethnic groups, but rather as processes which change, and which may be negotiable. In multilingual communities speakers are not confined to using languages separately, but rather they ‘translanguage’ as they make meaning through whatever repertoires are available to them. If we are to develop the successful cities of the future it is crucial that we understand how people in superdiverse cities communicate across borders that might once have appeared prohibitive. In comprehensive, detailed accounts of interactions in four superdiverse cities, the TLANG project demonstrates how people communicate in everyday encounters with difference.

...THE TLANG PROJECT INVESTIGATES COMMUNICATION IN MULTILINGUAL CITIES FROM AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE.

The TLANG project investigates communication in multilingual cities from an interdisciplinary perspective. The project is a collaboration between academic researchers from a wide range of disciplines, nationally and internationally, including business, law, heritage, sports and exercise sciences, linguistics, social policy, and education. It is also a collaboration between academic researchers and networks of organisations whose user groups will benefit from outcomes of the research, including partners from museums, libraries, legal practice, sport, business, and the third sector.

Across the four cities we conducted ethnographic research in four phases. The phases were organized thematically, so that across the cities there was a common focus. The phases examined communication in sites related to business, heritage, sport, and legal advice. This shared gaze meant that the four research teams could meet together for collaborative analysis. Research sites have

included markets, corner shops, libraries, community arts, a karate club, a capoeira group, legal advice centres and more. Linguistic ethnography is painstaking, labour-intensive work, as researchers observe and record the communicative practices of people going about their everyday lives. More than a million words of field notes have been written, hundreds of hours of audio-recordings transcribed, thousands of online and social media messages analysed, scores of interviews conducted. This report presents a summary of the findings of the research in one of the four cities.

More extensive reports are available on the TLANG website:

www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tlang/publications/index.aspx

This report is highly relevant and timely as superdiverse cities are planned for the future, not only in the UK, but globally.

BIRMINGHAM

Birmingham is a youthful, superdiverse city, which attracts people from all over the globe. People come to Birmingham with varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds, histories of education and employment, and legal statuses. The city is a mix of old and new migrants, established populations, and resident minorities. In the complex, changing city people find ways to communicate and get along in their everyday lives. They translate, and translanguague, overcoming apparent difference, making sense out of their disparate experiences. Translation and translanguaging keep Birmingham moving as a vibrant, global city.



Themes

Specific sites were identified for each of the four phases of the research: business, heritage, sport, and legal advice. For the business phase researchers observed Birmingham Bull Ring Indoor Market. This was a place visited by people from all over the city, and all over the world, to buy cheap meat, fish, vegetables, and other goods. A Chinese couple who ran a butcher's stall agreed to participate in the research project. For the second phase, 'heritage', the new Library of Birmingham was the research site. A Customer Experience Assistant, originally from Hong Kong, was more than willing to collaborate. In the third phase a volleyball club was selected. The coach of one of the volleyball teams, also originally from Hong Kong, was happy to be involved in the research. Finally, for the legal advice phase, the Chinese Community Centre's Advice and Advocacy service agreed to participate.

Each of the observation phases took place over periods of four months. During this time the research team conducted observations of the key participant, wrote field notes, made audio-recordings in the work-place and the home, collected online and digital communications, interviewed the key participant and other stakeholders, gathered institutional documentation, took photographs, and video-recorded the key participant. This process generated a large amount of material, which was carefully analysed by the research team. The present report is a summary of the analysis of material collected in the four research sites.

COMMUNICATION IN A CITY MARKET

In the Bull Ring Indoor Market, traders said the profile of their customers had changed in recent times, and that customers now came from a greater range of global territories than previously. In their view ethnic, religious, linguistic and socioeconomic diversity was a normal part of life in Birmingham. The market traders did not see the arrival of speakers of many different languages as in any way problematic. The Chinese butchers, Meiyen Chew and Kang Chen, told stories of their arrival in the UK, of gaining legal status, of setting up a business, and developing a niche market. They said setting up the business was initially difficult, because they lacked knowledge of the butcher's trade. But as the business became established they gained in confidence, and were better able to negotiate with suppliers and customers.



Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew engaged in constant and ongoing negotiations with customers and other traders, in which they pushed for sales, commented on their customers, made remarks about 'British' cultural practices, and got along with people by whatever means possible. The day-to-day practices of buying and selling were normally characterized by good humour, conviviality, and generosity of spirit. In the market hall differences between people were unremarkable, something people lived with. Being able to speak and understand English was not a requirement to get on with other people in the market. A willingness to engage with others was more important.

Elaborate performance, including gesture and mime, was a regular feature of the market hall, as people entertained themselves and each other in the process of conducting commercial interactions. People often used more than one language at a time, rather than keeping languages separate. People also communicated in ways not always thought of as ‘language’, including performance, gestures, eye gaze, nods and head shakes, shrugs and smiles, and physical humour. The market was a place where people made fun of each other, teased each other, and sometimes became irritated with each other. Most importantly it was a place for buying and selling. This was successfully and convivially managed through ‘translanguaging’, as traders and customers made the best use they could of their communicative repertoires to get on with each other in whatever ways they could.

In this way spaces for communication were opened up. The market was a place where different kinds of communication could be tried out.

Communication was not always successful, as people’s attempts to joke, tease, mime, and haggle were occasionally not well received. But on the whole commercial activity continued in a convivial way that was not seriously troubled by apparent differences between linguistic, cultural, or national backgrounds.

The journey for the Chinese butchers, Kang Chen and Meiyen Chew, was not just about movement from China and Malaysia to Birmingham. It was also about learning through encounters with others, and with the voices of others. For them it was about more than running a business, it was about finding a voice.

Key points: Language and business

- The market is a place where migration is valued by traders, and this attitude can support a positive view of migrants
- In the market people communicate in whatever way they can, including using bits and pieces of each others’ languages, and gesture, mime, and performance
- In the market, traders and customers learn about others’ cultural practices and beliefs, and this contributes to intercultural understanding
- A willingness to engage with others is a key social skill practised in the city market
- The day-to-day practices of buying and selling in the market are usually good humoured and convivial, as people overcome difference to get on with other people
- In the market people often joke about difference as a way of getting on with each other
- The market brings together people who might otherwise never come into contact
- In the market difference and diversity are commonplace, and normally not problematic.

TRANSLANGUAGING IN THE LIBRARY

The research team spent four months observing and working alongside Winnie Lateano, a Customer Experience Assistant at the Library of Birmingham. Winnie was born in Hong Kong, and migrated to the UK more than twenty years ago. She had been working at the Library of Birmingham for 18 years. In this phase of the research, in addition to investigating how people communicate with each other in the superdiverse city, we focused on the question of what ‘heritage’ means in contexts of rapid change.

The Library of Birmingham opened on 3 September 2013, replacing Birmingham Central Library. The library cost £188.8 million, and was a flagship project for the city’s redevelopment. It is the largest public library in the United Kingdom, and the largest regional library in Europe. More than two million people visited the library in 2014. The library is a meeting-point for people of the city, and a popular attraction for visitors.

The Library of Birmingham is a place where people’s different backgrounds, experiences, and practices come into contact. Here social difference is commonplace. The free-to-enter civic space attracts scholars and business people, international students and those without a home, immigrants and long-established residents, families and the elderly, tourists and sightseers.



In the Library of Birmingham the worlds of business, tourism, heritage, language learning, and much more are found under one roof. In exchanges between staff and their clients, and in interactions between colleagues, translation and translanguaging are regular features of communication. People in the library are willing to get on with others, and are prepared to be creative in their efforts to communicate.

Heritage is found not only in the library archives, but also in meetings between people in everyday life, as different backgrounds come into contact. In the superdiverse city library, heritage is as much about the way people engage with difference as it is about preserving the past. More than just learning to live with difference and change, Winnie puts difference centre stage, making it a resource for getting on with her clients and her colleagues. She is able to

transform an interaction with a customer through her positive attitude to linguistic diversity, and her willingness to have a go at speaking other people's languages.

The users and staff of the library acknowledge ethnic, national, and linguistic difference, often turning that difference into a resource for communication. The Library of Birmingham is a place where staff and library users alike learn and practise the skills required to navigate the superdiverse city.

These skills are a heritage for the city, as people with different histories come into contact and find ways to communicate. In meetings between people of many different backgrounds, a positive attitude to difference and diversity were part of normal life, and something to be valued and safeguarded for the future.

Key points: Language and heritage

- In the Library of Birmingham people with different backgrounds, experiences, and practices come into contact
- Translation and translanguaging are regular features of communication, as people use creative means to get on with each other
- People in the library often acknowledge ethnic, national, and linguistic difference, turning that difference into a resource for communication
- Heritage consists not only in artefacts of the past, but also in meetings between people in everyday life
- In the library a positive attitude to difference and diversity are part of normal life, and therefore something to be valued and preserved for the future
- In the library people learn and practise the skills required to navigate the superdiverse city.

TRANSLANGUAGING AND VOLLEYBALL

The key participant in the sport phase of the research was Joe Ng, a volleyball coach. Originally from Hong Kong, Joe arrived in the UK at the age of 14. His role as coach is principally to enable the players to develop specific skills. He is also concerned with the development of the team as a cohesive group, with encouraging positive team morale, and with the organisation of training, matches, and social events. He is supported in this by senior players in the group. The researchers observed his coaching sessions, and also watched matches played by the team against other clubs. The volleyball team included players who had moved to the UK from a range of countries, including France, Germany, Iran, The Philippines, Romania, Rwanda, Spain, and Taiwan.

What the researchers observed over four months with the coach and his team was the rhythm of social life, played out on the volleyball court. Each year new players join, and the players gradually become a team, developing their knowledge and understanding of each other. The coach, Joe, puts in place the repetitive structures of teaching and learning, encouragement and reward, organisation and instruction, evaluation and sympathy. Crucial to the culture of the team is their banter and laughter. Also important is the repetition of small rituals and ceremonies, as they praise and reward each other, encourage and criticise, support and tease.



Translanguaging is more than moving between languages. On the volleyball court it is a way of engaging with others, a way of encountering change. It is a form of communication which relies on the willingness of participants in an encounter to engage in communicative practice which blurs or breaks through apparent boundaries between languages.

In volleyball players and coaches from many different biographical, historical, political, economic, and linguistic backgrounds play together. In order to do so they must communicate. Communication is an essential asset in the success of the team. On the volleyball court translanguaging is the basis of the social relations of the team.

Certain communicative practices are viewed as appropriate to certain spaces. In volleyball particular communicative practices are

permitted, and even encouraged. Shouts, cheers, roars, profanities, yells, screams, fist-pumps, hand-claps, high-fives, low-fives, physical contact, chants, stares, grimaces, all are present in the communicative repertoire of the volleyball court. Communication is as much about the body as it is about what we usually call 'language'.

The game is both ritual and communal. The players abide by set rules and practices which must be undertaken at specific times and in a set order; the game occurs in a limited time and space which is free from the usual social structure.

The game of volleyball brings people together in all their diversity and unites them. The game is the site of their learning to be human, and learning to live in the superdiverse city.

Key points: Language and sport

- Volleyball brings together players and coaches from many different national, ethnic, economic, and linguistic backgrounds
- The coach regularly shows the players what he wants them to do as well as telling them
- Translanguaging is centred on the body: coach and players communicate with each other with their bodies
- On the volleyball court communication through the body and through speech are integral parts of the same repertoire
- Translanguaging is more than communication: it is a way of engaging with difference
- In volleyball translanguaging is the basis of the social relations of the team
- Convivial banter and laughter are crucial to the culture of the team
- Small rituals, such as apology, reward, and encouragement, bring the players together as a team.

TRANSLATION IN THE CITY



The fourth phase of the research focused on the Advice and Advocacy service of the Chinese Community Centre, Birmingham. The service supports people in accessing welfare benefits and public services. Chinese Community Centre-Birmingham (CCC-B) was established in 1977 by a group of volunteers to provide information and advice to Chinese people in the city. CCC-B advocates for Chinese people to improve their quality of life. The key participant in the research was Joanne Wan, an Advice and Advocacy Advisor. Seventy-nine meetings between Joanne and her clients were observed and recorded. Translation was a crucial aspect of exchanges in which Joanne provided advice and support to clients with a wide range of needs.

Translation often means transferring meaning from one language to another. In meetings with her clients Joanne moves back and forth between the languages which make up her communicative repertoire. However, for Joanne translation extends beyond the mere movement between English, Mandarin, and Cantonese. It also includes translation of complex systems, with their specialised terms, and their rules and regulations.

In the process of translating the world for her clients Joanne rewords, creates, contests, narrates, negotiates, co-constructs, summarises, and much besides. Translation also involves the exchange of meanings from one mode to another, for example a narrative told in Mandarin by a client may be summarised and entered by Joanne on an online claim form, or re-narrated in English to a benefits officer on the end of the telephone.

The translator takes on multiple roles. The process of translation in the advice and advocacy service requires flexibility, as Joanne improvises and adapts to unanticipated circumstances. She is not only a translator but also a mediator, making more comprehensible for her clients the rules and regulations of welfare benefits, immigration and citizenship, child protection, housing, and much more. She does this not only by translating one language into another, but by explaining, and advising, opening out the folds of the benefits system gradually and patiently.

Joanne is often confronted with decisions and choices in translation. She makes choices based on social justice for the client. Of secondary importance are questions of loyalty to the translation process. She is often required to navigate the complex welfare benefits system, making decisions in collaboration with her clients to achieve the best possible outcome for them. As translator and mediator she does what she can to make the world not only more meaningful, but also more just.

Joanne advocates on behalf of her clients, changing their life trajectories, often in small ways, sometimes more profoundly. But at times her efforts are to no avail, and the gap between herself and the client is found to be beyond translation, and out of reach. As one of the hidden translators in the nooks and crannies of social life, Joanne helps to drive communication in the superdiverse city.

Key points: Language and law

- Translation is more than the transfer between languages, and also includes translation of complex systems, with their specialized terms, and rules and regulations
- In the process of translating the world Joanne rewords, creates, contests, narrates, negotiates, co-constructs, summarises, and much besides
- Translation involves the exchange of meanings from one mode to another, including from speech to writing
- In addition to acting as a translator for her clients, Joanne takes on multiple other roles, including counsellor, advocate, gatekeeper, empathizer, expert, improviser, mediator, teacher, and broker
- Joanne makes translation choices based on social justice for her clients, rather than simple loyalty to transfer of meanings from one language to another
- Translation sometimes encounters the untranslatable, if text is specialized in a subject beyond Joanne's knowledge, or if the client is unable or unwilling to engage with her
- Joanne's practice as a translator and mediator supports Chinese people's access to rights and benefits in the city.

TRANSLATION AND TRANSLANGUAGING IN BIRMINGHAM

When people of different backgrounds come into contact in the market, in the library, and on the volleyball court, they often translanguage, making use of whatever languages they can to communicate with each other.

They borrow from each others' languages, try things out, and find areas of common ground for sharing meaning. And translanguage goes beyond 'languages', as people communicate through their bodies as much as through their spoken words. Translanguage includes aspects of communication not always thought of as 'language', including smiles, shrugs, pointing, mime, pats on the back, and so on. To buy two kilograms of chicken's feet, a sign with the hand is often used. To focus an exchange with a library user, Winnie will lightly touch her client on the arm. To offer congratulation on winning a point, volleyball players will embrace.

We saw that translanguage is often creative, and sometimes transformative, as potentially difficult interactions were made convivial when people played around with different languages. Most of all translanguage depends on people's willingness to get on with each other despite their apparent differences. Particularly in Bull Ring Indoor Market and in the Library of Birmingham, we observed many successful exchanges between people who did not speak the same language proficiently. They achieved this because they were prepared to accept ethnic, national, and linguistic difference, and to overcome that difference. In the market in particular increased diversity was regarded as an asset by traders.



On the volleyball court players horse around, pretending to fight, often in intimate physical contact. Low fives, high fives, a hand raised in apology, a shrug of the shoulders, ritual clapping, all are forms of communication on court. What we saw on the volleyball court is also true in other areas of social life: we communicate with our bodies.

**...MOST OF ALL TRANSLANGUAGING
DEPENDS ON PEOPLE'S
WILLINGNESS TO GET ON WITH
EACH OTHER DESPITE THEIR
APPARENT DIFFERENCES...**

Communicative practice in superdiverse, multilingual cities involves not only translanguaging, but also translation. If translanguaging suggests communication without keeping languages separate, translation implies communication between and across languages. Like translanguaging, in everyday practice translation can also be creative, and transformative. In the Chinese Community Centre Joanne was not limited to the transfer of meaning between languages, as she translated and explained the world for her clients. Translators like Joanne often perform crucial roles in hidden spaces, keeping the city going, giving people access to their rights, and explaining complex processes. Translation and translanguaging overlap, and co-exist, integral to each other. They are the means by which the multilingual city makes sense.

LOOKING FORWARD

This report presents new evidence of communication in the superdiverse city. Translation and translanguaging are essential features of life in Birmingham. It is hard to see how the city could go on without them. As Birmingham changes in terms of its demographics and its repertoires, it is crucial that we understand how people navigate everyday encounters, despite their apparent differences. Communication drives the city, and new knowledge about translation and translanguaging has implications for policy and planning. In public, private, and third sectors translation and translanguaging are key to the future of communication in the city.

Detailed reports on communication in Birmingham Bull Ring Indoor Market, the Library of Birmingham, the volleyball club, and the Chinese Community Centre are available at the following link and have the titles listed below.

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tlang/publications/index.aspx>

The University of Birmingham research team is: Professor Angela Creese, Professor Adrian Blackledge, and Rachel Hu. For further details contact Sarah Martin:

s.l.martin@bham.ac.uk

Working Paper 2:

*Blackledge, A., Creese A., & Hu, R. (2015)
Voice and Social Relations in a City Market*

Working Paper 13:

*Blackledge, A., Creese, A. & Hu, R. (2016)
Protean Heritage, Everyday Superdiversity*

Working Paper 19:

*Blackledge, A., Creese, A. & Hu, R. (2017).
Translanguaging, Volleyball and Social Life*

Working Paper 29:

*Blackledge, A., Creese, A. & Hu, R. (2017).
Translating the City*

Reports summarising TLANG themes are available at the same link; the first three are listed here:

Working Paper 1

*Creese, A., Baynham, M., & Trehan, K. (2016)
Language, Business and Superdiversity:
An overview of four case studies*

Working Paper 21

*Creese, A., Blackledge, A. & Robinson, M.
(2017). Translanguaging: Heritage for
the future*

Working Paper 25

*Creese, A., Zhu Hua, Li Wei & Thompson, J.
(2017). Movement in the city: An overview
of sports case studies.*



INVESTIGATING LINGUISTIC TRANSFORMATIONS IN SUPERVILLE WARDS



Translation and Translanguaging

Investigating Linguistic and Cultural Transformations in Superdiverse Wards in Four UK Cities



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