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The Role of Specialized Translation in Enhancing Cross-cultural Legal and Medical Communication

 ¹ Tehrana Khudaverdiyeva

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Keywords	Abstract
Legal translation Medical translation Terminology Equivalence Cultural mediation Translation ethics	<p>Translating for specific purposes, particularly in legal and medical contexts, involves complex challenges that extend far beyond achieving linguistic equivalence. These highly specialized domains demand not only advanced linguistic proficiency but also subject-matter expertise, cultural competence, and sensitivity to ethical and legal implications. Within cross-cultural communication, translators function as both linguistic and cultural mediators, ensuring that meaning is conveyed accurately across differing systems of law, healthcare, and professional discourse.</p> <p>This article examines the multifaceted nature of legal and medical translation by drawing upon functionalist translation theories, including Skopos Theory and discourse-based approaches, alongside real-world case studies. It explores central issues such as conceptual non-equivalence, terminological precision, pragmatic adaptation, and the ethical dilemmas inherent in translating sensitive or legally binding information. The discussion emphasizes how translation decisions can influence legal justice, patient safety, and overall communicative effectiveness in multicultural settings.</p> <p>By integrating theoretical insight with practical examples, the study identifies best practices and proposes ethical guidelines for translators and institutions engaged in these high-stakes fields. Ultimately, it underscores the translator's crucial role in maintaining linguistic fidelity, cultural coherence, and professional integrity. Specialized translation, as argued, is not merely a technical act of language transfer but a vital component in safeguarding cross-cultural understanding, legal rights, and public health outcomes.</p>

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1. Introduction

Translation in specialized fields, often referred to as Translation for Specific Purposes (TSP), represents a critical and highly complex area of intercultural communication. Among the most challenging of these are legal and medical translations, which are not only linguistically demanding but also culturally and ethically sensitive. Legal and medical texts operate within institutional frameworks that differ significantly across nations and cultures. These texts are often dense with technical terminology, culturally bound concepts and normative language, which complicates the task of translation.

In the globalized world, the need for accurate and culturally appropriate translation in legal and medical settings is growing. Migration, international law, medical tourism, and cross-border cooperation have intensified the demand for translators who can navigate both the technical specificity and cultural intricacies of these fields. Misinterpretation or mistranslation in these domains can lead to serious consequences—ranging from the violation of legal rights to life-threatening medical errors.

The translator, therefore, plays a pivotal role not just in linguistic conversion but in facilitating mutual understanding between legal or medical professionals and clients or patients from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This dual function—as a linguistic expert and cultural mediator—requires advanced knowledge of terminology, discourse structures, and context-sensitive translation strategies.

In an increasingly globalized and multicultural world, the accurate and effective translation of specialized texts has become a critical necessity. Nowhere is this more evident than in the fields of law and medicine—domains where the consequences of mistranslation can extend far beyond mere miscommunication, potentially resulting in life-altering or even life-threatening outcomes. Legal and medical texts are not only rich in domain-specific terminology and institutional conventions, but also deeply embedded in the cultural, ethical, and social contexts from which they arise. Translating such texts is therefore not simply a linguistic exercise, but a complex act of cross-cultural negotiation, legal and ethical mediation, and professional responsibility.

Both legal and medical translation fall under the umbrella of Translation for Specific Purposes (TSP)—a field concerned with the translation of texts that are functionally embedded within particular professional, disciplinary, or institutional settings. What distinguishes TSP from general translation is the need for domain expertise, genre awareness, and audience-oriented strategies that respect the conventions and expectations of both the source and target systems. Legal and medical texts often involve rigid formatting, standardized expressions, and unambiguous terminology, all of which must be preserved—or functionally reproduced—in translation. At the same time, these texts frequently address sensitive subjects, engage with culturally specific norms, and carry significant ethical implications.



In legal contexts, translation plays a crucial role in ensuring access to justice, especially for non-native speakers involved in immigration proceedings, criminal trials, or cross-border legal transactions. A single mistranslated term in a court judgment or contract clause can have serious ramifications, including wrongful convictions, procedural invalidity, or contractual disputes. Legal translation is further complicated by the fact that legal systems are inherently national and culturally specific, meaning that many legal concepts do not have direct equivalents across languages or jurisdictions. As noted by Šarčević (1997), legal translators must possess more than just bilingual fluency—they must understand the legal cultures they are navigating.

Similarly, in medical settings, translation is essential for facilitating communication between healthcare providers and patients from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Whether in hospital settings, pharmaceutical companies, or public health campaigns, the stakes of medical translation are high. Errors in translating dosage instructions, diagnosis reports, or informed consent forms can endanger lives, compromise ethical standards, and expose institutions to legal liability. Furthermore, health-related beliefs and understandings of illness often vary across cultures, adding another layer of complexity to the translator's task. As Montalt and González Davies (2014) argue, medical translators must function not only as technical experts but also as cultural mediators who can render biomedical content intelligible and culturally relevant to a lay audience.

By examining both the linguistic and extralinguistic dimensions of translation for specific purposes, this study aims to highlight the critical role translators play in mediating between professional discourses and culturally diverse audiences. It also emphasizes the need for interdisciplinary collaboration, ethical reflection, and continued professional development to ensure that legal and medical translation not only communicates information accurately but also respects the rights, values, and contexts of those it serves.

2. Theoretical Framework

Translating specialized texts, such as legal and medical documents, requires more than a literal word-for-word transfer; it involves understanding the purpose of the text (Skopos), the context of its use, and the expectations of the target audience. The theoretical underpinnings of this article draw primarily from functionalist translation theories, notably the Skopos Theory (Vermeer, 1978), Nord's model of functional translation, and House's model of translation quality assessment. Skopos Theory asserts that the primary determinant of a translation's strategy is its intended purpose in the target culture. In this view, the translator must understand why the translation is needed, for whom, and in what context. This is especially relevant in legal and medical translations, where the target audience—be it a judge, a lawyer, a patient, or a healthcare provider—determines not only the language used but also the formality, terminology, and structure of the translated text.



Christiane Nord's notion of "function plus loyalty" expands on Skopos Theory by emphasizing that while the translator must fulfill the function of the translation, they also bear a responsibility of loyalty to the source text's author and context. This is crucial in legal and medical contexts, where ethical concerns about fidelity, consent, and rights are paramount.

Juliane House's model of translation quality assessment introduces the idea of overt and covert translation. Overt translations acknowledge their status as translations (common in legal documents like contracts), while covert translations aim to read like original texts (common in patient information leaflets). This distinction helps translators decide how visible their mediation should be, depending on genre, audience, and function.

Additionally, domain-specific theories of terminology (e.g., Cabré's Communicative Theory of Terminology) and pragmatic approaches to meaning further support the understanding of how meaning is constructed and conveyed differently across professional discourses and cultures. Together, these frameworks provide a basis for analyzing the challenges and strategies in translating legal and medical texts, with a view toward maintaining communicative effectiveness and ethical responsibility.

3. Challenges in Legal Translation

Legal translation is widely recognized as one of the most complex and sensitive areas of translation practice, primarily because it operates at the intersection of language, law, and culture. Legal texts, including contracts, statutes, judicial decisions, and procedural documents, are embedded within specific legal systems and often resist direct equivalence across languages and jurisdictions (Šarčević, 1997; Biel, 2014). The translator's task, therefore, involves much more than linguistic competence—it demands deep understanding of comparative law, legal pragmatics, and the socio-institutional role of legal discourse.

One of the most significant challenges in legal translation is the absence of conceptual equivalence between legal systems. Legal terms are system-bound, meaning that they derive their significance from the legal culture and institutional context in which they operate (Šarčević, 1997). For example, terms like equity in common law or Grundrecht in German constitutional law may lack a direct counterpart in other legal systems. Translators must decide between functional equivalence, borrowing, or descriptive paraphrasing, each of which carries implications for legal clarity and fidelity (Cao, 2007; Gémar, 1995).

Legal language is often characterized by archaic expressions, technical jargon, redundancy, and ritualistic formulations (Tiersma, 1999). These stylistic features are not mere ornamentation; they have legal force and fulfill procedural or evidentiary functions. Translators face the dilemma of how to preserve these rhetorical features while ensuring readability and target-culture appropriateness. A literal approach may result in unnatural or incomprehensible texts, whereas excessive adaptation may compromise legal intent (Biel, 2014; Garzone, 2000).



Legal discourse reflects underlying cultural assumptions about justice, power, and societal values (Engberg, 2013). For example, concepts such as due process, good faith, or public interest may carry differing connotations in different jurisdictions. A culturally insensitive translation can distort the intended meaning or even lead to misapplication of the law. Translators must act as intercultural mediators who balance the need for legal accuracy with the need to render concepts intelligible to the target audience (Šarčević, 1997; Gémár, 1995).

While natural language often allows for ambiguity, legal texts require high levels of precision and unambiguous interpretation. Phrases such as beyond a reasonable doubt or strict liability have specific legal interpretations that must be retained in the translation (Trosborg, 1997). A mistranslation, even of a single term, can result in legal misjudgment or procedural invalidation. Translators must therefore master not only legal terminology but also the pragmatic functions of legal expressions (Cao, 2007).

Legal translators frequently handle confidential and highly sensitive material. Ethical concerns—such as impartiality, fidelity, and confidentiality—are paramount, particularly in contexts like asylum cases, criminal trials, or international arbitration. Errors or omissions can have severe consequences, including violations of due process or human rights (Corsellis, 2008). Professional guidelines, such as those from the International Federation of Translators (FIT), stress the need for professional conduct and ongoing legal education.

4. Challenges in Medical Translation

Medical translation is a high-stakes field that directly affects patient safety, public health, and the integrity of healthcare systems. Unlike general translation, medical translation requires not only linguistic accuracy but also extensive knowledge of biomedical terminology, regulatory standards, and cultural beliefs about health and illness. Inaccuracies can lead to severe consequences, including misdiagnosis, inappropriate treatment, and violations of informed consent (Pérez González & Susam-Saraeva, 2012; Montalt & González Davies, 2014). This section outlines the key challenges faced by translators working in the medical domain.

Medical texts are rich in specialized terminology, including Latin and Greek-derived terms, abbreviations, and acronyms (e.g., BP, CABG, ECG). These terms may have no equivalents in the target language or may carry different meanings depending on regional medical practices (Fischbach, 1998). Translators must master domain-specific terminology, and often consult glossaries, medical dictionaries, or collaborate with healthcare professionals to ensure accuracy (Montalt & González Davies, 2014).

Furthermore, medical texts are highly genre-specific—ranging from patient leaflets and clinical trial protocols to surgical reports and pharmacological inserts—each with distinct communicative purposes and discourse conventions (Askehave & Zethsen, 2008). Adapting language use appropriately across these genres presents a significant challenge.



Perhaps the most critical challenge in medical translation is the direct impact on patient safety. A mistranslated dosage instruction, allergy warning, or consent form can result in adverse drug reactions or life-threatening errors (Flores, 2006). For example, the U.S. Institute of Medicine has reported that language barriers and inadequate translations contribute to medical errors, particularly among minority and migrant populations (IOM, 2004). Informed consent documents, in particular, require clear and culturally appropriate translation to ensure that patients fully understand medical procedures and their risks (Resnik, 2001).

Health and illness are deeply embedded in cultural beliefs and values. Concepts like pain, mental illness, or reproductive health may be perceived and described differently across cultures (Pöchhacker, 2006). For example, the biomedical term depression may not have an exact equivalent in some languages, and its symptoms may be described somatically rather than psychologically. Translators must navigate these conceptual gaps and ensure that the message is both accurate and culturally resonant (van Doorslaer, 2007).

Additionally, end-of-life care, organ donation, and genetic testing may carry religious or ethical sensitivities that require special attention in translation (Kaufert & Putsch, 1997). Failing to consider these factors can lead to mistrust or non-compliance in medical settings.

Medical translation must comply with strict regulatory frameworks, especially when translating documents for pharmaceutical companies, clinical trials, or medical devices. Guidelines from agencies such as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the European Medicines Agency (EMA), or ISO standards impose stringent requirements on linguistic precision, readability, and consistency (EMA, 2005). Non-compliance can delay drug approvals or result in legal liabilities. Ethically, medical translators are bound by principles of confidentiality, informed consent, and neutrality. Translators may encounter sensitive patient information or face pressure from healthcare providers to “soften” or alter bad news—practices that raise significant ethical concerns (Pöchhacker, 2006; Taibi & Ozolins, 2016).

Another growing challenge is translating medical content for audiences with low literacy or limited proficiency in the dominant language. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), low health literacy is a barrier to effective healthcare delivery, and translated materials must be both linguistically and cognitively accessible (WHO, 2013). Translators often need to simplify complex medical jargon without distorting the meaning, a process that involves both linguistic adaptation and cultural sensitivity (Zethsen, 2005).

5. Ethics and Cultural Mediation in Specialized Translation

Legal and medical translation extends beyond linguistic equivalence into the realm of cultural negotiation and ethical responsibility. In these high-stakes domains, translators often serve as cultural mediators—individuals who bridge not only languages but also contrasting worldviews, institutional norms, and belief systems. This dual role carries significant ethical implications,



particularly concerning neutrality, confidentiality, and informed consent (Pöchhacker, 2008; Taibi & Ozolins, 2016).

Cultural mediation involves interpreting the source message in a way that aligns with the expectations and conceptual frameworks of the target audience (Wadensjö, 1998). In legal translation, this might mean explaining culturally specific legal principles or institutions (e.g., jury trials or Islamic inheritance law) to an audience from a different legal tradition (Šarčević, 1997). In medical contexts, it may involve adapting content related to sensitive topics such as mental health, sexuality, or terminal illness, which may be taboo or conceptualized differently in the target culture (Kaufert & Koolage, 1984; Pöchhacker, 2006).

Cultural mediation is especially crucial when the intended recipients have limited exposure to the institutional frameworks of the source culture. For instance, refugee claimants may be unfamiliar with Western legal procedures, or immigrant patients may mistrust biomedical approaches due to previous experiences or cultural beliefs. In such cases, translators must make decisions about whether to remain invisible or to actively mediate concepts (Angelelli, 2004).

One of the most pressing ethical tensions in legal and medical translation lies in balancing neutrality with advocacy. Traditional codes of conduct emphasize the translator's neutrality and invisibility, especially in legal contexts where impartiality is critical (Hale, 2007). However, in community interpreting and healthcare settings, translators may feel compelled to intervene—clarifying ambiguous language, correcting factual errors, or ensuring the client understands their rights or treatment (Angelelli, 2004; Taibi & Ozolins, 2016).

These interventions, though well-intentioned, can challenge institutional expectations and raise ethical questions about the translator's role. Is the translator a conduit or an active agent? Should fidelity to the source text override concerns for patient welfare or legal justice? Scholars argue that while translators must uphold ethical codes, they also need flexibility to act in the best interests of vulnerable clients (Bot, 2005; Inghilleri, 2003).

Translators frequently deal with private and sensitive information, especially in asylum cases, medical diagnoses, and psychological evaluations. Maintaining confidentiality is a cornerstone of professional ethics (AIIC, 2012). However, challenges arise when working in informal or under-regulated settings where professional standards may be inconsistently applied or poorly understood (Corsellis, 2008).

Informed consent is another area where translation ethics are critical. A patient or legal client must fully understand their rights, options, and the consequences of their decisions. Translating consent forms and legal advisories requires not only linguistic accuracy but cultural sensitivity and clear, accessible language (Resnik, 2001). Mistranslations in these contexts can invalidate consent and expose institutions to liability.



Translators operate within asymmetric power structures—between doctors and patients, or courts and defendants—which can shape the interaction and influence the translator’s role (Wadensjö, 1998). In many cases, the translator becomes visible not by choice, but because their intervention is necessary for communication to occur at all. Recognizing the social and ethical dimensions of this visibility is essential to maintaining both professional integrity and human dignity (Inghilleri, 2005).

Ultimately, legal and medical translators must navigate a complex terrain where linguistic accuracy, cultural appropriateness, and ethical responsibility converge. Ongoing training in intercultural competence and ethical reasoning is essential for professionals in these fields.

6. Case Studies

To better understand the complexities of legal and medical translation in real-world settings, this section presents selected case studies that illustrate the consequences of translation decisions and the importance of context-sensitive, ethically guided practice.

In *Matter of Kasinga* (U.S. Board of Immigration Appeals, 1996), an asylum seeker from Togo sought protection in the United States, claiming fear of female genital mutilation (FGM). During the proceedings, the interpreter misrepresented key terms such as “forced marriage” and “mutilation”, using culturally neutral or softened expressions that failed to convey the severity of the claimant's situation. Legal scholars have since analyzed how the inaccurate translation impacted the court's initial understanding of the cultural and human rights dimensions involved (Inghilleri, 2005). Ultimately, expert testimony and corrected interpretation were required to reverse the decision and grant asylum. This case underscores how imprecise translation can delay justice and misrepresent culturally specific harms.

A well-documented case in U.S. medical literature involved a Spanish-speaking patient who was prescribed the medication “once daily” (Flores, 2006). The pharmacy label was mistranslated as “once” (Spanish for eleven), leading the patient to take the drug eleven times per day. The result was a severe overdose, which could have been fatal. This example highlights the life-threatening risks of lexical ambiguity, particularly with homonyms between languages. It also emphasizes the need for professional translators in all stages of medical communication, from prescription labeling to discharge instructions.

In the UK’s National Health Service (NHS), studies have shown that immigrant communities often struggle to understand translated health leaflets due to culturally inappropriate phrasing or excessive medical jargon (Askehave & Zethsen, 2008). For example, a Danish study found that even when terminology was accurately translated, non-Western patients interpreted words like “symptom” or “treatment” through culturally specific health beliefs, which affected compliance (Zethsen, 2005). These findings illustrate that linguistic translation must be supplemented with cultural adaptation to achieve true communication effectiveness.



Based on the challenges and case studies discussed, the following best practices are recommended for translators working in legal and medical fields:

1. Engage in Specialized Training

Translators should undergo formal training in legal or medical translation, including the study of comparative law or biomedical sciences, depending on their specialization (Cao, 2007; Montalt & González Davies, 2014). Institutions should prioritize certified professionals over ad hoc or bilingual staff, especially in high-risk scenarios.

2. Apply Functionalist and Contextual Approaches

Adopt a Skopos-based approach (Vermeer, 1989) to guide translation choices. Understanding the function of the text and the expectations of the target audience allows translators to make informed decisions about when to adapt, localize, or annotate culturally or legally specific content (Nord, 1997).

3. Utilize Quality Assurance Processes

Peer review, back-translation, and domain expert consultation should be standard in critical translations such as clinical trial documents or legal contracts (Pérez González & Susam-Saraeva, 2012). Institutions should implement structured workflows that include verification and validation steps.

4. Promote Ethical Awareness and Advocacy

Ethical guidelines should not be limited to neutrality but should allow for context-sensitive advocacy—particularly in cases involving vulnerable populations (Angelelli, 2004; Inghilleri, 2003). Translators should feel empowered to raise concerns about unclear, culturally inappropriate, or potentially harmful content.

5. Collaborate with Multidisciplinary Teams

Effective translation often requires collaboration with lawyers, doctors, patient advocates, and community liaisons. Multidisciplinary teamwork ensures that translated texts are not only accurate but also legally and culturally viable (Taibi & Ozolins, 2016).

6. Adapt Language for Health Literacy and Legal Comprehension

Translate into plain language whenever appropriate, especially for informed consent documents, patient education materials, and court notices (WHO, 2013). Avoid excessive jargon, and test translations with native speakers from the target demographic to ensure clarity.

7. Conclusion



Translating for specific purposes—particularly within the legal and medical domains—represents one of the most demanding and socially impactful areas of translation practice. Unlike general translation tasks, which may allow for more flexibility and creativity, legal and medical translation is governed by the imperatives of precision, clarity, and responsibility. Errors or oversights in these contexts can result in severe consequences: miscarriages of justice, compromised patient safety, loss of rights, or even life-threatening outcomes.

The conclusion is that that legal and medical translation is far more than the simple transfer of words from one language to another; it is a multifaceted communicative act that requires the translator to serve as a linguistic expert, a cultural mediator, and an ethical decision-maker. Through theoretical frameworks such as Skopos Theory, functionalism, and discourse analysis, we can better understand how translators navigate the interplay of textual function, target audience expectations, and institutional constraints. These theories elucidate the limitations of literal translations and underscore the importance of employing context-sensitive and goal-oriented approaches.

The challenges in legal translation—such as conceptual non-equivalence, rigid legal structures, and culturally bound legal norms—require translators to have deep knowledge of both source and target legal systems. Translators must carefully balance fidelity to legal terminology with the pragmatic necessity of ensuring comprehensibility and functional equivalence in the target system. Similarly, medical translators face difficulties related to domain-specific terminology, the complexity of clinical documentation, and the need to adapt highly technical content for lay audiences, all while maintaining accuracy and ethical integrity.

The case studies, from asylum hearings to medical mistakes, show the real-world importance of specialized translation. These cases demonstrate how poor translation can misrepresent facts and harm individuals, highlighting the need for better training, quality control, and ethical oversight.

From an ethical standpoint, translators are often placed in situations that demand more than neutrality. While professional codes stress objectivity and confidentiality, translators working in community settings, refugee tribunals, or healthcare environments often must advocate—either explicitly or implicitly—for those they serve. This raises ongoing debates within the field about the evolving role of the translator: Should they be passive conduits or active participants in communication? Current scholarship increasingly supports the view that ethical translation entails context-aware mediation, especially when dealing with power asymmetries and vulnerable populations (Inghilleri, 2005; Taibi & Ozolins, 2016).

As global mobility increases, and legal and medical institutions encounter more linguistically and culturally diverse populations, the need for qualified translators will only grow. Institutions must invest in specialized training, interdisciplinary collaboration, and inclusive policy-making that



recognizes the translator not as a marginal technician, but as a core agent in cross-cultural communication.

In conclusion, legal and medical translation is not merely a technical or linguistic challenge, it is a socio-political and ethical endeavor. Translators in these fields facilitate access to justice and healthcare, uphold human rights, and promote equity across linguistic boundaries. Recognizing the complexity and importance of their work is essential—not only for advancing the profession of translation but for safeguarding the dignity and wellbeing of the people who rely on it.

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Keywords	Abstract
theatre language theatre translation cultural adaptation performative language multimodality	<p>Theatre language is a distinctive mode of communication characterized by its performative nature, oral orientation, and integration within a multimodal artistic context. Unlike traditional literary texts, dramatic language functions not only as written material but as a blueprint for live performance, combining dialogue, physical gestures, timing, and spatial dynamics to create a holistic theatrical experience. Translating theatre texts, therefore, presents unique challenges that extend beyond linguistic equivalence to encompass cultural specificity, performative feasibility, and audience reception. This paper investigates the essential characteristics of theatre language and explores the inherent difficulties encountered in its translation across languages and cultures. Employing a qualitative methodology that includes a comprehensive literature review and comparative textual analysis of selected dramatic works—ranging from Shakespearean classics to contemporary European drama—the study identifies key features such as colloquialism, dialectal variation, wordplay, and multimodality that complicate the translation process. The results reveal that theatre translation requires creative strategies to negotiate cultural references, humor, and performative constraints, often demanding adaptive solutions rather than literal translations. The discussion highlights the translator’s role as a cultural mediator and creative collaborator within the theatrical production process. This paper contributes to the growing field of theatre translation studies by emphasizing the interplay between language, culture, and performance, and suggests directions for future research including empirical studies on audience reception and collaborative translation practices.</p>

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1. Introduction

Theatre is a distinctive and multifaceted form of artistic expression that relies heavily on language as a primary vehicle for storytelling, character development, and emotional impact. Unlike other literary genres, theatre language is inherently performative—it is crafted not only for reading but for live enactment before an audience. This dual function creates a complex linguistic landscape where the written word must simultaneously serve as a script for actors and a blueprint for staging, tone, and timing. Theatre language encompasses not only dialogue but also stage directions, pauses, intonations, and physical gestures, all contributing to the overall communicative effect (Carlson, 2006).

The unique characteristics of theatre language pose significant challenges for translators tasked with transferring dramatic texts from one language and cultural context to another (Babayev, 2023). Translators must navigate linguistic nuances, idiomatic expressions, and culturally bound references while preserving the play's performative qualities and dramatic intent (Gulkhara & Aysu, 2025). Unlike prose or poetry, where the focus is primarily on the text itself, theatre translation demands consideration of how language will function in performance, including how it will sound when spoken and how it will resonate with an audience unfamiliar with the original culture (Bassnett, 1991).

Moreover, theatre often serves as a mirror of societal values, beliefs, and power dynamics, embedding its language deeply within specific historical and cultural frameworks. This embedding complicates translation, as what may be humorous, poignant, or controversial in one culture may be opaque or even offensive in another. Therefore, theatre translators are not merely linguistic intermediaries but cultural mediators and creative collaborators who must balance fidelity to the original text with the necessity of making the play accessible and engaging to new audiences (Pavis, 1989).

Despite its importance, theatre translation remains an underexplored field compared to literary translation at large. This study aims to elucidate the defining characteristics of theatre language and investigate the particular challenges that arise in its translation. By doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how translation operates within the performative arts and highlights the translator's critical role in cross-cultural theatrical communication.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative research methodology focusing on a comprehensive literature review and textual analysis to explore the characteristics of theatre language and its translation challenges. The methodology was designed to capture both theoretical perspectives and practical examples within theatre translation studies.



2.1 Literature Review

An extensive review of academic literature was conducted to understand the existing scholarship on theatre language and translation. Sources were selected based on their influence, relevance, and coverage of interdisciplinary aspects, including linguistics, dramaturgy, cultural studies, and performance theory (Ahmedova, 2025). Foundational texts by scholars such as Susan Bassnett, Patrice Pavis, Mary Snell-Hornby, and Martin Carlson were prioritized for their seminal contributions to translation studies and theatre research. Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference papers from the last four decades were included to ensure a broad yet focused theoretical framework.

2.2 Textual Analysis

To ground theoretical insights in practical examples, the study analysed selected dramatic texts and their translations. Two primary case studies were chosen:

Shakespearean Drama — scenes from *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* were examined in their original Early Modern English versions alongside various contemporary translations into modern English and other languages (e.g., French, German). This comparison aimed to highlight how linguistic playfulness, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references are handled across different translations.

Contemporary European Drama — excerpts from plays by modern playwrights such as Samuel Beckett and Yasmina Reza were analysed to observe how their minimalist or culturally specific language posed challenges for translation.

2.3 Analytical Framework

The textual analysis applied an integrative framework combining:

Linguistic Analysis: Focusing on word choice, idiomatic expressions, sentence structure, and stylistic devices such as puns and wordplay.

Performative Analysis: Assessing how the translated language might function in performance, including rhythm, tone, and actor-audience interaction.

Cultural Analysis: Examining the handling of cultural references, historical allusions, and localized humor (Sadikhova & Babayev, 2025).

This triangulated approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of how theatre language operates in source and target languages, and how translation strategies accommodate or struggle with these factors.



2.4 Limitations

While the qualitative approach provides rich insight, it also limits generalizability. The study does not incorporate quantitative measures or audience reception data, which could offer additional perspectives on translation effectiveness. Moreover, the selection of texts, though representative, is not exhaustive, and future research might expand to include non-European or non-Western dramatic traditions.

3. Results

The analysis of both the literature and selected dramatic texts revealed several key characteristics of theatre language and elucidated the multifaceted challenges translators face when working with dramatic texts. The findings are presented in two main subsections: characteristics of theatre language and challenges in its translation.

3.1 Characteristics of Theatre Language

Theatre language is distinguished from other literary forms by its inherent performativity and interaction with multiple communicative modes. The analysis identified several defining traits:

- **Performativity and Oral Orientation:** Theatre texts are designed to be spoken aloud and performed in real time. This means the language must not only convey meaning but also suit the voice, breath, and timing of actors. For example, rhythmic patterns, pauses, and intonations embedded in the script are essential for dramatic effect (Carlson, 2006). Translators must therefore preserve these oral qualities to maintain the text's performative viability.
- **Colloquialism, Dialects, and Idiolects:** Characters often speak in distinctive dialects, sociolects, or idiolects, which reflect social status, regional identity, or psychological traits. This linguistic diversity adds realism and depth but presents a challenge when equivalent dialects or registers do not exist in the target language (Zatlin, 2005). For instance, translating Shakespeare's regionalisms into French or German requires creative solutions to preserve character authenticity (Babayev, 2023).
- **Multimodality and Contextual Integration:** Theatre language operates within a rich multimodal environment that includes gestures, facial expressions, spatial arrangements, costumes, and sound effects. The verbal text is only one element among many that contribute to meaning (Carlson, 2006). This integration implies that translation must consider the interplay between language and non-verbal elements to avoid loss of meaning or dramatic impact.
- **Economy and Clarity due to Temporal-Spatial Constraints:** The live nature of theatre imposes time and space limitations on the dialogue. Speech tends to be concise and action-oriented to fit within stage constraints and to keep the audience engaged (Pavis, 1989). Consequently, translators



must ensure that the target text is sufficiently economical without sacrificing nuance or character development.

- **Use of Literary Devices and Wordplay:** Dramatic texts frequently employ rhetorical devices, metaphors, puns, and wordplay to enrich the text and engage the audience. These features serve both aesthetic and narrative functions, enhancing humor, irony, or tension (Zuber, 1980). However, such devices are often language-specific, complicating the translation process.

3.2 Challenges in Theatre Translation

Theatre translation encompasses more than linguistic equivalence; it demands adaptability to cultural, performative, and pragmatic contexts:

- **Cultural Specificity and Contextual References:** Idioms, customs, social norms, and historical references embedded in a play often do not have direct counterparts in the target culture. For example, jokes based on British class distinctions or French historical events may confuse or alienate foreign audiences (Bassnett, 1991). Translators must decide whether to domesticate (adapt) or foreignize (retain) these elements, each choice affecting audience reception differently.
- **Humor and Wordplay Translation:** Replicating humor is notoriously difficult due to its reliance on language-specific puns, timing, and cultural knowledge. The analysis of Shakespeare's plays demonstrated that translators frequently resort to creative reinterpretations or substitutions to preserve comedic effect, sometimes at the expense of literal fidelity (Zuber, 1980).
- **Performative Feasibility and Actor's Interpretation:** Translated dialogue must be natural and performable. Awkward phrasing or unnatural rhythms can hinder actors' delivery and weaken dramatic tension. Therefore, translators often collaborate with directors and actors to fine-tune the text for stage use (Snell-Hornby, 1988).
- **Audience Expectations and Reception:** Translations must balance the original's intentions with the target audience's cultural expectations and theatrical conventions. A literal translation may be faithful but fail to engage an audience unfamiliar with the source culture, whereas an adaptive translation risks distorting the playwright's voice (Pavis, 1989).
- **Collaborative Nature of Theatre:** Theatre translation is often a dynamic, iterative process involving directors, actors, dramaturgs, and translators. The fluidity of rehearsal processes means that translations may be modified multiple times, resulting in a living text that evolves with each production (Carlson, 2006).

These findings underscore the complexity of theatre translation and suggest that successful practice requires not only linguistic skill but also cultural literacy, dramaturgical insight, and practical theatrical experience.



4. Discussion

The results of this study highlight the inherently complex and multifaceted nature of theatre language and the considerable challenges translators face in adapting such texts across languages and cultures (Ahmedova, 2023). Unlike literary translation, which often centers on the written text alone, theatre translation must engage with the performative dimension of language, requiring the translator to act as both a linguistic mediator and a cultural interpreter within a collaborative artistic process (Sadikhova & Babayev, 2025).

One key insight emerging from this research is the performativity of theatre language as a fundamental characteristic that distinguishes it from other textual forms. Theatre language is crafted with an awareness of its embodiment in performance—its sound, rhythm, pauses, and intonation—which means that a translation must not only be linguistically accurate but also aurally and rhythmically suitable for actors. This performative requirement complicates the translator’s task, as linguistic equivalence often conflicts with performative feasibility. For instance, a perfectly literal translation may result in clumsy or unnatural speech, undermining the actor’s ability to deliver lines effectively and the audience’s suspension of disbelief. This underscores Pavis’s (1989) notion of the “hermeneutic circle” in theatre translation, wherein meaning is continually negotiated between source and target cultures, and between text and performance.

Cultural specificity further complicates theatre translation. Dramatic texts frequently embody social norms, historical contexts, idiomatic expressions, and humor specific to the source culture (Babayev & Alaviyya, 2023). The translator’s dilemma lies in balancing fidelity to these elements with the need to make the text accessible and resonant for the target audience. The choice between domestication—adapting references to be familiar to the target audience—and foreignization—preserving the original cultural markers—has significant implications for how a play is received. While domestication may increase audience comprehension and engagement, it risks erasing the cultural identity of the source text. Conversely, foreignization maintains cultural authenticity but may alienate or confuse audiences. This tension is particularly pronounced in comedies and satirical works, where cultural nuances are integral to humor and meaning (Bassnett, 1991; Zuber, 1980).

The collaborative and iterative nature of theatre production also influences translation practices. Unlike static literary texts, theatre scripts are often subject to revision throughout rehearsals, with directors, actors, and dramaturgs contributing to the evolution of the translation. This fluidity challenges the traditional notion of a “finished” translation and positions the translator as an active participant in the theatrical creation process (Carlson, 2006). Consequently, theatre translation blurs the boundaries between translation, adaptation, and interpretation, requiring translators to adopt a flexible and creative approach.



Furthermore, the analysis underscores the importance of multimodality in theatre communication. Language in theatre is only one semiotic system among many, including visual staging, movement, sound, and lighting. Translators must therefore be mindful of how their linguistic choices interact with these non-verbal elements to produce a cohesive performance. This aspect of theatre translation is often overlooked in traditional translation theory, which tends to prioritize textual analysis over performative context (Alisoy, 2022).

Given these complexities, theatre translation emerges as a unique interdisciplinary endeavor that draws upon linguistics, cultural studies, dramaturgy, and performance theory. Translators must possess not only linguistic competence but also cultural awareness, theatrical knowledge, and collaborative skills. This multifaceted role elevates the theatre translator from a mere language converter to a creative co-author who shapes the reception and impact of a dramatic work in new cultural milieus.

Future research might explore empirical studies on audience reception of translated plays or investigate collaborative translation models involving translators, directors, and actors in rehearsal settings. Additionally, expanding research to include non-Western theatrical traditions could provide a more global perspective on theatre language and translation challenges.

Translating theatre is not a process of linguistic substitution but rather one of cultural negotiation and artistic adaptation. The translator must serve multiple roles: linguist, dramaturg, cultural mediator, and sometimes even co-creator. Pavis (1989) introduced the concept of the “hermeneutic circle” in theatre translation, wherein meaning is recreated rather than merely transferred. For example, translating Molière’s comedies into English often requires re-contextualizing jokes or updating social references to maintain comic effect and audience engagement (Gulkhara & Farzaliyeva, 2025). Moreover, the collaborative nature of theatre production implies that translations are often modified by directors and actors, leading to fluid, performable texts rather than fixed translations (Carlson, 2006). These complexities suggest that theatre translation should be viewed as an act of intercultural performance rather than mere textual reproduction.

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that theatre language possesses distinctive characteristics—such as performativity, multimodality, colloquialism, and cultural embeddedness—that set it apart from other literary forms. These traits underscore the fundamental challenges involved in translating dramatic texts, which extend beyond linguistic transfer to encompass cultural adaptation, performative feasibility, and audience engagement. Theatre translation is therefore a complex, interdisciplinary practice that requires a nuanced understanding of both language and performance, as well as an ability to negotiate the cultural contexts of source and target audiences.

The analysis of key challenges, including the handling of cultural references, humor, idiomatic expressions, and the demands of oral performance, reveals that fidelity in theatre translation is not



simply about literal accuracy but about recreating meaning and dramatic effect in a way that resonates within the target culture. Translators must often balance competing priorities, such as maintaining the playwright's voice while ensuring clarity and naturalness for actors and audiences. The collaborative and evolving nature of theatrical production further complicates this task, positioning translators as active agents within a creative team rather than isolated linguistic technicians.

Given these complexities, the role of the theatre translator can be seen as a form of cultural mediation and artistic interpretation. This calls for an expansion of traditional translation theories to more fully incorporate performative and intercultural dimensions. It also suggests the need for specialized training and greater recognition of theatre translation as a distinct field within translation studies.

Looking ahead, future research could benefit from empirical investigations into audience responses to translated theatre, exploring how different translation strategies impact comprehension, emotional engagement, and cultural perception. Additionally, examining collaborative translation practices in rehearsal environments could yield valuable insights into the dynamic processes by which translated texts are adapted and refined. Finally, broadening the scope of study to include diverse theatrical traditions from non-Western cultures would enrich our understanding of the global challenges and strategies in theatre translation (Babayev & Sadikhova, 2025).

In sum, theatre translation is a demanding yet creatively rewarding endeavor that plays a vital role in fostering cross-cultural artistic exchange. By illuminating its unique characteristics and challenges, this study contributes to a deeper appreciation of the complexities involved and encourages ongoing dialogue between translators, theatre practitioners, and scholars.

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The Socio-Pragmatics of Digital Slang in Post-Pandemic Online Communities

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Keywords	Abstract
digital slang socio-pragmatics affective communication identity post-pandemic discourse online communities	The COVID-19 epidemic significantly altered the lines separating work, education, and personal life by increasing people's dependence on digital communication and changing how people use language in online contexts. Digital slang is analyzed in this theoretical article as a socio-pragmatic phenomena that illustrates how intimacy, identity, and ideology interact in post-pandemic communication. The research conceptualizes how slang serves interpersonal, expressive, identity, and ideological purposes in digital discourse by drawing on Speech Act Theory, Politeness Theory, and Relevance Theory. According to the investigation, slang serves as a tool for subtle power negotiation, in-group connection, and emotional attunement, especially in Zoom culture and online communities like TikTok and Discord. This study frames digital slang as a language strategy of adaptation, a dynamic reflection of how people reconstruct social meaning, emotion, and belonging in mediated interaction, by combining viewpoints from digital ethnography and affective pragmatics. In the end, comprehending digital slang is equivalent to comprehending the sociocultural processes by which language continuously adjusts to the complex post-pandemic environment.

I. Introduction

Online communication behaviors have accelerated globally in a way never seen before due to the COVID-19 epidemic. Since lockdowns, social distance, remote employment, and virtual

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schooling have become more common, people have been engaging online more than ever before through social media, messaging applications, and video conversations. Online technologies have become essential for social life, employment, and education as a result of the pandemic (Gupta et al., 2021). One such study indicates that many in-person activities were replaced by digital ones. The increasing prevalence of informal and non-standard language use, including slang, in cyberspace has also had a significant impact on students' linguistic identities, according to studies on young populations (Irianto & Malik, 2025). Instead, a new normal has come to existence where digital interactions are more prevalent in everyday life. Social media, gaming platforms, messaging groups, and forums are among the online communities that have gained importance and have been a constant source of new language. Digital slang has taken place in these communities; emoji-based expressions, memes, online neologisms, innovative abbreviations, and other non-standard language have become the vital means to show identification, emotion, group membership, and attitude.

Digital slang is useful in social situations and is not only ornamental or incidental. It can give a common code among community members, foster familiarity, ease tensions brought on by unclear internet communication, and shorten social distance. Slang, in particular, can be regarded as a tool that grants the youth access to the cultural norms while at the same time signaling their in-group membership. Research on the use of Generation Z slang in Instagram and TikTok has discovered that these language variations not only promote but also enhance solidarity and expressiveness (Murni & Anjani, 2025; Sawe, 2025; Sitohang & Ristia, 2025). In post-pandemic online ecosystems, digital slang is far from peripheral: it functions as a linguistic innovation, a social code, and a mechanism of identity and community building. On Vietnamese social media, for example, “hot-trend” expressions (e.g. “o may zing good job”, “xuc xac xuc xe”, or “get go”) proliferate rapidly, circulated via memes, comment threads, and remixed posts (Nguyen, 2025). Similarly, scholarship on Facebook slang in Vietnam highlights how the English loanword “*flex*” has been appropriated as a marker of self-presentation or status within youth networks, with usage frequency correlated to social influence and peer norms (Le et al., 2024). These phenomena show that digital slang is not simply playful variation, but a form of social action embedded in everyday communicative life.

Viewing things through the socio-pragmatic lens, a good understanding of these processes can be obtained. Pragmatics deals with the whole process of meaning being determined in a particular situation, that is, what is said or written does not always correspond directly to what is meant, but rather depends on the situation, the norms that are shared, the relationships between the people, and their expectations. Socio-pragmatics carries this discussion further and emphasizes the social aspects of the pragmatic acts; how language use is influenced by and influences identity, power, group membership, politeness or face norms, and community values. This is how socio-pragmatics makes the investigation of digital slang not only a matter of lexical innovation but also of sociolinguistics. Among the theoretical frameworks that come into play here are Speech Act



Theory (e.g. Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), which aids in the comprehension of what kinds of actions digital slang performs (e.g. solidarity, teasing, greeting); Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), which gives us a handle on how speakers manage face-needs in online interactions that are either constrained or ambiguous; Community of Practice theory (Wenger, 1999), which depicts how shared linguistic norms, including slang, are formed in virtual communities; Indexicality and Relevance Theory, which account for why certain slang expressions become identity markers or indicators of shared values or stance among users.

In post-pandemic online communities, digital slang is a socio-pragmatic phenomena that reflects and negotiates identity, social connections, power, and affect in novel technical and social contexts, according to this research. The goal is to theoretically outline the ways in which digital slang acts as a social act, including its purposes, the norms it involves, and its effects on community, identity, and communication in the digital age. The following lays forth the theoretical backdrop, including definitions and important terms related to identity, slang, digital discourse, and socio-pragmatics. The study then looks at how online communities and communication standards have changed in the post-pandemic environment. Digital slang's socio-pragmatic roles are studied in terms of identity, interpersonal relationships, expression, and ideology. Finally, the discussion ends with the implications for a wider understanding of digital communication and future theoretical works.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Socio-Pragmatics and Digital Communication

Socio-pragmatics, one of the areas of pragmatics, studies the way that the employment of language not only reflects but also creates social ties, identities, and power relations. On the other hand, pragmatics considers the whole picture of which communication is the case, that is, the context, intention, and the presentation of the speakers or language users when it comes to (Leech, 1983). Socio-pragmatics, however, concentrates on how the socially defined and the socially recognized meanings are established and passed on in a given community (Thomas, 1995). To say it differently, pragmatics deals with what the speakers mean; on the other hand, socio-pragmatics studies how social factors dictate what they mean and how they are allowed to mean it. The division is significant for online communication since usually in such situations there are little to no linguistic cues, and social meaning has to be built up using alternative strategies, such as humor, emojis, memes, and innovative slang. Socio-pragmatic analysis thrives in digital communication because online discourse combines rich contextual signaling with grammatical simplicity. In order to convey alignment, tone, and posture, users traverse multimodal elements such as text, emoji, GIFs, and hashtags (Tagg, 2015). Online spaces are new writing cultures, as Androutsopoulos (2014) observes, where social positioning, intimacy, and group affiliation are performed through microlinguistic decisions. The technologization of communication also changes the pragmatics of ordinary speech, forcing people to create new language indicators for sarcasm, comedy, or politeness (Crystal, 2011).



There are still a number of traditional frameworks that are essential for comprehending these socio-pragmatic phenomena in digital settings. According to the Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), language is an action, with utterances carrying out illocutionary tasks including making demands, making promises, expressing emotions, or proclaiming. In the digital sphere, speech actions are frequently condensed into language shortcuts, such as "*fr*" (for real), which serves as an aggressive gesture of agreement, or "*no cap*," which indicates sincerity and solidarity. Regardless of the asynchronous nature of texting, these performative micro-acts are still very helpful in maintaining community unity. The second basic paradigm is Politeness Theory, which shows how speakers control their faces through language, emphasizing the need for approval (positive face) and independence (negative face) (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Emojis, softeners, and amusing language to reduce possible offense or ambiguity are examples of politeness in digital contexts. A face-saving technique that preserves harmony and interpersonal intimacy between interlocutors is the use of phrases like "*lmao*," "*brooo*," or fun exaggerations following a taunting comment. Last but not least, the sociological framework provided by Community of Practice theory (Wenger, 1999) explains how online communities, including fandoms, gaming circles, and meme communities, create common terminology and communication standards. The "*digital tribes*" or those adhering to the same groups online create their presence and hierarchy through mutual participation, collaborative activities, and the constant use of the same words. Hence, one could view the emergence of distinct slang (for instance, "*touch grass*" and "*based*") as a byproduct of joint meaning-making and community identity efforts.

Relevance Theory captures inferential efficiency in meaning-making, Politeness Theory emphasizes relationship management, and Speech Act Theory emphasizes the performative power of digital communications. When taken as a whole, they provide a multifaceted view of how users balance face, affect, and economy in online conversation. Consequently, socio-pragmatics offers the conceptual framework for comprehending how digital language functions as a means of social negotiation in addition to being a means of expression. These theories provide light on how individuals utilize digital slang in post-pandemic online communities to enact social cohesiveness in a digitally mediated environment by performing acts of resistance, humor, and alignment.

2.2. The Nature of Digital Slang

A collection of informal, imaginative, and context-specific language patterns that develop and spread within online discourse groups is known as "digital slang." Emoji combinations, acronyms, new spellings, and memetic phrases that have social and emotional connotations beyond their literal form are all included (Eble, 2012; Tagg, 2015). Digital slang is distinguished linguistically by its multimodality, inventiveness, and brevity. From a morphological perspective, it frequently entails humorous re-spelling ("*u*" for "*you*"), cutting ("*sus*" from "*suspicious*"), or orthographic stylization ("*brooo*"). Many slang terms see quick semantic changes as they spread among internet communities.



Digital slang has many communication and cultural purposes and is thus considered very important in the society of today. It is an indicator of in-group identification (Eckert, 2000), which in turn, promotes camaraderie among peers who are aware of the context and the slang used. Moreover, it manifests itself as social resistance, for instance, mocking of the authoritative ones, use of sarcasm, or questioning the prevailing discourse. Online language originality, according to Androutsopoulos (2014), frequently reflects young innovation and countercultural position. Additionally, digital slang facilitates affective expression in the absence of paralinguistic signals by serving as an expressive and emotional medium. Examples of slang terms that convey approbation or sincerity include "*based*" and "*no cap*," while "*touch grass*" parodies internet infatuation in a hilarious way.

The memetic nature of digital slang is one of its unique characteristics. As people remix, hashtag, and incorporate it into memes or short movies, it changes and spreads virally. The logic of internet culture itself, such as ephemeral, participative, and community-driven, is reflected in this "*language viralization*" (Shifman, 2014). These diffusion mechanisms strengthen social barriers between insiders and outsiders in addition to reproducing language patterns. Digital slang is a reflection of the persistence of social play and the development of hybrid linguistic identities influenced by prolonged online presence in the setting of post-pandemic communication. Its ability to capture shared experience, emotion, and adjustment to life mediated by digital means makes it socio-pragmatically significant. Recognizing digital slang as a semiotic instrument of affect, inventiveness, and belonging in the dynamic ecology of online discourse is therefore necessary to comprehend it.

3. Post-Pandemic Context and the Evolution of Online Communities

3.1. Digital Intimacy and Emotional Expression

The COVID-19 epidemic caused a persistent rearrangement of daily contact that academics have dubbed a new kind of digital intimacy by compressing traditionally separate social spheres, such as work, study, and leisure, into overlapping digital settings (Baym, 2015). Extended mediated co-presence (with associated affordances and limitations) became commonplace with video conferencing and remote work. Research on virtual meetings during the pandemic shows how these platforms' social demands increased and how they helped to reestablish interpersonal norms (Karl et al., 2021). Fast, multimodal practices of expression (mesmes, soundclips, stickers, slang) that provide instant affective alignment and shared emotional framing were simultaneously promoted by short-form platforms like TikTok and participatory places like Discord and other chat groups. As a result, digital slang serves as an affective resource: short, high-inference expressions (text, emoji, meme) that perform social reassurance and emotional attunement across dispersed networks. This process is linked to ambient affiliation, as defined by Zappavigna and Martin (2018), and it builds alignment and values through social media micro-interaction and social tagging.



3.2. Identity, Power, and Group Solidarity

Digital slang has developed into a crucial indicator of social affiliation and identity performance in post-pandemic online environments. Slang phrases serve as semiotic markers that connect language form to social meanings like age, subcultural affiliation, or ideological attitude, in line with Silverstein's (2003) idea of indexicality. In digital tribes, terms like "*based*," "*ok boomer*," and "*touch grass*" indicate group alignment and shared ideals rather than just propositional content. Thus, online communities, from political meme cultures to fandoms, become communities of practice where language innovation serves as a signal of in-group participation and expertise (Wenger, 1999).

Language is also used to negotiate power dynamics in these settings. Slang usage or coinage frequently gives influencers, moderators, and subcultural elites who mold discursive norms symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Based on wider hierarchies of visibility and influence, these players have the linguistic power to validate or invalidate particular statements. Irony and comedy also function as socio-pragmatic instruments of resistance and unity. Online comedy, in accordance Milner (2016), recontextualizes shared experiences via playful irreverence, so fostering unity and challenging authority. In this sense, post-pandemic digital slang is discursively charged and enacts social critique, exclusion, and inclusion; it is not only lighthearted. In addition to speeding up digitization, the epidemic changed the practical definitions of comedy, empathy, and belonging. Therefore, in the absence of co-present engagement, digital slang developed as a semiotic tool for users to adjust emotional expression.

4. SOCIO-PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF DIGITAL SLANG

Beyond merely inventing new words, digital slang has several socio-pragmatic functions. In online environments, it functions as a communicative tool for establishing interpersonal connections, expressing emotive attitude, communicating social identity, and negotiating ideological implications. From the standpoint of socio-pragmatics, these functions show how language is used to carry out social work, how speakers use seemingly lighthearted forms of communication to control power, closeness, and belonging.

Building and maintaining interpersonal ties is one of the main purposes of digital slang. Slang creates a casual tone that promotes camaraderie and conviviality and frequently indicates in-group identification. Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) would categorize expressions like "*bruh*," "*bestie*," and "*no cap*" as expressive speech acts, acts that reflect sentiments and build interpersonal ties. This interpersonal characteristic is in line with Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, which maintains that amusing slang lowers the likelihood of face-threatening circumstances by emphasizing familiarity and softening directness. For instance, phrases like "*chill phet*," "*mlem mlem*," or "*dinh kout*," which reflect global trends of online sociability, similarly perform digital intimacy and community membership in Vietnamese digital culture.



By indexing age, ideological attitude, and group membership, digital slang also carries out identification work. According to Silverstein's (2003) concept of indexicality, slang expressions indicate affiliation with certain subcultures and communities of practice (Wenger, 1999). For example, in the online communication of Generation Z, terms such as "*based*," "*cringe*," or "*simp*" are markers of the generation, whereas expressions like "touch grass" or "ok boomer" are used to express sarcasm and opposition between the generations. In this manner, slang mirrors the youth culture and digital participation; at the same time, it serves as a symbolic barrier, making the grouping stronger (Eckert, 2012).

Crucially, users intentionally remark on, mock, or influence language trends as a means of stance-taking in digital slang, which is also a place of metapragmatic awareness. Using sarcastic quotation marks, spoof instructions, or meme captions such as "*POV: you still say 'yeet' in 2025*," online speakers frequently present slang as a humorous or critical object. Slang is not just an impromptu linguistic creation, but also a self-aware commentary on language usage, identity performance, and cultural engagement, as demonstrated by these reflective activities. As a result, metapragmatic reflexivity is included into the way users in networked discourse negotiate belonging and authenticity.

The dynamics of gender and power also have a significant impact on who has the right to create or spread digital slang. According to Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital, socially prominent actors, including influencers, streamers, or subcultural elites, are frequently the source of slang innovation. Their online status validates some terms while marginalizing others. Likewise, gendered trends show up: women and queer users are typically the first to employ emotional or stylistic slang (such as "*slay*," "*bestie*," or "*it's giving*"), but their language innovation is usually hijacked or trivialized in popular discourse. Therefore, the socio-pragmatic study of slang has to focus on how digital hierarchies both provide opportunities for fun resistance and redefinition and replicate larger injustices.

Digital slang's expressive role is highlighted by its emotive and affective usage. Slang improves communicative efficiency by distilling emotional meanings into highly inferential, context-sensitive statements, according to Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). Phrases that communicate great emotive resonance and shared comprehension, such as "*I'm dead*" or "*mood*," require little semantic information. These forms are prime examples of affective pragmatics, which emphasizes communal empathy and emotional attitude with little language effort. This expressive modality is further enhanced by the inventive use of emojis, GIFs, and phonetic spellings (e.g., "*brooo*," "*slayy*"), which execute digital counterparts of tone and gesture (Zappavigna & Martin, 2018).

Digital slang has ideological significance in addition to interpersonal and expressive objectives. To mirror public judgments, through irony and critique, it nonetheless serves as a vehicle for social commentary. The labels "*Karen*," "*NPC*," and "*snowflake*" are indicative of the cultural tales



dealing with ethics, genuineness, and a conflict with the dominant narratives (Milner, 2016). Such remarks are like discourse guns that, in a few words, take away the legitimacy of certain behaviors or opinions and, at the same time affirm the membership of the group. These ideological roles make clear how the politics of representation and power dynamics in online communities are mediated by digital lingo. From a socio-pragmatic perspective, these expressions are performative actions of stance-taking that help shape public discourse in the post-pandemic age, rather than just being hilarious (Bourdieu, 1991).

In conclusion, the socio-pragmatic purposes of digital slang demonstrate how people utilize language to take social action. These forms demonstrate the dynamic interaction between language innovation, digital environment, and social meaning-making in modern online communication, whether they are used to convey intimacy, belonging, emotion, or ideology.

5. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In the post-pandemic period, the socio-pragmatic study of digital slang highlights the changing interplay between language, technology, and identity. Digital slang is a prime example of how linguistic practice is becoming more hybridized as communicative life increasingly takes place in hybrid contexts, where virtual and physical encounters coexist (Androutsopoulos, 2015; Varis & Blommaert, 2015). The example of people modifying languages to fit the advantages of the internet while still keeping social contact is a mixture of both technological and social aspects. As online conversation continues to alter the parameters of authentic or acceptable communication, the mix compels researchers to renew their faith in established sociolinguistic principles regarding community, register, and context.

In theory, with the objective of reflecting the users' transitions of meaning, emotion, and power, future studies should integrate digital ethnography along with socio-pragmatic inquiry (Pink et al., 2016). A more thorough comprehension of how language practices like slang function as social acts rooted within networked cultures may be achieved by combining pragmatic analysis with anthropological sensitivity. As slang and informal registers increasingly influence the design of chatbots, voice assistants, and generative AI systems, this multidisciplinary approach may also be used to the study of algorithmic communication and AI-mediated discourse (Bender & Friedman, 2018; Van Dijck, 2020).

Digital slang study has wider implications for language instruction and digital literacy than just its theoretical relevance. It is possible to develop instruction that encourages linguistic inventiveness rather than stigmatizing informal speech by understanding how young speakers use slang to generate humor, position, and solidarity (Gee, 2017). This makes socio-pragmatic awareness an aspect of critical digital literacy, which is the capacity to engage in the language economy of the online world in a meaningful way and to navigate and comprehend. The socio-pragmatic



examination of digital slang ultimately sheds light on the evolving nature of communication as well as the persistent human urge to play, interact, and interpret language.

6. CONCLUSION

One of the most prominent socio-pragmatic manifestations of the post-pandemic state is digital slang. It captures the ways speakers recreate sociality, identity, and affect in digitally mediated existence, and is by no means a language oddity or simple amusement. Slang evolved into a language technology of intimacy and resilience as a result of the pandemic's acceleration of interpersonal communication's shift into virtual spaces. Digital slang illustrates how language users reevaluate the values of collaboration, civility, and emotional expression in limited and fragmented online environments through its creative shortness, comedy, and intertextuality.

Digital slang not only reflects the digital persona that every online user shapes but also gives insights into how emotions are expressed through minimalistic signs and how the listeners' part in the making of the message is the main point in this type of communication, revealing the socio-pragmatic complexities of today's communication. The ways in which digital slang is used creatively should not be interpreted merely as random choices but rather as coming from an ideology that involves exercising power, identifying oneself with a certain age group, or belonging to a specific subculture. Thus, the negotiation of meaning online and consequently, the impact of language on social life have been uncovered through digital slang study, which employs the theories of Affective Pragmatics, Indexicality, Politeness, and Speech Acts. Language evolution, under the constraints of cutting-edge technology, may be mistaken for linguistic chaos, but it is, in fact, a systematic negotiation of the meaning that is taking place.

From a wider theoretical viewpoint, digital slang is a suitable example of the fusion of language and technology, what Blommaert (2018) refers to as the sociolinguistics of globalization. It signifies that the change in languages is not only in terms of vocabulary but in terms of the entire ecosystem of communication: the ecosystem is changing as people occupy the overlapping areas of digital and physical space. Therefore, understanding digital slang means understanding the ever-changing pragmatics of social life, how people deal with the issues of emotion, identity, and belonging in the chaos of a post-pandemic digital era. In the end, the sociolinguistics of globalization is best illustrated by digital slang, which shows how language changes to accommodate the hybrid ecology of digital and physical existence. It demonstrates that post-pandemic language development is a methodical negotiation of meaning, emotion, and belonging across mediated environments rather than a chaotic one.

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Challenges in the Translation of Religious Culturonyms

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Keywords	Abstract
religious culturonyms linguaculture religiocultural terms culture-specific lexical items	The translation of culturonyms—culture-specific lexical items tied to the religious practices, beliefs, institutions, or worldviews of a source culture—poses myriad challenges. This paper examines the difficulties inherent in rendering religious culturonyms from a source into a target language and culture. Drawing on prior research in translation studies and selected case examples from sacred texts and novels, the study identifies major obstacles—semantic non-equivalence, cultural invisibility, translator competence, and audience reception—and outlines strategies commonly adopted (domesticating, foreignizing, explanatory) together with their trade-offs. The findings suggest that no single strategy suffices; rather, a context-sensitive balance is required, and translators must possess deep cultural and religious literacy. The conclusion considers implications for translator training and future research.

Introduction

Language is not merely a tool for communication but also a repository of culture, worldview, and collective memory. When translators transfer meaning from one language to another, they bridge the gap between distinct cultural and conceptual worlds. One of the most intricate aspects of this process is the translation of *culturonyms*—words or expressions deeply rooted in the cultural, historical, and social fabric of a community. As Kabakchi and Proshina (2021) note, culturonyms are “linguistic units that denote culture-specific realities and embody the worldview of a given community.” These terms are not simply lexical items; they are cultural signifiers that resist straightforward equivalence because they are bound to unique practices, values, and beliefs.

Cultural words, or *culturonyms*, encapsulate cultural, social, or religious meanings beyond mere denotation. In translation studies, the challenge posed by culture-specific items (CSIs) has been widely acknowledged: what happens when a religious term in the source text carries meanings, references, and connotations that the target culture lacks? As Alhaddad and Abdullah (2023) observe, “Words can be easily translated, but their cultural meaning is oftentimes not.”

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Within this broader class, *religious culturonyms* occupy a particularly complex space. These are linguistic items related to belief systems, rituals, sacred objects, theological concepts, or institutional structures—for instance, *karma*, *Eucharist*, *jihad*, *nirvana*, or *bar mitzvah*. Each carries dense layers of significance that extend far beyond dictionary definitions. The cultural, theological, and emotional weight embedded in such terms makes their translation not only a linguistic act but also an act of cultural negotiation and ethical responsibility.

Religious linguaculture, in particular, presents additional difficulties: concepts are embedded in faith traditions, ritual contexts, sacred texts, metaphysical assumptions, and the lived practices of the source culture. The translator of a religiocultural term must navigate semantic, pragmatic, cultural, and theological dimensions. In literary contexts, for example, scholars have shown that translators commonly employ domesticating or foreignizing strategies, with foreignizing used more frequently for religious expressions—such as in the rendering of terms in Naguib Mahfouz’s *Sugar Street*.

The translation of religious culturonyms poses challenges that extend beyond linguistic equivalence. As Nida and Taber (1969) argue in their theory of dynamic equivalence, communicative effectiveness requires that the translated message evoke a response in the target audience comparable to that of the original. In religious translation, however, this is difficult to achieve because target readers may lack the experiential and cultural background needed to comprehend a term’s religious or spiritual context. For instance, the Arabic *taqwā*, central to Islamic thought, has been rendered as “piety,” “God-consciousness,” or “fear of God,” yet none fully captures its Qur’anic nuances. Similarly, the Sanskrit *dharma* in Hindu and Buddhist contexts has no single English equivalent that encompasses law, duty, cosmic order, and moral virtue.

These difficulties show that translating religious culturonyms is not merely a search for lexical parallels but a mediation between distinct conceptual and spiritual systems. Translators must decide whether to domesticate the text—making it more accessible by adapting it to target-culture norms—or to foreignise it, preserving the source culture’s flavour even at the risk of alienating the target reader (Venuti, 1995). In religious contexts, this decision carries ethical and theological implications, since altering or simplifying sacred terms may distort doctrinal meanings or offend believers. The translator thus becomes a cultural and moral mediator, responsible for conveying both the linguistic and the spiritual dimensions of the source text.

The aim of the present article is to analyse the major challenges in the translation of religious culturonyms, to identify and categorise them, and to review the strategies translators adopt (and their consequences). It asks: What specific difficulties arise when translating religious culturonyms? What factors influence strategy choice? What are the implications for adequacy, equivalence, and reception? The study contributes to translation theory by focusing explicitly on the religious domain of culturonyms and offering a structured overview of the problem.



The significance of this issue has increased in the context of globalisation and interfaith dialogue. As religious texts, sermons, and theological writings circulate across linguistic boundaries—through scripture translation, missionary activity, or world literature—the need for sensitive, accurate, and culturally informed translation becomes paramount. Misinterpretation of religious culturonyms can lead not only to misunderstanding but also to cultural stereotyping or religious conflict. Hence, the translator’s decisions bear not only linguistic but also sociocultural and ideological consequences (Babayev, 2023).

Existing studies (e.g., Khukhuni et al., 2019; Abdel-Hafiz, 2020; Valizadeh & Ezzati Vazifekkhah, 2022) demonstrate that translating religiously charged terms requires advanced cultural literacy and interpretive skill. Khukhuni et al. emphasise that both linguistic and extra-linguistic factors—such as the translator’s religious background, cultural empathy, and awareness of sacred connotations—affect translation outcomes. Abdel-Hafiz’s analysis of Naguib Mahfouz’s *Sugar Street* shows that translators often favour foreignisation for religious expressions to preserve authenticity and respect the original culture’s sacred elements. Meanwhile, Valizadeh and Ezzati Vazifekkhah highlight the need for translators to possess “bicultural and bireligious competence” to interpret religious expressions accurately across contexts.

Aims and Scope

In light of these complexities, the present study examines the specific challenges involved in translating religious culturonyms across semantic, cultural, pragmatic, and ideological dimensions. It also classifies the strategies translators employ—domesticating, foreignising, explanatory, and substitutional—and considers their implications for equivalence, readability, and intercultural understanding. By synthesising findings from existing literature alongside illustrative case studies, the article clarifies how religious culturonyms function in translation and which factors condition their successful rendering.

Types of Religious Culturonyms

1. Biblical and Scriptural Culturonyms

Many culturonyms originate in holy texts such as the Bible, Quran, Bhagavad Gita, or Torah. For example:

- “David and Goliath” — symbolising a struggle between the weak and the powerful.
- “Cross to bear” — denoting a personal burden or suffering, drawn from Christian imagery.

2. Ritual and Symbolic Culturonyms

Derived from religious ceremonies or symbols, these terms encapsulate spiritual practices:



- “Baptism by fire” (Christian origin; now meaning a difficult initiation).
- “Pilgrimage” — originally a sacred journey, now used metaphorically for any meaningful quest.

3. Ethical and Moral Culturonyms

These expressions convey moral lessons rooted in religious ethics:

- “Good Samaritan” — a person who helps others selflessly.
- “Reap what you sow” — moral causality akin to the concept of karma.

4. Interfaith and Universal Culturonyms

Some religious culturonyms transcend single traditions and enter global discourse:

- “Amen” — used across Christianity, Judaism, and Islam (Babayev, 2024).
- “Peace be upon you” — found in multiple linguistic forms across the Abrahamic faiths.

Functions of Religious Culturonyms

1. Cultural Identity and Continuity

They reinforce group belonging and transmit collective memory through language.

2. Moral and Ethical Communication

They serve as shorthand for moral principles, turning complex ethical ideas into accessible idioms.

3. Linguistic Enrichment

They add metaphorical depth and stylistic colour to a language.

4. Intercultural Dialogue

As religious culturonyms migrate across languages through translation or globalisation, they foster intercultural understanding and shared human values.

In sum, the translation of religious culturonyms sits at the intersection of language, culture, and faith. It requires translators to balance fidelity with functionality, precision with accessibility, and reverence with clear communication. Engaging these challenges illuminates not only the craft of translation but also the broader processes of intercultural and interreligious exchange in an increasingly interconnected world (Javid & Sadikhova, 2025).

Methods

This study is qualitative and exploratory. The methodology comprises:



1. **Literature review:** Surveying key papers on the translation of culture-bound items and religious terms (e.g., Khukhuni et al. (2019) on cultural words in sacred texts; Kabakchi & Proshina (2021) on culturonyms).
2. **Case analysis:** Examining published studies on the translation of religious words/expressions in literature (e.g., Abdel-Hafiz, 2020) to identify common patterns of difficulty and strategy.
3. **Categorisation:** Distilling, from the review and case analysis, categories of challenge (semantic, pragmatic, cultural, translator competence, audience) and mapping translator strategies (domesticating, foreignising, explanatory, substitution) together with their trade-offs (see also Petrova, 2017 on the translation of realia).
4. **Interpretive synthesis:** Integrating findings into a coherent framework by listing challenges, linking them to strategy choices, and discussing factors that influence decisions.

No new empirical translation experiment was undertaken; rather, the study leverages existing research to synthesise an analytical overview.

Results

Religious culturonyms are linguistic units (words, idioms, expressions, or symbols) that arise from religious traditions and carry meanings rooted in belief systems. They function as verbal signifiers of religious identity, history, and morality within a particular culture or community (Babayev & Alaviyya, 2023).

These expressions may derive from:

- **Sacred texts** (e.g., “prodigal son,” “Judgment Day”)
- **Religious rituals** (e.g., “baptism by fire,” “bar mitzvah”)
- **Doctrinal concepts** (e.g., “karma,” “nirvana”)
- **Common greetings and interjections** (e.g., “God bless you,” “Salaam alaikum”)

Such terms often transcend their original religious contexts, entering secular language while retaining spiritual undertones.

The analysis revealed the following major categories of challenge in translating religious culturonyms, with associated observations:

1. **Semantic non-equivalence / lexical gap:**
Many religious culturonyms lack direct equivalents in the target culture/language. Sacred terms, ritual names, or theological concepts may have no ready counterpart. Translators may borrow, coin, explain, or domesticate. For example, some Islamic expressions in



translation require adaptation—or, in rare cases, omission—due to the absence of precise target-language parallels.

2. Cultural invisibility and background knowledge:

Target audiences may lack the religious or cultural background needed to grasp a term's full connotations (Sabir, 2023). The translator must decide whether to include explanatory glosses, annotations, or leave the term as is. Khukhuni et al. (2019) also highlight extra-linguistic factors in sacred-text translation, including cultural and religious background knowledge.

3. Connotation, ideology, and sacredness:

Religious terms often carry ideological, doctrinal, or sacred status. Alteration, domestication, or omission can affect perceived meaning or offend communities of belief. Abdel-Hafiz (2020) found that translators of Mahfouz's *Sugar Street* often favoured foreignising strategies for religious words to preserve source-culture values.

4. Translator competence and cultural-religious literacy:

Beyond linguistic proficiency, translators require deep cultural and religious literacy. Valizadeh & Ezzati Vazifekkhah (2022) showed that interpreters needed thorough knowledge of both Iranian and American cultures to translate religious expressions accurately.

5. Target-text audience and reception:

Anticipating how readers will receive a term is essential. If unfamiliar, will it alienate, confuse, or be misinterpreted? The choice between domesticating and foreignising strategies depends in part on the intended readership and the translation's purpose.

6. Challenges in translation and interpretation:

Religious culturonyms frequently resist direct translation due to deep cultural and theological roots (Alisoy, 2022). For instance:

- The Arabic phrase “Inshallah” means “if God wills,” conveying spiritual humility and social politeness that are difficult to capture fully in English.
- “Dharma” in Sanskrit spans duty, morality, and cosmic order, with meanings that vary by context.

Translators must therefore balance semantic accuracy with cultural sensitivity, at times opting for transliteration or explanatory notes (Sadikhova & Babayev, 2025).

Discussion

Findings from the literature synthesis and case analyses reaffirm that translating religious culturonyms is among the most intricate and ethically charged tasks in translation practice. Unlike general lexical items, these terms are embedded within the conceptual frameworks, ritual practices, and belief systems of specific communities. Their translation therefore entails more than linguistic



transfer—it requires mediation between divergent worldviews. This discussion expands on the theoretical, practical, and ethical implications of these findings and proposes directions for translator training and future research.

1. **The dialectic of equivalence and faithfulness**

The tension between faithfulness to the source text and equivalence in the target text lies at the heart of translation theory. Nida and Taber's (1969) concept of dynamic equivalence emphasises reproducing in the target audience an effect comparable to that experienced by the original audience. This principle becomes problematic, however, when translating sacred or doctrinal terms whose full significance is grounded in a specific theology. For example, rendering the Christian term *grace* into languages lacking the concept of divine, unmerited favour risks semantic dilution or doctrinal distortion. Conversely, excessive literalism—often associated with “formal equivalence”—can obscure meaning and alienate the target audience.

Religious culturonyms thus expose the limits of both strategies: literal translation may miscommunicate, while dynamic equivalence may misrepresent. Translators must negotiate this dialectic situationally, balancing respect for the sacred text with communicative clarity. This aligns with Nida's later assertion (1986) that equivalence should be functional rather than absolute, and that the translator's task is to approximate meaning within the constraints of cultural incommensurability.

2. **Domesticating vs. foreignizing strategies revisited**

Venuti's (1995) distinction between domestication and foreignization offers a useful lens for analysing translator choices in religious texts. Domestication seeks to make the text familiar to the target audience by adapting cultural and religious references, whereas foreignization retains the source culture's otherness.

The present study supports previous findings (Abdel-Hafiz, 2020) that foreignization is often preferred for religious culturonyms, particularly in sacred or culturally sensitive contexts. This strategy preserves the authenticity and sanctity of the source terminology, even at the cost of readability. For instance, retaining terms like *Allah*, *karma*, or *Bodhisattva* rather than replacing them with “God,” “destiny,” or “saint” safeguards doctrinal specificity and avoids syncretism. However, when addressing audiences unfamiliar with the source culture, excessive foreignization can hinder comprehension and reduce communicative effectiveness.

Domestication, by contrast, enhances accessibility but risks eroding the cultural and theological depth of the original. Translating *shalom* simply as “peace” or *Ummah* as “community” may be comprehensible yet fails to convey the spiritual and communal dimensions of these terms. A growing number of scholars (Katan, 2014; Valizadeh & Ezzati Vazifekhhah, 2022) advocate hybrid strategies—combining transliteration with glosses or paratextual notes—to balance fidelity and intelligibility.



3. **Translator as cultural and ethical mediator**

Translators of religious culturonyms must operate simultaneously as linguistic experts, cultural anthropologists, and ethical mediators. Katan (2009) characterises translators as “intercultural communicators” who bridge mental models across cultures. In religious translation, this role carries heightened responsibility: errors can misrepresent doctrine or even inflame intercultural tensions.

For example, rendering the Arabic term *jihad* solely as “holy war” distorts its broader sense of spiritual striving and has contributed to widespread misunderstanding in Western media discourse. Likewise, reducing the Sanskrit *ahimsa* to “non-violence” obscures its metaphysical grounding in karmic philosophy. Such distortions underscore the need for cultural empathy and ethical sensitivity, ensuring that translation choices reflect not only linguistic accuracy but also respect for the source community’s values and beliefs.

4. **The role of context and audience**

Appropriate strategy depends heavily on context and target readership. As Newmark (1988) argued, translation is purpose-driven; skopos theory (Vermeer, 1996) echoes this by insisting that decisions align with the text’s communicative function. A translation intended for interfaith dialogue or academic study may preserve source terms and supply explanatory notes, whereas one aimed at children’s education or popular literature may employ adaptive strategies to enhance comprehension.

Audience expectations also shape reception. Readers familiar with multiple faith traditions may welcome foreignisation for its cultural authenticity, while others may find it opaque or alienating. Translator prefaces, footnotes, or glossaries can mitigate these risks by guiding readers without distorting meaning.

5. **Pedagogical and professional implications**

The challenges identified point to an urgent need for translator training programmes to include sustained modules on cultural and religious literacy. Such training should extend beyond language proficiency to cultivate awareness of religious symbolism, ritual terminology, and intercultural ethics. Role-play, comparative textual analysis, and guided exposure to multilingual sacred texts can sharpen sensitivity to religious nuance.

Professionals also require institutional support—clear guidelines, peer review, and consultation with theologians or cultural experts—to safeguard accuracy and respect. Collaboration between translators and scholars of religion can bridge knowledge gaps and help prevent doctrinal misinterpretation.

6. **Technological and future perspectives**

In the era of machine translation (MT) and artificial intelligence, religious culturonyms acquire renewed relevance. Studies such as Yao et al. (2023) show that even advanced neural MT systems struggle with culturally bound expressions, often proposing



inappropriate or anachronistic equivalents. Given their layered semantics and spiritual resonances, religious culturonyms remain resistant to automation; the cultural and ethical judgment they demand cannot yet be replicated by AI.

Even so, MT can assist human translators by providing consistent terminology databases, parallel corpora, and context-aware suggestions—provided these resources are curated and verified by culturally competent experts. The most promising trajectory is human–AI collaboration, in which human translators retain ethical and interpretive authority while leveraging technological tools for efficiency and consistency.

7. Towards an integrative model of religious culturonym translation

Building on the findings, an integrative approach is proposed comprising four interdependent dimensions:

1. **Semantic dimension** – grasping the denotative and connotative meanings of the term.
2. **Cultural dimension** – recognising the term’s embeddedness in ritual, history, and collective identity.
3. **Communicative dimension** – adapting the translation to the target audience’s expectations and purpose.
4. **Ethical dimension** – ensuring respect for religious sensitivity and avoiding reductionism or distortion.

A translator who balances these dimensions through informed strategy selection (e.g., partial borrowing with commentary) can achieve both cultural authenticity and communicative clarity.

8. Limitations and avenues for future research

The study’s conclusions are constrained by its reliance on secondary literature and illustrative cases. Empirical research could enrich the field—for example, by testing how readers from different cultural or religious backgrounds perceive translated culturonyms, or by examining how professional translators justify their strategy choices in practice. Cross-linguistic comparisons (e.g., Arabic–English vs. Chinese–French) may also reveal how linguistic typology affects strategy selection.

Moreover, emerging translation technologies warrant longitudinal assessment. As MT systems evolve, it remains to be seen whether future models can incorporate contextual, cultural, and ethical awareness when processing religious discourse.

Conclusion

Translating religious culturonyms is more than a linguistic exercise; it is a negotiation between languages, cultures, and belief systems. The study shows that these terms, deeply rooted in religious thought and ritual, resist direct equivalence and require strategies that balance fidelity,



clarity, and cultural sensitivity. Translators must therefore act as cultural mediators—preserving the sacred essence of the source while ensuring intelligibility for the target audience. A combination of foreignisation, explanatory glosses, and contextual adaptation often proves most effective. The process also raises ethical questions of representation, respect, and intercultural responsibility. Effective translation of religious culturonyms demands not only linguistic expertise but also theological literacy, empathy, and awareness of audience expectations. As global communication expands and technology evolves, continued scholarly attention is essential to promote accurate, respectful, and meaningful cross-cultural understanding in religious and spiritual discourse.

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The Linguistic Mirror of Emotion: How Language Shapes Feelings Across Cultures

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Keywords	Abstract
Language and emotion linguistic relativity cross-cultural psychology emotion lexicon	Language is more than a vehicle for communication – it is a mirror reflecting and shaping human emotion across different cultural worlds. This article explores how linguistic structures, vocabularies, and metaphors influence the way people perceive, categorize, and express their feelings. Drawing on evidence from linguistics, anthropology, and psychology, we find that languages encode emotion in culturally specific ways, from unique “untranslatable” emotion words to grammar and idioms that frame feelings differently. Cross-cultural studies show that speakers of different languages may actually perceive emotional expressions differently, supporting the view that language helps constitute emotional experience (Gendron et al., 2014; Jack et al., 2012). Moreover, bilingual individuals often report shifts in emotional intensity and expression when switching languages, highlighting the intimate link between language and feeling. While certain basic emotions may be pan-human, their linguistic labeling and interpretation are far from universal. Understanding these nuances has profound implications for cross-cultural communication, mental health, and global empathy. In sum, our emotions are not just biologically “hard-wired” responses but are also shaped and sharpened by the words and concepts our languages provide.

Introduction

How do our words color our feelings? The relationship between language and emotion has fascinated scholars for decades, raising questions about whether people of different cultures feel the same emotions or whether language shapes those feelings in unique ways. The classic Sapir–Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity posits that the language we speak influences how we think and perceive the world. Emotions are a poignant testing ground for this idea: if language indeed affects thought, then speakers of different languages might experience or interpret feelings differently.

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Early researchers such as **Paul Ekman** argued for universal basic emotions with corresponding facial expressions recognizable across cultures (e.g., happiness, fear, anger; *Ekman, 1992; Ekman & Friesen, 1971*). Yet other scholars have countered that emotions are also culturally constructed and mediated through language. Anthropologist **Anna Wierzbicka** notably observed that English emotion terms such as *disgust* or *shame* represent a folk taxonomy of feeling, not a universal human repertoire—in fact, other languages may lack direct equivalents for some of these terms (*Wierzbicka, 1999*). For example, Polish has no exact word for *disgust*, and an Australian Aboriginal language, Gidjingali, traditionally used one word for what English distinguishes as *fear* versus *shame* (*Lutz, 1988; Ekman, 1992*). Such findings caution against assuming that English-speaking notions of emotion are globally shared. As Wierzbicka argues, concepts like *disgust* or *fear* can be “highly language-specific and culture-specific,” rather than innate universal categories (*Wierzbicka, 1999, p. 45*).

Contemporary approaches blend these perspectives, recognizing a biological capacity for core affect while emphasizing that language and culture fine-tune emotional experience. Constructionist theories in psychology go so far as to suggest that emotions are not fixed neurological modules but “mental compounds” constructed from more basic psychological ingredients, with language supplying crucial conceptual scaffolding (*Barrett, 2017; Lindquist & Gendron, 2015*). In this view, words for emotions are not mere labels we affix to pre-formed feelings; rather, they are active ingredients in the recipe of emotion. Recent research by **Lindquist, Barrett**, and colleagues supports this: when people’s access to emotion words is temporarily blocked or altered, their ability to recognize and even feel those emotions can change (*Lindquist & Gendron, 2015; Gendron et al., 2014*). Cross-cultural studies likewise reveal striking differences in how emotions are categorized and recognized, suggesting that what one culture calls *anger* or *sadness* may not perfectly map onto the emotional reality of another culture (*Gendron et al., 2014; Jack et al., 2012*). The language of emotion, in short, both reflects and shapes the emotional life of communities.

In this article, we examine the linguistic mirror of emotion – how language influences emotional concepts, experiences, and expressions across cultures. We survey evidence that ranges from unique emotion words around the world to psycholinguistic experiments and neuroimaging studies. Section 1 discusses the rich diversity of emotion lexicons, including so-called “untranslatable” terms that illuminate cultural values. Section 2 explores how language affects the perception of emotion, highlighting research in which altering language input (or comparing different language speakers) changes how emotions are recognized and categorized. Section 3 considers cultural scripts and metaphors for emotion, showing how languages frame feelings through metaphor and context and how this guides emotional expression (for instance, some cultures encourage overt emotional talk, while others rely on subtle cues). Section 4 delves into the bilingual experience, investigating how people who speak multiple languages sometimes feel



as if they have different emotional selves in each tongue. Finally, the conclusion reflects on why appreciating the linguistic shaping of emotion matters in an interconnected world. Throughout, we maintain an academic, evidence-based perspective – befitting an inquiry at the crossroads of linguistics, anthropology, and psychology – to understand how our languages both mirror and mold our hearts. By acting as a linguistic lens, culture and language together turn emotion into a profoundly varied human experience.

1. Emotion Words as Cultural Concepts

One of the most vivid ways language shapes emotion is through vocabulary – the words a language provides for feelings. Every culture has developed its own lexicon of emotion, carving up the spectrum of human feeling into named categories that sometimes have no direct equivalent elsewhere. These “untranslatable” emotion words are illuminating windows into what a society deems important or salient in emotional life (*Lomas, 2018; Wierzbicka, 1999*). When a language invents a word for a very specific feeling, it signals that the experience is common or valued enough to merit its own name (*Lomas, 2018; Lara Translate Blog, 2023*). Conversely, if a language lacks a term that another language has, speakers may be less inclined to notice or dwell on that nuance of feeling in daily life.

Examples of unique emotion words abound across the globe. The German word *Schadenfreude* famously describes the pleasure derived from another’s misfortune – a complex emotional mix that English speakers recognize but can only circumscribe with a phrase (*Wierzbicka, 1999*). Its existence in German (and adoption into other languages) hints that this bittersweet feeling is culturally acknowledged and discussed in German-speaking contexts. In Finnish, *sisu* refers to a deep, quiet inner fortitude and determination in the face of adversity – more than mere perseverance, it connotes a cultural ethos of resilient grit (*Lomas, 2018*). Finland’s long winters and history of struggle may have seeded the concept of *sisu*, and having the word reinforces the importance of stoic courage as a Finnish cultural value (*Lomas, 2018*). Similarly, Japanese has *amae*, roughly translated as a pleasurable dependence or presumption upon another’s love – essentially the comfort of being able to “act like a spoiled child” with someone who cares about you. This nuanced emotional concept, first analyzed by anthropologist Takeo Doi, does not neatly translate into English, yet it plays a key role in Japanese conceptions of family and affection (*Doi, 1973*). Another Japanese term, *natsukashii*, captures a feeling of nostalgia tinged with warmth or longing for the past; English speakers feel this emotion too but require a description like “bittersweet nostalgia,” whereas Japanese wraps it in one evocative word.

Many of these words spotlight emotions that tie individuals to community or environment. The Welsh word *hiraeth* describes a profound homesickness or yearning for a home one cannot return to (or that may never have existed); it reflects Wales’ emphasis on homeland and heritage, threading the emotion with national identity (*Lomas, 2018*). In South African Bantu languages,



ubuntu names the feeling tied to the philosophy of shared humanity (“I am because we are”) – a term that blends empathy, community connection, and moral value. Its existence highlights how deeply communal harmony and human interconnectedness are felt in those cultures (*Lara Translate Blog, 2023*). From Tahiti, anthropologists record *pouri*, which roughly corresponds to sadness but, intriguingly, Tahitians before Western contact didn’t have a concept equivalent to “anger” as English speakers know it – their emotion lexicon divided the space differently, emphasizing other affective states (*Levy, 1973*). And on the Micronesian atoll of Ifaluk, as Catherine Lutz documented, the word *fago* represents a blend of love, compassion, and sadness all in one (*Lutz, 1988*). To feel *fago* is to respond to someone in need with a mix of tender sorrow and love – an emotion that makes sense within the highly cooperative, kinship-focused society of Ifaluk. Lutz noted that “*fago is an emotion whose full flowering requires the understanding attained only through social discourse,*” meaning that in Ifaluk culture one learns to feel *fago* in the context of social interactions and expectations (*Lutz, 1988, p. 45*). What an English speaker might compartmentalize into separate feelings (grief, love, pity) an Ifaluk person experiences as a singular, culturally meaningful emotion.

These examples underscore that language provides a conceptual scaffolding for emotion. Having a named category for a feeling can focus attention on it and allow people to discuss and even cultivate it. By contrast, the absence of a term might make an experience feel less distinct. As one linguistics blog put it, “*when cultures create words for specific experiences, they’re essentially saying: this matters enough that we need a word for it*” (*Lara Translate Blog, 2023*). The priorities and values of a culture often emerge in its emotion words (*Lomas, 2018; Wierzbicka, 1999*). For instance, the existence of *sisu* in Finnish or *lagom* in Swedish (meaning “just the right amount, in balance”) points to how those cultures prize endurance and moderation, respectively (*Lomas, 2018; Lara Translate Blog, 2023*). In Japan, *omotenashi* denotes wholehearted hospitality and caring for guests—again revealing an emotional value placed on selfless service and consideration (*Lara Translate Blog, 2023*). By learning these foreign terms, we not only enrich our vocabulary, but also expand our ability to recognize subtle hues of feeling. Psychologist **Tim Lomas** has argued that discovering untranslatable words can enhance our well-being by giving us new frames to understand ourselves; indeed, people often report that learning a new emotion word helps them articulate a vague feeling they had but couldn’t name before (*Lomas, 2018*). This demonstrates the powerful feedback loop between language and emotion: language can create new emotional awareness. As one commentator noted, “*language doesn’t just reflect our thoughts—it may actually influence how we think,*” especially about experiences as subjective as emotions (*Lara Translate Blog, 2023*). In sum, the diverse emotion lexicons of the world’s languages serve as cultural mirrors, each reflecting a society’s emotional landscape and in turn sharpening the feelings of its speakers.



2. Language Influences Emotion Perception and Cognition

Do people who speak different languages actually perceive emotions differently? A growing body of cross-cultural psychological research suggests the answer is yes—language can shape not only how we talk about feelings, but also how we recognize and even experience them at a fundamental level. The theory of linguistic relativity of emotion predicts that if a language makes certain emotional distinctions (or lacks them), its speakers will become attuned to those patterns in the flow of feeling. Modern experiments have tested this by observing what happens when people’s access to emotion vocabulary is changed. The results provide some of the most direct evidence that, far from being a passive descriptor, language actively participates in constructing emotion.

One line of research involves **semantic satiation**, a technique where repeating a word over and over renders it temporarily meaningless. In a clever study, psychologists had participants say an emotion word (like *anger*) 30 times in a row—enough to make it start sounding like gibberish—and then immediately perform a task judging facial expressions (*Lindquist & Gendron, 2015; Gendron et al., 2014*). Normally, people are quick to match a scowling face with another scowling face as “the same emotion.” But when participants’ concept of *anger* had been satiated (and thus momentarily unavailable), they became significantly slower and less accurate at recognizing two scowling faces as both expressing anger (*Gendron et al., 2014*). In essence, disrupting the word disrupted the perception. Notably, this wasn’t just a quirk of being tongue-tied; a control condition repeating a neutral word like *idea* had no such effect (*Barrett, 2017*). This implies that the brain actively drew on the concept of *anger* (anchored by the word) to make sense of the angry faces—when that concept was knocked out, the visual system struggled to categorize the expressions (*Lindquist & Gendron, 2015*).

In a related experiment, researchers found that people with **semantic dementia** (a neurological condition that degrades conceptual knowledge and word understanding) also showed an altered perception of facial emotions. Patients who had lost access to many emotion words could no longer sort facial expressions into the usual discrete categories; instead, they tended to group faces only by broad affect (positive vs. negative) (*Lindquist & Gendron, 2015*). For example, without knowing concepts like *disgust* or *fear*, a patient might simply see a variety of unpleasant faces and lump them together, unable to differentiate a look of disgust from one of fear or anger beyond the shared negativity. Healthy individuals and younger children show a parallel pattern: infants and two-year-olds, who have very limited emotion vocabulary, primarily distinguish happy vs. unhappy expressions, but struggle to separate specific negative emotions until they learn the words for them around age 3 or 4 (*Widen & Russell, 2008; Barrett, 2017*). All these findings align with the idea that learning emotion words teaches us to make finer perceptual distinctions between feelings (*Lindquist & Gendron, 2015; Widen & Russell, 2008*).



Cross-cultural studies further demonstrate linguistic shaping by comparing speakers of different languages on emotion tasks. In one remarkable study, an American research team worked with the **Himba**, a remote ethnic group in Namibia whose language (*Herero*) has emotion terms that do not map neatly to Western ones. They asked Himba participants and English-speaking participants to sort a set of facial expression photos into piles by emotion type (a method to see how people naturally categorize emotions). The English speakers reliably grouped the faces into the six “basic” emotion categories—anger, disgust, fear, sadness, happiness, and neutral—essentially replicating Western results that assume those categories (*Ekman, 1992; Gendron et al., 2014*). The Himba participants, however, did not sort the faces in the same six piles (*Gendron et al., 2014; Roberson et al., 2008*). Even when given translated emotion words as labels for piles, the Himba groups did not align with the Western categories (*Gendron et al., 2014; Roberson et al., 2008*). Notably, the Himba were not randomly guessing—they tended to sort faces in their own consistent way, often grouping some expressions by intensity or valence (e.g., putting angry and fearful faces together as “high-arousal negative”) rather than separating them as Anglo-Americans do (*Jack et al., 2012; Jack & Schyns, 2015*). This suggests that because the Himba language and culture do not emphasize the same discrete emotion groupings as English (for instance, there may not be distinct words for *disgust* versus *anger*), Himba individuals perceive the continuum of facial expressions somewhat differently, focusing on other cues. In the words of the researchers, “*emotion words have a powerful effect on emotion perception,*” helping to structure sensations into the familiar Western categories—and without those words, people may use alternate frameworks (*Gendron et al., 2014; Lindquist & Gendron, 2015*).

Another cross-cultural comparison looked at Chinese vs. English speakers’ perceptions of facial expressions with and without emotion labels. In one experiment, participants from China and the U.S. viewed dynamic facial animations morphing through various muscle movements; they had to press a button when they thought the face showed a specific emotion (from a list given) (*Jack et al., 2012; Jack & Schyns, 2015*). Interestingly, Chinese participants did not carve up the emotional expressions in the same way as Americans. Whereas American viewers tended to see distinct expressions corresponding to the six basic emotions, Chinese viewers showed more overlap—for example, they did not clearly differentiate *fear* vs. *surprise* vs. *disgust* as separate categories, often confusing those, especially given that the task used English emotion terms or their direct Chinese translations as prompts (*Jack et al., 2012; Jack & Schyns, 2015*). Researchers hypothesized that the Chinese emotional lexicon (and cultural context) might emphasize different emotion concepts, leading to less segmentation among certain Western-defined categories (*Mesquita, 2022*).

In fact, when Chinese participants were shown the English word *disgust* right before seeing a disgusted facial expression, their brains’ processing of the face changed to become more “efficient,” more like that of American participants (*Leshin et al., 2023; Pirchner, 2024*). A recent neuroimaging study by **Leshin et al. (2023)** found that Chinese immigrants in the U.S. activated



different neural networks for interpreting faces depending on whether they were primed with an English emotion word. For instance, without a word, a wrinkled-nose face might not strongly register as *disgust* to a Chinese-born viewer, but seeing the label *disgust* beforehand significantly improved recognition and altered brain connectivity, engaging semantic regions to help interpret the face (Leshin et al., 2023; Pirchner, 2024). In contrast, American participants (for whom that expression and word were deeply familiar) showed no such neural difference whether or not the word was provided (Jack et al., 2012). This implies that language can serve as a mental catalyst for perceiving emotion—giving a name to a configuration of facial cues literally helps the brain see it as that emotion, particularly if one’s cultural upbringing did not emphasize that category (Leshin et al., 2023; Jack et al., 2012).

Overall, these studies support a compelling conclusion: **language guides the mind in parsing emotional reality**. Emotion perception is not a passive, universal reading of facial muscle movements or vocal tones; rather, the concepts and words we have internalized set up expectations and interpretations. As one scientific review phrased it, accumulated cultural knowledge about emotions “shapes the way people perceive the emotional meaning” of others’ expressions (Leshin et al., 2023; Pirchner, 2024). When our language has a precise label, we are primed to detect that signal; when it doesn’t, we may miss the finer distinctions. Far from trivial, this has real-life implications. Consider how this insight might affect cross-cultural communication or even technology: an AI trained only on Western emotion concepts might misread the feelings of someone from a different culture if it doesn’t account for these differences (Mesquita, 2022; Leshin et al., 2023).

On the personal level, it reminds us that expanding our emotional vocabulary—in any language—could literally expand how we feel and understand feelings. Psychological research shows that simply putting feelings into words (a process called **affect labeling**) can modulate their intensity; for example, verbalizing one’s emotions tends to dampen amygdala reactivity and engage regulatory brain regions (Lieberman et al., 2007; Burklund et al., 2014). In one study, people doing a stressful task showed a reduced physiological stress response if they labeled their emotions during the task, compared to those who did not—suggesting that language provided a form of implicit emotion regulation (Burklund et al., 2014). Thus, language not only helps us identify emotions in others, it also can alter our own emotional responses. To sum up, research from semantic satiation experiments to fMRI scans converges on a key idea: **our feelings are partly a product of our language**. The way we learn to speak about emotions trains our perception and can even feed back into how strongly or in what way we experience those emotions ourselves (Lindquist & Gendron, 2015; Widen & Russell, 2008).



3. Cultural Scripts and Metaphors of Emotion

Languages do more than supply vocabulary for emotions; they also provide **cultural scripts** and **metaphors** that guide how feelings are understood and expressed in context. A cultural script can be thought of as the implicit “rules” or norms for when and how to show certain emotions, often reflected in idioms, proverbs, or common turns of phrase (*Wierzbicka, 1999; Mesquita, 2022*). Metaphors, on the other hand, are the figurative language linking emotions to more concrete experiences, and these metaphors can vary widely across cultures—**influencing how people conceptualize what an emotion is** (*Kövecses, 2000; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980*). Both scripts and metaphors embedded in language play a profound role in shaping emotional life.

One key area of difference is the **directness of emotional expression**. It has been observed that Western, individualistic cultures like the United States or much of Europe encourage a relatively direct articulation of one’s feelings: “say what you feel” is often considered healthy communication (*Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Mesquita, 2022*). In contrast, many collectivist or traditional cultures place greater emphasis on social harmony and context, often favoring indirect cues to convey emotion (*Matsumoto, 2006*). This pattern emerges in cross-linguistic pragmatics. For instance, in East Asian languages such as Japanese, there is a well-known distinction between *honne* (one’s true feelings) and *tatemae* (the public façade or feelings expressed to meet social expectations) (*Ide, 2008*). Emotions in such contexts might be conveyed through subtle facial expressions, tone, or situational allusion rather than explicit words. A recent cross-cultural analysis noted that “*Western individualistic cultures tend to favor direct emotional articulation, whereas collectivist cultures often depend on indirect or pragmatic cues*” (*Mesquita, 2022, p. 144*). For example, an American might say, “I’m very upset that you did that,” whereas a Japanese speaker, following different norms, might not state anger outright but instead fall silent or say something understated like “This is a bit inconvenient” with a troubled tone. The linguistic habits reflect deeper cultural values: Western communication prizes individual self-expression and clarity, while many other cultures prize empathy, reading the air, and not burdening others with one’s personal emotions unless appropriate. Neither approach is inherently better; rather, each language-culture system socializes members into a certain emotional style. These styles can sometimes lead to misunderstanding—a direct communicator may perceive an indirect one as “hiding” feelings, whereas the indirect communicator may view the direct one as inappropriately blunt or lacking finesse (*Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Matsumoto, 2006*).

Metaphors of emotion in language also shape how feelings are conceptualized. Cognitive linguist **Zoltán Kövecses** and others have shown that English speakers often use *heat* and *pressure* metaphors for anger—e.g., “he erupted in anger,” “simmering rage,” “ready to explode”—reflecting an implicit model of anger as a *hot fluid in a container* (the body) that can boil over (*Kövecses, 2000; Lakoff & Kövecses, 1987*). In contrast, Chinese conceptual metaphors for anger include the notion of *qi* (vital energy or gas) rising upward in the body; an angry person in



Mandarin might say something like “气上来了” (literally “the qi has risen up”) rather than “I’m boiling mad” (Yu, 1995). Such differences suggest that even the physiological experience of anger might be interpreted through one’s cultural-linguistic model: Do you feel a *hot head* or a *chest full of rising energy*? Likely, people’s bodily experience aligns to some degree with the metaphors their culture provides, teaching them where to “locate” and how to describe their anger. Likewise, sadness in English is often a “down” feeling (“down in the dumps,” “feeling low”), whereas in some cultures sadness might be described as a heaviness or a pressure on the heart (Kövecses, 2000). These pervasive phrases are not just ornamental; they reflect and reinforce mental models of emotion. Research in cognitive linguistics suggests that such metaphors can influence how we process emotions; for example, experiments have found that thinking of an emotion in metaphorical terms (like visualizing anger as a pressurized container) can affect how intensely people report feeling it, because the metaphor carries certain entailments (pressure building, eruption, etc.) (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011).

Grammatical structures also frame emotions. An intriguing difference exists between languages in whether they treat an emotion as something one *is* or something one *has*. In English, one typically says “I am angry,” equating the self with the emotional state. But in Spanish, it’s common to say “tengo miedo,” literally “I have fear,” instead of “I am afraid.” Other languages, like Russian or Arabic, might say “to me there is sadness” (using a dative construction) or “it makes me sad”—effectively phrasing emotion as something that happens to the person or that one possesses temporarily, rather than an identity (Wierzbicka, 1999; Dewaele, 2008). These grammatical nuances may subtly influence people’s attitudes toward emotions. If “I am angry,” then anger might be viewed as somewhat inherent or defining in the moment; whereas if “I have anger” (or “anger is upon me”), it suggests the emotion is a separate entity that one might control or lose, akin to a possession or an external force. Linguists have pointed out that such structures can influence perceived **agency in emotions** and strategies for regulation (Wierzbicka, 1999). For example, Spanish speakers might, by habit, externalize emotions a bit more (“the fear has come over me”), which could affect how they attempt to get rid of it (since it is “had,” perhaps it can be let go). English speakers might internalize it (“I am angry”) and perhaps feel it as more tied to their self-concept in the moment. These are subtle tendencies, but they exemplify **Benjamin Lee Whorf’s** famous idea that grammar is an invisible guide to everyday thinking (Whorf, 1956). Indeed, one cross-cultural linguistic study highlighted this English–Spanish contrast, noting that “*in Spanish, emotions are often expressed as possessions (‘Tengo miedo’ – ‘I have fear’), whereas in English, emotions are described as intrinsic states (‘I am afraid’). These differences suggest that language...actively constructs emotional experiences*” (Wierzbicka, 1999, p. 123). In other words, whether we linguistically cast emotions as objects, states, actions, or reactions can shape how we psychologically experience and cope with them.



Cultural scripts also dictate which emotions are socially emphasized or played down. For instance, in many East Asian cultures influenced by **Confucian** values, anger (especially toward elders or in-group members) is often seen as destructive and discouraged, whereas feelings like shame or remorse in response to one's own missteps are given more attention as tools for self-correction (Mesquita, 2022; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The language reflects this: there are multiple words for shades of shame, humility, modesty, and feelings related to maintaining honor (for example, Japanese *hansei* refers to introspective regret and self-reflection on one's mistakes), whereas there might be fewer casual words for overt anger (Ide, 2008). In English, we find the opposite pattern—many everyday expressions of anger (*annoyed, peeved, ticked off, irate, furious*, etc.) but less rich vocabulary for shame (often just *ashamed* or borrowing idioms like *red-faced*) (Wierzbicka, 1999). This doesn't mean people in English-speaking cultures never feel shame or that Japanese people never feel anger; rather, the linguistic resources available can encourage people to focus on and discuss certain emotions more readily, thus weaving them more deeply into the fabric of social interaction. We can think of it as the **emotional “menu”** offered by a culture's language. If a concept is on the menu, you're more likely to order it (experience it and talk about it); if it's absent or only available off-menu, you might overlook it or feel it only vaguely. A poignant example comes from Wierzbicka's analyses: some languages lack a general word for *emotion* as a category. For instance, she noted that some smaller languages do not have a single term that lumps feelings together in the way English does with *emotion* (Wierzbicka, 1999). Speakers of those languages may not talk about “emotions” in the abstract at all, but only about specific states like *anger, joy*, etc., each in its own context. This could lead them to perceive those states as less connected to each other than an English speaker who is taught from childhood that anger, joy, fear, etc. are all species of the same genus “emotion.” In contrast, English and many Western languages have a whole apparatus of talking about emotions in general (emotion versus reason, emotional intelligence, controlling your emotions, and so on), which itself shapes how we conceptualize feelings as a domain of life (Mesquita, 2022).

Lastly, **cultural values** can be inferred from the scripted emotion words that often appear in moral exhortations or folk wisdom. For example, many languages have proverbs about anger and patience. In Arabic, one proverb says, “غضبك نار، فأطفئه بصبرك” (“Your anger is a fire; extinguish it with your patience”), metaphorically teaching emotional control through the lens of locally resonant imagery (Al-Sughair, 2015). In English, the proverb “Don't cry over spilled milk” trivializes regret or sadness for accidents, implicitly encouraging emotional restraint in the face of minor loss. The fact that certain proverbs gain currency indicates the emotional tendencies a culture seeks to promote or curtail. By internalizing these linguistic nuggets, speakers learn patterns—for example, anger should be cooled down like a fire, or sadness should be overcome when it's pointless. Language thus carries **cultural emotion-regulation strategies** across generations in aphoristic form (Mesquita, 2022; Wierzbicka, 1999).



In summary, beyond individual words, the broader linguistic and cultural context—metaphors, syntax, idioms, and discourse norms—systematically influences how emotions are framed. Through language, cultures script when one should feel proud or ashamed, how one should describe love or anxiety, and even how to physically experience a surge of anger or a pang of longing. Emotions may be universal in potential, but language channels those potentials into culturally preferred grooves, ensuring that each society not only speaks but feels in its own characteristic style. As linguist **Anna Wierzbicka** notes, even the so-called “basic emotions” like happiness, fear, or anger, when examined closely, turn out to be entwined with cultural meaning and linguistic expression (*Wierzbicka, 1999*). Recognizing these differences is essential in intercultural settings: what might seem like an absence of emotion could be a different style of expression, and what seems like a strong emotion could have a different connotation in another language. Appreciating the role of language in emotion equips us to navigate cross-cultural relationships with greater empathy and insight.

4. Bilingual Minds: Shifting Languages, Shifting Emotions

If language shapes emotion, what happens in the minds of people who speak multiple languages? **Bilinguals and multilinguals** provide a natural experiment in how different linguistic contexts influence feeling. Interestingly, many bilingual individuals report that their emotional experiences and expressions can change with the language they are using. They often feel that one language (usually their mother tongue) is more emotionally intense or “true” to them, whereas another language (often a later-acquired one) might feel more detached or cerebral for emotional topics. This phenomenon has been termed the **emotional-resonance hypothesis**—the idea that one’s first language, imbued with early childhood experiences, carries greater emotional weight than languages learned later (*Dewaele, 2008; Pavlenko, 2014*). Research in psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics largely supports these self-observations.

Multilinguals commonly describe a sensation that emotional words—like *I love you* or curse words—do not pack the same punch in their second language (L2) as in their first language (L1). A study by **Dewaele (2008)** found that bilingual speakers reported different levels of emotional arousal depending on which language they were using; for example, many said that swearing or expressing anger in their native tongue felt much stronger (and in some cases more uncomfortable) than doing so in a second language. Conversely, some bilinguals prefer to discuss vulnerable or traumatic experiences in a second language precisely because it provides a kind of emotional distance—the feelings are “held at arm’s length” when filtered through a less instinctive lexicon (*Pavlenko, 2014*). This may explain why bilingual individuals in psychotherapy sometimes switch languages when recounting painful memories, or why a multilingual person might argue in one language but apologize in another. One participant in **Pavlenko’s** research vividly noted, “*We usually argue in English/Spanish mishmash. When either of us are boiling, it’s each in her/his own L1,*” whereas if feeling a bit more in control, switching to the other language can be a strategy to



diffuse intensity (Pavlenko, 2014, p. 183). This anecdote illustrates how each language can tap into different emotional circuits—the native-language channel brings out raw, unfiltered emotion, while the second-language channel allows a step back, sometimes enabling more cool-headed or even wittier expression of the feeling (Pavlenko, 2014).

Neuroscientists have begun to uncover why this might be. Language learned in early childhood tends to be encoded in memory along with the emotional contexts of one's family and early life, engaging limbic (emotional-brain) regions more strongly. Later languages, often acquired in classroom or formal settings, might remain somewhat “disconnected” from those deep emotional networks. Brain-imaging studies of bilinguals show differential activation patterns when hearing emotional phrases in L1 vs. L2—hearing an endearment or taboo word in one's native tongue can trigger greater amygdala (emotion-center) response than the same word's translation in an L2, which the brain may treat more like a cognitively processed stimulus (Harris, Ayçiçeği, & Gleason, 2003; Caldwell-Harris & Ayçiçeği-Dinn, 2009). Essentially, the mother tongue is tied to emotion-laden memories (your parents' voices, playground insults, childhood lullabies), whereas an L2 might have been used mostly in relatively neutral contexts initially. Of course, as one becomes truly fluent and especially if one lives emotionally in the second language (relationships, significant life events), that language gains emotional resonance too. Nonetheless, a sizable number of bilinguals report a persistent difference. As one study succinctly put it, “*bilingual speakers' first and second languages are differentially associated with their emotional experiences*” (Dewaele, 2008, p. 1754).

This can also lead to **code-switching during emotional moments**. Research by Williams et al. (2020) observed immigrant parents switching from English to their native Chinese when expressing strong negative emotions toward their children, and back to English when the emotional intensity reduced—indicating that high arousal might spontaneously drive people to the language in which they can most fully (or automatically) express that arousal (Williams et al., 2020). Their analysis suggests that when emotion runs high, cognitive control is lowered and bilinguals may revert to their emotionally dominant tongue, whereas mild positive emotions might be handled in either language more flexibly (Williams et al., 2020; Pavlenko, 2014).

This has fascinating social implications. A bilingual person might appear to have “different personalities” in different languages—a trope sometimes noted humorously in multicultural settings. For example, someone might be more reserved when speaking Japanese but quite boisterous in English, or more polite in French but more blunt in Russian, aligning with the cultural norms each language embodies (Grosjean, 2010). Part of this is adapting to social expectations (pragmatic competence), but part may be that the emotions themselves feel differently accessible. A French–English bilingual may find it easier to say *I love you* in English than *Je t'aime* in French, because the French phrase feels weightier and more intimately tied to deep feelings, whereas the English words, while understood, might roll off with less inner vulnerability. On the other hand,



some emotions might be more readily accessed in the second language if the first language has taboos. For instance, speakers from cultures where discussing sexuality or mental health is stigmatized might find it liberating to talk about those topics in English (an L2) because English words aren't loaded with the same shame or discretion they learned in their native terms (Pavlenko, 2014). Essentially, a second language can sometimes function like an emotional “filter” or, conversely, an “escape,” allowing expression of things that would be hard to admit in one's mother tongue.

Psychologically, using a foreign language has been found to induce a more utilitarian, less emotional mode of thinking—a phenomenon called the **foreign language effect**. Studies where people make moral decisions (like trolley-problem dilemmas) have shown that people are more likely to make coldly rational choices (sacrificing one to save five, for instance) when considering the problem in their second language, compared to their native language in which they respond with more emotion-based aversion (Costa et al., 2014; Hayakawa et al., 2017). This suggests that an L2 can provide emotional distance, dampening instinctive gut reactions. In daily emotional life, that might translate to someone being less anxious when talking about a phobia in an L2, or less angry when cursing in an L2—essentially, the emotional color is a few shades paler. Indeed, bilingual writers have described feeling like a slightly different self in each language, precisely because their emotional repertoires shift.

However, it's crucial to note that context and proficiency matter. Immigrants who use an L2 (say, English) for decades and primarily in emotional situations (like family life in a new country) can come to develop just as strong emotional connections in that language. In some cases, the language in which one first says *I love you* to a partner, or experiences a tragedy, becomes deeply emotionally salient regardless of whether it was L1 or L2. Furthermore, not all bilinguals experience a big split; balanced bilinguals who grew up using two languages from early childhood may have a more blended emotional encoding. Still, the majority do sense some difference, and this is supported by aggregated research findings (Dewaele, 2008; Pavlenko, 2014).

One important real-world application of understanding bilingual emotional dynamics is in **therapy and counseling** for multilingual individuals. Therapists often ask which language a client feels more comfortable or real in when expressing certain feelings. A multilingual person processing trauma might switch to their native language when crying or venting anger, but then prefer a second language to analyze or intellectualize the experience. Sensitive clinicians take these cues to navigate between languages in sessions, ensuring the patient can both feel and reflect in the languages that serve each purpose (Santiago-Delefosse et al., 2015). **Legal settings** also grapple with this: testimony given in a second language might lack some emotional nuance or intensity that it would have if given in the mother tongue, which could affect jurors' perceptions (Dewaele, 2010). Skilled interpreters and cultural consultants are aware of these subtleties.



In summary, the bilingual experience strongly reinforces that language and emotion are intertwined. By straddling two (or more) languages, bilinguals effectively illuminate the boundaries and influences of each on their inner emotional life. As one bilingual writer quipped, “*I swear in Spanish, but I save my secrets for English*”—highlighting that different languages may house different emotional domains of one’s life. Scientific studies confirm that bilinguals’ hearts and minds respond distinctively depending on the linguistic context (*Harris et al., 2003; Williams et al., 2020*). These insights remind us that to truly understand someone’s emotions, it can be crucial to understand the language through which those emotions are being filtered. For the bilingual individual themselves, being aware of this can be empowering: if expressing grief feels too intense in one language, another tongue might allow a safer outlet—or vice versa, when one wants to really connect with a buried feeling, using the language of childhood might unlock it. The languages we speak are not just interchangeable channels; each is a lens with its own focal length for the heart. As such, bilinguals live with multiple lenses—sometimes overlapping, sometimes divergent—giving them a unique perspective on how profoundly language shapes emotional reality.

Conclusion

Language and emotion are inextricably linked, forming a feedback loop that is fundamental to the human experience. As we have seen, language serves as a mirror of emotion, reflecting a culture’s values and nuances—yet it is also a mold, actively shaping how feelings are understood and even felt. Different cultures carve up the emotional landscape in distinctive ways through words and expressions: what is *heartbreak* in one tongue might be *saudade* in another—the Portuguese term for a deeply nostalgic longing—each capturing facets the other leaves out. These linguistic differences are not superficial. They influence how we categorize a crying face or a fit of laughter, how we judge someone’s emotional reaction, and how we make sense of our own inner turbulence.

Cross-disciplinary research supports the notion that while the capacity for basic affect may be universal, the categorical emotions humans experience are partially a cultural construction, with language as a key building material (*Barrett, 2017; Gendron et al., 2014*). We found that speakers of diverse languages do not always agree on where one emotion ends and another begins—the boundaries are drawn according to the lexicon they have learned (*Gendron et al., 2014; Lindquist & Gendron, 2015*). Words act as anchors for perception; without them, we rely on broader intuitive impressions (e.g., simply good vs. bad feelings), and with them, we gain finer discrimination (*Widen & Russell, 2008; Lindquist & Gendron, 2015*). From the Himba of Namibia to bilingual immigrants in New York, people illustrate in myriad ways that language guides emotional awareness. In practical terms, this means that increasing one’s emotional vocabulary—even by borrowing foreign terms or learning a new language—can enrich one’s emotional intelligence and empathy. Each new word is like a lens sharpening our view of a particular feeling.



Understanding the linguistic shaping of emotion has significant implications. In an age of global interaction, being attuned to these differences can foster better cross-cultural communication and empathy. Rather than assuming someone is cold, overly emotional, or inscrutable, we might consider how their language conventions influence their emotional expressions. For instance, a Japanese colleague's stoicism or an Italian colleague's expressiveness in a meeting might both be better understood in light of their cultural emotion scripts, as opposed to knee-jerk judgments about personality. On the level of international relations and multicultural communities, acknowledging that languages encapsulate different emotional worlds could improve everything from diplomacy to customer service—anytime we deal with feelings across a language barrier. Even technology must take this into account: artificial-intelligence systems aiming to recognize or respond to human emotions (in, say, sentiment analysis or facial-expression reading) must be culturally informed. As **Leshin et al. (2023)** warned, an emotion-detecting AI that ignores linguistic-cultural differences might “misinterpret people’s expressions,” underscoring the need for culturally aware design (*Leshin et al., 2023*).

Within individuals, the interplay of language and emotion opens interesting possibilities for emotional growth and regulation. Psychologists have found that simply labeling an emotion in words can help manage it—a practice now used in mindfulness and therapy (“name it to tame it”). Our review suggests that using the right word, one that truly fits the felt experience (perhaps drawn from any language), can provide a cathartic clarity. Conversely, lacking a word can leave emotions amorphous and harder to handle. Hence, learning from the rich lexicons of the world—the Icelandic term *þetta reddast* for a kind of optimistic resilience, or the Korean *han* for sorrowful lament mixed with hope—might not only be intellectually enlightening but emotionally liberating. We also see that for bilingual people, choosing the language of expression is an emotional tool: one language may allow more intensity, another more distance, enabling bilinguals to navigate their feelings by code-switching as needed (*Williams et al., 2020*).

Ultimately, exploring how language shapes emotion across cultures reinforces a humbling and beautiful truth about humanity. We all laugh, love, fear, and mourn—those capacities are in our shared biology. Yet the way we laugh, the flavor of our love, the shades of our fear, the rituals of our mourning are deeply colored by culture and language. Emotions are often touted as a universal language, but as we have shown, actual languages profoundly influence emotions. Rather than a universal language, emotions are a universal story told in 7,000 tongues. Each tongue tells it a bit differently. By listening to these differences, we gain a more complete understanding of the human heart. We become, in effect, emotionally multilingual—able to empathize with experiences that our own language may not emphasize. In a global era, this empathy is invaluable. It helps transform what could be cultural collisions into opportunities for connection, as we learn to see emotional expressions not through a monolithic lens but within their cultural-linguistic context.



In closing, the study of language and emotion teaches us that neither words nor feelings exist in a vacuum. As language scholar **Claire Kramsch** eloquently put it, “*Language is the road map of a culture.*” If so, then emotion words are the landmarks on that map—guiding us through the terrain of joy and sorrow that people navigate. The scientific evidence and examples across cultures make one thing clear: change the language, and you change the map. Happiness might be a hill in one culture and a valley in another; anger, a fire or a hot fluid or a sharp arrow, depending on the metaphors provided. But by exchanging our maps and learning from each other’s lexicons, we can all travel a little further into understanding the diverse richness of human emotion.

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Exploring the Translation of Colloquial Expressions: A Sociolinguistic Perspective

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Keywords	Abstract
colloquial expressions sociolinguistics translation strategies cultural mediation	This study investigates the translation of colloquial expressions through a sociolinguistic lens, emphasizing the interplay between linguistic equivalence, cultural mediation, and social identity. Colloquial language—including slang, idioms, and informal speech—reflects speakers’ cultural values, group membership, and evolving communication norms. Translating such expressions presents challenges due to their cultural embeddedness, contextual variability, and rapid evolution across digital platforms. Using examples from English and Azerbaijani, the paper analyzes how translators navigate these challenges through adaptive strategies such as borrowing, paraphrasing, domestication, and contextual adaptation. It argues that translators function as cultural mediators, preserving not only semantic meaning but also social and pragmatic nuances that define colloquial discourse. The study highlights the increasing influence of social media on the emergence and diffusion of slang, underscoring the need for translators to maintain cultural awareness and linguistic flexibility in the digital age.

1. Introduction

Language is not only a vehicle for propositional content; it is a social practice that encodes identity, group membership, and cultural value. The colloquial layer of language—slang, idioms, and other informal registers—makes these social and cultural functions most visible by indexing in-group solidarity, stance, and local knowledge (Crystal, 2003; Eble, 1996). Precisely because colloquial expressions are context-bound, culturally specific, and fast-moving, they resist one-to-one equivalence and pose distinctive problems for translators who must preserve not just referential meaning but also pragmatic force and social resonance (Newmark, 1988; Venuti, 1995). The velocity of change has increased in the platform era: social media accelerates the diffusion and

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obsolescence of slang and continually shifts meanings, demanding ongoing cultural attunement from translators (Sheralieva, 2025; Kulkarni & Wang, 2017; Liang, Meng, Wang, & Zhou, 2025).

In the English–Azerbaijani pairing, additional hurdles arise from structural differences, stylistic norms, and discourse conventions; translators frequently rely on paraphrase, adaptation, and hybrid strategies to balance intelligibility, tone, and cultural positioning (Babayev, 2023; Resulova & Abbasov, 2020; Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958). This paper therefore aims to examine how linguistic (semantic, pragmatic, stylistic) and socio-cultural (identity, age cohort, community norms) factors interact in the translation of colloquial expressions, with illustrative data from English and Azerbaijani.

Research question. *How do sociolinguistic factors shape the choice and effectiveness of translation strategies for colloquial expressions?*

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Colloquial Language and Sociolinguistics

Following Crystal (2003), we treat colloquial language as the everyday, informal register of a speech community, encompassing idioms, slang, and stylistic reductions that are sensitive to setting and audience. Eble's (1996) ethnography of campus slang shows how such expressions function as social badges—signaling affiliation, boundaries, and shared experience—while also serving playful and affective purposes. Recent work on youth discourse underscores that slang is not static: it is shaped by peer networks, trends, and media cycles, with forms and meanings turning over quickly (Sheralieva, 2025).

Because colloquial usage varies across social identities (age, gender, subculture) and cultural groups, the same surface form may carry divergent connotations across communities, and different forms may fulfill equivalent functions in different locales (Crystal, 2003; Eble, 1996). For translators, this implies that successful rendering depends on reading the social indexicality of an expression—who uses it, to whom, where, and why—and then selecting target-language resources that reproduce those social meanings, not merely the denotation.

2.2. Translation Theory and the Sociocultural Approach

Classical frameworks supply a repertoire of techniques but also different ideologies of reception. Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) catalogue procedures from borrowing and calque to modulation and adaptation; Newmark (1988) distinguishes methods according to the priority given to semantic vs. communicative effect. Venuti (1995) reframes these choices ethically as foreignization versus domestication: whether to preserve source-culture alterity or to accommodate target-culture norms.



In colloquial translation, these orientations directly bear on how much “foreignness” of social identity and register is retained.

From a sociolinguistic vantage point, the translator becomes a cultural mediator who must evaluate which strategy best recreates the original’s pragmatic function and social indexicality for the target audience (Venuti, 1995). For culturally dense or group-specific slang, borrowing can preserve flavor but risks opacity; adaptation can secure accessibility but may flatten social nuance (Newmark, 1988; Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958). In English–Azerbaijani practice, translators often combine strategies—e.g., a borrow plus an explicitation on first mention, or a culturally analogous idiom where a direct equivalent is absent—guided by genre, audience, and evolving usage norms (Babayev, 2023; Resulova & Abbasov, 2020). The sociocultural approach thus situates technique within community expectations and identity work, aligning procedure with the social life of language as documented in colloquial discourse (Crystal, 2003; Eble, 1996; Sheralieva, 2025).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study adopts a qualitative, comparative discourse-analytic design that triangulates linguistic form with sociolinguistic function. We analyze English–Azerbaijani pairs of colloquial expressions (slang, idioms, and other informal registers) to examine how translators balance semantic content with pragmatic effect and social indexicality (Crystal, 2003; Eble, 1996; Newmark, 1988; Venuti, 1995).

3.2. Materials and sampling

Data comprise naturally occurring colloquial items collected from:

- **Contemporary usage:** short-form social media posts and comments, subtitled audiovisual dialogs, and conversational transcripts in public online spaces;
- **Reference descriptions and case discussions** in the local literature on Azerbaijani usage and translation (Abbasova, 2023; Hasanova, 2023; Babayev, 2023; Resulova & Abbasov, 2020).

Sampling followed maximum variation principles: (a) balance across slang, idioms, and informal formulas; (b) balance across source directions (EN→AZ and AZ→EN); (c) inclusion of youth- and domain-specific slang (e.g., tech, campus), given its rapid turnover (Sheralieva, 2025). Each token was archived with its immediate cotext (preceding/following turns) and situational metadata (speaker role, presumed audience, platform/genre, date) to preserve interpretive context (Eble, 1996; Crystal, 2003).



3.3. Analytic dimensions and operationalization

We evaluate each translation (human-produced or proposed by our analysts) along three primary dimensions:

(a) Semantic equivalence. Denotational content preserved?

- 2 = fully preserved; 1 = partial shift (hyper-/hyponymy, metaphor dilution); 0 = major loss or change.

Anchoring tests draw on sense relations and componential analysis (Newmark, 1988).

(b) Pragmatic function. Original illocution and stance preserved (humor, irony, solidarity, provocation, mitigation)?

- 2 = functionally isomorphic; 1 = broadly similar but attenuated; 0 = divergent function. Functional labels are adapted from discourse-pragmatic descriptions of slang as social action (Eble, 1996; Crystal, 2003).

(c) Social context preservation. Retention of register, in-group indexicality, and identity cues (age cohort, subculture, power/solidarity).

- 2 = social indexicality retained (e.g., youth-coded, informal); 1 = mixed; 0 = neutralized/formalized.

This dimension foregrounds the sociolinguistic life of expressions (Sheralieva, 2025).

In parallel, each solution is coded for strategy using a consolidated taxonomy: borrowing, calque, literal translation, modulation, adaptation, paraphrase, explicitation, omission (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958; Newmark, 1988). We additionally tag orientation as domestication or foreignization to capture macro-level choices (Venuti, 1995) and note any hybrid sequencing (e.g., borrow + gloss at first mention) common in English–Azerbaijani practice (Babayev, 2023; Resulova & Abbasov, 2020).

3.4. Coding procedure and reliability

Two bilingual annotators independently coded all items after a calibration round using a shared guide with examples from the cited literature (Abbasova, 2023; Hasanova, 2023; Babayev, 2023). Disagreements were resolved by adjudication. Inter-rater reliability was assessed with Cohen’s κ for categorical labels (strategy, orientation) and weighted κ for the 0–2 scales; target $\kappa \geq .75$ for “substantial” agreement.

3.5. Analytic techniques



We combine:

- **Within-pair qualitative analysis** to explain why particular strategies succeed or fail on the three dimensions;
- **Cross-case patterning** to relate strategies to outcomes (e.g., whether adaptation more reliably preserves pragmatic function than borrowing in AZ→EN youth slang);
- **Temporal sensitivity** for fast-evolving items influenced by platform cycles (Kulkarni & Wang, 2017; Liang, Meng, Wang, & Zhou, 2025). Findings are interpreted against sociolinguistic accounts of colloquial usage and translator mediation (Crystal, 2003; Eble, 1996; Venuti, 1995).

3.6. Data ethics and limitations

Only publicly accessible materials were consulted; usernames and platform-specific identifiers were anonymized in examples. Because colloquial meaning is highly context-bound and time-sensitive, results reflect usage at the time of sampling and may shift with evolving norms (Sheralieva, 2025). Machine translation outputs were not benchmarked systematically, given known weaknesses with informal registers, but are referenced to contextualize constraints (Kulkarni & Wang, 2017).

4. Findings

4.1. Linguistic Challenges

Colloquial items pose three recurrent difficulties: non-standard morphosyntax, idiomatic (non-compositional) meaning, and context-dependence. Forms such as *gonna*, *wanna*, *ain't* or slang verbs like *drag*, *flex*, *roast* carry stance and in-group cues that are often neutralized in target renderings if translated literally or normalized editorially (Crystal, 2003; Eble, 1996). Where no direct equivalent exists, translators resort to adaptation or paraphrase, which can preserve denotation but risk diluting tone and social indexicality if not carefully motivated (Newmark, 1988; Resulova & Abbasov, 2020). Preserving the pragmatic effect—humor, irony, solidarity, provocation—proved more decisive for reader reception than preserving surface form, especially for youth-coded slang (Resulova & Abbasov, 2020; Eble, 1996).

4.2. Cultural Context and Mediation

The translator's choices sit on a continuum between foreignization (retaining source-culture flavor) and domestication (aligning to target norms) (Venuti, 1995). Foreignizing borrowings keep subcultural color but can reduce accessibility; domesticating analogs increase readability but may



flatten group identity cues (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958; Newmark, 1988). Slang and humor are especially culture-bound: punchlines often rely on local references or platform memes. The pace of change in social-media discourse (new forms, shifting meanings, rapid obsolescence) further demands time-sensitive choices and continual updating by translators (Sheralieva, 2025). Audience factors (age cohort, genre, formality) consistently shaped strategy selection (Crystal, 2003; Eble, 1996).

4.3. Application of Translation Strategies

Across the dataset, we observed consistent use of borrowing, calque, literal translation, modulation, adaptation, paraphrase, explicitation, and occasional omission (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958; Newmark, 1988). Two patterns stood out:

- Adaptation/paraphrase most reliably preserved pragmatic function and tone.
- Borrowing + first-mention explicitation balanced flavor with clarity in youth and platform slang (Babayev, 2023; Venuti, 1995).

Illustrative micro-comparisons (0–2 scale for Semantic / Pragmatic / Social indexicality):

EN expression	Concise AZ rendering	Strategy	Why it works
<i>spill the tea</i>	“dedi-qodu var” / “sirri açmaq”	Adaptation / paraphrase	Preserves gossip/reveal function and informal tone without awkward literalism.
<i>ghost (someone)</i>	“yoxa çıxmaq” / “yazışmadan çəkilmək”	Paraphrase	Captures abrupt, silent withdrawal common in chat/dating contexts.
<i>stan (a singer)</i>	“stan” (+ first-mention “fanatik pərəstişkar”)	Borrowing + brief gloss	Keeps subcultural flavor while ensuring initial comprehension; later uses can drop the gloss.

Overall, EN→AZ renderings favored adaptation/paraphrase to maintain tone; AZ→EN often combined paraphrase + explicitation to signal local nuance for global readers. Purely literal choices frequently neutralized register and lost social meaning (Newmark, 1988; Resulova & Abbasov, 2020; Venuti, 1995). Rapidly evolving, platform-driven slang benefited from hybrid sequencing (borrow → brief gloss → subsequent unglossed reuse) to foster both uptake and stylistic authenticity (Babayev, 2023; Sheralieva, 2025). Machine translation remained weak on these items due to poor handling of context-dependent informality (Kulkarni & Wang, 2017; Liang, Meng, Wang, & Zhou, 2025).



5. Social Media and Technology

Digital platforms have accelerated the creation, diffusion, and obsolescence of colloquial forms, globalizing local slang while continually shifting meanings across communities and contexts. This velocity heightens the translator's burden: items can become opaque or re-indexed within weeks, and platform-specific memes travel with culture-bound presuppositions (Crystal, 2003; Eble, 1996; Sheralieva, 2025). In such environments, translators must track time-sensitive usage and “glocal” adaptations (imported forms naturalized to local norms), often deciding between preserving subcultural flavor and securing readability through minimal explanation.

Current machine translation (MT) and large language models (LLMs) remain brittle on informal, context-dependent language. They struggle with non-literal meaning, stance, and social indexicality, and they frequently normalize nonstandard forms or misread irony, in-group cues, and platform humor (Kulkarni & Wang, 2017). Even as slang-aware benchmarks emerge, performance lags because items are rapidly evolving, polysemous, and community-specific (Liang, Meng, Wang, & Zhou, 2025). Consequently, MT outputs for slang are best treated as first-pass scaffolds requiring human mediation to restore pragmatic force.

These pressures make ongoing technological and social attunement part of the translator's craft: maintaining rolling glossaries, monitoring platform communities, and deploying hybrid techniques—e.g., borrowing with a brief first-mention gloss, then streamlined reuse; or adaptive paraphrase calibrated to audience age and genre (Newmark, 1988; Venuti, 1995; Babayev, 2023; Resulova & Abbasov, 2020).

6. Discussion

Sociolinguistic motivation of strategies. Choices such as borrowing, adaptation, paraphrase, or explicitation are not merely technical—they are sociolinguistically motivated by audience, register, and the identity work an expression performs (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958; Newmark, 1988). For youth-coded slang, preserving stance (teasing, solidarity, provocation) often outweighs preserving surface form; hence adaptation/paraphrase that recreates function can be preferable to literalism (Crystal, 2003; Eble, 1996).

Preventing loss of social context. When domestication increases accessibility, it can flatten indexical cues (e.g., age, subculture). Mitigations include first-mention glosses, paratextual notes, or culturally analogous idioms that restore social positioning without overburdening the text. In dialogic or subtitle formats, brief on-the-fly explicitation and consistent register marking help retain tone and in-group signals (Resulova & Abbasov, 2020; Babayev, 2023; Venuti, 1995).

Human translators and ethical responsibility. Because colloquial items encode group identities and boundaries, human translators act as cultural mediators with ethical obligations: avoid



stereotyping, refrain from over-domesticating minority voices, and signal otherness where it is semantically and socially constitutive (Venuti, 1995). Editorial normalization should not erase the speaker's social positioning or silence subcultural varieties that carry meaning beyond denotation (Eble, 1996).

Translation as a linguistic bridge. Done well, translating colloquial expressions bridges communities—carrying humor, affect, and solidarity across languages while respecting local norms. A practical workflow is human-in-the-loop: use MT/LLM output to surface candidates, then human post-edit to restore pragmatic function, stance, and indexicality, especially for fast-moving, platform-borne items (Kulkarni & Wang, 2017; Liang et al., 2025). In the English–Azerbaijani pairing, our analysis supports hybrid strategies (borrowing + brief gloss; adaptation tuned to genre and audience) as the most reliable path to preserve meaning, tone, and social resonance (Newmark, 1988; Venuti, 1995; Resulova & Abbasov, 2020; Babayev, 2023).

7. Conclusion

Translating colloquial expressions is a cultural act, not a word-for-word exercise. Effective renderings preserve pragmatic force (humor, stance, solidarity) and social indexicality (age, subculture) alongside meaning, with the translator acting as a mediator between communities. In English–Azerbaijani work, hybrid strategies—adaptation/paraphrase for tone, borrowing with a first-mention gloss for flavor, and selective explicitation—consistently outperform literalism. Given the speed of platform-driven change, a human-in-the-loop workflow remains essential.

Future directions (brief):

- Tune MT/LLMs to social variation; evaluate on pragmatic adequacy, not just lexical overlap.
- Build bilingual, diachronic corpora of colloquial usage to map strategy–outcome patterns.
- Advance multimodal translation (text + prosody/gesture/visuals) for discourse where meaning is not purely verbal.

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Learning Through the Lens of Realia: Expanding Language Skills with Real-World Contexts

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Keywords	Abstract
Realia language learning vocabulary acquisition listening comprehension speaking fluency authentic materials	This study explores the effectiveness of using realia—authentic, real-world objects and materials—in enhancing language skills in second language acquisition. The research investigates how real-world contexts can expand vocabulary, improve listening comprehension, and foster fluency in speaking. Data were collected through pre- and post-assessments, classroom observations, and student surveys, involving 30 language learners. Results indicate significant improvements across key language domains: a 20% increase in vocabulary usage, a 17% enhancement in listening comprehension, and a 12% boost in speaking fluency. Classroom interactions showed that realia stimulated greater student engagement, promoting more spontaneous language use and peer-to-peer communication. Survey responses revealed high levels of student satisfaction, with 85% of participants finding realia to be a useful tool in language learning. However, some learners faced challenges in relating unfamiliar objects to language concepts, highlighting the need for contextual support. The findings suggest that realia can effectively bridge the gap between classroom instruction and real-world application, making language learning more relevant and meaningful. Future research should explore the long-term effects of realia and its applicability across diverse student populations to further validate its pedagogical value.

Introduction

In the dynamic world of language learning, connecting classroom knowledge with real-world experiences has become increasingly vital for fostering deeper understanding and enhancing practical communication skills. One powerful approach to bridge this gap is through the use of *realia*—authentic materials and objects from the real world that provide learners with tangible, context-rich opportunities to engage with language. From shopping receipts and menus to maps, advertisements, and social media posts, realia immerses students in the language as it is used in

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everyday life, giving them insight into cultural nuances and linguistic applications that textbooks alone cannot offer.

Language learning is a multifaceted process that involves not just mastering grammar and vocabulary, but also acquiring the ability to use the language in authentic contexts. Traditional language teaching methods have often relied on textbooks, exercises, and audio-visual materials, which, while useful, can sometimes fail to immerse students in the language as it is used in real life. In contrast, realia—authentic materials drawn from the culture of the target language—offers a way to expose learners to the language in real-world contexts, providing both linguistic and cultural insights that textbooks alone cannot provide (Vasilenko, 2016). These materials can include everyday objects, such as menus, newspapers, maps, or advertisements, as well as media such as films, music, or radio broadcasts, all of which reflect the dynamic and living nature of language use in society.

Research has demonstrated that realia offers numerous benefits in language education, including enhanced vocabulary retention, improved listening and speaking skills, and increased motivation. By engaging learners with materials that reflect real-world language usage, educators can help students bridge the gap between formal instruction and the practical, conversational use of language (Nunan, 2004). Realia also plays a crucial role in promoting intercultural competence, as it exposes learners to cultural references and practices that are integral to understanding the language (Byram, 2008). For instance, understanding the local context in which certain idiomatic expressions are used, or learning how cultural norms influence communication styles, can significantly enhance a learner's ability to communicate authentically in the target language.

The value of realia has been recognized by language educators and researchers across the globe. In their review of second language acquisition (SLA) strategies, Swaffar and Arens (2005) argue that the use of realia allows students to experience language in a way that promotes both cognitive and emotional engagement. Furthermore, authenticity—a key feature of realia—has been shown to motivate students by providing them with materials that are relevant and directly connected to their interests and everyday lives (Gilmore, 2007). This sense of relevance can increase student investment in the learning process, which is critical for fostering long-term language development.

While the integration of realia has been discussed widely in the literature, its implementation in the classroom is often dependent on teachers' creativity and resourcefulness. Teachers are tasked with selecting appropriate real-world materials that align with the learning objectives and the linguistic level of their students (Waring, 2011). As such, the practical challenges of using realia—such as access to resources, time constraints, and balancing language skills with cultural content—are important considerations when incorporating these materials into language instruction. Nonetheless, the evidence suggests that the educational benefits of realia outweigh these challenges, making it a valuable tool for enhancing language acquisition.



In this article, we will explore the impact of realia on language learning, examining its role in vocabulary acquisition, listening and speaking skills, and cultural competence (Babayev, 2023). Through a review of current literature and classroom case studies, we will demonstrate how realia can be effectively integrated into language teaching to provide learners with a richer, more authentic language experience.

This article explores how integrating realia into language instruction not only strengthens learners' vocabulary and grammar but also nurtures critical thinking and cultural awareness. By expanding language learning beyond the confines of the classroom, we aim to demonstrate how real-world contexts can transform language acquisition into an active, meaningful, and engaging experience. Through the lens of realia, students can gain the confidence and competence needed to navigate the complexities of communication in diverse, real-world settings.

Methods

This article draws on a mixed-methods approach to examine the effectiveness of realia in language learning, synthesizing both quantitative and qualitative research findings from a variety of studies. The research framework includes an in-depth review of academic literature, a collection of case studies from language classrooms, and an analysis of surveys and classroom observations. This combination allows for a holistic view of how realia can be integrated into language education and its potential impact on learners' proficiency across different language skills (Alisoy, 2024).

1. Literature Review

A significant portion of this article is based on a comprehensive literature review of studies that investigate the role of realia in language acquisition. Articles, books, and research papers published between 2010 and 2023 were selected to examine the trends, effectiveness, and practical application of realia in various language teaching contexts. The review specifically focuses on studies that address vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, speaking fluency, and cultural competence. Research was sourced from top-tier journals in the fields of applied linguistics, second language acquisition (SLA), and foreign language pedagogy, such as *The Modern Language Journal*, *TESOL Quarterly*, and *Language Teaching Research*.

The literature was analyzed to identify:

Common methodologies used in studies involving realia (e.g., experimental, quasi-experimental, and case study approaches)

The specific types of realia most commonly used (e.g., newspapers, advertisements, cultural objects, and multimedia)

The outcomes related to vocabulary retention, learner engagement, and cultural understanding

Any challenges or limitations noted in the use of realia in language teaching



2. Case Studies and Classroom Observations

In addition to synthesizing published research, this article incorporates real-world case studies and classroom observations from language instructors who have integrated realia into their teaching. The case studies were chosen from a variety of educational settings, including elementary, secondary, and university-level language courses. These studies offer insights into how teachers select and use realia in different teaching contexts, as well as how students respond to these materials.

The following classroom settings were considered:

Primary Education: Case studies from elementary classrooms that focus on young learners, where teachers use visual aids, flashcards, and physical objects to introduce basic vocabulary and everyday expressions.

Secondary Education: Case studies from high school language programs that utilize more complex realia such as newspapers, product packaging, and social media content to engage learners in discussions about current events, trends, and cultural norms.

Higher Education: University-level case studies where realia like film clips, academic journals, and authentic travel materials (e.g., brochures, tourism websites) are used to build both linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence in advanced language learners.

The case studies also include classroom observations, where teaching methodologies and student reactions were documented. In these observations, realia was assessed not just for its linguistic value, but also for its capacity to engage students and foster deeper cultural understanding. The analysis also focused on student motivation and the perceived relevance of the language being taught.

3. Surveys and Learner Feedback

To complement the case studies, this article examines survey data collected from language learners who have experienced instruction incorporating realia. The surveys were designed to assess students' attitudes toward realia and its impact on their motivation, language retention, and cultural awareness.

The surveys included both Likert-scale questions and open-ended responses, allowing learners to reflect on:

How often realia was used in their lessons

The types of realia they found most engaging or useful

Their perceptions of the relevance of realia to real-life language use



How realia affected their confidence in using the language outside the classroom

In addition to surveys, informal student interviews were conducted to gain more nuanced insights into learners' experiences with realia. These interviews focused on how realia influenced students' speaking and listening skills, and whether exposure to authentic materials helped them feel more prepared to engage in real-world conversations (Naghiyeva, 2025).

4. Language Assessments

To measure the concrete impact of realia on language proficiency, this study draws on results from language assessments that evaluate vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and speaking fluency. In many of the studies reviewed, learners who were exposed to realia showed measurable improvements in these areas compared to students who learned exclusively from textbooks or conventional methods (Zeynalova, 2025). Pre- and post-tests were administered in several of the studies to assess learners' gains in vocabulary retention and comprehension skills after participating in lessons that used real-world materials (Alisoy, 2024).

The assessments examined:

Vocabulary Retention: Tests focused on whether students could recall and use vocabulary they encountered in authentic materials. Realia-driven lessons often led to higher retention rates, as the vocabulary was used in context, making it more meaningful.

Listening Comprehension: Listening tests were used to evaluate how well learners understood real-world audio materials such as news broadcasts, interviews, or podcasts in the target language.

Speaking Fluency: Speaking assessments involved interactive tasks such as role-plays or debates, where students used realia to simulate real-life conversations (e.g., ordering food at a restaurant, shopping for groceries, etc.) (Ismayilli et al., 2025).

By comparing language proficiency outcomes between students who used realia and those who did not, this study provides concrete evidence of the effectiveness of realia in enhancing language skills.

5. Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of realia in language teaching. The survey and assessment data were analyzed using statistical methods to determine the significance of realia's impact on language proficiency (e.g., paired t-tests for pre- and post-test comparisons). Qualitative data from classroom observations, learner feedback, and case studies were coded and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and insights related to the integration of realia in language instruction.



Thematic analysis of student feedback highlighted key benefits of realia, such as increased engagement, improved cultural understanding, and better application of language skills to real-life situations (Babayev, 2023). Similarly, analysis of the classroom observations provided insights into the specific ways teachers effectively used realia to support language learning objectives.

Results

The study aimed to assess the effectiveness of using realia—objects from the real world—as a tool for enhancing language acquisition and expanding linguistic skills. Data were collected through a combination of pre- and post-assessments, classroom observations, and participant surveys. The integration of realia into language teaching was found to have significant positive effects on various aspects of language learning.

Participant Performance Improvement

Quantitative analysis of pre- and post-assessment scores demonstrated a significant improvement in language proficiency. On average, participants' test scores increased by 15% from pre-assessment to post-assessment. The most noticeable improvements were observed in vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, and contextual usage of phrases. Specifically:

Vocabulary: Participants exhibited a 20% increase in their ability to identify and use newly learned vocabulary in context.

Comprehension: There was a 17% improvement in listening comprehension when real-world objects or scenarios were used in listening exercises.

Speaking Skills: Students were able to produce more contextually accurate responses, with a 12% increase in fluency during interactive speaking tasks.

Thematic Analysis of Classroom Interactions

Classroom observations revealed several key trends in the use of realia during lessons. Students were more engaged when real-world materials such as newspapers, menus, advertisements, and authentic videos were incorporated (Babayev, 2025). These materials appeared to stimulate curiosity and prompted higher-order thinking, as evidenced by increased student questions and the incorporation of target language into casual conversation. The use of realia also fostered more peer-to-peer interaction, with students frequently engaging in discussions about the objects or scenarios presented.

Survey Responses

In the post-study survey, 85% of participants indicated that they found realia to be an effective tool for learning. Respondents highlighted that tangible, real-world contexts helped them better understand cultural nuances and linguistic usage. The survey also revealed that 72% of students



felt more confident in using the language in real-life situations, citing the relevance and practicality of the activities.

Challenges

While the majority of students showed positive results, a small subset (12%) found it challenging to connect the real-world items to language learning, particularly when the objects were unfamiliar. These students expressed a need for additional guidance and context to fully understand how to integrate the realia into their language practice. This was particularly true for abstract concepts such as idiomatic expressions or advanced grammar structures.

Limitations

It should be noted that the study's results are based on a relatively small sample size ($n = 30$), and the generalizability of the findings may be limited. Further research with a larger, more diverse cohort is recommended to confirm the broader applicability of using realia in language acquisition.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong evidence supporting the efficacy of realia as an educational tool for enhancing language learning. The significant improvements in vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and speaking skills highlight the potential of real-world contexts to bridge the gap between theoretical language instruction and practical, contextual use (Naghiyeva, 2024).

Realia as a Catalyst for Language Acquisition

One of the most striking results of the study was the improvement in vocabulary retention and usage. The use of realia appears to foster a deeper, more meaningful connection to the language. Participants were not just memorizing words; they were using them in context, which likely contributed to their ability to recall and apply these terms more naturally in conversation. This aligns with the theories of language acquisition that emphasize the importance of context and interaction in language learning (Krashen, 1982; Vygotsky, 1978). When students engage with real-world materials, they are exposed to language in authentic contexts, which helps them better understand how words and phrases function in everyday communication.

The 17% improvement in listening comprehension is also noteworthy, as it demonstrates how realia can facilitate exposure to authentic speech patterns, accents, and cultural nuances. By incorporating real-world videos, podcasts, or even advertisements, learners encounter the language as it is actually spoken, rather than in the simplified, decontextualized formats often used in traditional textbooks. This type of exposure not only helps students understand the language more effectively but also builds their confidence in processing authentic speech in real-life situations.



Enhancing Speaking Skills Through Interaction

Another important finding is the positive impact of realia on speaking skills. The study showed that students were able to produce more contextually accurate responses during speaking tasks, a key aspect of communicative competence. The interactive nature of realia—whether it was a physical object, an advertisement, or a real-life scenario—provided a platform for spontaneous conversation. This aligns with communicative language teaching (CLT), which emphasizes authentic communication as the core of language learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The classroom observations further reinforced this, as students were more likely to initiate conversation and engage in peer-to-peer interactions when realia was incorporated into the lesson. This supports the view that realia can create a more dynamic and interactive learning environment, encouraging students to use language in a way that mirrors real-world interactions. The tangible nature of realia also helps demystify abstract language concepts, making them more accessible and engaging for learners.

Addressing the Challenges

While the overall results are positive, it is important to acknowledge the challenges some students faced in connecting unfamiliar objects with language learning. This finding suggests that while realia can be a powerful tool, it is not without its limitations. For students who are less familiar with certain cultural contexts or who lack background knowledge of the objects used in the lessons, realia may initially cause confusion or frustration. This highlights the importance of scaffolding in instruction, where teachers provide sufficient context and guidance to help students make connections between the object and its linguistic significance.

Moreover, some advanced grammatical structures and abstract language use—such as idiomatic expressions—may not always be effectively represented by real-world objects. In these cases, additional teaching strategies, such as explicit instruction or contextualization through role-play or storytelling, may be necessary to ensure that students can grasp these more complex aspects of the language.

Implications for Language Teaching

The results of this study suggest that realia should be viewed as a complementary tool rather than a standalone solution in language instruction. Teachers can enhance the effectiveness of their lessons by carefully selecting real-world materials that align with the linguistic goals of the lesson and the cultural backgrounds of the learners. Moreover, it is crucial for teachers to provide sufficient context, explanations, and opportunities for practice to ensure that students can make meaningful connections between the realia and the language they are learning.

Given the positive feedback from participants, the study also suggests that incorporating realia could increase student motivation and engagement, factors that are critical to successful language



learning. Students reported feeling more confident using the language in real-life situations, a finding that underscores the potential of realia to increase the perceived relevance of language learning. This enhanced sense of relevance and practicality is particularly important in a world where language learners are increasingly seeking to use their skills in real-world contexts, such as travel, work, and intercultural communication.

Limitations and Future Research

While the study provides valuable insights into the benefits of realia, it is not without limitations. As mentioned, the relatively small sample size and the homogeneity of the participants may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could expand the sample size and include learners from diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds to determine whether the benefits of realia are consistent across different groups.

Additionally, future research could explore the long-term impact of realia on language retention and fluency. While this study focused on immediate improvements in language skills, it would be beneficial to track how well these gains are maintained over time and whether realia continues to support language development in the long run (Babayev, 2022). Investigating the integration of realia with other language-learning strategies—such as task-based learning or technology-enhanced learning—could also provide further insights into its potential effectiveness.

Challenges:

Despite its numerous benefits, integrating realia into language classrooms can be challenging. Teachers must ensure that the materials they select are appropriate for the students' proficiency level and that they are not overwhelming (Babayev, 2021). Additionally, access to realia may be limited depending on the institution's resources or the geographic location of the learners. Nevertheless, with the advent of digital media, many of these challenges can be mitigated through online resources and multimedia tools.

Conclusion

This study underscores the significant role that realia can play in enhancing language learning by providing students with authentic, contextualized experiences. The results demonstrate that real-world materials improve vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and speaking skills by creating more engaging and interactive learning environments. The positive feedback from participants suggests that realia increases the perceived relevance of language learning, motivating students to apply their skills in real-life contexts. However, the study also highlighted challenges for some learners, particularly those unfamiliar with certain cultural contexts or complex language structures. Therefore, while realia proves to be an effective tool, its success depends on careful integration, proper scaffolding, and teacher guidance. Future research could explore the long-term impact of realia on language retention and fluency, as well as its effectiveness across diverse



learner populations. Overall, realia offers a valuable strategy for creating more engaging and meaningful language learning experiences.

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How Music Makes You Fluent: Learning English Through Songs

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Keywords	Abstract
English language learning Songs Music-based instruction vocabulary acquisition pronunciation listening comprehension	<p>This study investigates the impact of learning English through songs on vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and listening comprehension. Music has long been recognized as a powerful tool in language learning, combining rhythm, melody, and meaningful content to enhance cognitive and affective processes. Twenty English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners participated in a four-week intervention involving structured activities, including guided listening, lyric analysis, shadowing, and comprehension tasks. A curated playlist of pop, acoustic, soft rock, and indie songs was used, selected for clear pronunciation, repetitive structures, and appropriate lexical content. Pre- and post-tests measured vocabulary knowledge, pronunciation accuracy, and listening comprehension, while qualitative feedback captured learners' perceptions and motivation.</p> <p>Results indicated significant improvements: vocabulary scores increased by 32%, pronunciation by 22%, and listening comprehension by 28%. Pop songs yielded the greatest gains in vocabulary and listening, while acoustic and soft rock songs enhanced prosodic features. Learners reported increased engagement, reduced anxiety, and enhanced motivation, highlighting the affective benefits of music-based learning. These findings support the integration of songs into language instruction as an effective, enjoyable, and culturally enriching approach. Music not only reinforces linguistic skills but also fosters fluency, confidence, and long-term retention, offering a holistic strategy for English language acquisition.</p>

1. Introduction

Music has long been recognized as a powerful cognitive and emotional stimulus, making it a valuable tool in educational contexts. In second language acquisition (SLA), songs offer a unique blend of linguistic input, rhythm, repetition, and cultural meaning. These elements create a

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multimodal learning experience that engages memory, attention, and affective factors—key components of successful language learning (Krashen, 1982; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991).

Songs provide authentic examples of spoken English, exposing learners to natural pronunciation, connected speech, idiomatic expressions, and colloquial grammatical structures. This supports the principles of communicative language teaching, which prioritize meaningful, real-world input over artificially constructed textbook sentences (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Because lyrics often reflect everyday conversational English, they help learners internalize vocabulary and syntax in a contextualized and memorable manner.

The melodic and rhythmic features of music facilitate language processing at both phonological and semantic levels. Research shows that melody enhances memory encoding by creating predictable patterns, which strengthen learners' ability to recall new vocabulary (Wallace, 1994; Medina, 1993). Rhythm also contributes to the development of prosodic awareness, enabling learners to better understand stress patterns, intonation, and timing—skills essential for producing intelligible speech (Richards, 1969; Schön et al., 2008).

Motivation is another crucial factor in language acquisition, and music is particularly effective in boosting learner engagement (Alisoy, 2025). According to Gardner's socio-educational model, positive emotional experiences and integrative motivation strongly influence SLA success (Gardner, 1985). Songs evoke emotion, reduce anxiety, and create a low-pressure learning atmosphere, encouraging learners to take linguistic risks. Murphey (1990) refers to this phenomenon as the “song-stuck-in-the-head” or “din in the head” effect, suggesting that repeated mental playback of lyrics provides unconscious language rehearsal (Sadiqzade, 2024).

Furthermore, music serves as a cultural bridge, allowing learners to connect with English-speaking communities through the themes, narratives, and social contexts embedded in song lyrics. Cultural exposure supports pragmatic understanding and fosters a sense of identity and belonging in the target language (Kramsch, 1993). For these reasons, integrating music into English learning is not only enjoyable but pedagogically sound.

This study builds on previous research by examining how structured engagement with songs—including listening, lyric analysis, and singing—affects vocabulary development, pronunciation, and listening comprehension (Babayev, 2023). It aims to further clarify the mechanisms through which music enhances fluency and to provide practical implications for both learners and educators (Babayev, 2025).

2. Methods

Twenty English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners participated in the study. Participants ranged in age from 16 to 35 ($M = 24.2$) and represented ten different L1 backgrounds, including Spanish, Arabic, Vietnamese, and Thai. Their proficiency levels ranged from A2 to B1 on the CEFR scale, as determined by a standardized placement test administered at the beginning of the academic term. All participants had completed at least one year of formal English instruction but reported



minimal prior experience using music as a structured learning tool. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all individuals.

2.2 Materials

2.2.1 Song Selection

A playlist of 12 English-language songs was curated according to the following criteria:

- clear, moderately paced vocal delivery
- high-frequency vocabulary appropriate for A2–B1 learners
- repetitive lyrical patterns
- relatively simple, accessible themes (e.g., relationships, daily life, aspirations)
- availability of official lyric transcripts

The playlist included pop, acoustic, soft rock, and indie genres. Songs such as *Counting Stars* (OneRepublic), *Photograph* (Ed Sheeran), and *Someone Like You* (Adele) were selected for their high lexical repetition and strong narrative coherence.

Table 1. **Pre- and Post-Intervention Results Across Language Skills**

Skill Area	Measurement Type	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Improvement
Vocabulary	Score (out of 40)	18.4 (46%)	30.5 (76%)	+32%
Pronunciation	Rubric Score (1–5 scale)	2.7	3.3	+22%
Sentence Stress	Sub-score (1–5)	2.3	3.1	+35%
Rhythm & Intonation	Sub-score (1–5)	2.4	3.1	+29%
Consonant Clusters	Sub-score (1–5)	3.0	3.4	+13%
Listening Comprehension	Score (out of 25)	14.8 (59%)	19.0 (76%)	+28%
Fast Speech Recognition	Item Accuracy (%)	41%	78%	+37%
Paraphrase Understanding	Item Accuracy (%)	45%	76%	+31%
Reduced Forms Awareness	Item Accuracy (%)	43%	72%	+29%

2.2.2 Supplementary Materials

To facilitate structured engagement with the songs, the following materials were used:

- printed lyric sheets with line numbers
- vocabulary lists containing 10–15 target items per song



- pre- and post-intervention vocabulary quizzes
- pronunciation rubrics covering segmental and suprasegmental features
- listening comprehension worksheets with short-answer and multiple-choice questions
- audio playback through headphones to ensure consistent listening quality

2.3 Procedure

The intervention lasted four weeks and consisted of two 45-minute sessions per week (eight sessions in total). Each session focused on one or two songs. The procedure followed a consistent four-step structure.

2.3.1 Step 1: Guided Listening

Participants listened to each song twice:

1. **First hearing:** No materials were provided. Learners were instructed to focus on the general meaning and emotional tone.
2. **Second hearing:** Lyric sheets were distributed, and learners followed along, marking unfamiliar vocabulary.

The instructor briefly clarified unknown words but encouraged students to infer meaning from context first.

2.3.2 Step 2: Lyrics Analysis

Learners worked in small groups to identify:

- vocabulary items related to everyday themes
- idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs
- simple grammatical structures (e.g., present perfect, conditionals, modal verbs)

Groups then discussed how figurative language and narrative elements contributed to the song's overall meaning. This stage aimed to promote semantic elaboration, which is known to support long-term memory retention.

2.3.3 Step 3: Pronunciation and Shadowing Practice

Students practiced shadowing—a technique in which learners repeat speech simultaneously with the speaker—to imitate rhythm and intonation patterns.

Activities included:

- softly singing along to match stress and intonation
- practicing difficult consonant clusters



- focusing on reduced forms commonly used in spoken English (e.g., *gonna*, *wanna*, *I'mma*)

This step targeted improvements in fluency, prosody, and awareness of connected speech.

2.3.4 Step 4: Comprehension and Production Tasks

Students completed listening comprehension questions and paraphrased selected lyrics orally or in writing. Some sessions included short creative tasks such as rewriting a verse using new vocabulary. These activities aimed to reinforce comprehension and encourage language production—an essential component of second language acquisition.

2.4 Assessment Instruments

2.4.1 Vocabulary Test

A 40-item pre/post vocabulary test assessed recognition and production of key words from the playlist. The test included matching items, fill-in-the-blank questions, and short written responses.

2.4.2 Pronunciation Evaluation

Instructors rated learners using a rubric that focused on:

- consonant and vowel accuracy
- sentence stress
- rhythm and intonation
- fluency and confidence during read-aloud tasks

Each category was scored on a 1–5 scale.

2.4.3 Listening Comprehension Test

Participants completed a 25-item listening comprehension exam that included:

- identifying main ideas
- recognizing paraphrased meanings
- detecting specific lexical items within rapid speech

Audio excerpts were drawn from the playlist as well as from thematically similar but unfamiliar songs to assess transferability.

2.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data (vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening scores) were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentage gains and mean score comparisons. Qualitative data from open-ended feedback questionnaires were coded using thematic analysis. Recurring themes



related to motivation, enjoyment, and perceived language improvement were identified and categorized.

3. Results

3.1 Vocabulary Acquisition

Pre- and post-test measures revealed a substantial positive effect of song-based instruction on vocabulary learning. Participants' mean vocabulary score increased from 18.4/40 (46%) before the intervention to 30.5/40 (76%) after the intervention, representing an average improvement of 32%.

Words that appeared frequently in choruses or predictable narrative sequences were remembered at significantly higher rates. Items such as *broken*, *promise*, *dream*, *running*, and *leave* showed retention gains exceeding 40%. In contrast, less frequent or metaphorical terms (e.g., *reckoning*, *chasing down*, *misery*) demonstrated more moderate improvements between 15–20%.

Learners also performed better on productive vocabulary tasks—such as fill-in-the-blank items and short written responses—indicating that the songs supported not only lexical recognition but also active usage. These findings align with previous research suggesting that repetition, emotional engagement, and contextualized exposure contribute to stronger lexical retention.

3.2 Pronunciation Improvement

Pronunciation scores increased from an average of 2.7/5 to 3.3/5, reflecting a 22% improvement across all evaluated categories. The greatest gains were observed in:

- **Sentence stress** (+0.8 average increase)
- **Rhythm and intonation** (+0.7 average increase)

Learners reported that singing along and shadowing helped them “feel” the natural rhythm of English, reducing hesitation and improving connected speech. Several participants shifted from syllable-timed speech patterns typical of their L1 to more stress-timed patterns characteristic of English.

Consonant cluster accuracy (e.g., /str/, /pl/, /bl/) showed moderate improvement (+0.4), especially among learners whose L1 includes limited cluster structures. However, certain phonemes—such as /θ/, /ð/, and /ɹ/—remained challenging, showing only minimal progress (≤ 0.2). These results suggest that while music effectively supports prosodic development, improvements in segmental accuracy may require more targeted instruction.

3.3 Listening Comprehension

Listening comprehension scores increased from 14.8/25 (59%) to 19/25 (76%), representing a 28% improvement.

The most substantial gains occurred in:



- **Identifying key words in fast speech** (+37%)
- **Understanding paraphrased ideas** (+31%)
- **Recognizing reduced and linked forms** (+29%)

Two comprehension items taken from unfamiliar audio extracts demonstrated a transfer effect: learners were able to decode meaning in songs not included in the training playlist. This suggests that students developed general listening strategies—such as attending to stress, rhythm, and recurrent lexical patterns—rather than merely memorizing the lyrics of the practiced songs.

3.4 Learner Perceptions and Qualitative Outcomes

Qualitative analysis of learner feedback revealed four major themes.

3.4.1 Increased Motivation

Ninety percent of participants described the lessons as “more enjoyable,” “motivating,” or “relaxing” compared to traditional grammar-based instruction. Several learners reported replaying the playlist voluntarily outside of class time.

3.4.2 Reduced Anxiety and Increased Confidence

Many learners noted that singing lessened their fear of mispronunciation. Classroom discussions also became more fluent, supported by the “safe and playful” atmosphere created by music-based activities.

3.4.3 Enhanced Memory and Automaticity

Students frequently reported that lyrics “stuck in their head,” supporting unconscious repetition. This reflects the “din in the head” phenomenon described in earlier literature. Some learners mentioned recalling vocabulary during daily routines, indicating improved long-term retention and automaticity.

3.4.4 Perceived Cultural Connection

Several participants stated that songs helped them better understand cultural values, emotional expression, and storytelling traditions in English-speaking communities. This sense of cultural engagement was perceived as enhancing both motivation and comprehension.

3.5 Summary of Findings

Overall, the integrated use of songs produced measurable gains in vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening comprehension. The study documented:

- **32% increase in vocabulary retention**
- **22% improvement in pronunciation accuracy and prosody**
- **28% improvement in listening comprehension**



- **Strong qualitative support** for enhanced motivation, cultural engagement, and reduced learning anxiety

These findings suggest that structured musical activities can serve as an effective supplement to traditional English language instruction.

Table 2. Learning Outcomes by Music Genre

Genre	Number of Songs	Vocabulary Improvement (%)	Pronunciation Improvement (%)	Listening Comprehension Improvement (%)
Pop	5	35%	24%	30%
Acoustic	3	28%	20%	26%
Soft Rock	2	32%	22%	27%
Indie	2	29%	21%	25%

Notes

- Pop songs yielded the highest gains across all three skills, likely due to higher repetition, simpler vocabulary, and memorable melodies.
- Acoustic and soft rock songs showed moderate improvements, possibly because their slower tempo and clearer pronunciation supported prosodic development, although their vocabulary was slightly more complex.
- Indie songs produced moderate engagement but weaker vocabulary gains due to more abstract or metaphorical lyrics.

4. Discussion

This study highlights the effectiveness of music as a language-learning tool. Consistent with previous research, songs facilitated vocabulary retention by pairing repetition with emotional engagement (Medina, 1993). Melody helped learners internalize stress patterns and rhythm—key components of English prosody (Richards, 1969).

Furthermore, music created a low-pressure environment that encouraged risk-taking in speaking, an essential factor for developing fluency. These findings suggest that integrating music into language learning may significantly enhance outcomes, particularly for learners who struggle with traditional classroom methods.

Quantitative results showed substantial improvements: vocabulary recall increased by 32%, pronunciation by 22%, and listening comprehension by 28%. These outcomes align with prior studies indicating that music supports language acquisition through repetition, melody, and affective involvement (Medina, 1993; Murphey, 1990; Wallace, 1994).

4.1 Interpretation of Findings



The largest vocabulary gains were associated with frequently repeated or predictable lyrics, supporting the view that meaningful repetition strengthens memory encoding (Krashen, 1982). The “earworm” effect noted by Murphey (1990) was evident in qualitative feedback: learners frequently recalled lyrics outside of class, demonstrating that songs promote both conscious and unconscious language rehearsal.

Pronunciation improvements—particularly in stress, rhythm, and intonation—indicate that musical input reinforces prosodic awareness. Shadowing and singing along allowed learners to internalize English stress-timing patterns, which are often challenging for non-native speakers. While consonant cluster accuracy improved moderately, certain segmental features (e.g., /θ/, /ð/, /ɹ/) remained difficult, suggesting that musical practice benefits prosody more than precise articulation and may require complementary explicit instruction.

Listening comprehension gains showed that learners were not simply memorizing the practiced songs but were transferring skills to new, unfamiliar material. Improved recognition of key words, paraphrased ideas, and reduced forms supports the idea that music exposure enhances auditory processing and strengthens input-based learning strategies (Schön et al., 2008).

4.2 Genre-Specific Insights

Analysis by musical genre revealed distinct patterns:

- **Pop songs** produced the highest gains in vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening comprehension due to their simple, repetitive structures and strong melodic hooks.
- **Acoustic and soft rock songs** offered clearer articulation and slower tempo, which supported prosodic development and listening comprehension, though vocabulary gains were slightly lower.
- **Indie songs**, with their abstract or metaphorical lyrics, enhanced interpretive skills and cultural understanding but contributed less to lexical retention.

These findings suggest that song selection should be aligned with instructional goals: simpler, repetitive songs may benefit beginners, while more complex or metaphorical songs may better support advanced learners and cultural immersion.

4.3 Motivational and Affective Factors

Qualitative data emphasized the role of music in reducing anxiety, enhancing motivation, and creating a supportive, low-stress environment. According to Gardner’s socio-educational model, affective variables such as integrative motivation significantly influence SLA outcomes (Gardner, 1985). Music encouraged learners to experiment with language, practice pronunciation openly, and participate in communicative activities without fear of making mistakes. These findings highlight the importance of emotional engagement and enjoyment in language learning.

4.4 Pedagogical Implications



This study offers several practical recommendations for teachers and learners:

- Structured musical activities—listening, lyric analysis, shadowing, and paraphrasing—can be incorporated into regular lessons to promote fluency.
- Genre selection should reflect learning aims: pop music for vocabulary building, acoustic or soft rock for prosody, and more complex genres for cultural interpretation.
- Playlists can be assigned as homework to support autonomous learning and reinforce classroom content.

4.5 Limitations

Although the findings are encouraging, several limitations should be acknowledged:

- The small sample size ($n = 20$) limits generalizability.
- The short four-week intervention may not capture long-term retention.
- Pronunciation improvements were assessed primarily through instructor ratings, which may introduce subjectivity.
- Cultural familiarity with the songs was not controlled, and prior exposure may have influenced motivation and learning outcomes.

Future research could increase sample size, include control groups, measure long-term retention, and use objective acoustic analysis for pronunciation assessment. Additionally, exploring digital platforms (e.g., Spotify, YouTube, language-learning apps) could further enhance engagement and accessibility.

4.6 Conclusion from Discussion

Overall, the study supports integrating songs into English language instruction as a multifaceted tool that enhances vocabulary retention, listening comprehension, and prosodic development while simultaneously increasing motivation and reducing anxiety. Music-based learning thus represents an effective, enjoyable, and pedagogically sound approach to developing English fluency.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that integrating music into English language learning can significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and listening comprehension. Learners who engaged in structured musical activities—including guided listening, lyric analysis, shadowing, and comprehension tasks—showed measurable improvements across all assessed language areas. Pop songs, characterized by repetition and melodic simplicity, produced the highest gains in vocabulary and listening comprehension, while acoustic and soft rock genres contributed notably to the development of prosodic features and pronunciation. Qualitative feedback highlighted increased motivation, reduced anxiety, and higher levels of engagement, indicating that music not



only reinforces cognitive learning processes but also positively influences affective factors essential for language acquisition.

The findings support previous research emphasizing the roles of rhythm, melody, and repetition in memory encoding and phonological awareness (Murphey, 1990; Medina, 1993; Wallace, 1994). Music provides authentic and meaningful input that mirrors natural speech, enabling learners to internalize vocabulary, stress patterns, and connected speech more effectively. Although limitations such as the small sample size and short intervention duration must be acknowledged, the results indicate that music-based learning is a flexible, enjoyable, and pedagogically sound supplement to traditional classroom instruction. Incorporating songs into language curricula can promote fluency, cultural awareness, and learner confidence, offering a holistic approach to developing English proficiency.

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The Role of Gender Category in Homonym Formation in the German Language

 ¹ Ulduz Aslanova

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Keywords	Abstract
German language grammatical gender homonymy lexical semantics disambiguation corpus linguistics	This study investigates the role of grammatical gender in the formation, differentiation, and stabilization of homonyms in the German language. Drawing on lexicographic sources, corpus data, and theoretical literature, the analysis demonstrates that gender functions as a key structural mechanism that enables phonologically identical nouns to maintain distinct meanings. Homonymous sets such as Band, See, and Teil show that gender provides essential morphological cues that prevent lexical merger and support semantic clarity. Diachronic evidence further reveals that gender often preserves distinctions between historically unrelated roots that have converged phonetically over time. In contemporary usage, gender agreement within noun phrases offers redundant syntactic signals that facilitate efficient disambiguation, aligning with psycholinguistic findings on gender-based lexical access. The results highlight the broader linguistic, cognitive, and pedagogical significance of gender as a central organizing principle within the German lexicon.

1. Introduction

Homonymy—lexical items that share identical phonological or orthographic forms but differ in meaning—represents a central topic in lexical semantics and structural linguistics. In German, homonymy is particularly noteworthy because it arises within a morphological and grammatical framework that provides multiple mechanisms for both generating and disambiguating ambiguous forms. Among these mechanisms, grammatical gender (*Genus*) stands out as a uniquely influential factor. German nouns obligatorily belong to one of three genders—masculine, feminine, or neuter—and this classification affects not only determiners and adjectives but also syntactic agreement patterns throughout the sentence (Aslanova, 2025). Consequently, gender is embedded deeply in lexical representation and processing.

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Despite a substantial body of research on German gender assignment—ranging from semantic and morphological theories to psycholinguistic models of gender retrieval—its specific role in homonym formation has been comparatively understudied (Ismayil et al, 2025). Traditional accounts of homonymy often emphasize semantic divergence, etymological convergence, or phonological reduction, yet they rarely address how gender interacts with these processes. Considering how frequently German relies on gender distinctions to differentiate otherwise identical forms (e.g., *der Band*, *das Band*, *die Band*), the lack of focused attention on this topic leaves a gap in our understanding of German lexical structure.

The German gender system contributes to homonymy in two primary ways. First, it facilitates the coexistence of multiple lexemes with identical forms but different meanings: gender acts as an additional lexical feature that prevents complete homonymic collapse (Babayev, 2022). Second, it acts as a communicative safeguard by providing morphological cues that aid speakers and listeners in resolving ambiguity during real-time language processing. These functions illustrate how homonymy in German is not merely a product of semantic evolution but also an outcome shaped by grammatical constraints.

Moreover, gender-based homonyms provide a valuable test case for broader theoretical questions about the mental lexicon. For example, if gender operates as part of a noun's core lexical specification, then homonyms differing in gender should behave as distinct lexical entries during processing (Ismayil, 2018). Conversely, if gender is treated as a syntactic feature external to lexical semantics, then homonym pairs might share more cognitive representation than traditionally assumed. Thus, the topic sits at an intersection of morphology, syntax, semantics, and psycholinguistics.

This study aims to explore these issues by examining how gender categories contribute to the formation, stabilization, and functional disambiguation of homonyms in the German language (Zeynalova & Ismayil, 2023). By analyzing representative homonymous sets and reviewing relevant linguistic theory, the paper demonstrates that gender is not only a classificatory device but also an active structural component influencing lexical architecture (Babayev, 2022). Ultimately, understanding the role of gender in homonymy deepens our insight into how German organizes meaning and form within its lexicon.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative linguistic methodology designed to identify, analyze, and contextualize German homonyms that differ primarily by grammatical gender. The methodological framework draws on established procedures in lexical semantics, corpus linguistics, and morphological analysis (Eisenberg, 2013; Lyons, 1977).



2.1 Data Sources

To ensure reliability and linguistic accuracy, data were collected from three primary sources:

1. Authoritative Lexicographic Resources:

Standard German dictionaries such as *Duden Deutsches Universalwörterbuch* (Dudenredaktion, 2020) and *DWDS – Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* served as the principal sources for identifying homonymous lexemes. These resources provide canonical gender assignments, definitional distinctions, and historical notes.

2. Contemporary Corpora:

Corpus examples were drawn from DWDS and, when relevant, the DeReKo corpus to observe homonyms in authentic syntactic and pragmatic environments. Corpus linguistics methodology follows guidelines outlined by Lemnitzer & Zinsmeister (2010), emphasizing naturally occurring usage across genres.

3. Secondary Linguistic Literature:

Scholarly works on German grammatical gender, semantic change, and homonymy (e.g., Corbett, 1991; Köpcke & Zubin, 1983; Wurzel, 1989) were used to contextualize findings and support theoretical interpretations.

2.2 Selection and Classification of Homonyms

The selection criteria focused on nouns sharing identical orthographic and phonological forms but differing in gender categories. Only items demonstrating clear semantic divergence (e.g., *der Band*, *das Band*, *die Band*) were included. This approach is consistent with theoretical distinctions between homonymy and polysemy described in Cruse (1986).

Each homonymous set was classified according to:

- **Gender forms** (masculine, feminine, neuter),
- **Semantic domains** (e.g., concrete object, abstract concept, collective noun),
- **Etymological backgrounds** where available, based on etymological data in Duden and DWDS.

2.3 Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded in three stages:

1. Morphological and Semantic Analysis:



For each homonymous set, gender assignment was examined for its role in meaning differentiation. Morphological paradigms were analysed following Eisenberg's (2013) framework to determine how inflectional patterns contribute to the maintenance of lexical distinctions.

2. Syntactic-Contextual Examination:

Contextualized examples were extracted from corpus data to evaluate how gender marking on determiners, adjectives, and pronouns contributes to disambiguation in natural texts. This stage aligns with psycholinguistic evidence indicating that gender cues facilitate lexical access (Schiller & Caramazza, 2003).

3. Comparative Theoretical Integration:

The empirical findings were interpreted within broader theoretical discussions about gender as a lexical feature. Works by Corbett (1991) and Audring (2019) provided the basis for assessing whether gender primarily functions as a morphological classifier or as part of lexical-semantic structure.

2.4 Limitations

The study adopts a qualitative approach and does not include quantitative measures such as frequency counts or statistical modeling. While corpus examples were consulted, token frequencies were not systematically compared across homonyms. Additionally, diachronic interpretations rely on secondary etymological sources rather than original historical corpora (Ulduz, 2022). These limitations, however, do not undermine the study's goal of identifying structural patterns but leave room for future empirical work.

3. Results

The analysis revealed several recurring patterns in how grammatical gender contributes to the formation, differentiation, and stabilization of homonyms in the German language. Findings are presented in three subsections: (1) gender as a differentiating mechanism, (2) diachronic divergence and convergence effects, and (3) syntactic disambiguation. Representative examples are included in Tables 1–3.

3.1 Gender as a Differentiating Mechanism

The data confirm that grammatical gender frequently functions as the *primary distinguishing feature* between homonymous lexemes. In many cases, gender is the only morphosyntactic marker separating semantically unrelated nouns, supporting claims by Lyons (1977) and Cruse (1986) that non-phonological cues often sustain lexical distinctions.

Table 1. Common German Homonyms Differentiated by Gender



<i>Lexeme</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Translation</i>	<i>Semantic Category</i>	<i>Source</i>
Band	der	volume (book)	cultural object	Duden (2020)
	das	ribbon/tape/bond	concrete object	Duden (2020)
	die	music band	collective noun	DWDS
See	der	lake	geographic feature	Duden (2020)
	die	sea (poetic)	body of water	Eisenberg (2013)
Verdienst	der	earnings/income	economic concept	DWDS
	das	merit/accomplishment	abstract value	Cruse (1986)
Teil	der	component/section	structural category	Duden
	das	piece/object (informal)	concrete item	DWDS

These examples illustrate that gender enables multiple lexemes to coexist without phonological differentiation—an effect discussed extensively by Köpcke & Zubin (1983) in their work on German gender categorization.

3.2 Gender Enables Diachronic Divergence and Convergence

Diachronic analysis of dictionary and corpus data suggests that several homonyms emerged not from semantic branching but from phonological convergence of historically unrelated roots. Gender assignment helped preserve distinctions that might otherwise have collapsed.

For example:

- **Teil** (masculine) derives from Old High German *teil* meaning “portion,” whereas
- **Teil** (neuter) developed from a later semantic generalization referring to “a small piece.”

The gender difference, already present in Middle High German, has prevented merger despite phonological identity (see Wurzel, 1989; Duden Etymology).

This diachronic layering substantiates the claim by Corbett (1991) that gender systems often preserve lexical distinctions across historical stages.

3.3 Gender and Syntactic Disambiguation in Authentic Contexts

German noun phrases encode gender not only on determiners but also on adjectives and relative pronouns, providing multiple cues for disambiguation. Corpus-based examples show that gender agreement reliably clarifies meaning even when the homonym appears in isolation.



Table 2. Diachronic Development of Gender-Based Homonyms

<i>Lexeme</i>	<i>Historical Root</i>	<i>Modern Gender</i>	<i>Modern Meaning</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Teil	MHG <i>teil</i> ("portion")	der	part/section	Maintained semantic specificity
	later semantic innovation	das	piece/object	Generalized informal use
Band	OHG <i>band</i> ("binding")	das	ribbon/tape	Older concrete meaning
	NHG <i>Band</i> ("volume")	der	book volume	Metaphorical extension in 18th c.
	English loan "Band"	die	music group	Borrowed in 20th c., feminine gender via analogy

Table 3. Corpus Examples Illustrating Gender-Based Disambiguation

<i>Sentence (DWDS examples adapted)</i>	<i>Target Meaning</i>	<i>Gender Marker</i>
<i>Ich stelle den neuen Band ins Regal.</i>	volume (book)	masculine (<i>den, neuen</i>)
<i>Sie befestigte das blaue Band am Geschenk.</i>	ribbon	neuter (<i>das, blaue</i>)
<i>Heute spielt die Band im Stadtpark.</i>	music group	feminine (<i>die</i>)
<i>Der See ist im Winter zugefroren.</i>	lake	masculine
<i>Die See war heute sehr stürmisch.</i>	sea	feminine

These examples align with psycholinguistic findings that gender cues accelerate lexical retrieval (Schiller & Caramazza, 2003). Because gender is redundantly coded across the noun phrase, ambiguity is minimized even in cases where semantic context alone might be insufficient.

Table 4. Homonymous nouns in the singular and plural

<i>Noun in the singular</i>	<i>Noun in the plural</i>
der Leiter -leader	die Leiter -leaders
die Leiter-ladder	die Leitern-ladders
der Flur-corridor	die Flure-corridors
die Flur-lawn	die Fluren-lawns
der Schild-thyroid gland	die Schilde-thyroid glands
das Schild-board	die Schilder-boards
der Schild-shield	die Schilde-shields
der Kiefer-chin	die Kiefer-chins
die Kiefer-candle	die Kiefern-candles



Though some homonymous nouns are the same in the singular with gender difference, they differ in plural.

3.4 Summary of Findings

Overall, the results indicate that:

1. **Gender is a robust differentiator** that prevents homonymic collapse in numerous noun pairs and triplets.
2. **Historical developments** frequently interact with gender to maintain or sharpen distinctions between form-identical lexemes.
3. **Syntactic markers** of gender in noun phrases function as redundant cues that facilitate comprehension and reduce ambiguity.
4. Gender-based homonyms represent a *systematic* phenomenon in German rather than a marginal lexical anomaly, supporting earlier typological observations by Corbett (1991).

4. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that grammatical gender plays a central, systematic, and multifaceted role in the formation and maintenance of homonyms in the German lexicon. This section synthesizes the implications of these results across linguistic subfields, compares German patterns with those of other languages, and discusses how the gender system interacts with cognitive and communicative processes.

4.1 Gender as a Structural Mechanism Supporting Lexical Differentiation

The analysis confirms earlier observations that gender functions not merely as a morphological classification but as part of the internal architecture of the German lexicon (Corbett, 1991; Audring, 2019). The presence of homonyms distinguished solely by gender—such as *Band*, *See*, and *Teil*—demonstrates that gender operates as a lexical feature capable of sustaining semantic differentiation independently of phonological or orthographic variation.

This structural function is consistent with Cruse's (1986) argument that languages may rely on "extraphonological mechanisms" to preserve lexical opposition. In German, gender fulfills that role by establishing discrete lexical identities for otherwise identical forms. Without gender distinctions, several homonymous sets would collapse into single lexemes, greatly reducing semantic transparency.

4.2 Gender as a Diachronic Stabilizer of Lexical Distinctions

The diachronic examples indicate that gender often serves as a stabilizing factor in historical processes, preventing the merger of etymologically distinct roots that have undergone



phonological convergence. As Wurzel (1989) notes, inflectional morphology often contributes to maintaining contrasts over time, and gender—being a core part of nominal morphology—is particularly effective in doing so.

For instance, *Band* and its tripartite gender-based meanings illustrate how multiple lexical layers (native roots, semantic extensions, and loanwords) can coexist without conflict due to differential gender assignments. This supports the view that gender categories can absorb lexical innovations while preserving existing distinctions, thereby enhancing the flexibility and resilience of the lexicon.

4.3 Cognitive Implications: Gender Effects in Lexical Access

Psycholinguistic literature suggests that gender is encoded in the mental lexicon and accessed automatically during word recognition (Schiller & Caramazza, 2003; Levelt, Roelofs & Meyer, 1999). The results of this study align with this perspective: the presence of gender markers in determiners, adjectives, and pronouns provides multiple cues that help speakers and listeners rapidly identify the intended meaning of homonymous forms.

The redundancy of gender marking likely reduces cognitive load during processing. When encountering an ambiguous form such as *Band*, speakers do not rely solely on conceptual or semantic context but also on grammatical cues present in the noun phrase. This supports the argument that gender is a “predictive cue” during comprehension (Audring, 2019), aiding both native speakers and advanced learners.

4.4 Cross-Linguistic Considerations

The German system appears particularly conducive to gender-based homonymy because it includes three genders and exhibits rich gender agreement. In contrast:

- **English**, which lacks grammatical gender for nouns, seldom relies on morphological means to differentiate homonyms; ambiguity is usually resolved solely by context or lexical expansion.
- **Romance languages**, though rich in gender, typically only have two genders and do not permit the same degree of homonymous divergence based on gender alone. Cases such as French *le livre* vs. *la livre* (book vs. pound) are comparatively rare and often historically motivated (Lyons, 1977).
- **Slavic languages** have more productive gender systems, but homonym formation is less frequently tied to gender distinctions and more to case morphology.

Thus, German occupies a unique typological position in which gender distinctions are both numerous and structurally embedded, enabling a higher frequency and stability of gender-based homonyms.



4.5 Implications for Language Learning and Pedagogy

From a pedagogical standpoint, the findings underscore the importance of teaching gender as an integral part of lexical identity rather than as an add-on grammatical rule. Many second-language learners struggle with homonyms such as *der See* vs. *die See*, because textbooks often treat gender separately from meaning.

Explicit instruction that integrates gender with semantic differentiation can significantly improve learners' comprehension and production accuracy. Furthermore, awareness of gender-disambiguation strategies may help learners develop more efficient reading and listening skills, as suggested by psycholinguistic studies (Schiller & Caramazza, 2003).

4.6 Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides qualitative insights into gender-based homonymy, several limitations point to future directions:

1. Lack of quantitative frequency analysis:

Future corpus-based studies could examine how frequently each member of a homonymous set appears across genres, providing insight into cognitive accessibility and ambiguity resolution in real-time language use.

2. Psycholinguistic experimentation:

Eye-tracking, ERP, or reaction-time studies could clarify how quickly gender cues aid disambiguation and whether different genders (masculine, feminine, neuter) are processed differently.

3. Cross-linguistic expansion:

Investigating similar phenomena in other gender-rich languages (e.g., Russian, Arabic) may clarify whether the patterns observed in German represent a typological generalization or a language-specific effect.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that grammatical gender plays a decisive and multifaceted role in shaping homonym formation in the German language. Through qualitative analysis of dictionary data, corpus examples, and linguistic theory, it became clear that gender is not merely a classificatory feature but an essential structural component that enables multiple lexemes to share identical phonological forms without collapsing into ambiguity (Gataillina et al, 2017). German's three-gender system provides a robust framework in which homonymous nouns such as *Band*, *See*, and *Teil* can coexist, each supported by consistent gender marking that guides interpretation in both spoken and written contexts.



Diachronic evidence further shows that gender has historically functioned as a stabilizing force, preserving distinctions between converging lexical roots and accommodating new borrowings without threatening existing semantic categories. In contemporary usage, gender agreement across determiners, adjectives, and pronouns supplies redundant cues that facilitate rapid lexical access, supporting claims from psycholinguistic research that gender is encoded in the mental lexicon. These findings also hold pedagogical implications: integrating gender more explicitly into vocabulary instruction can enhance learners' semantic precision and reduce misunderstandings.

Ultimately, the role of gender in German homonymy underscores the dynamic interaction between morphology, semantics, and cognition. By maintaining lexical clarity and supporting communicative efficiency, gender contributes significantly to the structure and evolution of the German lexicon.

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The Ancient and Religious Roots of the Idea of Human Rights

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Keywords	Abstract
Human rights democracy Pericles philosophy Epicurus Stoics	This text examines the historical and philosophical development of the concept of human rights from antiquity to modern times. It argues that human rights have evolved in close connection with social, political, cultural, and intellectual conditions of each historical period. Beginning with ancient Greek and Roman thought, the text highlights early democratic ideas, the contributions of the Sophists, and the contrasting views of philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, who prioritized the state over the individual. It further explores religious perspectives that grounded human dignity and equality in divine or natural law. Modern liberal democracy is presented as a system that limits majority rule through the protection of fundamental human rights. The text emphasizes the international character of human rights, as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, while also stressing the importance of cultural and historical specificity. Ultimately, it concludes that human rights can only be sustainably protected in societies that consciously understand, accept, and actively struggle for them (UN, 1998).

Introduction

Human beings, as the highest and most advanced stage of living creatures on Earth, are the subjects of social activity and culture. For this reason, they constitute one of the eternal problems of philosophy. This is because every era has left its own imprint on the content of the concept of “human.” In the modern age as well, under conditions of scientific and technological progress and social dynamism, the human problem acquires even greater significance. The concept of “human”

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has emerged as a result of the long-lasting evolution of social development and the intellectual history of humanity.

The historical roots of the idea of human rights go back approximately to the 6th–5th centuries BCE. Even at that time, such ideas began to emerge in Athens and Rome. Although these ideas were not then called “human rights,” in essence they were the first rudiments of today’s human rights. As examples, one may cite the reforms carried out for the benefit of the people by Pericles of Athens, one of the earliest democrats, or the struggle between plebeians and patricians in Ancient Rome. However, at that time, what were understood as human rights applied only to slave owners, and slaves had no rights at all.

It is very likely that the idea that a person possesses rights that cannot be violated either by society or by the state emerged from the earliest periods of human societies. The ancient Greek philosophical schools associated with the Stoics and Epicureans, as well as the Roman thinker Cicero and his followers, placed human freedom, rights, and personal life above public interests and the political interests of the state.

In religious societies where belief in gods dominated social consciousness, the idea of human rights arose from “divine law,” or, as it was later emphasized, from “natural law.” “Divine law” stood above the ruler’s decrees and the rules established by society. In this case, a person acquired the right not to obey the unjust decree of an earthly ruler, because he or she was subject to the just judgment of “divine authority.” In monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—it is stated that human beings were created by God and that their lives depend solely on the will of the Great Creator. God created human beings “in His own image,” and humans reflect within themselves a particle of the Great Creator. It is also proclaimed that God created all people equal, and in the sacred books the oppression of human beings and the trampling of their dignity are declared great crimes (Huseynov et al, 2025).

Thus, in ancient Athens, in a fully “democratic” manner, based on the majority vote of the city’s population, the great philosopher Socrates was sentenced to death for irritating everyone with his critical ideas. The Athenian state deprived Socrates of his right to life. If we do not take the idea of human rights into account, this was entirely lawful (Huseynov, 2025). Similarly, in the 1930s in Germany, anti-Jewish decrees were issued in a legal manner, or in the USSR, people who expressed their opinions about the government were imprisoned or sent into exile. The main essence of the historical struggle for human rights is to ensure that the state is not given the opportunity to encroach upon or restrict a person’s rights to live, to freely express opinions, to own property, to appeal to a lawful and just court, and so on.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, theoretical, and comparative methodological approach grounded in philosophical and historical analysis. Primary and secondary philosophical texts from ancient,



religious, and modern traditions are examined to trace the evolution of human rights concepts across different historical periods. The method involves interpretative analysis of key thinkers—such as the Sophists, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Hegel—to identify how their ideas reflect changing social and political conditions. Comparative analysis is used to contrast ancient democratic models with modern liberal democracy, particularly regarding the limitation of state power and majority rule through human rights. Normative analysis of international legal frameworks, especially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is applied to assess the universal versus culturally specific dimensions of human rights (Aliyev, 2007). Throughout the study, contextualization is emphasized, situating philosophical ideas within their socio-political environments. This integrative approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of human rights as historically conditioned yet normatively universal principles.

Results and discussion

The ideas and thoughts that prevailed in every historical period, along with the socio-political conditions and modes of thinking of that era, have influenced the formation of human rights. For this reason, the criteria, level of thought, and accepted principles concerning human rights in one period cannot be equated with the views on human rights of earlier or later periods.

In democratic countries, human rights serve to limit the rule of the majority. No majority may adopt a law that violates human rights. Modern democracy differs from ancient Athenian democracy precisely in this respect. Therefore, today a democratic regime means that, through properly conducted elections, the rule of the majority is established in a country, but this rule is restricted by human rights. Such a form of democracy is called liberal democracy.

A violation of human rights in one state is sometimes not considered a rights violation in another. In general, it should be noted that in the modern era human rights have reached such a level that this term now implies the same rights in all states. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights envisages not the application of human rights to different individuals in varying degrees, but their equal and uniform application to everyone (UN, 1948). Thus, the unambiguous understanding of human rights in all states—regardless of their geographical and cultural affiliation, or their social and political systems—proves the international character of these rights.

As noted, in general, a person is understood as a social being whose rights are realized in social practice. An individual isolated from society and from the socio-political environment as a whole is deprived of the possibility of realizing his or her rights. Since human rights are realized within socio-political, economic, and cultural relations, the existence of democratic principles in these relations results in the highest level of protection of human rights (Sagikhanli, 2003).

Genuine democracy contradicts the notion of human rights being exported from a single center and imposed on peoples and societies as “universally accepted standards” in the form of schematic projects. Both logically and in reality, democracy and human rights cannot exist outside specificity,



including national-cultural, historical-traditional, and religious characteristics. Perhaps deeply understanding the importance of these characteristics, Bernard Shaw once said that the level of democracy cannot be higher than the “human material” of a society.

On the other hand, it must be noted that if the state has obligations toward the individual, the individual also has duties toward the state. The existence of such mutual rights and obligations characterizes citizen–state relations, which are more progressive than mere individual–state relations. Naturally, in return for the rights whose fulfillment the citizen demands from the state, he or she must serve the state with honor and dignity (CID, 2005). Defining the boundaries of rights is extremely important. The limits of human rights are mainly enshrined in international legal documents and in the normative legal acts of states (Huseynov et al, 2025).

Undoubtedly, if a person exceeds the limits of freedom, he or she may be punished and deprived of liberty. But what is freedom? What constitutes its socio-philosophical essence? Research and analyses conducted in this direction have not produced a unanimous view; on the contrary, they have deepened the diversity of opinions. In this regard, Montesquieu once said: “No other word has been given so many different meanings and left such varied impressions in people’s minds as freedom.” Jean-Jacques Rousseau devoted almost his entire work *The Social Contract* to clarifying the idea that “man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.”

Reflecting on the historically widespread master–slave relations that were accepted by the majority, and considering them incompatible with law, the modern state, and civil society, Hegel wrote: “In general, a human being becomes the object of law only as a being. At the foundation of law lies the freedom of the individual taken separately, and law consists in the fact that I treat others as free beings. Reason demands the observance of law. Everyone is essentially a free person; to respect another means to respect oneself. It is precisely this that leads to the conclusion that when the right of one person is violated, everyone is offended.” Although concepts such as freedom, individuality, equality, and rights were alien to people of the ancient world, the roots of ideas such as free thought and humanism go back to ancient Greek civilization. Thus, in Greek philosophy—which for a long time sought answers to questions such as the origin of nature while remaining indifferent to human beings and their problems and needs—a new movement emerged: Sophism. The Sophists believed that it was meaningless to investigate endless hypotheses about the creation of the universe and argued that human beings should stand at the center of thought. According to them, the state was created by people in order to provide for them; that is, the state is a means to ensure human happiness.

Among the Sophists, Protagoras emphasized that knowledge of the state should not belong to a specific group but to all citizens; Antiphon opposed the aristocrat–commoner distinction and put forward the claim that everyone is equal by birth. Alcidas, in turn, objected to the concept of master and slave with the assertion that “God has given freedom to everyone; nature has made no one a slave.” Two particularly important points are emphasized in Sophist thought:



- “The human being is the most important goal. The state may be limited for the sake of human goals.”
- “People are equal and free. Discrimination among them is not justified.”

These two points, which encompass the idea of human rights, posed a threat to the already established way of life in Greece and were met with hostility and criticism. In order to restore the authority of the state that had been shaken by the Sophists, new philosophical currents began to emerge. The most prominent representatives of these currents were Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates.

For Socrates, the fundamental value is the *polis* (used in the sense of the city-state; here it refers to the politically and socially organized part of the people). In the struggle against surrounding injustices, no harm should come to the *polis*, and its laws should be obeyed even if they are unjust.

Plato, on the other hand, divided society into three classes: rulers, workers, and warriors. The workers should produce, the warriors should protect society, and those at the top—the rulers—should govern society. According to Plato, the duties and rights of each class are clearly defined, and they must not go beyond their established boundaries. He believed that what is “just” is “that which serves the interests of the state.” Similarly, Aristotle, like Plato, gave precedence to the state over the individual and considered the whole more important than the part.

In one of his famous works, *The Philosophy of Spirit*, Hegel notes: “The fact that the freedom of one person exists in another unites these people inwardly. By contrast, needs and necessities bring them together only outwardly. Therefore, people strive to find themselves in one another. However, this cannot occur so long as they remain in their naturalness and immediacy, for it is precisely these qualities that separate people and prevent one from being free in relation to another. Therefore, freedom requires that everyone who becomes self-conscious neither allows their own naturalness to assert itself nor tolerates the naturalness of others. Thus, freedom can be attained only through struggle.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to state that the only solution to problems in the field of human rights within society is to increase society’s sensitivity toward them. That is, it is not possible to solve the problem by fully implementing human rights in a society that is not ready for them. The solution lies solely in this factor being understood and accepted by all people. This understanding must be voluntary; otherwise, the foundation of the values that are meant to be understood will be undermined. Finally, let us keep in mind that human rights remain lasting and stable only in those societies that have struggled for their rights.



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Armenian Migrations to the South Caucasus in the Second Half of the 20th Century and Its Consequences

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Keywords	Abstract
Armenian migrations South Caucasus Soviet repatriation policy ethnic conflict	<p>In the second half of the twentieth century, Armenian migration to the South Caucasus became a key factor influencing the region's demographic and political development. Officially presented by Soviet authorities as a humanitarian "repatriation" initiative, this policy primarily pursued strategic objectives aimed at reshaping the ethnic structure of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. Between 1946 and 1948, large numbers of Armenians were resettled from abroad to Soviet Armenia, a process that coincided with the forced displacement of the Azerbaijani population from their historical territories.</p> <p>These population movements significantly disrupted the ethnic balance of the South Caucasus and weakened long-standing traditions of multicultural coexistence. Over time, Armenia developed into a largely monoethnic republic, while Azerbaijan encountered serious social, economic, and humanitarian challenges related to the accommodation and integration of displaced communities. Furthermore, the long-term consequences of these demographic policies contributed to growing political tensions in the region. The escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the late 1980s can be interpreted as an outcome of these sustained ethno-demographic transformations, which ultimately undermined regional stability and interethnic relations.</p>

INTRODUCTION

The second half of the twentieth century was marked by profound ethnic, political, and demographic transformations on a global scale. In the South Caucasus, one of the most significant processes of this period was large-scale population migration, particularly the systematic resettlement of Armenians into the region. These movements were closely linked to the internal policies of the Soviet Union and were aimed at reshaping the national composition of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic.

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The relevance of this topic lies in the long-term consequences of Armenian resettlement for the ethnic balance of the South Caucasus. These policies generated increasing demographic pressure and contributed to territorial claims directed against the Azerbaijani population. From a contemporary scholarly perspective, an objective analysis of these historical processes is essential for understanding the underlying causes of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

In the postwar period, Soviet demographic policy—especially under the leadership of Joseph Stalin—sought to implement structural population changes in the Armenian SSR by encouraging the return of Armenians from abroad to what was termed “Soviet Armenia.” Although officially presented as a humanitarian repatriation initiative, this policy in fact reflected a deliberate strategy of ethnic engineering.

Beginning in 1945, the leadership of the Armenian SSR actively petitioned Moscow to support the “return of Armenians to their homeland.” As a result, between 1946 and 1948, approximately 90,000–100,000 Armenians from Syria, Lebanon, France, Greece, Iran, and the United States were resettled in Armenia under a centralized state plan. While some were placed in urban centers, a significant number were settled in rural areas traditionally inhabited by Azerbaijanis, accelerating rapid demographic change.

Beyond demographic considerations, this policy also served broader political objectives. The Soviet leadership used the repatriation campaign as leverage in its pressure on Turkey, particularly in connection with territorial claims over the Kars and Ardahan regions. To legitimize these claims, it was considered necessary to artificially increase the Armenian population of the republic.

RESULTS

As a direct consequence of Armenian resettlement, Azerbaijanis residing in the Armenian SSR became subject to systematic displacement. In December 1947, the Council of Ministers of the USSR issued Decree No. 4083, ordering the relocation of nearly 100,000 Azerbaijanis from the Armenian SSR to the Kura–Araz lowlands of the Azerbaijan SSR. Although officially justified by economic considerations and agricultural development, the primary objective was to create living space for incoming Armenian settlers.

During the deportations carried out between 1948 and 1953, Azerbaijani communities were forced to abandon their homes, lands, and villages. Many deportees were unable to adapt to harsh environmental and social conditions, resulting in significant loss of life. Those who attempted to return were prevented from doing so by Soviet authorities. Consequently, the Azerbaijani share of Armenia’s population declined sharply—from nearly 15 percent in 1939 to approximately 6 percent by 1959—contributing to the gradual transformation of the Armenian SSR into a monoethnic entity.

Although Stalinist repression formally eased in the late 1950s and early 1960s, discriminatory practices against Azerbaijanis persisted. Azerbaijani-language schools were closed, social institutions dismantled, and employment opportunities systematically restricted. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Azerbaijani population continued to decline to around 70,000, driven not by



open deportation but by sustained economic and social pressure, including land restrictions and increased taxation.

Simultaneously, a new wave of Armenian migrants arrived from abroad as part of Soviet ideological propaganda. Despite Armenia's limited economic capacity to absorb these populations, the Armenian SSR was promoted as a national center for Armenians worldwide. By the 1970s–1980s, census data showed that although Armenia's population exceeded three million, Azerbaijanis constituted only 1–2 percent. Archival evidence and eyewitness accounts confirm that this decline resulted from deliberate state policy.

During this period, Azerbaijani cultural heritage was systematically destroyed. Village names were altered, mosques demolished, and cemeteries erased under the pretext of modernization. In reality, these actions aimed to eliminate the historical presence of Azerbaijanis and complete the process of cultural assimilation.

DISCUSSION

In the early 1980s, as the USSR entered a deep economic and political crisis, national issues once again moved to the forefront of political life in the Armenian SSR. Following Mikhail Gorbachev's rise to power in 1985 and the introduction of the policy of *perestroika*, conditions emerged that enabled the open articulation of nationalist ideas. Within this environment, the “Miatsum” (“Unification”) movement developed, with Armenian political elites and nationalist groups openly demanding the incorporation of Nagorno-Karabakh into Armenia.

These developments were not accidental. The demographic and ethnic transformations implemented throughout the second half of the twentieth century had already reshaped Armenia into a predominantly monoethnic society, creating a structural foundation for renewed territorial claims. Within this context, Armenian political discourse increasingly positioned Armenia as a “national center,” fostering expansionist aspirations toward neighboring territories, particularly Azerbaijan.

The mass demonstrations and separatist rallies that erupted in February 1988 in Khankendi represented the culmination of these long-term demographic and political processes. While the movement received broad support within Armenia, the central Soviet authorities initially failed to respond decisively. This lack of effective intervention accelerated the escalation of tensions in Nagorno-Karabakh, deepened interethnic confrontation, and ultimately led to armed conflict.

During this period, Azerbaijanis residing in the Armenian SSR were once again subjected to forced displacement. Between 1988 and 1990, approximately 200,000 Azerbaijanis were expelled from their homes. Entire villages were destroyed, houses burned, and cultural and religious monuments demolished. By the end of the twentieth century, these processes had resulted in Armenia becoming a fully monoethnic state.

The destabilization of the ethnic balance in the South Caucasus had far-reaching consequences. Within Azerbaijan's internationally recognized territory, separatist movements supported by



Armenia triggered the outbreak of the Karabakh conflict. The roots of this conflict can be directly traced to the demographic engineering policies implemented between the 1940s and the 1980s. Each wave of Armenian migration served specific political objectives: in the 1940s, as part of Soviet pressure on Turkey; in the 1960s–1970s, to ensure ethnic homogeneity within the Armenian SSR; and in the 1980s, to legitimize territorial claims and separatism.

As a result, centuries-old traditions of interethnic coexistence in the South Caucasus were replaced by distrust and confrontation. For the Azerbaijani population, these developments constituted a profound tragedy—not only in terms of demographic loss, but also due to enduring moral and psychological suffering. Hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis expelled from Western Azerbaijan have been unable to return to their ancestral lands to this day.

Parallel to these demographic changes, the economic structure of the region was also transformed. The forced relocation of Azerbaijanis to the Azerbaijan SSR generated social tension and placed additional strain on agricultural systems and infrastructure. At the same time, Armenia received substantial financial assistance from the Soviet state to accommodate incoming Armenian settlers, exacerbating economic inequality among the republics.

The consequences of Armenian migration extended well beyond the twentieth century, producing political, social, and economic repercussions that persist into the twenty-first century. Ethnic stability in the region was never fully restored, and mutual mistrust deepened. Armenia's monoethnic structure further contributed to its isolation from broader regional economic and cultural integration processes.

Thus, Armenian migration in the second half of the twentieth century should be understood not merely as population movement, but as a deliberate political, demographic, and ideological strategy. From postwar repatriation campaigns to the separatist movements of the late 1980s, each stage formed part of an interconnected process aimed at altering the traditional ethnic composition of the South Caucasus, weakening the role of Azerbaijanis and other communities, and consolidating Armenian dominance in the region. Consequently, the South Caucasus—once characterized by multiculturalism and mutual tolerance—was transformed into a zone of prolonged ethnic tension, the effects of which continue to shape regional dynamics today.

The Armenian resettlement process directed toward the territory of the Armenian SSR formed an integral part of the Soviet Union's broader national policy in the postwar period. Officially promoted under the slogan of “returning Armenians to their homeland,” this policy was presented as a humanitarian initiative. In practice, however, it pursued clear political objectives: to alter the ethnic composition of the Armenian SSR, create conditions for the systematic removal of Azerbaijanis from their ancestral lands, and strengthen future territorial claims against Turkey under the narrative of “historical lands.”

Between 1946 and 1948, tens of thousands of Armenians were resettled from the Middle East and Europe into the Armenian SSR. Their placement followed a centralized state plan, with particular emphasis on rural areas predominantly inhabited by Azerbaijanis. As a consequence, the



demographic structure of Armenia changed radically. Whereas Azerbaijanis constituted nearly 15 percent of the population in the late 1930s, by the late 1980s their share had fallen below one percent. This decline was not the result of natural demographic processes but stemmed from a deliberate policy of ethnic cleansing, in which Azerbaijanis were forcibly expelled from their homes and their property transferred to newly resettled Armenians.

The social consequences of these policies were severe. Many deported Azerbaijanis were relocated to the Kura–Araz lowlands, including the districts of Sabirabad, Saatli, and Imishli, where they faced extreme climatic and socioeconomic difficulties. A large number of families struggled to adapt, resulting in widespread hardship and long-term social vulnerability. These processes affected not only one ethnic group but also undermined the overall social fabric of the South Caucasus, destroying long-standing traditions of peaceful coexistence and multicultural interaction.

Culturally, the impact was equally destructive. In the region historically known as Western Azerbaijan, hundreds of Azerbaijani villages were erased, and dozens of mosques, cemeteries, and architectural monuments were demolished or repurposed. Place names were systematically changed, and settlements were renamed in Armenian, reflecting a deliberate policy of cultural transformation aimed at eliminating the historical presence of Azerbaijanis. These measures represented a coordinated effort to erase tangible and intangible Azerbaijani heritage from the region.

The political consequences of Armenian migration were profound. From the 1940s to the 1980s, the expulsion of Azerbaijanis and the artificial growth of the Armenian population fundamentally disrupted the ethnic balance of the South Caucasus. Armenia gradually evolved into a monoethnic state, while Azerbaijan and Georgia retained their multiethnic structures. This transformation enabled Armenia to construct an identity as an “ethnically homogeneous” space, which later facilitated separatist movements and territorial claims.

Within Armenia’s domestic politics, demographic changes increasingly intersected with economic challenges. During the final decades of the USSR, Armenian political elites linked internal economic difficulties to ethnic narratives, promoting territorial demands under the banner of “historical justice.” This ideological framework became the basis for the events that erupted in Nagorno-Karabakh in 1988. The monoethnic environment that had formed in Armenia strengthened these ambitions both ideologically and practically.

As a direct consequence of Armenian migration policies, the Nagorno-Karabakh issue intensified on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Having consolidated an “ethnically pure” state, Armenian political forces extended similar objectives to neighboring regions, particularly Azerbaijani territory. The events of 1988–1991, including Armenia’s territorial claims and the subsequent war, were the political outcomes of long-term demographic engineering. The artificial resettlement of Armenians disrupted ethnic harmony and fostered deep mutual distrust.



Demographic transformation also had economic implications. Although Armenian resettlement temporarily stimulated urban and agricultural sectors, this growth proved artificial and unsustainable. Many Armenians resettled from abroad failed to adapt to local conditions and later migrated to other Soviet cities. Nevertheless, the primary political goal had already been achieved: territories formerly inhabited by Azerbaijanis were emptied and repopulated.

Following the destruction of the South Caucasus's multicultural balance, confrontational tendencies intensified. Mutual trust among ethnic groups was replaced by division and hostility. Armenian migration also influenced neighboring regions, such as Georgia's Javakheti, where demographic changes contributed to long-term political and social tensions.

The moral and psychological consequences were particularly severe for the Azerbaijani population. The forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis from Western Azerbaijan remains a national tragedy embedded in collective memory. Many families have never been able to return to their ancestral lands, and subsequent generations grew up displaced, deepening feelings of injustice and loss. At the same time, Armenia's pursuit of ethnic homogeneity undermined regional stability and long-term development.

By the late 1980s, Armenia had effectively eliminated most ethnic minorities, including Azerbaijanis and Kurds, despite officially promoting the rhetoric of "friendship among peoples." From a broader perspective, these policies disrupted economic integration within the South Caucasus. Inter-republican economic ties weakened, Armenia's domestic market contracted, and these challenges intensified after independence in the 1990s.

Culturally, centuries-old patterns of coexistence collapsed. Mixed families, shared traditions, and interfaith practices gradually disappeared, as rigid ethnic boundaries replaced a historically interconnected cultural landscape. Ultimately, Armenian migration constituted not merely a demographic phenomenon but a comprehensive geopolitical process. It reshaped the political map of the South Caucasus, undermined multicultural values, and transformed the region into a zone of prolonged ethnic confrontation. The legacy of these policies continues to shape Armenian–Azerbaijani relations and regional dynamics to this day.

CONCLUSION

In the second half of the twentieth century, Armenian resettlement in the South Caucasus became a decisive factor shaping the region's political, social, and demographic trajectory. Although officially framed by Soviet authorities as a policy of "repatriation," this process functioned in practice as a mechanism of ethnic homogenization within the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. Between 1946 and 1948, tens of thousands of Armenians were relocated from abroad to Armenia, a development that coincided with the forced displacement of large segments of the Azerbaijani population from their ancestral territories.

These demographic interventions fundamentally disrupted the long-standing traditions of ethnic and religious coexistence in the South Caucasus. As Armenia gradually evolved into a monoethnic state, Azerbaijan was confronted with extensive humanitarian, social, and economic challenges



related to the accommodation and integration of displaced communities. The consequences of these policies extended beyond population change, fostering deep interethnic mistrust and political tension across the region.

Ultimately, the resettlement and deportation policies of the Soviet period contributed directly to the escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the late 1980s. The resulting humanitarian crisis and prolonged instability demonstrate that these demographic strategies undermined regional cooperation and multiculturalism, leaving enduring negative effects on peace and development in the South Caucasus.

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Silence, Power, and the Archive: Reading Marisa J. Fuentes and Michel Rolph Trouillot

Book Review

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Keywords	Abstract
archival silence epistemic violence historiography Marisa J. Fuentes Michel-Rolph Trouillot colonial archives Black women's history power and knowledge decolonial critique historical methodology	<p>This review examines the intersecting arguments of Marisa J. Fuentes's <i>Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive</i> (2016) and Michel-Rolph Trouillot's <i>Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History</i> (1995), situating both within contemporary debates on power, epistemic violence, and the politics of historical knowledge. Trouillot's foundational analysis reveals how silences structure history at every stage—from the creation of facts to their retrospective interpretation—demonstrating that historical production is inseparable from relations of domination. Fuentes extends this theoretical frame into the gendered and racialized domains of the colonial archive, focusing on eighteenth-century Bridgetown, Barbados, where the fragmented traces of enslaved and free women of color expose the archive as a “technology of violence.” Her method of reading against the grain uncovers both the violence and the possibilities within archival fragments, foregrounding the ethical dilemmas of representing lives marked by erasure. Read together, Trouillot and Fuentes articulate a critical practice that redefines silence not as a void but as an active condition of historiography. They compel historians to treat the archive as a contested space where power and knowledge converge, urging a reimagining of historical methodology that attends to absence, affect, and the ongoing colonial grammars of representation. The review concludes that both works illuminate the necessity of confronting the limits of what can be known, while envisioning a more reflexive and decolonial practice of reading, writing, and remembering history.</p>

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Marisa J. Fuentes's *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (2016) and Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995) offer two of the most incisive meditations on power, history, and epistemic violence in recent decades. Both authors interrogate how historical narratives emerge from systems of domination that dictate what can be remembered, who may speak, and what constitutes the historical itself. Read together, they illuminate how silences—far from being accidental gaps—are the constitutive conditions of modern historiography.

In *Dispossessed Lives*, Fuentes turns to eighteenth-century Bridgetown, Barbados, to examine the lives of enslaved and free women of color whose traces appear only in fragments scattered across colonial archives. Through figures such as Jane, Rachael Pringle Polgreen, Joanna, Agatha, Molly, and Venus, Fuentes reconstructs microhistories that reveal how archives are not neutral repositories but “technologies of violence” that perpetuate the dehumanization of Black women. As she writes, “the violent systems and structures of white supremacy produced devastating images of enslaved female personhood, and how these pervade the archive and govern what can be known about them” (Fuentes 2016, 5). Her method—reading against the grain of the colonial record—foregrounds the epistemological and affective limits of historical recovery while insisting on the necessity of engaging those very limits as sites of critique.

Trouillot's *Silencing the Past* provides a theoretical scaffolding for understanding these dynamics. He contends that history is not a transparent record of events but an ongoing process shaped by power. “Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments,” he writes, “the moment of fact creation, fact assembly, fact retrieval, and the moment of retrospective significance” (Trouillot 1995, 26). Through analyses of the Haitian Revolution and the “discovery” of the Americas, Trouillot demonstrates how silences are produced through the very mechanisms of historical narration. The Haitian Revolution—an event that fundamentally challenged the racial and political logics of modernity—was rendered “unthinkable” within Western historiography precisely because it destabilized the epistemological foundations of the colonial order.

Fuentes's work extends Trouillot's theoretical insights into the intimate and gendered registers of archival violence. Her chapters move through complex economies of domination and agency: from Jane's fugitive existence to Polgreen's role as a free woman of color who owned and exploited enslaved women, to Molly's execution for allegedly attempting to poison a white man. Each case illustrates how Black women's lives were mediated through regimes of racialized surveillance and juridical silencing. Venus's appearance in British abolitionist discourse—her suffering transformed into a symbol of humanitarian sympathy—underscores how the commodification of Black pain underwrote both colonial order and liberal sentiment.

While Trouillot theorizes the macro-structures of historical silencing, Fuentes inhabits its microtextures—the bodily marks, juridical absences, and partial archives through which Black



women's subjectivities were both erased and inscribed. For Trouillot, the historian's task is to confront the power relations that produce "silences"; for Fuentes, it is to engage those silences without re-enacting the violence that produced them. Both works thus articulate an ethics of historical practice attuned to the politics of knowledge production.

Taken together, *Silencing the Past* and *Dispossessed Lives* reveal that the archive and the historical narrative are not simply reflections of reality but active participants in its construction. The violence that pervades the archive is continuous with the violence of the world it documents. To read these texts in concert is to recognize that the struggle over the past is also a struggle over the boundaries of humanity, over who may be rendered legible within history's frame. Trouillot and Fuentes both insist that the task of the historian—or the reader—is not to fill in the gaps of the record but to theorize the conditions of its silence.

These two works together constitute an urgent call for a reimagining of historical knowledge. They compel us to treat the archive as a site of both domination and possibility, to attend to the politics of absence, and to confront the ongoing colonial grammars that shape what counts as history. As Fuentes and Trouillot remind us, history is not merely what happened—it is what power has allowed to appear, and what critical engagement might yet make visible.

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Politics of Death and the Limits of Democracy: A Review of Achille Mbembe's Necropolitics

Book Review

 ¹ Yahaya HALIDU

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Keywords	Abstract
Necropolitics sovereignty colonialism racism democracy biopolitics Achille Mbembe postcolonial theory	This review offers a critical analysis of Achille Mbembe's <i>Necropolitics</i> (2019), a text that redefines the relationship between power and death in modern political life. Building upon Michel Foucault's notion of biopolitics, Mbembe conceptualizes necropolitics as the exercise of sovereignty through the creation of "death worlds"—spaces where populations are rendered disposable. The review highlights Mbembe's central argument that liberal democracy is inseparable from the colonial and racial regimes that underpin modernity. Drawing on examples from slavery, apartheid, and the occupation of Palestine, Mbembe illustrates how necropower operates across historical and contemporary contexts. The review emphasizes the book's interdisciplinary breadth and its relevance to ongoing debates in political theory, postcolonial studies, and global governance. Despite its theoretical density, <i>Necropolitics</i> stands as an essential text for understanding how the management of death continues to define modern political systems.

Achille Mbembe. (2019). *Necropolitics*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics* (2019) offers a profound and unsettling rethinking of sovereignty, democracy, and violence in the modern world. Extending Michel Foucault's concept of *biopolitics*, Mbembe introduces the notion of *necropolitics*—the exercise of power through the control of death. His central claim is that political modernity, particularly Western liberal democracy, is founded on the systemic production and management of death. Far from being exceptional, such violence constitutes the very grammar of modern power.

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Reconceptualizing Sovereignty and the Politics of Death

For Mbembe, the sovereign is defined not merely by the right to decide over life, but by the capacity to impose death. In the contemporary world, states and institutions create “death worlds” where marginalized populations—racialized, colonized, or displaced—exist in conditions between life and death. Racism functions as the organizing principle of this order, determining whose lives are valued and whose can be extinguished without consequence. The plantation, colony, and concentration camp, Mbembe argues, are historical templates for this politics of death (p. 19).

This argument leads to a powerful indictment of Western liberal democracy. Far from representing a universal ideal, democracy emerges from the violent foundations of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism. The rights and freedoms of the privileged few were purchased through the dehumanization and extermination of others. Mbembe terms this legacy “democracy’s bitter sediments” (p. 20), a haunting reminder that liberal values are built upon colonial violence that persists in new forms—racial capitalism, militarized borders, and global surveillance.

Colonial Continuities and the Modern Deathscape

Mbembe extends this critique to the postcolonial state, which he contends has often reproduced colonial logics of domination. Through case studies such as Israel’s occupation of Palestine and the wars of decolonization in Africa and Asia (p. 24), he demonstrates how spaces of occupation and siege continue to define contemporary sovereignty. The fragmentation of authority—between states, militias, and private militaries—has created new “war machines” that govern through terror and disposability (p. 86). In this necropolitical landscape, the right to kill is no longer monopolized by the state but dispersed across a network of actors and technologies.

From Biopolitics to Necropolitics

Engaging Foucault’s notion of *biopolitics*, Mbembe argues that modern power cannot be understood solely through the management of life. Instead, *necropolitics* exposes how sovereignty depends on the ability to determine the conditions of death. In *states of exception* and *states of siege* (p. 70)—from apartheid South Africa to occupied Palestine—the sovereign constantly redraws the boundaries of humanity, designating populations as disposable. Mbembe thus advances Foucault’s theory by centering violence, race, and colonialism as foundational to modern governance.

Technology, Capitalism, and the Globalization of Death

Mbembe’s chapter “Viscerality” connects necropolitics to the rise of digital surveillance and global capitalism. New technologies of control—biometric monitoring, data collection, and drone warfare—extend necropolitical power into the most intimate aspects of human life. Through what he calls “planetary entanglement” (p. 96), capitalism transforms death into a transnational enterprise, linking warfare, ecology, and the digital economy in a shared regime of domination.



The later chapters, “Fanon’s Pharmacy” and “Stifling the Noonday,” address the psychic and cultural dimensions of necropolitics. Revisiting Frantz Fanon, Mbembe situates racism as a mechanism of power’s self-preservation (p. 130). He calls for the decolonization of memory and representation, especially within institutions such as museums that continue to display colonized peoples as artifacts of another’s history (p. 171).

Interdisciplinary Reach and Scholarly Impact

Drawing upon a wide array of sources—from political philosophy and psychoanalysis to history and cultural theory—Mbembe weaves a compelling and interdisciplinary argument. His discussion of the “war on terror,” drone warfare, and digital capitalism situates *Necropolitics* firmly within twenty-first-century debates. The book’s engagement with thinkers such as Fanon, Césaire, Foucault, and Arendt situates it within a rich intellectual genealogy of anti-colonial and critical thought.

Evaluation and Significance

Mbembe’s contribution lies in his ability to expose the necropolitical underside of modernity: the way global systems of governance depend on the continual reproduction of zones of death. His work challenges the liberal myth that modern politics is oriented toward life, showing instead that death remains the organizing logic of sovereignty.

The book’s dense philosophical style may limit accessibility for general audiences, but its conceptual rigor makes it indispensable for scholars in political theory, postcolonial studies, and African philosophy. Mbembe’s elegant prose, grounded in historical and contemporary examples, rewards close and sustained engagement.

Conclusion

Necropolitics stands as one of the most significant interventions in contemporary political theory. Mbembe’s analysis dismantles the distinction between democracy and domination, revealing how the management of death defines the modern world. The book invites readers to imagine political life beyond necropower—beyond the hierarchies of race, nation, and humanity that sustain the present order. For scholars and thinkers concerned with sovereignty, violence, and decolonization, *Necropolitics* is an essential and transformative text.

Reference

Mbembe, A. (2019). *Necropolitics*. Duke University Press.



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