Multilingualism is integral to the human condition. Hinging on the concept of Creative Multilingualism — the idea that language diversity and creativity are mutually enriching — this timely and thought-provoking volume shows how the concept provides a matrix for experimentation with ideas, approaches and methods.

The book presents four years of joint research on multilingualism across disciplines, from the humanities through to the social and natural sciences. It is structured as a manifesto, comprising ten major statements which are unpacked through various case studies across ten chapters. They encompass areas including the rich relationship between language diversity and diversity of identity, thought and expression; the interaction between language diversity and biodiversity; the ‘prismatic’ unfolding of meaning in translation; the benefits of linguistic creativity in a classroom setting; and the ingenuity underpinning ‘conlangs’ (‘constructed languages’) designed to give imagined peoples a distinctive medium capable of expressing their cultural identity.

This book is a welcome contribution to the field of modern languages, highlighting the intricate relationship between multilingualism and creativity, and, crucially, reaching beyond an Anglo-centric view of the world. Intended to spark further research and discussion, this book appeals to young people interested in languages, language learning and cultural exchange. It will be a valuable resource for academics, educators, policy makers and parents of bilingual or multilingual children. Its accessible style also speaks to general readers interested in the role of language diversity in our everyday lives, and the untapped creative potential of multilingualism.

As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is available to read for free on the publisher’s website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found at www.openbookpublishers.com.
6. Prismatic Translation

Matthew Reynolds, Sowon S. Park and Kate Clanchy

Here are the key principles of ‘Prismatic Translation’, one of Creative Multilingualism’s research strands:

Translation generates multiple new texts: it is inherently creative.

Translation works differently with different kinds of languages: for instance, in the ‘Chinese scriptworld’, speech and writing do not interact in the same way as with European languages, so translation has other processes and results.

Translation can merge with other modes of writing and re-writing: poetry and fiction are nourished by the fresh perspectives that come from thinking and feeling across languages.

In what follows, three participants in the strand outline the new perceptions and practices that arise from their approach. Matthew Reynolds explains the prismatic conception of language and translation, and shows what you can discover when you look at a book — in this case Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre — that has been translated multiple times into many different tongues. Sowon Park then shows that paying attention to different kinds of script can change how we think about what a language is, and therefore what translation does. For instance, in Europe, writing and speech typically relate to one another quite differently than in East Asia: the meaning-making practices that we name with one word — ‘language’ — are, in fact, very varied, and translation has to be correspondingly creative as it moves across them.
Finally, Kate Clanchy describes what happened when she introduced elements of translation and multilingual imagining into her poetry workshops at a comprehensive school, Oxford Spires Academy. A prismatic understanding of language and translation helped generate brilliantly creative work in the classroom.

Two Ideas of Translation

In the first idea, translation is a matter of right or wrong. You are doing a test at school: you either know the French for ‘teacup’ or you don’t. You are a diplomat negotiating an international treaty: you need a text that holds both countries to the same obligations. You are a reader making your way through a book called the Divine Comedy: you want to know that you are getting an accurate picture of what goes on in Dante’s Commedia. You take it for granted that the source text has something called ‘a meaning’ which can be carried across into the new language: any differences are errors to be deplored and, if possible, corrected. In this idea, translation is like a channel.

In the second idea, translation inevitably generates change. Even a word like ‘ναι’, which a dictionary will tell you is the Greek for ‘yes’, is not exactly the same as the English word: it has different nuances and is used in slightly different ways. How much more will a whole sentence shift when it is re-made in another language, especially if it is a sentence from a literary novel or a poem. In this idea of translation, a source text does not have a given meaning that can be extracted and relocated in another language. Rather, its significance at any moment is generated in collaboration with readers who — if they then translate — make an approximation to the source in new words which inevitably generate new meanings. These differences reveal the creative aspect of human linguistic interaction. People are varied; communication requires change; and change entails creativity. In this idea, translation is like a prism.

These two contradictory ideas probably always co-exist in thinking about translation. People use translations as equivalents of their source texts; and they also (at least, when they stop to reflect) recognize that translation and source are different. But the balance between the two ideas varies according to circumstances. With an international treaty,
there will always in fact be differences of nuance between the text in one language and the text in another; but a legal and administrative structure will be in place to try to make sure that their interpretation does not differ in ways that matter in practice. With a poem, variances in translation are more likely to be relished: this is why there have come to be hundreds of translations from the Commedia into English, and many more than that in all the languages of the world.

The nature of the languages involved matters too, as does the medium in which the translation is done. With standardized, national languages such as French or German, grammar books and bilingual dictionaries impose the idea that there is a clear distinction between right and wrong ways of using the words, and therefore correct and incorrect translations. The medium of print reinforces this notion, because print produces identical, static copies: it is easy to slip into treating a translated book as though it were just another copy of the source text.

But there are very many situations where language-use is more fluid, so that the differences between languages become difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish from variations of dialect, register and idiom. Speech is more variable than print: speakers everywhere — in Oxford or Cornwall just as much as Delhi or Hong Kong — shift across languages, varieties and styles as they change topic, audience, or whim. In this kind of language-use, the question of what is or is not acceptable is not so much a matter of correctness as of what works in a given context.

Traditionally, this fluidity in language has been easier to hear than to see. It could manifest itself in handwriting, but it was generally excluded from the domain of print by the stringent processes of correction — of punctuation, spelling and grammar — to which manuscripts were subjected on their way to being fixed in type and published. But now, new media have shifted the relationship between the aural and the visual aspects of language: you need only glance at a text message or go to a chatroom to see all sorts of idiosyncratic, non-standard ways with words; and the Internet makes a lot of varied language-use from around the world readily available to anyone who looks for it. This alters how translation can be done, and thought about. The Prismatic Translation project responds to these new circumstances, and reconceptualizes translation in the light of them.
Translation and Interpreting

The difference in English, and some other languages, between ‘translation’ and ‘interpreting’ implies a strong distinction between writing and speech. We ‘translate’ written texts, and ‘interpret’ when someone is speaking. The word ‘interpret’ has connotations of freedom which harmonize with the fluidity of spoken language by contrast with print — as when a musician interprets a piece of music or a ballerina interprets a dance. Friends with different languages who interpret for one another in informal conversation might adopt a similar liberty, and the way they re-word one another might become part of an expression of sympathy or humour.

But often interpreting happens in formal contexts such as an asylum interview or a session of an international body like the United Nations. In these circumstances, the interpreter’s use of language is strongly regulated, as we can see from the guidelines for interpreters in the Finnish immigration service:

> The asylum seeker’s matter must be interpreted into another language comprehensively and accurately, so that the authority can reach a fair decision in the matter of a person seeking international protection. Therefore the interpreter is in a key position, communicating messages in situations which have a bearing on the rest of the asylum seeker’s life. (Finnish Immigration Service Refugee Advice Centre 2010: 9)

This shows the role of context and purpose in determining what an interpreter can do. The same is true of written translation: part of the reason why literature is often more freely translated than other texts is that literature spans many contexts and has complex purposes.

The Prism in Action: Prismatic Jane Eyre

The Prismatic Translation project combines several domains: critical theory, literary research, and the writing of poetry in schools. In all of them, we explore the creativity of translation in a world of linguistic fluidity.

In the domain of theory, we emphasize that translation necessarily generates difference. Once you accept this, you can see that the hundreds of translations of Dante are not a by-product of a process which fundamentally aims to achieve equivalence; they are not the
detritus of a repeated failure of translations to match up to the original. Neither is it sufficient to explain them as symptoms of historical change. Rather, they arise from the mutability of language, and the variety in how people experience and inhabit it. Each reader will see something slightly different in the Commedia and, if they then translate, they will remake it in their own ways in their own idioms and cultures. Of course, sometimes there are changes that can be called mistakes; but more often there are variances which reveal the differences between people using language differently in different places and times, and thereby open up the wealth of potential meaning in the source text, its signifying energy.

This means that we can use translations not only to get a sense of books in languages we do not know, but to learn more about works that we can already read in our own tongue(s). Like Dante’s Commedia, Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre is massively translated worldwide: so far, we have identified five hundred and ninety-two different translations, including three into Armenian and thirty into Persian. What can we discover by studying them?

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Fig. 1 This map shows the global distribution of translations of Jane Eyre, from the first one in 1848 to the present day, in Prismatic Jane Eyre: An Experiment in the Study of Translations, https://prismaticjaneeyre.org/maps/. Reproduced by kind permission of Matthew Reynolds and Giovanni Pietro Vitali.
Even changes to the title are suggestive. In 1904, an anonymous Italian translation re-titled the book *Jane Eyre, o le memorie di un’istitutrice*, which might be back-translated as ‘Jane Eyre, or the Recollections of a Governess’. In 1941, a Portuguese version by João Gaspar Simões (under the pseudonym ‘Mécia’) saw a different story in the novel: *A paixão de Jane Eyre* (‘Jane Eyre’s Passion’). In Slovenia, in 1955, France Borko and Ivan Dolenc’s translation offered another emphasis: *Sirota iz Lowooda* (‘The Orphan of Lowood’), echoing the titles of Hungarian and German film versions, which in turn re-use the sub-title of many German translations from 1853 onwards. Jump to the 2001 Chinese translation, by Li Daming 李大明 and Li Jing 李晶, and we find yet another key, one which exploits the distinctive resources of the Chinese writing system. The title *jiǎn ài* 简·爱 sounds like ‘Jane Eyre’, but the characters also mean ‘simple love’. For details of these translations, and to discover more titles, go to https://prismaticjaneeyre.org/prismatic-title/. The information relayed here has been provided by participants in the project: Alessandro Grilli, Ana Teresa Marques dos Santos, Claudia Pazos Alonso, Jernej Habjan and Yunte Huang — working on multiple translations requires multifaceted collaboration!

How should we think about these prismatically varied titles? They are all different from the source; but they are not mistakes. Their divergences show that language is always embedded in contexts and communities: to translate is to remake, not only in a new language with its different nuances and ways of putting words together, but in a new culture where readers are likely to be attracted by different themes: orphanhood, governesses, passion, simple love. Tracing variants in translation can be a precise mode of cultural studies. But the multiple titles also open up a fundamental ambiguity about what kind of text *Jane Eyre* is, and what sort of story it tells. This ambiguity was already hinted at in the English titles. When it was first published in English, in 1847, the book was called *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography. Edited by Currer Bell* (Charlotte Brontë’s name did not appear). The second edition, a year later, introduced a small but startling change: *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography. By Currer Bell*.

This makes the title utterly self-contradictory. If it is ‘by Currer Bell’ then it cannot be Jane Eyre’s autobiography; if it is Jane Eyre’s autobiography then it cannot be by Currer Bell. The paradox points to
related questions of identity which run throughout the novel: whom should we think of as writing it? How far is it autobiographical? Is it realism or romance? How much is it about orphanhood and being a governess, and how much a timeless story of love? These uncertainties are brought into the open and crystallized by the prismatic spread of translated titles. Similar things happen to ambiguities everywhere in the book, in pretty much every turn of phrase: to show this, the Prismatic Jane Eyre project has taken twenty-six keywords, from ‘passion’ and ‘conscience’ to ‘walk, ‘elf’ and ‘glad’, and tracked how they shift in translations into twenty languages. The source text reveals new colours of meaning when seen through the creative prism of translation. To open up this phenomenon for readers, we have created an interactive website: https://prismaticjaneeyre.org/. Please visit, explore and enjoy!

**Language Lives**

**True to My Linguistic Reality**

Eleni Philippou

In the 1940s, my grandparents emigrated from Cyprus and Greece to South Africa. My parents were raised in Greek-speaking homes, but like many first-generation children adopted their host country’s language as their primary tongue. In our familial home, we spoke English to each other, but it was an English peppered with Greek phrases or words, thrown into conversation haphazardly. I went to a Greek secondary school in Johannesburg, where most pupils had the same background as myself: my friends and I used the same sort of pastiche language, English with a very light sprinkling of Greek.

As an academic I strictly use standard English, but in conversation with Greek friends and family, I still sometimes switch languages, and it is in my poetry that the mixture flourishes most creatively. I write in English, but throw in Greek words or expressions, and never translate them: that would feel disingenuous, not true to my linguistic reality. Sometimes using Greek gives a poem a different rhythm or sound, or plays with a poem’s visual fabric. I believe that my poems’ multilingualism forces the Anglophone reader into an active reading experience — if the reader wants to understand everything in the poem, they must search out the meaning!
My poems have been translated into Greek, Polish and German. The Polish and German translations have kept their polyglottal dimension, retaining the original Greek. To remove the Greek aspect of the poems would flatten or eviscerate them.

Here is an extract from a work in progress, entitled ‘Simera’:

In Attica,
from the hotel rooftop
I watch the erection of tents.

Your people carrying banners and rough signs.
They come in waves and wash the grey cement with the paraffin grit of Molotovs.

They break upon the shoreline
of police shields,
the tainted words drachmi and dollaria.
euro.

* 

As you enter the ward you pay your fakelaki —
pearl-white casing for an ashen owl face —
and the doctor listens to the watery murmur in your chest,
and it beats and it beats,
but only because you paid to make it beat.

Eleni Philippou is a Post-Doctoral Research Assistant on the ‘Prismatic Translation’ strand of Creative Multilingualism.
6. Prismatic Translation

Scriptworlds

A particular problem with the ‘channel’ view of translation is that it fails to distinguish between spoken language and written language and ignores the problems that emerge from the conflation of speech and text.

Admittedly the distinction between spoken language and written language is one that very few people are concerned to make because it has seemed self-evident that spoken language is the primary structure from which writing is derived. Thus, what we call ‘language’ is often presumed to be synonymous with speech, of which writing is a phonetic copy. The relation between speech and writing is quite straightforward in this way of thinking.

Ignoring the specific properties of writing does not pose an obvious problem when we are translating between literatures in European languages, which have uniformly used the sound-based Roman alphabet for writing. But when we broaden our view to the literatures of the world, and especially when we are translating between them, it becomes obvious that the relation between writing and speech is much more complicated than that which arises from within the European frame.

In contrast to how European languages are written, many ‘national’ languages are written in more than one script in other parts of the world, especially in the southern hemisphere. To put it technically, the national languages are ‘digraphic’. Contemporary Konkani is written in Devanagari, Kannada, Perso-Arabic, the Roman alphabet and Malayalam. Azerbaijani was written in the Runic alphabet (fourth to eighth century), Arabic (seventh to twentieth century), the Roman alphabet (1929–1939), and then Cyrillic (1939–1991), before returning to a modified version of the Roman alphabet after 1992. Vietnamese was written in Chữ Nôm and classical Hanzi (Chữ Hán) before transitioning to the Roman alphabet in the early twentieth century. As these examples illustrate, spoken language and written language do not correlate with each other along the official borders of standardized national languages.

The lack of alignment produces a basic problem in translation. When, say, a ‘Korean’ poem is translated into English, anthologized and categorized as being translated from Korean, it gives a very vague and confusing indication of what it refers to, since there is no such thing
as a Korean written language — or a literature written in a Vietnamese written language, or a Turkish writing system. Stating that a Gasa has been translated from ‘Korean’ into English without specifying whether it was from Hangul or Hanmun misses the fundamental details of the piece from which the translation was made. Script is not a transparent medium for transcribing spoken language as is conventionally thought.

Erasing the particular features of script is to miss the ways in which the author negotiated with the writing systems of that literary culture. For the script in which a text is written indicates whom it aimed to address. So, for example, when we read The Tale of Genji in English, we have an idea that it is translated from Japanese, but this does not tell us very much. In order to understand who it is addressed to, we need to know that it is mostly written in phonetic Hiragana and not classical Kanji. We can then see that Murasaki Shikibu intended it for an intimate female circle of readers in the imperial court rather than the elite male class of eleventh century Kyoto. Or we might think about the fact that Ho Chi Minh wrote the stirring Declaration of Independence (1945) of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the Roman alphabet and not Chữ Nôm or classical Chữ Hán. The alphabetic writing alone reveals the pedagogic apparatus of an internationalist literary culture in which the document is steeped.

Script is not just a medium for transcribing spoken language with no independent features in itself. Not only does it disclose the text’s immediate readership, it also reveals whom it intended to exclude. Paying attention to the form of written language leads us to differentiate between the levels of readership it was intended to reach as well as to situate it in its generic and literary tradition. There are political dimensions, historical dimensions, class dimensions and dimensions of literary craft. Understanding script choice is often a precondition for appraising the nature and value of specific literary practices in most non-European literatures.

Understanding the system by which a literary culture encodes its multiple spoken languages offers a comparative perspective on how different ‘scriptworlds’ organize and disseminate knowledge. In a basic sense, this is because writing systems reveal the institutional educational processes by which literacy is acquired. But in a more fundamental sense, writing systems offer insight into the cognitive
Prismatic Translation processes by which literature is produced and interpreted. For written word recognition not only enables the transmission of culture but also inscribes culture in our brain, as the neuroscience of reading has demonstrated in recent years. Gaining an awareness of its functions equips us with an understanding of how distinct cognitive worlds are created through different writing systems.

In addition, the opportunities presented by a more precise understanding of script allow us to move constructively beyond studies of literature based on national boundaries and national languages. World literature anthologies have become more diverse than before. But national classifications such as ‘Polish literature’, ‘Azerbaijani literature’ and ‘Vietnamese literature’ sustain and reproduce the modern myth of separable national languages. Statements such as ‘Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* has been translated into forty languages’ reaffirm the presupposition of languages as discrete and distinct systems and assumes that the act of translation crosses over the gaps. Exactly what counts as a language is normally unquestioned. It is assumed that languages just exist, as biological species are assumed to exist, and need no further definition.

But the lines that divide languages are debatable and often disputed, particularly by the specialists. The old Hindi proverb that ‘language changes every eighteen or twenty miles’ or the often-repeated jibe that ‘a language is a dialect with an army and a navy’ (see also Chapter 10 in this volume) point to the hazy and often arbitrary line between dialects and languages and the equally arbitrary line between speech and writing.

Once we delve into writing systems, we soon encounter problems that force us to think through fundamental ideas which are often taken as axiomatic. One conspicuous feature of ‘language’ that is laid bare by scrutinizing writing systems is the extent to which the borders of a language are regulated by the structures of a nation state that legitimate and enforce them, erasing differences between the extraordinarily diverse range of spoken and written forms of language. The model of a singular standardized national language is inseparable from the sociolinguistic constructions of the modern nation state that polices and patrols all the scripts and dialects that the standard is supposed to constitute. The lens of script allows us to see that there is always a gap between speech and the written sign which defies the standard classification.
Translation provides an excellent site for drawing out each of the properties that distinguish writing from spoken language, and for re-orienting the relationship between them. By moving away from naturalized phonocentrism, the Scriptworlds project explores the nature and significance of both writing and spoken language on their own terms.

One of the focuses compares literature written in ‘ideographic’ scripts (e.g. Chinese) with those written in phonetic scripts (e.g. the Roman alphabet) and contests the controversial idea that the ideographic Chinese produces ‘nominalist’ thought on account of its ‘graphic wealth’ and ‘phonetic poverty’, while the phonetic Roman alphabet lends itself to the kind of abstract thinking that produced western ‘realist’ philosophy.

Another looks at how recent developments in technology and cognitive neuroscience can help us think about language, literature and translation. With the support of the Digital Arts and Humanities Commons at the University of California, Santa Barbara, the Arnhold Program (2018–2019) scrutinized how ideas about writing can influence both our close and distant reading. Ten undergraduate and two graduate fellows researched the use of visual experimentation in the International
Concrete Poetry movement (1960–1980) archived at the Getty Research Institute. The Arnhold students translated and produced shape poems, which were exhibited in the Digital Arts and Humanities Commons (DAHC). The project enabled students to animate new links between existing scholarship on concrete poetry and the notable advances that have been made in the study of visual communication in digital technology and cognitive neuroscience. Overall, Scriptworlds creates new ways of thinking about world literature beyond the traditional rubric of nation, state and national language by examining language and literature through the lens of script, giving a more adequate account of what we call a ‘language’, and providing a more prismatic view of translation.

Creative Writing across Language-Difference in School: The Prismatic Workshops

Oxford Spires Academy (OSA) in Oxford is a comprehensive school with two special characteristics. One is its ethnic mix. OSA is the chosen school of Oxford’s many migrants: both the asylum-seeking families who come in from nearby Heathrow and Campsfield, and the ‘economic migrants’ who man the city’s huge hospitals and thriving car plant. The school has only about 25% White British pupils: the rest come from all over the world and speak more than thirty languages. Our second specialism is poetry: we annually sweep the board in national poetry competitions and we’ve made a Ted Hughes Award nominated radio documentary. Now we reach millions with our tweeted poems and we’ve had an anthology, *England, Poems from a School* (2018), published by Picador.

These two things are clearly related. Many of our best poets have another language at home. Very often, they went through a period of dislocation in their childhood when they lost their native language and, as one of my students once put it, ‘silence itself was my friend’. That locked-down period may be painful, but it feeds the inner voice. Many of the second language students also have a strikingly good ear for the musicality of English words. Perhaps this is because, in the same way that children can learn to speak a new language without an accent because their ears and brain are still open to all the sounds and rhythms of another speech, they are also especially able to hear and reproduce the sounds of English poetry.
I came to England from Nepal, when I was six years old, and although I had been learning English beforehand, it wasn’t until I lived here that I truly mastered the language. I still speak Nepalese every day at home, to talk to my mother. When I am translating something, I am amazed at how the tones, and how the word orders are so different. The message is still the same, but the stresses are at different destinations. Nepal is also geographically in the middle of many countries so it is a melting pot of languages, and therefore I can also converse in Hindi and Urdu. These tongues have such a vital presence in our culture. I also taught myself very basic Korean, Japanese and Mandarin because I enjoy connecting to people from different backgrounds and I love celebrating the beauty of their words. In school I have been learning German for five years, and this has reached a point where I can write better in German than in Nepalese! Earlier on, I think there were definite barriers between the languages (my prepositions still suffer to this day), but now they co-exist, and allow me to look through different specs, aiding me in my essays, writing, drama. Every language feels like a distinct part of my identity. It feels like wearing a different mask or a persona, every time I move from one to the other.

Mukahang Limbu, who went to school at Oxford Spires Academy, is a winner of the First Story National Writing Competition, the Out-Spoken Prize for Poetry, the Peregrine Prize for Young Writers and the Forward/emagazine Student Critics Competition.

Fig. 4 Mukahang Limbu (2018). Reproduced with his kind permission. Photograph by Helen Bowell (2018).
The shapes of the student’s mother language show through their English: that is part of their freshness and originality, in the way that passing a simple metaphor through Google Translate, and back again, may turn it into poetry. But the word ‘mother’ also matters: it is no coincidence that many of my best poets have at least one story-telling, poem-singing, non-English speaking, magical parent. When I started a Ghazal Club with Arabic-, Bengali-, Urdu- and Farsi-speaking students, and explained this ancient form, one of the Afghan girls said: ‘I didn’t know that ghazals were proper poems. I thought it was just something my mum knew.’ But her illiterate, brilliant, mother knew, as so many Afghan women do, how to use pictures and sound to tell a salty story, create comedy and set a memory, and she had passed that ability to her daughter, who passed it into English. We wrote some wonderful ghazals because the students were able to write as more themselves with their home tongues pressing in their mouths, their magical mothers at their shoulders.

Since working with Creative Multilingualism, we’ve been able to bring poets in those mother languages into school. Once a term we’ve brought in a home language poet to work with students who speak that language. So far, we’ve hosted Arabic, Polish, Portuguese and Swahili poets and the results have been amazing. The students find it exciting and liberating to work in their home languages and have often started writing and translating independently afterwards. The Arabic workshop was so successful that we have had to run extra ones. One Syrian student subsequently won the John Betjeman Competition, and Mohamed Assaf, who is twelve, has had his poems retweeted more than 10,000 times on Twitter. In the summer of 2017, we gathered the poems together into anthologies and launched them in a celebratory Festival of Poetries.

In 2018, there was an extra book at that Festival. Thanks to a grant from the Royal Society of Literature’s Literature Matters scheme, we were able to produce ‘The Young Person’s International Dictionary of Rare and Precious Words’. We collected students’ favourite words and phrases from home and encouraged them to write poems around them, like this example by Anton:
'Это не трамвай!'
This isn’t a tram!
My mother cries.
Закрой двери!
My mother says.
Shut the doors!

I imagine a tram. A tram
at the end of the line,
screching rusty tracks,
a soft wind filtering
its fading interior,
a metallic bulky haul
of emptiness.

This tram only stops
when the doors slam shut.
So this tram never stops.
And this tram has no more tracks.

Now our living room is full
of Russia.
And still, it is not a tram.

Anton Chrapovikiji (aged eighteen)

The finished volume includes a hundred words, and poems about them, from ‘Accomplishment’, through such rare and precious terms as ‘Bahī’, ‘Cham’, ‘Dīnlo’, ‘Hijāb’, ‘Lubīta’, ‘Marlet’, ‘Ogūk Szendelorz’, ‘Pronunciation’, ‘Raał’, ‘Trauma’, and ‘Vsst’, to ‘Zero’. There is never a shortage of languages. Recently, I ran a workshop with local primary school children and found that in a group of twenty, we had eighteen other languages in the room. I had to remind the only monolingually English-speaking child that everyone has a special language in their home — the one their mother uses, just for home. Her poem was one of the best.

The Prismatic Vision

The different facets of the ‘Prismatic Translation’ strand combine. Once you see that language is a continuum of variation, and that the
relationship between speech and script can be constructed differently, then you can understand why translation is inherently creative. It generates new meanings and can invent new words and fresh ways of putting them together. When you realize that, you can see why multilingualism and creative writing belong together in the classroom. Any speaker or writer of any language is operating in a landscape of prismatic diversity. When you express yourself through language, you find yourself among languages.

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*Prismatic Jane Eyre: An Experiment in the Study of Translations*, https://prismaticjaneeyre.org/


Find Out More


This anthology of poems written by multilingual schoolchildren at Oxford Spires Academy includes many that were produced during the prismatic workshops.

This ground-breaking collection of essays shows how research on writing systems can change how you think about language.

*Prismatic Jane Eyre: An Experiment in the Study of Translations*, [https://prismaticjaneeyre.org/](https://prismaticjaneeyre.org/)

Discover the prismatic world of translation through the many versions of *Jane Eyre*. The website includes interactive maps and other illuminating visualizations.


A popular introduction to translation which ranges across the whole field from conflict zones to poetry, and also lays the foundations of the prismatic view.


An in-depth presentation of the prismatic theory of translation, with case studies ranging from ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs to modern digital media.

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Research project on prismatic translation conducted as part of the Creative Multilingualism programme between 2016 and 2020. This chapter draws on that research.

**Credits**

Permission to include their contribution was kindly granted by the following:

Anton Chrapovikiji for the poem ‘это не трамвай!’.

articles/PMC4852309/. Research by Alexander Huth, Wendy de Heer, Thomas Griffiths, Frederic Theunissen and Jack Gallant. Visualizations created by Alexander Huth using pycortex software (http://pycortex.org) by James Gao, Mark Lescroart and Alexander Huth (Fig. 3).

Mukahang Limbu for the Language Life ‘Connecting to People’ and his photograph (Fig. 4).

Eleni Philippou for the Language Life ‘True to my Linguistic Reality’ and her photograph (Fig. 2).

Matthew Reynolds and Giovanni Pietro Vitali for the map showing the global distribution of translations of Jane Eyre, from the first one in 1848 to the present day, in Prismatic Jane Eyre: An Experiment in the Study of Translations, https://prismaticjaneeyre.org/maps/ (Fig. 1).