



## Introducing *Language(s) and (re)translation in a changing world*

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To say that our world is changing can be an understatement and an overstatement at once. The scale, pace, and impact of change in recent years would make it an understatement. The worldwide economic crisis, the proliferation of digital tools and social media, and the climate challenges in the early years of the new millennium culminated in the 2020s in a pandemic and the advent of what could be called ‘mass-AI’, i.e., open, ready-to-use artificial intelligence. The political upheaval, societal displacements, and cultural turns accompanying all these phenomena have created deep anxieties and all sorts of *malaises* in the people experiencing them. Radicalisation, social isolation, identity crises, and cultural wars have swept the (western) world in recent years. To many, this “age of accelerations” (Friedman) has seemed too fast paced and messy.

On the other hand, *panta rhei*. Change is the one thing that remains constant in the world, said Heraclitus over two millennia ago, making our initial adage an overstatement. Every human invention or idea brilliant enough to gain widespread support must have seemed just as daunting to the people facing it. The Industrial Revolution ushered in what Dickens described as “hard times” while advanced automation and post-WW2 societal shifts made Bob Dylan sing that times “are a-changin’”. To paraphrase poet Leonard Cohen’s introspective mantra, “I change, I am the same” (Gilmore), the world changes, the world is (still) the same.

What role do the humanities—language(s) and translation in particular—play in this changing, yet somehow unwavering world? Somewhat

ironically, mass-AI (embodied by OpenAI-modelled or -inspired products such as Chat GPT or Google’s Gemini), “a major disruptor” (Penet) and the main cause of uncertainty and concern within the language (services) industry and the humanities today, is based on *language*—large language models (LLMs) and natural language processing (NLP), to be more precise. In other words, language lies at the heart of what challenges language as an object of study and activity—from teaching and learning to research and translation. On the one hand, this shows, if one ever needed supplemental proof, the symbiotic intertwining of language and human experience. On the other hand, this rapid development and expansion of language-based generative AI is sure to bring about a “full-on reinvention challenge” (Friedman) in the humanities, whose first stages seem to be underway. This is already visible in the names of the numerous scientific events currently organized in the field, which either mention or allude to ‘change’ and ‘AI’<sup>1</sup>.

In his 2016 book *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist’s Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations*, Friedman suggests that pausing to reflect and “dynamic stability”—“you need to keep pedaling (or paddling) all the time”—or “innovation in everything other than technology” (n.p.) might be key strategies to surviving and adapting to this changing world. Approaching phenomena relevant to today’s research landscape—e.g. offline and online language hierarchies, humanist education, healthcare communication, AI tools in translation—while maintaining a foothold in the past and in human-centred perspectives—by discussing bible idioms or Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine the Great* in translation—, the papers in this *Linguaculture* issue are a small-scale effort to contribute to the reinvention challenge the humanities are faced with today.

This reinvention should include proactive (digital) planning and advocacy to protect linguistic diversity both online and offline, argues the opening contribution in the volume, Christian Mair’s “World Languages in Competition: The Digital Factor”. Highlighting two major trends in today’s global multilingualism—a steady decrease in linguistic diversity offline, and a

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<sup>1</sup>For instance, *The Changing Faces of Translation and Interpreting Studies* (2025 Congress of the European Society for Translation Studies), *Mastering the Machine: Shaping an Intelligent Future* (2025 World Congress of the International Federation of Translators), *Advancing Humanism through Language Technologies* (Language Technologies for All 2025 Conference).

selective, economically driven pattern of multilingualism online—the study notes the increasing dominance of English in the online world, due to digitalization, deepening language hierarchies and the new digital divides. As a way to “keep pedaling”, if we are to refer back to Friedmans idea of ‘dynamic stability’, Mair suggests taking active measures to implement policies that balance English’s global role and support the technological advancement of other languages.

The reinvention of (humanistic) education in this changing world should be based on a holistic approach, argues Laura Carmen Cuțitaru in her contribution, “Between Neuroeducation and the Humanities”. Contrasting what she calls the “atomistic”, relativist approach of the Anglo-American world—epitomised by the new “language coaching” methods of neuroeducation—with the classical revival happening today in European education, the paper argues that neither strategy is sufficient on its own. The former is too narrow while the latter is retrospective. To face the complex challenges of our time, an integrated approach combining both perspectives is, in the author’s opinion, “the only path to restore balance in minds, cultures, and societies”.

If ‘dynamic stability’ is the key to success in the future, Cătălin Nicolau’s contribution shows that dynamism has been shaping the way we perceive the world for a much longer time. Starting from the idea that what we think of as ‘reality’ is actually an intellectual construct that is historically contingent, “Dynamism in the 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Worldview and Linguistic Science” highlights how major scientific discoveries, like Einstein’s theories on gravity and spacetime, have transformed our understanding of physical reality, shaping all realms of human experience, including culture and linguistics. The author argues that dynamism in the ‘natural’ sciences, brought about by the newer insights on the expanding nature of the universe, has profoundly shaped our views of language in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as exemplified by Coseriu’s theory of language *as process*.

An example of language dynamism at work is given in the fourth contribution in this issue, “Gender Differences in the Use of Politeness Strategies by Iraqi Nursing Students in Patient Interactions”, signed by Marwa Muhammad Ahmad and Alaa Siddeq Khudir. Using Brown and Levinson’s politeness strategies framework, supplemented by newer insights into the relationship between language and gender, the paper presents the results of a

study on the interactions between 16 nursing students and 40 patients in a real-life healthcare setting in Iraq. This research carried out in a cultural area and language less investigated by mainstream (western) academia confirms previous theories (e.g. Holmes; Mills) on the relationship between politeness and gender. According to the study's findings, Iraqi male students prefer the more direct and unmitigated bald-on-record strategies while female students tend to favour negative politeness.

Echoing the current revival of classicism in European academia discussed in Laura Carmen Cuțitaru's contribution, Vira Kulibaba uses a "linguosemiotic" approach to study how biblical idioms have evolved and survived from Koine Greek to today's English through translation and successive recontextualization in several Bible versions and contemporary discourse. With the help of the new digital tools available to researchers (e.g., Google Ngrams), "Tracing the Sacred Tongue: Biblical Idioms from Greek Origins to the King James Version" shows that some idioms, like *the blind leading the blind*, have remained highly popular throughout their history, while others, like *to cast pearls before swine*, have declined in use and are nearly obsolete today.

Several solutions to the "full-on reinvention challenge" may be found in Corina Drobotă's reflection on "The Role of the Translator in the Digital Age". Adopting an optimistic view of the future and considering various aspects involved, like ethical considerations or the role of the translator as cultural mediator, the paper argues that AI should be seen as an "augmentative tool" rather than a translator substitute. To adapt to the new digital challenges, human-AI collaboration will become essential. This is why, Corina Drobotă maintains, education should include "training in post-editing, corpus building, prompt engineering, and ethical literacy", to ensure that the growing need of safeguarding meaning, cultural coherence, and ethical responsibility in an AI-powered translation environment is properly addressed.

Gathering its data just months before the start of the AI-revolution in November 2022, the translation market survey conducted by Yifan Miao, Patricia Rodríguez-Inés, Helena Casas-Tost in their contribution, "L2 Chinese-to-Spanish Professional Translation in China: A Study based on Job Advert and Survey Analysis", might serve as a valuable *before*-picture for an *after*-analysis on the impact of the new technologies on this particular industry sector. Miao et al.'s study shows that in the early 2020s Spanish-language translators were in

high demand in China, particularly for Chinese-to-Spanish projects. Most translations were handled by native Chinese speakers, though some companies employed native Spanish-speaking translators for revisions, and a significant portion of the translation work focused on financial and scientific and technical fields.

As a counterpoint to the ongoing discussion about technology and its reshaping of the world as we know it, the last two contributions in the volume are linked by their human-centredness.

Creativity and individual stylistic choices, both in English and in (human-made) (re)translations, are explored and showcased in Nadina Vişan's study "Altered Familiar Expressions in Romanian Retranslations of Roald Dahl's *The BFG*". The author identifies and analyses several "altered familiar expressions", i.e., English collocations or idioms creatively modified by Dahl in his children's book for humorous and stylistic effects, and discusses their translation in three published Romanian versions of *The BFG*—to which she adds her own creative solutions as well. Contrary to what previous studies on this matter have shown (e.g. Epstein), the paper suggests that Romanian translators tend to use replacement (equivalence) and retention (literal translation) as strategies of choice in the translation of these creative language units.

In "On the Shoulders of Giants: Retranslating Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine The Great* (Part I)", Oana-Celia Gheorghiu acts as a 'double agent', proposing a theory-backed analysis of her own retranslation of the famous Elizabethan play in contrast with the previous version, produced by Leon Leviţchi, a 'giant' of Romanian Anglistics. Paying homage to her "canon-building" predecessor's work, which succeeded in rendering the source text's rhetoric and high diction, the author confesses that her retranslation reflects a different approach, aiming "to be target-oriented and sensitive to performance value and psychological resonance".

Highlighting the complex interplay of change and continuity in language, translation, and academia at large, the papers in this *Linguaculture* issue address the complexities brought about by technological advancements as well as the influence of classical traditions and human creativity. To close the circle opened in the introduction to this editorial, the contributions in this volume show that efforts to achieve "dynamic stability" and reinvent the humanities are being made as we speak.

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