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# Introducing Creative Multilingualism

*Katrin Kohl and Wen-chin Ouyang*

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Creative Multilingualism is a manifesto. It signals that multilingualism is fundamental to the human condition and that we are all in some way multilingual — both in terms of talent and in terms of our daily ‘language lives’. It also points to the key role languages play as a creative force in our thought and emotions, our expression and social interaction, and our activity in the world — languages are a creative force in how we live.

This volume presents fruits of collaborative research conducted over four years across disciplines ranging from the humanities through the social sciences to the natural sciences. It is designed to illuminate how multifariously language diversity intersects with creativity, though the book is not intended to offer a coherent, watertight theory or closed set of findings. Rather, it is framed in exploratory terms, inviting further research. And it is a manifesto calling for change on two fronts:

- *Language* needs to be understood as intrinsically diverse — as *languages*. The entitlement of individuals and cultural groups to express themselves in their distinctive language must be supported as a fundamental human right, and must be nurtured as vital to the sustainability of the natural and cultural world.
- *Creativity* needs to be understood as intrinsically bound up with our capacity for linguistically diverse thought, expression and action. Languages are far more than communicative ‘tools’: they are creative. Language diversity and creativity are mutually enriching.

Our ten manifesto statements highlight interactions between language diversity and creativity. Over four years, these interactions have stimulated our joint research on Creative Multilingualism, taking us into different disciplinary fields, prompting us to try out new methodologies, and fuelling productive debate about connections between languages and creativity. The research was conducted in seven strands, and their work forms the basis for Chapters 1 to 7, which were written by the respective research teams. Each of these chapters has a particular disciplinary focus and associated methodological principles, suggesting new ways of seeing languages through the lens of creativity. The multiplicity of perspectives and approaches is reflected in diverse styles and modes of presenting the research. This pluralism reflects our belief that all academic disciplines have something distinctive to offer research on languages, and that creativity must be given full rein in academic research across the arts and sciences if we are to understand complex human processes such as languages, and creativity itself.

Who is this book for? It is dedicated to young people. A key reason for this is that young people are often sold short on language learning, particularly if emphasis in education is placed primarily on maths, sciences and technology. Especially in societies where the first language is English, language learning may seem unnecessary, so the advantage of knowing what is currently the most widely spoken language in the world often goes hand in hand with too little opportunity to develop language-learning skills ambitiously early on. The chief reason for dedicating this book to young people is that they are the future of our multilingual world. We would like them to embrace human diversity through languages, and we hope that our research will enhance appreciation of the deep connections between language diversity and human creativity.

Our book is also intended for fellow researchers, teachers in schools, universities and the wider community, and more generally for anyone who is already interested in languages, or who would like to find out more about them. This includes parents, who will in any case be taking an interest in their children's linguistic development. We hope our research will encourage them to give their children every possible access to more than one language and, if the home is bilingual, to exploit that opportunity to the full.

This book is a manifesto promoting language diversity as a human advantage and human right. As such, it is addressed to policymakers, especially in the field of education, but also more broadly with respect to multilingualism in our societies. Diversity of languages needs to be supported as a rich source of creativity in the arts, and recognized for its vital importance in the sciences. Creative Multilingualism is an experiment in interdisciplinary research in which each project demonstrates the role of languages at the creative heart of human endeavour. By placing the focus on the connection between language diversity and creativity, we seek to demonstrate that beyond their communicative usefulness, languages also sustain and enrich thought, literacy, social cohesion, the creative arts and scientific engagement with sustainability.

We are passionately committed to promoting language diversity in research. It is therefore a severe shortcoming of our volume that it is currently available only in English — the language that threatens linguistic pluralism in our present world more than any other language. The rationale is contextual, strategic and practical.

The pertinent contextual factors are that English is the only shared language of the research team, the research was funded by a UK research council in response to a call focused on modern languages in the United Kingdom and primarily addressed in an Anglophone context, and our most immediate audience are Anglophone readers. We are therefore using English as the most wide-reaching lingua franca for our volume, while also addressing the specific roles of lingua francas in relation to other, often more local languages (see Chapter 10 in this volume).

The key strategic objective is to engage readers whose Anglophone context can make it difficult to see beyond an Anglo-centric view of the world, and establish the many benefits and pleasures of embracing language diversity, discovering one's own existing multilingualism, and learning languages. The medium is therefore English, but the examples we discuss are from a very wide range of languages, elucidating the riches beyond individual linguistic comfort zones.

The chief practical impediment to multilingual dissemination is our staff capacity and budget since translation into many languages would vastly overstretch our resources. However, in order to enable and encourage dissemination in other languages, we are making the content

of this volume freely available under a Creative Commons licence (CC BY) that permits translation without special permission so long as the original authors are appropriately credited. We would be delighted if our collaborative project inspired many other researchers to take up our ideas and extend their communicative possibilities in their own linguistic environment.

Our research has been conducted in a variety of contexts that have taken us beyond universities, libraries and laboratories. We have been working with a wide range of partners across society who have helped us to identify fruitful research questions and fields of investigation, contributed to events for the wider public, and helped us to communicate our findings in ways that make sense not just to other researchers but also to people who may hitherto have had little occasion to think about what makes languages so fascinating. The concept of Creative Multilingualism has provided a matrix for experimentation with ideas, approaches and methods. We hope you will want to join us on our journey of discovery.

## What is Multilingualism?

‘Multilingualism’ is usually defined in contrast to ‘monolingualism’ and refers to speech communities that use more than one language, as is typical of most parts of Africa and India, for example. An individual who is a member of such a speech community, or who has learned languages to a high level, is also ‘multilingual’, though in the case of their using two languages, they are usually referred to as ‘bilingual’. A further term that has come into use is ‘plurilingualism’, which places less emphasis on a high level of linguistic attainment in the respective languages and is often taken to embrace intercultural competence (see e.g. Mehmedbegovic and Bak 2019 for a brief discussion of the terminology). There is fluidity in the use of these terms, which causes some controversy in the context of sociolinguistic research and at the interface between academic discussion and popular usage. However, it also points to a fluidity within language diversity that requires both acknowledgement and further investigation.

We have placed the term ‘multilingualism’ at the centre of our research on the grounds that it reflects the fluid interplay between language

varieties which is intrinsic to human communication. Our understanding of the term is rather more open than the above definition would suggest, and it is not our concern to establish firm terminological boundaries separating it from ‘monolingualism’, ‘bilingualism’ or ‘plurilingualism’. The purpose of this project is to explore the multilingual potential we all activate to a greater or lesser extent in the course of our lives even if we live in a ‘monolingual’ environment and see ourselves as using only one language.

In order to appreciate this, it is worth taking a step back to consider what we mean by ‘language’. This abstracts a generic phenomenon from the multitude of languages people actually speak. We can only access it via theories about it — no one knows or speaks ‘language’. When we think of ourselves as using ‘language’, we are in fact always sharing the communicative practices of a particular community. What we experience, learn and use in our lives is a particular language — or more than one — which is culturally specific, and part of the very lifeblood of the community or communities we grow up in. It is one of many languages, and diversity is built into it.

We can see this in the fact that languages typically have many dialects (such as Scouse in England or Bavarian in Germany) and many registers (such as formal and informal, ‘high’ and ‘low’). And if you dig deeper, you find that every professional group develops its own jargon, and perhaps even its own grammatical shortcuts. Languages evolve through time, absorbing and responding to changing material and cultural conditions that shape our lives, so different generations speak differently. Young people or other particular groups may wish to establish their identity as distinct by using a distinct vocabulary and/or pronunciation and special grammatical features that other groups may consider ‘incorrect’. New technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) or games such as *Dungeons & Dragons* may swiftly generate communities that develop words and ways of speaking which are partially incomprehensible to other people.

What this tells us is that we’re all equipped to learn new languages, and happy to do so if the social need or personal incentive arises. And if we observe how we use language(s) in our daily lives, we find that the way we speak or write is highly flexible and changes depending on who we are talking to — Gran, friend Dave, toddler Rosie, the rather

formal boss, the dog, the laptop that has just crashed. Emails and social media give us written evidence of the phenomenal speed with which we adapt our language to new contexts and communication practices, and the extent to which we vary our usage according to who we're communicating with. When emojis became standard on mobile phones in 2010, a type of pictogram invented in Japan in 1997 — *e* (絵, 'picture') + *moji* (文字, 'character') — suddenly became a globally utilized feature of communication that few of us would now want to do without.

Creative Multilingualism is a provocation to think of language not as typically homogeneous, monolithic and unified, but as intrinsically diverse — languages.

## Language Lives

We all have complex 'language lives' that evolve out of our heritage and life experience. If we go far enough back, our family will have migrated to where it now lives. Few families live in one place without at some point embracing people from other regions, countries or continents, for example by marriage. Many families speak a different language at home to the language that is spoken where they live, study or work. At school we may learn one or more languages, even if only to a very modest level, and we may have classmates who are from different parts of the world. At work, or when we go shopping, or visit a hospital, we generally encounter people who speak different languages — though they may do so only at home and in their communities. When we travel, we experience different linguistic worlds. Each encounter with someone speaking a different dialect or language subtly contributes to our 'language life' — be it because we're fascinated by it, manage to learn even just the odd word, become interested in the cultural context it gives us access to, or suddenly realize what it feels like to be in an alien environment.

In this chapter and some of the others in the volume (see Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 9), we have included 'Language Lives' — reflections by individual people on what role languages play in their own personal lives, on biographical circumstances that have shaped their knowledge

*Language Lives*

## A Place for Languages

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

Today I cannot but think with gratitude of Krishnashankar Pandya. For if I had not acquired the little Samskrit that I learnt then [age twelve], I should have found it difficult to take any interest in our sacred books. In fact I deeply regret that I was not able to acquire a more thorough knowledge of the language, because I have since realized that every Hindu boy and girl should possess sound Samskrit learning.

It is now my opinion that in all Indian curricula of higher education there should be a place for Hindi, Samskrit, Persian, Arabic and English, besides of course the vernacular. This big list need not frighten anyone. If our education were more systematic, and the boys free from the burden of having to learn their subjects through a foreign medium [English], I am sure learning all these languages would not be an irksome task, but a perfect pleasure. A scientific knowledge of one language makes a knowledge of other languages comparatively easy.

Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* [1927–1929], trans. from Gujarati by Mahadev Desai (2007: 32).



Fig. 1 Mohandas K. Gandhi in South Africa (1906). Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gandhi\\_London\\_1906.jpg#/media/File:Gandhi\\_London\\_1906.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gandhi_London_1906.jpg#/media/File:Gandhi_London_1906.jpg)

and use of languages, and on their attitude towards languages. In the present chapter we have also included the 'Language Lives' of a London bus, and food. These language stories are intended to exemplify the highly individual nature of language and the many ways knowledge and use of languages intersect with the experiences, circumstances and situations that make up our lives. This individual dimension matters. It can be easy to assume — especially in an environment which views monolingualism as the norm — that the language(s) we have a command of are simply a function of the community or country we grow up in. But the Language Lives make clear that languages are much more alive and individual than this would suggest. It is worth reflecting on one's own language life, the linguistic diversity within it, and the value of the distinctive linguistic richness that has come about through biographical circumstances, personal interests — and serendipity.

Attending to the linguistic diversity that is at work in our daily lives and encounters, and valuing that diversity, is especially important in countries where the national language is English, since its dominance as the main global lingua franca is otherwise liable to become a means of repressing others, and impacting negatively also on cultural diversity. It can also significantly impoverish English speakers, who are increasingly in a very different position from those growing up in other countries. Whereas people living in other countries have an increasingly strong incentive to learn at least English, and thereby the skill of learning a foreign language, it's difficult for speakers of English as a first language who live in an Anglophone context to muster the energy, time and sheer hard work required to learn another language, especially since it isn't self-evident which one might be most useful, and a mobile device can conjure up a translation in seconds. For policymakers in English-speaking countries, investing in language education will tend to seem less of a priority than it is in countries where the need to learn at least English is obvious. This in turn generally leads to under-investment in language learning.

What are the effects of monolingualism for the creativity of speakers of English as their only language? How does it affect their language lives? Will they lose out on mental and cultural flexibility by comparison with their more multilingually and multiculturally trained competitors? And what about future-proofing — do we know that the

## Sharing Languages in India

Sheela Mahadevan

My parents moved to the UK from India in 1979 and I grew up in Kent. After a BA in French and German and a masters in German, I trained as a teacher and lived for three years in India teaching French and German at an international school. This gave me the opportunity to regularly visit my elderly grandparents, and allowed me to witness their multilingualism, and how it affected their lives.

My grandmother begins her day chanting Sanskrit prayers for worship, after which the local maidservant will arrive to clean the flat. The maidservant speaks the regional language, Kannada, spoken in Karnataka, though this is not our mother tongue. Within seconds of completing her prayers, my grandmother is conversing as well as she can with the maidservant in Kannada, which she actually learnt from her. She then talks to my grandfather in Tamil, before switching on the TV to watch a film in Malayalam, to reconnect with the language of Kerala, where she lived during her youth.

Then there'll be a knock on the door from the neighbours, who are North Indians, and my grandmother starts chatting to them in Hindi. Then she'll chat to me in English, or in Tamil, or a fusion. Sometimes she wants to watch a TV programme which is in another South Indian language, Telegu, and she tries to learn this by watching the programme. My grandfather operates on a similar basis, and added to this is his knowledge of French, as he used to live in Pondicherry, a former French colony. Not a day goes by without my grandparents operating multilingually; it is part and parcel of their lives, and is common for many Indians.

*Sheela Mahadevan is Head of French at a school in Greater London.*



Fig. 2 Sheela Mahadevan with her grandparents, Ganga Narayanan and Guruvayur Krishna Narayanan. Reproduced with their kind permission. Photograph by Subramaniam Mahadevan (2020).

world will *always* prefer global English to other lingua francas? The story of Latin suggests perhaps not; Latin gained massive influence as the Roman Empire extended its reach, became the lingua franca of the Catholic Church and the Western learned world right through to the seventeenth century, but then lost out to the vernacular languages. French then took over, becoming the language of diplomacy and polite society, and a key colonial language that is still enormously influential, for example in Africa. English only just outcompeted German to become the main language of the United States, and the basis for its now global influence was laid by British colonialism. But as Asia has asserted itself economically and politically, non-European languages have been coming to the fore. In 2013, Prime Minister David Cameron urged the British to ‘look beyond the traditional focus on French and German and get many more children learning Mandarin’, and in 2018, Chinese A-Level entries overtook German ones in the British school system (Stacey and Warrell 2013; Allen-Kinross 2018). In fact, it’s likely that many of those entrants have come from China, or grew up with Chinese as their first language. Chinese speakers have become increasingly enterprising about learning at least English and often other languages as well. They are therefore likely to be getting better equipped multilingually, and more competent multiculturally, than speakers of English as their first language. And while Chinese may not be prominent on the Internet seen in Europe and the US, the Internet available to Chinese people is increasingly powerful. So it’s not just fanciful to think that as power relations change, English might one day — potentially within our lifetime — lose its status as the (only) global lingua franca.

Lingua francas are, in any case, only one side of the language story. They are convenient for exchanging practical information across language groups and local contexts, and they fulfil a vital role in international communication in all fields and for all purposes. But there has never been a time when everyone has shared a single lingua franca. And when used as a lingua franca, a language is often divested of its local colour, idiomatic quirks and creative richness in order to be more broadly comprehensible. Moreover, languages are not just about conveying practical information, and their value is not just defined by communicative convenience and international power. If that were all, the Welsh, Scots and Irish would happily have abandoned their languages

long ago and confined themselves to English as the lingua franca that has long prevailed across the British Isles. The reason they haven't done so is because their distinctive languages are a fundamental part of their specific cultural identities and sense of themselves as cultural groups, and their individual sense of identity. Languages evolve with the groups and individuals that speak them, and passing them on to the next generation is crucial for sustaining collective knowledge and understanding of the group's heritage. Sharing a language sustains community building and audibly distinguishes the speech community from other groups — a principle that underpins the creation and standardization of national languages as much as it can motivate twins or friends to invent a private language that no one else understands.

Each one of us has their very individual 'language life'. It's made up of who we talk to at home, at school and at work; where we grew up and where we live; what language community we belong to; who we love, live with and meet; our educational opportunities and experiences; where we travel and how much we want to open ourselves to other language communities; and, not least, our own language choices. Each of these aspects holds creative potential which we can activate.

We tend to think of this only in terms of the language qualifications we have — or more likely those we don't have, the skills we failed to develop and the knowledge we've forgotten. But this is to ignore that our languages are part of us, ready to play a tiny role or a big one, highly complex when they're the language we have grown up with and the one we use every day, and restricted if we have not learned them to a high level and don't have much opportunity to practise them. They shape and express our emotions, our ways of conceptualizing the world and our relationships with other people. Through the language we grow up with, we will already have become familiar with a multitude of other languages that have contributed words at different points in the history of that language — rich potential that is waiting to be explored. And we will have learned to select different words, structures and often even pronunciations depending on the situation we are in and who we are talking to. Our individual language life began when we were in the womb, and it developed with phenomenal speed as we grew up and became active in the world. And it is part of us now, waiting to be enriched.

## The Language Life of Bus 29

Wen-chin Ouyang

I rarely hear Queen's English on Bus 29. Everybody speaks Global English peppered with diverse accents, words and grammatical constructions they bring to it from the other languages they know. Most of the passengers Bus 29 picks up and discharges as it winds its way through London from Trafalgar Square to Wood Green through the West End, Camden Town, Finsbury Park and Haringey speak more than one language.

They switch with ease from one language to another depending on their audience. A Turkish young professional argues with a French colleague in English between Warren Street and Camden Town. The bus picks up his friends at Manor House. He speaks to them in Kurdish. A mixed English-French couple have it out with each other now in English and then in French all the way from Holloway Prison to Seven Sisters Road. Algerian men, Syrian women, Iraqi families and Saudi youths talk to each other on the bus, or to friends on their mobiles, in different varieties of spoken Arabic on their way to the popular Turkish and Kurdish kebab restaurants on Green Lanes' Grand Parade, to eat there or pick up a take-away for their families. A young Polish mother gets on at Manor House. She coos to her baby daughter in Polish. Her mobile rings. She answers. She speaks English to the phone.

Life on Bus 29 is an adventure in multilingualism, a microcosm of the Global City of London. London is a meeting place for people, their ideas, stories and languages from around the world. The city is multilingual, and so are many of the people who live there or come for a visit. Multilingualism is integral to the fabric of London's soundscape, and to the patterns of communication and thinking among Londoners and their guests. Languages coexist and do their work as a means of communication side by side, and together.



Fig. 3 London Bus 29. Photograph by mattbuck (2012). Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London\\_Buses\\_route\\_29#/media/File:Camden\\_Road\\_railway\\_station\\_MMB\\_05.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Buses_route_29#/media/File:Camden_Road_railway_station_MMB_05.jpg)

If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.

Attributed to Nelson Mandela, explaining why he learned Afrikaans, the language of his prison guards in South Africa (Garamendi 1996: vi).

## The Creative Potential of Multilingualism

We might say that creating something is to make something that wasn't there before. The creative act may be associated with an individual urge to make an original artefact that leaves a unique footprint. But creativity may also be more experimental and playful than this suggests, and connect the individual with others more fluidly — performance is a case in point. If we consider the interplay between languages and creativity, it becomes clear that the creative potential and creative forces at work in, with, and through languages are complex and infinite, and they affect every aspect of an individual's or group's interaction with the world.

Creativity is above all about process, and a spirit of change and transformation. These are dimensions that tend to get lost in definitions. To take just one example, the editors of the useful essay compendium entitled *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity* (Kaufman and Sternberg 2010) contend that 'the first step to understanding creativity is to define it', and their starting point is that 'a creative response is novel, good, and relevant' (p. xiii). The problem with this definition is that it kills creativity stone dead. And is it even true? Immediately, examples of creativity spring to mind that fail to meet at least part of the definition. Moreover, it seems focused above all on a product.

Creativity doesn't lend itself naturally to definition — unsurprisingly, perhaps, since definitions are concerned with establishing stable features, setting identifiable boundaries and taking the object of investigation out of the flux of time. Creative Multilingualism therefore takes a different starting point. It seeks to keep the process in play in the course of exploring tangible, concrete works. Moreover, it celebrates the impetus for expression and communication that connects individuals with the community, forges a sense of common purpose in joint enterprises and events, and generates creative energy in different types of performance.

We speak many languages with each other, and when we think and feel, these languages interact. Dialogue is at the heart of linguistic creativity. The ideas, meanings and performances that come into being during linguistic creativity are as alive as their creators, and they are continually in flux, both generative and transformational. Each of the research projects discussed in this volume has evolved its own understanding of what Creative Multilingualism generates, what it means and what effects it has. Each will therefore investigate the nexus between creativity and languages on its own terms and with its own particular approach and methodology, contributing distinctive facets to our collective understanding of how Creative Multilingualism works.

One might object that this doesn't allow Creative Multilingualism to be tested, measured, verified or falsified. An answer might be that the proof of the creatively multilingual pudding lies in the eating. The purpose of Creative Multilingualism is above all to provoke questions, stimulate discussion and allow the value and excitement of languages to be experienced live.

*Language Lives*

## The Multilingual Life of Food

Wen-chin Ouyang

Languages evolve through time in specific cultural contexts. They are personal and communal, regional and/or national, local and/or global. They connect with identities and arouse passionate feelings of cultural allegiance. We can see all these processes at work in the language of food and 'cuisine' — a word introduced into English in the late eighteenth century that reflects the admiration of sophisticated French cooking among the upper classes. Different languages have their own names for foodstuffs such as flour, rice, bread or eggs, and many dishes stay local. But some travel across cultures together with their names.

Yorkshire pudding started life as 'dripping pudding' before it became associated with a particular region and then advanced to the status of a British national dish while retaining the regional name. Unlike *rosbif*, though, it hasn't travelled much beyond the British Isles — perhaps because of its local name. In fact a controversy erupted in 2018 over a *New York Times* recipe for a 'Dutch baby' — supposedly of German origin but actually a Pennsylvania Dutch creation from around 1900. Brits claimed it

as ‘their’ Yorkshire pudding — though it was recommended for ‘breakfast, brunch, lunch and dessert’ (Morrissy-Swan 2018).

Dishes migrate with their eaters and their names, and globalization has increased the range especially in cities. It would not make sense to translate couscous, falafel, hummus, kebab, ramen or spaghetti into English. Each of these words denotes not only a food item but also a dish prepared with a particular recipe and traditionally consumed within a specific cultural context that comes with occasions and conventions for serving, and that may be associated with particular table manners, religious beliefs and even politics.

Couscous refers to small grains of crushed durum wheat semolina as well as the North African party dish served with a meat stew. The recipe may vary from region to region but it is habitually served at social gatherings such as family reunions when members of the family and their guests sit around the elaborately presented dish and enjoy it together. Falafel (fried chickpea and parsley balls or patties) and hummus (a dip made from chickpeas, sesame paste and lemon juice garnished with parsley and olive oil) are two Eastern Mediterranean side dishes that have become a popular stuffing and spread for sandwiches everywhere in Britain, Europe and North America. Their already diverse Mediterranean recipes have picked up even more flavours and colours along their global travels.

In Israel/Palestine these dishes are today subject to competing claims. They are Palestinian dishes, Palestinians would say. No, Israelis will retort, they’re staples of Israeli cuisine. Kebab, the familiar grilled meat, originates in the Middle East, where it is only eaten in restaurants. It marks the special occasion of a family outing. Ramen and spaghetti are both noodle dishes but Japanese ramen is served in a clear soup while Italian spaghetti is eaten with a variety of cream or tomato-based sauce. Their names in the language of the people who first invented them evoke our experience of the dishes as both food (how they look, taste and smell) and culture (when, where and how they are prepared, served and consumed). Translations can rarely convey the fullness of our experience.



Fig. 4 Ramen with soft boiled egg, shrimp and snow peas. Photograph by Michele Blackwell (2019) on Unsplash, <https://unsplash.com/photos/rAyCBQTH7ws>

The following points give an insight into some of the ideas that have generated fruitful discussion in the course of our research.

- Every language is interconnected with the thought patterns, perceptual habits and environment of its speech community, creating a window onto the world that differs subtly from that opened up by any other language, and providing a medium for creating understanding of that point of view.
- Each speech community develops the vocabulary it needs to describe and create the world around it, giving linguistic prominence to the things it is most concerned with. Moving between languages and translating between them opens our minds to different ways of seeing the world, and creates new meanings.
- Languages evolve in creative interaction with their natural environment, and in this process they become an essential part of that environment's preservation. A language that identifies local species, and gives each one a distinctive place in its vocabulary, myths and religious beliefs, becomes a living resource for curatorial expertise and provides an invaluable basis of experience in creative husbandry.
- A language has distinctive morphological, phonetic, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic parameters, but it is also always in flux and without intrinsic boundaries. This gives speech communities immense scope for drawing on other languages in creative ways by borrowing, translating and adapting. And they can be equally creative in evolving new forms, positing difference from a linguistic neighbour, and defining standards that resist the processes of change. An analogy that springs to mind is that of each language being like a garden, offering the potential for trellises, fences, and a burgeoning wealth of weeds and herbs, vegetables and flowers, shrubs and trees.
- Languages can take many forms. Spoken words, written texts, sign language, picture language, facial expression, gesture and voice can play an important part in conveying meaning. Diverse cultures develop different genres and media, with

each one opening up new creative possibilities, as is evident in graffiti, literature, theatre, film, social media.

- We are aware of language death — this normally comes about because the members of the speech community have sadly died out. What is less obvious is when a new language comes into being. In the contexts of conquest, colonialism and global migration, mixing of peoples also brings mixing between languages. ‘Hybrids’ such as Hinglish may seem like impure, inferior forms that have no distinctive status. Yet all our languages have emerged as people have migrated — and the ‘fusions’ of today may be the languages of tomorrow. ‘English’ as we know it wouldn’t exist if Anglo-Saxon hadn’t gradually mingled with Norman French. Hybridity offers considerable creative potential because people can manipulate and exploit the wider range of linguistic possibilities that become available.
- We learn languages in interaction with learning to think, articulate our feelings, and do things with others. We are continually processing language we have never heard before in quite that constellation, and learning the new words that are coming into our language every day. Language learning is therefore part of what we do throughout our lives, whether or not we think of ourselves as language learners. Some people enjoy experimenting with artistic forms of creative learning while others prefer to keep their eye on practical goals. But creativity is always part of it, whether you’re a linguistic trapeze artist, linguistic football player or linguistic cook.
- Each language has evolved with a distinctive toolkit for innovation in its processes of word formation, its sound system, handling of gender, number and tense, its syntactic structures, conventions of oral use and — in literate communities — its conventions of writing. Each speech community therefore has distinctive options for responding creatively to the world. We can conclude from this that no language is intrinsically more important than any other — each contributes distinctive creative potential and offers our joint planet distinctive creative solutions.

## Researching Creative Multilingualism

Creative Multilingualism is the concept that connects and shapes the research presented in the following chapters. It highlights the interconnection between language diversity and creativity, and provides an experimental space for investigating the creative processes that make languages what they are, inspire their speakers to generate new expressive forms, and contribute to learning languages. Creative Multilingualism is designed to explore how creativity works across the whole spectrum of language production, expression and learning, focusing on specific questions from the perspectives of different disciplines. These disciplines traditionally approach languages with different presuppositions, methods and toolkits. The research presented here has been developed in a process of collaboration, discussion, debate and exchange of ideas between the researchers and with partners beyond academia. And it has involved working closely with people from many countries, age groups and walks of life. For Creative Multilingualism is above all about people talking to each other across cultural groups — communicating ideas, sharing what matters, and evolving new ways of thinking and doing things.

**Ten Manifesto Statements** form the start of the book, and each one is picked up as a key theme in one of the subsequent ten chapters.

**The Creative Power of Metaphor** (Chapter 1) looks at processes of figurative language in the interplay between thought and language from the vantage point of cognitive linguistics, exploring how different languages give their speakers different perspectives on the world through the ways metaphors shape even the most fundamental concepts, such as time.

**Creating a Meaningful World: Nature in Name, Metaphor and Myth** (Chapter 2) uses the linguistic and cultural resources of the Ethno-ornithology World Atlas (EWA) and draws on comparative and historical linguistics, anthropology and biology to investigate the creative processes at work as linguistically diverse communities respond to the natural world through naming, metaphor and myth.

**Not as 'Foreign' as You Think: Creating Bridges of Understanding across Languages** (Chapter 3) deploys methods from historical and experimental linguistics to examine how speakers of one language

manage to understand people speaking another (related) language, identifying strategies they use to create meaning in response to the ‘other language’ — and strategies with which they create barriers to understanding in order to preserve a distinctive identity.

**A Breath of Fresh Air... Ivan Vyrypaev’s *Oxygen* (2002): From Moscow to Birmingham via Oxford** (Chapter 4) investigates interaction between languages in the performing arts — theatre, stand-up comedy, grime, rap, hip-hop — and the types of creativity this generates in response to cultural contexts and audiences, drawing on media and performance studies, and working with artists ranging from Russian dramatists to Black British and British Asian musicians from Birmingham and Leicester.

**Multilingualism and Creativity in World Literature** (Chapter 5) explores multilingual literatures to critique current theories of world literature, and investigates how drawing on more than one language in writing and reading generates new ways of seeing and understanding.

**Prismatic Translation** (Chapter 6) develops an innovative theory of translation that captures its creative dimension. The metaphor of the ‘prism’ enables translation to be seen not in terms of functional equivalence but as a release of multiple signifying possibilities. This idea is put into practice through literary critical research into the many translations of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, and into the importance of different scripts (e.g. Chinese, Arabic, alphabetic) as a factor in translation; we also use the approach to inspire creative writing in schools.

**Getting Creative in the Languages Classroom** (Chapter 7) draws on empirically based methodologies in the field of Second Language Education to consider creative alternatives to the prevalent emphasis on language learning for functional purposes, investigating the extent to which they may enhance foreign-language acquisition in schools and beyond.

**Inspiring Language Learners** (Chapter 8) showcases work with schools in creative writing workshops and the Multilingual Performance Project (MPP), exploring the energy languages can bring to classroom work when they provide a context in which it’s OK just to have fun with languages, encourage experimentation with new expressive resources, and build confidence with linguistic diversity.

**Languages at Work** (Chapter 9) looks at the role languages play in working contexts. It examines how increasing your linguistic flexibility and learning languages extend your communicative and cultural range in ways you can deploy for career purposes; and how glimpses of careers in which people use foreign languages tell us something about what makes languages valuable personally, culturally, professionally and financially — sometimes all at once.

**Creating Languages** (Chapter 10) sets out on a journey of discovery, homing in on some key questions concerning the interplay between creativity and languages, and finding out what motivates language inventors to create an artificial language such as Esperanto and equip mythical folk such as Elves and the Dothraki with distinctive languages. It further considers the extraordinary linguistic inventiveness that allows us to create and appreciate language play, such as puns.

**Works Cited** are given at the end of each chapter and listed also at the end of the book in a comprehensive bibliography. The end of each chapter additionally offers suggestions for further reading in **Find Out More**, with all the suggestions also appearing at the end of the book. More information and resources can be found at our Creative Multilingualism website.

**Why Learn a Language?** forms the conclusion of the book. Building on the ten Manifesto Statements, this section offers some concrete reasons why it's worth spending time and effort learning a language.

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## Find Out More

**Bilingualism Matters. 2020.** <http://www.bilingualism-matters.ppls.ed.ac.uk>

Founded by Antonella Sorace, Bilingualism Matters is a research and information centre on bilingualism based at the University of Edinburgh. The initiative has spread across the world, and its mission is to work with a wide range of partners to research, support and promote bilingualism.

**Creative Multilingualism. 2020.** <https://www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk>

This website represents the research that underpins the content of this volume. The research was conducted by the authors between 2016 and 2020 and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC, part of UK Research and Innovation) in the context of its Open World Research Initiative (OWRI). The website includes the projects conducted by the seven research strands (see Chapters 1 to 7) and further sections with blogs, resources and reports on conferences and public engagement work, some of which is presented in Chapters 8 and 9.

**Creative Multilingualism. 2020a. *LinguaMania: The Podcast*,** <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/series/linguamania>

This series of eight podcasts was made by the Creative Multilingualism team. It explores connections between languages and creativity, and opens up a wide range of perspectives on language learning.

**Crystal, David. 2010.** *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*, 3rd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

David Crystal's depth of insight into everything to do with language and languages is unsurpassed, as is his talent for making complex research accessible. This book offers an invaluable point of entry on fundamental questions concerning languages.

**Jones, Rodney H. (ed.). 2016. *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Creativity* (Abingdon: Routledge), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315694566>**

A volume that presents current research on the relationship between language and creativity in various disciplines, including sections on literary creativity, multimodal and multimedia creativity, and creativity in language teaching and learning.

**Kharkhurin, Anatoliy V. 2012. *Multilingualism and Creativity* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters).**

This valuable study examines theoretical approaches to the connection between multilingualism and creativity, offering useful discussions of relevant research on both areas as a basis for presenting empirical evidence and educational applications.

**Maher, John C. 2017. *Multilingualism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198724995.001.0001>**

An excellent overview of the topic with a wealth of interesting facts and thought-provoking comments on multilingualism as a feature of the human condition. The final section on revitalization concludes with the view that 'indigenous is the new cool'.

**Marsh, David, and Richard Hill. 2009. *Study on the Contribution of Multilingualism to Creativity: Final Report, Public Services Contract no EACEA/2007/3995/2*, [http://www.dylan-project.org/Dylan\\_en/news/assets/StudyMultilingualism\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://www.dylan-project.org/Dylan_en/news/assets/StudyMultilingualism_report_en.pdf)**

A European Commission study which sets out to establish the scientific basis for the claim that multilingualism — understood as the ability to engage with more than one language in everyday life — contributes to individual and collective creativity.

**Martin-Jones, Marylin, Adrian Blackledge and Angela Creese (eds).** 2012. *The Routledge Handbook of Multilingualism* (Abingdon: Routledge), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203154427>

This collection of essays provides a stimulating insight into a complex field of research, taking account of social, cultural and political angles and contexts. It is aimed at postgraduates and many of the essays are specialized in focus, but it also offers good scope for browsing.

**Mehmedbegovic-Smith, Dina, and Thomas H. Bak.** 2020. *Healthy Linguistic Diet*, <http://healthylinguisticdiet.com/>

An engaging project based on an analogy between physical and mental health, showcasing evidence that using two or more languages has lifelong benefits for cognitive development and well-being.

**Project MEITS, Heather Martin and Wendy Ayres-Bennett (eds).** 2019. *How Languages Changed My Life* ([n.p.]: Archway).

Stories that illuminate how languages have shaped the careers of individuals from many walks of life, including writers and musicians, politicians and activists, teachers and students, scientists and sportspeople.

**Singleton, David, and Larissa Aronin (eds.).** 2018. *Twelve Lectures on Multilingualism* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters), <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788922074>

A collection of thought-provoking essays on key topics currently being pursued in research on multilingualism, aimed at undergraduates and postgraduates.

## Credits

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

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