



Many languages may be speaking their last words

BY ANUSHKA ANAND AND APURVA KRISHNAMURTHY

As English continues to globalize and be prioritized over other languages, language isolates are left behind. Many communities lose a part of their culture as younger generations forfeit a link to their heritage and identity.

"Languages tell you about culture and act as the memory of older generations," freshman and Shanghaiese speaker Cindy Tao said.

There are over 7,000 recorded languages spoken in the world today, about 35% of them being endangered. A language dies when its last known speaker dies. According to the Language Conservancy, nine languages die every year.

Some languages die out quickly when small communities are wiped out by disasters. El Salvadoran speakers of the indigenous Lenca and Cacaopera languages abandoned their languages to avoid being identified as natives after a widespread massacre in 1932. The Dunser language of the Papua region in Indonesia has only a handful of remaining speakers after flooding in 2010 devastated the Dunser village.

"The Cherokee tribe had a written language which was wiped out in an attempt to Americanize," Clark said.

In the digitalized age, online or televised content tends to cater to society's most prominent languages. Children in multilingual homes are often exposed to the most dominant language media from their area, making them more accustomed to the dominant languages during a crucial age of language development. As this content does not favor indigenous languages, populations lose familiarity with them, especially with the most integral parts such as colloquialisms, making it harder to pick up native languages later.

Colonialism is one of the leading causes of linguistic endangerment in areas with large indigenous populations. Historical emphasis on assimilation and suppression of indigenous languages promoted attitudes of cultural superiority, as proficiency in European languages was viewed as prestigious and could further oneself in a colonized society.

With the globalization of English came English schools, using styles of instruction in English throughout Asia and non-English speaking European countries. Younger generations begin to lose proficiency in their native dialects as English is placed at a higher importance. "Historically, languages have really been a political issue because they're such a powerful tool," Clark said.

Immigrants often prioritize learning English to bring more economic success to future generations.

Many second-generation U.S. immigrants do not speak their native language fluently because it is more economically and culturally beneficial to speak English. However, elderly speakers of a language are often left behind in rural communities, holding on to the fleeting traces of the language as others begin to forget it.

"It's sad because we can see languages disappearing for newer generations," Tao said.

Preservationists have been working to revive endangered languages as these languages are closely linked with regional or ethnic identity. For instance, Hebrew died out as a colloquial language in the 2nd century but was revived in the 19th-20th century. The language was continued through religious mediums as well as used in scholarships causing it to come back in prevalence. Now, it is the first language for many in Jewish countries.

Languages that are considered "dead language" are often commonplace within academia. Many high schools and higher education institutions offer classical languages such as Latin, Greek and Sanskrit despite the former two not having any native speakers. The efforts have proven influential in reinvigorating these languages as there are roughly 25,000 native Sanskrit speakers and such education promotes the culture and furthers the language into future generations.

Preserving languages maintains long-standing cultures. Spoken words are linked with values and traditions which can be passed down through generations, which enable speakers to connect with older generations. As speaking languages connect a person to their nation's history, it also gives the speaker a sense of personal identity. When languages are lost, a part of a culture is lost.

"You lose the language, the history and an understanding of the people," Clark said. "Then the whole world just becomes too homogenized. The diversity makes a richer world."

84.4%

of Lynbrook students grew up in a multilingual household

80.9%

speak their parents' native language

53.8%

speak their parents' native language fluently

According to a survey of 202 Lynbrook students

Bilingual or bye-lingual?

BY LILLY WU AND EILEEN ZHU

As multilingualism continues to shape the world, the ability to speak more than one language has become an increasingly valuable asset. The benefits of learning a new language range from improved cognitive function to enhanced cultural understanding and global communication. As such, the pursuit of linguistic mastery is a worthwhile endeavor, regardless of an individual's age or background. Lynbrook students and teachers have embraced the benefits of learning a new language.

Spanish

Sophomore Paula Begonia immigrated from Venezuela to California in 2021. As a native Spanish speaker of 16 years, she faces her own set of challenges when fusing two languages into her day-to-day life. At times, she struggles to navigate her own identity when trying to adapt to communicating with different people.

"It was hard to feel like I was a part of something because there's not a lot of Hispanic people here at school," Begonia said. "Sometimes I feel like I'm translating a word that I know the meaning of but just can't find the written word. People make comments about my pronunciation. It's sad because they usually don't know about all the effort others are putting in."

French

French teacher Denise Schang exemplifies how learning a language goes beyond putting words and grammar together.

"I always tell my students not to stress over pronunciation or making mistakes, because at the end of the day, what's most important is for one to understand the culture," Schang said. "What's great about learning a new language is that you challenge your own thoughts and broaden your perspective."

She cultivates a deeper understanding of French among her students.

"Instead of limiting another person to just their accent, recognize this person is being exposed to two cultures as there is so much to learn from each other," Schang said.

Chinese

Until 2015, sophomore Riley Dowdell attended an international school in Shanghai before moving to California. At this school, he spoke English with the rest of the students, who all came from different countries all over the world. Within eight years, he picked up parts of the Chinese language by taking classes everyday at school.

Despite forgetting much of the Chinese language, he remembers the customs and cultures that were exhibited in his International school.

"We had uniforms so it was a cultural shock for me when I went to the states," Dowdell said. Their cafeteria food was definitely much better in China and classes were a lot stricter."

Japanese

When Jeremy Kitchen was in high school, he was enthusiastic to leave his hometown and travel somewhere new and exciting. Due to the influences from his Korean friend, he decided on South Korea as his destination. After finding out the option was unavailable, Kitchen found himself in Japan, which opened up a new chapter in his life.

Kitchen can often relate to his students and understand their struggles when learning the language.

"We actually have a mistake counter in my classroom where my students keep track of my mistakes, and it really helps me realize that while I am teaching my students, I am also learning along with them."

lost in translation

Words aren't enough: exploring limits of translation

BY ASHLEY HUANG AND SUSANNA TANG

"Tsumdoku" is the Japanese word that describes the habit of ambitiously buying books but letting them pile up unread. Uniquely expressed only by this language, the word holds Japanese cultural connotations that are unable to be precisely translated to other languages. Likewise are multitudes of untranslatable words isolated by linguistic and semantic barriers. The hazy diction of translated text is often left unnoticed and can stifle fluent and authentic communication or complete appreciation of secondary literary works.

"A huge fraction of how text communicates is context," UC Davis English and Comparative Literature professor Joshua Clover said. "As soon as you translate, you're moving the word or phrase into a new context. As soon as the context changes, the connotation gets really difficult to preserve."

Attempting to understand every language is undoubtedly impossible, making translated literature unavoidable and crucial to education. Dramatic differences in cultures and tones of each language pose challenges to both translators and readers alike. Each word holds a unique definition, connotation, allusion and aesthetic value in its original language — when translated, at least one of these formal features must be sacrificed to preserve another. Translators must choose what to sacrifice, while readers must fill in the blanks.

Of the most common factors that interrupt precise equivalent translations are cultural, historical, linguistic and environmental differences.

"Language is the backbone of a culture," sophomore Athreya Iyer said. "Language not only serves as a source of pride for cultures, but it also serves as a way through which cultural folktales are passed down through generations."

Language is culture and culture is language; the homology between the two creates distortion in one when the other is removed. Chinese idioms that remain frequent in daily conversation strongly represent this concept; they originate from classical Chinese fables — each idiom retells its respective fable in often four concise

characters. "井底之蛙" (jǐng dǐ zhī wā) is a well-known idiom used to criticize someone with a closed mind. Direct translations render this phrase as "frog in the bottom of a well," disregarding all meaning and context. Merely examining its definition and translation, one would be unaware of the fable from which the idiom emerged from — a large aspect of its aesthetic value. Sacrificing any of its general features may debilitate the original beauty and message of Chinese literature.

"Untranslatability often comes from deep-seated cultural meaning that is understood by everybody in the culture where it originates, but otherwise has to be explained at some length in a paraphrase," Stanford University Comparative Literature Professor Roland Greene said.

Direct translations may also erase historical context. "Whakapapa," a word in Māori, most commonly spoken in New Zealand, encompasses the idea that people are connected to their ancestors and the land they come from. In Māori history, natives have used whakapapa to trace their ancestral connections, allowing them to assert their rights and claims to land. This word is not only deeply rooted in the history of New Zealand but is also important to Maori identity and culture.

Linguistic differences can also challenge precise translations between languages; one example can be shown by comparing possession in English and French. The English language uses possessive nouns, while the French language uses passive voice to show possession. For example, an English speaker may say "the cat's collar," while a French speaker may say, "le collier du chat," which directly translates to "the collar of the cat." The lack of possessive contractions in French makes French text almost always longer than English text. French possession represents just one of many language-specific grammatical rules that pose challenges to translators.

Environmental factors may also contribute to the lack of direct translations between languages. The vocabulary of Inuktitut — a language most commonly spoken throughout colder countries such as northern Alaska, Canada and Greenland — encompasses many words used to describe different types of snow. A few examples include: "ᓆᓆᓆ" (qanik), meaning fresh, falling snow; "ᐱᓆᓆ" (aput), meaning soft, powdery snow; and "ᓇᓆᓆ" (pukak), meaning snow with a layer of ice on top. Each

Would you rather read literature in its original language or the language you are most familiar with?



language is uniquely influenced by their own environmental factors, so none can convey direct translations for Inuit snow vocabulary, as these words are only central to Inuit daily life.

"Of course, it's possible for the English language to create words with the exact same denotations and connotations as words from other languages," Zhuang said. "But the spread of new words from a niche creation into everyday use is very much a culturally contingent matter — oftentimes there won't be enough people using the word for it to be embedded into the common English vocabulary."

To mitigate the inevitable impact of translation in literary works, some languages have adopted words or phrases from others to preserve linguistic and semantic authenticity. "Déjà vu," a familiar French term used to describe the feeling of having already experienced a current situation, is frequently used across different cultures. By using the French term, people are able to evoke the term's concept without having to lose connotation or conciseness.

"Nothing has a perfect translation," Clover said. "It's more important to feel the experience that the writer and translator are both constructing, rather than focusing on understanding everything. The experience encapsulates both meaning and emotion."

Because literary works are published in a limited number of languages due to accessibility, translations are thus valuable for providing analysis for education. Nonetheless, due to the loss of authenticity, translations may not precisely convey the same meaning as original pieces.

To address this phenomenon, many of Lynbrook's literature teachers incorporate short lessons and research projects before beginning reading units to immerse students into the cultural and historical context of the literary pieces. This allows for more efficient analysis and helps students better understand the author's intent and message behind particular details in the book.

Although there is importance to understanding the context of a text, literature should be appreciated by the experience that authors and translators construct, rather than small imperfections of translations.

"All translations are imperfect," Greene said. "We must embrace this imperfection and make the translation a part of the art."

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