

# Reimagining Language Justice Through the Art of Translation

Cristina Viti (Translator and Activist), Rosa Mucignat and Sanja Perovic (Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures), with contributions from a broad network of poets, translators, performers, publishers, and language activists, including collaborators from Tenement Press, Francis Boutle Publishers, and others.





## PROJECT SUMMARY

*Reimagining Language Justice Through the Art of Translation* brought together poets, translators, publishers and activists to explore how language shapes power, identity and resistance. Led by Cristina Viti with collaborators Rosa Mucignat and Sanja Perovic, the project responded to the erasure of minoritised languages and the constraints of institutional language by creating spaces for dialogue, poetry and co-translation.

Rooted in the idea of “activist translation,” the programme addressed language injustices across a range of contexts—from marginalised UK languages like Cornish, Gaelic, Welsh, Scots and BSL, to the experience of navigating migration and bureaucracy. Through 11 drop-in sessions and a two-day conference, participants exchanged ideas and creative practices across generations and activist traditions.

The project revealed translation as both political and relational, while also exposing tensions between academic structures and activist urgency. Supported through the Activist-in-Residence scheme, the team now hopes to build on this work with further workshops and publications exploring language justice as a collective and creative force.

## HOW DID THE PROJECT COME ABOUT?

The project grew out of a previous collaboration on the AHRC-funded *Radical Translations* project, which explored the role of translation in revolutionary-era activism. Building on this work, Cristina Viti, Rosa Mucignat and Sanja Perovic developed *Reimagining Language Justice* to focus on contemporary issues of linguistic oppression, translation as activism, and the politics of multilingualism. The aim was to create space for dialogue between academics, artists, and grassroots communities around the everyday realities of language injustice.

The team was particularly interested in how language functions as a form of political domination—whether through the suppression of minority languages, the imposition of bureaucratic jargon, or the marginalisation of migrant voices. Cristina’s experience as a translator and interpreter in both literary and public service contexts brought a grounded, activist perspective. Together, the team developed a programme that would foster dialogue across academic, artistic, and activist spheres, using collaborative translation workshops and public events to explore how language justice can be reimagined from the ground up.



## WHAT HAPPENED?

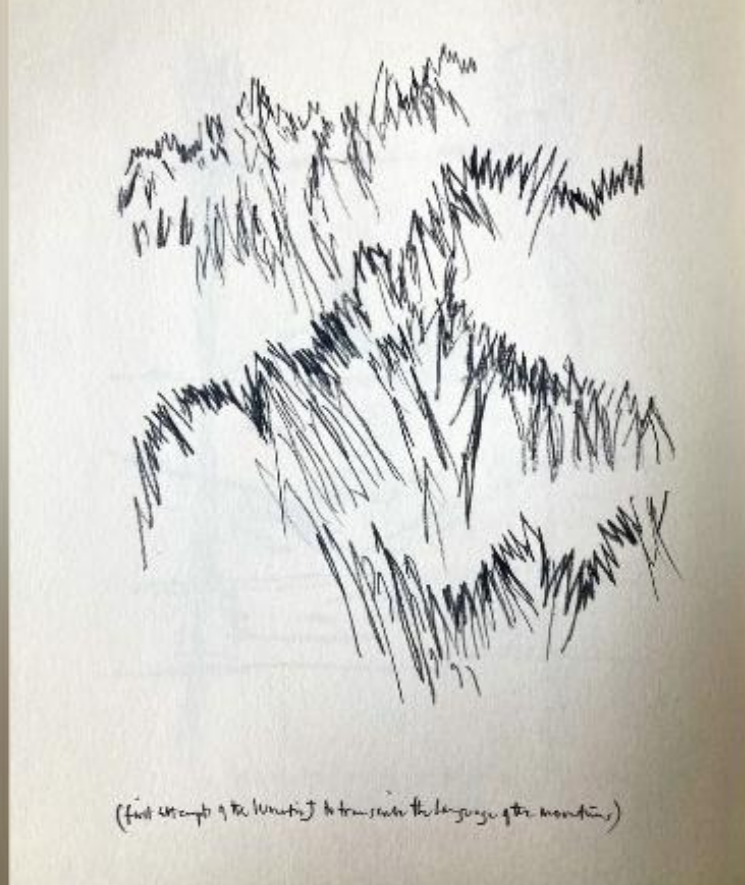
The project unfolded through two main strands: a series of 11 drop-in sessions titled *Translator in the House*, and a two-day public conference, *Reimagining Language Justice*. Together, these activities created space for deep, collective reflection on the politics of language and translation.

Cristina Viti hosted the drop-in sessions at King's, welcoming students, translators, publishers, academics, and community members into an open and informal environment. Participants brought a wide range of experiences and texts—sometimes literary, sometimes personal—and used these to spark conversations about multilingualism, minoritised languages, and everyday encounters with language injustice.

The conference built on these dialogues, bringing together more than 50 in-person and online attendees, including poets, interpreters, cultural organisers, publishers and language justice advocates. It showcased work across Cornish, Romani, Gaelic, Welsh, Scots, British Sign Language, and other languages, blending academic panels, multilingual poetry readings, musical jam sessions, and workshops.

The events revealed both the richness and the complexity of working across languages, generations, and activist traditions. There were also real-world challenges—technical difficulties, last-minute speaker changes, and the constraints of hybrid delivery. But these moments became part of the learning process, prompting important questions about who has access to language, space, and institutional support. The project used these challenges to model a more relational, creative and care-based approach to impact.

The events were rich in dialogue, and they also revealed challenges—including limited technical support, hybrid format issues, and tensions between institutional timelines and activist modes of organising. These moments became opportunities for reflection on how language justice is shaped not just by content, but by the conditions under which people gather, speak, and listen.



## WHAT WAS THE PROJECT'S IMPACT?

The project created a unique space for reflection, dialogue and creative exchange around language, power and justice. For participants—many of whom work in minoritised languages or across activist and academic contexts—it provided rare opportunities to connect across disciplines, generations and geographies. Feedback from attendees highlighted the value of hearing underrepresented languages spoken, performed and debated in public spaces, and several participants expressed a desire for the work to continue in the form of a festival or publication.

Students and early career researchers involved in the drop-in sessions described the experience as energising and eye-opening. Cristina Viti's presence as Activist in Residence was cited by academic collaborators as transformative, offering a radically different model of engagement that contrasted with institutional norms and inspired new ways of thinking about impact.

The project also surfaced important tensions—between academic timelines and activist urgency, between different generations of organisers, and between single-issue and transnational approaches to language justice. Rather than smoothing over these differences, the project created space to engage with them openly. These moments of honest exchange deepened participants' understanding of the complexities involved in collaborative work, and highlighted the importance of creating inclusive, responsive environments where diverse voices and approaches can coexist.

The collaborative and multilingual nature of the project also helped spotlight voices often marginalised in mainstream cultural spaces. By including languages such as BSL, Romani and Cornish, the project challenged dominant ideas of linguistic legitimacy and showcased the creative vitality of these communities. Several participants spoke about how the experience changed their relationship to their own language(s), offering both validation and renewed pride. For some, it was the first time they had encountered others working at the intersection of translation, activism and poetry—sparking new connections and ongoing conversations.

## THE TEAM'S TOP TIPS FOR IMPACT

### 1. Create open, flexible spaces for participation

Not everyone engages in the same way. Combining structured activities with open-ended discussion allows people to bring their own experiences, ideas and creative practices into the room.

### 2. Work with people, not just outputs

Prioritise relationships over deliverables. Impact grows through trust, collaboration and mutual respect—not just through events or publications.

### 3. Embrace complexity

Impact work often brings together people with different backgrounds, priorities and politics. Rather than avoiding difficult conversations, create space for honest, respectful dialogue. This can lead to deeper, more meaningful outcomes for everyone involved.

## Translator in the House



Attention translators! This term you have the opportunity of discussing work in progress or any ideas, concerns, doubts related to translation at weekly drop-in sessions with professional translator and A&H Activist in Residence Cristina Viti. Open to students and researchers interested in the technical aspects of translating, career and editorial advice, and practice-based insights on the art of translation.

All welcome, no need to book.

**When:** Wednesday afternoons 2-4pm

**Where:**

**OCTOBER 2 – 9 – 16:**

**BUSH HOUSE (SE) 2.03**

## FURTHER READING

- Rebecca Gould and Kayvan Tahmasebian (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Activism* (Routledge, 2020)
- Mona Baker, *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account* (Routledge, 2006)
- Cristina Viti, *Note di Traduzione / Translator's Notes* (2019) – see below

### TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

1. To watch from within the interplay of systems compared.
2. To pursue lucidity in logging differentials & connections.
3. Natural language : skin & nerves to the body of reality.
4. To tend the live body of reality flayed of its song each day.
5. Delicate attention, detail against dictate, conscious choice.
6. Writing as craft, as festive dialogue. Warm honey of work.
7. Sharp ear, connected view: process-text vs. word-product.
8. Not rendering—surrendering to the text's breath & voice.
9. Surrender on strict terms: tone & rhythm, melody, form.
10. A proportion where accuracy : readability = warp : weft.
11. Text & translation as two sails: same course, same speed.
12. A pathway on the sea wept by the stone of sealed harbours.

*Cristina Viti, summer 2019*

This project was funded by an AHRC Impact Acceleration Account hosted by the Faculty of Arts & Humanities at King's College London, and supported by the Faculty's Impact & Knowledge Exchange team

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