Translating Crises
Language as a social determinant of health
Overview

- Risk communication
- Social determinants of health
- From Equality to Equity
## Overview

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Crisis: a terminological note

For Sellnow and Seeger (2013: 4-20), three conditions must be present for a situation to be considered as a crisis: the situation violates social expectations of daily routines.

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3. requires responses

Crisis: a terminological note

For Sellnow and Seeger (2013: 4-20), three conditions must be present for a situation to be considered as a crisis: the situation

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• (1) violates social expectations of daily routines
• (2) poses threats
• (3) requires responses
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“Lack of integration, lack of participation, lack of access to information represent vulnerabilities for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.” (O’Brien and Federici 2019: 131)


Risk communication

“During public health emergencies, people need to know what health risks they face, and what actions they can take to protect their health and lives. Accurate information provided early, often, and in languages and channels that people understand, trust and use, enables individuals to make choices and take actions to protect themselves, their families and communities from threatening health hazards.” (WHO 2017)

Crisis Translation

In emergencies and crises, the confines between written, oral, or multimodal modes are narrower.
Crisis Translation

In emergencies and crises, the confines between written, oral, or multimodal modes are narrower.

CATCH IT
Sneeze, sneeze, sneeze always cover your nose or mouth.

BIN IT
Throw away for at least 72 hours or as soon as possible.

KILL IT
Wash your hands as often as you can.
Crisis Translation

In emergencies and crises, the confines between written, oral, or multimodal modes are narrower.

“Translation” is therefore here intended as any form of linguistic and cultural transmission of messages that enables access to information during an emergency, regardless of the medium, the channel, and the format.
Crisis Translation

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Different means of communication are considered: multiple solutions are required.
Crisis Translation

Different means of communication are considered: multiple solutions are required at different times.

Videos with accessible formats. Audio in Central Arrernte and EN subtitles, from Australia.

Leaflet, Tagalog, Philippines.

For refresher, intensive courses, OpenWHO, Yorùbá.

Translation can be used to inform of hazards beforehand...
Social determinants of health

Language and health access
Social determinants of health: Language inequality

- Linguistically: all languages are equal in potential
- Socially: not all language users are equal
- Culturally: some varieties are more powerful than others
- Racially: systemic discrimination affects language choice and language use, from choice of register, to language choice
- Legally: some languages are used in law making and they become standards in specific geographical areas
- Economically… obvious
Institute of Health Equity, London, UK
Institute of Health Equity, London, UK
Social determinants of health

- ‘Income and social protection
- Education
- Unemployment and job insecurity
- Working life conditions
- Food insecurity
- Housing, basic amenities and the environment
- Early childhood development
- Social inclusion and non-discrimination
- Structural conflict
- Access to affordable health services of decent quality’
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Social determinants of health: language position

• American Association of Applied Linguistics (AAAL) in the USA recommended a form of advocacy for language phenomena in healthcare communication to be studied in relation to their role as a social determinant of health.

• “Why is it critical that our profession [applied linguists] advocate for renewed attention to language in health care, not merely as a demographic marker, but arguably as one of the most significant (and yet underexplored) social determinants of health in underserved linguistic minority communities?” (Showstack et al., 2019: n.p.)

Social determinants of health impact

**Education**
100% low-education groups are at higher risk of health problems

**Communication**
Lack of cultural and language-appropriate communication increases risks

**Incidence**
Most deprived areas have double mortality rates on Covid-19 than least deprived areas


Social determinants of health impact

“One submission reported the remarks of a junior doctor working in intensive care:

“Language barriers for people who can’t speak English, especially when you can’t say if you’re in pain or short of breath, can have a huge impact.”

For migrants, requirements to show passports when seeking care and information passing between the NHS and the Home Office has created a significant barrier to accessing even emergency healthcare.” (Lawrence 2020: 10)

Social determinants of health impact

• ‘Black, Asian and minority ethnic people face significant barriers to accessing healthcare. These barriers include a lack of cultural and language-appropriate communication; not being taken seriously when presenting with symptoms; a lack of clinical training on the presentation of different illnesses across communities; and the ‘no recourse to public funds’ rule which prevents migrants accessing state assistance. Black, Asian and minority ethnic people are also under-represented across the senior leadership of the NHS.’
(Lawrence 2020: Executive Summary)

• Sewell’s Report on UK Racism: let’s stop using BAME

Take-aways from these premises

1. Language is one of the social determinants of health; communication strategies depend on it.

2. Inequalities are often compound (poverty, health, discrimination, marginalization, and so on): acting only on one factor is not a solution.

3. Importantly, linguistic inequality begins to be considered and its role is tangible as lack of access to crucial information has cascading effects.
Emergency plans and language policies

Positioning language service provision: from terminologists, to translators, interpreters, signers, and language-related professionals
Risk communication

**STATUTE**

**Civil Contingencies Act 2004**

**Emergency Plans**

**HM Emergency Response and Recovery**

**Emergency Preparedness**

**Language policy**

**National policies**

**Local policies**

**Training on plans**

**PRACTICE**

**Awareness of language needs**

**Signers, interpreters, translators**

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PRACTICE

Awareness of language needs

Signers, interpreters, translators


Crisis translation in action?
Cultures and information

The COVID-19 outbreak (unfortunately) has offered examples of all the reasons for efficient risk communication of hazards in public health.
Cultures and information

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- **Political**
  - e.g. number and choice of languages

- **Socio-cultural**
  - e.g. disproportionated impact on minorities; trust in government
Cultures and information

The COVID-19 outbreak (unfortunately) has offered examples of all the reasons for efficient risk communication of hazards in public health.

- **Political**
  - e.g. number and choice of languages

- **Socio-cultural**
  - e.g. disproportionated impact on minorities;
  - trust in government

- **Linguistic**
  - e.g. sign language;
  - subtitles;
  - pictograms for low-literacy audiences…
Cultures and Infodemic

- Translations in over 500 of the 6,000(+) regularly spoken languages
- [https://endangeredlanguagesproject.github.io/COVID-19/#QXJhZ29uw6lz](https://endangeredlanguagesproject.github.io/COVID-19/#QXJhZ29uw6lz)
Crisis Translation for risk communication

Illustrations from COVID-19 response in the UK
Culture and infodemic

A devolved approach? The UK
• Public Health England (23 March): 10 languages including Welsh, plus easy read EN and WL
Culture and infodemic

The non-sensical UK approach

- Public Health England (23 March): 10 languages including Welsh, plus easy read EN and WI
- Public Health Wales, API (Recite.me): machine translations
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- Public Health Agency Norther Ireland: 11 languages including Irish (90 with browsealoud)
- Public Health Protection (Scotland): 11 (including BSL, EN easy read and audio)
- Doctors of the World for the UK (23 March): 43 languages
- Doctors of the World for London: 61 languages

f.m.federici@ucl.ac.uk
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Local authorities also had a range of community-specific options.
Socio-linguistic spectrum


Socio-linguistic spectrum

Socio-linguistic spectrum

Crisis communication
Machines, trust, and accessibility
Coronavirus (COVID-19)

All of Wales is at alert level 4.

You must:

- stay at home
- work from home if you can
- wear a face covering where required
- wash your hands regularly
- stay 2 metres from anyone you do not live with

From 20 February, 4 people from 2 households can exercise together outdoors (not in private gardens), under 11 year olds and carers are not counted in the maximum of 4.

Self-isolate if you or anyone in your household has symptoms.

If you have symptoms get a test.
Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Tutto il Galles è a livello di allerta 4 🆙.

Devi:

- resta a casa
- lavora da casa se puoi
- indossare una copertura per il viso dove richiesto
- lavarsi le mani regolarmente
- stai a 2 metri da chiunque non vivi

Dal 20 febbraio, 4 persone di 2 nuclei familiari possono esercitarsi insieme all'aperto (non nei giardini privati), i minori di 11 anni e gli accompagnatori non vengono conteggiati nel massimo di 4.

Isolati se tu o qualcuno nella tua famiglia lo avete fatto sintomi 🆙.

Se tu hai sintomi fai un test 🆙.
Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Tutto il Galles è al livello di allerta 4.

Devi:
- resta a casa
• lavora da casa se puoi
• indossa una mascherina piuttosto che una copertura per il viso
• lavati le mani regolarmente
• stai a 2 metri di distanza dalle persone non vivi
• esercitati all'aperto (non nei giardini privati)
• i minori di 11 anni e gli accompagnatori non vengono conteggiati nel massimo di 4.
• isolati se tu o qualcuno nella tua famiglia ha avuto sintomi.
• Se tu hai sintomi fai un test.

Sexual innuendo: "if you did it"
What can we expect for low-resourced languages and rare language combinations?
What can we expect for low-resourced languages and rare language combinations?

Answer: Inequality
Coronafeirws (COVID-19)

Mae Cymru gyfan yn lefel rhybuddio 4.

Rhad:

- aros gartref
- gweithio o garthref os gallwch
- gwisgo goruchudd wyneb lle bo gofyn
- golchi eich dweyo’n rheolaidd
- aros 2 ffrth wrth unrhyw un na ydych yn byw gyda nhw

O 20 Chwefror, gall 4 o bob person o 2 awydd o ymmyrder corff gyda’i gylydd tu allan (nid mewn gerddi preifat). Nid yw plant dan 11 oed a gorfeywynt rhwng y cyfrifi a’r wyaelfosom o 4.

Hwnnw yw nysig os oes gennych chi neu unrhyw un yn eich cartref symptomau

Os ydych cael symptomau yna cael prawf.
From inequality to equity

Linear, cyclical, spiraled, vectoral: provided it happens!
Let’s make it the last pandemic

“Recommendation VI.
Invest in and coordinate risk communication policies and strategies that ensure timeliness, transparency, and accountability, and work with marginalized communities, including those who are digitally excluded, in the co-creation of plans that promote health and wellbeing at all times, and build enduring trust.” (Independent Panel Report, 2021: 59)

"When a woman who didn’t speak English arrived at the overrun emergency room of a Brooklyn hospital last week, she was initially placed in a unit for patients who didn’t have the coronavirus. But on Thursday, a doctor realized she had a cough and fever and should be treated for COVID-19. The doctor brought her over to the coronavirus unit with a warning: 'Good luck. She speaks Hungarian.' She died the following night. A medical resident who treated her believes she would have gotten better care if she spoke English."

Hard choices

“When they asked what language” he said, ‘I spent five minutes just yelling: ‘Hungarian! Hungarian!’ And they were like, ‘Spanish?’”

The woman may have died even if she spoke English, but the episode and others like it demonstrate how those who speak a foreign language are at a disadvantage in New York City’s chaotic and crowded hospitals. “It takes 10 minutes of sitting on the phone to get an interpreter, and that’s valuable time when you’re inundated,” the resident said.

“So this utilitarian calculus kicks in. And the patients that are most mainstream get the best care’.”

What about MT?

• “On 30 December 2019, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission issued two urgent notices to hospital networks in the city about cases of pneumonia of unknown origin linked to the Huanan Seafood Market. […] On the morning of 31 December, Chinese business publication Finance Sina reported on one of the notices issued by the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission. […] A machine translation of the Finance Sina report was published on the website of the Program for Monitoring Emerging Diseases (ProMED).”

(Independent Report, 2021: 22)
What about MT?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Statement</th>
<th>Translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“You can take over the counter ibuprofen as needed for pain.”</td>
<td>Armenian: “You may take anti-tank missile as much as you need for pain.”</td>
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| “Your Coumadin level was too high today. Do not take any more Coumadin until your doctor reviews the results.” | Chinese: “Your soybean level was too high today. Do not take anymore soybean until your doctor reviews the results."
| “Do not blow your nose or put pressure on your facial fracture.”                  | Chinese: The character chosen for blow is more commonly used in relation to “the wind blowing” Farsi: “Do not explode your nose because it could put pressure on the break in your face.” (Taira et al. 2021) |

What about MT?

• “The important implication of our study is that, despite recent reports of improvement in accuracy and the suggestion that GT has a role for use in the clinical setting, we found that GT accuracy varies substantially by language and is not yet a reliable tool in the clinical setting. Even for languages in which the accuracy is high, there is still the potential for important inaccuracies and the potential for patient harm”

Language inequity

• Translators and interpreters operate in the socio-linguistic ecosystems of specific societies

• Visibility and invisibility of translators and interpreters is an extension of existing language dynamics and attention to society to its complexity

• Lack of signers, interpreters, and translators reflect social inequalities and shows how language is a SDH
Equity
Custom tools that identify and address inequality

Justice
Fixing the system to offer equal access to both tools and opportunities

Take-aways

Vulnerabilities are created by culture and society

Perception of risk is culture- and language-specific

Risk communication in health-related contexts must consider linguistic diversity to achieve health equity
INTERACT Recommendations

1. Emergency management communication policies should include provision for translation and interpreting and should be regularly reviewed and revised.

2. A specific owner of the policy on translation and interpreting should be identified and assigned within organizations responsible for emergency communication policy and implementation.

3. Emergency management communication policies should be developed in consultation with relevant multilingual and multicultural communities.

4. Emergency management communication policies should cover all phases of crisis and disaster management (mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery).

5. Emergency management communication policies should consider languages spoken by affected communities (including sign language), levels of literacy, and cultural appropriateness.
INTERACT Recommendations

6. Alternative formats and channels for dissemination of translated information should be considered – not just traditional written or spoken formats.

7. Emergency management communication policies should allow for two-way communication between responders and affected communities.

8. Ensure training is provided for professional and volunteer translators and interpreters so that they can effectively operate in crisis and disaster settings. Also ensure training for users and managers of translation and interpreting services.

9. Establish direct lines of communication between emergency responders and professional associations of translators and interpreters for the purposes of collaboration.

10. Recruit into multilingual organizations who are responsible for aid or emergency response in such a way as to avoid reliance on international *lingua franca* and *ad hoc* or convenience translation and interpreting.