

# Final Report

On the Symposium

## Language and Migration: Experience and Memory

Held by the Migration Lab, Princeton University  
and The Study Group on Language and the United Nations

April 19 - May 1, 2021

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NOTE: The following report is based on notes taken by the rapporteurs in relation to the symposium and does not necessarily represent the exact comments of the participants or speakers.

## 1. Introduction, Program Overview, and Attendance

This year’s annual symposium of the Study Group on Language and the United Nations, held jointly with the Migration Lab of Princeton University, took on a new form, as so many conferences have over the past year, given the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic. The symposium was held online, with presenters recording and uploading their paper presentations to be viewed in advance, followed by abbreviated presentations during a designated time slot, to allow for moderated question and answer discussions. The symposium took place over six days, spaced across two weeks, convening scholars, humanists, social scientists, fieldworkers, policymakers, artists, and writers to think together about migrants as resourceful users, interpreters, and creators of language. The present report on this year’s symposium, with the topic *Language and Migration: Experience and Memory*, includes summaries of the keynote addresses, paper presentations, and other conference sessions.

This year’s symposium reached 525 attendees (counted as unique viewers, of 1,052 total registrations) from upwards of 300 institutions, in 52 countries, on 6 continents. The list of attendees’ countries is displayed in the table below.

Austria	Finland	Lebanon	Saudi Arabia
Belgium	France	Malaysia	Somalia
Benin	Germany	Netherlands	South Africa
Brazil	Greece	New Zealand	South Sudan
Bulgaria	Hong Kong SAR	Nigeria	Spain
Cambodia	Hungary	Norway	Sudan
Cameroon	India	Pakistan	Sweden
Canada	Iraq	Paraguay	Switzerland
China	Ireland	Philippines	Turkey
Colombia	Italy	Poland	Uganda
Cyprus	Japan	Portugal	Ukraine
Denmark	Jordan	Romania	United Kingdom
Egypt	Kuwait	Russia	United States

## 2. Welcoming Remarks

**Humphrey Tonkin**, *Chair, NGO Committee on Language and Languages*, and **Esther Schor**, *Co-Director, The Migration Lab, Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies (PIIRS)*, opened the symposium with welcoming remarks to attendees, thanked presenters and

organizers, and reflected on the topic of language and migration. Tonkin noted that “language is frequently taken for granted, a kind of appendage to this or that interaction or organization,” but that the premise of the present symposium is that “language is utterly central,” such that “the choice of language can often exclude, rather than include.” The question of language in migration situations, whether forced or voluntary, is an essential consideration for the UN, as well as other national, international, and local bodies.

Given that this year is the 25th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights and the 15th anniversary of the Girona manifesto, “a succinct and aspirational version of the original Declaration,” Schor (PIIRS) presented the key points of the Girona manifesto: “Linguistic diversity is a world heritage that must be valued and protected. All individuals learn to speak, in the heart of a community that gives them life, language, culture, and identity. It is desirable for citizens to have a general knowledge of various languages because it favors empathy and intellectual openness and contributes to a deeper knowledge of one's own tongue. The translation of texts, especially the great works of various cultures, represented a very important element in the necessary process of greater understanding and respect among human beings. The media is a privileged loudspeaker for making linguistic diversity work and for competently and rigorously increasing its prestige. And finally, the right to use and protect one's own language must be recognized by the United Nations as one of the fundamental human rights.”

Considering these statements and aligned with the topic of language and migration, Schor emphasized that “the language rights of migrants, rather than of territorial communities, will be our primary concern.” The COVID-19 pandemic has stolen (as of the time of the symposium) three million lives from the world, and increased the precarity of migrants' lives even further, demonstrating that the topic is all the more timely and more necessary.

### 3. Keynote Address, Day 1

**Day 1: Threading Past, Present, and Future-Building (Sarah Dryden-Peterson, Associate Professor of Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education: Language, Migration, and Education)**

**Dryden-Peterson** centered her keynote address on the question, “What languages?” Refugees might ask themselves, “What languages will I use to speak with my teacher, what languages will enable me to have opportunities in the future, what languages will support me in maintaining relationships of love and care?” Policymakers and others might ask, “What language(s) should refugees learn and why?”

Refugees’ educational experiences are laden with uncertainty, but, rather than conceiving of it as a negative state to circumvent, Dryden-Peterson argued that we should regard uncertainty as a set of unavoidable circumstances to navigate. Such ubiquitous uncertainty produces for refugees a condition that is both pragmatic and existential, that of facing “unknowable futures.” Refugees must set about living in the place where they are hosted while also simultaneously planning for (or “building”) multiple possible futures. They encounter many barriers to accessing resources and opportunities, but education (including language education) is a means to helping navigate the barriers, especially the misalignment between present schooling and future opportunities.

This navigation is reflected in the ideas of *cognitive mobility* and *temporal mobility*. *Cognitive mobility* refers to the ways in which young people can apply what they learn in schools across places, and *temporal mobility* refers to the way in which young people connect their presents and their futures, allowing young people to not have to choose between their present and their future. Educators who decenter traditional ideas of nation-state belonging support the development of students’ cognitive and temporal mobilities. While migration policies are hyper-focused on boundary management, the pedagogy of educators in settings of migration, when they focus on relationships that blur such boundaries, promote these kinds of mobilities. Dryden-Peterson concluded by proposing that future-building should be the overarching purpose of refugee education, with cognitive and temporal mobilities as mechanisms for imagining possible futures.

### 4. Summary of Papers

**Day 1 (Monday, April 19)**

**Day 1: Session 1: Education, Chair: Rosemary Salomone (St. John’s University School of Law)**

**Dr. Tony Capstick** (University of Reading, UK) presented research entitled “Cross-disciplinary perspectives on the role of language in enhancing the resilience of refugees and host communities,” conducted over the past several years as part of an interdisciplinary team focused on refugees and other displaced persons in the Middle East. The team identified five

principles for using language as a vehicle for psycho-social support, that is, for developing language for resilience. The principles ranged from promoting home language literacy to training educators and refugees alike on the psychological and physiological effects of trauma to advocating for linguistically inclusive pedagogy. Capstick encouraged the audience to conceive of resilience as an individual skill as well as a dynamic, communitarian, and interpersonal quality. For those two levels to be effective, there need to be overarching cross-disciplinary resilience-enhancing initiatives that take all stakeholders' voices and perspectives into account.

**Dr. Carol Benson** and M.A. students **Maria Serio** and **Jon Kwok** (Teachers College, Columbia University) presented research entitled, "Applying principles of L1-based multilingual education to refugee and immigrant programs: An exploration." They argued that all students benefit from linguistically responsive education, but policies for refugee education do not always promote effective linguistic inclusion. Educational programs for refugee students may prioritize either country-of-origin curriculum or country-of-asylum curriculum, and both approaches are accompanied by advantages and disadvantages for the students, affecting how students access resources in the present and prepare for the future. Benson, Serio, and Kwok advocated a language-as-resource orientation for teachers and offered several recommendations from multilingual education that could be fruitfully adapted for refugee education, including language mapping activities, organizing classes and group work by language, employing community members as teaching assistants, and using multi-language materials.

**Celia Reddick**, a Ph.D. candidate (Harvard University), presented "The language is a part of them': How teachers navigate the educational inclusion of refugee students," a comparative case study constituting part of her larger dissertation research conducted in Uganda. This study focused on three schools in Kampala and analyzed the ways in which head teachers (principals) interpret the national language-in-education policy and thereby shape the way teachers implement the policy in their practice. She presented two main findings: (1) there is an overall lack of training for teaching in multilingual classrooms; and (2) in the absence of explicit or structured preparation, teachers rely on head teachers to set expectations. However, head teachers are also insufficiently prepared, and so they draw on their personal beliefs about (or orientations to) language, language learning, and refugees to create and interpret school-based policy. Head teachers then influence teachers' pedagogical choices and activities, as the teachers embrace, accommodate, or resist head teachers' official or unofficial policies. Reddick ended with a call for systematic, structured guidance for teachers and head teachers on how to practice educational inclusion and meet the needs of multilingual, multinational students.

**Dr. Mohammad Thalgi** and **Dr. Ayat Nashwan** (Yarmouk University, Jordan) presented research conducted with **Özgür Aslankiliç**, a PhD candidate (Osman Gazi University, Turkey), entitled, "Language education problems related to Syrian refugees' education in Turkey and Jordan." The education problems in the two countries are similar, though distinct. Although both Syria and Jordan are Arabic-speaking nations, thus facilitating educational participation for Syrian refugees in Jordan, in Turkey, Turkish language and culture are unfamiliar, creating barriers to meaningful educational participation. In addition, students struggle with English proficiency, which impedes educational attainment and relocation to a third country; further, the

COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated extant difficulties with technology preparation and access. The researchers made several recommendations to address the educational problems they documented: (1) learn the reasons that children leave school and then develop targeted solutions, providing families with educational and financial supports; (2) establish remedial programs for children who have not enrolled in formal education and do not have literacy skills; (3) use effective teaching methods to promote high-level language learning outcomes; and (4) evaluate the use of distance learning during the pandemic and provide the necessary equipment for online learning.

## ***Day 2 (Wednesday, April 21)***

### ***Day 2: Session 2: Linguistic Human Rights, Chair: Lisa Atalianis (Birkbeck, University of London)***

**Dr. Eve Haque** (York University) presented research entitled “Official and non-official language rights in Canada” in which she discussed the passing of the Indigenous Languages Act, the first language act pertaining to Indigenous languages in Canada, which is intended to support the reclamation, revitalization, maintaining and strengthening of all Indigenous languages. This decision comes nearly fifty years after English and French were declared the official languages of Canada according to the Official Languages Act of 1969. The passing of this Act extends recognition to the approximately 70 Indigenous languages in Canada; however, it does not bestow official status on these languages, of which two thirds are considered endangered, and almost all the rest are classified as vulnerable to loss. Haque described the differences in provisions of the two acts, elucidating the deficiencies of the Indigenous Languages Act in contrast with the Official Languages Act. Specifically, Haque compared the linguistic rights accorded to Indigenous languages with the rights of English and French as enshrined in the Canadian constitution. Haque noted that the asymmetrical distribution of linguistic rights is paralleled in the huge disparity in implementation and resourcing between these language groups. In short, these disparities underscore the continuity of Canada’s White settler coloniality that underpins the place of Indigenous languages into the present.

**Dr. Yael Peled** (McGill University) presented research entitled “Multilingual selfhood and the political ethics of a linguistic in-betweenness” in which she considered the question of a multilingual self within an agency in the context of a democratic society whose civic life and public institutions are often set for a monolingual linguistic majority to accommodate their own linguistic preferences, habits, beliefs, norms, and convictions. Peled questioned what it means to live with the experience of a language barrier in a political community that values liberty, solidarity, unity, inclusivity, and autonomy, yet is often unaware of how these values are impacted by linguistic diversity and linguistic alterity. Her paper examined the challenge that a complex multilingual selfhood seems to represent to contemporary democratic societies where prevailing linguistic beliefs, practices, cultures, and traditions often operate based on monolingual premises. In her presentation Peled also stressed the critical imperative of developing a more language-aware civic and institutional framework for contemporary democratic societies. She explained that the key towards a democratic approach lies in the

transformation of linguistic culture and linguistic epistemic humility, a theory which Peled described as an attitude of awareness of one's own linguistic epistemic capacities and limitations in both interlinguistic and interlinguistic contexts. Linguistic epistemic humility highlights the importance of a broader capacity for language awareness in civil society and in public institutions. The concept does not work to supplant theories of linguistic justice but rather to address those sites and circumstances of interaction across linguistic barriers that cannot be simply regulated or clearly enforced.

**Dr. Timothy Reagan** (University of Maine) presented research entitled "Identifying and responding to linguicism: Towards a conceptual model" in which he suggested a four-tiered conceptual typology of linguicism, the unfair treatment of an individual based solely on their use of language, which is caused by power and control in society. According to Reagan, linguicism, a term coined by Finnish linguist and educator Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, is the linguistic equivalent to such phenomena as racism, sexism, ageism, audism, classism, and so on. Reagan adopts Critical Race Theory as a lens to describe types of linguicism occurring internally, interpersonally, institutionally, and structurally. He provided some historical examples of how linguicism has manifested across different cultural contexts. Reagan suggested that linguicism is deeply ingrained in society and has significant implications for virtually every aspect of human society including education, a domain in which linguicism exacts the greatest harm on children's self-identity and ability to learn. He concluded that since linguicism takes on many different forms, responding to it effectively requires a range of actions.

***Day 2: Session 3: Voices, Chair: Sarah Chihaya (Princeton University)***

**Grace Tran**, a Ph.D. candidate (*Centre for Criminology and Sociolegal Studies, University of Toronto*), presented her research entitled "I did not know what 'refugee' meant, but I knew...it was a bad word": Intersections of refugee subject formation with language loss and acquisition". Tran employed ethnographic research methods to examine how one proves and asserts their 'right' and 'deservingness' to be in a country without the adequate language to do so. Tran drew on the oral histories of her parents and interviews conducted with twenty-two other Vietnamese refugees who were resettled in Canada to theorize refugee subject formation as it intersects with language loss and acquisition. Her research focused on two questions: (1) How do moments of confrontation and declaration transcend physical borders, and (2) How do processes of language loss and acquisition mediate Vietnamese refugees' experiences of resettlement, belonging and integration into Canada? She detailed contours of refugee belonging via the narratives of three refugees. The narratives portray the complicated trajectories of language loss, language abuse, and language acquisition that enable Vietnamese refugees not only to make sense of themselves and their place in Canadian history, but also to position themselves as worthy, deserving subjects that 'belong' in relation to host populations and other racialized migrant groups. In discussing key findings, she described language as a register of belonging to an idealized Canadian citizenship, language acquisition as key to participants rendering themselves as intelligible to others, and language as a metric for refugees' sense of belonging and deservingness.

**Laila Omar**, a Ph.D. candidate (University of Toronto), presented research entitled, “Between memory and anticipation: Exploring the role of language in shaping refugee mothers’ perceptions of past, present, and future”. Omar conducted 41 semi-structured interviews with Syrian refugee mothers in Canada to explore how they experience time and project their future in Canada. She observed the role of language acquisition in the host country in refugees’ memory construction and imaginings of future selves based on two conflicting conditions. First, their proficiency in Arabic, their mother tongue, is associated with a sense of nostalgia towards the past and feelings of comfort and security in their home country. Second, their lack of proficiency in the English language limits their ability to conceive of a concrete future and integration in Canada. Omar also looked at how successful language acquisition becomes associated with other goals related to economic and social integration in the host country, and how it might transform traditional family dynamics. In describing major findings, Omar noted: (1) that the lack of proficiency in English stripped participants of their agency and their mastery of language was erased; (2) that some refugee mothers perceive learning English in Canada as being born again, with new opportunities and new experiences; and (3) that language learning is associated with economic advantage and social advancement to have a good future and find a job, while being seen as contributing to the subversion of traditional gender roles in the Syrian family.

**Briana Nichols**, a Ph.D. candidate (University of Pennsylvania), presented research entitled “No son libres allí / They are not free there”. Nichols’ presentation drew from 10 months of ethnographic field work in Guatemala with Indigenous youth from areas where an estimated 40 to 60 percent of community members are living abroad or have lived abroad at some point. In this context, migration is often seen as the logical next step for young people. However, Nichols explained how living within a culture of migration can also produce an urgent will to stay despite broader social pressures to do otherwise. The youth she worked with want to stay in their home communities. In discussing her findings, she made note of the way in which young people draw on linguistic and cultural practices, as well as physical mobility and personal dignity, to discursively create a binary between their home community and their impressions of life in the United States. Nichols argued that it is the intergenerational mobility of culture that has created an environment whereby local youth can redefine what they imagine their futures to be, opting for freedom at home and rejecting what they have come to view as false opportunities abroad.

**Dr. Aleksandra Olszewska**, a postdoctoral research fellow (*Center for Multilingualism in Society across the Lifespan/MultiLing*, University of Oslo) presented her research entitled “Multilingual identities in refugee-background students’ voices: Counter-stories from Poland.” Olszewska focused on refugee-background students’ (RBSs) identities and language identities, exploring their strengths, agency, and multilingual repertoires. Her study focused on the voices of four Chechen RBSs in Poland and examined what their stories reveal about their identities and language identities. This qualitative study drew on several theoretical frameworks including the constructs of RBS identity, language identity, and Refugee Critical Race Theory. Olszewska spoke of the dynamic backgrounds of refugee background students as encircled by dominant narratives and counter narratives. Her findings demonstrated that refugee background students’ identities are enacted through three processes: (1) a claimed open and confident relationship, (2) negotiated identity and adaptation within the new host context, (3) an envisioned identity of



themselves. Olszewska concluded that a single narrative cannot capture the richness, complexity, and beauty of refugee background students' identities. Counter-stories understood as stories of self-definition have the power to portray and unpack the multilayeredness of refugee background and student identities, and to oppose the violent act of imposing essentializing definitions on refugees.

**Leonie Schulte**, a Ph.D. candidate (University of Oxford), presented research entitled "The German you need to know: Language learning and temporal uncertainty among newcomers in Berlin", in which she examined the consequences of what happens when states require newcomers to learn a country's dominant language before they can work, study, and become citizens. Since 2014, Germany has granted asylum to over 1.1 million displaced people. Five years on, over 800,000 remain in Germany, most of whom are still seeking employment. Schulte presented fifteen months of in-depth ethnographic fieldwork focused on Berlin's state-funded language and integration programs for adult newcomers. Her paper argued that although these programmes are designed to accelerate newcomers' socioeconomic incorporation, in practice they significantly delay newcomers' access to work, higher education and development of a sense of inclusion. Schulte asserted that due in part to the slowing effect these programs have, newcomers to Germany experience various forms of temporal disruption and uncertainty. Schulte illustrated the complex ways in which language policies and state-sanctioned programs impact newcomers' temporal experiences. Language training courses are often perceived as innocuous components of broader immigration and citizenship policies. However, Germany's language requirements for immigrants are deeply embedded in a broader and often opaque complex bureaucratic landscape that newcomers struggle to navigate. Her findings lead scholars to question: How should we understand the role of language in these temporal experiences? How does language become enmeshed in the temporal dimensions of migration and displacement? And ultimately, how does policymaking impinge on experiences of temporal disruption?

### ***Day 3 (Friday, April 23)***

#### ***Day 3: Session 4: Interpretation and Translation, Chair: Joel Gomez (Center for Applied Linguistics)***

**Dr. Morven Beaton-Thome** (University of Applied Sciences, Germany) presented research entitled "Superdiversity in institutional contexts: Language use and language contact in the lives of migrants – What role(s) do interpreters and translators play?" The aim of her research was to explore discourse on interpretation and translation in the migration context in Cologne and to investigate textual evidence of this discourse in the form of documentation and translation of official websites. She discussed the role of interpreters and translators, and how they must position themselves within conversations and texts. She further cited the Refugee Guide as a specific example, discussing how the tones in the English and German translations have different meanings. Beaton-Thome ended with further steps, including a recommendation for more ethnographic research into relationships between language use, language contact and interpretation, with potential implications for language policy and interpreter and translator training.

**Dr. Maria Bo** (California State University, Fullerton) presented research entitled “Created equal? Translating linguistic rights and the false equivalents of language justice.” Her research explored how moving between languages via translation can help us to understand the limits of the regime of linguistic rights to better fight for those who are themselves language-minoritized. She used the work of Western philosopher Vine Deloria to critique how Western European and American political theory has consistently conflated equality with justice. Finally, Bo analyzed the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, arguing that the various equivalent versions of the document can help chart new paths to freedom, and therefore, that language does not need to be protected by rights but can become the source of its own emancipation.

**Anisa Rahim** (National Language Access Advocates Network/N-LAAN) discussed her own experiences as a civil rights lawyer in her presentation entitled “Language justice: An evolving framework for fundamental language rights and equal access.” She discussed the challenges of working with indigent populations, including: the representation of low-income individuals; their access to public benefits, entitlements, and housing; working with interpreters or a lack of qualified interpreters; and the lack of translated materials. Rahim addressed the requirement of language assistance in federal and state law, explaining that while interpretation (oral) and translation (written) services are meant to be available for any individual when they are accessing governmental benefits, challenges still arise. These challenges may include the quality of interpreters, or state agencies not recognizing their affirmative obligation (i.e., they may not know what Title VI is, and they may not realize that they must provide this language assistance if they are recipients of federal funding).

**Dr. Dolores Inés Casillas** (University of California, Santa Barbara) presented research entitled “Listening to migration on U.S. Spanish-language radio.” Her research focused on people’s voices, specifically the interaction between listeners and hosts, and how immigration politics and the immigration experience of economic and legal vulnerability characterize immigrant listening. She discussed how radio for immigrant listeners, even in this digital era, continues to be a site of community, as listeners are expected to speak Spanish, are never looked down upon or questioned as to their legal status, and are provided a safe space to advocate for one another.

***Day 3: Session 5: Media and Representation, Chair: Paul Nadal (Princeton University)***

**Argyro Nicolaou**, a postdoctoral fellow (Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies, Princeton University), presented research entitled “Documenting migration in contemporary video art: Bouchra Khalili’s *Mapping Journey Project*.” The Mapping Journey Project features an eight-channel video installation of the accounts of eight displaced persons describing their own journeys, with their faces absent from the picture. Nicolaou discussed the ethical responsibility of such work, including the decontextualization of the refugee or migrant stories that are presented. She mentioned that while there are challenges to this form of art, the art of experimentation can offer a platform for ethical issues that go beyond the stereotypes of mainstream media and pave the way for new collective imaginaries. Nicolaou ended by stating that “in an era of fake news, film and media art are well-positioned to respond to the desire for truth and inclusivity, so long as they continue to experiment with the political relationship between content and form.”

**Dr. Max Cavitch** (University of Pennsylvania) was unable to attend the live session, but his pre-recorded presentation on his research entitled “Self-translations” was shown. Cavitch discussed how autobiographical writing is important for any study of the relation between language and migration, particularly when more than one language is involved. He discussed how language acquisition and language loss are among the most shared migrant experiences. Writing about these experiences can show one's relationship with the language(s) of the place they have left behind, while also being a way of exploring and strengthening one's relationship with the language(s) of one's destination. Cavitch gave two specific examples, Alice Kaplin and Nancy Houston, and described their experiences as bilingual writers.

**Somita Sabeti**, an M.A. candidate (Koç University, Turkey), presented research entitled “Between liminality, ‘ghorbat-hood’ and belonging: Mapping the experiences of young Afghan migrants ‘in transit’ in Istanbul.” She carried out this research study in the spring of 2019, looking specifically at the lived experiences of young Afghan irregular migrants in Istanbul, Turkey, the coping mechanisms they have developed, and the sources that offer them a sense of belonging in the Turkish society. She completed fifteen interviews and used observational sketching as a reflexive tool. Sabeti found that while there is no such thing as an untranslatable word, no single word in English corresponds directly to the terms “ghorbat” and “saboor.” By using these expressions, a space was opened for a “deeper understanding of the research participants' experiences of migration, language, and memory as a form of meaning-making.”

**Dr. Rahul Bjørn Parson** (University of California, Berkeley) presented research entitled “Seizing the telling: Deterritorialized Hindi and Urdu literature in Kolkata.” His talk situated literary trends in multilingual settings to make visible the deeper motives of vernacular literature. He discussed outsider literature, written in an anti-territorialized language, and the challenges of dominant social imaginaries, language ideology, and literary hierarchy that provide a nuanced and unique view of Kolkata specifically and India in general. He mentioned two specific stories: *Kaikatha: Via Bypass* (Saraogi, 1998) and *Lamp Jalanewale* (2008). He concluded that by locating these social material processes within art and literature, one can see the articulations of living processes that are more widely experienced in society. In the case of migrant literature, this articulation may be the only glimpse of the life-worlds of communities with scarce records in narrative form.

#### **Day 4 (Wednesday, April 28)**

##### **Day 4: Session 6: Asylum Seekers/Refugees, Chair: Patricia Fernández-Kelly (Princeton University)**

**Dr. Tommaso Manfredini** (Columbia University) presented research entitled “Ketli? Kori? Keli? A literary archeology of an asylum narrative, Italy, 2019.” This presentation told the story of a particular moment of an asylum claim in Italy in 2019 and critiqued the practice of translation during the Refugee Status Determination interview, which involved the transfer of an oral event into writing, a multilingual event into a monolingual document. Manfredini discussed the positioning of the applicant and his story and what eventually appeared on the page, and the

prejudices that infiltrated that retrieval process as evidenced by the artificial reduction of the distance by the translation process.

**Dr. Forough Ramezankhah** (Keele University, UK) presented research entitled “Beyond language: The role of memory and experience in the presentation of asylum claims.” This presentation navigated the linguistic challenges, both superficial and beyond the word, as interpreted in the Western style of truthfulness. The memories of two socially similar men were presented, both of whom sought asylum in Britain with two very different narratives—one granted asylum and one denied. The first analysis was of the words used by each of the two men during their asylum interviews. The language choices that crafted their stories directly affected the credibility of the two narratives. Dr. Ramezankhah then presented a model to explain what lies beneath visible language, looking at strands that come out of dissecting the language: childhood memories, collective memories, asylum capital, and pre-asylum knowledge. Ramezankhah provided insight into why certain asylum claims are deemed credible and why some are not in the eyes of the Western authorities, who ultimately grant or deny refugee status to the asylum seekers.

**Dr. Shahzaman Haque** (Institute National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, France) presented research entitled “Language practices and linguistic landscapes in the asylum camps of Paris and its suburbs: Focus on Urdu speakers.” Haque said that while most host countries are monolingual with strong monolingual ideologies, most refugees are multilingual. This study explored the linguistic landscape of refugee camps and the language practices revealed there. Refugees have difficulty in accessing assistance in their home languages, and the signs that do appear in their languages sometimes cannot be read by asylum seekers who have had interrupted schooling or problems with literacy. Reliance on multilingual volunteers for translations, on Urdu as a linking language for refugees from South Asia, and on English as a lingua franca are all common occurrences in the asylum camps. Haque’s analysis concluded that the linguistic landscapes of the camps prepare refugees for the language regimes they will be subjected to living in the host country and reveal circulating ideologies surrounding refugees and asylum seekers.

**Dr. Cosette Maiky**, an international expert on governance (United Nations Development Programme), presented her research entitled “The intersection of language and global health: Conflict-affected Arab countries as a case study.” An examination of cross-language use in qualitative research in global health, Dr. Maiky revealed the methodological shortcomings that the language barrier creates and the challenges that migrants and asylum seekers face gaining access to quality health services in the Arab region. Global health research in the conflict-affected Arab countries has been constrained by several forces including lack of funding, security issues, and political issues. Particularly salient in her research was the lack of translators in the health centers. Research models from non-Arab countries are typically in English, therefore translated into local languages revealing the first instance of bias that researchers face because of the cross-language differences between English and Arabic, further complicated by translation into local varieties or dialects in the field. Maiky suggested that the solution lies in the answer to two questions: first, how to find a way to acknowledge the

diglossia of the region and second, how to best preserve the authentic narratives of the affected individuals.

**Dr. Tatyana Scheila Friedrich**, visiting fellow (Fordham University and Feder University of Paraná, Brazil), and **Dr. Bruna Ruano** (Feder University of Paraná, Brazil) presented research entitled “The linguistic approach of a program that welcomes migrants and refugees at a Brazilian university.” They described a program instituted at a Brazilian university designed for migrants and refugees who started university in their country of origin but were unable to finish to complete their degrees. The program uses an interdisciplinary approach to acclimate newly arrived students to university life in Brazil. Not only are students provided opportunities for learning Portuguese and adapting to Brazilian university life, but they are also welcomed to share their home cultures and languages by encouraging interculturality. Though this program builds a bridge between the host culture and refugee students, students still report being confronted with prejudice, racism, and xenophobic acts. The goal of this program is to outline the actions to implement inclusive policies and provide practical examples and activities to meet the increasing demands for a pluralistic university environment.

***Day 4: Session 7: Migrants and the State, Chair: Stephen Macedo (Princeton University)***

**Dr. Jean-Pierre Gauci** presented “From law to policy: Language, categorizations, and migrant rights,” which focused on the implications of the terminology used regarding migrants and the movement of people globally. Gauci highlighted the impact language has on migrant rights and criticized the nebulous nature of much of the terminology used to describe migrants, their movement, and their reasons for migration. Often the language is either too rigid or too vague; it is misused to either justify policy or obfuscate failures of policy. Gauci raised examples such as refugee versus migrant versus expat, trafficking and smuggling, climate-displaced, vulnerability, and credibility—all terms that are used frequently in the discourse about migrants and yet have no concrete definitions. He also noted that these words are wielded to assign positive or negative connotations, to deflect responsibility, or to otherwise create or support policy that directly impacts migrants’ rights.

**Dr. Francisco Robles** (University of Notre Dame) presented research entitled “Ofelia Zepeda’s poetic languages of creation and inhabitation.” Exploring the poetry of Ofelia Zepeda, linguist and Indigenous language advocate, Dr. Robles discusses the language Zepeda used as representative of a tension between the unbounded nature of the O’odham, Indigenous people of the U.S./Mexican border desert land, and the legal institutions of the Mexican State. Despite longstanding migration patterns of the O’odham people, colonialism and the rise of the nation-state have produced a conceptual inability to understand migration as a historically continuous phenomenon. Robles shared one of Zepeda’s poems, parsing the language of the story of Zepeda’s birth and subsequent attempt to obtain her birth certificate, her juxtaposition of the highly descriptive natural scene to the office of a government worker, highlighting the vivid life of the Sonoran Desert and the inability of the State to accurately express or describe the desert, or its people’s lives.

**Zrinka Bralo** (Chief Executive, Migrants Organise, UK) gave a presentation entitled “Xenophobic language: the media, the state, and public policy in the UK,” which discussed the narrative created by British politicians and media and the resulting dehumanization and demonization of migrants. Xenophobia and racism run rampant in public discourse, online, and on social media, exacerbated by the scarcity narrative. No longer limited to the migrants themselves, the people assisting them are now being targeted as well. Bralo described Britain’s previous policy on immigration along with the latest passed on 24 March 2021. Anti-immigrant sentiment is peddled by all political parties, and dominant narratives are even unintentionally perpetuated by advocates and organizations with the aim of helping immigrants by citing stories of “good” immigrants or the “vulnerable”, implying that there are “bad” immigrants or those who aren’t “victim” enough. To move towards a better future, Migrants Organise, an advocacy group, is organizing relational storytelling and radical listening to support those subjects to immigration control, with the goal of reshaping the increasingly xenophobic UK society.

**Dr. William Allen** (University of Oxford and the Centre on Migration, Policy, and Society) presented research entitled “Language about state and policymaking: Learning from UK’s ‘Net Migration’ Target.” This presentation centered on how language matters for migration politics, and how we view the State by focusing on a particular term: “net migration.” This term entered the media sphere in 2010 with Prime Minister David Cameron’s pledge to reduce net migration but did not gain traction until 2014 when migration numbers rose. As a political scientist, Allen explained that his aim is to open the discussion of the use of this term, as it has played a large part in the UK’s dialogue regarding migration and the policies around it. Though the promise to reduce net migration was never met, the term shaped migration policies for years and reveals how language travels between policy and media. Wrapping up, Allen discussed the importance of statistics as used for governance and, in this case, for making migrants legible or countable, adding that language has consequences for migrants, citizens, and policymakers. By acknowledging this power, we can start working on changing the language of migration.

**Clara Beccaro**, M.A. candidate (The New School for Social Research), presented research entitled “The discursive production of worthiness: Queer refugees and the French asylum procedure.” Her presentation started with how the French state uses rhetoric to purvey xenophobic immigration policies under the guise of sexual democracy. In recent years, France has positioned itself as a queer-friendly country, yet there are visible exclusionary tactics from the State throughout the French asylum process, with only 6% of queer and trans asylum seekers seeing their requests granted. Beccaro then shifted her focus to the function of language during the French asylum procedure. From the spoken words, to body language, to the asylum interview narrative, the imposition of Western typology, biases, and stereotypes plays a detrimental role against asylum seekers. The discourse that queer people are often forced to deliver to conform to these Western expectations is not lying per se, but conformity to certain stereotypes is the true narrative that is being assessed to be perceived as having a credible asylum claim.

## **Day 5 (Friday, April 30)**

**A reading by Princeton Creative Writing Faculty: Jhumpa Lahiri, Yiyun Li, Aleksandar Hemon, introduced by Prof. Sandra Bermann, (Princeton University).**

In this session, authors **Jhumpa Lahiri, Yiyun Li, and Aleksandar Hemon** read selections of their works. Notes on this session were not taken; please see the symposium programme for more information.

## **5. Keynote Address, Day 6**

### **Day 6 (Saturday, May 1)**

**Day 6: Language & Migration: Experience & Memory, Chair: Professor Anne Cheng (Princeton University), Esther Schor (Princeton University), and Humphrey Tonkin (Princeton University).**

**Professor Anne Cheng (Princeton University)** introduced the conference's final session and shared a brief comment about migration being a history of knowledge and a movement towards a new future that recapitulates a longing for a way home. She also emphasized that when we talk about migrants, we should recognize the individuals being discussed. Migrants become migrants to find better opportunities for themselves and their families, and some need to escape an unstable society or persecution. She described the various reasons people become migrants and suggested that we should be careful in how we work with, address, or refer to these individuals, as their stories are complex. Cheng then introduced the keynote speaker **Viet Thanh Nguyen** and called attention to the importance of learning from Nguyen's personal story as a refugee. She applauded his ability to critique society while also encouraging others to see things from various perspectives by humanizing migrants and refugees.

**Viet Thanh Nguyen, Aerol Arnold Professor of English, (University of Southern California) winner of the Pulitzer Prize for *The Sympathizer***

**Viet Thanh Nguyen** discussed some of the themes from his book, *The Sympathizer, Race and Resistance*, and his collection of essays titled "The Refugees" and "Nothing Ever Dies." His presentation centered around the keywords of the conference—*language, migration, experience, and memory*—and further expanded on how language and migration are tied together. Nguyen spoke from his parents' personal experiences as refugees and his own adoption of that label to discuss the ethics of memory, highlighting the importance of conceptualizing ourselves as victims and perpetrators of humane and inhumane actions. He explained that the ethics of recognition serves as a way for us to recognize that we are human and inhuman at the same time.

With language as his focus, Nguyen discussed the distinction between a refugee and an immigrant. He called attention to the UNHCR's definition of the different types of migrants and mentioned the UNHCR's statistics about the number of displaced people in the world. In 2016,

there were about 66 million; however, that number increased to 79.5 million in 2021. Officially, 26 million of them are classified as refugees. Nguyen called attention to the ironic nature of the ethics of remembering. He used the United States as an example of a nation that has caused some of the world's refugee problems through "militarized multiculturalism" while acting as a "savior" to some of these very countries. Nguyen ended his keynote by circling back to the humanity and inhumanity of the U.S. He warned migrants that they should see the duality of the brutality and the beauty, hope, and horror that the U.S. displays. It is ethical for all to think about the complexity of being a migrant and a refugee; we should imagine this and store it in our memories.

The Q&A session consisted of five questions regarding the experiences of immigrants related to work ethics, assimilation, not having the privilege of being mediocre (unlike many non-immigrants), the role of gender in the discourse of liberation and decolonization, and who counts as a refugee (American vs. non-American perspectives).

## 6. Closing and Remarks

**Humphrey Tonkin**, *Chair, NGO Committee on Language and Languages*, and **Esther Schor**, *Co-Director, The Migration Lab, Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies (PIIRS)*, offered some final remarks on the symposium. **Tonkin** asserted that the U.N. needs to be included in the discussion of language differences in dealing with human displacement. He recognized that the *Study Group on Language and the U.N.* is a great starting point for such conversations as the group consists of academics, NGOs, and U.N. personnel who seek to raise awareness of languages and are prominent in decisions about policy and practice. **Schor** (Princeton University) reminded the audience that stories can save or destroy us, and that we need to keep in mind the duality Nguyen mentioned in his speech. She ended the session by emphasizing that language matters to the lives of refugees, migrants, and immigrants.

## 7. Symposium URL

<https://migration.princeton.edu/symposium>