Translating the Universal Declaration on Archives into Local Languages

Introduction

Language is essential to human identity. It defines us as human, shapes our cultural identities and cannot be contained by political borders. Over time, some languages have spread as their speakers migrated, fled from disasters and wars, or colonised other lands. Some have been overwhelmed and tragically died out, others have been brought back from the brink of extinction. Very occasionally a language can survive without everyday speakers for very long periods. This may be through use for religious purposes or academic communication, or, like Latin and ancient Greek because it is continually taught over generations for its importance as a forerunner of and contributor to other languages.

Language can also be used as a political tool in attempts to unite or divide us. There have been instances in history where languages have been forbidden or discriminated against in a bid to assert power or independence, shape national identity, or assimilate minority groups into a dominant culture through requirements to speak an official language. An article on the BBC News on 22 July 2018[1] provides some recent examples from Israel, Latvia, Croatia, India, Turkey and Canada. However, most countries with a history of conquest, colonialism, or recently asserted independence have experienced similar issues.

The *Universal Declaration on Archives* (UDA) has already been translated into many languages. The ICA website has a list of all the languages into which the UDA has been translated together with links for downloading them[2].

Why is it important to communicate in local languages?

The *Universal Declaration on Archives* is a declaration for all peoples in all countries of the world. It is crucial to work towards preserving and protecting the archives of all peoples and all cultures. To do that, we need to communicate directly with them and offer them tools that will support them in advocating for their archives. In spite of the complexities of developing national language policy, the best way to facilitate and promote understanding of archives, what they are and why they are important, is by working towards enabling the use of the UDA in their own language. One example is South Africa, where there is a growing realization of the breadth and depth of pre-colonial traditional knowledge, legal and political systems that have

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[1] Israel and Arabic: where else do language and politics collide? BBC News https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-44892114 Accessed January 2022.

[2] See: https://www.ica.org/en/universal-declaration-archives

not been captured into 'official' archives, although "indigenous law and the role of traditional authorities have gained constitutional recognition in South Africa"[3]. There are many other countries with similarly complex histories and heritages.

Official languages and national languages

There is a difference between official languages and national languages and the realities of national language policy and language use can be very complex.

> The difference between a national language and an official language is well illustrated by the island state of Singapore. Singapore has four official languages which are English, Chinese, Malay, and Hindi. English represents the historical colonial link with Britain and the other three languages belong to the three main ethnic groups in Singapore. All four languages are used by the government of Singapore, but only one, Malay, is the national language. This has been chosen because it is the language used by the first people to reside on the island before the arrival of British colonial influence.[4]

Some countries aim to reflect their linguistic diversity and history through recognising multiple official languages. Bolivia[5] is the country with the most official languages, recognising thirty-six languages besides Spanish. India[6], with its twenty-two "scheduled languages" and six languages awarded "classical language" status, illustrates the complexity and tensions involved in recognising official languages. There are eleven official languages in South Africa[7], reflecting its pre-colonial and colonial history. In Sweden, Swedish is the official "main language", but there are also five official "minority languages". The European Commission's *The most spoken languages in the European Union* page[8] offers an insight into the variety of languages spoken within the various European Union countries.

Other countries, including the USA, have no formally designated official languages. Australia, for example, does not have an official language, although the Constitution is written in English, and all official government business must be conducted in English. Australia, like many other countries, collects census data about which languages are spoken at home. Data gathered in the 2016 census indicates that nearly 70% of Australians spoke English at home. The next most frequently spoken languages are Mandarin (2.5%), Arabic, (1.4%) Cantonese (1.2%), Vietnamese (1.2%) and Italian (1.2%). Other significant immigrant language groups in Australia, to name just a few, are Greek, Croatian, Maltese and Indonesian. The UDA is available in all these languages except Vietnamese.

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[3] Hamilton, C. (2002) 'Living by Fluidity': Oral Histories, Material Custodies and the Politics of Archiving. In: Hamilton, C et al (Eds) (2002) Refiguring the Archive. Dordrecht, Springer (p.219). ISBN: 978-94-010-0570-8. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-010-0570-8 Accessed January 2022

[4] Aussie German Translation Services. https://aussiegermantranslation.com.au/whats-difference-national-official-language/ Accessed January 2022

[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bolivia#Language Accessed January 2022

[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_India Accessed January 2022

[7] https://www.expatica.com/za/about/basics/official-languages-of-south-africa-105823/ Accessed January 2022

[8] https://languageknowledge.eu/countries/eu27 Accessed January 2022

Language history in Australia is even more complex. At the time of European settlement, indigenous languages were spoken. AIATSIS, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, has produced a *Map of Indigenous Australia*[9], attempting to document these languages and dialects. Of these, only approximately 20 are in regular use, although some others are being actively revived. Currently, according to the 2016 Census, about 50,000 people in Australia speak an indigenous language at home. Therefore, it would be very hard to follow the Singaporean example for choosing a national language in Australia.

Canada has two official languages at the national federal level, English and French, but most provinces have only one official language, French or English. Quebec is the only officially French province and it has recognized French as its sole official language since 1974. Although a number of government services are available in English (usually on request), the province of Quebec has the peculiarity of being institutionally bilingual at the constitutional and federal levels while giving official recognition only to French at the level of provincial institutions. In addition, provincial governments with English as their official language offer services in French and in other non-official languages besides English, including Aboriginal languages and immigrant languages. The *Canadian Encyclopedia* Bilingualism page[10] provides additional information on languages in Canada.

Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish are examples of languages that have spread to many lands through colonisation, conquest, migration, political alliance or trade. The *Countries and languages*[11] website gives information about the extent of influence of some languages. Note that they are not necessarily official languages in every country listed.

In summary, languages reflect the history of their speakers and may be crucial to their cultural and personal identity. The politics of language and languages within countries and across international boundaries is complex and sometimes very sensitive. Above all, it is important to communicate in a language which people accept, understand and feel comfortable using.

Planning for translation into another language

The ICA has considerable experience in guiding UDA translation projects, assuring their quality and approving a final version for publication. The need for a new translation needs to be supported locally. Ideally, the national archival institution, or a professional association should be involved and their endorsement may be crucial to acceptance of the final translation. However, this may not always be practicable, and it is important to remember that it is people with proficiency in the language who do the translations, not an institution. Furthermore, if a need is identified for translation into a minority language, sometimes government-funded organizations do not have the resources or the mandate to provide financial or staff support for

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[9] https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/aiatsis-map-indigenous-australia Accessed January 2022
[10] https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/bilingualism Accessed January 2022
[11] https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/countries_by_languages.htm Accessed January 2022

such a project. This does not mean that they would necessarily be against such a translation. Gaining the support of an ICA member is important to the success of a UDA translation project.

The first step in translating the UDA into a language not already translated is to contact Dr Claude Roberto, President of the ICA Advocacy Expert Group[12]. She will be able to provide expert guidance and resources for the project, including a template for new translations.

Strategies for recruiting translators

Translation requires a high level of language literacy in both the source language and the target language (that is, the language into which the document is being translated). Best translation practice is for a translator to translate from a foreign language into their own native language. *Best practices for managing translation workflows*[13] provides more guidance on this.

Archival terminology is highly developed and very specific the *Universal Declaration on Archives Terminology*[14] gives helpful definitions of key terms used in the UDA.

A great deal of work has already been done by archivists in many languages to identify and define specialist terminology for the purpose of communicating best practice, national and international standards, building archival theory and research in the discipline of archival science. A good demonstration of this is the *Multilingual Archival Terminology*[15], a joint project between the International Council on Archives and the InterPARES Trust Project, where examples of archival terminology for a limited number of terms can be found in twenty-four languages. Note that the *Multilingual Archival Terminology* does not strive to produce a single, approved definition for the terms it includes. Rather, it gives examples of usage of the terms, which can be useful for providing a wider understanding, or tracking changes in usage over time.

Therefore, a UDA translation project needs translators familiar with this specialist archival terminology as well as proficiency in the language into which the UDA is being translated. Such expertise can usually be found in university programmes where records management and archival science is taught; in archival organizations which employ qualified professional archivists; and sometimes in academic programmes for linguistics or training programmes for translators. Members of national standards organizations may also have some experience of translating standards into their national or official language(s).

It is a good strategy to form a translation committee in order to ensure expertise in both translating into the local language and the specialist terminology, as well as to spread the load of

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[12] roberto@ica.org
[13] http://blog.globalizationpartners.com/managing-translation-workflows.aspx
[14] See: https://www.ica.org/en/universal-declaration-on-archives-uda-terminology
[15] See http://www.ciscra.org/mat/

project management, translating, debating and deciding correct terminology, and proofreading to ensure that the translation progresses to successful completion.

In developing a UDA translation project, the following points should be considered:

- Whether the country has an official language or languages, or a recognised national language. If so, what is it/are they? Are there other languages that are not recognised as "official"?

- If the country does not have an "official" language, which language(s) are most widely spoken? Check government websites to see which languages are used on the website, and in which languages documents are available for citizens to download important information.

- If there is more than one language used in the country, which ones are candidates for translation?

- Check the ICA UDA resources page[16] to see if the Universal Declaration on Archives is available in any of the country's languages, official and/or national)

- How and why translations into the various languages used would be useful in promoting awareness of archives within the country.

Validating and approving translations

ICA has a validation and approval process which must be completed before a new translation can be published on the ICA website for downloading. Claude Roberto is the person to contact for help in submitting an application for this process.

Conclusion

Undertaking a project to translate the UDA into a new language requires consultation with key stakeholders, careful planning to recruit support and translators, drawing on expertise provided by the ICA, and commitment to see the project through to the conclusion. The resulting high-quality translation will help to advance knowledge about the importance of archives for another cultural group wherever they may be found, both in their original country or in countries to which they have migrated.

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[16] https://www.ica.org/en/universal-declaration-archives