

INTERNATIONAL TRANSLATION DAY

Wording the word and worlding the world: Poetics and politics of translation

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Translation is never merely a matter of linguistic equivalence. As Walter Benjamin proposed in *The Task of the Translator*, it is a kind of afterlife—a reverberation of the original that both preserves and transforms, defers and restages. Translation does not transfer an intact meaning from one language to another; it conjures a ghost, recognisable, yet estranged. In globalised, postcolonial world, the work of translation must reckon with a dual responsibility: not only to language, but to the geopolitics of representation. It unfolds across two entangled dimensions—*wording the word* and *worlding the world*—that render translation a site where poetics and politics are inseparably intertwined.

Wording the word: The impossible fidelity
To “word the word” is to confront the instability of language itself. Meaning is always deferred, as Derrida reminds us; every act of saying slides into another. Translation becomes a structurally impossible but ethically necessary act. Paul de Man’s notion of the “permanent parabasis” of language—a rhetorical detour interrupting its own linearity—captures this paradox. The translator, far from being a transparent conduit, becomes a curator of estrangement, staging the untranslatable rather than concealing it.

Consider the Bangla word *biraha*, a devotional longing steeped in cultural specificity. English approximations, “melancholy,” “yearning,” “desire”, fail to carry its devotional undertone and affective density. Fidelity here is not about sameness but about letting difference resonate. Translation becomes an act of estranged fidelity, where failure to replicate becomes the space of meaning.

Thus, the translator is not a neutral bridge but a creative curator of opacity, attuned to the poetics of resonance and resistance. The literary turn in translation studies reimagines the translator as a writer—one who writes through and with instability. Here, the excess of language—the aporia, the opacity, the

unrenderable remainder—is not erased but foregrounded. Trust lies not in fluency or equivalence, but in friction: in preserving the weight of words without dissolving their strangeness.

Worlding the world: The politics of framing
If wording the word engages the poetics of language, *worlding the world* exposes the politics of representation. The phrase draws from Heidegger’s *The Origin of the Work of Art*, where art does not merely depict the world but discloses it as a horizon of meaning, not a neutral backdrop. Worlding, in this sense, is the ontological act of rendering the world meaningful.

But in a postcolonial context, worlding takes on a coercive charge. Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak reappropriated the term to critique how the West “worlds” the non-West: by coding it into imperial epistemologies, translating it into grammars of control. Spivak famously equated translation with cartography—an epistemic practice that draws borders, imposes grids, and dictates who may speak, and in what terms. Here, translation becomes less a linguistic act than a geopolitical one: a mechanism of negotiation and contestation under unequal terms.

Translation, Spivak reminds us, is never innocent. It becomes complicit in epistemic violence when it renders the other legible only through dominant idioms—when alterity is preserved by being domesticated. Talal Asad deepens this critique, arguing that translation, particularly in anthropology, rewrites subordinate cultures within institutional logics shaped by academic authority. It does not merely reflect power asymmetries; it reinforces them.

When Tagore is translated for Western audiences as a mystical poet stripped of his radical politics, or when African texts are translated to accentuate tribalism and dysfunction, translation “worlds” a reality that flatters liberal superiority while preserving epistemic hierarchies. These are not mere

choices of diction; they are geopolitical interventions.

Thus, worlding implicates translation in shaping futures—not through fidelity, but through framing. To world the world is to decide what is preserved, muted, or distorted in the passage between languages and cultures.

Translation as a site of tension and reckoning

its institutional domestication. Translation emerges as a counter-hegemonic act, not one that erases difference but amplifies it in all its unsettling force.

Contrapuntal practice: Beyond reconciliation

Wording and worlding are not binary opposites but contrapuntal logics—echoing Edward Said’s concept of contrapuntal reading, where texts are read in light of their

here is not closure. It is an openness to the untranslatable, to opacity, to the possibility that understanding requires us not to domesticate.

Shaping the future you can trust?

This year’s theme for International Translation Day, “Translation, shaping a future you can trust,” invokes a reassuring clarity amid algorithmic opacity and disinformation. But read through the twin lenses of wording and worlding, it demands deeper interrogation. What kind of future? Whose trust? At what cost?

If wording the word reminds us that language is unstable, then any future “shaped” through translation must embrace that instability. Trust must not imply uniformity but a fidelity to uncertainty. It must rest on ethical vigilance: a willingness to let the unfamiliar speak without taming it.

And if worlding the world reveals translation as a geopolitical act, then trust cannot be presumed. It must be earned through a reflexive politics that asks who gets to speak, how, and for whom. Translation constructs and contests futures. In this light, the 2025 theme becomes less a celebration than a challenge.

Trustworthy translation lies not in smoothing differences, but in sustaining tension. Not in fluency, but in friction. Not in closure, but in critique.

The translator as double witness

To translate is to stand at the fault line of two imperatives: to word the word and to world the world. One demands fidelity to the untranslatable; the other, vigilance against the politics of framing.

The translator is a double witness: to the impossibility of equivalence and the inequities of cultural exchange. Translation is not a seamless bridge; it is a borderland where meanings collide and resist containment. It is where articulation and erasure coexist.

To dwell here is to practice double critique: interrogating both source and target. Translation is not a relay of meanings but a reckoning with difference. It insists that translation is always already an act of becoming: unsettled, porous, open to misreading. It belongs to what Paul Ricoeur called the hermeneutics of trust, but trust



VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

The friction between wording and worlding is not a problem to be resolved—it is translation’s very condition. It lives in this dissonance, between semantic nuance and ideological frame, textual opacity and political legibility. To translate is to engage both the poetics of expression and the politics of reception.

Take Rafiq Azad’s defiant line during Bangladesh’s famine-stricken 1970s: “*Bhat de haramzada, noile manchitro khabo*” (“Give me rice, you scoundrel, or I’ll eat up the map of the land”). It bristles with hunger, anger, and subaltern resistance. No polite English rendering can preserve its texture without taming its rage. Wording demands fidelity to its rhetorical fury; worlding warns against its commodification as poetic exoticism or Oriental despair.

In such moments, translation becomes not a bridge but an insurgency. It resists smoothing and flattening. The translator becomes what Spivak calls the “intimate enemy”: loyal to the text, yet disruptive of

imperial entanglements. A contrapuntal translation listens for dissonance: between what the text says and how it is framed, what is spoken and what is silenced. It reads against the grain of language and history.

Wording without worlding risks solipsism—a fetishisation of linguistic subtlety detached from political consequence. Worlding without wording risks instrumentalism—treating texts as ideological vessels. Responsive translation must resist both. It must negotiate a third space where meaning is neither fixed nor free-floating but agonistic—always in tension, always contested.

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NATIONAL GIRL CHILD DAY

Climate change is not gender-blind, our response must not be either

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SABA EL KABIR

On my recent visit to a char community in Gaibandha, I met a 13-year-old girl whose dream was to become a teacher, like her mother. She was preparing to get married. The river might take their house at any time, her family explained. Although the community would help them find a new homestead, as is customary, their prospects are far from certain. Finding a home where their daughter would be cared for during this crisis was paramount.

We nodded in acknowledgement of the reality of the situation. This was no surprise, even as the younger son of the family remained on course to continue his schooling. We also recognised a larger, more insidious truth: when disaster looms, consequences are not shared equally. In households where resources shrink, choices about whose schooling continues, who carries extra burdens, and whose health is prioritised are filtered through the biases that shape everyday life.

These are not abstract prejudices.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), over 99 percent of people in Bangladesh hold at least one bias against women, with around 69 percent believing that men make better political leaders. In times of crisis, such beliefs harden into outcomes. Girls are the first to be pulled out of school, assigned to care work, married early, or face greater threats to their security and well-being.

This is what makes climate change such an insidious threat. The cycles are changing: droughts deepen, rains grow more erratic, cyclones intensify, and both heat waves and

cold waves press harder. The same logic that already governs who loses in an economic downturn or a natural disaster threatens to become a permanent condition of daily life.

In 2024, climate hazards disrupted schooling for up to 3.5 crore children across Bangladesh. Record heat forced nationwide school closures in April and May, with classrooms shuttered for weeks. Later in the year, floods and cyclones extended the disruption, with some districts losing nearly two months of teaching time. While any child who misses that much education risks falling behind, the chance of never returning is far greater for girls. Unicef notes that prolonged school closures increase the likelihood that girls will drop out permanently or be married off as families search for ways to cope.

The long-term effects of this educational disruption are profound. Every additional year of schooling for a girl is linked to delayed marriage, reduced risk of maternal mortality, improved child health, and higher family incomes. Bangladesh’s progress in girls’ education has been one of its most celebrated achievements over the last three decades, helping transform both economic and social outcomes. But climate change risks undoing these gains. A girl pulled out of school after a flood or cyclone rarely returns, and the setback ripples across her lifetime. It reduces her ability to earn, limits her agency within her household, and narrows the opportunities available to her children. The cost is borne not only by individual families but by the nation as a whole, undermining workforce potential and widening inequality at

a time when resilience requires the opposite.

In the country’s climate-vulnerable regions—erosion belts, saline coastlines, low-lying deltas—these dynamics are even starker. Here, lives are being reshaped by habitat loss, water scarcity, and failing harvests.

When storms destroy crops or floods

take homes, families make tough choices. Too often, daughters are the first to bear the brunt of them.

Research from the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in coastal districts found a staggering 39 percent surge in child marriage following climate-induced disasters.

Crises also sharpen risks of sexual abuse and exploitation. Cyclone shelters and relief camps are often overcrowded and lack safe, segregated facilities, leaving women and girls vulnerable to harassment and assault.

After Cyclone Amphan, humanitarian organisations recorded a steep rise in gender-based violence in affected areas.

Adolescent girls described

avoiding shelters altogether because

they felt unsafe, even when their homes were uninhabitable.

Lack of privacy in sleeping areas and toilets compounded risks.

Furthermore, studies in Bangladesh

have found that gender-based violence

often increases in the months following

floods or cyclones as displacement and

economic stress take hold.

Families that lose income may marry off

daughters early to reduce household

burdens, or girls may be trafficked

under the guise of employment

opportunities. When schools close

indefinitely, girls also lose one of their

safest spaces: classrooms that provide

structure, peer support, and oversight

from teachers. With that protective

environment gone, many become more

vulnerable to harassment, abuse, and

coercion within their communities.

Subsequently, climate change

amplifies pre-existing vulnerabilities.

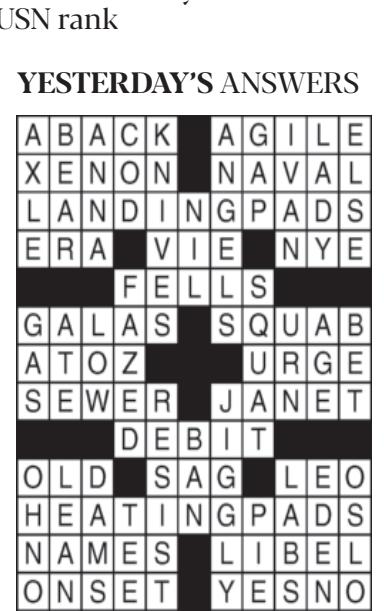
A storm or flood does not create

prejudice, but it magnifies its

consequences. For girls, this often

leads to shrinking their security,

ACROSS
1 Military awards
7 Midmonth day
11 Broad street
12 Fish feature
13 “Wasn’t me,” e.g.
14 Like an eyesore
15 Mideast ruler
17 Acid’s opposite
20 Fathom and foot
23 Yale rooter
24 “30 Rock” star
26 Easter find
27 Stunning serve
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