




History of Translation

1st course


■ THE BEGINNINGS OF TRANSLATION AND FIRST ALPHABETS

- Human beings have been living and dying for some **4 mln** years,
- but they have been writing for fewer than **6000**.
- The earliest form of writing, **Sumerian cuneiform script**,
- born in **Mesopotamia** to facilitate agricultural and commercial bookkeeping.
- Other systems soon appeared in **Egypt** and **China**.


- Wherever **writing** existed,
- it was regarded as a **divine gift** and became the **exclusive privilege** of an elite or a powerful aristocratic class.
- The word “**hieroglyphics**” means “sacred inscriptions”.
- With writing, history was born.
- Translation, too.
- Archaeologists uncovered Sumerian-Eblaite vocabularies inscribed in **clay tablets** that are **4,500** years old.


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- These bilingual lists attest to the existence of TR even in remotest history.
 - **Writing** became the preferred medium for
 - commercial contracts,
 - religious teachings,
 - law and literature.
 - In ancient civilizations, scribes were the masters of writing, teaching and TR.
 - performed most administrative functions,
 - controlled both the sacred and secular sciences.

- The invention of an **alphabet** by the **Phoenicians** around **1000 BCE**,
- most probably in Byblos (north of present-day Beirut), was truly revolutionary.
- Using alphabetic abstraction (i.e. assigning a character or symbol to represent each sound),
- one had to know only about **30 letters** in order to write, instead of memorizing 100s, or 1000s of signs or drawings such as pictograms, hieroglyphics or ideograms.

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- Because the **Phoenicians** were merchants and navigators,
 - their alphabet spread to other peoples living on the shores of the Mediterranean.
 - The **Aramaic**,
 - **Hebrew**,
 - **Greek, Coptic** and
 - **Arabic** alphabets were all derived from the **Phoenician** one.

- The **Greeks** were the 1st
- to introduce **vowels** to accurately reproduce the sounds of their Lg graphically, using signs that represented consonants in the **Aramaic** alphabet.
- This gave rise to the letters **A, E, O** and **Y**.
- The letter **I** was a **Greek** innovation, as was the use of wax tablets.


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- In the **7th century BCE**,
 - **Greek writing** in turn gave rise to the **Latin alphabet** with Etruscan acting as an intermediary step.
 - The **alphabet** is regarded as
 - the **key** to the history of humanity and its advent considered to have initiated the democratization of knowledge.

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- Today, linguists have identified nearly **7000** **lgs** spoken all over the world,
 - although only a **few 100** of these have a literary tradition.
 - Some traditional writing systems are gradually being displaced by the **Latin alphabet**, preferred by linguists, who add diacritical marks to indicate the distinctive features of indigenous Lgs.
 - It is not always easy to determine the precise contribution of translators to writing.

- History can appreciate the efforts of **4 translators** who helped to give nations a memory:
- **1. *Ulfila***, the inventor of the **Gothic alphabet** (4th century, Bulgaria);
- **2. *Mesrop Mashtots***, the inventor of the Armenian, Albanian and Georgian alphabets (5th century, Armenia);
- **3. *Cyril***, the inventor of the Glagolitic alphabet (9th century, Moravia);
- **4. *James Evans***, the inventor of the syllabic writing system for Cree (19th century, Canada).

- **Ulfila** (“little wolf”) was born around the year **311**, probably somewhere in **Romania**.
- he was descended from Roman Christian prisoners.
- A TR of the Scriptures proved essential to **Ulfila’s evangelical work**,
- and he soon realized that an alphabet would have to be invented for this purpose.
- Up to this point, Gothic had been strictly a spoken Lg.
- **Ulfila** used characters taken from **Greek** and **Latin** to transcribe Gothic sounds.

- **Ulfila's alphabet**, which consisted of **27 characters**, is not to be confused with the German script also known as "Gothic",
 - which is simply a graphic transcription of the **Latin alphabet**.
- With the assistance of a team of collaborators,
- **Ulfila** undertook to translate the **Bible**.
- This monumental task occupied him for the **40 years** he was bishop.

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- To carry out the TR,
 - **Ulfila** worked from the Greek text, scrupulously following its word order and syntax.
 - He was often forced to coin new words or phrases.
 - “With this translation [...], Ulfila stands out as the founder of Gothic literature, which enables us to understand the evolution of Germanic Lgs over 15 centuries.


- **Mesrop Mashtots** was a monk, theologian, and linguist who invented the Armenian script in **405** and helped establish Armenia's golden age of Christian literature.
- After studying Classical Languages with the patriarch **Nerses I**,
- **Mesrop Mashtots** began a monastic existence about **395**.
- He was ordained a priest, maintained a lifelong esteem for the ascetic life, and founded several monasteries.


- He systematized or invented the definitive **36-character Armenian alphabet**, following a Greek model;
- This alphabet was initially used to translate from the Greek the first popular Armenian Bible, the “Mesropian” **Bible (c. 410)**.
- **Mesrop Mashtots** himself was responsible for translating the **New Testament** and the **Old Testament** book of Proverbs.
- He subsequently revised the entire text.

- The ***Cyrillic*** alphabet owes its name to the **9th** century Byzantine missionary **St. Cyril**, who, along with his brother, **Methodius**,
- created the first **Slavic alphabet** - the ***Glagolitic*** - in order to translate **Greek** religious text to **Slavic**.
- Based on the Greek ceremonial script,
- the original **Cyrillic** alphabet included the **24 letters** of the Greek alphabet and **19 letters** for sounds specific to the Slavic lg.

- The **Cyrillic alphabet** has gone through many reforms in both Russia and other countries.
- In Russia, the first reformer of the **Cyrillic** was printer and publisher **Ivan Fyodorov**.
- He eliminated the letters **E** and **C** and many forms of the letter **O**.
- Most reforms saw the number of letters decrease and the simplicity of their inscription increase.

- But the reverse has also happened:
- at the end of **18th century** the Russian writer and historian **Nikolay Karamzin** suggested to introduce the letter **Ё**.
- Letters **Э** and **Й** were officially added to the alphabet in **18th century**.
- The **Cyrillic alphabet** achieved its current form in **1708** during the reign of **Peter the Great**.


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- The very existence of the **Cyrillic alphabet** in Russia was once under threat.
 - In **1919** there was an idea to replace it with the **Latin one** and bring it into harmony with the alphabet used in Western countries.
 - That could have made the process of learning Russian much easier for some,
 - but this was not to be and we can still enjoy the masterpieces of Russian lit-re in their original script.

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- Today **Cyrillic** is the **3rd official script** of the EU, following the **Latin** and **Greek** scripts.
 - It is used in over **50** different lgs, especially those of Slavic origin, mainly in **Russia, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe.**
 - In Russia the Old Slavic lg, which uses the Cyrillic alphabet has been historically used for religious services, and is sometimes used for these purposes today.

- Other alphabets that played an important role in the creation of Lgs are:
- ***Phoenician alphabet***
- The Phoenicians developed the alphabet circa **1400-1250 BC** in order to communicate with the diverse cultures, tongues of their maritime trading partners.
- It was the **Phoenician alphabet** -widely received, adapted in Greece and throughout the Mediterranean world,
- as it was only **22 letters** based on sound, as opposed to the myriad of symbols in cuneiform and hieroglyphics prevalent at the time.


- ***Aramaic*** The oldest Aramaic inscriptions belong to the **9th century BC**.
- the spoken lg of the North Semitic people living in northern Mesopotamia and Syria since the **13th century BC**.
- The script that developed around **1000 BC** to write the Aramaic Lg was called the **Aramaic alphabet**.
- It writes right to left and has **22 letters**, all consonants.
- **Square Hebrew, Arabic and Persian** alphabets were developed from Aramaic.

- ***Persian*** -belongs to the Iranian group of Lgs.
- The earliest civilization of Persia goes back to around **3000 BC**.
- Its linguistic development could be divided into 3 periods:
 - (1) Old Persian (up to 300 BC) which used cuneiform script;
 - (2) Middle Persian, also called the Pahlavi, (3rd century BC to 9th century AD) which used Aramaic alphabet for writing;
 - (3) Modern Persian which used Arabic alphabet.


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- The Persian Lg went through many changes in its alphabet, style of writing, vocabulary and also the grammar.
 - The Modern Persian grammar is much simpler as compared to Pahlavi or Old Persian which has no comparison with the present system of writing.

- The oldest Lgs spoken in the world:
- **Sanskrit, Hebrew and Basque.**
- *Sanskrit* is one of India's **22 official languages** and the official Lg of the northern Indian state of Uttarakhand, although the lg only has 14,000 native speakers.
- The earliest attested **Sanskrit texts** are the texts of **Rigveda**, a collection of ancient Indian hymns, which dates from the mid-to-late **2nd millennium BC.**


- The earliest traces of written *Hebrew* date back to the **10th century BC** when the Lg was widely spoken in the ancient Kingdoms of Israel of Judah.
- Throughout history, use of **Hebrew** faded and revived, and today it is spoken by more than **5 million** people, mainly in Israel.
- The *Basque lg* is spoken by approximately 700,000 people in the Basque territories of northern Spain and south-western France.
- it is most likely to have been spoken before the Indo-European Lgs developed in Western Europe.


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- Of the roughly **7,000** Lgs spoken in the world,
 - **90 %** are spoken by less than 100,000 people,
 - while **25%** are spoken by less than 1000 people.
 - More than half of these Lgs have no written form.
 - Overall, **96 %** of world's Lgs are spoken by just **1%** of world's population.

- Africa is the world's most linguistically rich continent, with more than **2000 different Lgs** spoken there.
- *Papua New Guinea* is the country with the most spoken Lgs – an incredible **820**.
- All the more incredible when you consider that the country only has **5.5 million citizens**.
- Papua **New Guinea** only has 3 official Lgs, though.


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- Country with the most official languages is *South Africa* with 11 – Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Sotho, Swazi, Tswana, Tsonga, Venda, Xhosa, and Zulu.
 - Up until 1994, it only had 2 – English and Afrikaans.
 - *Somalia* is the only country in Africa where the entire population speaks the same language – Somali.

- The Lg with the smallest vocabulary is ***Sranan Tongo***, which only has **340 words**.
- It is also known as **Taki Taki** and is spoken by approximately **300,000** people in Suriname.
- The Lg with the largest vocabulary is, according to Stephen Fry and other sources, English.
- The *Oxford English Dictionary*, with descriptions for approximately **750,000** words is the most comprehensive single-Lg dictionary by a distance.

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- ***Khmer***, the official Lg of Cambodia with approximately 12 million speakers,
 - has the longest alphabet, with **74 different letters.**
 - ***Rotokas*** -a Lg spoken in Bougainville, an island to the east of New Guinea, has the shortest alphabet with only **12 letters.**

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- The USA, Australia, Chile and Mexico have no *de jure* official Lg on a national level, although they all have a language spoken by the overwhelming number of the population.
 - The foreign Lg that has bagged the most number of Oscars for Best Foreign Film is Italian, with 12.
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- Due to the huge diversity of Lgs spoken all over the world,
- it is worth mentioning the ***Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights***
- (known also as the **Barcelona Declaration**) adopted at the conclusion of the *World Conference on Linguistic Rights*
- held 6–9 June 1996 in Barcelona, Spain,
- its very important principles related to Lgs, and namely:

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- *“Article 7*
 - 1. All languages are the expression of a collective identity and of a distinct way of perceiving and describing reality and must therefore be able to enjoy the conditions required for their development in all functions.
 - 2. All languages are collectively constituted and are made available within a community for individual use as tools of cohesion, identification, communication and creative expression.



■ *Article 8*

- 1. All language communities have the right to organize and manage their own resources so as to ensure the use of their language in all functions within society.
- 2. All language communities are entitled to have at their disposal whatever means are necessary to ensure the transmission and continuity of their language.

■ *Article 9*

- All language communities have the right to codify, standardize, preserve, develop and promote their linguistic system, without induced or forced interference.



■ *Article 10*

- 1. All language communities have equal rights.
- 2. This Declaration considers discrimination against language communities to be inadmissible, whether it be based on their degree of political sovereignty, their situation defined in social, economic or other terms, the extent to which their languages have been codified, updated or modernized, or on any other criterion.
- 3. All necessary steps must be taken in order to implement this principle of equality and to render it effective.



■ *Article 11*

- All language communities are entitled to have at their disposal whatever means of translation into and from other languages are needed to guarantee the exercise of the rights contained in this Declaration.


■ *Article 12*


- 1. Everyone has the right to carry out all activities in the public sphere in his/her language, provided it is the language proper to the territory where s/he resides.
- 2. Everyone has the right to use his/her language in the personal and family sphere.





■ *Article 13*


- 1. Everyone has the right to acquire knowledge of the language proper to the territory in which s/he lives.
- 2. Everyone has the right to be polyglot and to know and use the language most conducive to his/her personal development or social mobility, without prejudice to the guarantees established in this Declaration for the public use of the language proper to the territory.


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- Over the last **50 years** there has been a substantial increase and productive work in activities relating to the **history of TR**.
 - Researchers try to give to the history of TR its deserved place.
 - articles, papers, monographs, bibliographies, and anthologies have been published;
 - conferences and congresses have been organized;
 - journals and special collections have been launched.


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- we have today considerable resources of various types, based on differing approaches.
 - **Lieven D'hulst**
 - *“the history of TR has not received the attention it merits in terms of research and cannot be compared to any other type of research in translation studies.”*


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- For centuries, people believed in the relation between translation and the story of the **tower of Babel** in the **Book of Genesis**.
 - According to the **Bible**, the descendants of Noah decided, after the great flood, to settle down in a plain in the land of Shinar.
 - There, they committed a great sin.
 - Instead of setting up a society that fits God's will,
 - they decided to challenge His authority and build a tower that could reach Heaven.

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- This plan was not completed, as God, recognizing their wish, regained control over them through a **linguistic stratagem**.
 - He caused them to speak different Lgs so as not to understand each other.
 - Then, he scattered them all over the earth. After that incident, the number of Lgs increased through diversion,
 - and people started to look for ways to communicate, hence the birth of **TR**.


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- Actually, with the birth of *translation studies* and the increase of research in the domain, people started to get away from this story of Babel,
 - and they began to look for specific dates and figures that mark the periods of TR history.
 - Researchers mention that writings on TR go back to the **Romans**.
 - ***Eric Jacobson claims that translating is a Roman invention.***

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- **Cicero and Horace (1st century BC)**
were the **1st** theorists
 - who distinguished between
 - **word-for-word translation** and
 - **sense-for-sense translation.**
 - Their comments on TR practice
influenced the following generations of
TR up to the 20th century.

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- Another period that knew a changing step in TR development was marked by
 - **St. Jerome (4th century CE).**
 - His approach to translating the **Greek Septuagint Bible** into **Latin** would affect later TRs of the scriptures.
 - Later on, the **TR of the Bible** remained subject to many conflicts between western theories and ideologies of TR for more than a 1000 years.

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- Moreover, these conflicts on **Bible TR** were intensified with the coming of the Reformation in the 16th century,
 - when TR came to be used as a **weapon** in both dogmatic and political conflicts
 - as nation states began to emerge and the centralization of the Church started to weaken evidence in linguistic terms by the decline of **Latin** as a universal Lg.

- Needless to say that the invention of **printing techniques** in the **15th** century developed the field of TR and helped in the appearance of early theorists.
- **Etienne Dolet (1515-46)**, whose heretic mistranslation of one of Plato's dialogues, the phrase "*rien du tout*" (*nothing at all*) that showed his disbelief in immortality, led to his execution.


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- The **17th century** knew the birth of many influential theorists such as
 - **Sir John Denhom (1615-69),**
 - **Abraham Cowley (1618-67),**
 - **John Dryden (1631-1700),**
 - who was famous for his distinction between three types of translation;
 - *metaphrase, paraphrase and imitation,*
 - **Alexander Pope (1688-1744).**


- In the **18th century**,
- the translator was compared to an artist with a moral duty both to the work of the original author and to the receiver.
- the study of TR started to be systematic;
- **Alexander Frayer Tayler's** volume ***Principles of Translation (1791)*** is a case in point.
- For Tytler, the aim of TR is the production of an equivalent effect that transcends linguistic and cultural differences.





- He declared that


- “I would therefore describe a good translation to be *that, in which the merit of the original work is so completely transfused into another language, as to be as distinctly apprehended, and as strongly felt, by a native of the country to which that language belongs, as it is by those who speak the language of the original work.*”


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- According to **Tytler**,
 - TR means aesthetic judgment based on “correct taste” and “exquisite feeling.”
 - The translator’s every choice should be governed by it — even to the point of violating the “laws” for good translation.
 - 1 “That the TR should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work,”


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- **2** “That the style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original”.
 - Tytler’s **3rd** and final “law” is that
 - “the translation should have all the ease of original composition”.

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- The **19th century** was characterized by **2 conflicting tendencies**;
 - the 1st considered TR as a category of thought and saw the translator as a creative genius, who enriches the literature and language into which he is translating,
 - while the 2nd saw him through the mechanical function of making a text or an author known.


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- This period of the 19th century knew also the enhancement of Romanticism,
 - the fact that led to the birth of many theories and translations in the domain of literature, especially poetic translation.
 - An example of these translations is the one used by **Edward Fitzgerald (1809-1863)** for **Rubaiyat Omar Al-Khayyam (1858)**.


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- In the 2nd half of the **20th century**,
 - studies on TR became an important course in language teaching and learning at schools.
 - What adds to its value is the creation of a variety of methods and models of translation.
 - For instance, the grammar-translation method studies the grammatical rules and structures of foreign languages.


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- The cultural model is also a witness for the development of translation studies in the period.
 - It required in TR not only a word-for-word substitution, but also a cultural understanding of the way people in different societies think.
 - With this model, we can distinguish between the ethnographical-semantic method and the dynamic equivalent method.


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- Another model that appears in the period is text-based translation model, which focuses on texts rather than words or sentences in translation process.
 - This model includes a variety of sub-models: the interpretative model, the text linguistic model and models of translation quality assessments.
 - The period is also characterized by pragmatic and systematic approach to the study of translation.

- The most famous writings and figures that characterize the 20s are those of
- **Jean-Paul Vinay and Darbelnet**, who worked on a stylistic comparative study of French and English (1958),
- **Alfred Malblanc (1963)**,
- **George Mounin (1963)**,
- **John C. Catford. (1965)**,
- **Eugene Nida (1964)**, who is affected by the Chomskyan generative grammar in his theories of translation,
- **De Beaugrand** who writes a lot about translation, etc.

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- Nowadays, TR research started to take another path, which is more automatic.
 - The invention of the internet, together with the new technological developments in communication and digital materials, has increased cultural exchanges between nations.
 - This leads translators to look for ways to cope with these changes and to look for more practical techniques that enable them to translate more and waste less.

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- They also felt the need to enter the world of cinematographic TR,
 - hence the birth of ***audiovisual translation***.
 - The latter technique, also called ***screen translation***,
 - is concerned with the TR of all kinds of TV programs, including films, series, and documentaries.

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- This field is based on computers and TR software programs, and it is composed of two methods: **dubbing** and **subtitling**.
 - In fact,
 - **audiovisual translation** marks a changing era in the domain of TR.

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- In short, **TR** has a very wide and rich history.
 - Since its birth, **TR** was the subject of a variety of research and conflicts between theorists.
 - Each theorist approaches it according to his viewpoint and field of research, the fact that gives its history a changing quality.

- It can be stated that the history of TR goes back to and starts in the ancient times with
 - the distinction of “**word-for-word**” (literal translation or *verbum pro verbo*) and
 - “**sense-for-sense**” (free translation or *sensum pro sensu*)
 - employed for the first time by **Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C.E)** in his *De optimo genere oratorum*.

- **Cicero** pointed out that one should not translate *verbum pro verbo*.
- He opened a debate that was continued for centuries by
- **Horace, Pliny, Quintilian, St. Augustine,**
- **St. Jerome, John Dryden, Miguel de Cervantes, Novalis, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,**
- **Percy Bysshe Shelley, Aryeh Newman, Ezra Pound** etc.,
- who managed to make TR a science and assigned the place it deserves.