# *Translation* AND Translanguaging

## Investigating linguistic and cultural transformations in superdiverse wards in four UK cities

*London*

Arts & Humanities Research Council

Translation and Translanguaging

Birkbeck UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

UCL Institute of Education

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# *Foreword*

**Professor Charles Forsdick,**
AHRC Theme Leadership Fellow
Translating Cultures

‘Translating Cultures’ is one of four thematic programmes currently supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). In a world increasingly characterised by transnational mobility and globalised connections, the theme foregrounds the importance of understanding communication within, between and across diverse contexts. ‘Translating Cultures’ addresses this challenge by studying the role of translation, understood in its broadest sense, in the sharing and interpretation of languages, values, beliefs, histories and narratives.

The theme includes a portfolio of over 100 grants, focused on key concepts such as multiculturalism and multilingualism. It explores the zones within, across and between which translation occurs, and encourages understanding of the role of those intermediaries who perform translation work. Central to this activity is a cluster of three large grants, of an unprecedented scope and scale for the AHRC, to which ‘Translation and Translanguaging’ (TLANG) belongs. In its study of four multilingual cities, this project has made an invaluable contribution to our theme. The emphasis on translanguaging has revealed the innovative modes and practices on which everyday translation depends; and the focus on co-produced research with partners from museums, libraries, law, sport and business has shown the complex linguistic ecologies of contemporary British cities. The linguistic ethnographies of ‘Translation and Translanguaging’ provide a striking illustration of the dynamic, creative multilingualism of the UK, reminding us of the importance of languages in everyday life, and presenting linguistic diversity as a major resource and not an impediment to social cohesion. I welcome this report, and hope that it will inspire future work in collaboration with a wide range of community partners.

# THE TLANG PROJECT

**Professor Angela Creese,**
Principal Investigator,
TLANG Project

The aim of the TLANG project is to understand how people communicate multilingually across diverse languages and cultures. We define 'translation' as the negotiation of meaning through different modes (spoken/written/visual/gestural), where speakers have different proficiencies in a range of languages and varieties. When speakers do not share a common language they may rely on translation by professionals, friends or family, or by digital means. Such practices occur in 'translation zones', and are at the cutting edge of translation and negotiation.

We view 'cultures' not as fixed sets of practices essential to ethnic groups, but rather as processes which change, and which may be negotiable. In multilingual communities speakers are not confined to using languages separately, but rather they 'translanguage' as they make meaning through whatever repertoires are available to them. If we are to develop the successful cities of the future it is crucial that we understand how people in superdiverse cities communicate across borders that might once have appeared prohibitive. In comprehensive, detailed accounts of interactions in four superdiverse cities, the TLANG project demonstrates how people communicate in everyday encounters with difference.

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## ...THE TLANG PROJECT INVESTIGATES COMMUNICATION IN MULTILINGUAL CITIES FROM AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE.

The TLANG project investigates communication in multilingual cities from an interdisciplinary perspective. The project is a collaboration between academic researchers from a wide range of disciplines, nationally and internationally, including business, law, heritage, sports and exercise sciences, linguistics, social policy, and education. It is also a collaboration between academic researchers and networks of organisations whose user groups will benefit from outcomes of the research, including partners from museums, libraries, legal practice, sport, business, and the third sector.

Across the four cities we conducted ethnographic research in four phases. The phases were organised thematically, so that across the cities there was a common focus. The phases examined communication in sites related to business, heritage, sport, and legal advice. This shared gaze meant that the four research teams could meet together for collaborative analysis. Research sites have included markets, corner shops, libraries, community arts, a karate club, a capoeira group, legal advice centres and more. Linguistic ethnography is painstaking, labour-intensive work, as researchers observe and record the communicative practices of people going about their everyday lives. More than a million words of field notes have been written, hundreds of hours of audio-recordings transcribed, thousands of online and social media messages analysed, scores of interviews conducted. This report presents a summary of the findings of the research in one of the four cities.

More extensive reports are available on the TLANG website:

**www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tlang/publications/index.aspx**

This report is highly relevant and timely as superdiverse cities are planned for the future, not only in the UK, but globally.

# LONDON

## Why this project?

Our project in London focuses on the Polish-speaking communities across the city. Through a close observation of our key participants' everyday interaction with speakers of the same or different linguistic and/or cultural backgrounds, we investigate how people communicate across languages and cultures in a range of contexts including business, arts and heritage, sports and fitness, and law.
We are interested in the following two questions:

- How do people translanguage (i.e., making use of a range of languages, signs, body movements, digital media, etc) to communicate?
- How do their communication practices help with transnational individuals' experience as Londoners?

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### Why London and Polish?

With over 300 different languages spoken in the capital's schools, London is the most linguistically diverse city in the world. Based on the 2011 Census data, Polish is the second most spoken language in England and the third in the UK after English and Welsh; and Poles are the largest overseas-born group. In London, there were 147,816 Polish speakers and most of them arrived after Poland's 2004 accession to the European Union. The size of Polish-speaking population in the UK and the changes in migration patterns triggered by social, economic and political contexts both in Poland and the UK in the last two decades have made it essential to include Polish in the collaborative analysis of superdiverse cities as envisioned by the TLANG project.

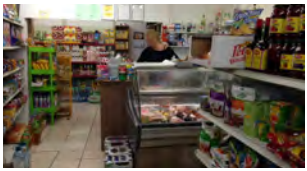
### Significance beyond Polish

Crucially, our project is not just about Polish or any particular language/group alone. Polish is our anchor point for dynamic multilingual and intercultural communication practices. Indeed our key participants, despite the fact that some of them do not see themselves as multilingual speakers, all speak or have learned languages other than Polish. Their languages of daily communication are multiple and mixed: Polish, English, Russian, German, French, Romani, etc. And these multilingual practices are only one part of the resources speakers can mobilise. Beyond conventional languages, our participants communicate through a range of signs and modes, such as eye gaze, body movement and artifacts in managing counter service; singing as a way of speaking; emojis, stickers or creative spelling in WhatsApp or Facebook; gestures, demonstrations and specialised Japanese karate terms in karate clubs; forms, records and documents in navigating the British legal system.

# POLISH SHOP AS TRANSNATIONAL AND TRANSLANGUAGING SPACE

We carried out detailed and systematic observations in a shop run by a Polish family in Newham, a borough in East London. The owners of the shop, a married couple, came from Poland in 1997. They originally planned to stay for a few years, save some money and return to Poland, but later the couple decided to stay and opened the shops, which are named after their daughter.


**Shop front**



**Inside the shop**

## Business and cultural practices

Connections with Poland are pervasive in all aspects of the business as well as the shop owners' family life. The shop sells almost exclusively Polish goods (mainly food products) and offers additional service such as renting Polish DVDs, sending parcels to Poland or offering goods on credit. The significance of the shop, however, is beyond transaction. It serves as a community hub where people can meet and 'off-load'. It also works as a node of cultural mediation where knowledge and expertise (e.g. food recipes, childcare advice) is passed on.

There is an overt orientation to Polishness, through the shop sign, the layout of the shop, the goods they sell and the services they provide, and the preference for the use of Polish in the shop. In the meantime, the Polishness is underpinned by its local connections. The Lycamobile decor, advertisements in English offering Heathrow airport pick-up and houses to rent in the local area, the presence of English texts within the shop, and small talks with customers about holidays in different parts of the UK tell us that this is not just any "Polski Sklep" but a Polish shop in London.

# 09

## Language practices

The language practices in the shop are characterised by resourcefulness and creativity. The owners use Polish, Russian, German, English and other languages that they know in their transactions with the customers, a majority of whom are of Polish or Eastern European backgrounds. They have a good, common-sense understanding of the role and status of several languages they use. Polish is their favoured language of communication with their customers and their daughter at home and they expect that customers who have Polish roots will be good at Polish too. Yet they are also happy to go along with the customer's choice of language. They make use of a range of semiotic resources available creatively and collaboratively to communicate with others. They are adept at adjusting their language choice and speech styles according to audience and demonstrate an ability to manipulate the degree of formality and politeness to suit their communicative goal.

The following field notes by the research team captured the moment when a Ukrainian customer apologised to the shop owner, for his bad Polish.

The Ukrainian customer paid and said **"Do widzenia. Przepraszam."** [**Good bye. I'm sorry.**].

The shop owner asked **"Za co ty przepraszasz?"** [**What are you apologising for?**]

He said that he was sorry that he'd been speaking so quietly but he was trying to cover up for not speaking Polish well.

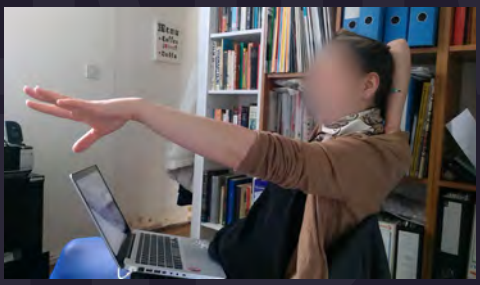
(field note, 5th September 2014).

**Key points: Language and business**

- Space matters.
- Words, signage, display of products, spatial layout, gaze, and gestures, etc. together create a Polish shopping space in London.
- The shop doubles up as a community hub and cultural node. Customers seek and are offered cultural advice, advocacy, support and practical help.
- The ethnic family business faces many challenges in their struggle to keep their business viable. Their transnational and family connections alone are not enough to keep the shop going.

# PLAYING A POLISH ARTIST IN LONDON

We studied the work and life of an artist of Polish origin in London, M, closely over a period of four months in 2015. M was born in the north-east of Poland, near the Belarussian border. She first came to the UK in 2003 to visit a friend. She was supposed to stay for ten days but decided not to return to Poland. She became a self-employed artist in 2014 when she resigned from a full-time assistant manager job in a café.



We want to understand how M goes about working and living as an aspiring, young, female, multilingual, freelance artist in London. There are many individual artists and performers in London with transnational, transcultural and translingual experience. M is a good example of them. For M, life is a performance. Her performance in the real world and performance on stage feed into each other and become two-in-one: her life is the stage of her social and identity acts, embellished by her theatrical performance skills. M's performance in life and work is highly original, replete with multiple voices, strategic stereotyping, acts of playful subversiveness, meta commentaries and reflection.

## Going about stereotypes

Being often labelled as a Polish actress, or 'a token Polish girl in the crowd' in her own words, M employs a subversive yet playful, strategic yet practical approach to managing the essentialised identities and roles ascribed by others. She is adept at turning stereotypes into resources for accomplishing new social actions and there are many instances of interactions and practices in which she actively rejects stereotypes while at the same time consuming them.

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## Turning stereotypes into performative resources

M took an opportunity to turn her self-reflections about identity into a performance when she came across a call for E-publication project with the theme of Lie back and think of England. The piece which she named as 'Untitled' portrays a pretentious artist who attempts to 'pass' as a Londoner. In the performance piece, M infused creativity with subversive playfulness. She made a mockery of pretentious artists, those people who, despite their upbringing in other parts of the world, try to pass off as local Londoners and play up to stereotypes about East European, Londoners and Englishness as well as artists. In the play, the conceptual artist and director M speaks through the character's voice. The character, named after M herself but with a different pronunciation, positioned herself as a local Londoner and as an artist who claimed to be inspired by everything including diversity and cultures but also at the same time disconnected from diversity and cultures and enjoying watching from afar.

Discussions about and references to stereotyping are frequent in M's interactions. In the following conversation, M uses language play to make a point about 'normal' language practice brought up by N, her work partner. She parses the word of 'polarising' into 'Pole-arising'.

**N:** I might just throw into it I might write down kind of normal ev- everyday language phrases that for instance W [N's partner, researcher's note] might use and I have to use those or attempt to

**M:** that's quite handy for you to have a German wife

**N:** I know that's how the whole German thing came into it for me

**M:** for me it was just ob- obviously polarising the Germans ...

**N:** yeah I know

**M:** Pole-arising

**N:** oh Pole, Oh

**M:** ah [clapping] just saying

**Key points: Language and heritage**

- Identities in mobility are complex.
- People can do a range of things with their identities in mobility.
- Stereotypes can be challenged while being strategically consumed; a sense of belonging to one's cultural heritage can grow in the new place of settlement.
- Translanguaging practices are the key resources to enact or reject identities.

**M in 'Untitled'**

# TRANSLATING AND TRANSLANGUAGING KARATE

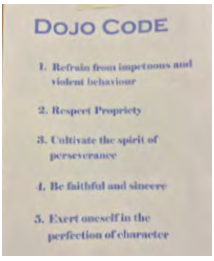
For the sports and fitness part of our project, we followed a karate instructor of Polish Roma origin, based in Newham. We were interested in how languages, people and cultures are transformed in multilingual karate clubs in London and, in particular, the role of multilingualism in the process of translation.

## Translating culture

Translation is understood here as 'a way of thinking about how languages, people, and cultures are transformed as they move between different places' (Young, 2003). Karate itself is a project of transnational cultural translation; it developed from Chinese Buddhist martial arts into a creole of practices associated especially with Okinawa, an island to the south of the Japanese main island. It was then adopted by the Japanese mainlanders who added rituals similar to those more traditional Japanese sports. Following the World War II, karate was popularised by the returning American military in the US as a self-defence exercise. Now there are more karate practitioners outside Japan than the entire Japanese population.

**Community Centre**


**Roma Karate club poster**




**Dojo code**

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## Polish/Roma connection

The karate instructor, Sensei SK, was born into a large Polish/Roma family of travellers in 1960s. He moved to the UK in 2006 to join his sister who lived in London already, aiming to find a better life for his family. He started learning karate in his teens in Poland and is now a 6th Dan (rank) karate coach teaching in karate clubs in London. He speaks Polish, Polish Romani and English and is highly proficient in specialised Japanese karate terms. SK shows resilience towards stereotypes associated with Roma people and sometimes strategically uses the stereotypes about Gypsies. Once he was heard, while coming to the end of setting up the floor mats, saying 'they (referring to the mats) are gone. The Gypsies stole it'. This kind of act allows SK to confront the stigma head-on.

## Rituals

Rituals are a significant component of practice in the karate clubs. They range from ceremonial performances where karate traditions and values and dojo (training hall) etiquettes are displayed and elaborated to embodied practices such as bowing, kneeling, and shouting osu (respect) or kiai (spirit yield). These rituals and, equally important, the process of learning to perform these rituals create a karate space, evoke a kind of Japaneseness for its participants and spectators alike and further transform its participants into karateka (karate practitioners).

An ordinary 'multilingual' moment in a Karate club in London as recorded in the researcher team's field notes. Different languages in different colours: Polish in **purple**; Japanese karate terms in **orange**; and English in **yellow.**

| TRANSCRIPT | TRANSLATION |
|---|---|
| **Nie rób głupich min!** | [**Stop making silly faces!**] – SK lectures a student in Polish. |
| **ichi, ni, san...** | [**one, two, three**] – he counts in Japanese again. |
| **zmień ręce!** | [**change hands!**] – he shouts in Polish. |
| **Kiai** | [**spirit fight**] – children cheer loudly. |
| **yoi** | [**ready**] – SK draws his students' attention – |
| **osu** | [**respect**] |
| **osu** | [**respect**] – children answer. SK helps the youngest student to tie his red belt up. The boy is smiling and staring at SK while a late student walks into the room and kneels down by the door waiting for SK's permission to be let in. |
| **bow** | He says |
| **osu** | She answers |
| **uczcie się od niej!** | [**Learn from her!**] – he compliments the girl for her behaviour. |

**(Field notes, 20.10.15)**

### Hierarchy

The social order of the karate clubs is manifested in the way hierarchy and expertise are interwoven into routine practices in the clubs. Hierarchy in the dojo is performed and reinforced through semiotics of colours, spatial allocation, gestures, commands, address terms, vocatives, and right to speak. Karate expertise is entangled with one's linguistic expertise. SK's competence in specialised Japanese karate terms cements his status and authority as the most senior karate coach.

### Different languages different purposes

In the dojo, multiple languages are used in coaching but for different purposes: the use of Japanese is limited to performativity and rituals and, along with white karate gi (karate uniform), hierarchy of ranks, kneeling and bowing, is part of the discourse that 'Japanises' the karate practices. In contrast, Polish, English and other linguistic and semiotic forms are used collaboratively as languages of instruction, elaboration, disciplines or information.

### Blending resources

SK is adept at mobilising and blending his linguistic and non-linguistic resources in communication. He has tried-and-tested strategies to make up for his English inadequacy through using 'simple' words, embodying instructions, and translation. The dynamic translanguaging practices by SK and the participants of the karate clubs contribute to the transformation of karate to a global and transcultural practice which, paradoxically, capitalises on the myth of karate as Japanese.

**Osu like this**

### Key points: Language and sport

- Sport is integral to the cultural and social (as well as sporting) life of many people in the city, and as such needs to be supported.
- Language plays a role in communication, but communication does not depend only on language.
- Sports clubs such as karate club develop a shared activity and a sense of belonging among those involved.
- Informal language learning during sporting activity happens in multilingual contexts, and English might not always be the most important language to learn.
- Engaging in sporting activities with people from across our superdiverse community develops an open outlook in communication with others.

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# INTERCULTURAL MOMENTS IN TRANSLATING SYSTEMS

We carried out a linguistic ethnographic study in a social-legal advice centre offering support to Eastern Europeans in the UK (known as EEAC), as the law part of the project. We want to understand how cultural and linguistic differences between people become salient, how people live with, experience and negotiate these differences on the ground and what role translanguaging plays in these two processes in the legal advice centre.

As an organisation supporting migrants in the UK, EEAC is a product of changing political dynamics between the UK, Poland and Eastern Europe. It was initially set up as a charity to help Polish people who were stranded in Britain during the period of Martial Law in Poland in the 1980s and became an organisation supporting Eastern Europeans in the UK several years later. It is currently repositioning itself as a resource centre, adding educational dimension to its existing main areas of work. Unexpectedly, EEAC also found itself speaking out for Polish communities in the media and leading campaigns against hate crimes since June 2016, the date of the EU membership referendum. We observed Renata, a senior advisor in EEAC, at work and talked to her at length about her intercultural and multilingual living. For Renata, home is where her children were born, where she brought them up and simply where she is while not at work, despite always being perceived as a 'foreigner' in London. Speaking Polish as first language and English with high proficiency, she believes that technical and professional terms in English do not need to be translated in the workplace, as they have less to do with which languages they appear in, but more to do with one's familiarity with the subject matter.

**A consultation room in EEAC**


**EEAC/EERC facebook account**


**EEAC leaflet in English**


**EEAC leaflet in Polish**

## Multilingual needs in the workplace

The nature of the work in EEAC requires a multilingual outlook in the workplace. A language audit by the research team shows an organically developed grass-roots approach to multilingual needs in the workplace. Polish is perceived as the desired language of the workplace where and when the staff have choices; English as the de facto working language with external organisations; and a translation and interpreting service for some East European languages can be provided upon request.

## Multiple roles

As a social-legal advisor, Renata plays a range of roles in navigating clients through the system and making institutional discourses accessible to her clients. She translates and 'humanises' the system and often becomes a facilitator between her clients and other agencies. There is an emphasis on writing, recording and documentation.

Renata uses a variety of means to determine relevance and accuracy of clients' narratives against the system, including reformulating and repeating the client's replies, using translation equivalents in different languages, and breaking down the questions. Below is an example of how R calibrates an ambiguous response from the client and how she (in)advertently brought the history and personal trajectories into the conversation. It illustrates an interesting, new dimension of translanguaging, and shows how people live with, experience and negotiate cultural and linguistic difference on the ground.

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Renata (R) is meeting a client (CL) who was born in Russia and grew up in Lithuania. In the following conversation, different colours represent different languages: Polish in plain; English in **orange**; and Russian in **yellow**.

| | TRANSCRIPT | TRANSLATION |
|---|---|---|
| R | i obydwa Pan będzie tak samo rozumiał? . bo musimy być tacy | and will you understand them both equally well. because we have to be |
| CL | ja **wolno** rozmawiam. ja **wolna** rozmawia na litewsk**am** i na rusk**am** to samo | I speak slowly/freely. I speak slowly/freely in Lithuanian and in Russian the same thing |
| R | '**wolno**' to znaczy dobrze? | 'slowly/freely' means well? |
| CL | tak | yes |
| R | czyli. **it doesn't.** to nie ma znaczenia dla Pana? | so. it doesn't. it doesn't matter to you? |
| CL | nie ma. może- | doesn't matter. maybe - |
| R | **всё равно** | doesn't matter |
| CL | **всё равно**{laughing} | doesn't matter {laughing} |
| R | o. to mi ze szkoły zostało jeszcze .. czyli albo **Russian** albo **Lithuanian**. a w jakiej kolejności? czy **Lithuanian** pierwszy? | see. this is what I still remember from school ... so either Russian or Lithuanian. and in what order? is Lithuanian first? |

**Key points: Language and law**

- Social-legal advice centres play an important role in helping migrants in navigating the system and accessing social justice.
- Social-legal advisers are many roles in one: humanising the system, translating and explaining how the system works in an accessible way, speaking for clients or mediating with other agencies are some examples.
- Social-legal advice centres need to meet their clients' multilingual needs and to develop a multilingual outlook in the workplace and social media in line with their capability and functions.

# LOOKING FORWARD

**SUMMARY**
The TLANG Project in London explores multilingual practices and transnational experiences by Polish speakers in business, arts and heritage, sport and fitness and law contexts. Dynamic multilingual practices and mobilisation of other semiotic resources and modes such as signs, body movements, eye gaze, gestures, forms, records and digital media form essential parts of everyday lives of these people and major socio-cultural resources for them individually and for society as a whole. Translation and translanguaging not only enrich individuals' transnational experience, but also contribute to community coherence and cultural vitality. Support for multilingual practices need to be strengthened in order to maximise the important social and cultural capital for the nation.

**Looking forward**
To further understand transnational experience and language practices and beliefs, Zhu Hua and Li Wei will take part in an ESRC-funded project on Family Language Policy between 2017-2019. The project will carry out a multi-level investigation of multilingual practices of transnational families.

**Research team**
The TLANG project in London is led by Professor Zhu Hua (Birkbeck, University of London), Professor Li Wei (UCL Institute of Education), Dr Agnieszka Lyons (Business and Arts & Heritage phases) and Daria Jankowicz-Pytel (Sport and Law phases). We would like to thank our participants, their colleagues, friends and families, Roma Support Group, EEAC, Funakoshi Shotokan Karate Association, and Martin Pinder from Newham Partnership for Complementary Education for their generous support.

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# FURTHER INFORMATION

Further research findings and summaries are published and available at the TLANG project website at:

**www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tlang/index.aspx**

- Zhu Hua, Li Wei & Lyons, A. (2015). Translanguaging Business: TLANG London heritage case study report. Working paper in Translation and Translanguaging (WP. 5).
- Zhu Hua, Li Wei & Lyons, A. (2016). Playful Subversiveness and Creativity: Doing a/n (Polish) Artist in London. Working Papers in Translation and Translanguaging (WP. 16).
- Zhu Hua, Li Wei & Jankowicz-Pytel, D. (2017). Translating Culture in Multilingual Karate Clubs in London. Working Papers in Translation and Translanguaging (WP. 20).
- Zhu Hua, Li Wei and Jankowicz-Pytel, D. (2017). Intercultural moments in navigating the (British) systems (WP. tbc).
- Zhu Hua, Li Wei & Lyons, A. (2017) Polish shop(ping) as Translanguaging Space. Social Semiotics, 27:4, 411-433, DOI: 10.1080/10350330.2017.1334390. Available as open access at **www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10350330.2017.1334390**

Summaries of the case studies, by theme, are also in our Working Papers series on the website.

- Creese, A., Baynham, M., and Trehan, K. (2016). Language, Business and Superdiversity: An overview of four case studies. Working Papers in Translanguaging and Translation (WP. 1).
- Creese, A., Blackledge, A. & Robinson, M. (2017). Translanguaging: Heritage for the future. Working Papers in Translanguaging and Translation (WP. 21).
- Creese, A., Zhu Hua, Li Wei & Thompson, J. (2017). Movement in the city: An overview of sports case studies. Working Papers in Translanguaging and Translation (WP. 25).


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