Positions through essaying

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TEXT SCRIPT
DIALOGUE AND STRUCTURE

Power of Translation

Section 1
Broken translation system

Why
It needs translation
It should be English

Definition of translation

Section 2
Definition of translation

Translation is
a dynamic negotiation
process

Translation is
words to words
sentence to sentence
paragraph to paragraph
page to page
culture to ♫

Machine:
Translation is
A to A
B to B
C to

contrast

Human:
Translation is
A might be B
B probable to C
C depends

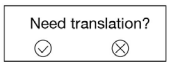
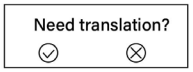
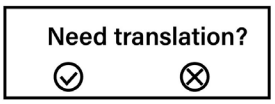
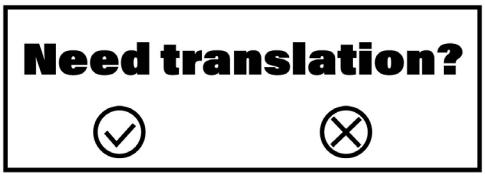
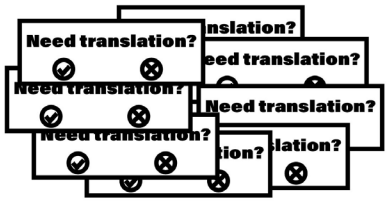
Power of Translation

Section 3
Studio practices

Translation should be English?
Not required.
But always.

TEXT SCRIPT

Section 1
Broken translation system

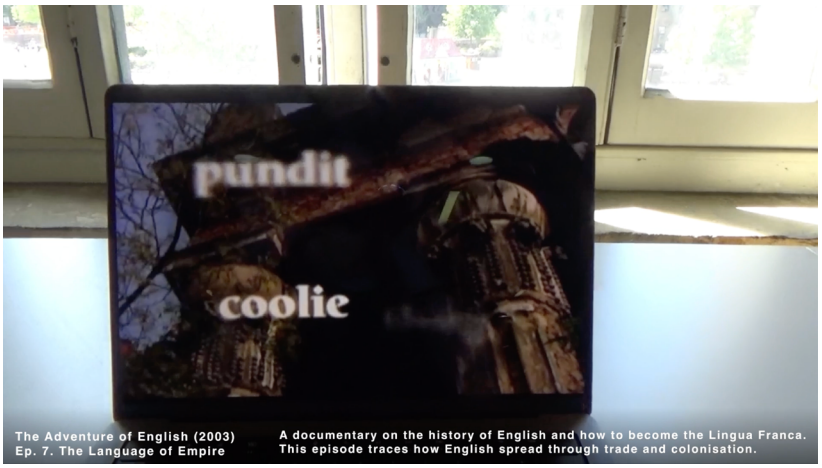
	Content	Dialog	Voice
Scene 1	Non-English scenarios in daily life		Ambient sound
Scene 2			Ambient sound
Scene 3			Ambient sound + why (machine noise low)
Scene 4			Ambient sound + why(machine noise) why(machine noise)
Scene 5			Ambient sound + why(machine noise) why(machine noise) why(machine noise)
Scene 6			why why why why Ambient sound why why why why
Scene 7			why why why why IT SHOULD BE ENGLISH why why why why
Scene 8	The screen began to crash and part of it turned into digital code. digital code. digital code.		IT SHOULD BE ENGLISH IT SHOULD BE ENGLISH IT SHOULD BE ENGLISH (piercing alarm sound)
Scene 9	IT SHOULD BE ENGLISH IT NEED TRANSLATION		

Enquiry

Why is English treated as the default, neutral language, while other languages are always placed in the secondary position of being translated?

Broader Context

This question belongs to the history of how English became a global language, and that history is not natural. The documentary that opens my video, The Adventure of English (2003), traces exactly this: how English travelled with the British Empire and was planted, country by country, until it came to seem universal. Phillipson (1992) describes this spread as a structural and ongoing operation of power, carried by colonisation, trade, and education rather than by any quality of the language itself. The neutrality of English is an effect of that power, not a property of the words.



I found this same logic standing in the British Museum, made solid and put behind glass. The Rosetta Stone, treated as the origin of decipherment, is celebrated as the founding image of translation itself, and is now borrowed even as the name of translation software. But the stone is also a colonial object, taken from Egypt and held in London, where it is explained to the world in English. The place that reads and displays the origins of other languages is also the place that took them. Translation and possession arrive together, and the museum is where I could see them held in the same gesture.

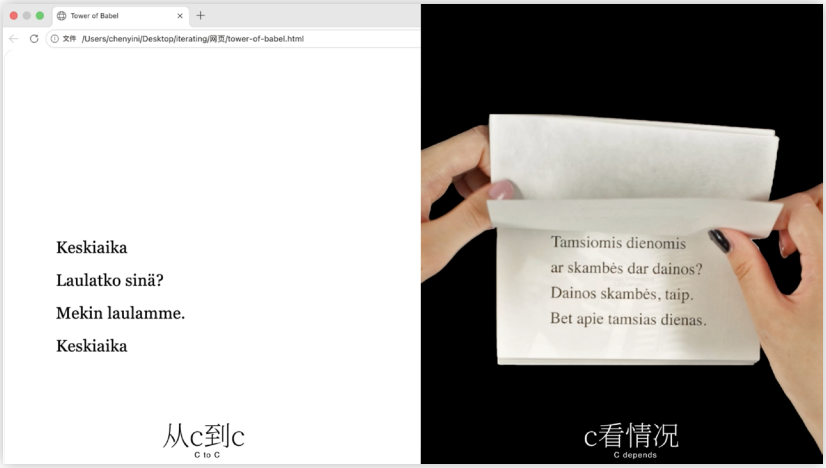


Position

As a native Chinese speaker studying graphic communication design in Britain, I live inside this hierarchy rather than observing it from outside. My position is that the neutrality of English is a construction, not a fact, and that the page is one of the places where the ranking of languages is quietly enforced. As a designer, my material is exactly this surface, where type size, position, and weight are never only aesthetic decisions. In an earlier project, I built a typographic system in which each language was scaled according to its number of speakers and its share of the internet, so that English sat largest and heaviest while smaller languages shrank towards the edge of legibility. The layout itself performed a power relation. I then carried this same logic of scale and hierarchy into my translation website, and now into the subtitles of this video, where Chinese is held large while English is reduced or magnified to expose the ranking at work. Kinross (2010) argues that supposedly neutral design choices are never neutral, and Spivak (1993) reminds us that no translation is ever equal. Typography is where these two claims meet.

Methods

This video essay is itself the method, and its form carries the argument rather than describing it. The central decision is the subtitle system. Conventionally, English subtitles sit at the bottom of the screen as a neutral service, assumed to be the language everything arrives in. I reversed this. Chinese is held large and central as the primary voice, while English is reduced in scale, displaced from the centre, and at moments of collapse allowed to break apart into code. The two languages are set on separate lines so that their hierarchy is legible at a glance. Rather than explaining English dominance through text, I arranged the surface of the work so that a viewer experiences the ranking of languages as they watch, and feels it inverted. A viewer who reads only English is, briefly, placed in the position my own language usually occupies, having to work at the edge of the frame. The form does not illustrate the argument. It enacts it.



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