Impasse

Before this tutorial, my enquiry into language and power had reached an impasse. The concept felt too abstract to visualise. Although my project had traced some of the historical reasons for English's global dominance, and represented that dominance through my experiments, I had not found my own position within it, and without a position I could not see how to advance or deepen the work.

Position

In the dialogue, Paul Bailey reframed the problem in two moves. First, he redefined what power might mean here. Rather than treating English as simply the most dominant language, he described translation tools as at once empowering, giving access to a language one does not speak, and "disempowering, because they need to rely on a tool rather than to draw from their existing knowledge". Power, then, is not fixed on one side but shifts constantly between access and dependency. He also drew a sharp distinction, noting that the most visible language is not the most understood, only the most present. Second, he connected this back to my own work. Looking at my experiment in which translated text grows larger until it becomes abstract and unreadable, he observed that I was "not just representing translation, [I was] commenting on it". This helped me see what the piece was already doing. As the text is translated more and made more visible, it becomes less legible, so that the experiment stages the very instability Paul described, where the act that appears to empower reverses, on the page, into its opposite. This shifted my enquiry. My question is no longer whether English should be criticised, a position I could not honestly hold, but how the instability of linguistic power can be made visible through typography, something my practice is already doing. Paul's advice to move from abstract claims towards particular situations gave that shift a direction.

Reference

Paul's references broadened my perspective on the question. Anna Barham's ZYX (Barham, 2026) treats machine mishearing as generative material, forcing speech-to-text systems to hallucinate and building the work from those errors, which shows me that a machine's failure to understand can be a method rather than a flaw, central to my own translation experiments. Dysfluent (Foran, 2023), a magazine on the lived experience of stammering, reframes what is usually treated as a deficiency as a form of meaning, a reversal close to my own treatment of translation error. A related project, Stuttering Can Create Time (People Who Stutter Create, 2024), goes further, using typography to perform three forms of stuttered speech across three languages at once, which mirrors precisely my own aim of making a language state visible through the page rather than describing it. Women in Concrete Poetry, 1959–1979 (Balgiu and de la Torre, 2020) offers a typographic lineage for treating composition itself as meaning.

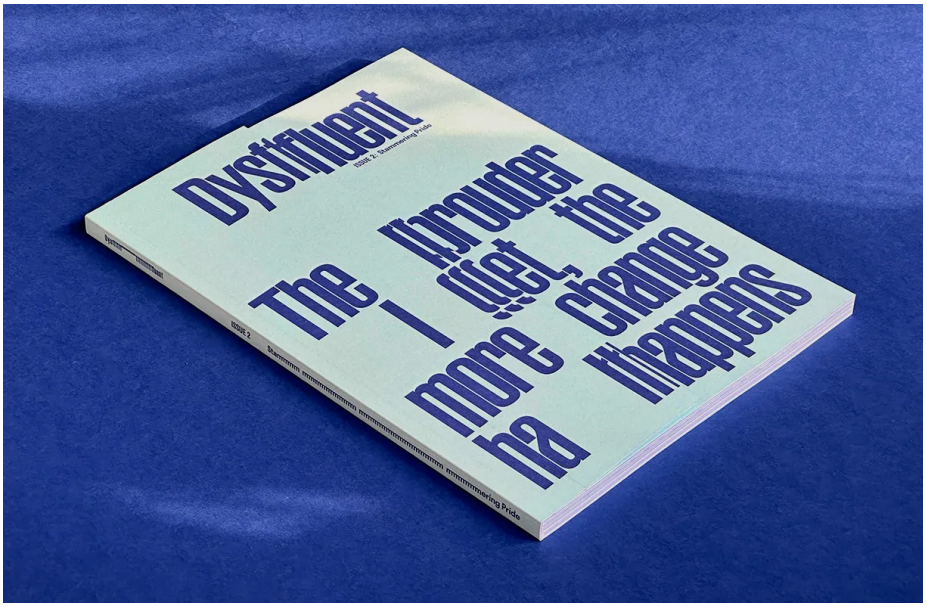
1. ZYX (Barham, 2026)



ZYX is a sound installation by the artist Anna Barham at Matt's Gallery in London. She designed an audio filter that amplifies the non-semantic parts of speech, including hesitations, repetitions, breath, accent and vocal strain, in order to force speech-to-text systems to hallucinate, that is, to mishear and fabricate. The texts generated through these algorithmic mishearings then become the material for the work's script, weaving machine error and bodily memory together.

Its value to me lies in showing that a machine's mishearing or misreading can not only be observed but actively designed and used, becoming a recognised method of making rather than merely a flaw. This directly supports my own practice of using machine translation breakdown as creative material, and it also lends legitimacy to the experiment I intend to carry out next, using an AI as a partner in dialogue. I am not exploiting a loophole in a tool to pad out my data, but working within a tradition already established in artistic practice, actively bringing the machine's non-understanding into the work.

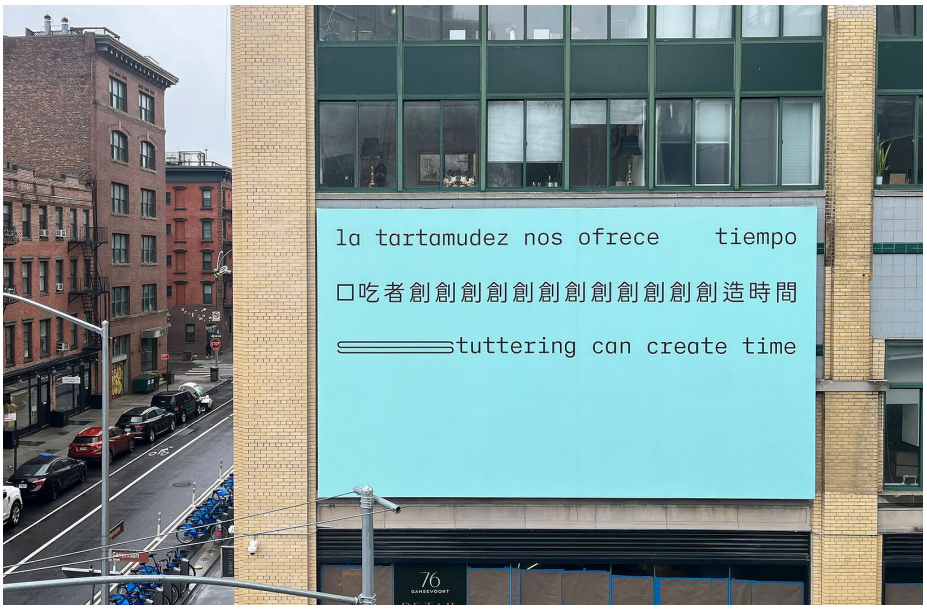
2. Dysfluent (Foran, 2023)



Dysfluent is an independent magazine edited by Conor Foran, focused on the lived experience of people who stammer, with its second issue themed around "Stammering Pride". What is most significant about it is that it does not treat stammering as a deficiency to be corrected, but reframes it as a valuable way of speaking and thinking.

It inspires me on two levels. The first is a reversal of value, where a language state usually seen as a failure is reunderstood as a source of meaning. This is the same move I make when working with machine translation errors, since I do not treat translation breakdowns, mistranslations and semantic loss as technical faults to be fixed, but as the core material of the work. The second is typographic, in that the magazine uses layout itself to present the theme of disfluency, for instance using letter spacing, line breaks and white space to let the rhythm of stammering become visible on the page rather than being smoothed away. It is an example of translating a language state directly into a typographic language, which is exactly what I want to do, making linguistic power visible through typography rather than explaining it through descriptive text.

3. Stuttering Can Create Time (2024)



Stuttering Can Create Time is a public artwork created by the collective People Who Stutter Create and commissioned for the 2024 Whitney Biennial, presented as a billboard. It sets the sentence "stuttering can create time" in three languages across three lines, and each line uses

typography to perform a different form of stuttered speech. The Spanish line opens a gap between the words for "us" and "time" to enact a block, the pause that interrupts speech. The Chinese line repeats the first character of the word for "create" to enact repetition. The English line stretches the "s" of "stuttering" horizontally to enact prolongation. The lower half of the composition is left empty, so that pause, silence and waiting become part of the image itself.

This work inspires me more directly than others, because it does exactly what my research sets out to do, using typography itself to present a language state rather than describing that state in words. What matters most to me is that it is multilingual, and the three languages are not equivalent translations of one another but separate performances, each using its own writing system to enact a form of stuttering. This turns translation from the carrying across of a fixed meaning into a material performance particular to each language. It shows how different languages on the same page can carry different relations of power and different bodily experience. It proves that a page can be multilingual, embodied and critical at the same time.

4. Women in Concrete Poetry, 1959–1979



Women in Concrete Poetry, 1959–1979 is an anthology edited by Alex Balgiu and Mónica de la Torre, collecting concrete poetry by women poets between 1959 and 1979. Concrete poetry treats language as a material, attending to how letters, words and sentences are arranged on the page, and to how that arrangement itself produces meaning. What makes this book distinctive is that it focuses on a group of women whose work has long been overlooked by the mainstream narrative of concrete poetry, and who used the materiality of language to address questions of women's rights and space.

Its value to me lies in giving me a historical lineage, proving that the idea of layout itself being content and argument has its own tradition and methods. The core of my research is precisely to make linguistic power visible through typography rather than to explain it through descriptive text. This anthology shows me that choices of type size, position and structure can carry a critical position directly, which gives me a solid precedent for treating the form of the work as a tool of argument, rather than merely a container for words.

Forward

In the next step, I will try to find my own perspective within this question of power from the broad topic. Locating the enquiry in something specific to me: my daily position as a bilingual designer who moves between languages and depends on translation tools, where the shifting of power Paul described is not an abstraction but a lived, everyday condition.

REFERENCES

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