Technology as a Facilitator of Linguistic Representation and Accessibility in the Artistic Sector

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CONTENT WARNING: Brief mention of death, abortion, rape, and suicide

PART I The Current State of Linguistic Representation and Accessibility in the Artistic Sector

SECTION I: Introduction

This research report is rooted in the following assertion made by the National Endowment for the Arts: "**the arts matter because they help us to understand how we matter**."[1]

From this statement, it follows that media has the power to "tell [a] society who and what is important."[2] For members of minority and underrepresented demographic groups, representation in arts and entertainment not only impacts how the world sees them, but guides how they see themselves. Identity-based association with creators, actors, or performances facilitated through accurate representation in entertainment holds the power to "break down barriers, open [up] new ideas, create powerful role models, and … be a source of inspiration" as one's own identity is strengthened through its represented existence on stage or screen.[3] However, alongside the positive identity-building potential of representation in the arts comes the equally powerful threat of underrepresentation and inaccessibility to these minority identities or communities. Intuitively, when the arts lack proper language-based accessibility and representation, harm comes to those who would be otherwise interested in or physically able to engage with the field.

In the wake of the 2020 murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, artistic organizations have made strides to systematically increase diversity, cultural-sensitivity, and broad cultural equity measures across the creative sector. Despite these strides, however, internationally-recognized artistic advocacy and service organizations such as Americans for the Arts (AFTA) are regularly criticized for "hoarding power and blocking pathways for professional advancement in the field for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) arts leaders."[4] However, language-based diversity and the related questions of physical accessibility are regularly left out of these conversations; whether consciously or not, DEAI (Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion) efforts in popular arts and media regularly function on the outskirts of language-based representation and accessibility. As will be expanded upon later in this report, in the nation's current artistic environment, a lack of language-based representation and diversity stifles how the United States' linguistically-diverse society is able to engage with the arts.

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[1] NEA Staff, "Why the Arts Matter," *National Endowment for the Arts,* September 23, 2015, https://www.arts.gov/stories/blog/2015/why-arts-matter.

[2] Bri Castellini, "Why Representation Matters," *Pipeline Artists*, February 9, 2021, https://pipelineartists.com/why-representation-matters-in-arts/.

[3] Jonathan Abbott, "Representation in Media Matters," *GBH*, accessed October 18, 2022, https://www.wgbh.org/foundation/representation-in-media-matters.

[4] Elizabeth Blair, "'Americans for the Arts' Promises More Racial and Cultural Equity," *NPR*, December 3, 2020, https://www.npr.org/2020/12/03/942451376/americans-for-the-arts-promises-more-racial-and-cultural-equity.

As illustrated on the following page in Figure I, in the United States alone, the US Census Bureau reports that the proportion of residents who speak a language other than English at home has increased by a factor of 194.0% between 1980 and 2019.[5] This statistic is especially striking when compared to the fact that the proportion of residents who only speak English in the home increased by a factor of only 28.8% over the same time period.[6] As will be expanded upon further in this article, identity is strongly tied to language-based culture or community. In her research on gender and identity, Mary Bucholtz explains that nearly all linguistic phenomena (ranging from discourse to slang to formal writing) are socially structured.[7] Under this framework, "speakers use language to project their identities" and using language, "identities emerge in practice, through the combined efforts of [linguistic] structure and [individual] agency."[8] Language and intertwined cultural heritage are key to individual identity. It then follows that any lack of language-based representation and accessibility in the arts are a failure of adequate diversity and representation in the sector.

At present, linguistic representation and language-based accessibility are far behind the (equally impactful) strides being made towards racial, gender-identity, and sexuality equity in the arts. It is up to arts leaders and creative activists to actively factor linguistic equity into all conversations on DEAI measures. This introductory report examines the current state of language in the arts, and breaks down why such representation matters not only for individuals, but the artistic sector as a whole. In future sections, additional explorations are presented, showing how technology may be integrated alongside systemic linguistic-consciousness to propel equitable linguistic practices in arts organizations. Ultimately, these opportunities can help foster an artistic community where users of all forms of language may use the arts "to understand how [they] matter."[9]

SECTION II: The Impacts of Linguistic Intervention on Identity

Prior to examining the current state of language diversity and accessibility in the arts, it is crucial to first solidify *why* exactly such representation matters.

Linguistic Empowerment Through Performance: In 2018, researchers Sarah Fahmy, Pui-Fong Kan, and Jen Walentas Lewon implemented a "theatre-based vocal empowerment

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[5] Sandy Dietrich and Erik Hernandez, "Language Use in the United States: 2019," *United States Census Bureau*, September 1, 2022, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2022/acs/acs-50.html.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Mary Bucholtz, "Why be Normal?: Language and Identity Practices in a Community of Nerd Girls," *Language in Society* 28, no. 1 (1999): 203 - 223, accessed October 19, 2022, https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/5F3744D7AB7FC0EA91079650D14E5ABA/S0047404599002043a.pdf/div-class-title-why-be-normal-language-and-identity-practices-in-a-community-of-nerd-girls-div.pdf.

[8] Ibid.

[9] NEA Staff, "Why the Arts Matter."

UNITED STATES LANGUAGE TRENDS

In 2022, the United States Census Bureau compiled nearly 40 years of data to track national trends in language proficiency.

FIGURE A — Monolingual and Multilingual Population from 1980 to 2019

- Speak only English at home
- Speak a language other than English at home

28.8 percent increase in monolingual individuals

194.0 percent increase in multilingual individuals

between 1980 and 2019 in the United States

FIGURE B — Non-English Language(s) Spoken by Multilingual Households in 2019

SPANISH
61.6 percent

INDO-EUROPEAN
French, Haitian, Italian, Portuguese, German, Yiddish, Greek, Russian, Polish, Serbo-Croatian, Ukrainian, Armenian, Persian, Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Nepali, etc.
16.9 percent

OTHER
Arabic, Hebrew, Afro-Asiatic Langs. (e.g. Somali), African Langs. (e.g. Twi, Igbo), Navajo, Native American Languages, etc.
5.4 percent

ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLAND
Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Hmong, Vietnamese, Khmer, Thai, Lao, Tagalog, Ilocano, Samoan, Hawaiian, etc.
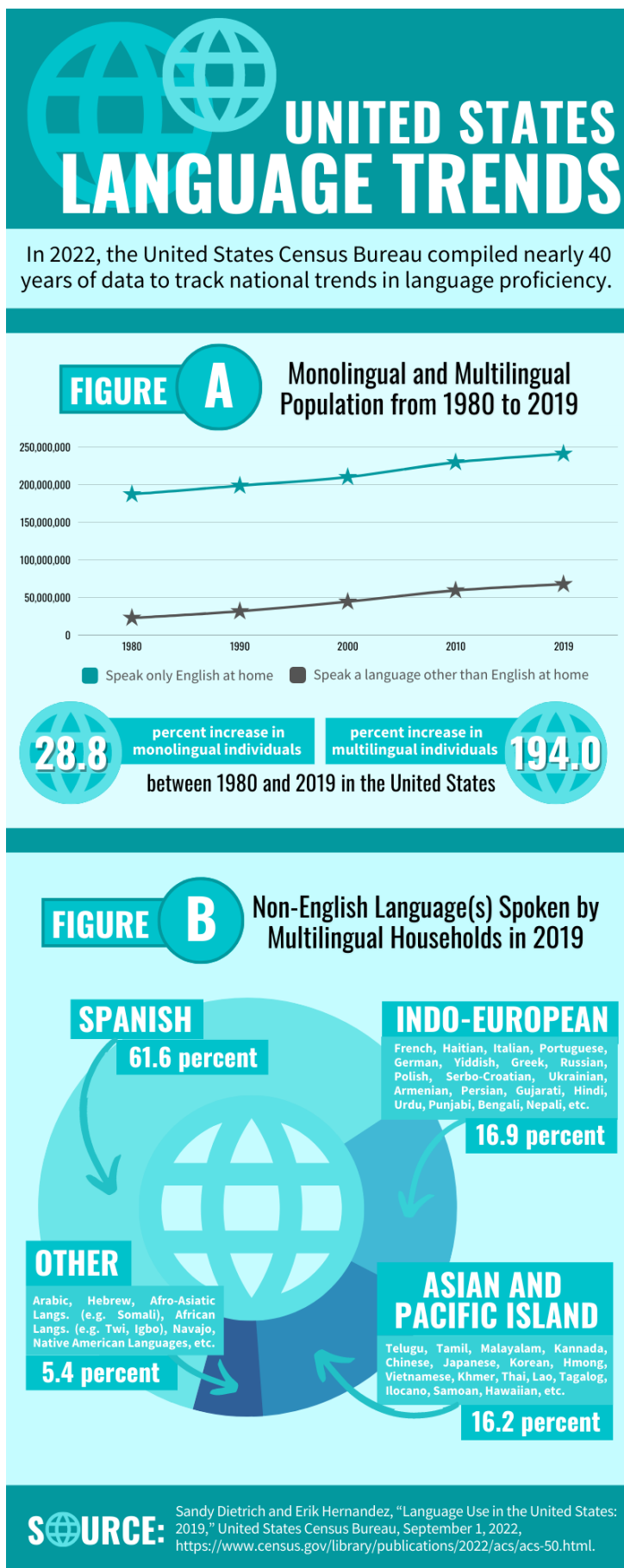16.2 percent

SOURCE: Sandy Dietrich and Erik Hernandez, "Language Use in the United States: 2019," United States Census Bureau, September 1, 2022, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2022/acs/acs-50.html.

Figure 1: An overview of the state of language use and monolingualism/ multilingualism in the United States between 1980 and 2019. (Source: *Author*)

program" on 55 bilingual women from Egyptian cities Alexandria and Aswan to measure intervention impacts on "the vocal and language characteristics and self-perceptions of [these] young bilingual … [participants]."[10] Researchers asserted that "young women who have an increased understanding and awareness of their voices have an increased ability to positively impact their self-advocacy to express themselves and contribute to their communities."[11] In other words, the team predicted that increased multilingual language evocation and representation through the use of theatrical exercises would strengthen self-perceived identity and advocacy in public settings.

The study's theatre-based vocal empowerment program included "dramatic techniques and physical movement" interwoven "to enhance participants' understanding of the biological, psychological, and emotional functions of voice production" in an explicitly improvisational theatrical setting.[12] All selected participants spoke Arabic natively, and had studied English as a second language in school; each participant had slightly varying levels of prior experience with and comfort using English in a non-academic setting.[13] Both before and after the 12-day intervention program, participants were measured on speech production tasks (targeting lexical diversity, grammatical complexity, speaking rates, and fundamental frequency) and a self-perception survey for both Arabic and English. This pre-post study design was used to analyze the impacts of the vocal empowerment program on the 55 bilingual participants.[14]

Ultimately, results supported the researchers' hypothesis that participation in applied and improvisational programming had positive impacts on participants "vocal and language production skills and their vocal empowerment knowledge" in *both* of their spoken languages.[15] Interestingly, while intervention had positive impacts on women from both cities, researchers found that individual results were still stratified in direct correlation with "socio-economic, educational, and language backgrounds."[16] In other words, linguistic representation and its promotion through the arts has positive effects on language-based identity.

Exposure to multiple languages in conjunction with arts education and experiences has the power to drive identity-based intervention, development, and support for individuals of all social, economic, and regional classes. As shown by the present study, although multilingual artistic activities do not entirely remove the barriers or divides caused by other factors targeted by DEAI measures (financial

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[10] Sarah Fahmy, Pui-Fong Kan, and Jen Walentas Lewon, "The Effects of Theatre-Based Vocal Empowerment on Young Egyptian Women's Vocal and Language Characteristics,"*Plos One* 16, no. 12 (December 31, 2021): 1 - 21, accessed October 5, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0261294.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

status, level of education, etc.), they can almost universally serve as a valuable tool in uplifting or advancing self-perceived confidence and the intertwined likelihood of one standing up for themselves in social settings. As the researchers put it, "theatre is a community-based, collective activity that engages [individuals] in an embodied way to practice using their voices with confidence to speak up about community concerns they care about."[17]

Language-based artistic engagement affects not only how speakers view themselves, but how they engage with society on a larger scale.

Linguistic Diversity in the Digital Age: The field of linguistics encompasses all facets of communication. The digital age has triggered "an explosion of new vocabularies, genres, and styles and by reshaping literacy practices."[18] While TikTok trends or Twitter-speak are not likely to start cropping up in the majority of operas, language in the digital age is a useful tool to convey how language is able to shape identity within both communities and individuals.

Summarizing this language-associated digital development, researcher Ron Darvin writes that through the rise of the internet: "new spaces of language acquisition and socialization" have been created and "social media capabilities have facilitated cross-language interaction" with "transcultural and translingual practices."[19] In other words, the general accessibility of linguistic diversity has increased exponentially with the global introduction of social media and the internet.[20] As a result of the previously-discussed dynamic role of language in identity formation, "the digital also transforms identity."[21] Because the digital world provides many unique spaces and communities, individuals are able to move through and perform diverse identities across various platforms and means of communication. Digital expansion has facilitated the growth of increased, cross-cultural knowledge bases while simultaneously enabling "the construction and performance of multiple identities."[22] As a whole, the digital revolution has opened vast opportunities for rapid identity formation and change in a large-scale, linguistically diverse ecosystem.

Virtual identities are defined by how an individual commands language on digital platforms. For example, linguists have uncovered a unique discourse style utilized exclusively on Facebook marked by high degrees of intensification including exaggerated quantifiers, boosters (e.g. "very," "really," "so," etc.), capitalization, and repetition relative both to non-virtual communication and to

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Ron Darvin, "Language and Identity in the Digital Age," in *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Identity*, ed. Sian Preece, Routledge (Oxfordshire, England, February 18, 2016), 523 - 540, accessed October 21, 2022, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303838217_Language_and_identity_in_the_digital_age.

[19] Ibid.

[20] It is, of course, important to note that this interaction is limited to communities in which internet access is reliably available or those where linguists have been dispatched to record, reconstruct, and publish language data. Cross-linguistic interaction is more vast than could have ever been imagined several decades ago, but it is not exhaustive.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

language on other social platforms.[23] As with other digital and non-digital communities, Facebook users adapt their identities to the linguistic norms of their surroundings.

Further, multilingual encounters have grown as linguistically diverse individuals are able to connect with a newly reachable international network. In the context of the present research, the rise of the internet and virtual communication has led to unique opportunities for language preservation through an "increased use of local languages among diasporic communities online" and the resulting assertion of otherwise geographically isolated linguistic identities on a global scale.[24] In other words, the reach of "digital media … enables the use of minority languages" and strengthening of individual and collective identities rooted in language.[25] Within this, however, the "ability to assert identity [in the digital world] becomes inextricably linked to being able to gain the attention of specific audiences."[26] Where there are opportunities for language diversity "among diasporic communities online," there are also significant barriers to gaining the attention and recognition that digitally solidifies the value of the linguistic identity in popular understanding.[27]

For the arts, the strengthening of linguistically-driven individual identity and thriving virtual, language-based communities through the digital revolution proves the viability and importance of language representation and accessibility. The arts can provide a valuable tool in ensuring that linguistic minorities are represented. As asserted earlier, media and entertainment can tell a society what matters. In turn, content produced or supported by trusted arts organizations holds the power to tell audiences that these minority voices and identities crafted through language do indeed *matter* and have a place in diversity, equity, and inclusion conversations.

SECTION III: The Present State of Engagement and Language Representation in the Arts

Focusing once again on the United States, in 2021 the nation was "the leading world art market" and made up for "43 percent of the global art market value."[28] In 2017 the National Endowment for the Arts reported that 74 percent of American adults "used electronic media to consume artistic or arts related content" and 54 percent "attended artistic, creative, or cultural activities."[29] Between

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] "Distribution of the Global Art Market Value in 2021, by Country," Arts and Culture, *Statista*, March 31, 2022, statista.com/statistics/885531/global-art-market-share-by-country/#:~:text=The%20United%20States%20was%20the,the%20global%20art%20market%20value.

[29] "U.S. Patterns of Arts Participation: A Full Report from the 2017 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts," *National Endowment for the Arts*, December 3, 2019, https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/US_Patterns_of_Arts_ParticipationRevised.pdf.

2017 UNITED STATES ARTS PARTICIPATION

In 2019, the National Endowment for the Arts published the compiled results of their 2017 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts administered in the United States.

74% ... used electronic media to consume arts content

54% ... attended artistic, creative, or cultural activities

54% ... created or performed art

ATTENDANCE BY TYPE OF ARTS EVENT

42% attended music performances

40% attended fairs or festivals

24% attended plays or musicals

23% attended arts exhibits

ATTENDANCE* BY RACE / ETHNICITY

*proportion of each documented racial identity who any arts or cultural event in 2017

WHITE 61%
BLACK 39%
HISPANIC 41%
ASIAN 45%
OTHER 57%

SOURCE: "U.S. Patterns of Arts Participation: A Full Report from the 2017 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts," National Endowment for the Arts, December 3, 2019, https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/US_Patterns_of_Arts_ParticipationRevised.pdf.

Figure 2: A brief summary of the National Endowment for the Arts' 2017 study conducted on arts participation in the United States (Source: *Author*)

creators and performers alike, 62 percent of adults who participated in performing arts activities "did so to spend time with family and friends."[30] The arts are highly prominent in the United States, and–as discussed above–foster the development of both community and identity.

Despite widespread national participation in the arts, English is *overwhelmingly* the most used language of artistic endeavors in the United States. To illustrate, in the film industry between 2003 and 2017, non-English language movies resulted in only 1.1 percent of total domestic box office revenue.[31] In opera - the performance medium most associated with presentation in languages other than English - 2021 received the lowest attendance of any performing art.[32] However, as mentioned above, **1 in 5 Americans speak a language other than English at home.**[33] The arts in the United States are *not* representative of the country's linguistically diverse population; English instead reigns as the hegemonic language of the nation's artistic endeavors. Such a discrepancy between this linguistic monopoly and the linguistic diversity of the country as a whole stifles the potential for minority identity-and-community building through the artistic sector.

Linguistic representation and language-based accessibility are crucial in creating an artistic sector that is truly inclusive and allows individuals and communities from all backgrounds to use the arts to strengthen their identities. At present, the arts fall flat in encouraging linguistic diversity. However, some organizations are taking notable strides to increase linguistic representation and accessibility. In many cases, these strides are enacted through the use of technology.

In the forthcoming sections of research, this report will analyze examples from theatre, opera, and digital streaming in which artistic organizations use technology to increase linguistically equitable artistic practices. These case studies will not only explore the present state of linguistic representation and accessibility in the sector, but will offer cross-sectional applications to varying domains within the arts.

Conversations of linguistic equity and accessibility are integral to a truly diverse and productive artistic future. The best way to formalize an equitable and sustainable path forward is through the examination of organizations that have already implemented such conversations into their missions and practices.

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[30] Ibid.

[31] "How Many Non-English Language Films Get a US Theatrical Release?," Articles, *Stephen Follows: Film Data and Education*, April 9, 2018, https://stephenfollows.com/how-many-non-english-language-films-get-us-theatrical-release/.

[32] "U.S. Patterns of Arts Participation," National Endowment for the Arts.

[33] Sandy Dietrich and Erik Hernandez, "Language Use in the United States: 2019."

PART II Equity Via Performing Art and Technology: A Case Study of Deaf West's *Spring Awakening*

SECTION I: Introduction

Linguistic representation and language-based accessibility are paramount to the development of a truly inclusive artistic sector in which diverse individuals and communities can use the arts to strengthen their identities and in turn "understand how [they] matter."[34] However, the United States' artistic sector presently fails to fully represent the substantial linguistic and cultural diversity of the nation.[35] This does not mean, however, that there are no organizations the US can look to for best practices on how to integrate questions of linguistic identity and accessibility into artistic missions and programming. Often, these linguistic best practices are facilitated through the use of theatrical technologies.

As examined in this first case study, the success of Deaf West Theatre teaches that (1) Language and linguistic identity can advance and strengthen storytelling and (2) Audiences *want* to see linguistically diverse and accessible stories.

SECTION II: ASL Usage and Deaf Culture in the United States

According to the World Federation for the Deaf, there are over 70 million deaf individuals in the global population, collectively using over 300 unique languages.[36] In the United States alone, two percent of adults aged 45 to 54 have disabling hearing loss - a statistic that rises to 50 percent for those aged 75 and older.[37] Further, roughly 3,750,000 members of the US population use ASL as their primary means of communication.[38] ASL was first invented over 200 years ago at the American School for the Deaf, but is still highly underrepresented in US popular culture, accessibility services, and education, despite its lengthy history and widespread use.[39] For example,

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[34] NEA Staff, "Why the Arts Matter."

[35] Sandy Dietrich and Erik Hernandez, "Language Use in the United States: 2019."

[36] "Our Work," *World Federation for the Deaf*, Accessed November 15, 2022, https://wfdeaf.org/our-work/.

[37] "Quick Statistics About Hearing," *National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders*, Accessed November 15, 2022, https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/statistics/quick-statistics-hearing#:~:text=One%20in%20 eight%20people%20in,based%20on%20standard%20hearing%20examinations.&text=About%202%20percent%20of%20adults,adult s%20aged%2055%20to%2064.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Michelle Jay, "History of American Sign Language," *Start ASL*, updated February 21, 2021, https://www.startasl.com/history-of-american-sign-language/.

98 percent of deaf individuals do not receive education in ASL and ASL-using adults disproportionately face significant job-based discrimination.[40]

Despite popular conception, ASL is *not* simply a "signed version" of Spoken English, but rather its own unique language with a grammar and lexicon that differs significantly from Spoken English.[41] "ASL is a language completely separate and distinct from English" and from other signed languages.[42] In fact, "ASL has regional variations in the rhythms of signing, pronunciation, slang, and signs used."[43] It follows then, that many deaf Americans have a linguistic (and in turn, cultural) identity rooted not in Spoken English, but ASL: a unique and independently standardized language.

Intertwined in this history and the significant diversity of hearing - related medical diagnoses, there is an additional important distinction between the labels "deaf" and "Deaf." The term "deaf" (written with a lowercase "d") refers to "anyone who has a severe hearing

Figure 3: A breakdown of "big D Deaf" vs. "little d deaf" (Source: *Author*)

[40] Sophia Waterfield, "ASL Day 2019: Everything You Need to Know About American Sign Language," U.S., *Newsweek*, April 15, 2019, https://www.newsweek.com/asl-day-2019-american-sign-language-1394695#:~:text=72%25%20of%20families%20do%20not,1%20in%2010%20hearing%20women.

[41] "American Sign Language," Health Information, *National Institute on Deafness and Other Hearing Disorders*, Accessed November 15, 2022, https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/american-sign-language#:~:text=American%20Sign%20Language%20(ASL)%20is,of%20the%20hands%20and%20face.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

problem" while "Deaf" or "culturally Deaf" (written with an uppercase "D") refers to "people who have been deaf all their lives, or since they learned to talk."[44] In other words, Deaf individuals and Deaf culture encompasses those who were prelingually deaf, and often use ASL as their first language.[45] As established in Section I, language shapes both identity and culture. As a result, the underrepresentation of deaf *and* Deaf cultures or identities hinders opportunities for equitable representation in the artistic sector.

SECTION III: Deaf West Theatre and Linguistic Identity

Founded in Los Angeles, California in 1991, Deaf West Theatre is a non-profit 501(c)(3) theatrical organization that positions themselves as "the artistic bridge between the Deaf and hearing worlds."[46] In their own words, the Company is committed to artistic "innovation, collaboration, training, and activism" in order to "engage artists and audiences in unparalleled theatre and media experiences" that weave "American Sign Language (ASL) with spoken English to create a seamless ballet of movement and voice."[47]

Linguistic equity and the value of Deaf cultural representation in the arts is at the core of Deaf West's mission. Company Artistic Director David Kurs states: "Deaf actors realize, perhaps subconsciously, that appearing on stage is the repudiation of the advice to their hearing parents when their child was born– that the child was deficient and needed to be fixed."[48] To Deaf West, "appearing on stage and signing in front of a paying audience is the personal affirmation of the deaf identity over pathology."[49] However, Deaf West Theatre does not stop at the casting of majority deaf, Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and Disabled actors. Rather, the organization strives to tear down "barriers of culture and language" in order to craft a "higher truth" in storytelling.[50] Through their intertwined aims to reconstruct theatre through a deeply linguistic and cultural lens for Deaf *and* hearing audiences alike and "increase the stature of deaf actors nationwide," Deaf West Theatre works to illuminate the hidden community of Deaf artists and stories in popular artistic entertainment.[51] As just one of their many linguistically and culturally groundbreaking productions,

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[44] "What is the Difference Between deaf and Deaf?," Learn About Deafness, *The Deaf Health Charity: SignHealth*, Accessed November 15, 2022, https://signhealth.org.uk/resources/learn-about-deafness/deaf-or-deaf/#:~:text=The%20 word%20deaf%20is%20used,started%20to%20learn%20to%20talk.

[45] Ibid.

[46] "About," *Deaf West Theatre*, Accessed November 15, 2022, https://www.deafwest.org/about.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Jessica Gelt, "Deaf West Artistic Director David Kurs: Why Deaf Actors Should Be Cast to Play Deaf Characters," Entertainment & Arts, *Los Angeles Times*, July 13, 2017, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-ca-cm-authenticity-deaf-west-20170713-story.html#:~:text=David%20Kurs%2C%20Deaf%20West%20Theatre's,production%20for%20the%20new%20season.&text=Deaf%20West%20Theatre%20was%20created,in%20service%20of%20vivid%20theater.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

Deaf West Theatre's 2015 Broadway revival of *Spring Awakening* stands as an example of best practice for how artistic organizations can place linguistic equity and accessibility at the forefront of their works.

SECTION IV: A Brief History of *Spring Awakening*

Written in the early 1890s, German Playwright Frank Wedekind's *Frühlings Erwachen: Eline Kindertragodie* (popularly translated to: *Spring Awakening: A Childrens' Tragedy*) has a tumultuous history marked by extensive controversy and attempts for censorship.[52] Propelling such controversy, at its core *Spring Awakening* is a critical exposé of the sexual repression and oppressive education systems imposed on German youth at the time. The narrative follows the turmoil of developing sexuality in teenagers Melchior Gabor, Wendla Bergmann, and Moritz Stiefel in a society pushing to keep them secluded in ignorance.[53]

Spring Awakening was first performed at Berlin's Deutsches Theatre in 1906, and - featuring topics such as sex, abuse, rape, homosexuality, abortion, masturbation, and sadism was consistently met with public

Image 1: Photograph of *Spring Awakening*'s final scene dated to the 1906 staging of Wedekind's provocative play, directed by Max Reinhardt (Source: *Wikimedia Commons*)

Image 2: Photograph from the four-performance 1974 run of *Spring Awakening* at the Hampton Court Theatre in the United Kingdom. The play was reported banned in the country until 1963 (Source: *Youth Action Theatre*)

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[52] The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Frank Wedekind: German Actor and Dramatist," Playwrights, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, updated July 20, 2022, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Frank-Wedekind.

[53] Frank Wedekind, "The Awakening of Spring: A Tragedy of Childhood," *Project Gutenberg*, accessed January 9, 2023, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/35242/35242-h/35242-h.htm.

outrage.[54] Further, the text's central clash pitted adult incompetence against youthful curiosity through the use of comedic or absurd dialogue - framing a tragic topic which had previously been taboo with distinctive comedic style and youthful energy that offended many early audiences.[55] As researcher Joel Garza explains: "what [was] truly disturbing about the production [was] not the subject matter of the plot, but the fierce truth with which Wedekind present[ed] it."[56] In fact, the first ever English-language production staged in New York City closed in 1917 after just one performance on charges of obscenity.[57] However, despite this lack of critical success, the power of Wedekind's narrative has made it incessantly relevant across vast historical contexts and the persistent, cross-cultural stigma placed around youthful curiosity, sexuality, and tragedy. Such adaptability was best exemplified in Steven Sater and Duncan Sheik's 2006 rock-musical, also titled *Spring Awakening*, and its subsequent revival by Deaf West Theatre and director Michael Arden in 2015.[58]

SECTION V: Deaf West's *Spring Awakening* Reconstruction

Deaf West Theatre's 2015 Broadway-transfer revival of Sater and Sheik's rock musical found the perfect niche for Wedekind's story in a contemporary, linguistically diverse context through its seamless integration of ASL in storytelling. Aligned with the Deaf West Theatre standard, the production was delivered simultaneously in ASL and Spoken English and featured a cast in which roughly half of the young actors were Deaf, deaf, hard-of-hearing, Disabled and making their Broadway debuts.[59] However, what facilitated linguistic equity and accessibility in the production to an even greater degree was the choice to make several of the story's central characters Deaf.[60] Each Deaf character was played by two actors: one Deaf or hard-of-hearing and one using ASL as well as Spoken English.[61] Within the production, dressed in more contemporary costumes and often doubling as members of the orchestra, Deaf actors' hearing counterparts acted as the inner voices and emotions of their characters. Not only did this choice offer opportunities for the expression of

[54] Joel A. Garza, "My Purple Summer: A Comparative Analysis of Frank Wedekind's Play 'Spring Awakening' and Steven Sater's Adaptation 'Spring Awakening: A New Musical'," *ProQuest*, May 2013, 1-94, https://www.proquest.com/pagepdf/1412698695?accountid=9902.

[55] Edward Journey, "Frank Wedekind's 'Spring Awakening' and the Tragedy of Adolescence," *Theatre Symposium* 23, no. 1 (2015): 20-29, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/595043/pdf.

[56] Joel A. Garza, "My Purple Summer."

[57] Ibid.

[58] Charles Isherwood, "Sex and Rock? What Would Kaser Think?," Theatre Review, *The New York Times*, December 11, 2006, https://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/11/theater/reviews/11spri.html.

[59] Linda Buchwald, "A New Awakening: Deaf West's Spring Awakening Puts the Musical's Themes–Voiceless Youth, Generational Misunderstanding–Into Even Sharper Focus," *American Theatre* 31, no. 9 (2014), https://www.americantheatre.org/2014/10/19/signs-of-the-times-spring-awakening-at-deaf-west/.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

marginalized voices to both hearing and Deaf audiences on a massive Broadway scale, but it significantly enhanced the strength of Wedekind's original text.

Image 3: The company of Deaf West's *Spring Awakening* (Source: *The New York Times*)

Importantly, no major changes needed to be made to *Spring Awakening*'s script to establish these Deaf characters and simultaneously increase linguistic representation and accessibility for members of the Deaf community. In addition to playing directly into Sater and Sheik's musical emphasis on the young teenagers' internal frustration and the external repression, Deaf West's *Spring Awakening* played directly to the historical and contemporary struggles of the Deaf community that thematically shape the musical's text.

In 1880 - just ten years before Wedekind's completion of *Spring Awakening* - the "Second International Congress on Education of the Deaf … deemed oral education superior to sign language and passed a resolution banning sign language in school."[62] In all variations of *Spring Awakening*, the rebellious and academically struggling Moritz is kicked out of school and written off by the story's adults as a failure. In Deaf West Theatre's *Spring Awakening*, Mortiz was portrayed as canonically Deaf. Mortiz label as a "failure" in the eyes of his generational superiors takes on a whole new level of meaning when applied to the fact that "the term given to deaf students who were unable to succeed with the often-abusive oral method [in late nineteenth century education] was 'failure.'"[63]

In modern times, as discussed above, the under service of educational and cultural opportunities for members of the Deaf community in the United States remain prominent. Core to the message of *Spring Awakening* are the pitfalls of botched communication and misunderstanding between older and younger generations, and today "about 90 percent of deaf people are born to hearing parents."[64] To drive forth this message of the weight of intergenerational communication, in Deaf West's *Spring Awakening*, young teenager Wendla is portrayed as canonically deaf. As said by ASL Master Shoshannah Stern: "making Wendla deaf gave her a concrete sort of repression that could be seen and felt… [and] with that added layer, she becomes someone whose mother can barely

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[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

communicate with her."[65] Where this lack of communication ultimately leads to Wendla's death by botched abortion following rape from her peer, Deaf West's choice to make several of *Spring Awakening*'s central characters canonically deaf captured and presented a terrifyingly realistic circumstance that has faced members of the Deaf community over the centuries.

Deaf West Theatre's 2015 Broadway production of *Spring Awakening* used their commitment to propagating linguistic diversity and accessibility for Deaf communities in order to to create artistic pathways for deaf, Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and Disabled creatives. Alongside these strides for linguistic diversity and accessibility, however, they effectively strengthened and reconstructed the text of a tragic, perennially relevant story. As Director Michael Arden explains, the integration of a linguistically and culturally

Image 4: Actresses Katie Boeck and Sandra Mae Frank as Wendla in Deaf West's *Spring Awakening* (Source: *The Guardian*)

marginalized community into Wedekind's "comment" on youth was able to give "that comment more of a specific time and place" and in turn center the reality of "what is going on in [these marginalized communities'] lives."[66]

SECTION VI: Technology Usage in Deaf West's *Spring Awakening*

Key to storytelling in Deaf West's *Spring Awakening* was the usage of technology. As is standard for Deaf West Theatre, the production was aimed at both deaf and hearing audiences. Within the structure of performance, however, Director Michael Arden wished to incorporate moments where no Spoken English was used without compromising the ability of hearing audiences to grasp what was taking place on stage. To solve this potential gap in audience understanding, a series of LED

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[65] Erika Noel Alvero, "A Desperate Need to Connect," *UC Berkeley: Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism*, (2018), https://escholarship.org/uc/item/89g8r8m1.

[66] Robert Viagas, "Radically Reconceived Broadway 'Spring Awakening' Revival Sets Dates; Here's What it Will Look Like," News, *Playbill*, July 7, 2015, https://playbill.com/article/radically-reconceived-broadway-spring-awakening-revival-sets-dates -heres-what-it-will-look-like-com-352762.

screens were built into various set pieces to project English "translations" for hearing audiences.[67] When spoken English stopped, hearing and deaf audiences alike were left in silence. However, for hearing audiences these moments offered a glimpse into the experiences of non-English speakers consuming art in the United States by forcing them to rely on the accessibility technology typically offered exclusively for non-Spoken-English users as their only means to comprehend key moments of the production's story.

Image 5: Russell Harvard as Adult Men and Daniel Durant as Mortiz in Deaf West's *Spring Awakening*. (Source: *The Guardian*)

In perhaps the most powerful usage of this structure, after being deemed a failure and removed from school, Moritz Stiefel commits suicide onstage. In the moments before his death, the character's hearing counterpart leaves his side; his inner, guiding voice walks away from him, and Mortiz' Deaf actor is left alone with himself and his pain. The character's final monologue is performed fully in ASL, with the Spoken English translation projected overhead. In this climactic moment of the play, the use of ASL and translation technologies wove together the experiences of the hearing and Deaf audience, unifying their perception of the tragedy depicted on stage. For Deaf West Theatre, translation technology built into the set was key to the clear establishment of not only the stark differences between Deaf and Spoken English cultures, but also of language and (mis)communication as the root of all the tragedy in Wedekind's story.

SECTION VII: What the Success of Deaf West Theatre's *Spring Awakening* Means for the Arts Sector

The critical and popular success of Deaf West Theatre's 2015 Broadway revival of *Spring Awakening* offers two major lessons to a United States artistic sector that requires increased linguistically conscious and equitable practices to represent the nation's diverse populations.

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[67] Charles Isherwood, "Review: 'Spring Awakening' by Deaf West Theatre Brings a New Sensation to Broadway," *The New York Times*, September 27, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/28/theater/review-spring -awakening-by-deaf-west-theater-brings-a-new-sensation-to-broadway.html?_r=0.

Language and linguistic identity can advance and strengthen artistic storytelling.

Deaf West Theatre recognizes the cultural diversity and massive misrepresentation of the community it serves. However, alongside efforts to create artistic opportunities for deaf, Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and otherwise Disabled creatives, they make efforts to use language as a means to advance storytelling. The introduction of ASL and canonically deaf characters in *Spring Awakening* (without having to alter any text) added a tragic touch of modernity for marginalized communities to Wedekind's original story.

Conversations about and integration of linguistic diversity in artistic programming should not exist simply to check a "diversity box." Rather, questions of how linguistic equity and accessibility can be improved should revolve around how increased equitable practices may be used to elevate an organization's programming. Deaf West Theatre is a model for how linguistically equitable practices can be used to enrich storytelling in the United States art sector.

Some American theatre companies have already begun to implement this lesson. After having seen *Spring Awakening*'s 2015 revival, Deaf actor James Caverly approached Maryland's Olney Theatre Center about addressing the lack of roles for deaf actors in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area.[68] Following his role as a Deaf character in Hulu's *Only Murders in the Building*, Caverly returned to Olney to star as Harold Hill in the company's 2022 production *The Music Man*.[69]

Image 6: Deaf actor James Caverly in Olney Theatre Center's production of *The Music Man* (Source: *The Washington Post*)

Where Olney soared, however, was following in Deaf West's example and adapting the story of The Music Man's *River City* to have a history rooted in Deaf culture, and using Spoken English supertitles to facilitate moments of exclusive ASL usage.[70] As Caverly said of the process: "when you add deaf people into the mix, it breathes new life into a classic musical."[71]

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[68] Thomas Floyd, "Olney Theatre Reimagines 'The Music Man' with Deaf Harold Hill," Theatre & Dance, *The Washington Post*, June 29, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/theater-dance/2022/06/29/music-man-olney-theatre-center/.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

This lesson of course does not stop with ASL. As discussed in Section I, one in five Americans speak a language other than English.[72] Deaf West Theatre's (and now, Olney Theatre Center's) integrations of ASL provide just one example of how a single underrepresented language and culture can be used to propel both storytelling and linguistic accessibility through the use of technology, but their efforts and techniques can be adapted across mediums for all the nation's diverse languages and cultures.

Audiences *want* to see linguistically diverse and accessible stories.

In addition to proving the storytelling power of linguistically-equitable art, Deaf West Theatre's production of *Spring Awakening* proved that audiences care about linguistically diverse stories.

Deaf West's *Spring Awakening* premiered in a 99-seat venue in downtown Los Angeles before moving to an "upscale art theatre" in Beverly Hills and ultimately securing its limited-engagement Broadway transfer.[73] After ending their critically acclaimed Broadway engagement in January 2016, the revival was ultimately nominated for three Tony Awards.[74] Lacking funds, however, Deaf West Theatre turned to crowdfunding to cover expenses for the full cast to travel and perform at Broadway's Biggest Night. Ultimately, the company raised over $200,000 and the full cast performed a mashup of two numbers from the show[75] - notably, with ASL slightly altered from the Broadway run as the original language was deemed "a little too hot for TV" by the Tony's broadcasting network.[76]

The journey of Deaf West's *Spring Awakening* from a tiny Los Angeles theatre to the Tony Awards proved that audiences cared about the life breathed into Wedekind's late nineteenth century story by their unique reconstruction. What this suggests for other artistic organizations is that when they offer moving, powerful pieces of art, audiences will follow - regardless of the language they are presented in.

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[72] Sandy Dietrich and Erik Hernandez, "Language Use in the United States: 2019."

[73] Ellysheva Zeira, "A Backstage Pass to Deaf West's Production of 'Spring Awakening.'" Blog Archive. *Tenement Museum*. Accessed December 5, 2022. https://www.tenement.org/blog/a-backstage-pass-to-deaf-wests-production-of-spring-awakening/.

[74] Michael Gioia, "ASL for 'Spring Awakening' Tony Performance Was Censored by CBS," Tony Awards, *Playbill*, June 12, 2016, https://playbill.com/article/asl-for-spring-awakening-tony-performance-was-censored-by-cbs.

[75] 70th Annual Tony Awards 'Spring Awakening,' YouTube Video, 4:51, posted by "BroadwayInHD," October 15, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSagsMcak4Q.

[76] Michael Gioia, "ASL for 'Spring Awakening' Tony Performance Was Censored by CBS."

PART III Linguistic Diversity in Opera Through Technology: A Case Study of Opera Australia

SECTION I: Introduction

Linguistically equitable and accessible practices are key to the development of an inclusive artistic sector in which diverse communities can use art to strengthen their own identities and "understand how [they] matter."[77] However, the United States artistic sector currently fails to appropriately represent the cultural and linguistic diversity of its constituents.[78]

The following case looks to Opera Australia for best practices for the maintenance of linguistic diversity in opera, and how technology can be used to reenergize the historic genre for a contemporary audience. Ultimately, Opera Australia teaches that (1) the preservation of original languages in art does not have to deter audiences from engagement and (2) linguistically diverse work is not inherently elitist and inaccessible.

SECTION II: A Brief History of Opera

Italian composer Jacopo Peri is largely credited with the development of the first surviving opera: *Dafne*, written in 1597.[79] Early artists such as Peri strived to "recreate the storytelling of Greek drama through music," and over time two distinctive forms of opera began to emerge.[80] The first, *opera seria*, was more dignified and dramatic in nature, aimed towards the royalty that sponsored early iterations of
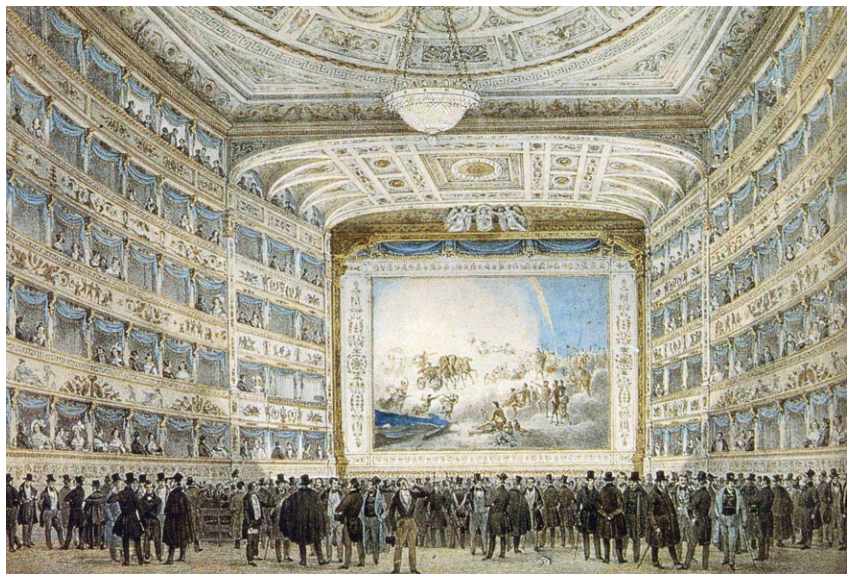
Image 7: Venice's La Fenice Opera House in 1837. (Source: *Public Domain Image*)

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[77] NEA Staff, "Why the Arts Matter."

[78] Sandy Dietrich and Erik Hernandez, "Language Use in the United States: 2019."

[79] Tabea Tietz, "Jacopo Peri and the Birth of Early Opera," Art, *SciHi Blog*, October 6, 2022, http://scihi.org/jacopo-peri/.

[80] "A Brief History of Opera," *San Francisco Opera*. Accessed December 15, 2022. https://www.sfopera.com/learn/about-opera/a-brief-history-of-opera/.

the art form.[81] *Opera buffa*, on the other hand, was an "intertextual genre" that drew inspiration from commedia dell'arte and was targeted towards broader, less classically "refined" European audiences.[82] [83] [84] From the beginning, there was a clear distinction within the art form between that which was "refined" and meant for the elite, and that which was aimed towards the less genteel broader Italian population.

Opera was at the forefront of Italian art and culture during the Baroque era (1600 - 1750).[85] As touched on above, a major propellant of the art form was the Italian Renaissance's adoration of Greek and Roman ideals.[86] As such, "the Greeks and Romans believed that music was a powerful tool of communication [that] could arouse any emotion in its listeners."[87] In acknowledgement of this inherited belief, Italian opera arose as a means through which (mostly Greek and Roman inspired classical) music could propel the communication of distinctly Italian ideals and knowledge.[88] In addition, with the rise of opera in the Baroque era came the simultaneous emergence of the concept of musical or artistic stardom.[89] As explained by Music of the Baroque, "solo singers took on a sort of celebrity status, and greater emphasis was placed on the aria as a result."[90] The role of the "celebrity" artist was often equally important to the content of an operatic piece in terms of popular and financial success.

Through a complex network of patronages and public engagement for both *opera seria* and *opera buffa*, the art form had massive cultural capital. In some cases, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries where the church banned female performances, poor families would volunteer their sons to be castrated around the age of nine in order to preserve their soprano voices.[91] Known as the "castrati," there were an estimated 4,000 castrated boys in seventeenth and eighteenth century

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[81]Mary Hunter, "Some Representations of *Opera Seria* and *Opera Buffa*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 3, no. 2 (July 1991): 89 - 108, https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/cambridge-opera-journal/article/abs/some-representations-of-opera-seria-in-opera-buffa/11A21FC2858FEEFC80ABCB088984144A.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Jennifer Meagher, "Commedia Dell'arte," Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, July 2007, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/comm/hd_comm.htm.

[84] Suzanne Whitney, "What is Opera Buffa," Opera Explained, *Opera Colorado*, September 1, 2021, https://www.operacolorado.org/blog/what-is-opera-buffa/.

[85] "What is Baroque Music?," About Us, *Music of the Baroque,* accessed December 15, 2022, https://www.baroque.org/baroque/whatis.

[86] Editors, "Italian Renaissance," *The History Channel*, accessed December 15, 2022, https://www.history.com/topics/renaissance/italian-renaissance.

[87] "What is Baroque Music?," *Music of the Baroque.*

[88] "A Brief History of Opera," *San Francisco Opera*.

[89] "What is Baroque Music?," *Music of the Baroque.*

[90] Ibid.

[91] Lily Rowan, "Castrati Singers: Boys Were Castrated to Keep Their Voices at a Higher Pitch," *History Daily*, June 13, 2017, https://historydaily.org/castrati-singers-boys-castrated-keep-voices-higher-pitch.

Europe whose families sought financial security through the preservation of their son's prepubescent voices in an operatic setting.[92]

Ticketed opera first grew in popularity in 1637 with the opening of Italy's first public opera house, and subsequently both *opera seria* and *opera buffa* slowly expanded outwards to theaters and concert halls across Europe.[93] [94] The art form, of course, did not only thrive in Italy. As explained by San Francisco Opera, performances "continued to flourish, and got bigger, louder, and longer during the Romantic period (1830 - 1900)."[95] By the late eighteenth century, Italian opera had newly emerging competition. German-language opera developed credibility and popularity with Mozart's 1782 opera *Singspiel, Die Entführung aus dem Serail*– translated to *The Abduction from the Seraglio*.[96] Existing in many European languages, but meeting its golden standard in Italian and German, opera has remained an internationally known, world-renowned art form for over 400 years.

However, with inter-continental expansion and a steadfast association of Italian and German as the preeminent languages of the art form came a reemerged association between opera and socioeconomic class. Though opera developed dual "high" (*seria*) *and* "low*"* (*buffa*) genres, it is important to remember the origins of both forms as "entertainment for the nobility" and "its antecedents were primarily Renaissance entertainments [once again meant] for the nobility."[97] It is unsurprising, then, that during the Romantic Period when opera continued to expand outside of Italy, the genre once again began to cater "more and more to connoisseurs" who were - on average - wealthy, educated, and well connected: a "modern" equivalent to the early nobility of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[98] Through interspersed windows of public accessibility, it is crucial to remember that opera's rich history is inextricably intertwined with the fashions and sensibilities of a cultures' elite, rather than those of the hoi polloi.

SECTION III: Opera in the United States

Dated to 1722, the first American opera house (named, "The Playhouse") is believed to have been constructed in Williamsburg, Virginia – which served as the nation's capital between 1699 and

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[92] Marilyn Pemberton, "Castrati: Did the End Justify the Means?," *Historia Magazine*, January 17, 2020, https://www.historiamag.com/castrati-end-justify-means/.

[93] "American Opera," Articles, *The Library of Congress*, accessed December 15, 2022, https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200197506/.

[94] "A History of Opera in Europe," River Cruising & Escorted Tours News, *Scenic: Luxury Cruises & Tours*, January 24, 2017, https://www.scenic.co.uk/news/a-history-of-opera-in-europe.

[95] "A Brief History of Opera," *San Francisco Opera*.

[96] "A History of Opera in Europe," *Scenic: Luxury Cruises & Tours*.

[97] David Guion, "Opera: When Did it Become Highbrow Culture?," *Musicology for Everyone*, June 19, 2017, https://music.allpurposeguru.com/2017/06/opera-highbrow-culture/#:~:text=From%20the%20middle%20of%20the,Cultural%20divisions%20became%20more%20apparent.

[98] David Guion, "Opera: When Did it Become Highbrow Culture?."

1780.[99] [100]A majority of American-based performers in the first half of the eighteenth century were from England, and performed translated works from Italy and Germany.[101] However, for many culturally blooming cities such as Williamsburg, at the start of the eighteenth century opera performances were strongly opposed by a rapidly developing, politically strong network of religious groups.[102] By 1774, the performance of opera – as well as other luxuries such as gambling and general theatrical performance – were declared "unpatriotic and unacceptable" by the nation's Continental Congress, and banned across all 13 colonies.[103]
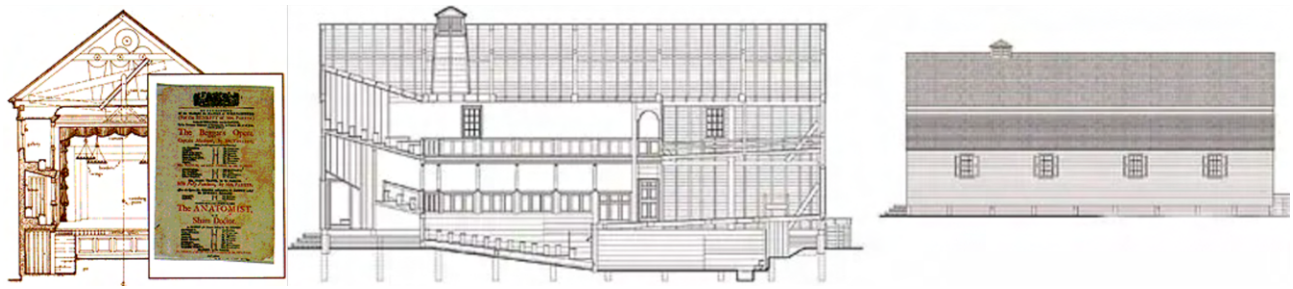
Image 8: Plans for the reconstruction of Williamsburg, Virginia's "Playhouse" (Sources: *The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and The New York Times*)

By the end of the American Revolution, there were "scattered attempts" by Americans to compose and perform opera, but they were met with little success by critics and consumers alike - deemed "pale imitations of European models."[104] However, in the years following the American Civil War (1861 - 1865), opera houses became a hot commodity in cities big and small. As explained by the New England Historical Society: "an opera house provided a sense of urbanity and many small communities used them as an enticement for the railroad companies to establish stops near their villages."[105] Jumping to the 1920s and 1930s, American artists trained in Europe once again attempted to create a distinctively American form of opera, yet due to the genre's history the general public continued to see "it as elitist, unrealistic, and irrelevant."[106] In the United States, then, distinctively American opera never found its niche in general cultural interests.

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[99] Margie Breakfield, "Opera Houses in the United States," *Jamestown Ohio Opera House,* June 8, 2012, http://www.jamestownohiooperahouse.com/website__opera_house_history.pdf.

[100] "History," About, *City of Williamsburg*, accessed December 15, 2022, https://www.williamsburgva.gov/488/History#:~:text=Williamsburg%20was%20founded%20as%20the,New%20World%20founded%20in%201607.

[101] "The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of the Historic Opera House," Arts and Leisure, *New England Historical Society,* accessed December 15, 2022, https://newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/six-historic-opera-house/.

[102] Maurer Maurer, "A Musical Family in Colonial Virginia," *The Musical Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1948): 358–64, http://www.jstor.org/stable/739548.

[103] David Malinsky, "Congress Bans Theatre!," Arts and Literature, *Journal of the American Revolution*, December 12, 2013, https://allthingsliberty.com/2013/12/congress-bans-theatre/.

[104] Rachel Hutchins-Viroux, "The American Opera Boom of the 1950s and 1960s: History and Stylistic Analysis," *Revue Lisa* 2, no. 3 (2004): 145 - 163, https://journals.openedition.org/lisa/2966.

[105] "The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of the Historic Opera House," *New England Historical Society.*

[106] Rachel Hutchins-Viroux, "The American Opera Boom of the 1950s and 1960s."

However, the perceived elite status of German and Italian opera made opera houses and select non-English operatic productions a staple of sophisticated or refined culture for the nation. In fact, drawing from this perception of early European opera as sophisticated and culturally valuable, contemporary United States opera companies rely almost exclusively on pieces written between the late-eighteenth and early-twentieth centuries for their standard repertoires.[107]

In the modern day, the five most performed operas internationally are in German, Italian, and French.[108] The United States is the second-largest producer of opera by performances globally, 19 percent of which are performed in New York City.[109] However, the National Endowment for the Arts reports that, for those who engaged with cultural or artistic programming in 2017, the least attended medium was opera.[110] Further, opera attendance decreased by a factor of 25 percent between 2012 and 2017.[111] In 2017 as a whole, only 2 percent of the United States adult population attended a live opera.[112] This statistic is even more illuminating when compared to the 24 percent that attended a live play or musical.[113]

Since its introduction in the United States, the central setback to Americans' lack of engagement with opera is twofold. First, consumers claim an inability "to follow [stories] in a different language."[114] Second, Americans believe that opera is "too expensive" or inaccessible for the average consumer.[115] As Jerome Socolof wrote for American's for the Arts in summation of his early conceptions of opera: "it's a bunch of people in horns singing in languages I don't understand for longer than I want to listen."[116] Inaccessibility both in terms of the genre's constructed elitism and perceived language barriers is what has led certain opera professionals to question if "millennials will kill opera" and if the art form will die out in the foreseeable future.[117]

Contrary to these struggles, however, if opera has proved anything in its over 400-year history, it is that it is capable of standing the test of time. Where the American artistic sector largely falls short

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[107] "American Opera," *The Library of Congress*.

[108] "Verified Opera Statistics," *Opera Base*, accessed December 15, 2022, https://www.operabase.com/statistics/en.

[109] Ibid.

[110] "U.S. Patterns of Arts Participation: A Full Report from the 2017 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts," *National Endowment for the Arts*, December 3, 2019, https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/US_Patterns_of_Arts_ParticipationRevised.pdf.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Arnold Mitchell, "The Professional Performing Arts: Attendance Patterns, Preferences and Motives, Volume 2," National Arts Administration and Policy Publicans Database, *Americans for the Arts*, December 1984, https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/legislation-policy/naappd/the-professional-performing-arts-attendance-patterns-preferences-and-motives-volume-2.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Jerome Socolof, "It's a Bunch of People in Horns Singing in Languages I Don't Understand for Longer Than I Want to Listen," Arts Blog, *Americans for the Arts,* April 18, 2014, https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2019/05/15/%E2%80%9Cit%E2%80%99s-a-bunch-of-people-in-horns-singing-in-languages-i-don%E2%80%99t-understand-for-longer-than-i-want-to.

[117] Bridget Read, "Can Opera Attract a New Generation of Fans? At La Scala, Signs of Hope," Arts, *Vogue*, July 10, 2019, https://www.vogue.com/article/will-millennials-kill-opera-too-la-scala-milan.

is in its ability to produce opera both by and for modern audiences while overcoming the genre's association with the elite. The preservation of linguistic diversity and culture is key to the celebration of opera and its rich history. In turn, extensive language-based technology is required to facilitate culturally and historically meaningful iterations of the centuries-old art that are simultaneously accessible, comprehensible, and desirable to widespread audiences. In addition to this maintenance of linguistic history, however, American artists must come to terms with the genre's association with elitism throughout history.

If the United States fails to find the intersection of language-based equity and modern applicability, the death of the nation's operatic sector is practically inevitable. Luckily, there are several companies across the world that are already acting upon best practices for the maintenance of linguistic diversity alongside a reenergized operatic style, largely through the use of cutting edge technology. An analysis of these organizations can offer guidance to a United States artistic sector in need of new life for the centuries old genre.

SECTION IV: Reconstructed Opera for All at Opera Australia

Opera Australia's mission is to "perform some of the greatest music ever written to as many people as possible."[118] Their vision is to enrich "Australia's cultural life with exceptional opera."[119]

Since its inception in 1956, a commitment to opera for everyone has been key to Opera Australia's operations: dedicating themselves and their programming to an intentional separation from the "elitist" atmosphere that still plagues much of European and American opera.[120] The Company's primary homes are the Sydney Opera House and Arts Centre Melbourne, but branch outside their spaces in constant cycles of touring productions in local theatres and public spaces across the continent.[121] Every year, Opera Australia tours and performs for over 80,000 primary school children, and offers discounted tickets and educational materials for students and educators of all ages.[122] The Company's outreach programs "work to transcend barriers so that no matter where [one lives] or [their] economic or social status, students get to experience, engage and delight in music and opera."[123] To break down barriers of accessibility and "elitism," Opera Australia's seasons offer a unique blend of English-language musicals and concerts alongside their full-length opera season.

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[118] "Opera Australia," About, *Opera Australia*, accessed December 15, 2022, https://opera.org.au/about/opera-australia/.

[119] "Annual Reports," About, *Opera Australia*, accessed December 15, 2022, https://opera.org.au/about/opera-australia/annual-reports/.

[120] "Opera Australia," *Opera Australia*.

[121] "The Barber of Seville," Other Events, *Opera Australia,* accessed December 15, 2022, https://opera.org.au/events/national-tour/the-barber-of-seville/.

[122] "Education and Outreach," Support Us, *Opera Australia*, accessed December 15, 2022, https://opera.org.au/support-us/education-and-outreach/.

[123] Ibid.

Opera Australia positions themselves as an arts and culture organization made for all ages, income brackets, and operatic experience levels.[124]

Actualizing progress in their vision to "enrich Australia's cultural life," Opera Australia reaches thousands of diverse consumers annually.[125] Further, language and "elitism" do not appear as barriers to Company success. To illustrate, of Opera Australia's 17,350 national tour attendees in 2021, 46 percent reported that it was their first time experiencing an opera and 94 percent reported that they would attend an Opera Australia production again in the future.[126] Further, while only 23 percent of audience members identified themselves as being from non-English-speaking backgrounds, 94 percent reported that they "enjoyed" the Opera being performed in French - its original language of composition.[127] Especially in their first year of operation following the outbreak of Covid-19, these numbers are staggering.

Images 9 & 10: Recent production photos from Opera Australia's *Carmen* (top) and *Aida* (left) (Source: *Opera Australia*)

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[124] "Education and Outreach," *Opera Australia*.

[125] "Annual Reports," *Opera Australia*.

[126] "Annual Reports," *Opera Australia*.

[127] "Annual Reports," *Opera Australia*.

SECTION V: Accessibility and Digitization at Opera Australia

Key to Opera Australia's success is a complex network of accessibility measures. It is the attention paid to these accessibility practices that make consumers break free of their assumptions of opera's "elitism" and language-based inaccessibility.

As Opera Australia's Chief Executive Rory Jeffes posits, "we're already a fifth of the way through the twenty-first century, so it's high time we kept up with audiences who are now dealing with digital in their everyday life."[128] In addition to efforts to use technology and

Image 11: Physical scenic elements against a backdrop of large LED screens in Opera Australia's *Madama Butterfly* (Source: *Opera Australia*)

"digitized" opera to make the field more accessible to modern audiences, Opera Australia recognizes that "digital is part of our future, not *the* future."[129] Due to their conception of digitization as a valuable tool in the promotion of accessibility in terms of both language and public interest, Opera Australia regularly utilizes large projection screens as key scenic elements in order to reduce the turnaround time between productions and in turn "program a greater variety of operas, [still] including purist-pleasing ones with traditional, [non-screen-reliant] staging" and new, Australia-born works.[130] [131]

Of course, in both digitized and more traditional Opera Australia stagings, language accessibility is key to programming. All Opera Australia productions involve some form of surtitles: "a translation of the text, often sung in a language other than English which can be seen on one or more screens and can be seen from most seats in each of our resident theatres."[132] Further, for those with visual impairments, the Company offers special "Audio Described" performances, in which headsets with audio descriptions of all scenic elements, entrances and exits, and pivotal moments are provided to all affected audience members.[133] Of note, while a majority of Opera Australia's productions are in a language other than English, annual seasons still include a handful of English concerts or musicals.

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[128] Michael Bailey, "'Not a 19th Century Art': Inside Opera Australia's Digital Revolution," *Financial Review*, August 16, 2019, https://www.afr.com/life-and-luxury/arts-and-culture/not-a-19th-century-art-inside-opera-australia-s-digital-revolution-20190810-P52ftx.

[129] Ibid.

[130] Ibid.

[131] "Annual Reports," *Opera Australia*.

[132] "Accessibility," *Opera Australia*, accessed December 15, 2022, https://opera.org.au/accessibility/.

[133] Ibid.

For these musicals, captioned performances are offered regularly and explicitly detailed on their ticketing site.[134]

Acting upon this goal to usher the digital into opera, during their 2019 season Opera Australia presented *Madama Butterfly* - an Italian opera composed by Giacomo Puccini in 1904 - in a creatively digitized format with English surtitles at the Sydney Opera House.[135] At the disposal of the Company were five trusses supporting pairs of rotating and tracking LED screens, as well an "additional pair of three-meter-wide panels that could track side to side and [a set of] of two-meter panels downstage of the proscenium."[136] The scale of the production and physicality of digitized scenic elements combined with an assortment of more traditional physical elements created what was described by one critic as a "visually arresting" production of the "beloved opera."[137] Further, the critic stated that the digital elements were "most convincing when [they were the] most abstract."[138] Drawing from the previous year's statistics, Opera Australia reports that 84 percent of attendees believed that "the digital sets added to their experience."[139] While not all critics and audiences responded to the digital elements with equal positivity, there was consensus that the production was captivating, "technologically slick," and "radically different to the production that had prevailed for the previous" decades.[140] [141] These efforts for digitization opened pathways for new and seasoned audiences alike to experience the classic Italian opera in its original language, as well as the opportunity for Opera Australia to present a larger season.

SECTION VI: What Opera Australia Means for the Arts Sector

As a whole, Opera Australia clearly comprehends the vitality of opera in its preserved original languages as applied to contemporary contexts. The organization's strong, curated relationship between digitization techniques and organization-wide accessibility efforts not only make opera linguistically accessible and engaging for a modern audience, but keep audiences coming back for more. There are two primary lessons to be learned from Opera Australia that may be applied to diverse mediums of the arts within the United States.

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[134] "Accessibility," *Opera Australia*.

[135] "Synopsis: *Madama Butterfly*," *The Metropolitan Opera*, accessed January 10, 2023, https://www.metopera.org/discover/synopses/madama-butterfly/.

[136] Natalie Robin, "Digitizing Opera: Part One, Video," Theatre, *Live Design*, August 29, 2019, https://www.livedesignonline.com/special-report/digitizing-opera-part-one-video.

[137] David Larkin, "A New, Darker *Butterfly* at Opera Australia," Opera Reviews, *Bachtrack*, July 1, 2019, https://bachtrack.com/review-madama-butterfly-murphy-son-gorrotxategi-opera-australia-sydney-june-2019.

[138] Ibid.

[139] "Annual Reports," *Opera Australia*.

[140] Zoltán Szabó, "Waiting for the Robins to Nest Again: an Underwhelming *Madama Butterfly* in Sydney," Opera Reviews, *Bachtrach,* June 30, 2022, https://bachtrack.com/review-madama-butterfly-sae-kyung-rim-torre-strong-opera-australia-june-2022.

[141] Rita Bratovich, "REVIEW: Opera Australia's 'Madama Butterfly' at Sydney Opera House," Arts & Entertainment, *City Hub*, July 3, 2022, https://cityhubsydney.com.au/2022/07/review-opera-australias-madama-butterfly-at-sydney-opera-house/.

The preservation of original languages in art does not <u>have to</u> deter audiences from engagement.

A major deterrent to opera for US audiences is a claim that they cannot follow non-English stories.[142] Opera Australia, in blunt terms, proves that this is definitively not true for the general public. In fact, 94 percent of surveyed attendees of the *Madama Butterfly* 2019 national tour said they "enjoyed that the opera was performed in its original language."[143] Additionally, 94 percent also claimed that they "would attend an Opera Australia performance in the future."[144]

In order to encourage American audiences to engage with stories from non-English origins, organizations must reanalyze how their programming is being presented, not simply the language that the story is presented in. In order to make the United States population engage with non-English art, language cannot be deemed the villain. Programming should strive to reflect linguistic diversity and history in a way that both honors the original language and opens it up for engagement from diverse contemporary populations. Opera Australia's high levels of engagement and satisfaction with non-English language performances through the use of surtitles and dynamic, reenergized performances prove that popular interest in non-English language art is viable.

Linguistically diverse work is not inherently elitist and inaccessible.

Opera is the least attended cultural or performing arts event in the United States.[145] Largely, this lack of attendance is due to an assumption of elitism drawn from the mid-seventeenth-century where patronage from royalty supported opera strictly for the "elite."[146] In contradiction to this near hegemonic belief, Opera Australia commits themselves to making opera available and enjoyable for everyone.[147] Through joint efforts for educational and outreach programming[148] that introduces young audiences to the genre, widespread ticket discounting practices,[149] digitization and modernization,[150] language and disability accessibility practices,[151] national tours,[152] and diverse, cross-genre seasons, Opera Australia largely excels in this mission. Opera Australia's audiences are not just opera-returners, but new, curious, and engaged first-timers. The commitment of Opera

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[142] Arnold Mitchell, "The Professional Performing Arts: Attendance Patterns, Preferences and Motives, Volume 2."

[143] "Annual Reports," *Opera Australia*.

[144] Ibid.

[145] "U.S. Patterns of Arts Participation," *National Endowment for the Arts*.

[146] Timothy King, "Patronage and Market in the Creation of Opera Before the Institution of Intellectual Property," *Journal of Cultural Economics* 25, no. 1 (2001): 21–45, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41810744.

[147] "Opera Australia," *Opera Australia*.

[148] "Education and Outreach," *Opera Australia*.

[149] "Special Offers," Buy, *Opera Australia*, accessed January 10, 2023, https://opera.org.au/buy/special-offers/.

[150] Vincent, Caitlin. "Opera's Digital Revolution May Be the Key to Increasing the Artform's Appeal." The Conversation. July 30, 2018. https://theconversation.com/operas-digital-revolution-may-be-the-key-to-increasing-the-artforms-appeal-100459.

[151] "Accessibility," *Opera Australia*.

[152] "The Barber of Seville," *Opera Australia.*

Australia to their mission of opera for everyone, and openness to innovation and outreach beyond what is "traditional" for the genre not only shows hope for the re-energization of opera in popular entertainment, but proves that art does not have to be conceptualized as something exclusively for society's wealthy or "elite."

PART IV Multilingual Technology for Global Entertainment: A Case Study of Netflix

SECTION I: Introduction

The United States artistic sector currently fails to appropriately represent the cultural and linguistic diversity of its constituents. Furthermore, linguistically conscious and equitable practices are key to the development of an accessible artistic sector in which diverse communities can use art to "understand [how] they matter."[153]

The present case study looks at Netflix for best practices in the propagation of linguistically equitable structures in streamed entertainment, and how technology-driven translation technologies can strengthen accessibility in the field. The success of Netflix's streaming service and business model supports that (1) the inclusion of linguistically diverse stories promotes otherwise unseen opportunities for international growth and (2) multilingual entertainment invites unprecedented international connectedness by the promotion of shared ideals and cross-cultural themes.

SECTION II: An Overview of Netflix's Language Practices

Netflix is the most popular film and television streaming platform in the United States.[154] Conceived in 1997 by entrepreneurs Reed Hastings and Marc Rudolph, Netflix was first launched as an online, mail-order subscription service.[155] In 2007 the platform began offering digital streaming alongside the pre-existing mail-order rentals, and in 2010 expanded to subscription packages that exclusively included Internet-based streaming.[156] Political thriller *House of Cards* ushered in the early stages of Netflix's empire of programming made exclusively for the platform, winning three Primetime Emmy Awards in the 2013 season.[157] As of August 2022, just over half of Netflix's library of films, documentaries, and episodes of television available in the United States were Netflix Originals.[158] In fact, as of January 2023 the streaming service's top 5 most watched films (*Red Notice, Don't Look Up, Bird Box, The Gray Man,* and *Glass Onion*) and individual seasons of television series (*Squid*

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[153] Sandy Dietrich and Erik Hernandez, "Language Use in the United States: 2019."

[154] Julia Stoll, "Share of Households Subscribing to Selected Video Streaming Platforms in the United States as of September 2022," TV, Video, and Film, *Statista*, November 3, 2022, https://www.statista.com/statistics/274192/streaming-services-penetration-rates-in-the -us/#:~:text=Netflix%20is%20unsurprisingly%20the%20most,platform%20in%20the%20United%20States.

[155] William Hosch, "Netflix: American Company," Movies, *Britannica*, accessed January 11, 2023, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Netflix-Inc.

[156] Ibid.

[157] "The Story of Netflix," *Netflix*, accessed January 11, 2023, https://about.netflix.com/en.

[158] Kasey Moore, "Netflix Originals Now Make Up 50% of Overall US Library," Netflix News, *What's On Netflix*, August 24, 2022, https://www.whats-on-netflix.com/news/50-of-netflixs-library-is-now-made-of-netflix-originals/.

Game, Stranger Things, Wednesday, Dahmer, and *Money Heist*) were originals.[159] It is the joint success of Netflix's relatively early transition to online streaming and the development of a vast network of linguistically and conceptually diverse original works that has allowed Netflix to thrive in over 190 countries and territories less than 30 years after its inception.[160]

Central to Netflix's growth is the company's keen understanding of its diverse international markets. As established in this section's predecessors, the comprehension and consideration of a population's language-identities is paramount in the understanding of their larger national cultures. It is no surprise, then, that international subscribers "often prefer local-language programming" and the 1 in 5 United States residents who speak a language other than English are likely to seek out non-English works for their entertainment of choice.[161] [162] To this end, as of 2019, non-English media made up 45% of Netflix's total streaming

Image 12: Netflix's online launch page circa mid-2004 (Product Habits Blog)

content and 35% of Netflix Originals available in the United States.[163] [164] Further, as of mid-2021 the service provides dubbing in 34 languages and subtitles in up to 37 languages.[165] Commitment to the continued expansion of these technologies is made clear by the fact that Netflix's economic investment in dubbing offerings has increased by a yearly factor of 25 to 35 percent annually as of

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[159] Joan E. Solsman, "Netflix's Top Hit Shows and Movies, Ranked (According to Netflix)," Services & Software, *CNET*, January 10, 2023, https://www.cnet.com/tech/services-and-software/netflixs-top-hit-shows-and-movies-ranked-according-to-netflix/.

[160] Louis Brennan, "How Netflix Expanded to 190 Countries in 7 Years," Global Strategy, *Harvard Business Review*, October 12, 2018, https://hbr.org/2018/10/how-netflix-expanded-to-190-countries-in-7-years.

[161] Ibid.

[162] Sandy Dietrich and Erik Hernandez, "Language Use in the United States: 2019," *United States Census Bureau*, September 1, 2022, https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2022/acs/acs-50.html.

[163] Kasey Moore, "Does Netflix Have Too Much Foreign Content?," Netflix News, *What's on Netflix*, August 5, 2020, https://www.whats-on-netflix.com/news/does-netflix-have-too-much-foreign-content/.

[164] This proportion, of course, grows when applied to the platform's media databases outside of the United States.

[165] Liz Shannon Miller, "Netflix Says 97% of American Subscribers Watched a Non-English Title in the Past Year," TV Features, *Collider*, August 21, 2021, https://collider.com/how-many-netflix-subscribers-watch-non-english-shows/.

2019 reports. [166] These figures are especially impressive when compared to Amazon Prime's supported 26 subtitle languages,[167] Disney Plus's 16,[168] and Hulu's two (English and, occasionally, Spanish) over similar time frames.[169] Netflix's commitment to the language-based identities of its diverse consumer base as a central tool in their globalization strategies are readily evident through the mass expansion of their non-English programming and language accessibility technologies since the early years of the company's existence.

Importantly, it is not only non-English speakers who take advantage of Netflix's multilingual offerings. In a report from Collider, between August 2020 and August 2021 a staggering 97 percent of United States Netflix subscribers consumed a non-English title.[170] This statistic represents a 71 percent increase in non-English viewing in just two years.[171] Evidently, Netflix does not produce and acquire non-English media simply for the sake of linguistically diversifying their catalog. Rather, they aim to support works genuinely in line with their mission statement of "entertain[ing] the world" where "whatever [one's] taste, and no matter where [one lives, they are given] access to best-in-class TV series, documentaries, feature films, and mobile games."[172] Though there is always room for improvement (which will be discussed at length later in this section), Netflix exudes best practice in linguistic representation in the artistic and entertainment sectors.

Access to linguistically diverse stories helps individuals "understand how [they] matter."[173] Further, popular media holds the power to "tell [a] society who and what is important."[174] Netflix's self-proclaimed "best-in-class," multilingual, highly-popular programming champions diverse languages and cultures in such a way that (1) non-English speakers can use the media representation of their language to strengthen their identities and (2) diverse populations come to understand the value of and opportunities contained within languages besides their native tongue.[175] Put another way, to Netflix English is *a* language of entertainment, not *the* language of entertainment. In addition to creating a route for the platform to globalize and rapidly grow revenue, this perspective

[166] Scott Roxborough, "Netflix's Global Reach Sparks Dubbing Revolution: 'The Public Demands It,'" TV News, *The Hollywood Reporter*, August 13, 2019, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/netflix-s-global-reach-sparks-dubbing-revolution-public-demands-it-1229761/.

[167] Lee Stanton, "How to Change the Language on Amazon Prime Video," *Alphr*, November 11, 2020, https://www.alphr.com/how-to-change-the-language-on-amazon-prime-video/#:~:text=Amazon%20Prime%20Video%20supports%2026%20languages.

[168] Daniel Martin and Derek Malcom, "How to Change the Language on Disney+," Guides, *Digital Trends*, February 10, 2022, https://www.digitaltrends.com/movies/how-to-change-the-language-on-disney-plus/#:~:text=Disney%2B%20supports%20subtitles%20and%20audio,Swedish%2C%20Icelandic%2C%20and%20Polish.

[169] Evan Killham, "How to Use Hulu Subtitles," Streaming TV, Movies, and More, *Life Wire*, April 18, 2022, https://www.lifewire.com/turn-on-hulu-subtitles-5200709.

[170] Liz Shannon Miller, "Netflix Says 97% of American Subscribers Watched a Non-English Title in the Past Year."
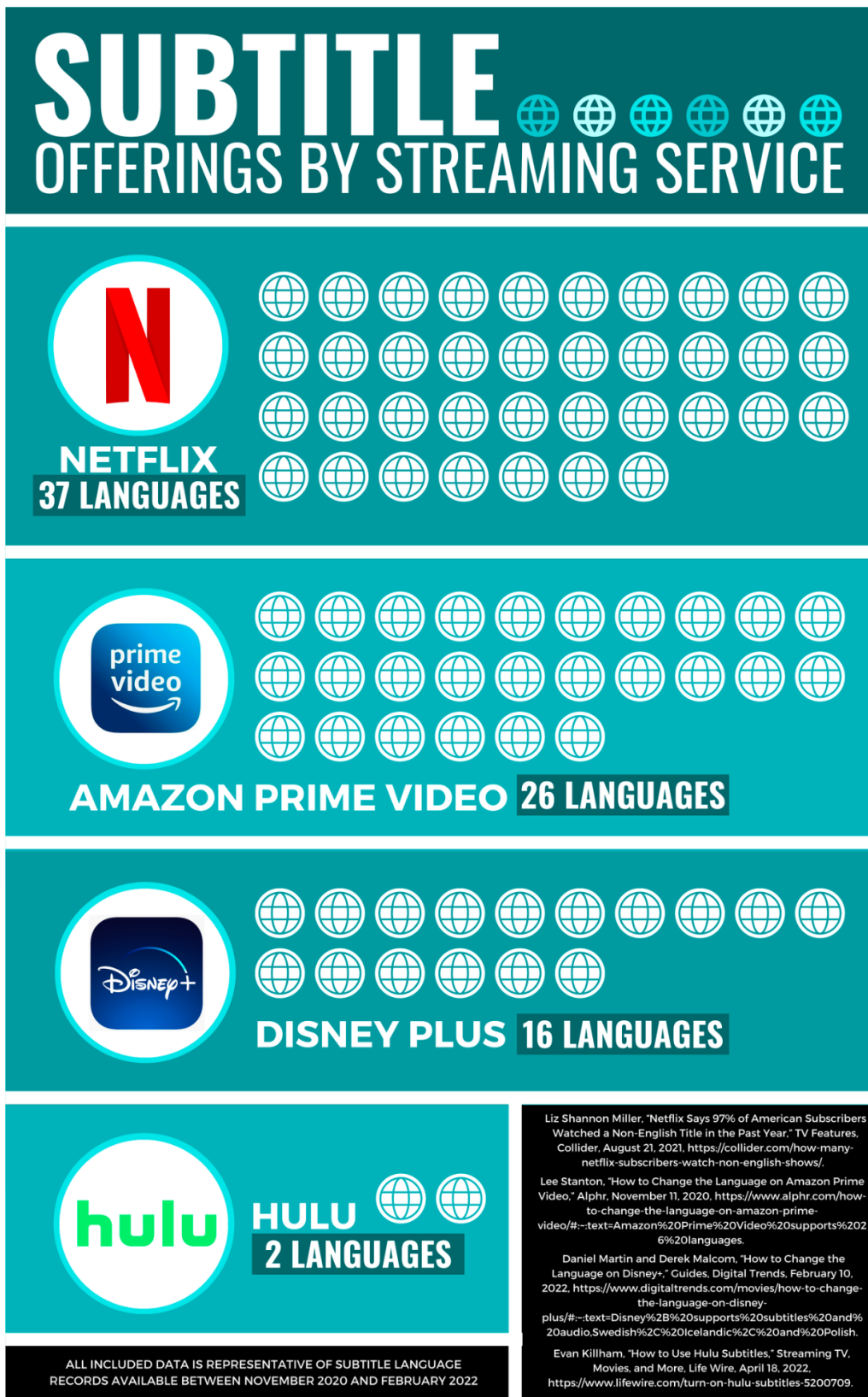
[171] Ibid.

[172] "The Story of Netflix," *Netflix*.

[173] NEA Staff, "Why the Arts Matter,"

[174] Bri Castellini, "Why Representation Matters," *Pipeline Artists*, February 9, 2021, https://pipelineartists.com/why-representation-matters-in-arts/.

[175] "The Story of Netflix," *Netflix*.

SUBTITLE
OFFERINGS BY STREAMING SERVICE

NETFLIX
37 LANGUAGES

AMAZON PRIME VIDEO 26 LANGUAGES

DISNEY PLUS 16 LANGUAGES

HULU 2 LANGUAGES

ALL INCLUDED DATA IS REPRESENTATIVE OF SUBTITLE LANGUAGE RECORDS AVAILABLE BETWEEN NOVEMBER 2020 AND FEBRUARY 2022

Liz Shannon Miller, "Netflix Says 97% of American Subscribers Watched a Non-English Title in the Past Year," TV Features, Collider, August 21, 2021, https://collider.com/how-many-netflix-subscribers-watch-non-english-shows/.

Lee Stanton, "How to Change the Language on Amazon Prime Video," Alphr, November 11, 2020, https://www.alphr.com/how-to-change-the-language-on-amazon-prime-video/#:~:text=Amazon%20Prime%20Video%20supports%202 6%20languages.

Daniel Martin and Derek Malcom, "How to Change the Language on Disney+," Guides, Digital Trends, February 10, 2022, https://www.digitaltrends.com/movies/how-to-change-the-language-on-disney-plus/#:~:text=Disney%2B%20supports%20subtitles%20and% 20audio,Swedish%2C%20Icelandic%2C%20and%20Polish.

Evan Killham, "How to Use Hulu Subtitles," Streaming TV, Movies, and More, Life Wire, April 18, 2022, https://www.lifewire.com/turn-on-hulu-subtitles-5200709.

Figure 4: Overview of subtitle languages available on Netflix, Hulu, Disney Plus, and Amazon Prime Video based on publicly accessible information from November 2020 to February 2022. (Source: *Author*)

allows for the seamless integration of linguistic diversity into programming, which invites routes for international growth in terms of both accessibility as well as shared culture.

SECTION III: *Squid Game* & the International Language Market

In recent years, in addition to more niche works aimed at consumer populations belonging to individual non-American cultures, Netflix's multilingual growth has massively capitalized on the development of stories and themes that capture mass global consumer appeal, blind to their language of presentation. Netflix Original series *Money Heist* (Spanish), *All of Us Are Dead* (Korean), *Lupin* (French), and *Narcos* (Spanish / English) have garnered millions of views each in the United States,[176] and Original films including *Roma* (Spanish) and *The Hand of God* (Italian) have received mass critical appeal.[177] However, in the most striking example to date, the 2021 release of Hwang Dong-hyuk's Korean series *Squid Game* unquestionably proved the viability of cross-cultural entertainment appeal in languages other than English.

The series' nine-installment first season was described by Vulture as "a thrilling and dark indictment of capitalism and class disparity" in which 456 financially desperate South Korean adults compete in a series of brutally adapted children's games in order to win $45.6 billion won.[178] According to Forbes, key to *Squid Game*'s storytelling success was the fact that it "manages to reflect the feeling of the present moment, in the same way the decrepit, deceitful rulers of *Game of Thrones* reflected audience's apathy and anger toward the political process[es of the world]."[179] [180] Unsurprisingly, this cross-culturally relevant thematic formula had worked before for international audiences, with South Korean films *Train to Busan* and *Parasite*'s class-centered narratives garnering popular and critical traction across the world.[181] Despite this precedent, however, *Squid Game*'s success exceeded all expectations.

Just under two weeks after its September 17, 2021 premiere, *Squid Game* was labeled the most popular show in 90 of Netflix's 190 streaming countries.[182] Further, an analysis of its combined

[176] "Most Popular Non-English Language Netflix TV Shows of All Time as of October 2022, by Number of Hours Viewed," TV, Video, and Film, *Statista*, October 19, 2022, https://www.statista.com/statistics/1281584/most-viewed-netflix-show-non-english/.

[177] James Descombes, "Oscar Nominations on Netflix 2022: From The Power of the Dog to Tick, Tick… BOOM! – Oscar-Nominated Films and Documentaries to Stream on Netflix," Film, *BT*, February 8, 2022, https://www.bt.com/tv/film/oscar-nominated-movies-films-documentaries-netflix-winners.

[178] "Squid Game," TV, *Vulture*, accessed January 12, 2023, https://www.vulture.com/tv/squid-game/.

[179] Dani Di Placido, "The Secret to the Success of 'Squid Game,' Explained," Arts, *Forbes*, October 6, 2021, https://www.forbes.com/sites/danidiplacido/2021/10/06/the-secret-to-squid-games-success-explained/?sh=3cf15005224c.

[180] Travis Clark, "'Game of Thrones' is Still One of the World's Most Popular Series, Data Shows, as HBO Readies Spinoffs Including a New Sequel About Jon Snow," Media, *Insider*, June 27, 2022, https://www.businessinsider.com/game-of-thrones-still-one-of-worlds-biggest-shows-data-2022-6.

[181] Dani Di Placido, "The Secret to the Success of 'Squid Game,' Explained."

[182] Josef Adalian, "Planet 'Squid Game'," Buffering, *Vulture*, September 30, 2021, https://www.vulture.com/article/planet-squid-game-netflix-biggest-show.html.

Netflix streams, Google searches, and recorded illegal downloads led Parrot Analytics to deem the program "a word-of-mouth global sensation" and "the most in-demand show in the world" less than one month after its release.[183] Netflix's global TV head Bela Bajaria had expected success from *Squid Game* due to the fact that Netflix users' K-drama (Korean drama) consumption in the United States had increased by a factor of 200 percent between September 2019 and September 2021, yet they "could not imagine that it would [get] *this* big globally."[184] Of course, the show only continued to grow in popularity. Exactly two months after the show's release, Netflix users had collectively streamed *Squid Game* for 2.1 billion hours (or, 239,700 years)– making the dark thriller the streaming service's most popular show to date, and remains the most watched by hour as of early 2023.[185] [186]

Yet, the rapid success of *Squid Game* upon its release massively contradicted its road to production. Though originally conceived as a feature film, *Squid Game*'s creator, writer, director, and producer Hwang Dong-hyuk came up with the series' plot in 2008, and developed a completed script by 2009.[187] However, in 2009

Image XII: Creator, writer, director, and producer Hwang Dong-hyuk on the set of *Squid Game*'s third episode (Source: *Variety*)

Hwang commented that producers found the story too "bizarre," and took over a decade to eventually be picked up by Netflix.[188] In Hwang's eyes, "after about 12 years, the world [had] changed into a place where such peculiar, violent, survival stories are actually welcomed. People commented on how the series is relevant to real life. Sadly, the world has changed in that direction."[189] Key to *Squid Game*'s eventual green-lit production as well as its rapid global success

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[183] Ibid.

[184] Ibid.

[185] Joan E. Solsman, "Netflix's Squid Game Was Even Bigger Than You Thought -- 2.1B Hours Big," Entertainment, *CNET*, November 17, 2021, https://www.cnet.com/culture/entertainment/netflix-squid-game-is-even-bigger-than-you-thought-2-billion-hours-big/.

[186] Joan E. Solsman, "Netflix's Top Hit Shows and Movies, Ranked (According to Netflix)."

[187] Lee Gyu-lee, "INTERVIEW: Director Shares Backstory of Global Hit 'Squid Game'," Entertainment & Arts, *The Korea Times*, September 30, 2021, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/art/2021/09/398_316211.html.

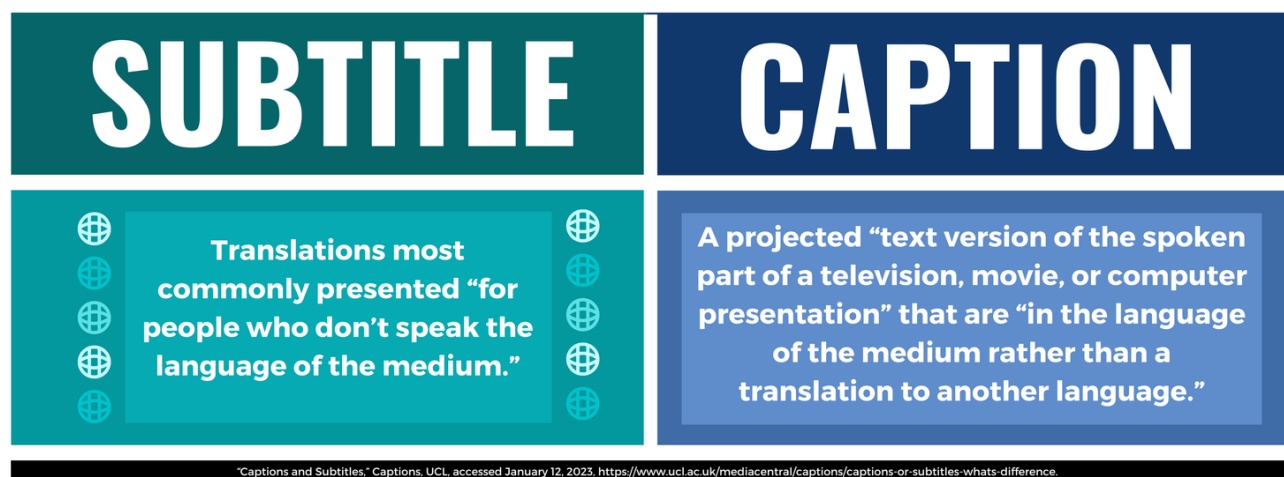[188] Lee Gyu-lee, "INTERVIEW: Director Shares Backstory of Global Hit 'Squid Game'."

[189] Lee Gyu-lee, "INTERVIEW: Director Shares Backstory of Global Hit 'Squid Game'."

was, once again, its thematic commitment to inter-continental realities that garnered empathy and interest from dozens of culturally distinct people groups: economic inequality, capitalist society, and humanitarian trauma. With *Squid Game*, Netflix and Hwang used art and entertainment as a tool to connect cultures through a shared understanding of deeply-human themes in an international language market.

SECTION IV: Translation Technology Accessibility and Accuracy

In addition to the proven worldwide potential for non-English, internationally relevant entertainment on a global scale, *Squid Game*'s popularity invited novel conversations on translation and accessibility technologies.

To begin, it is crucial to distinguish between captions and subtitles. While they both are used as accessibility technologies for those who are unable to access certain pieces of media, captions are a projected "text version of the spoken part of a television, movie, or computer presentation" that are "in the language of the medium rather than a translation to another language."[190] On the other hand, subtitles are projected translations most commonly "for people who don't speak the language of the medium."[191] To this end, by definition, subtitles do not necessitate direct translation.

SUBTITLE | **CAPTION**

Translations most commonly presented "for people who don't speak the language of the medium."

A projected "text version of the spoken part of a television, movie, or computer presentation" that are "in the language of the medium rather than a translation to another language."

"Captions and Subtitles," Captions, UCL, accessed January 12, 2023, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/mediacentral/captions/captions-or-subtitles-whats-difference.

Figure 5: The differentiation between subtitles and captions (Source: *Author*)

In fact, linguist Marie-Noëlle Guillot posits that "subtitles have a capacity to generate their own modes of representation and interpretation and [can subsequently] sensitize audiences [to] linguistic and cultural differences." To Guillot, this capacity "tends to be obscured in face-value textual

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[190] "Captions and Subtitles," Captions, *UCL*, accessed January 12, 2023, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/mediacentral/captions/captions-or-subtitles-whats-difference.
[191] Ibid.

comparison routinely highlighting 'loss' in translation."[192] In other words, translation-based alterations in subtitling practices hold the power to better expose widespread people groups to linguistic and cultural differences - inviting the all-important understandings of why other cultures "matter."[193] Regardless, even when positively implemented for cultural gain, these positive

linguistic changes are often a target for criticism as a "loss" or mistake. Where subtitles walk a dangerous line, however, is between making these positive translation alterations for the sake of cultural understanding and going too far to such an extent that the content suffers. In fact, it is a perceived "loss" of the South Korean language while watching with English closed captions that sparked *Squid Game*'s translation controversy.

On September 30, 2021, Korean speaker Youngmi Mayer tweeted: "not to sound snobby but I'm fluent in Korean and I watched Squid Game with English subtitles and if you don't understand Korean you didn't really watch the same show."[194] In one example, Mayer pointed out that the manipulative Han Mi-nyeo (Kim Joo-Ryoung) is quoted as saying "I'm not a genius, but I can work it out," when the direct Korean translation is "I am very smart, I just never got a chance to study."[195] This line's shifted meaning prevents non-Korean speakers from grasping a key element of Mi-nyeo's character, struggle, and motivations in the Game. However, there was a deeper reality to these "botched"

Figure 6: Illustration of three translation manifestations in Netflix's *Squid Game* (Source: *Author*)

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[192] Marie-Noëlle Guillot, "Film Subtitles and the Conundrum of Linguistic and Cultural Representation," in *Contrastive Media Analysis*, ed. Stefan Hauser, Martin Luginbuhl, Martin Luginbühl (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012), 101-121.

[193] Marie-Noëlle Guillot, "Film Subtitles and the Conundrum of Linguistic and Cultural Representation."

[194] Yongmi Mayer, Twitter Post, September 30, 2021, 10:36 AM, https://twitter.com/ymmayer/status/1443615642385592324.

[195] Yongmi Mayer, Twitter Post.

translations. Rather than watching *Squid Game* with subtitles ("English"), Mayer was watching with English closed captions ("English [CC]"): a translation of the English dubbed version of the show.[196] Upon investigation, using English subtitles, Mi-nyeo says: "I never bothered to study, but I am unbelievably smart," a much more accurate translation of the original meaning.[197] The almost unassuming switch from one English translation to another transforms how viewers could interface with *Squid Game* and its characters.

Even so, of course, the subtitles translation is not exact, which raises the fascinating question of to what extent multilingual services such as Netflix can ensure the accuracy of their captions, subtitles, and other language accessibility features.

As stated above, Netflix is a standout in the world of streaming language accessibility for offering dubbing in 34 languages and subtitles in up to 37 languages.[198] However, this does not mean that the service has necessarily mastered walking the line between positive, culturally motivated translations and "botched" misunderstandings. Of the *Squid Game* captioning vs. subtitles debacle, English-Korean interpreter Jinhyun Cho wrote: "subtitling becomes even more complicated when cultural factors come into play, because many culture-specific words and concepts are difficult to translate."[199] In her words, "the 'untranslatable' exists in all cultures" and "a meaning gap inevitably exists between the original Korean and the English subtitles due to the untranslatable."[200] An example of such in *Squid Game* is the use of age-based honorifics used by South Koreans in conversation for which there is no equivalent English form. As such, some of the emotional weight tied to shifts in how characters refer to each other over the course of the series is inevitably lost for non-Korean speakers regardless of the manner in which the series is translated into English.[201] Instead of relying on subtitles as the only "cultural and linguistic bridge" through which one may understand the "untranslatable" elements inevitable in non-English works, Cho writes that this gap "can only be filled by genuine understanding of the other culture and language."[202] Subtitles and captioning are just the first step in bridging linguistic divides; it is up to individuals and production companies to further the development of cross-cultural understanding through the entertainment they both consume and produce.

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[196] Adele Ankers-Range, "Squid Game Has Multiple English Translation and One is Seemingly More Accurate Than the Other," Squid Game, *IGN*, updated October 4, 2021, https://www.ign.com/articles/squid-game-netflix-english-language-translations-accuracy.

[197] Jack Shepherd, "You Could Be Watching 'Squid Game' Wrong- All Because of a Netflix Error," Drama, *Total Film*, updated October 4, 2021, https://www.gamesradar.com/squid-game-translation-english-korean-closed-caption/.

[198] Liz Shannon Miller, "Netflix Says 97% of American Subscribers Watched a Non-English Title in the Past Year."

[199] Jinhyun Cho, "'Squid Game' and the Untranslatable: The Debate Around Subtitles Explained," Arts + Culture, *The Conversation*, October 13, 2021, https://theconversation.com/squid-game-and-the-untranslatable-the-debate-around-subtitles-explained-169931.

[200] Ibid.

[201] Ibid.

[202] Ibid.

While it appears impossible for services such as Netflix to fully overcome the "untranslatable," this is not to say that their translation and linguistic accessibility technologies need no improvement. Strings of recent linguistic research have focused heavily on opportunities for dynamic subtitles ("placing subtitles in varying positions, according to the underlying video content") to increase consumer engagement and comprehension.[203] Researchers reporting at the 2015 ACM International Conference explained that there is an opportunity for dynamic subtitles to make the "overall viewing experience less disjointed and more immersive" for a proportion of viewers. Following the study, "the majority of people who watched dynamic subtitles enjoyed the experience and wanted to try them further" largely due to the fact that they were able to be more engaged in the action or emotion of the media and "pick up more non-verbal cues from actors" as subtitles were not permanently fixed at the bottom of the screen.[204] One participant reported: "I wouldn't have caught a lot of the small social cues if I were watching this with traditional subtitles."[205] However, concerns were raised by those who questioned whether the dynamic subtitles would be too distracting for those who did not need them.[206] As such, Netflix can continue to exude best practice in translation and accessibility technologies through testing and implementing an additional dynamic subtitling option for streaming content.

SECTION V: What Netflix Means for the Arts Sector

Netflix possesses an explicit understanding of the value of international markets in the growth of their business model, and as such prioritizes multilingualism as a tool for globalization. The success of Netflix's non-English programming and industry-best translation technologies both in the United States and globally supports the viability of linguistic diversity from a cultural and capital perspective. While unique in their global scale and nature as a for-profit corporation as compared to most United States artistic organizations, the lessons taught by Netflix's language-driven globalization and commitment to language-based-identity are highly applicable to the larger creative sector as a whole.

The inclusion of linguistically diverse stories promotes otherwise unseen opportunities for international growth.

As explored exhaustively above, Netflix's transition to online streaming and the development of highly popular original works was what allowed the company to launch its network to over 190

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[203] Andy Brown et al, "Dynamic Subtitles: The User Experience," in *Proceedings of the ACM International Conference on Interactive Experiences for TV and Online Video* (TVX'15:ACM International Conference on Interactive Experiences for TV and Online Video, Brussels Belgium: ACM, 2015), 103–112, https://doi.org/10.1145/2745197.2745204.

[204] Ibid.

[205] Ibid.

[206] Ibid.

countries and territories.[207] However, it is its commitment to "best-in-class" linguistically diverse stories that has allowed it to stay and thrive in these regions.[208] [209] Importantly, it is not just native speakers of a particular language who take advantage of Netflix's linguistically diverse offerings; between August 2020 and August 2021 a staggering 97 percent of United States Netflix subscribers consumed a non-English title and Korean thriller *Squid Game* remains the platform's most popular show as of January 2021.[210] [211] Linguistic diversity for the sake of genuinely good media rather than for the sake of "checking a diversity box" has allowed both the platform and its multilingual catalog to reach massive global audiences. Most importantly, this growth and access to diverse stories both helps individuals "understand how [they] matter" and creates routes through which diverse populations can come to understand the value of cultures that exist beyond their native tongues.[212]

Multilingual entertainment invites unprecedented international connectedness by the promotion of shared ideals and cross-cultural themes.

The unequivocal success of Hwang Dong-hyuk's *Squid Game* was largely ushered in by the thematic global applicability of its story. Economic inequality, capitalist society, and humanitarian trauma are realities accessible to a large proportion of the world, and empathy and interest garnered by these realities made the show a global success. Of course, *Squid Game*'s record breaking streaming performance was largely aided by the strength of Netflix's presence on a global scale, but it was Netflix's commitment to producing a story with thematic promise for multilingual connectedness that made the work stand out internationally. In this sense, *Squid Game* offers a path towards international connectivity and linguistic diversity through the artistic depiction of individual culture framed by what is shared between diverse cultures.

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[207] Louis Brennan, "How Netflix Expanded to 190 Countries in 7 Years,"

[208] Ibid.

[209] "The Story of Netflix," *Netflix*.

[210] Liz Shannon Miller, "Netflix Says 97% of American Subscribers Watched a Non-English Title in the Past Year."

[211] Joan E. Solsman, "Netflix's Top Hit Shows and Movies, Ranked (According to Netflix)."

[212] NEA Staff, "Why the Arts Matter."

PART V Conclusion

This research report evolved from the following statement from the National Endowment for the Arts: "**the arts matter because they help us to understand how we matter**."[213]

From this assertion, it follows that where arts and cultural institutions fail to adequately support the language diversity of their resident communities, identity-based harm comes to those whose identities are not being represented. As established in Section I of this report, the arts in the United States are *not* representative of the nation's linguistically diverse population, in which an ever-growing proportion of the resident population speaks a language other than English fluently.[214] The large-scale integration of linguistically equitable and accessible practices in arts and culture institutions - alongside active pushes for racial, gender, and cultural equity - are key to the development of an inclusive, creative, and sustainable artistic sector in which diverse communities can use art to strengthen their conceptions of why they matter.

Sections II through IV presented case studies from Deaf West Theatre, Opera Australia, and Netflix: three distinct artistic and cultural institutions that each have exuded best practices in the field of linguistic equity through the innovative usage of technology. Though from disparate industries, the six total lessons offered by these institutions are applicable to all artistic endeavors currently in practice in the United States.

(1) Language and linguistic identity can advance and strengthen artistic storytelling.

(2) Audiences *want* to see linguistically diverse and accessible stories.

(3) The preservation of original languages in art does not have to deter audiences from engagement.

(4) Linguistically diverse work is not inherently elitist and inaccessible.

(5) The inclusion of linguistically diverse stories promotes otherwise unseen opportunities for international growth.

(6) Multilingual entertainment invites unprecedented international connectedness by the promotion of shared ideals and cross-cultural themes.

Language is key to identity. It is the responsibility of arts and cultural institutions to enact linguistically equitable practices that support the linguistic and cultural identities of their

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[213] NEA Staff, "Why the Arts Matter."

[214] Sandy Dietrich and Erik Hernandez, "Language Use in the United States: 2019."

communities. As evidenced by Deaf West Theatre, Opera Australia, and Netflix, the conceptual groundwork exists for the promotion of linguistically equitable artistic practices regardless of industry; changes are not hard to implement, and often begin with the mere acknowledgement of the linguistic diversity that defines the constituency or leadership of any United States based organization. The ever-increasing accessibility of malleable technologies in the twenty-first century makes strides for linguistic equity entirely accessible to a majority of arts organizations, and can start with strides as small as listing the languages employees speak on name badges, offering a website's landing page in a variety of languages, or increasing subtitle options on a streaming platform.

When organizations begin to take accountability for the just representation of *all* levels of diversity in arts and cultural programming, senses of inclusion and belonging in the arts sector will thrive. The process will not happen overnight. However, small steps for linguistic consciousness, equity, and accessibility will pave the way for large-scale leaps in the United States artistic sector to fairly represent its linguistically diverse residents and subsequently allow them to use art as a tool to come to understand "how they matter."

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