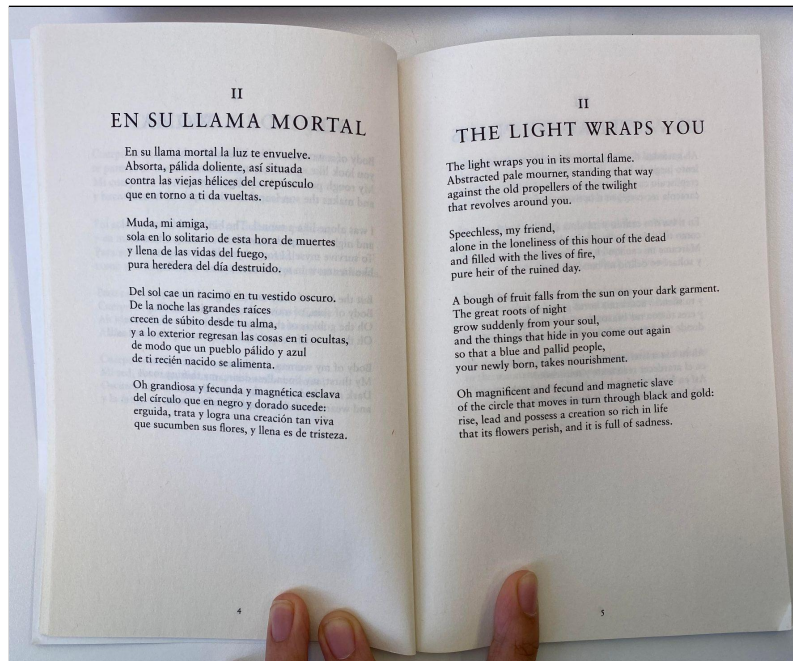


What constraints are there on the pursuit of knowledge?

Language is used worldwide as a vessel to transfer knowledge. With its significant role in the distribution and pursuit of knowledge, exploration of its constraints are crucial, in order to minimise such restrictions and utilise language more effectively.

Object 1: Pablo Neruda's "The Light Wraps You"

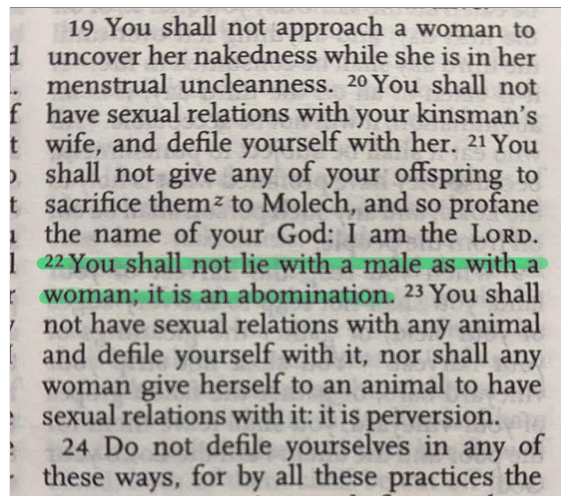


This is Pablo Neruda's poem "The Light Wraps You", that I studied in my English class. The anthology my class studies, as presented, includes the original Spanish version and an English translation. In the original, it is clear that Neruda refers to a female subject. This is because the verb conjugations when referring to the subject "ella" (ie. "she") are used—for instance, in "situada". This is translated to gender neutral terms, like "standing", in the English version. As a result, the gender of the subject becomes ambiguous.

This object is an example of knowledge that is lost in translation. Since English does not change its verb conjugations depending on gender, it is impossible to convey that the subject is female through the poem's verbs. As a result, the same poem in different languages contains different knowledge, and one would no longer interact with the originally intended knowledge when reading the translation.

And so, the first constraint is revealed: the diversity of language. There are thousands of languages in the world, and each of them possess different grammatical systems. Consequently, expressions in one language could simply be nonexistent in another; there may be no words that can capture the essence of the knowledge wished to be distributed. It is not to say that one ought to avoid translations; they are nonetheless an excellent tool to expose oneself to new perspectives in the lenses of those who have lived culturally different lives. However, its restrictions must also be acknowledged; one will ultimately face constraints pursuing knowledge through translated texts, as the author's intention may only be authentic through its original language.

Object 2: Leviticus 18:22, The Bible



This is a section of a translation from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible from my school's library. At first glance, the highlighted quote does indeed seem to deem homosexuality as a sin, as they refer to sex between men as "an abomination". However, it must be noted that this is an English translation interpreted from the original Hebrew version by the National Council of Churches roughly 24 centuries later, in 1989. There is much discussion in hermeneutics regarding the accuracy of this interpretation, with scholars arguing it condemns incest (Renato Lings) or pederasty (Myers) instead.

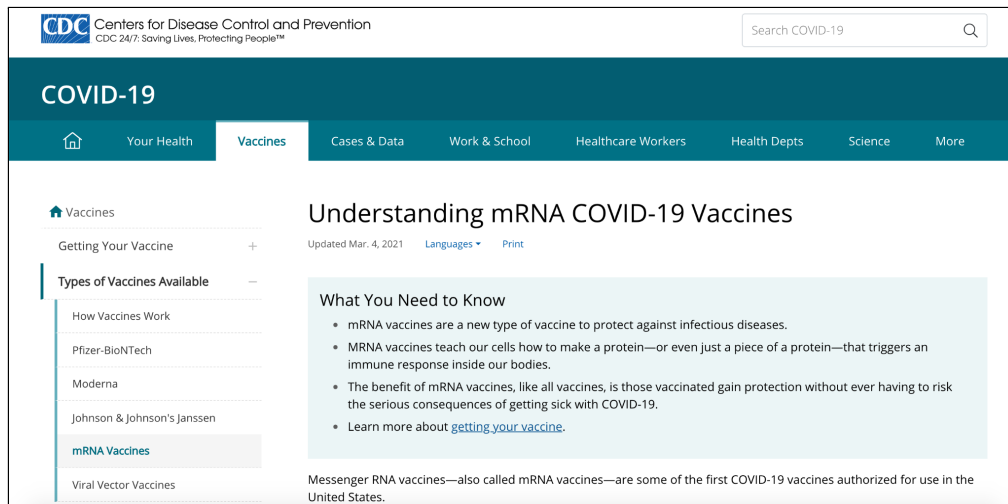
Initially, this quote may resemble the former object; a translation causes an unstoppable change in knowledge. While this is true, it exposes another constraint: the subjectivity in interpretations of language. Regardless of the Hebrew version's original message, its surrounding discourse shows that contrasting meanings may arise from analysing the same words; there is a lack of consistency in the knowledge understood. Hence, it is difficult to guarantee that groups of knowers can pursue accurate knowledge from language.

This is especially restrictive when considering translations, where a single biased interpretation is broadcasted to others. Here, the specific interpretations of certain translators lead to the explicit homophobic undertones seen within the quote; this is then distributed to other knowers, who are skewed to interpret the scripture in similar ways. Indeed, the original intentions of the quote are unknown, but the widespread distribution of a specific interpretation nonetheless presents a risk of misinformation.

It must be noted that the subjectivity of language can also encourage the pursuit of knowledge. The varied interpretations that arise from subjectivity allow for the development of different perspectives, encouraging discussion and reflection where knowers seek further information to confirm their beliefs, thus creating new knowledge. Though this may not have been the original intention of the text, this promotion of further exploration should nonetheless be acknowledged as an aid to the pursuit of knowledge.

However, a constraint remains within the subjectivity of language: effective and accurate communication between parties becomes difficult as one's interpretations may not always coincide with the intended knowledge.

Object 3: Explanation of the COVID 19 vaccine by the CDC



This is a screenshot of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s website, containing an explanation of how the COVID 19 vaccine prevents disease. The simple diction may be noted; for example, the vaccine is said to “teach our cells how to make a protein”, but how this is done is not explained.

It can be argued that this explanation is insufficient and thus untrustworthy; there is little to no detail to justify their claims, and so one may doubt its reliability. However, such an explanation is perhaps most appropriate for this situation due to its non-specialist target audience.

Groups of knowers, such as the healthcare industry, in this case, have language specific to their community. While such language is useful when utilised between members of the community, since it is vocabulary commonly known within the group, those outside the community are constrained; they are unfamiliar with any specific language and thus would not be able to understand. Consequently, language must be simplified when distributing knowledge to non-specialists. Despite this, it must also be noted that doing so will lead to vague explanations, as seen from the object; the original specificity achieved with specialist vocabulary is lost.

From this, another constraint is revealed: language specific to a group of knowers, even if within the same language, must be used to fully and efficiently transfer knowledge. However, doing so leads to incomprehensibility. Thus, one must find an equilibrium between the two in order to make knowledge both accessible and useful.

(Word count: 944)

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