

Some issues in translating the BLM solidarity statement from English to French, Spanish and German – an email trail (edited for length and clarity)

Laura, writing from France:

Hi,

Some interesting things appeared as I translated the BLM solidarity statement and require your input.

- There is, to my knowledge, no French equivalent acronym to BIPOC. So, I chose to spell the words entirely. However, it then occurred to me that the category “Indigenous” would be translated as *autochtone* in French, and this term carries completely different connotations: it relates more often to nativist-nationalist-fascist ideas, and the indigenous white population of France. *Indigène* is a word that does exist in French, but it was a colonial/racial category to refer to the natives in the colonies. Some migrants and descendants of migrants living in post-colonial metropolitan France have reclaimed it and created a movement (Indigènes de la République) then a controversial political party around it. So, it has acquired layers of meaning that are very different from what “Indigenous” means in a Pan-American context. I thus decided to use “Premières Nations” (First Nations) which is used by the Indigenous populations of French Guyana.
- Following from the above point, I realized that we do not mention migrants in our statement, and this reveals a rather US-centric approach where the paradigm of race does organize systems of oppression and violence. It seems to be that in France and other parts of Europe, and the world (including the US) for that matter, citizenship status, both administrative and “cultural”, is more/as important as organizing paradigm. I suggest therefore that we add migrants (which is a racialized category!) to the list — I did. This is my contribution to the geopolitical/linguistic decentering efforts of Pop Moves.
- “Addressing (im)mobilities” is hard to translate in French and, going back to the documents of the 2018 conference, it seems that I left it in English even then. So, I’ve translated it here as “Aide aux Mobilités”, which is the phrase which makes the most sense in French and echoes other French programs that address inequalities.

Have you experienced similar/different translations epiphanies? I’d be interested to compare them and learn from them.

Best wishes,

Laura

Clare, writing from the UK

Hi Laura,

Thank you so much for your thoughtful engagement with the translation process and for highlighting these issues. I've responded to each below.

- It's so interesting to hear about the different layers of meaning that accrue to the translations of 'indigenous' in the metropolitan French context. "Premières Nations" seems to be a good option, so I'm happy for you to go with that.
- Excellent point! I've inserted 'migrants' in the attached version and highlighted it in yellow so you can clearly see where I've added it.
- "Aide aux Mobilités" is fine for 'Addressing (Im)mobilities'.

Alex, Elena and Anamaria - do let me know if you've encountered any other translational issues. I love that our attention to linguistic diversity is helping to decentre our approach - that's what this work is all about.

Many thanks,

Clare

Alex, writing from the UK

Hi all!

I'm attaching the Spanish translation of PoPMoves BLM solidarity statement. To answer some of the points Laura raised:

- I have kept the acronyms BIPOC (with a Spanish translation) and LGBTQIA+ as to my knowledge these acronyms are largely adopted in Spanish writing, though this does of course support centering English.
- I have inserted 'migrantes' as put forward by both (and I am also reminded of the large and complex task we are trying to take on with finding ways to reach and include all groups in PoPMoves events by not just recognising them in documentation.)
- With regards to 'Addressing (Im)mobilities' I used the translated term we used in documentation for last year's conference, though this might need to be reviewed.

A final point that I thought might be useful to raise is the use of gendered language:

- For the most part I have avoided gendered language throughout the statement but when it comes to translating 'Signed' and the individual roles that PoPMoves members hold (president, member, treasurer etc.) I realised that perhaps we have assumed how PoPMoves members identify. In Spanish the use of 'o' or 'a' determines the masculine or feminine form- and I believe the same happens in French with the suffix 'eur' or 'ice'?- perhaps it would be good to have confirmation from those that are signing the statement with how they identify? Or can we find a gender-neutral format for roles such as Coordinator/ Coordinadora/ Coordinatrice? I chose to write 'Firmadxs' ('signed') favouring the gender-neutral 'x'- this isn't always recognised formally in academic writing but it is more commonly favoured in gender-neutral writing to my

knowledge. Not having had to engage with language in this way may also point to the lack of gender diversity within PoPMoves...

Any comments or suggestions regarding the above are most welcome! Perhaps, if Ana Maria has time and would like to review the Spanish translation again it might be worthwhile but in the meantime I asked a Spanish speaking friend and dance scholar if he could review it- given I am translating into a second language- though he recognises some of the stylistic differences that arise from different versions of Spanish across Latin America.

I hope you're all keeping well.

Warm wishes,

Alex

Clare, writing from the UK

Hi Alex,

Thanks so much for this translation and for the thought you have put into the issues involved. That's a really good point about gendered language. How about if I email all the signatories, attach the French and Spanish translations, and ask them to let me know if they want to be identified differently? I can't remember whether gendering is an issue in German - Elena?

Best wishes,

Clare

Laura, writing from France

Great idea Clare!

It's really interesting what emerges out of these translations. It's interesting in itself! I hadn't thought about gendered language as pronoun choices and debates are not (yet) very big in France. There are discussions in academic circles around titles like "doctor" (*docteur*) or "researcher" (*chercheur*) or "author" (*auteur*) which are often used in their masculine form for women and thought of as "neutral" (although many people contest that). Some women feel that the feminization of these titles belittles them, as they feel pressured to identify as women first and professionals second. Others feel that the feminization of these titles (*docteure, chercheuse, autrice*) is a necessary feminist move forward.

Best,
Laura

Elena, writing from Australia:

Hi all,

okay, I made it. And here are my two cents re: all the language peculiarities:

- Re: using English terms coming out of US-based activism in German as part of the debate is common and in the interview below Black German Studies professor Priscilla Layne explains why that is okay and what it signals. In terms of using the English race instead of the German word “Rasse”, this has to do with the history of the word in relation to Hitler and the Nazis and to avoid this connotation in this context, it is common to use race in italics. So I did that <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/black-lives-matter-ein-weisser-kann-diese-gewalterfahrung-nicht-vollstaendig-erfassen-a-3902a4aa-18c1-4437-ab4c-1cff2b7d4d52>
- In terms of sticking with the term BIPOC, there is a similar reason here. I have also found a German glossary for journalists and people working in news and other media, where it is indicated that PoC and BPoC (Black and People of Colour) is used in German, and, though less frequently, BIPOC is also used. I also found a university student network of BIPOC that uses this acronym, so I stuck with it. The same applies to LGBTQIA+, which has been taken over from English and is used as is. There is a German equivalent, but apparently that one is hardly used.
- In terms of gender. Oi, what a debate when you have a language that genders. Anyway, the way it works in Germany is as follows: You usually have a male and female version for something like activist. Male – Aktivist; Female – Aktivistin. Now there is a thing called a Gendersternchen, which has been used since about 2018/2019, where the male and female words are combined into one through the use of an asterisk, like so: Aktivist*in (singular) and Aktivist*innen (plural). That’s supposed to be more gender neutral and the Black Lives Matter Berlin people use this in their German announcements. So I am going with that. (There is now also a debate that this type of gendering has gone too far because it locates gender in the genitals and is supposedly more sexist and to go with English and use the masculine form as the neutral form, but I am going with the BLM Berlin peeps here.)
- Also, FYI, the German word for Chair (Vorsitzende (female)/Vorsitzender (male) is gendered, whereas the German word for member (Mitglied) is not. I will use the gender-neutral version Vorsitz to indicate Chair, because this neutralizes a gendered version of using Vorsitzende/r (which would make gender difference visible), if that makes sense? I am doing this because it is recommended in situation where using the asterisk can be avoided. Let me know if that is okay.
- PS: The German gender-neutral for secretary and treasurer falls into the use of the asterisk situation above.
- Pronouns are a whole other ball game again. Apparently it is not uncommon to use the singular they/their/them in German as well, but there is now also a German gender neutral one which is xier/dier/xies.

Also, please enjoy all the compound nouns.

Take care,

EI

Laura, writing from France:

Elena, this is fascinating!

In France, there has been the same reluctance to use race (which is written in the same way than in English) also because of its association with nazism, hence the French use of national origin to refer to people's phenotype or ethnicity, which then led to another form of othering: the constant reminder that some people are not "from here".

Interestingly, racial/ethnic categories emerged in French slang, in « verlan » in particular, where one inverts letters or syllables in a word (verlan = l'envers). So for exemple "noir" (Black) became "renoi", and "arabe" became "beur" (1980s and 1990s) and then later "rebeu" (from mid-1990s). Foreign words (and verlan thereof) are also used instead of the French ones: "Black" was used in the past (but not anymore) instead of "noir", and "baptou", the verlan of "toubab" (used in different West African languages to refer to white people) for "blanc" (white). Of course, these slang terms are not used in academia, media, and politics, except in exceptional times, generally to celebrate sports: the 1998 winning of the world cup by a "black blanc beur" national football team.

Also: racial, ethnic and national categories are not capitalized in French.

Laura