

A MULTILINGUAL BIENNIAL: EVERYONE INVOLVED!

The Verona Biennale 2026 is bilingual, mainly in Italian and French, since it takes place in Italy after several editions in France and French-speaking Belgium. It was prepared by a double organising committee: a French-speaking steering committee and a local Italian-speaking organising group. It is also multilingual, like previous editions, because it is international: we welcome participants from about fifteen different countries. To communicate with everyone, we also need English and Spanish. We must remember that many of the people who are going to use these languages have yet another language of origin. The aim of this document is to help all participants, in a situation of animation or participation, to align the principles of the New Education with our actions around multilingualism. The challenge is to create a space for inter-understanding so that everyone can understand and express themselves. This document of the FIMEM Translation Commission has been adapted from several previous editions.

COOPERATIVE TRANSLATION DURING WORKSHOPS, DEBATES AND TESTIMONIES

For workshops, debates and testimonies, we will not have professional translators. We will call on our collective intelligence, our cooperation and the responsibility of all.

1/ At the beginning of the session (role of the facilitator)

- Remind people in which languages the group will operate. If people have other needs, see if we can adapt or offer them a change of group.
- Identify the skills and needs of the group: who understands/speaks (well/average) the chosen language(s)? Who needs translation? Who can translate into the language(s) concerned?
- Who wants to be able to express themselves in their mother tongue, if they can be translated?
- Decide together how the translation will be organized during this workshop.
- Organize the disposition of people according to this organization if necessary.

2/ During the session (for everyone)

Simple gestures and habits facilitate multilingual functioning:

Before you speak

If you're going to be translated, check that the person who is going to translate is "with you."

While you're talking

- Make simple sentences, don't talk too long and not too fast.
- Remember to pause after about 3 sentences*: non-professional translation cannot be simultaneous!
- Look at the audience and the person translating: he or she may need you to pause/slow down/rehearse something.
- Don't answer a question until it's translated.
- Be careful: when the topic of the conversation changes, announce it clearly.

While you're listening

Do you benefit from translation?

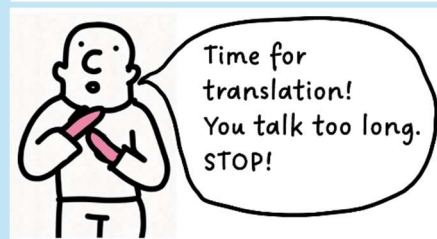
- Also listen to the original language and try to follow if each topic has been translated.
- Use gestures whenever necessary. Your silence will help the translator who is very focused. You will enjoy the sounds of another language, and you will perceive the non-verbal information of the interlocutor.
- Help the translator by being very attentive, possibly have an element that has not been translated repeated.
- Translators and speakers will appreciate your help.

Do you understand both languages?

- Be very quiet during speaking and translation time, as translators are very focused.
- You can also support and help translators. Everyone will appreciate it if you add something, or if you use gestures.

While you're translating

- Don't hesitate to think about your own needs and communicate your preferences: do you want to translate sentence by sentence? Do you want to be replaced after a certain amount of time? Do you want to change the organization in space...?
- Do you need to slow down or take a break? Do you want to take notes and translate by paragraph?
- Don't forget that you are also a participant: you can leave the translation role to speak on your own behalf or explicitly ask to share this role to be able participate more easily.
- Ask that each participant use gestures if necessary to help you.



ORGANISATIONS FOR TRANSLATION

The role of the facilitators is to think about the multilingual functioning of their activity, to explain their choices to the group, and to adapt if necessary, according to the context.

System 1: Translation aloud

Everyone hears everything in both languages.

This system has several advantages. In our opinion, **this basic system is fundamental for all workshops, testimonies and debates**. All the resource people in the group can contribute to the translation: it is more cooperative, less tiring and the quality is better. Participants who do not translate have the opportunity to listen to several languages, to progress and to perceive the speaker's non-verbal language. Those for whom none of the languages spoken are their original language often appreciate hearing it in several languages, it gives them time to take notes and allows them to understand better.

Disadvantage: admittedly, translation takes time, it is important to plan for this in the preparation of the activity. This system becomes **time-consuming when it is necessary to translate into several languages**.



System 2: Language groups

The group is divided according to languages, without translation.

This system is interesting in small group work situations; it avoids translation time and allows it to work with several languages. The disadvantage is that this reduces the diversity and interculturality of the exchanges. It is important to offer plurilingual people the opportunity to join a minority language group, to increase this diversity.



It is often interesting to **return to the system of translation aloud** for the sharing of group work or the general debate.

System 3: Whispered Translation

People who translate sit next to those who need it and talk to them in a low voice.

This system can be interesting **when there are more than two languages, for a small number of people**. It is essential to inform the whole group that **this translation will not be simultaneous**, as the translators are not professionals. There can be two translations at the same time in two languages, but not during the initial speech.

This requires discipline on the part of the group: respect silence and not continuing the discussion during translations.

This system requires a bit of learning, it can be useful to choose a person who is not involved in translations who ensures that everything goes well, who helps with the management of the pace...



Example in a workshop where the facilitator speaks French: two people listen to the English translation while one person listens to the Spanish translation. During translation, French-speaking people look at their notes, write, reflect, and possibly listen to their neighbors translating.

Other systems obviously exist.

Your system adapted to your situation / group:

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(do not hesitate to tell us about your experiences and inventions)



A FEW OPTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM TO MAKE THE WRITTEN DOCUMENTS USED ACCESSIBLE

- Provide a digital version in the main language used, or translated: this allows you to copy and paste into a translator, depending on the language needed.
- Make documents accessible in a cloud/ QRcode/link/USB key.
- Prepare a printed paper version in the main language or translated.
- Project a slide show in the main or multilingual language: this complements the oral and helps.
- Invite to take photos of the posters or post-its written by the participants during the workshop.- ...

THE QUESTION OF THE USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

We can try to supplement with translators on our phones or computers. Artificial intelligence is becoming increasingly efficient, even if there are ethical concerns, the risk of errors and misinterpretations and technical problems.

Some examples of uses:

- take a photo of a printed text, the phone translates from the image;
- a person who understands the language takes notes in a translator and the one who needs translation reads on the screen;
- the telephone translates a person who is speaking live (only one person speaks at a time, and distinctly).

This system can be interesting if you understand in part, because you can go back to the transcript for what you missed or didn't understand. Interesting if a bilingual neighbor makes sure that everything works, because the system requires a good connection and can block or pause after 5000 characters... Not all phones have the same quality of performance in translation.- ...

In most cases, the tools do not give the same quality as a person translating.

Digital technology is therefore not THE solution, but simply an additional help.

We invite interested parties to install and test the applications before the biennial.



PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATION DURING PLENARY SESSIONS

The Gran Guardia Palace, where the opening and closing plenary sessions will take place, is equipped with headsets and simultaneous translation booths. The organising group offers the service of professional translators. It is therefore possible to hear the translation from Italian to French, English, and vice-versa.

Translations available online: participants with other languages can scan a QR code (projected or in the leaflet) which gives them access to a page where some documents have already been translated.

Projected translation: speakers were asked to provide projected documents in multiple languages. This makes it easier to follow!



PLURILINGUAL FUNCTIONING IN INFORMAL TIMES

Throughout the Biennale, we will be able to hear the sound of multiple languages.

It is normal to gather with those who speak the same language, during mealtimes, visits to exhibitions or discovery of the city.

But if we are attentive to each other, we will be able to - depending on the situation:

- try to understand a conversation in a language that we don't know or only a little;
- translate or summarize a conversation to a person who is isolated in a group whose language they do not understand
- ask a resource person to help with translation or use digital tools to understand one another;
- explain to each other certain differences in functioning, linked to our linguistic or cultural practices.

This principle of care is the responsibility of all of us. It will enrich our Biennale.

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE NEEDS OF ALL

This requires collective vigilance. It may be interesting to appoint a "translation guardian" who ensures that the multilingual operation is maintained and that these needs are respected during the activity.

How can the needs of translators and their conditions of cooperation be respected?

The collective effort that is required is important. In previous meetings, we have seen that despite the cooperative will, it is often a few people who translate and who had not always anticipated this role. It is important not to make them victims of their skills and to allow them to also experience the Biennale as participants, or to ensure other commitments.

It will therefore be necessary to check their needs and skills, to give them the opportunity to express their limits or preferences - not only at the beginning but during the activity.

Here are some testimonials from translators during international meetings, in cooperative translation, which can help us better anticipate their needs and preferences:

I can translate when the person speaks slowly and when it's a topic I know.



I can translate from French to English, but not the other way around.



I like to translate as a team to support and help each other.



I don't feel comfortable in front of a group of 20 people.



I can't concentrate for longer than 20 minutes. I prefer to share the task of translation.



I need to be asked in advance and not at the last minute or during the activity.



For this workshop I want to actively participate in the content. It's too difficult to combine that with the function of translating.



I'm sick/tired today. I want to save some more energy for...



I can't take notes for a translation by paragraph so I need to translate sentence by sentence.



And I like to take notes and I make a summary every few minutes.



How do you ensure that all participants have the same access to content?

When the linguistic composition of a group is unbalanced, it is not easy to manage translation for people who are in the minority. During the activity, there is a risk of a decrease in vigilance with time and the fatigue of the group and the translators. It becomes difficult for a minority person to say that they still need translation or to speak more slowly, while others seem to understand. It's a very common experience that we hear afterwards, often in small groups: "It's a shame that the translation was not as good in the second part..."

It's easy to forget that some people are following along in a language that is not their native language. It is important to look at them, to check that they have understood, to ask who needs us to speak more slowly... A good strategy may be at the beginning of the workshop, agree that you have the right to interrupt by repeating a word you don't understand. The speaker or participants directly say the translation or synonyms and the conversation continues. You can also use gestures.



A monolingual situation? Even in a "non-translation" group, this attention to everyone must be constant. Not everyone is going to easily say their needs, and sometimes needs change along the way...

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE MULTILINGUAL FUNCTIONING OF THE BIENNALE.
WE WISH YOU RICH EXPERIENCES.

The "international/multilingualism" commission of the 2026 Biennale

Sources of this document: FIMEM translation commission / Biennale 2024 Nantes translation group

Are you interested in reading the research paper "Communicating in international meetings" (version 6)? Want to contribute to this collective learning? Feel free to send your ideas and experiences to be able to integrate them into future versions... katrien.nijs@gmx.net (FIMEM Translation Commission)