

UNESCO RILA: The sounds of integration Episode 18 – World Words

Speaker: Gameli Tordzro - Artist in Residence of The Unesco Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts (0:05)

Welcome to the podcast series of the UNESCO chair in refugee integration through languages and arts. We bring you sounds to engage with you, and invite you to think with us.

Speaker: Marzanna Antoniak (0:22)

I'm Marzanna and I've been collecting words from around the world. I've always had a natural curiosity to explore words that would get my attention for their sound or meaning, and I wanted to understand languages that I hear around. I happen to have notebooks full of random words and expressions in different tongues. And it's a pretty random selection, I would say, acquired through different interactions with my friends, or my language learners, and through listening to music from around the world, and of course, by keeping my ears open whilst travelling, and taking language lessons. I'm an avid language learner and I'm an aspiring polyglot. When I was invited to contribute to UNESCO RILA Spring School, I think that's when I had my lightbulb moment. And I realised that, of course, there must be more people like me, who would be paying attention to the words that they hear, here and there. And I decided to invite people to join me, and to share their own experiences, and the anecdotes and little stories about words and phrases and languages and to exchange them. And that's how the World Words project was born. And it remains an open invitation to share our personal stories and collectively reflect on the power of words, and how they enter our memory and change from boring to our own. Because we all know at least one word in a language that isn't our mother tongue. And I'm happy that in this podcast, we'll hear some personal stories, some of which may make us smile. Some will be somebody's reflection on a particular word. And there'll be also one story touching upon language persecution, which unfortunately, still occurs until this day. I'm grateful to all the participants for sharing their stories with us. We will hear from John Cavanagh, from whom will learn a handy Anglosaxon expression, Mary McCabe, who chose to share a word in Scots Gaelic, Maria Marchidanu with a word in Arabic, AbdelRahman Mohammed, with a Russian Egyptian mix up of a word that once got him into a little trouble, and from Anna Bogodist, who chose a word inspired by her love for a stunning Scottish Island.

Speaker: John Cavanagh (3:12)

Being involved in the antique trade when I was very young, proved to be an interesting way to grow up. Glasgow had antique arcades, with many small shops under one roof, which tended to be a Nexus for some rather unusual and at times, wonderful people. One example of an antique shop and counter which left a lasting impression on me, arose when I was 17. From a choice of 25 shops in one complex called the Victorian village on West Regent Street. Victoria arrived at mine with some small items to sell, and the invitation to look at larger pieces. As she and her dad were in the process of preparing to move away from their home in Glasgow's West End. Victoria's dad, Leslie Blakely, turned out to be the recently retired professor of Old English at Glasgow University. He was also the world's authority on Anglo Saxon riddles, as he proclaimed in the memorably rising cadences of an accent from Batley, Yorkshire. Have you heard of shoddy? He asked me. At the time I had not. He said. shoddy is

recycled wool products. They make them and badly. So if you see a label on a wool garment, and it says pure new wool, it's not shoddy and it's not from badly. I stood informed amidst the many objects I bought from these people. Some I still have in my home, Leslie gave me a present a copy of the book he'd authored called, Teach Yourself Old English. Present the reviews of this arcane work range from excellent and you could not do better to hard going, and indeed, awful. I cannot claim to have garnered from reading Leslie's book. Any mastery of Anglo Saxon, the tongue that replaced the languages of Roman Britain in the Middle Ages, but it certainly imprinted one particular word on my consciousness. The word is *gepungen*. *Gepungen* was the Anglosaxon equivalent of excellent, and is my choice for World Words, a beautiful, joyous utterance for sure, and one which has stayed in my lexicon across time. Not that it's exactly understood by many folks, if I happen to utter it out with my immediate circle. The word itself is a lost part of linguistic history. And as it had nothing to do with the Scots language in its time, *gepungen* is far enough removed, that I can claim it is not sourced from my mother tongue. Excellent suffices well enough for most occasions when required. However, there are times when something extra is called for, and then the word, the sound, the expression, the meaning, it's undeniably *gepungen*!

Speaker: Mary McCabe (6:05)

Hello, I'm Mary McCabe, and I'm going to tell you about the *maide-crochaidh*, the hanging stick. Most people agree that the hanging stick was used in schools as part of the century long project to stamp out the Gaelic language in Scotland, but there are different versions as to exactly how it was used. The first time I came across the word, the story went that the first child overhead speaking Gaelic in school would not be punished, but would have the stick hung around their neck. It was then the child's business to spy on their friends in the classroom and in other places where the teachers didn't go, to get rid of the stick by taking off and hanging on to somebody else, if they could catch somebody else speaking Gaelic. The last child still wearing the stick at the end of the day got the belt, and in other harsher versions, every pupil who spoke Gaelic and was given the hanging stick got the belt, and the first pupil got belted all over again at lunchtime if they hadn't managed to get rid of the stick on to somebody else. This was an efficient way of stamping out the language, as well as making the pupils associate garlic with ongoing public humiliation gave them an incentive to spy on and report the friends in parts of the school where the teachers didn't go, such as the playground, the sheds and the school toilets. versions of the same strategy were used elsewhere in Wales, in Nova Scotia in Canada, where there were large numbers of Gaelic speaking emigres, Kenya and parts of colonial Africa. The *maide-crochaidh* was reported as being in use in the Isle of Lewis as late as the 1930s. Angus McNicol, a well-known Gaelic poet who went to school on Skye in the late 1940s and early 1950s, before the days of television, told me that he started school aged five without a word of English in his head. The class were given a six weeks crash course in English, and afterwards they were punished if they spoke Gaelic. When they reached the stage of secondary school, they were taught Latin was compulsory, but for a second language they could choose between Gaelic or French. Most of them chose Gaelic... eh chose French because they thought it was more useful, and because they thought they could already speak Gaelic. Despite the primary schools based efforts, Angus chose Gaelic and he found himself faced with a teacher whose own mother tongue with Gaelic, teaching Gaelic as a foreign language through the medium of English to a class of pupils who themselves had Gaelic as a mother tongue. Fortunately, attitudes have changed and there are now efforts to save the Gaelic language through

Gaelic medium education and Gaelic broadcasting. And Time will tell if we're closing the stable door after the horse has bolted. I'd now like to read you my poem, *maide-crochaidh*. This imagines the experience of a Highland pupil losing concentration during a lesson on English history. The poem is in English but I used the idiom of Gaelic and it was published in a Scottish PEN anthology called *Declarations*. I'll point out that *tha mi duilich* means I am sorry.

***Maide-crochaidh*, hanging stick.**

It was not about history at all that I was thinking
when the dominee asked about the War of the Roses.
I was thinking the black cow would be calving.
I was looking out at the white thick machair.
I was thinking about the wee calf born early in the snow.
There was no history in it at all
when I let the reckless *ha mi duilich* fall out of my stupid mouth.
When first we came to this school, I would have been saved.
The stain of the Gaelic passed swiftly amongst us then
in the classroom, in the yard, at work or at playing in the ball.
I would not be lacking the chance to unburden my shame.
Now there is no corner left where the pitiless *béarla* (that means English) is not to the fore.
The dominee's bell will catch me still bearing the taint of my people.
Ha mi duilich! It will not be long before I will be sorry enough.
Duilich gu leòr, gu dearbh. (that means sorry enough, indeed)

Speaker: Maria Marchidanu (10:42)

Cuvinte, words, they are the shapes, we dress our memories in. They are the suitcase we carry on our journey, always. I always feel the need for silence, to hear who I am, and hope to become. And then the words, companions of silence, to hear each other, to try and understand. We all share silence. And we all share the feeling of loss at times, mirrored by the feelings that come upon us. When we are surrounded by a language, by words we do not understand. Along my journey, I met with words. Some I still carry, some I left along the way, some I heard only once and don't remember. All languages however distant or strange, they may seem, carry something of us, an echo of our stories. I found myself, a teacher of a language for a while, in a community of storytellers, in a language as unfamiliar as inspiring. For me, English in all its forms and identities, has been a bridge to find parts of myself and others. I hoped I would be able to share the same with my storytellers: my girls at Alasma School in the Hajar Mountains. English and Arabic met every day along with us. And we shared stories dressed in both languages. One morning, a word echoed something I had not shared, something that called My First Home. The girls echoed repeatedly *banat, banat*, as we prepared for the end of the year. I stopped and in the middle of all words, for me, there was only silence. In Romania, Banat is a region full of history and folklore, costumes and traditional dances, and what I thought until that moment, a sense of one identity. I knew what *banat* meant to me. But what about them? What does *banat* mean in Arabic, I asked. "Girls, miss, girls!" In that word, that brought together all the languages of my journey, I stopped being the teacher. Instead, I was a learner of languages without a name. Languages that, as much as building bridges, break borders, within ourselves, our

communities, our human divided countries. Languages, words, silence. They are all stories. In hearing the silence behind words, all words, we find the space of nature and of life where we can remember and understand and feel as one.

Speaker: AbdelRahman Mohammed (14:22)

Kofta. The word *kofta* in Egyptian Arabic, as well as many other Eastern languages, means meatballs. And in Egyptian Arabic, it also means kebab. The word exists also in Russian language, but it has a totally different meaning. The story starts when my Russian wife and I decided to invite my father and mother-in-law to a barbecue party in our garden in a small town near Moscow. I was in the kitchen preparing for the barbecue, when I heard my wife saying this to her mom: “Ты не знаешь где красная кофта?” Which translates into: Do you know where the red *kofta* is? What does she mean, I asked myself. Is she trying to find the red *kofta*? I thought she must have meant the raw kebabs I was supposed to prepare for the party and I realised I hadn't prepared them yet. So I hurried up and took some skewers, and then started making the *kofta* fingers quickly, before my wife could notice I was late. Soon, they were ready, and I put them in the fridge so that they can hold the shape, when I put them on the fire. A few minutes later, my wife appeared in the kitchen and said: “Я не могу найти красную кофту. Ты её не видел?” Which means I cannot find the red *kofta*. Have you seen it? I saw the confusion in her eyes. So I said: “Yeah, don't worry. It is in the fridge waiting for you.” I thought that would reassure her and help her relax. But on the contrary, I suddenly saw a scared look on her face, as if now she was even more worried about the red raw *kofta*. “Are you kidding me? What is my *kofta* doing in the fridge?” She said. For a moment, I thought she was greedy. Why would she say *my kofta*? Is it supposed to be ours, for us all to eat! But before I could even answer her question, she opened the fridge and shouted: “Now, where is that *kofta*?” I pointed to the *kofta* skewers in the fridge and I could see a mix of disappointment and bewilderment on her face, before she pulled the blouse she was wearing and said: “Эта кофта.” This is a blouse. That was the moment I learned that one of my favourite traditional dishes of Egypt in someone else's language is just a blouse. Certainly, Arabic *kofta* is much more delicious than the Russian one!

Speaker: Anna Bogodist (17:48)

Sky, by Anna Bogodist. The word sky is my destiny. It changes its meaning every chapter of my life. And it always gives me hope and something to look forward to. And here is why.

Chapter 1: Anna

After my ninth grade, I changed my school and passed exams into a law Lyseum, one of the best places in the city to finish your secondary education at that time, and to earn a place at the Law Academy afterwards. During my first exam, it was a written essay, I met a girl also named Anna, who became a very dear friend for many years to come. The story of this word starts with her. Anna was a total contradiction to what I was at 15 years old. She wasn't shy, she was very openly passionate about things. Fast, smart, and with quite the opposite tastes and books and music to me. And she was a bad girl, if you looked at her from my mom's eyes, meaning she was smoking and drinking and experienced. I was a well-behaved girl who was afraid to upset anyone, who tried to get the best marks, who didn't want to attract excessive attention and make any noise. I was a girl who liked studying, reading and appreciated friendship more than anything else in life. Anna read the essay I had written and she loved it. I think this was the first time anybody really loved what I did. We passed

our exams and got into the lyceum. Since we were both newcomers, we became inseparable and sat together at one desk till our graduation. I had had some really good friends before in my life. But Anna made me feel special by being genuinely interested in every aspect of my life. And I hadn't experienced anything like that ever before. It was also amazing to be discovering the world through her eyes. She made me fall in love with the Beatles music and especially John Lennon's life and work. Not that I didn't know the group before, but I had only heard a few songs and I was quite indifferent. She provided me with lots of audio and videotapes, and soon I couldn't pass a music store without buying another record. My stepdad still believes it was he who introduced me to the world of The Beatles, ha! I remember once I bought a book with a translation of every song written by the group, and brought it into school, and I took it, hid it in the cloakroom, and missed a class reading it. By the time I reached my 11th grade, I started dreaming about moving to St. Petersburg to become a dancer. It caused a revolution at home. My mom didn't want to hear about it since I was expected to follow her dream and inherited her firm and her office as a lawyer. But Anna and John Lennon had already changed my life a lot, so there was no going back. I didn't want to be a lawyer Mama. In one of John Lennon's video clips I got from Anna, there is a phrase like a whisper. *For the other half of the sky*. It felt like a shared secret. So I took a blue felt pen and drew those words on my wallpaper and capital letters, and added portraits of famous dancers below it. I guess it must have been a shock for my mom to see it. This became my mantra and my guiding maxime. Just imagine every step you take is for the other half of the sky. Now I know this was just the beginning.

Chapter 2: Sky

Two years later, I finally moved to St. Petersburg. Being on my own wasn't new. But being in a big city alone was frightening. At first, I almost regretted my decision. I had no permanent address and no phone number. To get a letter from my friends or to place a call to my mom, I had to go to the main post office. That's when the internet changed things. I remember our first computer class at the university, we were taught to register a personal email address and I came up with skyanne for it. I started to use it everywhere for my emails for later for social networks, chats, and my Beatles fan club name. None of my friends knew the meaning behind it and I believe they still don't. To say I was busy doesn't do it justice. I was studying journalism writing reviews for the main ballet magazine of the country, becoming a good photographer, learning languages, going to the festivals, exhibitions and performances every single day, undertaking an internship at the Mariinsky Theatre and taking dance classes three to five days a week. My nickname served me well. Maybe at first impression it was a bit ambitious. But it reflected how people saw me: a smiling person easy to get along with, if you can be bothered to get to know her, living life to the full, as if every day was her last. A guy I liked used to call me Angel, which fitted well with the sky. Some people were calling me Sky in Russian and it sounded like a great compliment to me. There were no obstacles for Sky and every door I knocked on opened at my touch: an incredible feeling. Behind one of those doors was a theatre company where I later worked as a manager producer, and eventually as a dancer for a whole 15 years. The leader and artistic director of the company definitely knew the secret of how to punch a hole in the sky. After watching their show *La Divina Commedia*, something changed inside me. I felt something grand and outstanding and spiritual. I felt something that was beyond words, and I knew I should be part of that. It was another secret shared, I was old enough to feel it, take it in and love it unconditionally, but not old enough to fully understand the meaning of what members of

the theatre group was saying. The horizon is always at your feet and the sky begins right from the ground. That was to happen later on.

Chapter 3: SkyeAnne, with E after sky.

Scotland is the country I have regularly visited since 2002. But I only truly discovered it years later, thanks to my friends who lived there. In 2012. Sky became Skye with an E in the end for me. You won't hear any difference if you say the word out loud. But there is a huge difference when I utter this word these days. What I mean is an amazingly beautiful island in Scotland. Skye begins from the ground there, literally just as soon as you cross the bridge. I had a few days off and I drove there without any plans, open minded to whatever happens. And I learned that when you let go of your control this is when the world can actually start speaking to you and showing you what life is about. Skye is very different. It is flat at some parts. It has mind blowing scenery in others. Sometimes it looks like a different planet. It can open itself to you bit by bit if you're ready to go along with everything that's happening on the way. It's changeable because of the weather. It switches its mood every few hours or even minutes and you learn to accept all the circumstances and conditions you're in. And Skye always rewards your patience and efforts with some incredible beauty. Its combination of natural power and outstanding landscapes make you think about sky on Earth. It brings tears to my eyes because it is so beautiful that it hurts. Skye makes me feel complete and happy. It's a place where every thought of mine is heard and becomes real in an instant, it's a place where I'm not afraid of anything. It's a place where I find peace and tranquillity in all weather conditions. It's where I feel whales and seals underwater and then see them a few moments later on the surface. It is where I become more myself than anywhere else. Since my first visit, Skye has meant coming home for me, and guess what, it was still just the beginning,

Chapter 4: Anna

Within the recent years, I have had hundreds of opportunities to witness how every tiny part of life in this world speaks about its source, and how the main source of life reflects itself in everything that surrounds us, and is inside us. As if you could suddenly start to understand the language of animals. Or as if you could see the whole picture by looking at just 100 pieces out of 1000 pieces jigsaw, the evidence is omnipresent in the ocean, in the mountains, in the skies, in the ground, in the forests, in the human body, and all around the planet. The best way to hide something is to make it public, to have every proof at your arm's length, to hear it from every corner, to say it in every biography, in every structure, in every coincidence. At some point in life there is this truth that you can't turn your face from. I've noticed how my friends' kids start asking their parents "Mom, I want to be Christian", suddenly out of nowhere at about seven years old. And so did I when I was seven, I look back and think how smart I was, how sharp when I was teeny. I knew everything I needed to know without knowing it. I acted based on the knowledge I wasn't aware of. Everything falls into place. Once you've seen the great mind behind it all and feel the unimaginable love this world was created with awareness was all I needed to get to the other side. *For the other half of the sky.* Sky(e), which started as inspiration or destination, transformed into something I don't need to find anymore. As I've become aware by now, it's something inside you. It is also supposed to be a starting point every morning, Skye does really start from the ground, it starts with you. And when there is enough of Skye inside you, it will be time for you to go. And so we dance where it begins a perfect circle, just as my first name is.

Speaker: Marzanna Antoniak (27:28)

Thank you for listening to this selection of stories submitted for the project. And if you'd like to submit yours, you'd be more than welcome. To do so visit www.tinyurl.com/worldwords. And that's where you'll find a little form with more information and also a space to submit your story. And I'm going to keep the project open. From time to time, I hope to have workshops, creative writing sessions, and just different ideas where people could come together and bring their stories alive. And the dream is one day to publish a collection of these words and their stories and share them with the world.

Speaker: Gameli Tordzro (28:22)

Thank you for listening to the podcast of the UNESCO che in refugee integration through languages and a podcast series to make you think more information about work can be found on the website of the University of Glasgow www.gla.ac.uk. Thank you very much



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