

**Fighting the BIPOC Awarding Gap:
Decolonising Translation in Higher Education**

**(Contra la brecha de minoría étnica: descolonizando
la enseñanza de la traducción en la universidad)**

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Resumen: Este artículo informa sobre un proyecto titulado “Tackling the BIPOC Awarding Gap” (2022-2025), cuyo objetivo es fomentar prácticas de formación docente que mejoren la diversidad en los entornos de aprendizaje de idiomas y abordar la brecha académica que afecta a los estudiantes de minorías étnicas, un problema aún acuciante en la mayoría de las universidades británicas según Advance HE (2021). Este artículo describe cómo nuestro proyecto colaborativo trata de compensar la brecha académica de minoría étnica abordándola desde cuatro ángulos principales: 1) colaboración entre estudiantes y profesores; 2) formación docente; 3) remodelación y descolonización de los programas de estudio de traducción; y 4) el establecimiento de una red de apoyo. En particular, nos centraremos en los principales desafíos, lecciones aprendidas y ejemplos de mejores prácticas que se derivan del primer año de este proyecto.

Palabras clave: Brecha de minoría étnica. Igualdad, diversidad e inclusión. Traducción. Descolonización de los planes de estudios. Aprendizaje de lenguas.

Abstract: This article reports on a project entitled “Tackling the BIPOC Awarding Gap” (2022-2025), whose aim is to foster teacher training practices that enhance diversity in language learning environments and tackle the *awarding gap* experienced by BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) aka BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) students. According to Advance HE (2021), the difficulties experienced by BAME-BIPOC students to achieve higher marks remain a patent reality in most of today’s higher-education institutions in the UK. This paper describes how our collaborative project endeavours to tackle the BAME-BIPOC awarding gap from four main angles: 1) student-teacher collaboration; 2) teacher training; 3) redevelopment and decolonisation of practical translation syllabi; and 4) the establishment of a support network. In this paper, the focus is put on the main challenges, lessons learnt and examples of best practices stemming from the first year of this project.

Keywords: BIPOC awarding gap. EDI. Translation. Decolonising the curriculum. Language learning.

1. Introduction

This article reports on a project entitled “Tackling the BIPOC Awarding Gap” (2022-2025) that is currently taking place at University College London (UCL) at the time of writing and whose aim is to foster teacher training practices that enhance diversity in language learning environments. By identifying the challenges experienced by BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) aka BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) students (as explained in Section 1.1. the latter acronym is preferred and will continue to be used henceforth), this project sets out to tackle the so-called (ethnic degree) *awarding gap*, that is, the fact that white students are more likely to be awarded top degrees compared to students of other ethnicities. Although this is still known as *attainment gap*, we believe that the use of *attainment* holds students responsible, whereas *awarding* enhances the agency of all stakeholders involved (i.e., institutions and staff) and is more socially acceptable nowadays. Be it as it may, the (ethnicity degree) *awarding gap* currently generates much discussion and features in institutional agendas due to its relevance, because just like Wong *et al.* (2021) put it, race is still relevant in higher education, where racist discourses heavily affect students’ probability of academic success. These discourses are still experienced first-hand

by young students ranging from school-leavers wishing to enrol in a programme at a top university to early-level students in highly competitive higher-education institutions.

When discussing the ethnicity gap, Bhopal and Pitkin (2020) champion the longstanding use of the acronym *BAME* to refer to individuals from Black British, Black African, British Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi, Chinese and those from other non-White backgrounds, which are all official terms used in the UK Census (2011). Nonetheless, our project has opted for the usage of the acronym *BIPOC*, not least because the former seems to be all-encompassing and can potentially disguise stark differences in outcomes between the various ethnic groups. Most importantly, during the Covid-19 pandemic, research commissioned by the UK's Cabinet Office Race Disparity Unit found that many ethnic minorities publicly expressed their dislike of the term (2022). Renowned anti-racist educators such as DiAngelo (2018), Saad (2020) and Jewell (2020) also encourage the use of the less aggregated term *BIPOC*. Although the latter is not too widely used in the UK, it is being used in other countries of the Anglosphere and it has been particularly welcomed by our students. It acknowledges the varying types of discrimination and prejudice faced by different ethnicities, and demonstrates solidarity between different communities.

By addressing and preventing micro-racisms and unconscious, invisible instances of racism, this project sets out to dispel racist myths and raise awareness of the BIPOC awarding gap that affects our classrooms and to equip translation educators with the tools necessary to make language and translation classrooms more diverse and inclusive. Doharty (2019) found that students of African and Caribbean descent experience racial microaggressions during their education years. Tate and Page (2018) assert that it is necessary for teachers to acknowledge and tackle white supremacy in the classroom insofar as the unconscious bias can be conscious, and that, therefore, a conscious effort must be made by teachers to eradicate it (Tate 2019). By learning to make micro-affirmations, teachers can positively impact BIPOC students' integration into discipline communities (Estrada *et al.* 2019).

Gender and postcolonial studies have sparked great interest among translation scholars (Bassnett 2014/1980), resulting in insightful discussions on the participation of translators in knowledge creation and the shaping of culture (Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002), followed by more recent proposals of "decolonized translation practice" (Batchelor 2009: 230). Yet most translation scholars' efforts have been placed on how literature is translated, and scarcer attention has been paid to who is being trained and how. This article will describe how our collaborative project is challenging the BIPOC awarding gap from four

main angles: 1) student-teacher collaboration; 2) teacher training; 3) redevelopment and decolonisation of practical translation syllabi; and 4) the establishment of a support network. In particular, we shall focus on the main challenges, lessons learnt and examples of best practices stemming from the first year of this project.

1.1. Rationale: Liberating the Curriculum and Fighting the BIPOC Awarding Gap

Our collaborative project was launched in October 2022 at UCL's Department of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies. First established in 1826 as the London University, UCL traditionally ranks in the Top 10 of global universities according to rankings such as the QS World University Rankings. More importantly, UCL welcomes more postgraduate students than any other UK university, and its community is comprised of over 55% international students as well as over 34% international members of staff¹. In recent years, the university's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) values has included a wide range of initiatives spanning EDI networks, support for students, staff and managers, EDI training, and policies aimed at the prevention of bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct². The so-called *Liberating the Curriculum* programme, first launched in 2016, forms part of this EDI agenda³ and has been adopted to encourage students and members of staff to collaborate and work towards a more diverse and inclusive curriculum. The three main objectives of this programme are:

1. To complement traditional Eurocentric, male and white dominated programmes;
2. To promote the representation of traditionally marginalised authors, and;
3. To achieve greater inclusion in our programmes in terms of factors such as race, religion, gender, sexuality, ability, and neurodiversity, among others.

Within the frame of this university-wide initiative, students were invited to contribute to the decolonisation of UCL's curricula and worked alongside module convenors and educators to diversify reading lists and teaching materials. According to Tate (2019), this activity results in more opportunities for recognition and identification, which would have a very direct impact in the sense

¹ Further information can be found on: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/about/what/key-statistics#student-numbers>.

² The full UCL Equity and Inclusion Plan 2020-21 can be consulted on: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/equality-diversity-inclusion/equalityucl/equity-and-inclusion-plan-2020-21>.

³ See: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/research-based-education/liberating-curriculum>.

of belonging of many students. This, in turn, helps eliminate the BIPOC awarding gap.

In the UK context, the *awarding gap* refers to the fact that out of a total percentage of 24.3% of UK-domiciled students who identify as BIPOC, only 68% of them are awarded a First Class degree, as opposed to a 81.4% of white students (Advance HE, 2021). Indeed, despite some progress across the higher education sector, this 13% awarding gap is both longstanding and persistent (TASO, 2021)⁴. As a response, the UK's Office for Students has set the target to eradicate this gap by 2030.

1.2. Project description, aims and expected results

The aim of our student-staff collaborative project is to address the so-called *cold climate* in our classrooms that, according to Tate (2019), is the leading cause of the BIPOC awarding gap at UK universities. This *cold climate* is the result of different factors such as micro racisms, lack of support for BIPOC students, “invisible” racism and stereotyping, which alienate students, thus negatively affecting their sense of belonging and making them more likely to drop out, and less likely to achieve 2:1 or First Class marks and to ultimately pursue postgraduate studies. Inspired by the Office for Students' efforts and UCL's commitment to an EDI-focused agenda, the “Tackling the BIPOC Awarding Gap” project is being piloted by translation educators who contribute to the BA in Hispanic Studies, in which students undertake direct and reverse translation (English-Spanish and Spanish-English) training throughout their studies.

Our project is exploring how to best tackle the hindrances caused by the aforementioned *cold climate* in the translation classroom from four angles: student involvement, redevelopment of modules, support from peers and project members, and teacher training.

In terms of student involvement, each academic year two BIPOC student representatives are selected for each cohort of the BA programme (Year 1, Year 2 and Year 4). The role of these student representatives, who receive a stipend, is to confidently liaise between other BIPOC students and educators, and subsequently raise any issues and work together to ensure that the voices of BIPOC students are heard and validated by the community. Representatives organise regular social meetings with other BIPOC students, and design and circulate polls to monitor levels of student satisfaction in the classroom. They gather general feedback and write reports to convey proposals and suggestions

⁴ <https://taso.org.uk/news-item/new-research-partnership-impact-of-he-curriculum-reform-on-race-equality-gaps/>

that project leaders can action in collaboration with the relevant members of staff.

The project leaders meet with the student representatives on a monthly basis to receive feedback and address any outstanding issues. Based on their recommendations, educators and students can work together to make translation modules less Eurocentric and more inclusive.

In terms of teacher training, each term, a workshop is offered to SELCS language educators by leading experts. This training is aimed at raising awareness of the BIPOC awarding gap among teaching colleagues. BIPOC student representatives' input is vital when organising these workshops.

With the purpose of offering support from fellow students and members of staff, a student-staff support network is established. Members of staff can advertise themselves as allies and offer their offices as safe spaces by using stickers. The BIPOC student representatives work jointly with educators in order to establish this network and advertise social events among other students. Special emphasis is placed on encouraging and guiding BIPOC students who excel in language and translation to pursue postgraduate studies.

The project is expected to conclude in 2025, when an international seminar will take stock of the project's achievements. Among the expected results is the reduction of the awarding gap among BIPOC students in the first, second and final years of UCL's translation modules offered at our department, and ideally other language departments within the School of European Languages, Culture and Society. Such a far-reaching result has to be achieved through the creation of more equal, diverse and inclusive classroom environments where BIPOC students can feel that they belong, and which are conducive to their academic success. The establishment of a support network for students, staff and allies is thus paramount. Support and safe spaces need to be provided, and teachers have to first and foremost reflect on their own position as prompted by dedicated teacher training opportunities. As a result of the lessons learnt, members of staff are encouraged to check their bias, reflect on their teaching practice and actively tackle the BIPOC awarding gap.

2. First year: challenges, teacher training, student feedback and examples of best practices

In this paper, we report on how the project has evolved since its inception and presents some findings that are currently driving the project's development.

2.1. Challenges: logistics and attendance

The “Tackling the BIPOC Awarding Gap” project was warmly received by fellow members of staff since it started in October 2022. The presentations and teacher training initiatives delivered in departmental and Faculty environments have awakened a keen interest from colleagues to attend further training on the BIPOC awarding gap. As the project progressed, this interest shown by students and staff remained strong, but challenges were met along the way.

In November 2022, and following the dispute about pay and pensions started in 2018, the national University and College Union (UCU) announced that strike action would take place in universities across the UK. Due to this lawful strike action, many university events had to be postponed and rebooked for the weeks in which lessons were to be held. As a result, finding suitable venues and dates for BIPOC student socials and expert-led workshops proved challenging. Likewise, the authors of this article coincide in remarking that in the academic year 2022-2023 attendance was generally lower than in pre-pandemic years. Although there is a number of possible determinants of attendance such as teaching issues, university policies, scheduling issues, provision of online materials, and an array of individual factors in greater or lesser extent out of the university’s control, Credé, Roch and Kieszczyńska (2010) consider student attendance to be associated with higher levels of academic attainment and to be a crucial aspect of student engagement. Therefore, we acknowledge that there could be a link between low attendance to departmental modules and both the low number of applications to the role of BIPOC representative we received, and the fact that two of the representatives dropped out of the project after the first few weeks of term.

2.2. Teacher training

With the purpose of offering teacher training to support language and translation educators by tackling and preventing micro racisms and “invisible” racism, dispelling racist myths and raising awareness of the BIPOC awarding gap, three expert-led workshops for members of staff have been delivered since October 2022. The design and choice of these workshops stems from the recommendations made to us by The Black Curriculum during an interview held in June 2022. Set as a British charity, its mission is to address the lack of Black British history in the UK curriculum across all levels of study with a particular emphasis on primary and secondary education⁵. In 2020, The Black Curriculum produced a report highlighting the lack of Black history in the current UK

⁵ For further info, please see <https://theblackcurriculum.com/>.

National Curriculum. The Black Curriculum boasts extensive expertise in supporting schools to deliver accessible Black British history curricula and in assisting with the creation of guidance, resources and training to empower teachers to teach confidently and effectively from a non-traditional lens. Following this interview, the project leaders reflected on how translation was being taught so far, sharing experiences and exchanging practical ideas to make translation modules more equal, diverse and inclusive. Following said conversations, we designed the programme of expert-led workshops for the 2022-2023 academic year.

The first session, entitled “Higher Education, Student Engagement and BAME Graduate Outcomes: The Two-Way Impact of Intersectionalities in the University Classroom” was led by Madeline Young, Senior Lecturer in Economics at the University of Northampton. The second session was delivered by Haydn Kirnon, a project leader himself, who discussed his practice as a Black educator at UCL and as a professional translator and lexicographer. His session, titled “Causing a SPLAS: Why I’m Still Talking to White People about Race” is soon to be published in *Pedagogy of Translation: Approaches from Literature and the Media* (UCL Press, in press). The third session was delivered by Professor Jason Arday, the youngest Black professor appointed by Cambridge University, and was titled “Advancing the Dialogue on the BAME Awarding Gap.”

All three expert-led workshops were attended by staff from UCL and other educational institutions. More importantly, the informal feedback received was overwhelmingly positive and confirmed the eagerness of educators and other members of staff to receive appropriate training to empower BIPOC students in achieving their best outcomes at university and in their future careers. In informal interviews held after each event, some participants expressed their willingness to be more aware of racial bias and showed strong commitment to denouncing and escalating complaints about racism in higher education. From September 2023, when teacher training seminars resume, a questionnaire will be circulated after every workshop with the purpose of ascertaining whether, or how, attendance to the expert-led sessions has helped staff to identify new dimensions of race equity issues, promote good practice and encourage partnership working on race equity. Furthermore, we seek to understand how our project can pave the way for similar cross-faculty and inter-institutional programmes in an attempt to liberate the curriculum and better cater for BIPOC students’ needs.

2.3. Student feedback

With regards to the student representatives' participation in the project, our main aim is to increase the sense of belonging among BIPOC students. With the help of the project leaders, they organised monthly social events for fellow BIPOC students. The importance of learning spaces for higher-education students to socialise has previously been confirmed by researchers such as Kuh *et al.* (2005). Despite the lack of research on the role played by physical spaces in higher education (see, for instance, Temple 2008), we believe that providing students with a space where to socialise and meet like-minded peers from other departments is of utmost importance.

Through peer-to-peer discussions between the BIPOC representatives and their fellow students, everyone is given a chance to provide their insights and make proposals on how to make translation seminars and syllabi more inclusive in terms of factors such as race, religion, gender, sexuality, ability, and neurodiversity. At the end of the first year, the BIPOC student representatives interviewed a number of students from different years and across different departments and Faculties who identified as BIPOC with the purpose of gauging their sense of belonging at UCL. Additionally, students from the Department of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies were asked questions specifically related to their translation modules (see section 3 of the questionnaire).

The following questionnaire was used by our four representatives, each of whom interviewed up to 6 students. The former were conducted in semi-structured interviews that lasted approximately 10 minutes. The below nine questions were aimed at eliciting information about their profiles, their sense of belonging and aspects that could be changed in our programme.

SECTION 1: STUDENT PROFILE
1. What are you studying and which year are you in?
2. Do you identify as male/female/non-binary or prefer not to say?
3. What is your background and which culture(s)/religion(s)/race(s)/ ethnicity(ies) do you identify with?
SECTION 2: SENSE OF BELONGING
4. Should UCL be committed to try and increase BIPOC representation among staff?
5. Would the implementation of reverse mentoring by BIPOC students help awareness of recurrent issues?
6. Have you felt 'left out' in social situations at university. If yes, why?
SECTION 3: TRANSLATION CURRICULUM (into and out of Spanish)
7. Have you ever felt "left out" when certain topics were discussed in class? If yes, why?

8. Would exploring authors from a minority background, certain themes or specific geographical areas help to improve your sense of belonging? Which recommendations would you like educators to consider?
9. Is there anything on the current translation syllabus that you are uncomfortable with, or wish to change because of potential BIPOC- related issues?

Table 1. Questionnaire used in student interviews

Using the above questions, 22 students were interviewed. This sample size was deemed adequate for qualitative research as seen in works such as Creswell and Poth (2016). The idoneity of this number for semi-structured interviews is further confirmed by Morse (2000), who recommends a maximum of 30 in order to avoid thematic saturation. Whilst the interviewed students spanned different backgrounds and races mainly of Asian and Black families such as Chinese, South Korean, Angolan, and Nigerian, among others, they all identified themselves as culturally BIPOC. For instance, a student expressed her equally mixed ethnicity: “I am half South Korean, half Scottish and I’d say it’s an equal balance between them.”

Figure 1 shows the number of participants that provided affirmative and negative responses in actual numbers. Answers revealed that the respondents experienced microaggressions that led to a reduced sense of belonging. Incidentally, many of the interviewees highlighted the usefulness of one of the social meetings organised by the student representatives. A PhD student, who identifies as queer and BIPOC, organised a workshop to introduced them to her pathways into academia and to her ongoing research on intersectionality in Ancient Rome. All respondents agreed on the need to increase the BIPOC representation among staff. One participant explained that this should be the case “because if students have role models that are people that they can identify with they would feel much more able to fit in and belong and integrate themselves into the student’s society.”

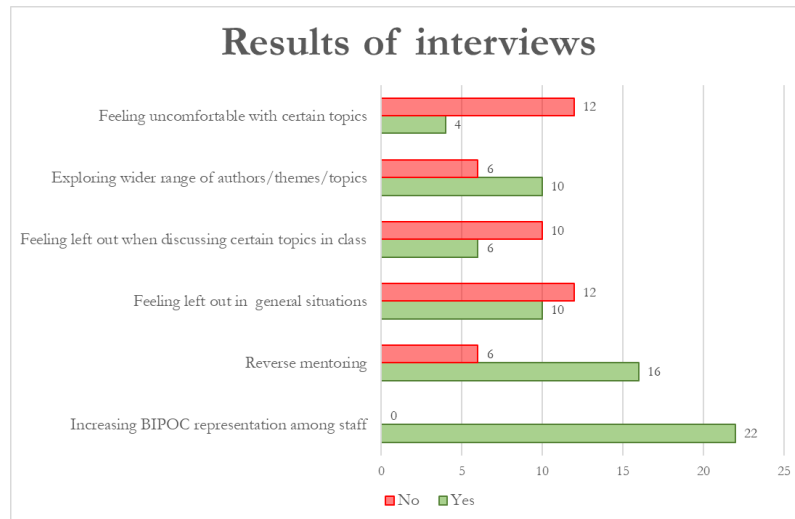


Figure 1: Results gathered from the interviews

Nonetheless, with regards to question 5, which dealt with the possible design of a reversed mentoring programme, answers were mixed. While all students appeared to acknowledge the benefits such a programme would bring in terms of building understanding between people from different generations and/or backgrounds, challenging power relations and calling for deeper thinking about the delivery of courses, 6 participants (27%) raised some issues. The main concern referred to how this activity could potentially place an emotionally taxing obligation on BIPOC students to educate staff on their experiences at no cost to UCL, when the university should use appropriate resources and funds to undertake this task. With regards to the question of feeling left out in general situations, over 12 students (55%) were inclined to provide an affirmative response, such as “Yes a little bit, sometimes there is a feeling that people stick to people from the same ethnicity as them or will avoid meeting someone or talking to someone because of differences.”

The last section of the questionnaire, relating to UCL’s current provision of translation out of and into Spanish teaching at undergraduate level was answered only by the 16 respondents that were enrolled in our programme at the time of the interview. Whilst the sample size is smaller, the answers coincided in praising the ways in which translation educators were attempting to decolonise the lessons. The respondents recognised the educators’ efforts in facilitating race-based conversations in which students and staff from distinct backgrounds can share their experiences as part of the lessons. Specific examples of materials that

were introduced following students' recommendations are discussed in Section 3.

2.4. *Student-teacher interactions*

Among the tasks carried out by the BIPOC student representatives were organising social events for fellow students, conveying recommendations for translation-specific teaching, and designing the questionnaire used in the student interviews. Inspired by the 'What Works?' programme (2012) findings, these activities promote healthy relationships with peers, and foster students' sense of belonging and boost their confidence, motivation and success in the classroom. Studies by Burke *et al.* (2016), Zepke and Leach (2010), Halawah, (2008) and Strauss and Volkwein (2004) have highlighted the many benefits of positive student-teacher interactions, which include an improved sense of belonging, higher motivation and greater intellectual development, among others. Therefore, we understand that the student-led monthly meetings have contributed to fostering closer relationships between students and staff.

It should be noted that the school's teaching team includes staff who come from a variety of backgrounds and minorities, including representatives of BIPOC and LGBTQI+ communities as well as different religions, genders, nationalities and ethnicities. This is expected to have a positive impact on the results of our project, as Dhanda (2009) found that this would improve the chances of BIPOC students engaging in pastoral and academic support, and Ambrose *et al.* (2010: 183) assert that "modelling inclusiveness can provide a powerful learning experience for all students." Similarly, we expect an increase in the number of BIPOC students pursuing postgraduate studies at UCL since Winter and Chapleo (2017) found that an institution's ability to create a sense of belonging is key to students choosing that university over others.

Furthermore, the role provided the student representatives with the opportunity to gain valuable professional experience, and in this sense Smith (2017: 53) alerted that ethnic minority students in higher education experience more difficulty in finding work placements and internships than their white counterparts. Against this negative trend, the nature of our project allowed student representatives to have a research placement supervised by the project leaders and ultimately gained a greater understanding of academia that might encourage them to pursue a professional career in research.

Finally, it is important to highlight that the pay student representatives received reflected and recognised the emotional labour their role involved.

3. Redevelopment of Translation from English into Spanish modules

At the core of the project's goals lies the redevelopment of translation modules at undergraduate level. We defend that universities should be welcoming havens for all students, and it is thus important that all students feel comfortable about their identities in order to maximise their learning potential and overall educational experience. Translation educators can and should play a key role inasmuch as the language(s) and culture(s) we teach can shape the students' understanding of the world as well as how they interact with others.

The Spanish translation modules were selected because they are a mandatory component of all language modules. They also involve a sizable quantity of oral interaction and discussion, and in-class debates. Translation out of and into Spanish is combined with the study of Spanish language and its varieties with the use of different text types and topics such as literature, film, history and cultures of Spain and Latin America, as well as a wide array of global current affairs. Seminars are taught by the project leaders (who are experienced language and translation instructors), and each cohort is composed of 80-90 students, divided into 7-8 seminar groups. This format allows for close personal interaction with the project leaders, who in turn may learn directly from students and fine-tune their teaching practice as a result. In terms of assessment, the high level of interactivity in these small groups results in more opportunities for providing formative assessment.

The main objectives of these translation modules are the improvement of students' linguistic and translation skills (from English into Spanish). These modules introduce students to a variety of text types and textual conventions and foster collaborative learning and teamwork. Students are taught how to use reliable sources and to develop their dictionary and documentation skills as well as to use translation as a valuable communicative skill in order to hone their interlinguistic and intercultural abilities. They are divided as follows:

- SPAN0001: an intermediate Spanish language module, aimed at first-year students, consolidating level B1 and exploring level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).
- SPAN0016: an intermediate Spanish language module designed for second-year students, consolidating level B2 and exploring level C1 (CEFR).
- SPAN0034: an advanced Spanish language module designed for finalists, consolidating level C1 and exploring level C2 (CEFR).

When it comes to the teaching of Spanish translation, many questions arose as soon as the project started. Some of the questions we posed ourselves were: "What is the proportion of cis, white men lecturing as opposed to the ever-more diverse student populations in higher education?", "Is privilege discussed or

acknowledged among staff members and/or students?”, or “Do we carry out research and/or education activities and collaborate with colleagues from other continents, let alone countries?” Indeed, as suggested by UCL’s official statistics, even though over half of the student population are international students, only a third of the staff are not UK nationals. Since staff include all workers, we presume that the percentage of non-UK educators is, therefore, considerably lower.

We established that further attention had to be paid to the materials that educators choose to teach translation, not only by questioning who produces them, but also who funds them and ascertaining the impact they can have on readers (particularly language students). If anything, translation is often taught from a Euro-centric and Western-focused perspective in the UK, while other traditions from the Global South are often obliterated. Racially motivated debates on the role played by translators have recently sparked the public’s attention, with notorious examples such as Amanda Gorman’s *The Hill We Climb* (see, for instance, Toda-Castán 2022). Yet translation studies have long been considered interdisciplinary as they intersect with other disciplines (see, for instance, Snell-Hornby 1988). Thus, further attention is currently being paid to intersectionality, with race studies establishing closer dialogues with feminist and LGBTQI+ studies, of which certain ground-breaking fiction and non-fiction works are exemplary, including Prof. Bernardine Evaristo’s *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) and John R. Gordon and Rikki Beadle-Blair’s *Being Black and Gay in the UK: An Anthology* (2014).

Following students’ recommendations and peer-to-peer conversations with BIPOC student representatives, translation modules were revisited and reconfigured so as to enhance the representation of BIPOC authors and backgrounds. The inclusion of new materials was accompanied by stronger attention being paid to how the materials were discussed so as to promote in-class discussions, while ensuring BIPOC students felt comfortable and empowered. As a result, three sequences were devised to raise awareness of EDI—and BIPOC—related challenges in the translation classroom (see Table 2). Our aim was for students to develop mediation skills either by translating, discussing and summarising texts or by audio describing video clips in Spanish for visually impaired audiences⁶.

⁶ Due to space restrictions, we will not be discussing audio description tasks and their rationale in this paper (see Navarrete and Bolaños 2022, and Navarrete 2023, for further information on this topic).

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Overall objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Developing mediation, linguistic and translation skills. · Raising awareness of EDI and BIPOC challenges. · Working on transferable skills (collaborative learning, organise their time, assign and manage their individual roles, etc.). · Widening their interaction with a range of text types and textual conventions. · Building up research skills by using reliable sources. · Improving students' interlinguistic and intercultural abilities. 		
Interaction	Teamwork when possible		
Submission	Moodle forum		
Timings	3 contact hours + homework		
Sequence	Warm-up: Introducing the topic areas of the texts, eliciting information from students, gaining interest in the topic areas.	Translating the text: summarising texts, reformulating expressions, researching new expressions, arguing for best translations.	Debating and mediating on how to improve their translations, discussing new concepts, expressing their own opinions, being in someone's shoes.

Table 2: General description of activities

The activities were designed using texts of approximately 200 words each with the goal of developing awareness of BIPOC issues among our students, who have to work in teams to complete the tasks. In the warm-up stage of the lesson, before being given a text to work with, students were prompted to discuss the text and devise translation strategies. For instance, they would underline unfamiliar vocabulary and complex structures whilst using dictionaries and exchanging information.

3.1. SPAN0001 Translation into Spanish (Year 1, Level B1)

Activity 1: Translating an informative leaflet about university strikes published by University College Union in 2022. As many lecturers went on strike during the 2022-23 academic year, it was essential to discuss with students why they did it and how this situation would affect them. Thus, students can gain a better understanding of what was happening in their university and across the UK. In 2023, primary and secondary school teachers, public health staff and transport drivers were on strike across the country. Students learnt valuable vocabulary related to activism and debated about issues raised in class. These new

words and expressions learnt from this task were key for the following translations of this sequence.

Activity 2: Translating two adapted biographies about Bree Newsome, a Black activist against white supremacy, and Rigoberta Menchú, an indigenous writer involved in social reform and women's rights, respectively. Students work in the same teams and revise Spanish past tenses and expand on new vocabulary. This final activity culminates with a debate where students expressed their own views about intersectional challenges, the awarding gap and social activism from different angles and target communities. Students become mediators by interacting with these texts and their peers and expressing their views. In teams, students adopt different roles, moderating debates and taking turns as well as researching new vocabulary. Transferable skills include teamwork, meeting deadlines, summarising ideas and promoting discussion.

3.2. SPAN0016 Translation into Spanish (Year 2, Level B2)

Activity 1: Translating Reni Eddo-Lodge's *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* (2017). The materials for this activity were taken from critically acclaimed non-fiction debut book by Reni Eddo-Lodge. The 200-word excerpt recounts a frustrated encounter with a white female friend with whom she discussed racist bias in job interviews. Before the translation task takes place, students are prompted to reflect on the concept of bias and racism in the workplace with a special emphasis on interviews.

The target text is produced using a pre-made template that contains existing translations of the excerpt in Spanish. There are ten blanks that students have to complete with the missing parts as well as ten mistakes that have to be identified and discussed. Some of the mistakes can be grammatical inaccuracies, meaning-related mistranslations, or punctuation errors, among others. Students are requested to translate concepts such as *structural racism*, *black unemployment* and *white girlfriend*, all of which are socially connotated. The fact that the text includes neutral gender terms such as *employers* is particularly relevant when it comes to approaching grammatical gender in Spanish. In terms of the narrative, it is interesting to discuss the use of the first person singular and plural, which Eddo-Lodge uses to make a stance and establish a closer rapport with the reader.

Activity 2: Translating David Olusoga's *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (2016). The materials for this activity were taken from a work of historical non-fiction by British-Nigerian historian, writer and university professor David Olusoga. His 2016 exploration of Black British history led to the publication of a book by Macmillan as well as a four-episode TV documentary series that Olusoga wrote and presented himself for the BBC. The companion website

contained further information on the history of Black Britain as well as a comprehensive media pack and an online art exhibition.

The combination of written work, series and website makes this a multimodal initiative that can help enhance engagement and research skills among students. As in the previous exercise, students receive a translation *skeleton* that already contains translations, blanks and mistakes. Alongside the race-related concepts that feature in the excerpts (e.g., *racial violence*, *ethnic ghettos*, *mixed-race*, *racial tensions*) is a greater emphasis on the cultural and social factors that affect Black Britain, with certain terms that can yield in-class discussions such as *council estate*, *neo-Nazis*, and *North-East of England (1970s-80s)*.

Other materials that have recently replaced more canonical texts now include excerpts from *The Book of Aleppo* (Christy Lefteri 2019) and Oxford's *The Pink Times*' revival issue of 2017. The visibility and representation of non-hetero normative characters are also fostered by the use of Spanish-language works such as Pedro Almodóvar's *Patty Diphusa Stories* (1991), Jaime Bayly's *No se lo digas a nadie* (1994) and the more recent feminist retelling of classical tales *Idiotizadas* (2017) by Raquel Córcoles. These works are used in the Spanish to English translation lessons and aim to expand the students' understanding of Hispanic cultures and societies beyond traditional approaches.

3.3. SPAN0034 *Advanced Translation into Spanish (Year 4, Level C1)*

Activity 1: Translating *Girl, Woman, Other* (Bernardine Evaristo 2020), specifically two excerpts from chapters "Dominique" and "Bumi." In order to fully understand the excerpts selected and to achieve a successful translation in spite of the many cultural references and unique literary style, it is necessary for students not only to foster their linguistic and translation skills, but also to develop their interlinguistic and intercultural abilities and their documentation skills. Therefore, this activity champions the use of mediation as a tool to develop more advanced skills, such as reformulating ideas, condensing information, providing definitions, explaining extralinguistic and cultural references, shifting registers, etc. Rather than simply focusing on gender, the excerpts selected raised issues of race, sex, culture, social class, physical ability, sexuality and education. Whilst all characters in the novel suffer some form of discrimination, the ways in which they are oppressed differ. The exercises proposed prompt students to work collaboratively, both together and with their educators, in order to achieve a translation that capitalises on this intersectionality.

Activity 2: Translating an excerpt from *The Handmaid's Tale* (Margaret Atwood 1985) with audiovisual support from the series and a piece of news showing Handmaid's style feminist demonstrations. Students translate a succinct excerpt

from the novel and are provided with the series clip showing that same scene, and also with a newsreel clip showing Handmaid's style feminist demonstrations in the US in 2020. References to the series' plot are intertwined with the news of abortion rights being curtailed in several American states, which prompts the news presenter to capitalise on the series' icons to establish a link between fiction and political reality.

Thanks to this audiovisual support, students are encouraged to carry out more creative activities through cooperation, team-work and collaborative intelligence. The longer exchange in the clip expands on the information provided in the text, which helps students' understanding of the text, and informs them that the character of Moira is a black lesbian woman, which is not explicitly stated in the novel's excerpt. This finding offers an opportunity to provide BIPOC and LGBTQ students with visions of possibility (Kondo 2018). Meanwhile, the rest of our students have the chance to expand their worldview and celebrate difference.

Needless to say, diversifying in-class materials is clearly not enough, nor are we advocating the replacement of translation instructors' materials with those solely produced by, or related to, the BIPOC communities. Indeed, in the same vein as the so-called Bechdel test—first appeared in comic strips (Bechdel 1986) and widely used to establish how gender is portrayed in fiction—the so-called Shukla test enquires whether “two ethnic minorities talk to each other for more than five minutes about something other than race” (Shukla 2015) in any given cultural product. Yet, when “liberated” course content is proposed, the classroom can potentially become a more diverse and inclusive space, that is, one to which everyone belongs and where discussion opportunities encourage BIPOC students to participate and contribute in an egalitarian fashion. Knowledge and critical inquiry lie at the core of higher education's principles irrespective of the discipline at hand (see, for instance, Dearing 1997). Engaging with an opinion critically constitutes an essential skill that can be fostered through in-class instruction, collaboration and discussion, so we strongly believe that the reading and translation tasks proposed by language educators can have a sizable impact on how knowledge is acquired, and what it is that we consider knowledge to be when examined outside of traditional Euro-centric and Western approaches.

Further remarks and future research avenues

In this paper, we have reported on our ongoing work to tackle the BIPOC awarding gap among Spanish language students at UCL, a project that first started in 2022. We have also endeavoured to offer some of the results that

student representatives have obtained through student-led interviews. Furthermore, we have discussed the curriculum changes that the project has prompted with a particular emphasis on translation lessons. We have discussed two newly introduced activities for each of the translation modules that were directly affected by the project's results, all of which now afford greater relevance to non-normative, non-canonical authors, while emphasising the importance of conveying meaning as well as the register and style of source texts in translation.

The sequences presented in this paper have also inspired new forms of assessment. Taking into consideration the increasing importance of mediation, translation and transferable skills, future Spanish language students will be producing short films in Spanish (5-7 minutes each). These tasks will be undertaken in small groups, and students will be requested to translate, subtitle or audio describe the films. Particular attention will be given to creativity and how students engage with BIPOC —and EDI— related topics. Further, our project also seeks to establish a reverse mentoring programme. Student mentors will be recruited, trained and matched with educators. These mentoring sessions will be aimed at building understanding between people from different generations and/or backgrounds, challenge power relations and call for deeper thinking about the delivery of courses.

By challenging the BIPOC awarding gap, our aim is to create safe spaces where students can provide insights and convey suggestions on how to make language and translation classes and syllabi more inclusive. Race, religion, gender, sexuality, ability, and neurodiversity, among others, are integrated into translation activities to reflect today's cultural and social realities. Besides increasing students' sense of belonging, we strive to empower BIPOC students to develop their leadership skills, make them more employable and pave the way for pathways into specialist education (e.g., postgraduate studies) and beyond.

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