



A NEWSLETTER FROM JENNY BHATT  
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## WE ARE ALL TRANSLATORS

FOCUSING ON THE ART & CRAFT OF LITERARY  
TRANSLATION & THE TRANSLATING LIFE.

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Dear Reader,

In the US this week, the folks at National Public Radio (NPR) took an unexpected stand on a much-debated topic: how to characterize a mass shooter's written declaration. In the past, we've seen journalists refer to such work as the person's "manifesto." And, technically, as this [NPR statement](#) says, that would be correct. But, in using this term for a public justification of a horrific act, we may be giving that justification even more importance.



The above example is pretty clear-cut, I think. Whichever side of the political fence one might prefer, most of us will agree that we do not want to elevate or even normalize a criminal act by using words generally used in entirely different contexts.

But there's another point of view about language policing in general too. Here's [David Skinner](#) talking about why he thinks the word "homeless" should not be replaced with something more, well, politically correct. This one is not quite as straightforward an issue as the NPR one above.

Issues like these come up often for us translators too. We're working with another writer's words, their biases and sensibilities and worldviews. With my [debut translation](#) of the Gujarati short story pioneer, Dhumketu, there are a couple of short stories that, because of the time they were written, refer to certain social matters in ways that we probably would not do today. For example, there's a story about a disabled person and the writer used ableist terms throughout because, a

hundred or so years ago, people didn't think of ableism as a privilege. So, as translators, we make a lot of judgment calls and choices for today's readership. And there will never be any universal linguistic prescription to fit all possible scenarios. In the end, I stayed with the writer's terms mostly and explained, in my introduction, that he was a writer of his time, writing for his time. The story itself had merit and deserved translation because it showed, as part of the selection of stories, the writer's evolution both in terms of his craft and his ethics.

Over to you: whether as a reader or a translator, have you come across problematic translated terms that you believe needed more sensitivity as with the NPR example above or that worked just fine despite being controversial like the David Skinner example? You can reply to this newsletter if you like. [And you can certainly share on social media too but I'm taking a breather from my online activity for a short while.]

Until next week.

Warmly,

[Jenny Bhatt](#)

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## Some interesting links

**[READ: Dropping their invisibility: 12 Indian translators discuss their forthcoming works by Anusua Mukherjee \(\\*ahem\\* including myself; The Hindu\)](#)**

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**[READ: In Praise of Echo: Reflections on the Meaning of Translation by Jhumpa Lahiri \(excerpt from Translating Myself and Others at Words Without Borders\)](#)**

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**[READ: 7 Books Inspired by the Dictionary by Ceillie Clarke-Keane \(Electric Literature\)](#)**

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**[READ: Forget About Perfection. Embrace 'Mamahuhu.' by Vanessa Hua \(New York Times; may be paywalled\)](#)**

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**[WATCH: '□' se Museum; A panel discussion on Hinglish with Shobhaa De, Rita Kothari, and Francesca Orsini \(Museum of Art & Photography in Bengaluru\)](#)**

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**[BOOK RECOMMENDATION: The Wordhord: Daily Life in Old English by Hana Videen](#)**

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