



INTERNATIONAL TRANSLATION DAY 2026 - FIT WEBINAR

Theme: *Linguistic Diversity and Language Rights — the power of being understood*

The Power of Being Understood:

Translation, Cultural Localization, and the Sustainability of Linguistic Diversity

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Abstract

Linguistic diversity is among humanity's most valuable and most vulnerable forms of heritage. Working at the intersection of languages, cultures, and sustainable development, this contribution argues that language rights move from principle to practice only through translation, interpreting, and localization. It positions human language professionals as custodians of cultural sustainability: the people who keep languages usable, teachable, and dignified in an age of accelerating artificial intelligence. Framed by Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, it shows how culturally grounded translation sustains identity while enabling equitable global participation because to be understood in one's own language is a precondition for inclusion.

Contribution

Linguistic diversity is one of humanity's greatest achievements and one of its most fragile. Every language carries a way of seeing the world — its memory, its values, its sense of home. Yet a right to one's language means little until someone makes it real. That is the quiet, decisive work of translators, interpreters, and terminologists: they turn legal recognition into lived access, and they turn diversity from something we admire into something communities can use.

I come to this theme from the meeting point of languages, cultures, and sustainability. In my work at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, and within Saudi Arabia's wider transformation under Vision 2030, I have seen that translation and cultural localization are not decorative add-ons. They are infrastructure. They decide who can study, who can be treated, who can stand before a court, and who can take part in public life — in a language they fully understand.

I would invite us to see translation as an act of sustainability. A language does not survive because it is celebrated once a year; it survives because it is used, taught, and carried across borders. Each time we translate well, faithfully and with cultural sensitivity, we keep a language alive and we keep its speakers included. This is cultural sustainability in the most practical sense, and it sits at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals: quality education, reduced inequalities, gender equality, and strong, trusted institutions.

Technology makes this work both easier and more urgent. Artificial intelligence has widened multilingual communication, but it has also exposed a deepening divide between high-resource and low-resource languages. Arabic, spoken by hundreds of millions, remains under-served in many digital and AI systems. If we are not careful, the languages and communities already at the margins will be left further behind. Human language professionals are what stand in that gap — safeguarding meaning, ethics, identity, and dignity that no system can guarantee on its own.

This is why the subtitle moves me: the power of being understood. To be understood in your own language, within your own cultural frame, is not a convenience. It is a precondition for participation, for equity, and for sustainable development. Localization, at its best, lets a community engage with the world without surrendering who it is.

So let us recognize translators, interpreters, and terminologists for what they truly are: not intermediaries at the edge of communication, but custodians of linguistic diversity — and architects of a more inclusive, more sustainable future.

Key Messages

- Language rights become real only through translation, interpreting, and terminology — the operational foundation of linguistic inclusion.
- Translation is an act of cultural sustainability: a language survives by being used, taught, and carried across borders.
- AI widens reach but deepens the divide between high- and low-resource languages; human professionals safeguard meaning, ethics, and identity.
- Cultural localization — not literal transfer — lets communities participate globally without surrendering who they are.
- Linguistic inclusion advances the SDGs and Vision 2030: quality education, reduced inequalities, gender equality, and trusted institutions.

Examples of Practices from College of Languages, PNU

- The X Factor Model.
- Translation vs. Localization.
- Linking courses with social responsibility.
- International Presence.
- Best practices for SDG 4.

Short Bio

Dr. Hamdah Alghamdi is Dean of the College of Languages at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University and a strategic academic leader working at the intersection of languages, culture, and sustainable development. She holds a PhD in Linguistics from the University of Canberra, with research in discourse analysis, and has led PNU initiatives that align language and cultural education with Saudi Vision 2030 and the

UN Sustainable Development Goals. Her work spans cultural localization, translation-and-localization content strategy, higher-education transformation, and women's leadership development, fostering partnerships across Asia, Europe, and beyond. A Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (UK) and a UNITAR-certified sustainability practitioner, she champions linguistic inclusion as a bridge between heritage and equitable global participation.

