

SOAS Symposium

Covid-19 today: Voices from diverse communities

Organised by the UKRI Covid-19 research project "Cultural translation and interpreting of Covid-19 risks among London's migrant communities" (AH/V013769/1)

List of abstracts

Anna Lindley (SOAS) & Saliha Majeed-Hajaj (QMUL, Queen Mary University of London)

Navigating risk in the pandemic: early insights from research with migrant communities in the UK

Our presentation draws upon the preliminary findings of an ESRC funded project, *Connecting during Covid: Practices of care, remittance sending and digitisation among UK migrant communities*, to explore understandings of, and responses to, the pandemic. Focusing upon Indian, Brazilian and Somali migrant communities, we use interview and survey data to explore three key issues. First, recognising inter- and intra-community differences, we detail the socio-economic, physical and mental health risks associated with (enforced) mobility and immobility. Second, we examine how migrants have sought to navigate these risks, balancing both local and transnational priorities as the pandemic has unfolded spatially and temporally in Brazil, India and Somalia. Third, we draw some tentative conclusions about what these experiences tell us about migrant experiences of the pandemic.

Stephanie Snow (University of Manchester)

Capturing voices in crisis through the NHS Voices of Covid-19 project

This presentation will reflect on the process of creating a national collection of personal testimonies to capture the social significance of the pandemic for our lives and communities in partnership with the British Library. It will consider the challenges of undertaking participatory research during a global health crisis and the unexpected benefits for both researchers and participants.

Saeko Kimura (Tsuda University)

What has Covid-19 brought to Japanese Literature?

From literary point of view, the COVID-19 pandemic is a rare time when the whole world experiences, reads, or writes about the same thing at the same time. Albert Camus' *The Plague* written in 1947, was read around the world and became a huge bestseller in Japan. In addition, Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*, Alessandro Manzoni's *The Inauguration*, and Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* were also read around the world.

The newly written literature on the COVID-19 has also been quickly translated and read. First, there was *Wuhan Diary: Dispatches from a Quarantined City* by Fang Fang of Wuhan China, who was at the forefront of the epidemic, and then there was *How Contagion Works* by Paolo Giordano from Italy, the country that experienced a sharp increase in the number of infected people in the early days. In the U.S., the *Decameron Project* was launched during the lockdown to create the current *Decameron*. In this presentation, I will introduce the literary works created in Japan, which had to postpone the Olympics due to the pandemic.

Banan Saeed (BAHons graduate of African Studies and Linguistics, SOAS)

Stigma and shame: the reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic and future Implications for public health In the rapidly changing environment of Sudan

My research is about the social impact of COVID-19 in Sudan. In Sudan tests are expensive and people are therefore unable to pay for regular lateral flow tests. As a result, the current positive test rate in Sudan is around 55%, even though a positive test rate of ~2.2% indicates sufficient testing (WHO guidance). Therefore, we must ask, why testing is so low, and how the Sudanese government can increase tests? While the testing site accessibility plays a key role, my hypothesis is that there are many unaccounted-for deaths by COVID-19 which have been assigned TB and other illnesses due to the stigma surrounding COVID-19.

Kriszta Eszter Szendrői & Lily Kahn (UCL)

Translating COVID-19-related information into Hasidic Yiddish

This talk gives an account of a recent project translating Covid-19 information into Yiddish for the benefit of the Hasidic Jewish communities in London's Stamford Hill and Manchester in the UK and in Montreal in Canada. The translation work developed as a response to the urgent need for Yiddish-language resources specifically designed for the Hasidic community near the beginning of the pandemic. The translations were undertaken by a team consisting of linguists and native speakers of Hasidic Yiddish and took place within the framework of an AHRC (UK Arts and Humanities Research Council)-funded research project dedicated to linguistic and sociolinguistic analysis of contemporary Hasidic Yiddish worldwide. In this talk we discuss the sociolinguistic background to the translations and investigate the reasons why they were so urgently needed, before going on to address the issues encountered during the course of the translation process and the decisions taken in order to resolve them. These issues include the type of Yiddish chosen for the translations, the translation of medical terminology, gender-based linguistic differences affecting the translations, and specific cultural considerations that needed to be taken into account.

Kriszta Eszter Szendrői is a professor of linguistics at UCL. She is PI of an AHRC-funded research project aiming to document and analyse Contemporary Hasidic Yiddish, the language spoken by the Ultra-Orthodox, Hasidic Jewish communities worldwide.

Lily Kahn is a professor of Jewish languages at UCL. She is Co-I of an AHRC-funded research project aiming to document and analyse Contemporary Hasidic Yiddish, the language spoken by the Ultra-Orthodox, Hasidic Jewish communities worldwide.