

ESSAY | PEER REVIEWED

# Back to my Mother Tongue: Challenging the Ideal of one Language for all in Music Therapy

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## Abstract

"I wish you would teach in Arabic," a student tells me. She takes my breath away: that language barrier again. So familiar. About a year ago, following an ongoing struggle with academic English, I returned to Hebrew, reclaiming the freedom of writing and speech, even at the cost of sharing my thoughts with a wider audience, publishing my texts, and achieving more recognition. This critical essay describes the experience of a non-English-speaking music therapist and academic through the prism of language and power. The complex influences of verbal speech are described. The ideal of international language, its benefits and its consequences are presented as well. The author's story, her mother tongue, Hebrew, and a recent Israeli survey on the accessibility of language may serve to shine a light on possibly similar experiences of non-English-speaking music therapists. The experiences of a Palestinian, Arab-speaking music therapist also complement this narrative. In closing, the author reflects on the possible implications of dominant languages on the global music therapy community and challenges the value of this ideal.

**Keywords:** music therapy; language; hierarchy; accessibility; sustainability

*This article contains four artworks and four video presentations. Extended descriptions (Alt Text) of the artworks can be found by moving the cursor over the artworks. Readers are also invited to click on the word Video, to open a link to another layer of words, sights, sounds, and meanings.*



**Figure 1.** Origami boat and Hebrew text from Genesis chapter 1.

### Three Perspectives on Language and Power

We think and work within our shared space: music therapy. The profession is one, yet we come from different places, ages, bodies, and minds. Our lifestyles and histories vary. Our thoughts about humanity, therapy, ethics, or music are not similar, and they lead towards the numerous differences in the practice of our profession. Communication binds us together despite all these differences; it defines and shapes the development of music therapy. Our ongoing discourse across pages of journals, in conferences, and over social media takes place mainly through language, a complex platform with a powerful impact. The forces imposed by language are described through the author's story, and the history of Hebrew, her mother tongue. The collected experiences of 69 Israeli music therapists are presented as providing a possible glimpse into the influences of the dominant language ideal upon local and the global music therapy communities.

This part of the essay presents the dual tendency of language: its power and the control it offers to mankind, alongside the ceaseless threat of possible loss. Three perspectives explore these ideas: Hebrew mythology, parent-infant relations, and "lingua franca," the ideal of a dominant language. The reader is encouraged to follow the links attached to this essay and discover additional layers of memory and culture.

## **Language, Power, and Hebrew Mythology**

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. (Bible Gateway, New International Translation, 2021a, Gen. 1:1-3)

### Video

On the opening page of the Holy Bible – the Book of Books according to Hebrew tradition, the act of creation begins with a short command: "Let there be light!" and the primordial light first appears in the darkness. Several more words, and then a whole new world is born: the earth and the sky, plants, animals, and finally, the human being, man and woman. God grants humans the mysterious power of verbal communication and from then on – humans begin talking their way in the opposite direction to what the creator expected: they discover the tree of knowledge, taste its forbidden fruit, and get exiled from heaven. Humans interact with each other and become jealous, competitive, and murderous; they are punished repeatedly. On and on, as the story goes, their relationships and endeavors corrupt God's newly born world in so many ways that he finds it necessary to annihilate almost every living being in a great flood (Bialik & Ravnitzky, 1992). Right after, still recuperating from the flood's disastrous consequences, the language of humans leads to yet another problem:

1 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. 2 As people moved eastward, [a] they found a plain in Shinar[b] and settled there. 3 They said to each other, [...] "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens. (Bible Gateway, New International Translation, 2021b, Gen. 11:1-3)

With the benefit of a shared language, the builders of Babel designed a city with a high tower aimed at the sky (*Bible Gateway, New International Translation, 2021b, Gen. 11:4*). God, tells the myth, needs to consider this plan. Did the people's unity trouble him? Their growing arrogance? Was it their rising tower, aimed directly at the Lord's celestial seat (Rony, 2006)? Finally, God reaches a decision: he increases the number of languages spoken by the builders until no one can understand anyone else anymore. This act, commentators have suggested, points to language itself—words and the social synchrony they afford—as the root of all sin (Rony, 2006). God's response was followed by a second dissolution of human society, as it broke into small, countless new tribes dispersed across the land, never to be united again (Bialik & Ravnitzky, 1992).

Biblical myths on the birth of society caution against the power of language from the perspective of religion. Psychology, many generations later, offered similar ideas from the point of view of the individual.

## **Parent-Infant Relations and Language**

### Video

Parents pay special attention to communication with their newborns. Babies display rich preverbal expressivity (Stern, 2010; Trevarthen, 2002), and parents hold back for a while, trying to capture the babies' meanings and intentions. Still, they cannot settle long for a vague proto-language, and soon enough they begin interpreting their child's expressions and translating them into words (Stern, 1998). The culture of humans relies on words (Matheus, 2003); therefore, parents translate, talk, and teach their babies verbal communication from the day they are born. Babies on their behalf arrive at this world equipped with the ability to remember, categorize, and adapt their responses (Trevarthen,

2002), and, long before acquiring language, they greatly influence their caregivers through behavior (Miller, 1987). Thus, babies behave with intensity, and parents keep teaching them language: "Don't behave, talk!" they encourage them, and gradually, no matter how fierce or persistent their babies are, language takes control. As they grow, children understand more accurately the meaning of every word; they learn to explain their needs and take part in social encounters. The development of language is therefore a great victory for humans, but it also involves losing rich, natural, and primary forms of expression in favor of a concerted, less personal process; it reflects a massive surrender of young individuals to society and culture.

As speech develops in children, it becomes more ordinary and technical (Stern, 1985). Still, every word is endowed with a rich history that incorporates the singular and intimate experience through which it was acquired. Throughout our lives, we try to recapture the wildness and sensuality of proto-language by engaging in the arts, such as music, movement, or other non-verbal forms of play and expression (Stern, 2010).

The two descriptions above describe the conflicting tendencies of human language: power and control versus annihilation and loss. A third aspect presented below, the ideal of lingua-franca, brings us a bit closer to the subject of our shared professional space.

### ***Lingua Franca and the Academic World***

As you are reading these lines, a very large number of people with different first languages are communicating through English as a lingua franca in business meetings, in conferences and other academic discussions, or sports activities, to name a few. Businessmen are busy trying to land deals, academics are giving lectures or having research meetings, university students are working out the details in their new institutions, and all of this, they do through English as a lingua franca. English, in this sense, has reached truly global dimensions no other language has come near before. It is used in a very large number of domains, spoken by millions of people for different purposes. (Björkman, 2013, p. 1)

"Lingua franca" is an international language enabling people to communicate when they have different mother tongues. Historically, various languages have had this status, and English holds this position today (Björkman, 2013; Curry, 2018). Over 27,000 academic journals are published globally; more than half, including the most distinguished ones, are in English (Curry & Lillis, 2004; Curry 2018). Disseminating academic knowledge in a shared international language promotes the global enterprise of increasing knowledge and scientific cooperation, but it also has secondary consequences that are hard to ignore:

The trend for English-medium publishing emerges from neoliberal policies that affect the goals, activities and working conditions in higher education. Publications in English signal the "internationalization" of institutions of higher education, as publication metrics are key criteria for the global rankings of universities. (Curry, 2018)

Producing large numbers of high-quality English publications creates an immense workload and economic pressure on many academics. Participants in a study (Curry & Lillis, 2004) found it difficult and even impossible to find or afford English translators with sufficient understanding in their fields of knowledge. Though they were distinguished scholars in their countries of origin, they felt that their English writing was not of the highest quality, and that it harmed their international reputation and reduced their self-esteem (Curry & Lillis, 2004). Raley (1999) claims that forcing academic writers to publish in "global English" has the earmarks of colonialism:

Despite the fantastic promises of a benign and neutral means of communication that attend upon a vision of a globally common language, the inexorable twinning of language and

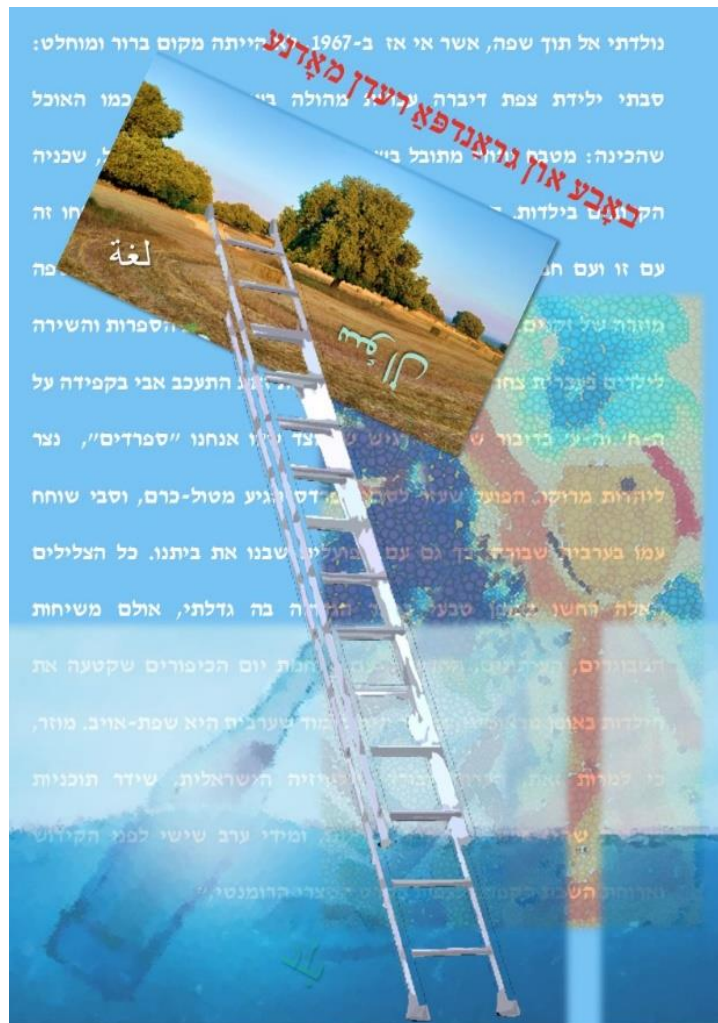


culture are such that this mythic common language is still bound to a particular cultural value, albeit one masked by universalism. (p. 52)

Curry (2018) adds that the ideal of publishing in English not only consumes time and mental effort, but it disrupts the development of culture and knowledge in local, smaller-scale language communities:

Another consequence of the global push to publish research in English is the loss of knowledge locally, as it may not also become available in local languages given the taboo against “dual publishing” of research. Not all local scholars or students speak or read English, so exporting research produced in local contexts for global, English-speaking audiences may hinder the development of local research cultures and societies more broadly. And while English has long been the dominant (but not only) language in scientific journals, pressures for English are now reaching social sciences and humanities scholars. (para. 6)

How does the ideal of a lingua franca affect music therapy and music therapists who speak and work in local and less influential languages? To answer this question, the second part of this essay seeks to explain the profound meaning of local language through my personal story regarding my mother tongue, Hebrew, and the history of this language.



**Figure 2.** A diagonally placed photo of a newly harvested golden field on a blue background with Hebrew, Arab and Yiddish words.

## Mother Tongue

### Hebrew

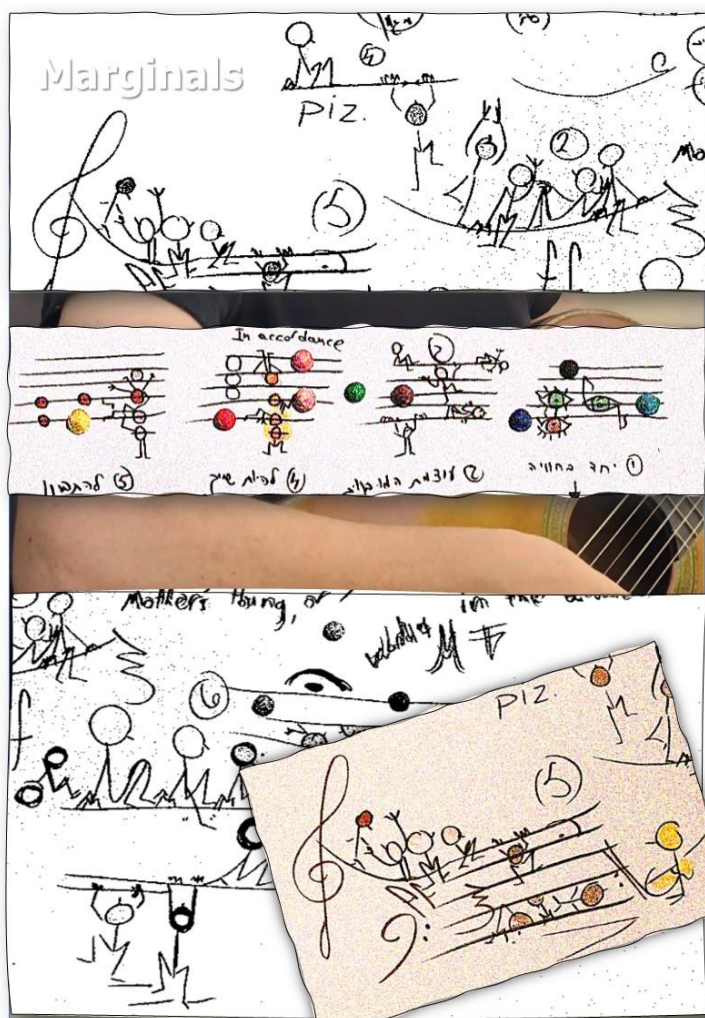
#### [Video](#)

There is a powerful story behind the language of my nation, which demonstrates why this language is so meaningful to us, Israeli Jews.

For 1300 years, our nation lived in the Land of Israel and spoke ancient Hebrew. In 200 A.D., following a wave of foreign occupations, the Jewish State was defeated by the Roman Empire, and its citizens were exiled. This exile lasted 1700 years: around the globe, Jews lived in closed communities but interacted daily with their non-Jewish neighbors, encountering other languages and cultures. Over the centuries, Hebrew was influenced by surrounding languages. Several dialects were more prevalent, for example, Yiddish, a fusion of Hebrew and German; Ladino, a mixture of Hebrew and Spanish, and more. Male students and scholars used ancient Hebrew and Aramaic, a Babylonian dialect, in their prayers and religious study (Fellman, 1973). Jewish mystics explored the magical power of Hebrew letters and word combinations (Paluch, 2016). With time, Hebrew had replaced the long-lost homeland; it provided a common ground, a safe space, a means of communication and cooperation, and a way to maintain national identity (Fellman, 1973).

Towards the mid-19th century in Europe, educated young Jews began to favor the languages of the countries where they lived, as this afforded them the means of obtaining a modern education and integrating into society. Some Jewish scholars predicted that the use of Hebrew would decline due to lack of necessity, while others made keen efforts to preserve it. Hebrew journalists, poets and writers stretched the language to its limits, even inventing new words. Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (Ben-Yehuda, 1981) combined the idea of reviving the Jewish language with the dream of returning to the ancient homeland. In 1882, Ben-Yehuda immigrated to Palestine, where he made the revival of the Hebrew his lifelong mission. At that time, Arabic, Turkish, French, Yiddish, and Ladino were the languages spoken in Palestine; Hebrew was used only for study and prayer. With immense sacrifice, Ben-Yehuda kept adjusting this language to daily life. He wrote and published in Hebrew and provided additional platforms for practicing Hebrew as an everyday language. Modern schools were established in Palestine, where children of the Jewish pioneers studied secular subjects in modern Hebrew. According to historic sources, teachers sometimes had to invent new words to fill existing gaps in the language. Forty years later, in the 1920s, Hebrew was alive again, and close to 40% of Jewish inhabitants in Palestine were using it daily (Fellman, 1973).

The wealth of history, emotion and culture encapsulated in the Hebrew language may demonstrate the similar richness of any one of nearly 1600 existing human languages (Ethnologue: Languages of the world, 2021). Imagine then, the many music therapists who practice using similarly local languages that are also steeped in emotion, history, and culture. How does the domination of English professional literature affect these therapists and their work? What do they gain and what do they lose? How do they update their knowledge? Where is the increasing linguistic homogeneity leading us as individual professionals and as a community? The following section on music therapists and language in Israel features some private experiences and the results of a recent survey.



**Figure 3.** Stick figures climbing a music score. A guitar player on the background.

## Marginals: Lingua Franca and Music Therapists with Local Languages

### Memory

1971: I am a four-year-old, curled in an armchair, reading my first book in Hebrew. **Turn page.** I'm five years old, sitting barefoot on the concrete pavement, my forehead wrinkled in effort and the tip of my tongue sticking out, scribbling some imaginary, curved, connected letters with a stone, mumbling to myself. Mom goes by: "What are you doing there, honey?" "I'm writing in English, mom." **Turn page.** 1974: I'm seven years old, and my family is living on an island in the Persian Gulf; Dad works here. We study at home, with mom. "What do you want me to call you during our English lessons?" She asks, "Maybe Sue?" "Sue?!" I exhale angrily, then I think it over, and I choose the lovely, royal name Elizabeth. **Turn page.** My Iranian girlfriends and I are talking: "You-Go-Bait-I" (Come, visit my home), "Come-Bozy" (come, play with me). And everything is fine. Everything is understood: three languages, a single friendship, our ongoing, playful daydream. **Turn page.** 1978: The Islamic revolution in Iran. We flee. I am sending my dearest girlfriend, Farra, a small letter in childish English letters, and I promise her that I will love her forever. To this day, I have not received her reply. Perhaps she misses me too in our secret, dreamy childhood language. **Another page:** I am a twelve-year-old, and it

is a hot July in Brooklyn, New York. I'm playing in English with my cousin and her friends, watching the movie *Grease*, and flying in English to Disneyworld, Orlando. Back at home with a touch of an American accent, an audiotape of *Grease*, and a suitcase loaded with gum, I make a firm oath to myself to think only in English for ever and ever.

**Back in time:** From the age of six, clumsily, unceasingly, I write short stories, poems, secret diaries with a pencil, then with a pen. I write my homework, then short articles for the school journals, tons of letters, and birthday greetings. Years later, with my first PC and a laser printer, I produce university papers; short stories (which remain in my drawer); more diaries; three or four full-length amateur novels; then, emails—about a million. My writing earned me lots of words, many compliments, and much confidence. Then, naturally, I was heading towards a music therapy MA, but there I pause, confused, even shocked. **What happened?**

**Turn page.** In academic writing, one does not use the first person so much. Imagination is forbidden. Instead, one uses empirical data (the author's name, the year, if it's a quote: please specify page numbers, please pay attention to the font type, the letter size, the spacing), OH NO! This author was doomed to start all over again, like a toddler learning to walk. Reading academic English... OH (again) NO! I need a dictionary and three different colored markers, and I translate nearly every word into Hebrew. It is slow. Very slow. **Turn page.** It is my doctoral dissertation, and I write it in English. Why? 'cause I can, 'cause that's what I want. My English is good enough, and I wish to make a global contribution. YES. I read, I write, I email my first and magnificent draft. I'm waiting anxiously, and soon—the reply: "The writing is not coherent. Could you please clarify this? And that? And that?" The rug has been pulled beneath my feet: I cannot write more clearly. Can I write English more clearly? Do I know English as well as I thought? Do I know English at all? **Turn page.**

I am at a conference in a foreign country. Social anxiety. I am missing words. I do not have any English at all. **I am all alone.**

### ***Lingua Franca: The Israeli Survey***

How does the domination of professional English affect the work of local-language music therapists? A survey designed by the author and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health and Welfare at the University of Haifa (21/502) was conducted to address this topic.

A link to an anonymous survey in Hebrew and in Arabic was posted during two successive weeks in May 2021 on four relevant WhatsApp and Facebook groups. The quantitative and qualitative questions explored the degree to which professional music therapy literature was accessible to respondents, and the effect of this situation on their professional experience. Sixty-nine music therapists responded. The quantitative data were analyzed using the Microsoft Forms interface, in addition all of the quantitative and qualitative data was analyzed using Interpretive-Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2003). In this process, a) the data were read form by form, vertically; b) notes were taken to explore emerging reflections, images, and idea; c) emerging themes were highlighted during a second round of vertical reading; d) connections between themes were collated within tables during a third round of vertical reading; and e) main categories and themes were outlined, and exceptional results were noted. The quantitative and qualitative results follow.

Most of the survey participants were native Hebrew speakers who completed their music therapy studies in Israel. Many were relatively new to the profession (Table 1).



**Table 1.** Demographic Data.

Mother tongue	Hebrew	Arabic	European language	Bilingual including English	Other
	45	10	8	4	2
Music therapy education	Hebrew	English			
	61	8			
Seniority	1-5 years	6-10 years	10-15 years	15-25 years	Over 25 years
	24	18	10	9	8

Half of the survey respondents reported that based on their experience, professional literature in English was less accessible. Their responses on a 5-step Likert scale received an average score of 2.5 (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Accessibility of English Music Therapy Literature to Israeli Music Therapists.

Experience the professional literature as inaccessible					Experience the professional literature as fully accessible
1	2	3	4	5	
10	25	19	11	4	

Most survey participants reported that the experience of reading professional materials in their native language was more effective, fluent, rapid, and coherent. They described the Hebrew literature as more relevant, culturally appropriate, and easier to apply in clinical work. Many participants who read Hebrew literature felt a stronger affinity to the local music therapy community; they could share books and articles and discuss them with colleagues. Professional satisfaction and confidence improved when reading or other forms of learning were available in a mother tongue. The foreign language of English was described as a major obstacle by most survey participants whose mother tongues were Hebrew or Arabic. Reading in English felt strenuous, exhausting, and slow. Some participants translated whatever they read word by word, while others found that audio or video sources instead of reading optimized their understanding in English. Four survey participants who were native English speakers and participants who studied abroad did not experience these difficulties.

Survey participants noted that some local publications were outdated, irrelevant to their field of work, or poorly written. They also described the updated English literature as less accessible, and available only to students or academics; they themselves had to purchase this literature at relatively higher prices.

The participants who found English literature too demanding described themselves as having less confidence and self-worth as music therapists. Had they read this literature, they would have been "better," "more professional," and could, in their view, provide more effective treatment. Some found it hard to conceptualize various processes and phenomena in therapy or explain their profession to colleagues. They expressed a desire to develop, learn, and obtain more skills and a higher academic degree, yet avoidance of international resources and activities due to the language barrier. Some participants finally left the field of music therapy behind and went on to study psychotherapy or art therapy because the education and literature were more accessible. These participants described their declining connections with the local music therapy community.

## ***Ghurba – Local Aliens: Arab-Speaking Music Therapists***

About a year ago, amid my raging struggle with English, I was in class, packing my laptop and preparing to leave when one of my students sighed softly in her seat and said, "How I wish you had taught us in Arabic." I turned and looked at her, puzzled, then I shivered, shocked at my own surprise.

According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2022), Arabic, spoken by more than 400 million people across the globe, is among the most spoken languages in the world. Does music therapy exist in the Arab-speaking world? What do we know about it? My students described a lack of Arabic music therapy literature; an additional internet search left me uncertain. I thought, "If Arab-speaking students in Israel are bound to study in Hebrew or any other foreign language, what is their learning and practice experience?" How does the issue of language affect their ongoing professional development?

Only ten Arab-speaking music therapists who live and work in Israel participated in the survey. The separate analysis of the Arabic-language questionnaires presented a similar demographic picture, and the same themes emerged. Due to this, an additional interview was performed with a Palestinian music therapist who trained and still practices in Israel. During our conversation—woman to woman, music therapist to music therapist—we felt a closeness and warmth, as well as a great distance. Listening to her story in English and Hebrew, not in Arabic, I needed to breathe slowly and deeply in order to fully understand the complexity of the experiences that unfolded with every word.

When you described to me the article you were writing, you presented the language as part of your identity, your history, of who you are as a person, as a nation, as a people. [As a Palestinian with Israeli citizenship] I always say: "the occupation here dwells in the people's minds;" through the education they got, people lost their ability to think in Arabic. [Here], academic education is given in Hebrew and all the literature—in Hebrew, not only in music therapy—in any field. Five hundred medicine students from the Israeli-Arab society are currently learning in foreign countries, in foreign languages.

[As for me], I'm already used to the fact that I can never talk about music therapy in Arabic. I cannot think in Arabic about music therapy. I have never read anything about music therapy in Arabic, and in general, I have a feeling [...] as if I were in another country. Foreign. Immigrant. In Arabic, it is called Ghurba.

For several minutes she tries to describe the meaning of that word. We look through various online dictionaries, and nothing compares to her intimate experience: the deep, overwhelming, and continuous feeling of alienation that takes control of her living and work environment.

Music therapy and I separated a long time ago. When I think about my identity fifteen years after I entered this profession, sometimes I find it even hard to say that I am a music therapist. I don't know if it's related to language or something more general. When I started studying music therapy, my Hebrew wasn't good. After graduation, I wanted to develop, expand my knowledge, but nowhere did I find what I needed. [...] When I studied, I could see how music therapy was effective with people who did not speak: on the autism spectrum, or people with chronic diseases [...] but following graduation I worked with verbal school children [...], I had to interpret their music into words, I had to relate to what they said, and I had no language; I had no way to acquire more skill in the profession. I couldn't find where. When I started working at schools, there were very few music therapists coming from the Arab society, and I couldn't find any supervision in my own language. Maybe I would if I dug harder.

Even a month later, I still cannot find the literal meaning of Ghurba, and the closest I get is the following lines, only demonstrating our inability to separate a word from the daily culture of those who use it:

The Arabic word ghurba, which literally means estrangement or separation, is typically used to refer to the state of being a foreigner in a land away from home, hence evoking feelings of alienation, loneliness, and a strong yearning for loved ones. (WARWICK: Humanities Research Center, 2021)

Reading this definition, I may have a better idea of what she was trying to tell me earlier: something about the inseparable bond between individual, family, homeland, and language as is reflected in her culture. Something about the sense of impairment when any part of this whole is left behind. Amazing how the entire cultural context is embedded within a single, untranslatable word.

As she worked toward her master's degree, my colleague sought academic supervision. She came up with a topic seemingly relevant to a Palestinian music therapist; however, no one was found who could support her in her research in Arabic or offer her music therapy research tools and perspective.

About feeling a stranger to music therapy, she reflects, "Throughout my life, I have been in music," but music has never taken root in her professional identity. The therapeutic use of music, as taught in Israel, was imbued with a sense of alienation and failure:

When I was a little girl, I learned how to play the recorder. [Then] I took voice lessons for two years, and I learned to play the oud and the guitar, but I had no primary instrument. [...] When I studied music therapy, we were required to play the guitar or the piano: these are Western instruments, and I failed this as well. [What I really] wanted [was] to play oriental or Arabic music. [So] I play drums, I like the tabla and other rhythmic instruments; [rhythm] is a natural part of the Arabic music. It is easier for me. The voice too.

Still, my colleague cannot picture any other professional reality:

It's like imagining something that's not an option anyway: How was it? What was it like if Arabic was the language heard in the background of my thoughts? And if all my professional development: to be more competent, more skilled, or to take therapy with an Arab-speaking music therapist—all this does not exist. It is not possible yet, and I think, "What if my mother tongue, Arabic, was there for me? Could my professional identity have been any different from what it is today?"

### [Video](#)

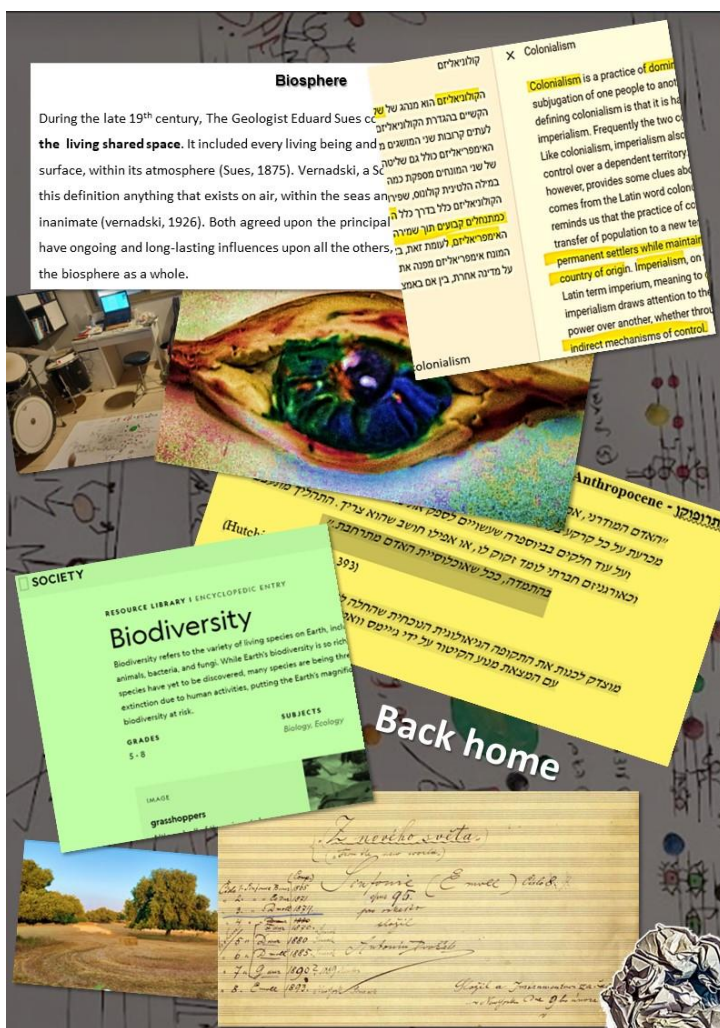


Figure 4. Scattered notes with printed text and music. A big colorful eye, and the words: "Back home."

### Back Home

My colleague and I are talking in a mix of English and Hebrew. Two days later, I am discussing something with a colleague abroad. My English sounds strange, I'm sure, and slow, how slow, and my accent is heavy. Both my colleagues have a foreign accent too, and I don't mind. We let the conversations progress, the words touch us, and we try to understand. I understand and feel understood. Something has changed during the writing of this article: I'm not so sensitive anymore. I don't criticize my language flaws, my slowness, my accent as harshly as before. **Turn page.** I am writing this article in Hebrew: mixing academic, poetic, and everyday language in this sweet, this terribly painful storm of writing. I correct my writing a lot, enjoy the intimacy and warmth of my mother tongue, then, I translate very slowly but lightheartedly into English, and I try to improve my writing as much as possible; yes, only as much as I can, without condemning myself. No more feeling so silly and small. There is no need: I know there are countless blind spots in the way I perceive English. Yes, there are. **Turn page.** I'm talking with a student who is currently writing his thesis in English: "But my English is OK," he claims. "I don't know if our English will ever get even a little close to anyone's whose mother tongue is English," I respond, not so bitter anymore. It's a simple fact of life, this language matter. **Turn page.** One day, when this writing is over, I will send it to an editor; It must be well-written and



coherent. After all, it's a pleasure to discuss music therapy with others who speak different languages, from different musical cultures and therapeutic perspectives; to maintain broad professional ties, recognize others, and be recognized. I guess many of us share this pleasure, and that is why we bother as a society to cultivate dominating languages so many years after the tower of Babel. We want to conquer and control, true, but also to communicate, participate, innovate, learn. We need to share, and so we share. Here is my personal experience, if you will, and thank you for reading. **Turn over to the last page.**

Language can throw people in multiple directions: words can be your obedient servant or harsh master. A native language is the root of identity, culture, and social participation. International languages, i.e., lingua francas, can enhance communication and the development of humankind but can also activate oppressive mechanisms. The ideal of publishing academic works in international languages, in this case English, results in fruitful scientific work, along with significant stress and loss in the case of local-language professionals and communities (Curry & Lillis, 2004; Curry 2018). The limited Israeli survey and the interview with my Arabic-speaking colleague demonstrated this.

Recently, the world of music therapy has become more sensitive to social justice and equality (e.g., Baines, 2021; Norris, 2020). This critical focus includes the problem of language and power, and it can embrace music therapy professionals—not only the therapy owners. Concluding this essay with some naive hope, I call upon music therapy organizations and academic institutions to look the tendency for language homogeneity in our profession straight in the eye and encourage more scholarly writing in local languages; reward such works, and create suitable, high-quality platforms for their publication. Embedding accessible means of translation within any reading platform can also be useful. And finally, developing sufficient resources for local language writing and supporting local, quality publications, can, and will contribute to the richness and diversity of the global music therapy arena.

### [Music Audio](#)

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### **About the Author**

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