

# TRANSLATION OF PERSONAL NAMES IN KLINGON *HAMLET*

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**ABSTRACT** • *The Translation of Names in the Klingon Adaptation of Shakespeare's "Hamlet"*. The translation of literary classics into constructed languages (ConLangs), particularly artificial languages (ArtLangs) like Klingon, offers unique insights into the interplay between language, culture, and translation theory. This paper focuses on the Klingon adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet, with a particular emphasis on the treatment of proper names. Through detailed analysis, the study explores how linguistic and cultural constraints of Klingon phonology influenced the adaptation of English names while maintaining their recognisability for readers. The adaptation process exemplifies a dual objective: conforming to Klingon phonological rules while preserving the familiarity of character names from the source text. For instance, adaptations like Gertrude becoming *ghertlhuD* demonstrate phonological transformation, where Klingon's alveolar lateral affricates replace English consonant clusters to align with Klingon phonotactics. Similarly, vowel epenthesis and consonant substitutions ensure Klingon phonological compatibility, balancing "alien-ness" with reader accessibility. The analysis also reveals how names retained key phonetic features, such as syllable count and nuclear vowels, to maintain their recognisability. This work situates the Klingon Hamlet within broader sociolinguistic and sociocultural contexts, emphasizing the importance of audience reception in translation. Ultimately, the Klingon adaptation of Hamlet highlights the imaginative potential of ArtLangs, transcending their fictional origins to become vehicles for scholarly inquiry and cultural expression. This study contributes to translation studies by illuminating how adaptations in ConLangs navigate between linguistic fidelity and cultural resonance, enriching our understanding of language as a dynamic and multifaceted medium.

**KEYWORDS** • Constructed Languages; Klingon; Proper Names Adaptation; Translation Studies.

*You have not experienced Shakespeare, until you have read him in the original Klingon*  
Chancellor Gorkon / David Warner (Star Trek VI-The Undiscovered Country)

## 1. Constructed Languages and Klingon

Constructed Languages (henceforth, ConLangs) are classified mainly according to their purpose and structure (Bausani 1970). ConLangs and their use have garnered increasing attention in sociolinguistic and sociological analysis, offering unique insights into the interplay between language, identity, and culture (Sanders & Schreyer 2020). Indeed, ConLangs serve not only as linguistic tools but also as cultural artifacts that reflect and shape societal ideologies, group dynamics, and identity construction. ConLangs, particularly ArtLangs (i.e., languages created for artistic purposes) such as Klingon, Dothraki, and Valyrian, transcend their fictional origins to engage with real-world linguistic and cultural phenomena. Beyond their grammars, these languages

have inspired literature, poetry, and community-driven creative endeavors that offer insights into the sociocultural dynamics of language use.

The first portrayal of Klingons in *Star Trek* dates back to the 1967 *The Original Series* episode “The Trouble with Tribbles.” At that time, Klingons were characterized as a warrior society emphasizing honor, combat, and a rigid clan structure, yet their appearance and behavior were not markedly alien. It was not until 1979, in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, that the Klingon language made its debut, coinciding with their now-iconic appearance featuring wrinkled foreheads and long hair. For this film, James Doohan (“Scotty” in the series) created the first Klingon words, but his original recordings are lost. Building upon these initial words, linguist Marc Okrand developed a comprehensive Klingon grammar in 1984, culminating in the publication of *The Klingon Dictionary* (Okrand 1992). Okrand’s work transformed Klingon into a fully functional language with an extensive vocabulary and grammatical structure. Its popularity spurred the creation of additional resources, such as *Star Trek: Klingon for the Galactic Traveler* (Okrand 1995), which explores Klingon culture, planetary names, and proper nouns. Okrand designed Klingon to sound unmistakably alien to human audiences. This was achieved by employing a rare object-verb-subject (OVS) word order and a phonological system dominated by back-of-the-mouth sounds, creating a harsh auditory effect (see also Meluzzi 2022). Morphologically, Klingon is agglutinative with a strict suffix order. Although its morphological structure is not inherently alien, its sound inventory and syntax give it an otherworldly quality. Klingon’s design reflects parallels with human cultures sharing a warrior ethos, underscoring how ArtLangs often mirror existing sociocultural features. Despite these influences, Klingon remains unique, balancing its linguistic “alienness” with the practical need for actors to articulate its sounds while in costume. This duality highlights the intricate craftsmanship behind creating a language for both fictional and real-world engagement.

Today, the number of fluent Klingon speakers is estimated between 30-50 people, but the number of people using Klingon, at various levels of competency (e.g., in fanfictions, see Comandini & Dedè submitted), is certainly around hundreds or more, but it is impossible to calculate. For instance, the reddit community *t/1hInganHol* counts 2293 members, and the Klingon course on Duolingo counts around 424,000 subscribers. Obviously, the number of subscribers to a language course does not implicate any level of competency, but it testifies an interest towards the language and the culture *per se*. Leaving aside numbers, it is true that, among the many other Conlang created for artistic purposes, Klingon is the one in which the link between reality and fiction has smoothed at point that there’s a linguistic journal in Klingon (HolQeD), language certificates (three levels), conventions and other meetings. What it is even more interesting is the presence of translations mainly from English classics into Klingon: although recently there has been a revival of these translations, the most famous is the Klingon translation (or, better, adaptation) of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* published in 1996 by the Klingon Language Institute and re-printed in 2000 by Pocket Books (see section 3).

This paper analyzes the so-called *Klingon Hamlet*, that is the Klingon adaptation of William Shakespeare’s famous masterpiece. A specific focus will be provided on the adaptation of characters’ names from Middle English into Klingon, with the general purpose of better understanding Klingon phonology and the link between ArtLangs and their use outside the fictional word they were created.

This paper is organized as follows: section 2 presents theoretical remarks concerning sociolinguistic features of ConLangs, and the issues in translating proper names. Section 3 illustrates the adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in Klingon, by focusing on characters’ names in light with Klingon phonology. Discussion and conclusion are included in the final section 4.

## 2. Theoretical remarks

### 2.1. The social dimension of ConLangs

The label ConLangs should be considered as an umbrella-term including every artificially created languages such as Esperanto, Klingon, and Dothraki. ConLangs serve not only as linguistic tools but also as cultural artifacts that reflect and shape societal ideologies, group dynamics, and identity construction (Thibault 2020).

As it is known, Esperanto was devised in the late 19th century by L. L. Zamenhof as a universal second language to foster international communication and peace. Its linguistic design includes regular grammar, phonetic spelling, and influences from diverse Indo-European languages. Esperanto's sociolinguistic significance lies in its adoption by a transnational speech community (Gobbo 2017). In contrast, Klingon, created by Marc Okrand for the Star Trek franchise, exemplifies a constructed language rooted in fiction but deeply influential in real-world sociocultural contexts. Initially developed to enhance the realism of an alien species, Klingon has since transcended its fictional origins to become a symbol of fandom and subcultural identity (Kazimierczak 2010). The Klingon Language Institute, founded in 1992, showcases how fans use language as a tool for community building and cultural expression. Its deliberately alien phonology and grammar (Meluzzi 2022) challenge traditional linguistic norms, offering sociolinguists a case study in how language forms can disrupt expectations and foster inclusivity among marginalized or niche groups. Similarly, Dothraki and Valyrian, created by David J. Peterson for HBO's *Game of Thrones*, demonstrate the role of ConLangs in crafting immersive fictional worlds. These languages not only enhance narrative authenticity but also inspire real-world linguistic engagement, as fans learn and adapt them. The sociological value of these languages lies in their function as vehicles of cultural capital within fan communities, where linguistic proficiency can signal status and deepen emotional investment in the fictional universe (Meluzzi 2019, Comandini & Dedè, submitted).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, these ArtLangs provide fertile ground for exploring language as a tool for identity construction and community building. Unlike natural languages, which develop organically over centuries, ArtLangs are intentionally designed to reflect specific cultural and narrative purposes. Klingon, for instance, reflects the militaristic and honor-bound ethos of the Klingon people, while Valyrian conveys the prestige and sophistication of a once-mighty empire. These linguistic designs influence how communities engage with the languages, fostering identities that align with the cultural values encoded in their structure and vocabulary. For instance, Dhantal (2022) has analyzed the linguistic representation of gender and class differences in the *Game of Thrones* franchise, with a particular emphasis on the two ArtLangs Dothraki and Valyrian.

Moreover, the growing body of written materials in ArtLangs underscores their sociological significance. These works often serve as markers of cultural capital within fan communities, where fluency or proficiency in an ArtLang can signify dedication, status, and creativity. For instance, participating in discussions or contributing original content in Klingon, Dothraki or Na'vi (Schreyer 2015) allows individuals to demonstrate their linguistic skills and deepen their engagement with the associated fandom. The act of writing and publishing in these languages also reinforces their legitimacy, positioning them as living languages with practical and artistic applications.

ArtLangs also challenge conventional definitions of language and its functions. Their use in creative writing and artistic performance emphasizes their cultural resonance: these languages

often embody the themes and narratives of the fictional worlds they originate from, making them potent tools for exploring broader sociocultural issues. Original poetry written in Klingon, for instance, often reflects themes of honor, loyalty, and conflict, mirroring the cultural preoccupations of the Klingon people (Thibault 2020). By engaging with these texts, sociolinguists and sociologists can examine how language serves as a vehicle for expressing and negotiating cultural values. However, as noted by Hietaranta (2022: 141), differently from real languages, ArtLangs do not have native speakers, therefore judgements on the correctness or appropriateness of translations often arise. The introduction of new rules or, at least, expressions in the ArtLang could be the result of a collective and cooperative discussion, often with evidences from one or more real languages used as reference point. As Beinhoff (2022) has pointed out, fictional languages are essentially “human languages”, created by human beings for other human beings, so they all must have some shared reference points to be able to understand each other.

## **2.2. The translation of proper names**

In translation studies, translation and adaptation represent distinct approaches to rendering a source text into a target language. Translation typically emphasizes fidelity to the original text, focusing on maintaining the semantic, syntactic, and stylistic integrity of the source material. It often strives for equivalence, where the target text closely mirrors the meaning and intent of the original, making it suitable for contexts that prioritize accuracy, such as legal or technical documents (Munday 2016). Conversely, adaptation involves a more transformative approach, altering the source text to suit the cultural, linguistic, or contextual expectations of the target audience. Adaptation may significantly modify the form or content of the source material, often prioritizing accessibility, relevance, or emotional resonance over strict fidelity (Venuti 2017). This approach is common in translating creative works such as plays, poetry, or advertisements, where cultural localization is necessary to preserve the impact and intent of the original (Bassnett, 2014). The difference lies not only in methodology but also in purpose. While translation seeks to convey the source text as faithfully as possible, adaptation aims to recreate its effect or function within a different cultural or situational context. In different works, Venuti has argued that translation inherently involves adaptation to some degree, as linguistic and cultural equivalence can rarely be perfectly achieved, making the distinction a matter of emphasis rather than strict separation (see Venuti 2017 among many others).

Proper names, thus including but limiting to personal names, represent a unique challenge in translation studies. Personal names carry historical, cultural, and symbolic significance that can enrich a text’s meaning or, conversely, create barriers for modern readers. Indeed, proper names often encapsulate cultural values or historical allusions, as ethnolinguistic and ethnographic approaches to language have variously demonstrated, starting with the fundamental work of Levi-Strauss (1962). Indeed, proper names are not individualizing but relational, since they could be better understood as classificatory markers embedded in social (and then linguistic) systems of meaning. For instance, Ehineni (2019) highlights how among the Yorubas, a personal name is like “a person’s private portfolio” (Ehineni 2019: 84), since it reflects a person’s birth day, period, events surrounding his/her birth, as well as family profession or status in the society, or even inform society that the child was an *àbí kù* (lit. born-to-die) child that survived (see also Akinyemi 2005). Similarly, Sumniengngam (2004) stressed the fact that in Thai society first names carries an auspicious value, but how these values change through time and society. A traditional textbook, the *Tamrataksa*, is still quite widespread since it provides the principles for traditional naming to wish the newborn child a happy and wealthy life (Suwan 1995). Moreover, the difference examples collected in vom Bruck & Bondenhorn’s (2006) work clearly emphasize how names are social

acts that construct and express relationships, signal group belonging, reflect political or moral values of a society, and can also be used as mean of contestation or resistance. As a consequence, naming is also not a one-time act but a process.

Due to the cultural significance of names and naming practices, translation of proper names is often very difficult, especially in the case of classical texts for which temporal distance adds on cultural one. Furthermore, names of characters in classical or popular texts tend to appear in multiple works and contexts: translators must consider the intertextual connections between these names and ensure consistency across texts and the philological tradition. In this respect, a famous case-study in translation studies concerns the translation of proper names (thus also including personal names) in the *Harry Potter* saga. Indeed, various scholars have addressed the problem of translation of J.K. Rowling's characters' names in different languages (e.g., McDonough 2004 for French and Spanish, Liang 2007 for Taiwanese, Mussche & Willems 2010 for Arabic, and Zahir & Haroon 2018 for Malay).

Fernandes (2006: 44) points out how the phonology of proper names in fantasy fictions is crucial in immediately portraying characters' personality, beliefs and even appearance, by following widespread principle of sound iconicity (Schmidtke et al. 2014). However, target languages impose their own phonological, grammatical, and syntactic rules, which can complicate the treatment of names. For instance, Greek inflected names may lose their case endings in English, altering their grammatical function. Therefore, understanding and addressing the treatment of proper names in translation requires a multifaceted approach that considers linguistic, cultural, and reader-oriented factors.

Translation studies have so far highlighted different approaches to the translation of proper names (cf. Nyangeri & Wangari 2019 for a recent overview). On a metaphorical scale from the original to the translation, one may find retention, transliteration, explanatory translation, adaptation, loan translation, and substitution. Retention involves leaving the original name unchanged in the target text. This approach is often used to preserve authenticity or cultural flavor, particularly when the translator assumes readers are familiar with the original culture. Retention is typical in modern translations that prioritize fidelity. Transliteration involves converting the sounds of the original name into the target language's script. This technique prioritizes phonetic similarity, which maintains the auditory impression of the original name, and it is common when the source and target cultures have significant linguistic and scriptural differences. Explanatory translation could combine with either preservation or transliteration, since they leave the original proper name as in the original but they add an extra text (usually a foot- or endnote), providing etymological and/or cultural aspects of the name for the general public. While these approaches try to preserve the original text, adaptation and loan translation focuses more on the target language. Adaptation modifies a name to better fit the phonetic, grammatical, or cultural norms of the target language. It often occurs when a name has established variants across languages and literary traditions, as in the case of the different adaptation of Harry Potter characters' names in Italian (Brøndsted & Dollerup 2004, Cornelio 2015). Loan translation or calque translates the elements of a proper name into the target language, by trying at preserving the etymological or conceptual meaning behind the name. Finally, it is also possible to omit a proper name altogether, and replacing it with a descriptive term or a pronoun: this strategy is quite rare and potentially applied only when a name's omission enhances the text's readability.

Many translations employ a combination of techniques to balance fidelity, readability, and cultural resonance. A translator might transliterate a name while adding a footnote or adapt a name while retaining its essential phonetic qualities (Lefevre 1992). Thus, The translation of proper names from literary (or popular) classics requires careful consideration of linguistic fidelity, cultural significance, and audience needs. Translators must navigate a spectrum of techniques,

from transliteration to adaptation, ensuring that their choices respect the integrity of the source text while resonating with modern readers.

### 3. Klingon Hamlet and the translation of characters' names

In the 6th Star Trek movie "The Undiscovered Country", the Klingon character Chancellor Gorkon (played by actor David Warner) states: "You have not experienced Shakespeare, until you have read him in the original Klingon". Although that was intended as a joke with the audience, a group of fans and already proficient users of Klingon language decided to translate Shakespeare into Klingon, by starting with *Hamlet* in 1996. This means four years after Klingons have started to speak their alien language on stage and the publication of Klingon grammar (Okrand 1992). Thus, even if it has started from fiction, Klingon has once again moved outside the stage and into the real world: the Klingon translation has had at least two re-prints, various forum discussions and even on stage representations.

The Klingon Hamlet is, however, not a real translation from English to Klingon, but an adaptation. By carrying on Gorkon's joke on Klingon being the original language of Shakespeare, the whole play was adapted to settle within a Klingon cultural and historical framework, starting with the name of the places and the cultural references. Therefore, Hamlet is not a prince of Denmark anymore, but of Klingon native planet *Qo'noS* (Kronos). The other countries of the tragedy were adapted as the other popular cultures of the Star Trek franchise: Germany is *vulqan* (Vulcan), France is *romuluS* (Romulus), England is *tera'* (Earth) and Norway is represented by the house of *DuraS*. Similarly, the names of deity and heroes that appeared in Shakesperian tragedy were culturally adapted to represented concepts and notions of Klingon mythology.

A different strategy was applied for characters' names. Table 1 compares the characters' personal names in the original Shakespearian texts and in its Klingon adaptation, by preserving the listing order in the Klingon 1996 edition.

<i>English</i>	<i>Klingon</i>
Hamlet	Hamlet
Claudius	tlhaw'Diyus
Polonius	polonyuS / Polonyush
Horatio	Horey'So
Laertes	LayerteS
Voltimand	voltImaD
Cornelius	qornelyuS
Rosencrantz	roSenQatlh
Guildestern	ghIlDeSten
Osric	oSrIq
Marcellus	marSe'luS
Francisco	veranchISqo
Bernardo	bernarDo
Reynaldo	reynalDo
Fortinbras	vortIbraS
Ophelia	ovelya / Ofelea
Gertrude	ghertlhuD

Table 1. *Hamlet* characters' names in English and Klingon.



Several significant patterns could be highlighted. The main translation strategy is represented by retention, starting with the main character's name Hamlet. The adaptation to Klingon orthography is generally minimal: for instance, the two names Bernardo and Reynaldo are identical in Klingon but with a capital <D>, which represent the realization of [d] as an alveolar retroflex [ɖ]. All personal names do not start with a capital letter, since this was not a graphemic opposition in Klingon. Orthographic variation in characters' name is minimal, and only the names of Polonius and Ophelia show some inconsistencies throughout the text. Indeed, the name Polonius is either transliterated as *polonyuS* or *polonyush*: the grapheme <y> represents Klingon [ɿ], but the problem is the graphic representation of English alveolar fricative /s/, a sound absent in Klingon phonology. The use of the grapheme <S> and later on the bigram <sh> denote an adaptation of the alveolar voiceless fricative /s/: in Klingon phonology the alveolar fricatives are not attested, but there is a post-alveolar sound, which is described by Okrand (1992: 15) as having a slight retroflex articulation.

Labiodental fricatives are also problematic due to the lack of the voiceless /f/ in Klingon phonology. Thus, the name Ophelia is differently adapted as *ovelya* or *Ofelea*: the second adaptation preserved more the original name, whereas the use of /v/ is an adaptation to Klingon phonology. Indeed, Klingon lacks voiceless labiodental fricative /f/ so it tends to substitute this sound with its voiced counterpart /v/: the variant *ovelya* is, indeed, the most widespread in the text, whereas *Ofelea*, with first capital letter, appears only in the introductory remarks of the 2000 Penguin edition (Shoulson et al. 2000: xvi). The same change of /f/ into /v/ and of the alveolar voiceless fricative /s/ into the post-alveolar /ʃ/ also appears for the name Francisco realized as *veranchISqo*.

Additionally, certain archaic English phonological features, such as the post-alveolar affricate [tʃ] found in Early Modern English and represented by <ch>, are deliberately preserved in Klingon transliterations. This effort underscores an attempt to maintain a historical phonetic resonance within the adaptations.

The treatment of rhotic clusters highlights the challenges posed by Klingon phonological constraints. It is preliminary necessary to consider the status of rhotic sounds in the English spoken by Shakespeare. Indeed, the vast majority of the scholars agrees with the fact that in Early Modern English of Shakesperian times, rhotic were still preserved, even if there was a tendency towards their disappearance at word-end as highlighted by some misspellings or orthographic variants of the texts. As Minkova (2013), among many others, pointed out, the rhotic following a stressed vowel tended to be weakened during this period, thus producing something similar to schwa and/or causing compensatory lengthening of the vowel. However, according to Bergs & Brinton (2012), this process could be dated between the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, not before. Therefore, when writing the Hamlet in 1600-1601, it was very plausible that this process was starting to spread in the English spoken and heard by Shakespeare. Furthermore, the rhotic was mainly preserved during this period in the West Country, thus including Scotland, whereas in the Southern areas of England the rhotic was starting to be cancelled when preceded by a consonant. This would have given rise to the opposition between rhotic and non-rhotic area in Modern English, starting from the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Lutz 1994).

In the Klingon Hamlet, rhotics are omitted entirely in some instances, such as in Rosencrantz becoming *roSenQatlh*, while in others, they are preserved as in Fortinbras becoming *vortIbraS*. Occasionally, vowel epenthesis separates the rhotic cluster, as in the aforementioned Francisco becoming *veranchISqo*. The translational choice for the name Gertrude, however, reflects a more complex adaptation: the translation as *ghertIthuD* shows how the /tr/ cluster is transformed into an

alveolar lateral affricate, phonologically represented as /tʎ/ (see Meluzzi 2022), showcasing an inventive solution for sequences that defy Klingon phonotactics. This example will be considered once more in the discussion section.

Klingon lacks consonant clusters involving a rhotic preceded by an obstruent, which likely influenced decisions such as the adoption of vowel epenthesis or consonant substitution. For instance, the transformation of *Rosencrantz* into *roSenQatlh* mirrors the phonetic realization of the /kr/ cluster as a uvular affricate, aligning with the structural rules of Klingon phonology. Similarly, the adaptation of *Gertrude* to *ghertlhuD* reflects the impossibility of a /tr/ tautosyllabic cluster in Klingon and underscores a creative compromise that maintains some phonetic similarity to the original. A look at Klingon dictionary (the original version of 1992 and the integrated one in 1997), only very few names contains a sequence of a consonant followed by a rhotic, the first consonant mainly being a glottal stop /ʔ/, graphically represented by the apostrophe <'>. So we have, for instance, *na'ran* “type of fruit” or *qivo'rIt* “a class of space vessel”: however, these cases could not be representative of a proper phonological cluster since the glottal stop and the rhotic are heterosyllabic in nature. Indeed, the glottal stop as a lengthening effect on the preceding vowel of a word or of a syllable (Okrand 1992: 16).

Conversely, in *boqrat* “type of animal / bokrat”, it is possible to argue that the two consonants pertains to two different syllables. This is confirmed also by the pronunciation reported on Klingon wiki, in which it is pronounced as [bok.'rat] and transcribed as bok-rat. The transcription with the hyphen originally appears in an episode in *Deep Space Nine* series when it is served a stewed bok-rat liver. This has led to the interpretation of a compound word containing the name “rat” to give a visual representation to the audience of the kind of animal the characters were eating.

The only case left of a consonant cluster with an occlusive followed by a rhotic is represented by the name *vIghro'* “cat”. This name appears only in the 1997 extended dictionary, and even in this case the Klingon wiki signals to pronounce it as two separated syllables [viɣh.'roʔ].

So, in Klingon grammar and extended dictionary there are no cases of consonant clusters involving a Consonant followed by a rhotic. This fact is confirmed if we look at Klingon onomastics. The long list of Klingon names in Okrand (1997: 197) show only one example of the occlusive-rhotic sequence in the personal name *'atrom*, transliterated in English as *A'trom*, but pronounced again as heterosyllabic [ʔatʰ.'rom]. The other instance is *ghawran* “Gowron”, which involves a semi-consonant and it is once again heterosyllabic [ɣaʊ̯.'ran].

In line with the previous example, the name of general *Qugh* is better known in English translation as *Kruge*. Here we can clearly find a correspondence between the English cluster /kr/ correspond to Klingon uvular affricate /qɣ/, graphically transcribed as <Q>. Since *Kruge* was the name of the Klingon commander of the third movie of *Star Trek* (*The Search of Spock*, 1984), when Klingon language was basically created, it is very possible that the translator had this name in mind when he turned the cluster /kr/ of the name *Rosencratz* into a / qɣ / of *roSenQatlh*.

The historical phonology of Early Modern English provides limited insight into these translational choices: as discussed before, while rhotics were likely pronounced during Shakespeare's time, their weakening or omission was context-dependent and not consistent with the patterns observed in the Klingon adaptation. The epenthetic and substitutional strategies evident in these translations seem more influenced by the constructed phonology of Klingon than by any attempt to replicate Early Modern English pronunciation. The broader context of Klingon onomastics further supports this interpretation. The absence of native consonant-rhotic clusters in Klingon's lexicon suggests that the translational approach prioritizes adaptation over direct phonetic mirroring. Even in cases like *Kruge* translated as *Qugh*, the adaptation serves both linguistic coherence and cultural assimilation. Such precedent reinforces the deliberate nature of the strategies applied to the rhotic clusters in *Hamlet*.



It remains to fully explain the last case, that is Gertrude becoming *ghertlhuD*. Here the first rhotic is maintained, but in the Klingon dictionary there are many cases of a rhotic followed by another consonant, so this doesn't seem to be problematic for Klingon phonology. The problem is why the cluster /tr/ has been translated as an alveolar lateral affricate. It is possible that various linguistic considerations have played a role: firstly, the cluster /tr/ must be tautosyllabic and this is not acceptable in Klingon phonology, as previously demonstrated; second, a change from a rhotic to a lateral is quite common in world's (real) languages, since they are both sonorants and sharing similar articulatory patterns (see Proctor 2011). From a sociolinguistic perspective, translators had to balance between two opposite forces: from one side, the characters' name needed to remain recognizable to the general audience, but from the other side, it was necessary to immediately clarify that characters were Klingon, thus having Klingon names. The name *ghertlhuD*, thus, includes the graphemic sequence <tlh> which represents the typical Klingon lateral alveolar affricate /tɬ/, which is not only marked in world's languages but also characteristic of Klingon phonology, as in Meluzzi (2022). Thus, it could be said that the transliteration of *Gertrude* in *ghertlhuD* better represent the necessity of adapting personal names into a language different phonology, while maintaining the recognizable characteristics of the original name.

#### 4. Discussion and conclusion

In Klingon Hamlet the adaptation is not only in the places of the tragedy, but also in the names of the characters with a constant balance between two opposite forces:

- 1) adapting the names to Klingon phonological system;
- 2) maintaining a similarity with the original characters' names.

This last point was crucial if we think that this adaptation was written not to be read aloud (although we've had examples) but to be read or consulted by fans: the reader should thus immediately recognize the character who was talking without having to consult every time the characters' list. So, the name had to maintain a similarity in the graphic form: the fact that the translated names tend to maintain the same number of syllables, the same nuclear vowels, and the same consonant quality at least at the beginning and at the end of the word could be considered as points in confirmation of this statement. Only as a second step the name could be to Klingon phonology, also to give to the name an element of "alienness" (which in some cases, like *ghertlhuD*, is more evident than in other like *bernardO*).

Ultimately, the translation of proper names in the Klingon adaptation of Hamlet illustrates a careful balance between linguistic integrity and reader accessibility. This delicate equilibrium reflects the functional nature of the adaptation, catering to a fan audience where familiarity and readability are paramount. In this context, the translation becomes more than a linguistic exercise; it emerges as an imaginative act of cultural and phonological mediation, honoring both the source material and the constraints of an alien tongue.

The translation of literary classics into constructed languages, particularly artificial languages (ArtLangs) like Klingon, serves as a compelling exercise that tests the boundaries of these languages while introducing novel challenges from both linguistic and cultural perspectives. As already argued by Hietaranta (2022), this translation process also highlights the adaptability of ArtLangs to convey complex cultural and linguistic nuances, showcasing their potential to mediate between fictional constructs and real-world linguistic phenomena.

A crucial dimension of this translation effort is the connection between the translators and the intended audience of these works. In the case of Klingon, the audience extends beyond the estimated 30 to 50 fluent speakers, encompassing a broader community of fans and enthusiasts. The adaptation of onomastics in *Hamlet* into Klingon phonology exemplifies this bridge between

the familiar and the alien, a dynamic that fosters both recognition and estrangement. As Kzazimierczak (2010: 36) observes, such adaptations engage in “processes of cultural re-appropriation as enacted in and through language,” contributing to broader debates on cultural and linguistic politics.

The Klingon translation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* underscores the idea that every translation is, in essence, a pseudo-translation. This paradoxical notion reinforces the intricate relationship between language and culture, which is expressed through a process of re-appropriation and adaptation. These adaptations are not confined to linguistic elements but extend to cultural references and onomastic strategies, thereby enriching the translated work’s interpretive layers.

In conclusion, the translation of *Hamlet* into Klingon transcends the realm of linguistic curiosity. It represents a meaningful and insightful endeavor that enhances our understanding of the interplay between language, culture, and practical considerations in the context of constructed languages. This exploration underscores the dynamic role of ConLangs as tools for cultural expression and scholarly inquiry, illustrating how fiction and reality intersect in the evolution and application of these languages. By examining such translations, we gain a deeper appreciation of the transformative power of language in mediating cultural narratives and linguistic innovation.

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