



## Toolkit:

# MLIL Support for New Americans Using Internet Resources and the Vermont Online Library

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## Introduction

Internet resources and the Vermont Online Library (VOL) can support information seeking in different languages and at various levels of print literacy in English and other languages. Librarians – even librarians who only know English – can assist multilingual patrons who are using the internet in other languages including New Americans such as immigrants and refugees. Through free multilingual options in the VOL and the internet, public librarians in Vermont can increase digital access for patrons with language backgrounds including Arabic, Chinese, French, Hindi, Nepali, Pashto, Spanish, Swahili, Thai, Ukrainian, Urdu, Vietnamese, and many others.

Multilingual Information Literacy (MLIL) is a subset of information literacy. As Nzomo et al. explain, a person with MLIL is “someone who is able to find, read, evaluate, and use information regardless of what language it is written in” (2021, p. 914). Nzomo and her co-authors believe that MLIL is “an essential skill for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” In addition to supporting multilingual internet access with MLIL techniques, librarians can also facilitate comprehension of English-language digital content.

Machine translation and other multilingual internet tools are incredibly powerful even if the full translation options and quality are uneven across languages (Aiken, 2019; Google, n.d.). MLIL is relevant for patrons using public desktop computers as well as their own personal technology including smartphones, Chromebooks, tablets, and desktops, if they have them. Both desktop and app technology options will be discussed in this toolkit. For a quick introduction to the incredible communication possibilities through MLIL, please watch these two videos: a [two-minute introduction](#) to Google Translate’s functions on a smartphone (Common Sense, 2020) and a five-minute [“Beginner’s Guide”](#) that demonstrates Google Translate’s desktop capability (Howfinity, 2019). If you are unfamiliar with Google Translate, these videos may seem futuristic (see Fig. 1).

Public librarians can harness the power of MLIL to support patrons of multiple language backgrounds. It may be easiest to begin with a real example of an English-speaking patron’s request for a book of recipes in Italian. Because the library collection did not have such a specialized resource, the librarian turned to the internet. A simple search for “Italian recipes” would not retrieve the desired results. Through MLIL options online, the librarian was able to use Italian – a language she didn’t know -- to assist this patron in finding recipes in the Italian language. First, she checked Google Translate to find the word for “recipe” (*ricette*). This term was pasted into Google’s search engine and returned some good results. The librarian thought that a more customized search of regional resources was a better option: Google.it, or Google in Italy, was a jackpot (see Fig. 2). Google.it provided autocomplete suggestions of search terms.

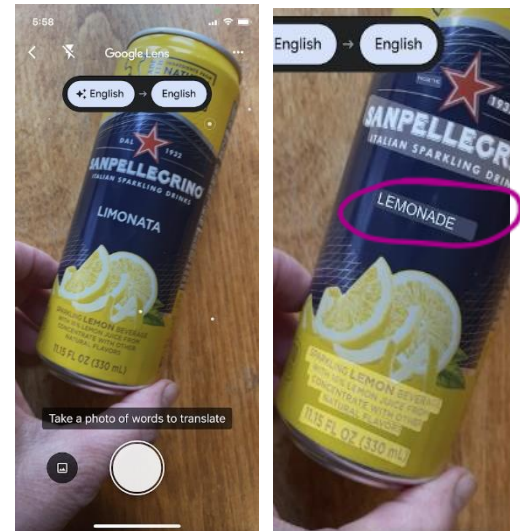


Figure 1. Before and after screenshots of Google Lens (the camera function) in Google Translate as an app on a smartphone. On the left is a can of “limonata” as it appeared prior to translation. On the right, Google Translate has superimposed the English translation “lemonade” on the image of the can on the smartphone screen (see the purple circle).

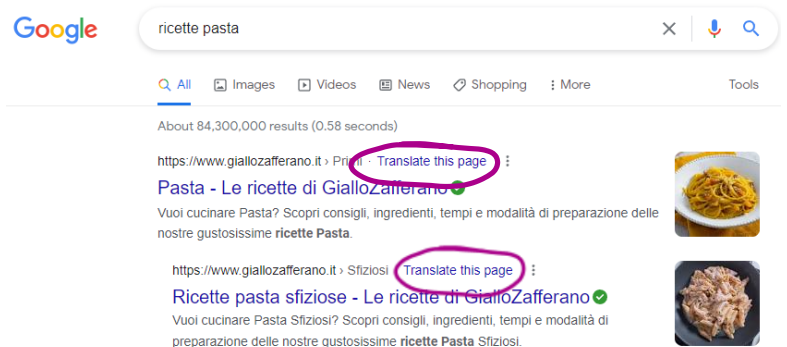


Figure 2. Search results for a translated concept in Google.it.

The patron selected “ricette pasta” and then clicked the options to translate individual search results into English to read them more carefully (see the purple circles). These steps only took moments, and the patron was satisfied with the results and the search technique.

The most useful application of MLIL is with multilingual patrons, particularly New Americans. Part 1 of this Toolkit will present technology adjustments that facilitate internet access and comprehension. In Part 2, we will examine the suite of products in the Vermont Online Library for customization into different languages as well as support for English learning. Note: Digital services constantly evolve; the following technology descriptions are current as of April 2022. Resources in this Toolkit focus primarily on Google products.

### 1.1 Supporting New Americans’ Internet Use

Individual New Americans will have recreational, research, and educational needs just like other patrons. New Americans may find the internet to be a useful tool for accessing English language exposure, English language learning, digital literacy, career preparation, citizenship, legal information, heritage language support, world news, financial tasks, health, employment, shopping, media, and communications. Most New Americans are not newly arrived, and many New Americans possess digital and literacy skills to independently locate resources through the web. For [the 30%](#) or so (Migration Policy, 2019) of Vermont New Americans who speak English less than “very well,” creative multilingual internet searching and easy technology tweaks will assist librarians in making internet and VOL resources more understandable.

Many comprehension-assistive adjustments depend on print literacy and computer-generated machine translation. Be mindful that New Americans vary in their digital and print literacy skills in any of their languages, plus machine translations will vary in quality and availability. If assisting in a reference inquiry with a New American patron, make sure results are understandable, which is part of the evaluation of sources that is encouraged by the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) of the American Library Association (ALA) ([RUSA, 2013](#)). If it is not possible to answer a New American’s reference question, consider reaching out to partner organizations who can provide assistance. The [New Americans Library Project](#) (2018) of the ALA offers terrific advice on community partnerships.

New American patrons develop amazing techniques in adapting their languages, literacies, and communication styles to technology. Following the lead of tech-savvy New Americans can teach librarians a thing or two about MLIL! New Americans patrons who are more hesitant with technology may be interested in suggestions (below). These techniques can also support English-speaking patrons in learning languages and about culture.

### 1.2 Browser, Website, and Video Adjustments

Simple adjustments can increase comprehension for patrons who are more comfortable with other languages or are learning English and other languages. Figure 3, at right, illustrates the language commands in Chrome’s settings menu.

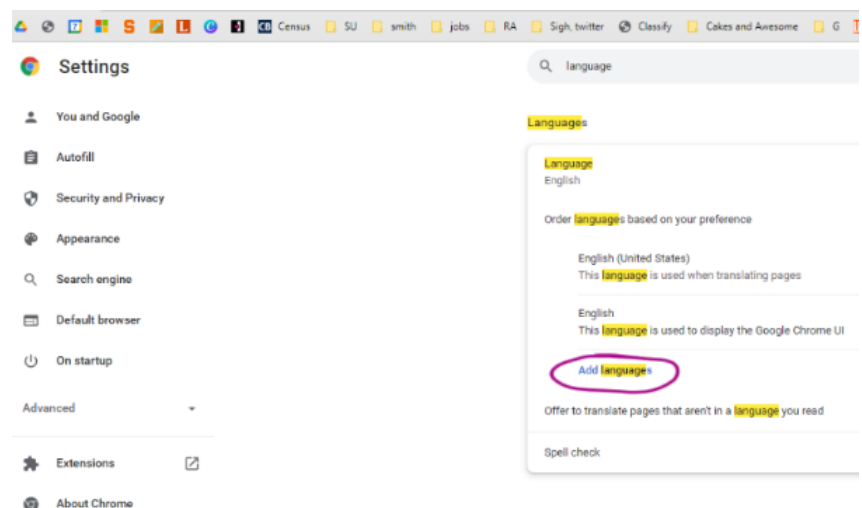


Figure 3. Screen capture of the language setting options in the Chrome web browser set to English defaults. There are about 140 languages and regional dialects available from the “add languages” dropdown menu (see purple circle).

**Text adjustments to improve multilingual access:**

1. **Web browser default language settings:** The default language can be changed in a web browser. Browsers like Chrome can operate in 140 languages and regional dialects from Amharic to Zulu. Google Chrome Help (2022) explains how the browser default language can be [easily changed in settings](#) for the web browser on a desktop, Android phone, or iPhone and iPad. Alternatively, just visit the Settings menu, and search for “language” to find the browser language controls. Google Translate can also be set to appear [as a popup](#) in the browser (Chrome Web Store, n.d.).
2. **Smartphone or tablet language settings:** It is also possible to change the language settings in a smartphone, which will alter the User Interface (UI), so that the language of the phone controls are customized to the user’s preferred language. Language setting directions are available for the different phone brands through an easy web search.
3. **Keyboard options:** Many languages have characters that do not appear on standard US keyboards. Here are four easy techniques to increase communication options.
  - **Web browser input extension:** In Chrome, there is a free extension that can be added to the browser called Google Input Tools that permits multilingual typographic input including, for example, other alphabets and accents. Click [here](#) to see a fascinating two-minute video about Google Input Tools for various languages (Chrome Web Store, n.d.). Google Input Tools currently offers multiple input styles such as virtual keyboards and transliteration for over 70 languages and dialects. Other browsers likely have ways to customize language preferences.
  - **Transliteration** programs will map the letters on a US standard keyboard to sounds in languages that are written in different characters such as Hindi or Arabic. Google Input Tools demonstrates transliteration in [this brief video](#) (n.d.).
  - **Virtual keyboards on websites:** There are websites that provide the user with virtual keyboards. For example, [Branah.com](#) has 100 keyboard options. Virtual keyboards facilitate typing in various languages, and the text can be copied/pasted into a document or search engine.
  - **Spoken options:** If print literacy is not an option, see the suggestions below in Speaking to Search or Write.
4. **UI translation:** The UI of a website can also be translated (see Fig. 4 for more information). Typically, the UI translation option appears at the top right of a webpage. Also, the Chrome browser may offer to translate a webpage depending on the language settings in the browser.
5. **Text size:** The size of the text on screen can be increased for easier reading.

**Speaking to search or write:** Dictation, speech-to-text, and voice assistants are also options especially for nonreaders. From a smartphone or with a microphone enabled, patrons can speak to search through Voice Search in Google in different languages. Apple Support (2022) explains how multilingual patrons can also [dictate](#) into their phones for texting or email. It’s also possible to use voice assistants like [Siri](#) in 21 languages and [Alexa](#) in eight languages (Apple Support, 2022; Ipervox, 2021).

### 1.3 Translation Assistance from Any Website or Device

It seems that most of the machine translation available through the internet relies on Google Translate tools embedded into websites. Other technology companies such as Amazon and Microsoft also have machine translation options. Though machine translation has improved dramatically in recent years, sophisticated aspects of language are not always translated well. Google Translate is more accurate (Aiken, 2019) or “better” in some languages than others. Remember the missing human element in machine translations and seek out assistance through partner organizations when necessary.

**Google Translate:** Google Translate isn't perfect, but it's very, very good in some languages and adequate to communicate concrete ideas in other languages. [Burgess \(2021\)](#) provides a recent overview of Google Translate options.

Depending on the device, it's possible for Google Translate to take input from finger drawing, typing, speaking, photos, dictation/transcription, and live images. [Here](#) is the main link to Google Translate that provides more information about these input possibilities. [This page](#) from Google Translate focuses on the capability of the app.

- Google Translate has many tools that are available through a webpage, an app, and embedded into Chrome as an extension (see section 1.2).
- From a smartphone, the Google Translate app can listen to speech and transcribe, scan text live through the camera and translate, and read aloud sections of translated speech.
- The Google app is incredible. Its camera "lens" option can assist with translating (see Fig. 1).

**Machine Translation in YouTube videos:** [YouTube videos will provide machine translation of closed-captions](#) into different languages (Flipped Classroom Tutorials, 2021). Thus, it is possible to watch a video of people speaking in English and read captions in Arabic or about 140 other languages.

**Microsoft Word:** In Microsoft Word, just right click to translate a blocked section of text into a tremendous number of languages.

**User-Interface (UI) translation:** Many websites present language options for the UI, which is typically an option in a translate icon at the top of the page. Google Chrome may offer to translate a website depending on the browser's default language.

As an example of UI translation, see Figure 4, below, for the UI translation of a familiar website for librarians, WorldCat, into Thai. WorldCat offers 13 options for translating its UI that are listed at the bottom of the web page. In Figure 4, the user is searching for material about introductory Spanish. The standard parts of the website are presented in Thai, such as the "search" bar (see the purple circle).

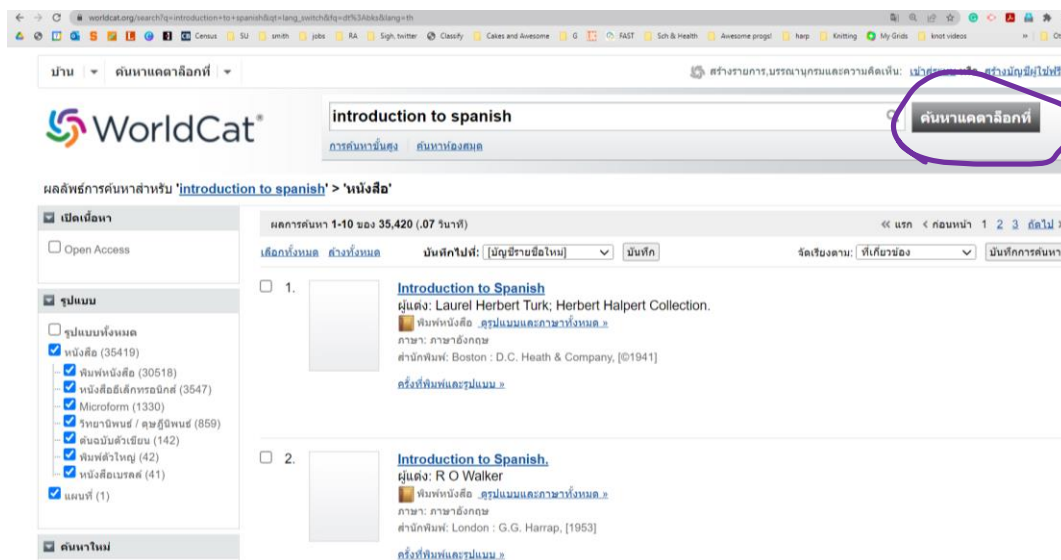


Figure 4. The website WorldCat with its UI translated into Thai.

## 1.4 Technology and Reference Services with MLIL Options

In *American Libraries* magazine, Sallyann Price recommends that librarians “embrace the role of...digital navigator, a dedicated one-on-one consultant and caseworker helping patrons with digital skills and devices” (2022). Librarians who are playing the digital navigator role with New American patrons can suggest and demonstrate MLIL techniques. Technology and reference services with MLIL is perhaps more collaborative than patron interactions in a shared language. Through respecting New American patrons’ preferences, librarians encourage trust and agency in information seeking. During the Listening/Inquiry stage that is recommended by RUSA (2013), the librarian can delicately confirm the patron’s preferences in languages and search techniques. One option is to conduct a search in English and translate results if the patron is interested. Also, the librarian can offer to search in a regional database or with search terms in other languages.

### MLIL search tips:

- **Google as a search engine can retrieve information across languages.** It isn’t necessary to translate anything into English in order to search in Google. Webpages can be automatically translated into many languages within the browser and some search engines.
- **Simple search terms may yield the best results.** Even though a librarian may not know the patron’s language, it may be possible to assist the patron in creating effective search terms.
- **Check translations:** Because the quality of machine translation varies, patrons who know multiple languages may find it useful to view translations in different languages.
- **Remind patrons about the limitations of machine translation.**

### Searching by Geographic Region

In addition to translating websites that are in English and intended for users in the United States, it’s also possible to locate more regional information. By working with Google Translate and/or a search engine specific to a certain country, a librarian may be able to locate sources that were originally written in languages that a New American patron is more familiar with than English.

- [Similarweb](#) (n.d.) has a dropdown menu of 57 countries and topics of interest. A user who is interested in learning about music (or hundreds of other topics) in Bulgaria can use Similarweb to find specific sites in this country about music. Similarweb encourages users to create a free trial account to see complete lists, but much information is available before the paywall is activated.
- The Google search engine is available with a regional focus. [GenealogyInTime](#) Magazine has a list of 192 links to Google search engines for specific countries (2018).
- Country codes for internet searches can enhance results. Northern Essex Community College has a [LibGuide](#) (2021) that offers additional information about this search technique along with an updated list of internet country codes.
- As in the example of locating recipes in Italian, it is easy to combine simple machine translation with a web search. Insert a search term into Google Translate and then copy and paste the translated version into the web browser.



## 1.5 Enhancing English Comprehension and Communication

Librarians can also support New American patrons if they are struggling to understand English-language resources.

**Video adjustments:** Listening to rapid English can be challenging, and there are several ways increase comprehension. Patrons can try one of the adjustments below or use several simultaneously.

- Closed captions in English can be turned on
- Through YouTube, closed captions *in other languages* can be turned on
- The speed of a video can be adjusted slower or faster
- Videos can be paused, and sections can be repeated.

**Using Multiple Modes:** Consider how much easier it is to understand a concept when it is accompanied by a photo or other image. Comprehension can be enhanced by combining resources in different languages and modalities.

- A patron can read in both English and a translation in another language. This supports English learning and comprehension.
- Reading comprehension is usually better through print on paper. Printouts can be made in English, in other languages via machine translation, or from resources on the same topic in other languages.
- Users can watch a video and read an English-language or translated version of a print resource.

**English definitions:** A definition is often as easy to access as a right click on a word. However, a definition can be more challenging to understand than the word itself! In some situations, it's a good idea to consult a dictionary written specifically for English learners. The best online dictionary for this purpose is the [Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English](#) (n.d.).

**Typing and keyboarding:** New Americans and multilingual patrons who are using the internet through a desktop computer may be interested in developing their comfort with the US standard keyboard. A free online basic typing class is available through Universal Class (see section 2.2). Another free online option is [TypingClub](#), which offers UI translation into 21 languages in addition to translated closed captions for its instructional videos.

## 2.1 Specific Resources in the Vermont Online Library

Vermont Online Library resources consist of three main products: Gale databases, EBSCO Learning Express, and Universal Class. All three are accessible through a web browser. Also, Gale resources are available as an app called the Cengage Learning Access My Library. EBSCO Learning Express Library resources are available through the EBSCO Learning Express app (see Fig. 5).



Figure 5. Icons for apps in the Vermont Online Library

The Vermont Department of Libraries has prepared several informative resources about the VOL:

- Vermont Online Library – for library staff: [https://libraries.vermont.gov/online\\_library/vol](https://libraries.vermont.gov/online_library/vol)
- Learning Express – for library staff: [https://libraries.vermont.gov/online\\_library/LearningExpress](https://libraries.vermont.gov/online_library/LearningExpress)
- Universal Class – for library staff: [https://libraries.vermont.gov/online\\_library/classes](https://libraries.vermont.gov/online_library/classes)
- A FAQ -- for patrons: <https://vtonlinelib.org/faq.php>



## 2.2 Universal Class

Universal Class can be reached with a web browser [at this link](#), and some Vermont libraries post a direct link through their websites. Many of the 500 courses offered by Universal Class provide terrific English exposure to adults who are learning English, such as courses about hobbies like photography, cooking, or crafting, and interests as diverse as marine biology and wellness. Access to Universal Class is not available through an app. On Universal Class, you can find...

- ESL classes primarily focused on grammar, US citizenship, American history and government
- Courses that develop listening skills, assertiveness, conversation skills, and writing
- Courses about basic digital skills: typing, Microsoft Word and other Office products, Google products, computer literacy at several levels

When playing a video in Universal Class, several adjustments can increase comprehension.

- Closed captions in English can be turned on.
- The speed of the video can be adjusted slower or faster.
- Videos can be paused and sections can be repeated.
- Users can learn through exposure to information in multiple modalities, for example by watching both a video and reading an English-language or translated version of an article.

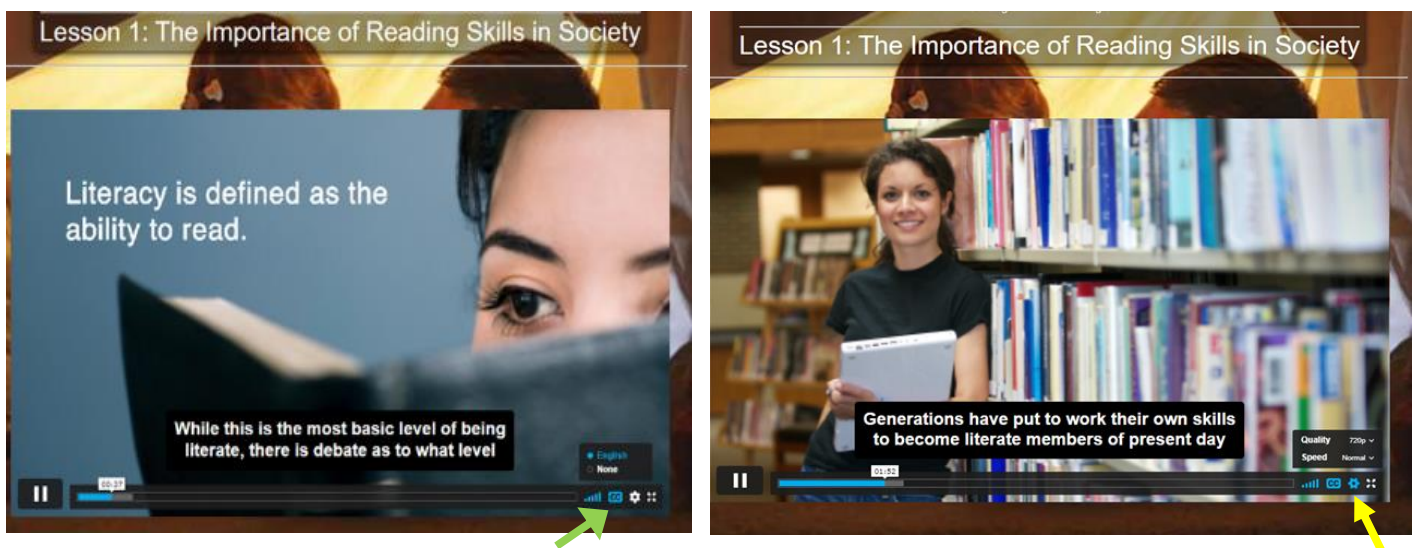


Figure 6. Screen captures of a video in Universal Class. The arrows identify closed captions (CC) and the settings for video speed.

Above left in Figure 6, a video in Universal Class is playing with closed captions. Hover the cursor over the video window to make the settings options appear. The caption settings are in the lower, right-hand side of the window marked with a CC (see the green arrow). In the image on the right, the audio speed options are expanded. These commands are available in the wheel to the right of the caption options (see the yellow arrow).

## 2.3 EBSCO Learning Express Library

This resource (linked [here](#)) is more academic and career focused with articles, career tools, eBooks, and practice tests. Several offerings might interest New Americans including:

- Classes in Spanish (*Recursos para Hispanohablantes*).
- TOEFL iBT test preparation in reading, listening, and writing.
- GED test preparation in English and Spanish.
- Resources connected to the process of becoming a citizen and practice for the citizenship test.

The EBSCO Learning Express Library is available through a web browser or as an app.

## 2.4 Gale Databases

The [Vermont Online Library](#) includes fifty searchable Gale databases on a wide range of topics from car repair to news, world history, health and fitness, and Peterson’s Career Prep. With the digital resources of the Vermont Online Library, there are many ways that New Americans can customize their reading or viewing to enhance comprehension. Usually this just involves one click or tap! Gale Databases are available through an app called Cengage Learning Access My Library.

Gale databases in the Vermont Online Library have potential to serve three patron needs:

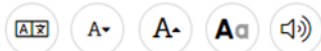
- **Reference inquiries that require specific answers** – for example a health issue -- may be available at different reading levels depending on the database selected and can be machine translated into multiple languages. If the patron’s language is available, explain that the translation is created by a machine and will not be perfect.
- **English exposure** and reading at different levels is available through the databases. Gale databases have special features that would support beginning English students or new English readers. The databases that are intended for school children are pictorial, which is helpful in the early stages of English language learning. The content is appropriate for children, but easy concepts support developing language and literacy for adults as well.
- **Information in multiple modalities:** Gale databases offer search results in text and video. In addition, text-to-speech automated read aloud provides audio support for reading comprehension.

Some Gale databases are best for university or high school research. Gale’s News, Magazines, and Middle School databases would be appropriate for intermediate readers in English.

Text adjustments:

- **Text to speech technology** can read Gale database articles aloud. The section being read will be highlighted. The speed of the reader can be customized by the patron.
- **Machine translation** into 45 languages<sup>1</sup> with just a click.
- **The User Interface (UI) can also be translated.** This control is at the top right (“select interface language”) with a drop-down menu.
- **The size of the text can be manipulated** with the zoom controls or control/command +.

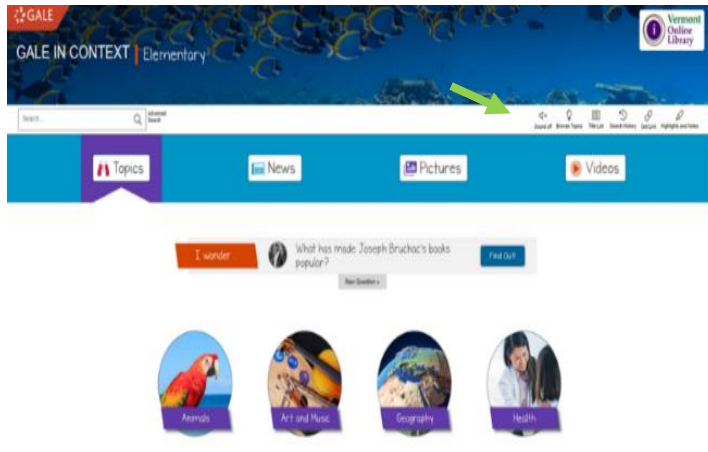
These are the language control buttons for the Gale databases in the Vermont Online Library.



From left to right, the functions are *translate*, *decrease font size*, *increase font size*, *adjust typeface display* (adding colors or changing the font), and *read aloud*. In a web browser display, these buttons typically appear on the left side of the screen.

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<sup>1</sup> The individual Gale databases vary with their translation options. These languages are available on some of the databases: Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Malay, Bengali, Bulgarian, Chinese (Simplified), Chinese (Traditional), Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Haitian Creole, Hebrew, Hindi, Icelandic, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Latvian, Nepali, Norwegian, Pashto, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Swahili, Swedish, Thai, Turkish, Ukrainian, Urdu, and Vietnamese.



**Gale Elementary and Gale Middle School** have leveled readings and translation options for numerous languages. Read aloud and translate are available on the app as well. In Gale Elementary, the read aloud option is especially useful in the web browser version. Click the “sound” button at the top right (see arrow in Fig. 7), adjust the volume, and move the cursor. Voice-to-speech technology will read aloud following the cursor in the web browser and the app (see Fig. 13).

Figure 7. To access the screen reader in Gale Elementary, click the “sound” button, identified with a green arrow above.

Gale Middle School offers multiple themed units connected to US holidays and culture, for example, Thanksgiving.



Figure 8. Screen capture of a resource from Gale Middle School.

To reach the translation and audio options, click the blue “Read More” box (see the green arrow in Fig. 8). Also, notice that there are additional resources including videos (noted with the starburst).

Below in Figure 9, the translation, read aloud, and text features are marked with a star. The UI translation dropdown menu is marked with a smiley.

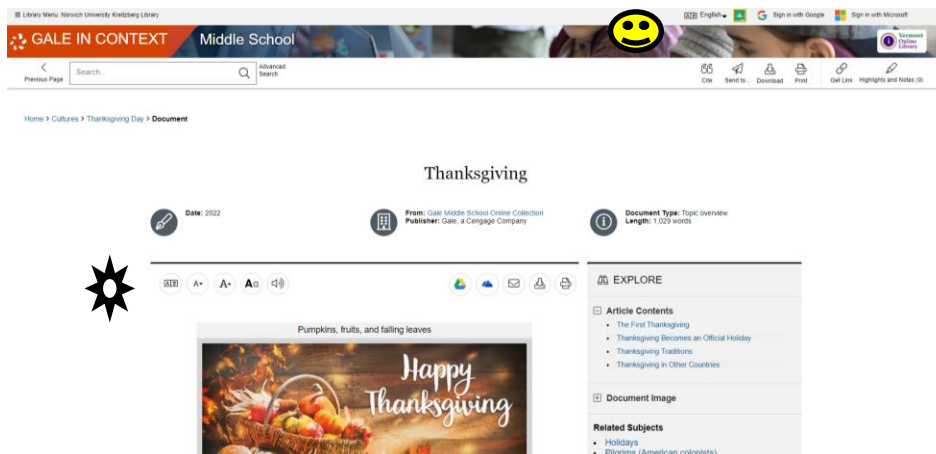


Figure 9. Image of a resource from Gale Middle School identifying the UI translation (see the smiley) and the text language controls (note the starburst).

Below, in Figure 10, see how the article looks when both the UI and article have been translated into Spanish.



Figure 10. This article and the UI have been machine-translated into Spanish.

Below, in Figure 11, the article is translated into Pashto with the UI set to English. Pashto is not presently available for the UI translation.



کې د حاجیانو او ښه عمده توګه د متحده ایالاتو سره تړاو لري، مننه د ملي کلنۍ رخصتۍ ده. په متحده ایالاتو کې، د شکر کولو نود په 1620 اصلي امریکایانو لخوا د مېلېسټیا سره پیل شو. حاجیان مذهبي استوګن وو چې د بریښي حاصلاتو په ستاېنه کې یې مننه پیل کړه.

مننه له هغه وخت راهیسې په متحده ایالاتو کې د کال یو له خورا مهم رخصتو څخه ګرځېدلې. دا د شمالي امریکا او د نړۍ په نورو برخو کې هم لمانځل کېږي. په متحده ایالاتو کې، مننه د کال ترټولو مصروف سفر ورځو څخه دی. دا په پراخه کچه د ګرېسېس رخصتې فصل تیر رسمي پیل هم ګڼل کېږي.

Figure 11. An article in Gale Middle School with a machine translation into Pashto.



Let’s look at one of the video options available about the same topic, Thanksgiving (in Fig. 12). Captions can be controlled in the “CC” box (marked with a smiley). The articles or transcripts that accompany videos also have a translation option.

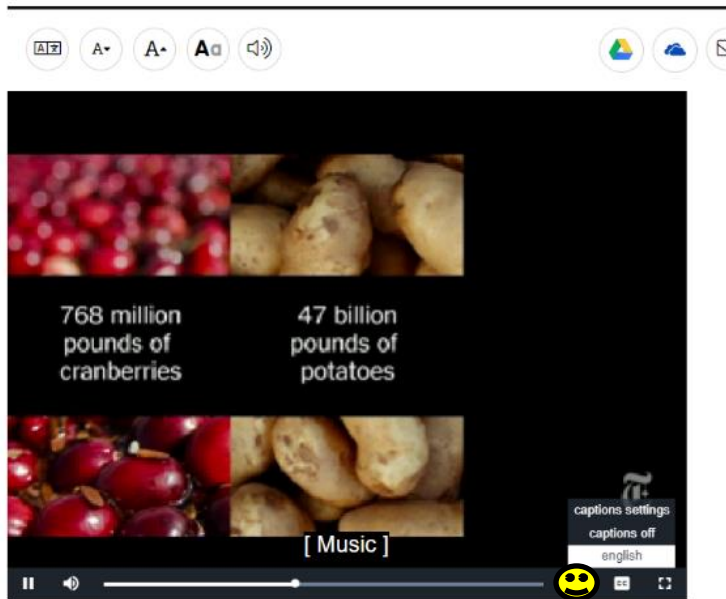


Figure 12. A screenshot demonstrating the captions settings in Gale Middle School.

Finally, the text-to-speech read-aloud and translation options are available in the Gale app, Cengage Access My Library. Below, in Figure 13, see how the Gale Elementary database appears on a phone.

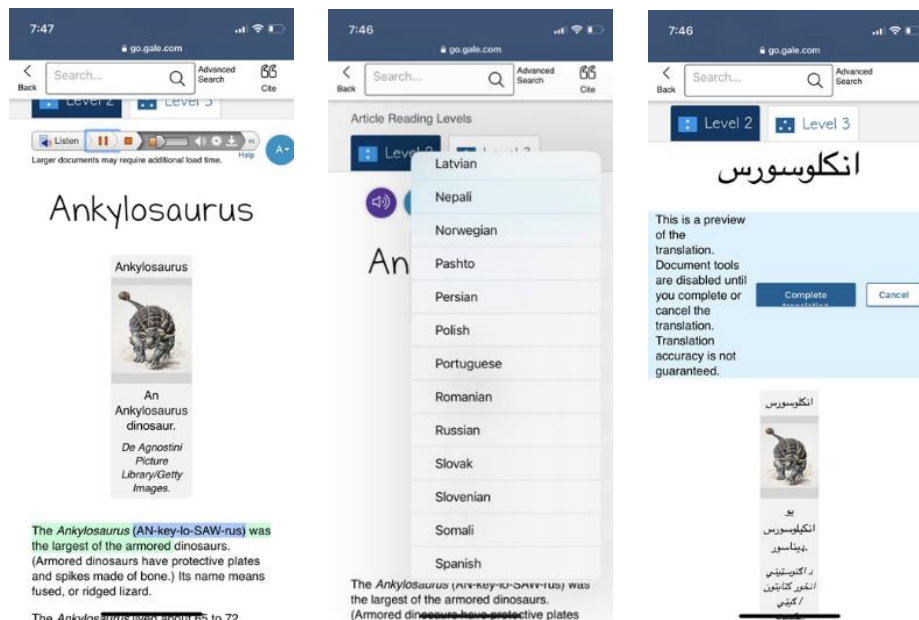


Figure 13 From left to right, an article being read aloud (the highlighted sections follow the screen reader), the dropdown menu of language translation options, and the article translated into Pashto.

## Conclusion

The multilingual world is multimedia— it's WhatsApp and YouTube rather than memorization and a grammar book. From elementary schools to universities, educators have embraced the potential of “multimodality,” which recognizes that print text is not the only way to learn, that important communication occurs in different modes like videos, images, and online social media. Information literacy skills that support multilingualism (MLIL) are terrific tools for librarians and their multilingual patrons in this digital era.

MLIL connects to important trends in teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in subfields known variously as English as a Second Language (ESL), English Language Learning (ELL), and Second Language Writing (SLW). In the past, it was common to hear “English only” mandates from educators who rejected their students’ other languages in the name of more rapid English learning. In fact, access to multiple languages can facilitate learning without obstructing English language acquisition.

Rather than forbid English learners from using their other languages, pedagogies such as Critical Language Awareness (Shapiro, 2022) and translanguaging are encouraging multilingual students in communicating in their various languages. Switching between or among languages, which is called code switching (or code meshing), is a normal aspect of multilingualism and living in a multilingual society. Educators have also become aware of the importance of heritage languages (or home languages). The ALA agrees: RUSA explains that libraries must provide access to education and literacy in heritage languages in addition to materials that support English language learning ([RUSA, 2008](#)).

There has been a sea change in the educational world: instead of labelling developing English skills negatively with the term “limited English proficient” or LEP, we can have an asset focus on the resources that New Americans contribute to our community in cultural heritage, language resources, economic initiative, and global citizenship. Professor Shawna Shapiro of Middlebury College explains that “Now more than ever, educators are eager for instructional strategies that celebrate and build on students’ linguistic resources” (2022). Through MLIL, librarians can do the same: multilingual digital technology enables librarians to meet New American patrons where they are, and to offer useful information literacy techniques and English-language comprehension support.

Public librarians’ positive attitude toward multilingualism and MLIL will increase New American patrons’ access to digital communication and information. MLIL benefits all patrons who are curious about the wider world and are interested in language learning. The technical adjustments and comprehension assistance techniques in this toolkit can be viewed as extensions of the ALA’s dedication to providing multilingual collections, programs, and services.

Above all, public librarians must follow the lead of our New American patrons, ensure that they are comfortable at the library, and support their individual communication, learning, and media preferences. In Vermont, a rural state with New Americans who come from diverse language backgrounds, one of the most valuable and inexpensive ways to serve New Americans is through MLIL, which promotes access to the internet, digital communication, and quality information resources such as the Vermont Online Library.

## References

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