



The Lady doth SPEAK our Portugal

U.PORTO

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“Language most shewes a man;
speake that I may see thee”

Ben Jonson, *Timber*

Her name is Khuloud Kalthoum, a 30-year-old young lady from Syria. To flee the horrors of war in her native country, Khuloud saw in the “Global Platform For Syrian Students” a ticket for survival, one that allowed her to study in Portugal. With a BA in Electrical Engineering from the University of Damascus, Khuloud concluded in the Portuguese city of Porto her masters in the field of Sustainable Energies and is now working as an engineer at a prominent energy company in Portugal (the EDP).

When she arrived in Portugal only four years ago, the foreign language was the first challenge, but never an obstacle. After all, embracing her new home (and its language) was embracing life. She now speaks the language fluently.



"Katharine and Alice", illustration by John Gilbert, *The Works of Shakespeare*, Vol.2, 1867

Katharine: "De foot et de coun! O Seigneur Dieu! ce sont mots de son mauvais, corruptible, gros, et impudique, et non pour les dames d'honneur d'user: je ne voudrais prononcer ces mots devant les seigneurs de France pour tout le monde. Foh! le foot et le coun! Neanmoins, je reciterai une autre fois ma leçon ensemble: de hand, de fingres, de nails, de arm, de elbow, de nick, de sin, de foot, de coun."

William Shakespeare,
Henry V

In her own words:

“Learning Portuguese was key to my integration. Because the linguistic aspect is the first hindrance facing migrants, I decided to start learning the language right away so that I could study and communicate with people.

I know the linguistic aspect is daunting when you arrive in a new country, I felt it myself. So I decided to do my part to help migrants with this problem by launching the platform **SPEAK** in the city of Braga where I now live. This platform brings together immigrants, refugees and locals to teach/learn languages and share each other's cultures, thus mitigating prejudices."

"**SPEAK** contributes to solving the problems arising from the migrants' social exclusion as these exchanges allow people to break barriers and meet new people.

Moving to a different country is never easy, especially when you have to leave your family behind. It was challenging, but I have no regrets: in Portugal I have found a safe and tolerant country and a love for its language and literature. I don't feel like I chose Portugal; I feel that Portugal chose me."

Caliban: "You taught me language; and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language!"

William Shakespeare,
The Tempest



"Caliban's Song", illustration by John Gilbert, *The Works of Shakespeare*, Vol.3, 1867

Khuloud's example and project are a reminder of the vital role that language plays in the matters of human integration. To speak a language is an extremely powerful tool, and it has been understood as such since the beginnings of humanity. From the mythical Tower of Babel to the development of English as the lingua franca, the mastering of a dominant language still remains a highly privileged cultural, political and social device.

William Shakespeare and his contemporaries were aware of this phenomenon as well and, according to Jonathan Hope, they understood how the “use of words and decorum of construction would reveal the speaker's level of education and place in the Early Modern social hierarchy”. The author of *Shakespeare and Language* continues his thesis and states that Shakespeare's characters “rarely comment on accent in our sense of regional accent, but they frequently comment on discourse as revealing a person's origins and status” (Hope, 7).

Characters such as Caliban, from *The Tempest*, and Princess Katharine of France, from *Henry V*, are vibrant examples of this. While Caliban is seen and described as an uncivilized subject, mocked for his lack of sophistication in language and manners, Princess Katharine is portrayed as a young and naïve woman, born into the French court, and inexperienced in the English language. Both serve a part in the creation of conditions for laughter in these two distinct plays when dwelling in the intricacies provided by the foreign language, within which the characters struggle.

For them, the mastering of the language is, such as in Khuloud's case, the first obstacle to overcome in order to understand another country, another culture and, most of all, to integrate in a society other than the one they have previously known. An understanding of the dominant language, or its lack, is then crucial to the individual's social status, and it is the means to achieve social relationships which are vital to the human being.

Katharine: “Your majesty shall mock at me; I cannot speak your England!”

Henry V: “O fair Katharine, if you will love me soundly with your French heart, I will be glad to hear you confess it brokenly with your English tongue.”

William Shakespeare,
Henry V



"King Henry V and Katharine", illustration by H. C. Selous, *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, 1864-68

CONTACT INFORMATION

SPEAK's Website: <https://www.speak.social/en/>

SPEAK's Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/wwwspeaksocial/>

University of Porto: https://sigarra.up.pt/up/pt/web_base.gera_pagina?p_pagina=home

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