

## For Shakespeare's Birthday, a Tribute to Language's Role in Uniting Civilizations

If you're reading this Friday Wrap, then the English language is probably something you have come to understand naturally. No wonder. English is today one of the most taught languages across the globe. But that just partly explains its widespread appeal among many. For current generations of youth especially, exposure to English takes shape early on in childhood, courtesy of the ever-evolving information age. Many of our favorite blockbusters come from Hollywood. Most of the songs that marked our teenage years spoke to our hearts in English. The same goes for the videogames we play in our free time. And if you're a computer science enthusiast, then you know for certain which language those code lines are written with.

UN English Language day takes place every April 23<sup>rd</sup>, commemorating the estimated date of birth of **William Shakespeare**. Eccentric and iconic to the core, Shakespeare left an undeniable legacy on global heritage as a writer, playwright, thinker, poet and philosopher. From *Hamlet* to *Romeo & Juliet* to *Macbeth*, Shakespeare's masterpieces are still referenced in explanation of the many intricacies of human nature: love, war, religion or justice. Even in the midst of his glory, one wonders if Shakespeare imagined that his mother tongue would be used for almost any purpose by demographic groups he barely knew existed...

One cannot possibly overstate the amazing power of today's *lingua franca* in galvanizing the thoughts, imaginations, contributions and aspirations of peoples across the world. Statistics vary in scope and scale, but it is estimated that 1.2 billion people worldwide communicate using English in some professional, social or educational capacity. Of these, no more than 379 million are native speakers: a testament to the far-reaching soft power and attractiveness of English for citizens of all races, ethnicities or religions.

Which is why a celebration of English is also a celebration of any other language that has contributed to bringing diverse civilizations closer and closer with time. Per United Nations tradition, April 23<sup>rd</sup> is thus a date "*to celebrate multilingualism and cultural diversity as well as to promote equal use of all six official languages throughout the Organization*". A much-needed reminder for an era where conflicts and divisions run rampant.

Rooted in Africa and open to the world, Mohammed VI Polytechnic University (UM6P) understood from day one the vital nature of languages in its educational mission. For years, the *UM6P Language Lab* has played a central role in making our university the multilingual, cosmopolitan institution it is today.

Equipped with more than 40 specialized linguists, the *Language Lab* has undertaken various critical language tasks. Just between 2020 and 2022, UM6P students and staff benefitted from a total of 12900 teaching hours in French (33%), English (46%), Spanish (10%), Arabic (3%) & Mandarin (8%). Within the same period, a total of 3715 international placement tests were administered. In addition to empowering beneficiaries with the ability to speak various languages, the *Language Lab* has also been at the forefront of translating academic content emanating from more than 15 fields. More than 100 UM6P documents have been translated from and into 3 languages in the past two years alone.

All members of the UM6P community are highly encouraged to take full advantage of the *Language Lab*'s resources in the spirit of making our collective learning journey richer and more impactful. No matter the language, the thirst for knowledge is what unites us all.