



# EMAIL NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2024

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Dear SIETAR India members and supporters,

Here is our first newsletter for 2024. It has always been our endeavour to feature new voices and highlight current and relevant themes and this edition will not disappoint!

The column “**An interculturalist by any other name**” features a unique story of cultural change in a remote village in India.

For the “**Lost (or Found) in Translation**” column, Sukanya Ramanujan chose to review R.F.Huang’s novel, highlighting both the magic of languages and the dark power dynamics behind them.

What does a **Trainers’ AI Toolkit** look like? Arpan Panicker gives us a glimpse of how we can use AI to design and customise content.

This year our column, **Intercultural Perspectives** will feature the voices of people involved in intercultural work in India. These sound bytes are part of the wider research project undertaken by our board members Dolon Gupta and Ishita Ray and will also be the focus of our first webinar for 2024.

As always, we hope you enjoy and feel energised by the articles and people featured in this edition of our newsletter.

Should you feel inspired to contribute an article to our newsletter or volunteer with us, please reach out at [sietarindia@gmail.com](mailto:sietarindia@gmail.com).

For the SIETAR India Board

Sunita Nichani  
President, SIETAR India



# An interculturalist by any other name

This column features an interview with a professional who is not a professional interculturalist and yet navigates cultural differences as an essential part of their work.

*For this edition, Pratha Shetty of SIETAR India spoke with Ulrike Reinhard, a German publisher, author, digital nomad, and futurist. Through this interview, they explored how a skatepark in the middle of a small village in Madhya Pradesh, India, has created a subculture and also helped close intercultural gaps.*

**SIETAR India:** Could you share the inspiration behind Janwaar and why you chose that specific village for your skate park project?

**Ulrike:** The choice of Janwaar village was purely coincidental. I was staying in the area, and it happened that someone willing to donate land for the skate park had a property there. There was no personal connection to the village prior to this project. The decision to build a skate park stemmed from a desire to create a livable place in a village left behind, with challenges like lack of sanitation, poverty, and a static cultural environment.

**SIETAR India:** How did the idea of a skate park, specifically, come to be?

**Ulrike:** Skateboarding, with its culture of rebellion and individuality, seemed like the extreme opposite of the traditional, closed-off life of an Indian village. Introducing a skate park was about creating a space where these contrasting cultures could clash, interact, and ultimately learn from each other. It was a way to bring movement and change to a static environment.

**SIETAR India:** What were the specific rules of the skate park, and how did they impact the village?

**Ulrike:** We had two main rules: "no school, no skateboarding" and "girls first. " These rules were instrumental in increasing school attendance, encouraging girls' participation, and reducing caste-based violence. They fostered a sense of community and interaction that was previously lacking in the village.

**SIETAR India:** Did you face any challenges or resistance in implementing this project?

**Ulrike:** Yes, there were challenges, including times when I needed police protection. However, enough people from all backgrounds supported the initiative, which kept it going. Change management is about navigating through resistance, and it's normal not to have unanimous support.

**SIETAR India:** How do you see the role of culture and cultural change in development aid and community projects?

**Ulrike:** It's crucial to work with the entire community and address the environment around individuals to facilitate change.

Focusing on empowering a specific group without changing the overall community dynamics often leads to limited impact.

**SIETAR India:** Do you believe this model of community engagement and development can be replicated in other contexts, such as urban areas?

**Ulrike:** While the specifics of Janwaar Castle may not be directly replicable everywhere, the principles of creating spaces for interaction, fostering confidence, and encouraging active participation are universally applicable. It's less about teaching a particular skill, like English, and more about enabling people to find their voice and act within their communities. This article is an excerpt from a podcast interview conducted by Pratha Shetty. An extended version of the interview can be listened to [here](#).



# LOST IN TRANSLATION (or found)

**This column looks at how ideas, words and concepts can be viewed across different languages and cultures.**

*For this edition, Sukanya Ramanujan, a seasoned communications professional currently with Nissan, has reviewed R F Kuang's novel **Babel: Or the Necessity of Violence: An Arcane History of the Oxford Translators' Revolution***

Philologists somehow seem to have an innate ability to create masterful fantasies. If you looked at the most famous fantasy novel ever written, **The Lord of the Rings**, the author and philologist J R R Tolkien originally created Middle Earth mainly as a playground for the languages he was inventing. The story was secondary.

Yet another student of language studies and an author of several fantasy books, R F Kuang, while delivering the 2022 Tolkien Lecture on Fantasy Literature, made the point that every piece of art must relentlessly search for the truth. In her 2022 book, **Babel**, Kuang, who is of Chinese American heritage, creates a fantastical parallel world powered by magical silver bars that can only be manipulated by translators.

The most powerful and influential group of translators are called Babblers, so named because they receive their education at and work out of the Tower of Babel at the University of Oxford, the beating heart of the British Empire which is very much the dominant political force in Kuang's alternate 19th Century. Centred around the lives of four very young translation students who have gained entry into Babel because of their ability to simultaneously and fluently inhabit the world of at least two languages, but who have also experienced a traumatic displacement from their native environments, **Babel** is a scathing commentary on Colonialism and power groups.

**Babel** is not an easy book to read. Not only because it deals with aggression and violence but also because of the complexity of its magic which is also simultaneously the root of its brilliance. The magic in the book works when silver bars are inscribed with so called "match pairs"- words in different languages that have similar meanings but are not exactly the same. The difference in nuance or meaning between the two words gives rise to a magical effect. The strength and duration and the nature of the magic are all dependent on the words used in the match pairs. Babblers actually spend a lot of time thinking about the semantic gap between potential match pairs, all in the interest of monetising the magical effects. Kuang's England uses silver bars with translated match pairs that do everything from heating water kettles to keeping the garden hedges green on the one side and to clean up sewers and hold up bridges on the other.

Anybody who has learnt a second language can associate with the magical moment when a new language becomes comprehensible- when the squiggles start making sense. In a way, **Babel** is actually a paradise for those who love to explore the nuances of various languages.

I myself at several points wished I could apply to be a student at Babel and spend my time learning Greek, Latin, French, Japanese and so much more. However, rather than airy magical dreams, Kuang uses language and translation as the warp and weft of the tapestry that ultimately paints a grim picture of the savagery of colonialism.



## How does AI help a trainer?



*Generated with AI!*

As a Learning Architect, I often collaborate with trainers on blended learning solutions. I've always been awed by the amount of time trainers take to draft and craft their training materials, and then to redo and redesign their content for every other deployment. But what if you could have an entire suite of AI assistants who could translate your vision to glorious content and design with minimal effort? Let's talk about what a trainer AI toolkit would look like!

### The AI Context

To ensure this article is accessible to even complete AI newbies here, let's get some basic concepts out of the way.

- GPTs: Generative Pre-Trained Transformers are one type of Generative AI LLMs (coming up next) that can mimic human speech and writing.
- LLMs: Large Language Models are AI entities that have been taught to 'understand' language through extensive training.
- Training AI: LLMs have been fed hundreds of thousands worth of content to help them statistically analyze and generate human language.
- Fine Tuning AI: You can take a pre-trained AI and fine tune it further to train it to your context.
- Prompt Engineering: You can take a pre-trained AI and ask it questions through 'prompts'. This starts the interaction where the AI gives you what you want.

For the purpose of this article, let us stick to ChatGPT, the premier and most popular version of generative AI that most people use.

*In this article, Arpan Panicker, learning architect and founder of [Instructionalize](#), shares tips on how trainers can get onboard the Gen AI train.*

### ChatGPT Trainer Toolkit

Here are a series of steps that will help you set up your own ChatGPT toolkit to make content creation a lot easier. This works best with subscription plans.

- You will need a ChatGPT plus subscription (USD 20 per month) to be able to do a lot of these steps. If you want to keep your content completely confidential, splurge for a ChatGPT Teams subscription with at least two seats @ USD 25 per month.
- You can use ChatGPT's GPT builder to create your own GPT. This is similar to fine tuning.
- Train AI assistants for specific tasks. Think specialists more than generalists. Write learning objectives and/or outcomes. Convert source content in paras to condensed bullet points. Create visuals with your branding and chosen art style.
- Training your GPT requires a series of structured instructions that tells it what to do and what not to do.

To keep the training effective, ensure that you:

- Follow logical hierarchy in instructions: **Purpose → Structure → Knowledge → Skills → Rules → Examples.**
- Supplement instructions given in chat with small documents that can be uploaded to provide instructions to further train the GPT.
- Test your GPT in parallel using the split screen interface to ensure your training is getting you the results you need.
- You can further use prompts to ensure the GPT gives you consistent output every single time (especially when you want a specific format or structure).
- Remember, the more knowledge and skills you train your GPT on, the better it will be at giving you the output you need.
- Combine the GPT assistant with other tools that also incorporate AI like Canva or Beautiful.AI. Drop in an avatar for self-paced learning with Synthesia.

This is only the first step in adopting AI to get your training content faster, without compromising quality. Good luck with your AI content journey!



# Intercultural perspectives

*This year this section of our newsletter will feature the results of the survey undertaken by Dolon Gupta and Ishita Ray on the intercultural field in India*

How do you see India's current role in the field of intercultural understanding and education? (e.g. contribution to theory & research, existing practices, spread of the field etc.)

*"India recognizes the importance of intercultural understanding and education and has taken several initiatives to promote it both nationally and globally"*

*"It is behind others as we lack courses, programs and certifications in this domain. Mostly researchers from English crossover do stuff in India. We have very few anthropologists and cultural studies scholars and the good ones go abroad and settle there."*

*"India is a growing corporate powerhouse and training in intercultural competencies is of paramount importance."*

*Dismal*

*"Research is nascent, and we need a lot more people contributing."*





SOCIETY FOR INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION, TRAINING & RESEARCH

The Society for Intercultural Education Training and Research (SIETAR) - India is a non-profit association of educators, researchers and trainers from a wide range of practical and academic disciplines who share a common concern for intercultural relations. SIETAR-India provides an opportunity to learn from and share with colleagues in the intercultural arena and advance the body of knowledge and practice in the field.

Established in 1974, SIETAR has over 3500 members world-wide with affiliates in many countries. SIETAR holds Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) status with the United Nations and the Council of Europe. SIETAR - India is part of the global network of SIETAR organizations.

### Contact Us

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For more information or to submit a guest article please send us an email.

## OUR TEAM

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## UPCOMING SIETAR EVENTS AROUND THE GLOBE

### SIETAR INDIA WEBINAR ON APRIL 18TH, 8 P.M IST

**Topic:** *WEIRD Theories and their relevance in the Indian context*

*What kind of content is being used in Indian classrooms? To what extent do theories on intercultural studies inform the content? What problems in India does intercultural education have the potential to address? Kirsten Waechter based In Germany, with her expertise on WEIRD and post-colonial theories and Dolon Gupta, with an in-depth experience of the academic and corporate world in India will discuss the findings of the BCFAI research project. An insightful fireside chat that will help participants get a glimpse into the nuanced layers of needs and solutions, that is relevant not just to India but also to any part of the world.*

**SIETAR EUROPA CONGRESS  
2024 IN LILLE FROM 4TH TO  
8TH JUNE 2024.**

**Theme:** *Systems: The  
Ecosystem of Interculturalism*

*To register, click here;  
[https://www.nunify.com/events  
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