

# #SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay

Wednesday 3 July 2025



1

00:00:00,000--> 00:00:02,588

-I would like to  
welcome everyone

2

00:00:02,612--> 00:00:05,108

to today's SoA at Home event

3

00:00:05,132--> 00:00:07,468

How we translate,  
in conversation with

4

00:00:07,492--> 00:00:10,000

David Colmer and David McKay.

5

00:00:10,000--> 00:00:11,948

I'm Jane Davis

6

00:00:11,972--> 00:00:14,028

and I'm a literary and  
commercial translator

7

00:00:14,052--> 00:00:16,148

from the Scandinavian

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



languages and French,

8

00:00:16,172--> 00:00:18,468

as well as a  
proofreader and editor.

9

00:00:18,492--> 00:00:20,948

Um, and I'm very  
keen on the idea

10

00:00:20,972--> 00:00:23,000

of translator  
collaborations of all types.

11

00:00:23,000--> 00:00:25,388

So I'm delighted to be  
presenting today's event

12

00:00:25,412--> 00:00:30,000

which is part of our SoA at Home  
Spring/Summer 2025 programme

13

00:00:30,000--> 00:00:31,908

and it's being run

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



in conjunction with

14

00:00:31,932--> 00:00:36,000

the SoA's Translators

Association.

15

00:00:36,000--> 00:00:38,188

This SoA at Home

event is free for all,

16

00:00:38,212--> 00:00:39,468

but if you can afford to,

17

00:00:39,492--> 00:00:41,028

please consider donating to

18

00:00:41,052--> 00:00:43,000

the Society of

Authors Access Fund

19

00:00:43,000--> 00:00:44,988

which provides grants to authors

20

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:00:45,012--> 00:00:49,348

so that travel, subsistence,  
childcare costs, and access needs

21

00:00:49,372--> 00:00:50,548

aren't barriers to authors

22

00:00:50,572--> 00:00:54,000

taking part in events,  
residencies, and retreats.

23

00:00:54,000--> 00:00:56,268

We suggest a  
minimum donation of £5.

24

00:00:57,772--> 00:01:00,548

You can also help the  
Society of Authors Access Fund

25

00:01:00,572--> 00:01:03,000

by making a purchase  
on our virtual bookstore

26

00:01:03,000--> 00:01:04,868

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



on Bookshop.org,

27

00:01:04,892--> 00:01:06,468

where you can

find books by writers

28

00:01:06,492--> 00:01:10,000

taking part in the SoA

at Home programme.

29

00:01:10,000--> 00:01:12,948

This session will

last 45 minutes,

30

00:01:12,972--> 00:01:16,000

including a 10-minute

Q&A at the end.

31

00:01:16,000--> 00:01:19,748

If you need captions,

32

00:01:19,772--> 00:01:21,828

please do turn on the

closed captions option

33

00:01:21,852--> 00:01:25,000

if you'd like live

subtitles during the event.

34

00:01:25,000--> 00:01:27,908

And the recording,

um, will be available

35

00:01:27,932--> 00:01:30,000

on the SoA's

website for members.

36

00:01:30,000--> 00:01:32,828

That can be accessed by

logging into the members area

37

00:01:32,852--> 00:01:35,000

and going to our resources page.

38

00:01:35,000--> 00:01:36,468

And for non-members,

39

## #SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay

Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:01:36,492--> 00:01:42,000

the recording will be available  
via the SoA's Vimeo channel.

40

00:01:42,000--> 00:01:43,828

Um, if you do  
have any questions,

41

00:01:43,852--> 00:01:45,908

please post them in the Q&A box.

42

00:01:45,932--> 00:01:48,000

You can post them  
anonymously if you prefer.

43

00:01:48,000--> 00:01:50,348

And any general comments,

44

00:01:50,372--> 00:01:52,000

like where you are  
and how hot it is

45

00:01:52,000--> 00:01:54,588

in the chat box.

46

00:01:54,612--> 00:01:58,628

And I'd now like to introduce  
you all to today's guests,

47

00:01:58,652--> 00:02:01,000

David Colmer and David McKay.

48

00:02:01,000--> 00:02:04,748

David Colmer is an Australian  
translator of Dutch literature

49

00:02:04,772--> 00:02:08,000

having translated  
more than 80 books.

50

00:02:08,000--> 00:02:09,508

He has won a  
number of major prizes

51

00:02:09,532--> 00:02:11,828

and David Van  
Reybrouck's Revolusi,



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Wednesday 3 July 2025



52

00:02:11,852--> 00:02:13,308

his first co-translation,

53

00:02:13,332--> 00:02:17,000

was shortlisted for  
the Baillie Gifford Prize.

54

00:02:17,000--> 00:02:19,268

David McKay lives near The Hague

55

00:02:19,292--> 00:02:22,000

and translates books  
about art, history and culture

56

00:02:22,000--> 00:02:24,748

for Dutch museums,  
researchers, and other clients,

57

00:02:24,772--> 00:02:29,000

as well as fiction, literary  
non-fiction, plays, and poetry.

58

00:02:29,000--> 00:02:32,388

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



He is best known for his  
translations of War and Turpentine,

59

00:02:32,412--> 00:02:37,000

and other novels  
by Stefan Hertmans.

60

00:02:37,000--> 00:02:38,708

And we're going to start today

61

00:02:38,732--> 00:02:41,428

with, um, David McKay  
reading a short extract

62

00:02:41,452--> 00:02:43,228

from the prologue of Revolusi,

63

00:02:43,252--> 00:02:46,348

which, as you can see, goes  
into the action straight away.

64

00:02:47,000--> 00:02:48,308

-Thanks, Jane.

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



65

00:02:48,332--> 00:02:50,508

Here's the book.

66

00:02:50,532--> 00:02:52,308

It's surprisingly light,

67

00:02:52,332--> 00:02:55,000

considering it's a large size.

68

00:02:55,000--> 00:02:57,028

And, uh, I'm going  
to read the prologue.

69

00:02:59,892--> 00:03:03,788

No waves, no  
billows, no breakers.

70

00:03:03,812--> 00:03:06,868

The calm Java Sea  
splits the moonlight

71

00:03:06,892--> 00:03:10,000

into a thousand

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Colmer and David McKay  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



oyster-white chards,

72

00:03:10,000--> 00:03:11,908

but bobbed gently

on the dark water.

73

00:03:11,932--> 00:03:16,000

A mild northeast

breeze brings some relief,

74

00:03:16,000--> 00:03:18,468

but as always, when the

monsoon winds change direction,

75

00:03:18,492--> 00:03:21,000

the heat lingers

until after midnight

76

00:03:21,000--> 00:03:22,508

even at sea.

77

00:03:22,532--> 00:03:26,000

Millions of stars

sparkle in the firmament.

78

00:03:26,000--> 00:03:30,000

The Milky Way is a swipe  
of chalk on a blackboard.

79

00:03:30,000--> 00:03:32,388

From the distance  
comes a faint thrumming,

80

00:03:32,412--> 00:03:34,000

barely audible at first.

81

00:03:34,000--> 00:03:36,628

But the sound  
intensifies, coming closer.

82

00:03:36,652--> 00:03:40,000

Now a distinct throbbing,  
an ever-louder pounding.

83

00:03:40,000--> 00:03:43,588

until it turns into a  
forceful, regular thumping.

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



84

00:03:43,612--> 00:03:45,308

And in the moonlight,

85

00:03:45,332--> 00:03:50,000

the unmistakable form of a  
steamship surges into view.

86

00:03:50,000--> 00:03:51,548

A majestic white colossus

87

00:03:51,572--> 00:03:55,000

harding the waters  
with her ramrod prow.

88

00:03:55,000--> 00:03:57,108

Her masts, derricks, and decks

89

00:03:57,132--> 00:03:59,000

announced that  
this is a packet ship

90

00:03:59,000--> 00:04:01,308

carrying both

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



passengers and freight.

91

00:04:01,332--> 00:04:04,148

The broad funnel

trails a horizontal wisp

92

00:04:04,172--> 00:04:07,000

of smoke like a pennant.

93

00:04:07,000--> 00:04:10,000

Now and then, the stack

disgorges a shower of red sparks.

94

00:04:10,000--> 00:04:14,000

The stokers in the boiler

room are raking the live coals.

95

00:04:14,000--> 00:04:16,788

But the sparks soon

fizzle in the open air

96

00:04:16,812--> 00:04:19,000

and the packet glides on

97

00:04:19,000--> 00:04:20,908

through the lead-blue  
waters of the night.

98

00:04:20,932--> 00:04:24,268

The ship is listing  
to starboard a little,

99

00:04:24,292--> 00:04:26,000

not much.

100

00:04:26,000--> 00:04:27,548

She's just carrying  
a heavy load.

101

00:04:27,572--> 00:04:30,028

But the angle of  
list is increasing,

102

00:04:30,052--> 00:04:33,000

the vessel tilting, further  
and further off-centre.

103



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Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:04:33,000--> 00:04:36,388

On the lower decks, the  
passengers look around in fright

104

00:04:36,412--> 00:04:38,068

then the whistle sounds.

105

00:04:38,092--> 00:04:39,668

Six short blasts,

106

00:04:39,692--> 00:04:40,948

one long.

107

00:04:40,972--> 00:04:42,348

Abandon ship.

108

00:04:42,372--> 00:04:45,000

And again, and again.

109

00:04:45,000--> 00:04:47,108

Now everything happens fast.

110

00:04:47,132--> 00:04:50,000

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



A few deck passengers  
rush out onto the promenade.

111

00:04:50,000--> 00:04:51,868

Not everyone has a life jacket

112

00:04:51,892--> 00:04:56,000

and it's hard to assemble when  
the deck has become a slope.

113

00:04:56,000--> 00:04:59,000

Stokers and trimmers are making  
their way up the steep ladders.

114

00:04:59,000--> 00:05:00,788

But which way is up?

115

00:05:00,812--> 00:05:05,000

People on deck cling to pipes,  
cables, chains, and ropes.

116

00:05:05,000--> 00:05:06,188

Those who lose their grip

117

00:05:06,212--> 00:05:08,548

slide down the deck,  
slam into the rail,

118

00:05:08,572--> 00:05:11,000

and fall, broken into the sea.

119

00:05:11,000--> 00:05:12,508

A shriek of terror.

120

00:05:12,532--> 00:05:14,388

The crunch of impact.

121

00:05:14,412--> 00:05:17,000

A cry of agony.

122

00:05:17,000--> 00:05:18,308

And then the splash.

123

00:05:18,332--> 00:05:20,508

A few minutes later,

124

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:05:20,532--> 00:05:21,908

the ship keels over.

125

00:05:21,932--> 00:05:24,000

Her funnel smacking  
into the sea.

126

00:05:24,000--> 00:05:26,348

She chokes, spurts water,

127

00:05:26,372--> 00:05:32,000

takes in more, and then suffocates  
in a death rattle of steam, soot,

128

00:05:32,000--> 00:05:33,468

coal and salt.

129

00:05:33,492--> 00:05:37,000

The big bronze  
propeller, half-submerged,

130

00:05:37,000--> 00:05:39,148

slows to an inglorious halt.

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



131

00:05:39,172--> 00:05:43,068

The large flag that flew  
so proudly from the stern

132

00:05:43,092--> 00:05:46,000

now floats on the dark water.

133

00:05:46,000--> 00:05:48,388

The once-mighty  
vessel lies on her side

134

00:05:48,412--> 00:05:51,000

in the sea among  
the drowning people.

135

00:05:51,000--> 00:05:53,028

Because the dynamo  
is on the port side,

136

00:05:53,052--> 00:05:54,348

now facing up,

137

00:05:54,372--> 00:05:56,908

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



many electric lights  
on deck keep blazing

138

00:05:56,932--> 00:06:01,000

until the packet's final  
descent to the seabed.

139

00:06:01,000--> 00:06:02,908

Glaring bulbs on a sinking ship,

140

00:06:02,932--> 00:06:05,000

brightly lit decks,

141

00:06:05,000--> 00:06:06,788

wet coils of rope.

142

00:06:06,812--> 00:06:10,000

A short circuit, crackling.

143

00:06:10,000--> 00:06:13,988

Then, only bubbles  
rising to the surface.

144

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:06:17,000--> 00:06:19,388

-I kind of want to

applaud after that, that's...

145

00:06:19,412--> 00:06:21,268

Um, I mean, it's a...

146

00:06:21,292--> 00:06:23,068

it's a huge, as you've shown,

147

00:06:23,092--> 00:06:25,000

um, it's a huge book, it's

148

00:06:25,000--> 00:06:27,348

400 and something pages or

149

00:06:27,372--> 00:06:29,308

500 and something pages?

150

00:06:29,332--> 00:06:30,668

It's a huge book, and it's...

151

00:06:30,692--> 00:06:32,588

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



it's history, so it  
should be kind of...

152

00:06:32,612--> 00:06:34,908

Um, it should be kind of dry

153

00:06:34,932--> 00:06:38,000

and a bit difficult to  
deal with, but actually,

154

00:06:38,000--> 00:06:40,148

the style is  
amazingly accessible

155

00:06:40,172--> 00:06:42,668

and I think you've both done  
a great job of conveying that.

156

00:06:42,692--> 00:06:43,692

So, um...

157

00:06:43,716--> 00:06:45,000

[claps]



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Wednesday 3 July 2025



158

00:06:45,000--> 00:06:46,000

-Thanks.

-Well done.

159

00:06:46,000--> 00:06:49,348

-Yeah, it's more than 600, including  
the back matter, I just checked.

160

00:06:49,372--> 00:06:50,372

-Yeah.

161

00:06:50,396--> 00:06:52,748

-And we worked very  
hard on that one...

162

00:06:52,772--> 00:06:54,828

one little piece of this  
huge book, of course,

163

00:06:54,852--> 00:06:56,368

because it's the  
first thing you read

164

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:06:56,392--> 00:06:58,976

and because it's a  
beautiful little set piece.

165

00:06:59,000--> 00:07:01,628

Um, and also because  
that metaphor of the ship

166

00:07:01,652--> 00:07:03,988

keeps coming back in different  
ways throughout the book,

167

00:07:04,012--> 00:07:06,628

so it's an important  
image for the entire story

168

00:07:06,652--> 00:07:08,331

and a symbol of  
the colonial regime.

169

00:07:08,355--> 00:07:10,108

Yeah.

170

00:07:10,132--> 00:07:11,948

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



-Yes. Um...

171

00:07:11,972--> 00:07:14,708

So, um...

172

00:07:14,732--> 00:07:19,000

You've done many  
co-translations,

173

00:07:19,000--> 00:07:24,000

while David Colmer, I gather  
this was your first co-translation.

174

00:07:24,000--> 00:07:25,068

-That's right, yeah.

175

00:07:25,092--> 00:07:28,000

-How did you find each other?

176

00:07:28,000--> 00:07:29,148

And more specifically,

177

00:07:29,172--> 00:07:32,031

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



how did you find each other  
for this particular project?

178

00:07:33,000--> 00:07:36,228

-Well, we knew that we were  
both interested in this book,

179

00:07:36,252--> 00:07:38,348

interested in doing it, and um...

180

00:07:38,372--> 00:07:40,388

And we also knew  
how long the book was

181

00:07:40,412--> 00:07:43,000

and how much time it would take.

182

00:07:43,000--> 00:07:44,148

So...

183

00:07:44,172--> 00:07:48,228

And I, you know, I usually have  
a number of different projects

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



184

00:07:48,252--> 00:07:51,576

on the go, so when I  
was approached about

185

00:07:51,600--> 00:07:53,548

doing the translation,  
I thought, oh, maybe...

186

00:07:53,572--> 00:07:56,000

maybe David would like to...

187

00:07:56,000--> 00:07:58,628

to, um, to make  
it a co-translation,

188

00:07:58,652--> 00:08:02,000

so I approached him and  
he was amenable to the idea.

189

00:08:02,000--> 00:08:03,588

And that was how...

190

00:08:03,612--> 00:08:05,100

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



and we, you know,  
suggested it to the

191

00:08:05,124--> 00:08:08,708

Dutch and British  
publishers, and to the author,

192

00:08:08,732--> 00:08:10,000

and... and...

193

00:08:10,000--> 00:08:12,348

ended up, uh, that  
everyone thought it was fine

194

00:08:12,372--> 00:08:16,000

and it allowed them to get the  
translation within their time scale,

195

00:08:16,000--> 00:08:18,068

and it allowed us to have a life

196

00:08:18,092--> 00:08:20,000

while we were doing it.

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



197

00:08:20,000--> 00:08:21,000

[laughter]

198

00:08:21,024--> 00:08:22,748

-So that's... that's a generous...

199

00:08:22,772--> 00:08:24,448

Your memory of it is

very generous to me.

200

00:08:24,472--> 00:08:26,668

I sort of remember

me inviting myself

201

00:08:26,692--> 00:08:28,148

to translate it with you

202

00:08:28,172--> 00:08:29,868

once I heard that they

had approached you.

203

00:08:29,892--> 00:08:32,668

You were saying you weren't really

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



interested because it was too long,

204

00:08:32,692--> 00:08:34,948

even though you  
really liked the books.

205

00:08:34,972--> 00:08:38,000

And I said, well, let's  
do it together then.

206

00:08:38,000--> 00:08:39,668

Yeah, yeah.

207

00:08:39,692--> 00:08:41,348

But we've known each  
other for a long time

208

00:08:41,372--> 00:08:43,628

and we've worked together  
in many ways for a long time.

209

00:08:43,652--> 00:08:46,468

We've been on teams  
working on joint projects,



210

00:08:46,492--> 00:08:49,308

like a Frisian-English

translation project

211

00:08:49,332--> 00:08:51,000

together we had done before.

212

00:08:51,000--> 00:08:55,068

And we're off in each other's

first readers for other translations.

213

00:08:55,092--> 00:08:58,228

Um, so we knew that we

could work well together.

214

00:08:58,252--> 00:08:59,576

We were sent...

215

00:08:59,600--> 00:09:01,468

You know, almost

every day we're at work,

216

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:09:01,492--> 00:09:05,000

we send questions to each  
other on WhatsApp or email, so...

217

00:09:05,000--> 00:09:06,000

-Yeah.

218

00:09:06,000--> 00:09:08,908

-And I think this particular  
project allowed us both to

219

00:09:08,932--> 00:09:12,000

bring some strengths  
to the project,

220

00:09:12,000--> 00:09:13,348

um, to the book.

221

00:09:13,372--> 00:09:16,000

So, so, I mean, I know  
that David has a lot of

222

00:09:16,000--> 00:09:17,668

experience with non-fiction

223

00:09:17,692--> 00:09:20,228

and he has a lot  
of, uh, experience

224

00:09:20,252--> 00:09:22,908

with this translating  
for diplomatic...

225

00:09:22,932--> 00:09:26,000

discussions of diplomatic  
situations, like the...

226

00:09:26,000--> 00:09:27,988

how it works with  
embassies and all that.

227

00:09:28,012--> 00:09:30,000

He knows... he knows  
all that stuff really well.

228

00:09:30,000--> 00:09:31,628

Um, and I have, uh...

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



229

00:09:31,652--> 00:09:35,468

I'm fairly familiar with Indonesia,  
David as well, of course.

230

00:09:35,492--> 00:09:37,000

He's also translated

231

00:09:37,000--> 00:09:40,068

Max Max Havelaar, the  
Max Havelaar, but um...

232

00:09:40,092--> 00:09:44,068

I've been to Indonesia a lot

233

00:09:44,092--> 00:09:46,068

and I know a little  
bit of Indonesian,

234

00:09:46,092--> 00:09:48,188

so that helped with  
this project as well,

235

00:09:48,212--> 00:09:49,212

#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



so...

236

00:09:49,236--> 00:09:51,428

-Yeah, I mean, that was  
going to be my next question.

237

00:09:51,452--> 00:09:55,000

What's the... what are the  
benefits, um, of a co-translation?

238

00:09:55,000--> 00:10:00,000

And, you know, obviously, the  
fact that you each bring different...

239

00:10:00,000--> 00:10:01,000

different things to...

240

00:10:01,024--> 00:10:03,000

Different bits of  
knowledge to bear.

241

00:10:03,000--> 00:10:05,468

Um, and you've already  
mentioned the fact

242

00:10:05,492--> 00:10:10,000

that you can work on something enormous and still have, um, a life.

243

00:10:10,000--> 00:10:13,148

Um, can you think were there any others that, um... that came?

244

00:10:13,172--> 00:10:14,988

And are there any challenges

245

00:10:15,012--> 00:10:17,548

that you don't have when you're working on your own?

246

00:10:20,000--> 00:10:21,828

-Um, I mean, I think that, you know,

247

00:10:21,852--> 00:10:25,000

because you have to coordinate the style of the translation,

## #SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay

Wednesday 3 July 2025



248

00:10:25,000--> 00:10:27,588

so that's something you don't  
usually need to worry about.

249

00:10:27,612--> 00:10:30,568

So we had to have some discussions  
about how we were going to approach it

250

00:10:30,592--> 00:10:33,028

and... And kind of, um...

251

00:10:33,052--> 00:10:35,988

Makes... lays some  
ground rules for, kind of,

252

00:10:36,012--> 00:10:38,000

the voice we wanted  
to bring to the book.

253

00:10:38,000--> 00:10:41,348

Um, so that's... that's  
an unusual problem

254

## #SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay

Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:10:41,372--> 00:10:44,000

compared to translating solo.

255

00:10:44,000--> 00:10:45,548

Um, and I... and I...

256

00:10:45,572--> 00:10:48,608

-Yeah, and that's one of the things  
that makes it more time-consuming, too,

257

00:10:48,632--> 00:10:50,148

for the translators.

258

00:10:50,172--> 00:10:54,000

It's more work than translating  
half a book would normally

259

00:10:54,000--> 00:10:55,388

be for each of us.

260

00:10:55,412--> 00:10:57,308

Or at least more  
time goes into it.



**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**

Wednesday 3 July 2025



261

00:10:57,332--> 00:10:58,788

And on the other hand,

262

00:10:58,812--> 00:11:01,000

it means you don't have to

263

00:11:01,000--> 00:11:02,868

keep banging your

head against a wall

264

00:11:02,892--> 00:11:04,728

if you're not getting

anywhere with something.

265

00:11:04,752--> 00:11:07,000

You can just see... there's

always someone who's...

266

00:11:07,000--> 00:11:09,668

who you feel comfortable

asking the question,

267

00:11:09,692--> 00:11:13,788

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



and usually, even though, you know, there  
are translators I'm often in contact with

268

00:11:13,812--> 00:11:16,948

or individuals or groups

I'll ask questions of,

269

00:11:16,972--> 00:11:19,068

after you've asked 10

questions about the same book,

270

00:11:19,092--> 00:11:22,228

you start to think, maybe I should

solve some of these problems myself.

271

00:11:22,252--> 00:11:24,388

But in a co-translation,

you don't have to do that.

272

00:11:24,412--> 00:11:26,968

You just, you leave... you leave

a note in the draft, and...

273

00:11:26,992--> 00:11:27,992

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



[laughs]

274

00:11:28,016--> 00:11:29,016

Yeah.

275

00:11:29,040--> 00:11:32,068

-And of course, you're working as  
each other's editor as well, in a sense,

276

00:11:32,092--> 00:11:35,000

so it improves the quality

277

00:11:35,000--> 00:11:36,708

of the... of the  
translation, I think.

278

00:11:36,732--> 00:11:38,000

So...

279

00:11:38,000--> 00:11:39,000

-Yeah.

280

00:11:39,000--> 00:11:42,548

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



-Yeah, that's a benefit,  
although, of course, that's not...

281

00:11:42,572--> 00:11:46,000

you don't necessarily  
get paid for that, so...

282

00:11:46,000--> 00:11:49,188

-No, well, I mean, there's  
a lot of translation work

283

00:11:49,212--> 00:11:51,000

that we don't get paid for.

284

00:11:51,000--> 00:11:52,628

Um...

285

00:11:52,652--> 00:11:54,388

Were there any  
specific challenges

286

00:11:54,412--> 00:11:56,000

apart from the length of it

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



287

00:11:56,000--> 00:11:58,188

in translating this book?

288

00:12:03,000--> 00:12:05,908

-I think the diversity of  
voices is a challenge.

289

00:12:05,932--> 00:12:08,268

Um... uh...

290

00:12:08,292--> 00:12:11,608

You already mentioned that David brings  
so many different characters to this book,

291

00:12:11,632--> 00:12:13,000

and he talks about  
so many people.

292

00:12:13,000--> 00:12:15,828

And, uh, in the  
second half of the book,

293

00:12:15,852--> 00:12:17,148

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



there's a lot of oral history.

294

00:12:17,172--> 00:12:19,000

So where he visited

295

00:12:19,000--> 00:12:21,148

a number of people  
in different countries.

296

00:12:21,172--> 00:12:22,788

Japanese...

297

00:12:22,812--> 00:12:25,548

Japanese... former  
Japanese soldiers,

298

00:12:25,572--> 00:12:28,000

Indonesians who had  
fought against the Dutch,

299

00:12:28,000--> 00:12:30,028

the Dutch conscripts.

300

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:12:30,052--> 00:12:33,708

All kinds of people...

Gurkhas, in... in Nepal.

301

00:12:33,732--> 00:12:36,988

And then he has all these  
people, and he's kind of given them

302

00:12:37,012--> 00:12:40,000

all their own voice,  
sometimes drawing on

303

00:12:40,000--> 00:12:42,108

primary sources,  
sometimes on the interviews.

304

00:12:42,132--> 00:12:43,628

And, you know, there's a...

305

00:12:43,652--> 00:12:46,332

you know, translating from all  
these different languages into Dutch,

306

00:12:46,356--> 00:12:48,076

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



which we then had to  
translate into English,

307

00:12:48,100--> 00:12:50,000

sometimes back into English.

308

00:12:50,000--> 00:12:52,000

Um, so we had to look  
up the sources, and then...

309

00:12:52,000--> 00:12:54,988

Yeah, make it all work,  
and make it all distinct.

310

00:12:55,012--> 00:12:56,108

And that was...

311

00:12:56,132--> 00:12:59,000

that was a particular  
challenge for this book, I think.

312

00:12:59,000--> 00:13:00,508

-Yeah, yeah, I agree.



**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



313

00:13:00,532--> 00:13:01,588

And...

314

00:13:01,612--> 00:13:04,428

There's also an understanding

315

00:13:04,452--> 00:13:08,000

of, um, Indonesian

history that's kind of

316

00:13:08,000--> 00:13:09,908

shared implicitly

in the Netherlands

317

00:13:09,932--> 00:13:12,188

and often the author

is challenging that,

318

00:13:12,212--> 00:13:13,708

but even when he's

challenging that,

319

00:13:13,732--> 00:13:17,628

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



he's assuming the readers have some  
kind of previous understanding of it.

320

00:13:17,652--> 00:13:19,548

So often, we had  
to look at, you know,

321

00:13:19,572--> 00:13:23,000

what do we need to fill in, what  
do we need to word differently?

322

00:13:23,000--> 00:13:25,668

Assuming that people know  
almost nothing about Indonesia.

323

00:13:25,692--> 00:13:27,188

It's not that they  
have prejudices

324

00:13:27,212--> 00:13:28,468

they need to be disabused of,

325

00:13:28,492--> 00:13:30,000

they just have hardly

326

00:13:30,000--> 00:13:31,308

thought about Indonesia at all.

327

00:13:31,332--> 00:13:32,332

Yeah.

328

00:13:32,356--> 00:13:34,028

-Yes, there's a...

there's a bit about that

329

00:13:34,052--> 00:13:36,528

in the, um, early on in,

like, Chapter 1 or something,

330

00:13:36,552--> 00:13:39,028

where it says that, you know,

it's the fourth largest country

331

00:13:39,052--> 00:13:41,000

by population in the

world and people know

332

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**

Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:13:41,000--> 00:13:42,668

absolutely nothing about it.

333

00:13:42,692--> 00:13:44,148

And I sat there reading out,

334

00:13:44,172--> 00:13:45,748

um, to a part...

335

00:13:45,772--> 00:13:49,000

to my partner, I sat there  
reading out bits of the book.

336

00:13:49,000--> 00:13:50,988

Um, and saying, did you  
know this about Indonesia?

337

00:13:51,012--> 00:13:52,012

And he was going, no.

338

00:13:52,036--> 00:13:54,308

Did you know this  
about in Indonesia? No!

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



339

00:13:54,332--> 00:13:56,868

And it's gradually getting  
more and more irritated

340

00:13:56,892--> 00:13:58,428

that it knew nothing  
about Indonesia,

341

00:13:58,452--> 00:14:00,500

and I said, well, you know,  
I'm just making a point.

342

00:14:00,524--> 00:14:02,028

Um, yes, yes,

343

00:14:02,052--> 00:14:05,000

so I understand that you  
would have had to explain, um,

344

00:14:05,000--> 00:14:06,548

quite a lot, uh, about it.

345

00:14:06,572--> 00:14:08,188

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



How did you actually  
approach the book?

346

00:14:08,212--> 00:14:12,000

I mean, did you work on  
one chapter at a time, or...?

347

00:14:12,000--> 00:14:15,708

-We actually divided it in half,  
more or less in the middle,

348

00:14:15,732--> 00:14:17,000

the main body of the book.

349

00:14:17,000--> 00:14:19,108

And then we negotiated

350

00:14:19,132--> 00:14:20,908

about the front matter  
and the back matter,

351

00:14:20,932--> 00:14:22,868

and who would do  
which parts of that.

352

00:14:22,892--> 00:14:25,000

-We... we... we changed  
translators mid-war.

353

00:14:25,000--> 00:14:26,988

[laughter]

354

00:14:28,000--> 00:14:30,268

-Um, that's an  
interesting approach.

355

00:14:30,292--> 00:14:31,428

I think, um...

356

00:14:31,452--> 00:14:32,748

Yeah, that's...

357

00:14:32,772--> 00:14:33,988

I mean, one of the...

358

00:14:34,012--> 00:14:36,000

is this... is this...

359

00:14:36,000--> 00:14:39,708

Um, David M, um,  
is this something that

360

00:14:39,732--> 00:14:42,388

varies depending  
on the co-translation?

361

00:14:42,412--> 00:14:45,000

Are they... are co-translations  
always different?

362

00:14:45,000--> 00:14:49,388

Or are there kind of things  
that, um, unite them all?

363

00:14:50,000--> 00:14:52,668

-Absolutely. I have one...  
done one other co-translation

364

00:14:52,692--> 00:14:54,148

that was half-half like that,



**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



365

00:14:54,172--> 00:14:56,428

but that was because  
the other translator

366

00:14:56,452--> 00:14:58,188

had translated half the book

367

00:14:58,212--> 00:14:59,568

and then sort of  
ran out of steam.

368

00:14:59,592--> 00:15:01,668

And I thought, I need  
someone else to finish that,

369

00:15:01,692--> 00:15:03,928

so that was a case in which  
I was just being brought in

370

00:15:03,952--> 00:15:06,000

halfway through  
the project to...

371

## #SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay

Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:15:06,000--> 00:15:08,268

That was a very different  
kind of co-translation.

372

00:15:08,292--> 00:15:09,508

Even though I did work closely

373

00:15:09,532--> 00:15:11,000

with the other  
translator then, too.

374

00:15:11,000--> 00:15:15,028

Um, and yeah, and this one  
we were very much peers,

375

00:15:15,052--> 00:15:16,788

so we were very  
much collaborating with,

376

00:15:16,812--> 00:15:19,000

you know, with, um, under...

377

00:15:19,000--> 00:15:21,148

understanding that we were

378

00:15:21,172--> 00:15:23,428

bringing an equal  
amount of experience

379

00:15:23,452--> 00:15:25,348

to an accomplishment  
to the book.

380

00:15:25,372--> 00:15:28,788

Um, but I've also been the  
junior partner in a co-translation.

381

00:15:28,812--> 00:15:31,000

I've been the senior  
partner in a co-translation.

382

00:15:31,000--> 00:15:32,708

Um, yeah,

383

00:15:32,732--> 00:15:34,908

and then you actually learn  
an enormous amount of it,

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



384

00:15:34,932--> 00:15:37,108

you know, from it

in all those cases.

385

00:15:37,132--> 00:15:38,132

Um...

386

00:15:38,156--> 00:15:42,028

And there can be

co-translations by groups, too.

387

00:15:42,052--> 00:15:44,000

I've done, especially

when books

388

00:15:44,000--> 00:15:45,588

have many parts to them

389

00:15:45,612--> 00:15:48,068

when they're composed of

entries or when they're composed

390

00:15:48,092--> 00:15:50,308

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



when it's a collection  
of texts or something,

391

00:15:50,332--> 00:15:52,148

I've worked in groups of 4 or 5

392

00:15:52,172--> 00:15:55,000

or more translating books, yeah.

393

00:15:55,000--> 00:15:57,828

And with this book, because  
it starts from the prehistory...

394

00:15:57,852--> 00:16:00,000

prehistory, really,  
and goes up to,

395

00:16:00,000--> 00:16:05,000

you know, it kind of goes  
up to the early 60s, really.

396

00:16:05,000--> 00:16:06,000

Um, but uh...

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



397

00:16:06,024--> 00:16:08,868

You know, there were  
maybe distinct places

398

00:16:08,892--> 00:16:11,068

you could have  
stopped, but, um, like,

399

00:16:11,092--> 00:16:14,000

you know, with the  
Japanese invasion, or...

400

00:16:14,000--> 00:16:16,828

or the modern period  
between the wars

401

00:16:16,852--> 00:16:19,408

or something like that would  
have been logical places to change,

402

00:16:19,432--> 00:16:20,432

but... but...

403

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:16:20,456--> 00:16:24,576

Unfortunately, that was kind of like... that  
would have been two-thirds, one-third, so...

404

00:16:24,600--> 00:16:26,728

So we had to kind of,  
like, split it down the middle

405

00:16:26,752--> 00:16:28,568

and that... and that  
actually worked quite well.

406

00:16:28,592--> 00:16:30,488

And again, you know, to  
say something about the

407

00:16:30,512--> 00:16:32,276

range of voices in the  
book, I think that's...

408

00:16:32,300--> 00:16:34,548

that one... that's one  
aspect that helps to...

409

## #SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay

Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:16:34,572--> 00:16:37,068

to make it work

as a co-translation,

410

00:16:37,092--> 00:16:40,000

because there are so many

different voices that even if we

411

00:16:40,000--> 00:16:41,748

both have a little

bit of a tendency

412

00:16:41,772--> 00:16:43,028

to give our own voice to the...

413

00:16:43,052--> 00:16:44,868

to our part of the

translation, "our part",

414

00:16:44,892--> 00:16:46,300

because we discussed

everything, but

415

00:16:46,324--> 00:16:49,028



**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



even if we do that, there's  
still so many distinct voices

416

00:16:49,052--> 00:16:51,000

that it kind of gets diluted.

417

00:16:51,000--> 00:16:53,238

That's... that bias.

418

00:16:54,000--> 00:16:55,000

-Yeah.

419

00:16:55,000--> 00:16:56,988

Yeah. I think it played  
to our strengths, too.

420

00:16:57,012--> 00:16:59,588

I mean, I knew more  
about the colonial history

421

00:16:59,612--> 00:17:01,868

and I think David knew more  
about contemporary Indonesia

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**

Wednesday 3 July 2025



422

00:17:01,892--> 00:17:03,148

and the wartime history,

423

00:17:03,172--> 00:17:07,000

and so it made sense from  
that perspective as well.

424

00:17:07,000--> 00:17:08,988

Um, David C,

425

00:17:09,012--> 00:17:11,108

will you do more  
co-translations,

426

00:17:11,132--> 00:17:13,000

having now embarked upon this

427

00:17:13,000--> 00:17:14,488

adventure?

428

00:17:15,000--> 00:17:16,348

-Well, I mean, it was...

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



429

00:17:16,372--> 00:17:18,468

I'm quite happy with  
how this one's gone, but I...

430

00:17:18,492--> 00:17:22,000

I think with, um,  
thinner books, um,

431

00:17:22,000--> 00:17:25,000

then I probably will stick to  
just doing them by myself.

432

00:17:25,000--> 00:17:26,348

I mean, I have done...

433

00:17:26,372--> 00:17:27,668

I have been involved in...

434

00:17:27,692--> 00:17:30,588

intensively involved with  
translations as a mentor,

435

00:17:30,612--> 00:17:33,908

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



but then, um, then I feel  
like it's the other person's,

436

00:17:33,932--> 00:17:37,000

the mentee's  
translation is their--

437

00:17:37,000--> 00:17:39,308

It's their translation, so they  
have to make the decisions

438

00:17:39,332--> 00:17:40,332

and I'm happy to...

439

00:17:40,356--> 00:17:41,788

to be a sounding board

440

00:17:41,812--> 00:17:44,000

or to give ideas to  
discuss things, but...

441

00:17:44,000--> 00:17:48,000

But I think as soon as you  
start to share the authority

442

00:17:48,000--> 00:17:50,468

for the decisions,  
you know, then...

443

00:17:50,492--> 00:17:52,508

then it becomes quite  
difficult to negotiate

444

00:17:52,532--> 00:17:53,908

on a smaller project,

445

00:17:53,932--> 00:17:55,000

maybe one that's kind of

446

00:17:55,000--> 00:17:57,108

just more distinct.

447

00:17:57,132--> 00:17:58,968

Although, you know,  
you never know, I mean...

448

00:17:58,992--> 00:18:01,828

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



Of course, there's lots of different possibilities for books, you know,

449

00:18:01,852--> 00:18:04,228

anthologies of poetry  
or something, of course,

450

00:18:04,252--> 00:18:06,000

you can easily share that, or...

451

00:18:06,000--> 00:18:07,388

whatever, so it's...

452

00:18:07,412--> 00:18:08,548

Yeah.

453

00:18:08,572--> 00:18:10,748

Never say never,  
I suppose, yeah.

454

00:18:10,772--> 00:18:13,000

[laughter]

455

## #SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay

Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:18:13,000--> 00:18:16,908

Um, so let's now

have the second extract

456

00:18:16,932--> 00:18:21,148

which is taken from

further on in the book.

457

00:18:21,172--> 00:18:24,000

Um, do you want to

give us a little bit of, um...

458

00:18:24,000--> 00:18:26,000

context for this?

459

00:18:26,000--> 00:18:28,068

-Yeah, this is... this

is an excerpt to, um...

460

00:18:28,092--> 00:18:30,588

to illustrate the

different voices, and it's...

461

00:18:30,612--> 00:18:32,548

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



I think it's quite  
novelistic, this passage,

462

00:18:32,572--> 00:18:36,000

and it's about the  
experience of Dutch soldiers

463

00:18:36,000--> 00:18:38,068

during the war in Indonesia

464

00:18:38,092--> 00:18:41,000

when the Dutch tried  
to reimpose their rule.

465

00:18:41,000--> 00:18:43,308

And it's... it draws heavily on

466

00:18:43,332--> 00:18:46,000

interviews with Joop  
Hueting, who was the...

467

00:18:46,000--> 00:18:47,668

first and most  
important whistleblower



468

00:18:47,692--> 00:18:53,308

who exposed some of the  
Dutch atrocities in Indonesia.

469

00:18:55,000--> 00:19:00,000

Hueting's and other accounts  
talk about sausage and sauerkraut.

470

00:19:00,000--> 00:19:05,000

In the tropics, tinned  
stew with coconuts

471

00:19:05,000--> 00:19:08,068

and the boredom of  
endless volleyball matches.

472

00:19:08,092--> 00:19:11,000

Always that same awful game.

473

00:19:11,000--> 00:19:13,228

And the platitudes  
in the letters home.

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



474

00:19:13,252--> 00:19:16,000

"Everything's still fine here."

475

00:19:16,000--> 00:19:18,148

"How lovely that Nell  
has had her baby!"

476

00:19:18,172--> 00:19:21,000

Because why worry them  
with stories that they,

477

00:19:21,000--> 00:19:24,148

with their crocheted  
doilies and floral wallpaper

478

00:19:24,172--> 00:19:26,000

and milk bottles  
on the doorstep

479

00:19:26,000--> 00:19:27,988

wouldn't understand anyway.

480

00:19:28,012--> 00:19:32,000

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



Stories about mud and  
blood on a sweltering dirt road

481

00:19:32,000--> 00:19:34,908

and blackened brains  
crawling with flies.

482

00:19:34,932--> 00:19:38,308

Stories about bamboo  
huts burning so fiercely

483

00:19:38,332--> 00:19:40,068

that the roar of the  
flames drowns out

484

00:19:40,092--> 00:19:43,000

the screams of the  
people who live there.

485

00:19:43,000--> 00:19:45,828

Stories about naked 15-year-olds  
writhing on the concrete

486

00:19:45,852--> 00:19:48,776

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



with electric wires  
attached to their bodies.

487

00:19:48,800--> 00:19:49,800

No.

488

00:19:49,824--> 00:19:51,588

You couldn't bother  
them with the friendship

489

00:19:51,612--> 00:19:53,228

and filthy jokes  
of your mates here

490

00:19:53,252--> 00:19:55,828

who can't even drink  
out of a teacup any more.

491

00:19:55,852--> 00:20:00,000

They're so used to  
canteens, taps, and mugs.

492

00:20:00,000--> 00:20:02,748

Why bother the homefront

#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David  
Colmer and David McKay  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



with stories like these?

493

00:20:02,772--> 00:20:04,988

What did they know  
about your body's

494

00:20:05,012--> 00:20:08,000

never-ending dark  
longing for another body?

495

00:20:08,000--> 00:20:09,468

Even if only for a single night,

496

00:20:09,492--> 00:20:12,000

if only for a  
quarter of an hour.

497

00:20:12,000--> 00:20:14,668

Just a moment to  
momentarily be allowed

498

00:20:14,692--> 00:20:18,000

to hide your tanned,  
leathery, grim face

499

00:20:18,000--> 00:20:21,788

in one of those thick heads  
of dark, anonymous hair.

500

00:20:27,000--> 00:20:28,868

-Yeah, it's, um...

501

00:20:28,892--> 00:20:31,948

This is what I was  
saying earlier on,

502

00:20:31,972--> 00:20:34,000

that the... the... it's such a...

503

00:20:34,000--> 00:20:35,788

It should be just history,

504

00:20:35,812--> 00:20:38,748

but it's very immersive.

505

00:20:38,772--> 00:20:40,000

You feel...

506

00:20:40,000--> 00:20:41,000

Um...

507

00:20:42,812--> 00:20:45,428

The use of language

is so, so love--

508

00:20:45,452--> 00:20:49,000

and you've... you've both

captured that so nicely.

509

00:20:49,000--> 00:20:51,508

Um, that it's... it's

very immediate,

510

00:20:51,532--> 00:20:52,588

I feel.

511

00:20:52,612--> 00:20:55,000

Um, did you...

512

00:20:55,000--> 00:20:56,000

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



Did you...

513

00:20:56,024--> 00:21:00,028

Did you learn anything  
while you were doing it?

514

00:21:01,000--> 00:21:02,868

Do you think? Or were  
you already... because,

515

00:21:02,892--> 00:21:05,228

um, again, you know,  
there's a reference at the start

516

00:21:05,252--> 00:21:07,000

to the fact that the Dutch

517

00:21:07,000--> 00:21:10,748

have a kind of a, um, a  
relatively positive view

518

00:21:10,772--> 00:21:13,000

of their colonial past,  
unlike, say, the British.



519

00:21:13,000--> 00:21:15,388

Um, were there...

520

00:21:15,412--> 00:21:18,000

was there anything that you  
came across that you didn't?

521

00:21:18,000--> 00:21:20,000

You hadn't previously  
been aware of?

522

00:21:20,000--> 00:21:22,228

-Well, I mean, I come  
from Australia, and...

523

00:21:22,252--> 00:21:25,868

I had friends,  
Indonesian friends,

524

00:21:25,892--> 00:21:28,000

before I had Dutch  
friends, really.

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**

Wednesday 3 July 2025



525

00:21:28,000--> 00:21:30,228

So... so I've always  
been astonished

526

00:21:30,252--> 00:21:32,000

by the blinkers  
that the Dutch have

527

00:21:32,000--> 00:21:34,188

in relation to  
their colonial past.

528

00:21:34,212--> 00:21:37,000

Um, so...

529

00:21:37,000--> 00:21:39,908

I mean, the book confirmed that,

530

00:21:39,932--> 00:21:43,000

but of course there's,  
like, a mass of detail, and...

531

00:21:43,000--> 00:21:46,108

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



that I just wasn't aware of,

532

00:21:46,132--> 00:21:51,000

and it just adds up and gets  
stronger and stronger, and... and...

533

00:21:51,000--> 00:21:52,748

So it's quite  
stunning in that way.

534

00:21:52,772--> 00:21:55,548

And, you know, I can't really  
give any examples of things

535

00:21:55,572--> 00:21:57,188

I didn't know, but, I mean,

536

00:21:57,212--> 00:21:59,000

there were, you  
know, there were

537

00:21:59,000--> 00:22:01,000

things that were  
quite stunning. Yeah.

538

00:22:01,000--> 00:22:02,000

-Yeah.

539

00:22:02,000--> 00:22:04,588

-Yeah, I think the  
sheer scale of...

540

00:22:04,612--> 00:22:06,628

I mean, there were lots  
of things I didn't know.

541

00:22:06,652--> 00:22:09,228

I wasn't very well informed  
about modern Indonesian history

542

00:22:09,252--> 00:22:11,000

before starting the book.

543

00:22:11,000--> 00:22:12,388

And, um...

544

00:22:14,092--> 00:22:16,108

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



But just...

545

00:22:16,132--> 00:22:18,668

Even the part I knew a little  
better, the colonial history,

546

00:22:18,692--> 00:22:20,000

just how...

547

00:22:20,000--> 00:22:24,428

how huge Indonesia is, how many  
people were involved in this Dutch colony,

548

00:22:24,452--> 00:22:27,028

how much bigger it is  
than the Netherlands itself.

549

00:22:27,052--> 00:22:31,000

And this tiny group of people  
trying to administer this vast

550

00:22:31,000--> 00:22:33,068

part of the world.

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**

Wednesday 3 July 2025



551

00:22:33,092--> 00:22:34,228

Um...

552

00:22:34,252--> 00:22:36,428

And the fact that there are wars

553

00:22:36,452--> 00:22:38,068

that have been

totally forgotten now,

554

00:22:38,092--> 00:22:39,628

that were, you

know, larger in scale

555

00:22:39,652--> 00:22:42,000

than the First World

War in Europe.

556

00:22:42,000--> 00:22:44,000

Um, astonishing

things like that.

557

00:22:44,000--> 00:22:45,508

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



-Yeah, I mean, that's...

558

00:22:45,532--> 00:22:48,108

that's something that I didn't  
know, for instance, that the, um,

559

00:22:48,132--> 00:22:51,000

the number of Indonesian  
civilians who died in...

560

00:22:51,000--> 00:22:52,748

in the Second World War was...

561

00:22:52,772--> 00:22:54,588

You know, that was one  
of the largest numbers

562

00:22:54,612--> 00:22:57,000

of civilian deaths  
in the whole world.

563

00:22:57,000--> 00:23:00,000

Um, I think second only to the  
Soviet Union, is that right, David?

564

00:23:00,000--> 00:23:03,068

-Um, I don't know for sure  
either, that sounds right, yeah.

565

00:23:03,092--> 00:23:05,000

-Yeah, yeah.

566

00:23:05,000--> 00:23:07,468

-Yeah, but it's a... it's a...  
it's a part of the world that,

567

00:23:07,492--> 00:23:09,000

in the West, we don't

568

00:23:09,000--> 00:23:10,468

recognise,

569

00:23:10,492--> 00:23:12,228

don't know anything about.

570

00:23:12,252--> 00:23:13,868

And the history is...



571

00:23:13,892--> 00:23:17,000

Well, hopefully, the  
history will now become a little bit more

572

00:23:17,000--> 00:23:18,708

well known.

573

00:23:18,732--> 00:23:21,708

I mean, your  
translation of Revolusi

574

00:23:21,732--> 00:23:23,948

was nominated for  
the Baillie Gifford Prize,

575

00:23:23,972--> 00:23:27,000

which rewards excellence  
in non-fiction writing.

576

00:23:27,000--> 00:23:28,428

Um...

577

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:23:28,452--> 00:23:31,148

How important is it  
that translated texts

578

00:23:31,172--> 00:23:33,828

are judged in, uh, as  
books in their own right,

579

00:23:33,852--> 00:23:37,188

alongside titles  
written in English?

580

00:23:38,800--> 00:23:40,908

-Well, I mean, I think  
it's... I think it's fantastic,

581

00:23:40,932--> 00:23:43,348

because we translate books

582

00:23:43,372--> 00:23:45,908

to have them exist as  
books in their own right,

583

00:23:45,932--> 00:23:49,388

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



and so when they're  
judged on a level playing field

584

00:23:49,412--> 00:23:53,000

against original... books that  
were written in... in English,

585

00:23:53,000--> 00:23:55,508

that's... that's really what  
we... what we hope for them.

586

00:23:55,532--> 00:23:57,428

That's... and that's... that's the...

587

00:23:57,452--> 00:23:58,588

that's the ultimate, really.

588

00:23:58,612--> 00:24:00,000

I mean,

589

00:24:00,000--> 00:24:01,388

translation prizes that are

590

## #SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay

Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:24:01,412--> 00:24:03,268

reserved for just translations

591

00:24:03,292--> 00:24:06,000

or where they compare  
the two languages,

592

00:24:06,000--> 00:24:08,108

they're fantastic  
too, of course,

593

00:24:08,132--> 00:24:10,868

but I think that this  
is really the test,

594

00:24:10,892--> 00:24:12,788

true test of a  
book in translation,

595

00:24:12,812--> 00:24:15,000

if it stands up

596

00:24:15,000--> 00:24:16,868

along with original

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



English books.

597

00:24:16,892--> 00:24:19,000

That's... so that's... that's great.

598

00:24:19,000--> 00:24:21,628

And to be applauded, really,

599

00:24:21,652--> 00:24:25,000

that there's more

and more prizes that...

600

00:24:25,000--> 00:24:28,468

that don't segregate

the translations out, so.

601

00:24:30,000--> 00:24:31,948

-So I think the ideal

from our perspective

602

00:24:31,972--> 00:24:34,748

is something like, um,

the Cundill History Prize,

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



603

00:24:34,772--> 00:24:37,868

which Revolusi was  
also shortlisted for.

604

00:24:37,892--> 00:24:39,628

It's a Canadian History Prize

605

00:24:39,652--> 00:24:41,988

and that's also for both  
translations and books

606

00:24:42,012--> 00:24:44,000

that were originally  
written in English.

607

00:24:44,000--> 00:24:45,708

But there are also  
provisions in the rules

608

00:24:45,732--> 00:24:48,628

that say translators will be  
recognized as co-winners,

609

## #SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay

Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:24:48,652--> 00:24:52,268

translators will be paid this  
percentage of the prize money.

610

00:24:52,292--> 00:24:54,468

So there's that  
official recognition

611

00:24:54,492--> 00:24:57,508

that it's partly the achievement  
of the translators, too.

612

00:24:57,532--> 00:24:59,000

-Yeah.

613

00:24:59,000--> 00:25:01,188

-Yeah, I was going  
to say, I mean, if you...

614

00:25:01,212--> 00:25:03,000

if you're, um, if the...

615

00:25:03,000--> 00:25:06,868

The prize is giving out

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



money to the author,

616

00:25:06,892--> 00:25:09,000

but it's a translation, how...

617

00:25:09,000--> 00:25:11,668

how is that, um, divided?

618

00:25:11,692--> 00:25:15,000

But I suppose it's up to the...

619

00:25:15,000--> 00:25:17,028

If they... if they are  
recognizing translations

620

00:25:17,052--> 00:25:20,000

and allowing them to be, um,

621

00:25:20,000--> 00:25:21,108

nominated,

622

00:25:21,132--> 00:25:24,000

then that's something they



**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



need to think about in advance.

623

00:25:24,000--> 00:25:26,068

-Well, I think if the  
style of the book

624

00:25:26,092--> 00:25:28,468

is part of the consideration  
as to which book wins,

625

00:25:28,492--> 00:25:31,148

then it's... seems to me  
self-evident that the, uh,

626

00:25:31,172--> 00:25:34,000

that the translators should  
be recognized as co-winners.

627

00:25:34,000--> 00:25:35,788

And part of being recognized is...

628

00:25:35,812--> 00:25:38,508

is receiving some kind of award

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



629

00:25:38,532--> 00:25:39,868

or some kind of prize as well,

630

00:25:39,892--> 00:25:41,000

along with the author.

631

00:25:41,000--> 00:25:43,588

And, um, you know,

different prizes,

632

00:25:43,612--> 00:25:47,000

the Baillie Gifford

hasn't done that

633

00:25:47,000--> 00:25:50,000

in the past, but maybe they'll

change their policy in the future.

634

00:25:50,000--> 00:25:51,628

Uh, and other prizes

635

00:25:51,652--> 00:25:54,788

do do that, so, you know,

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



the Cundill History Prize,

636

00:25:54,812--> 00:25:56,788

they give 10% of the award

637

00:25:56,812--> 00:25:59,000

to the translator. If the  
translator wins, the....

638

00:25:59,000--> 00:26:05,000

the, um, Dublin International Literary  
Award gives 25% to the translator.

639

00:26:05,000--> 00:26:09,068

And, um, the Griffin Poetry Prize  
gives 60% to the translator, so...

640

00:26:09,092--> 00:26:11,148

so you see there a  
reflection, perhaps,

641

00:26:11,172--> 00:26:14,576

in the importance of style  
for those different prizes.

642

00:26:14,600--> 00:26:15,888

You could consider it that way.

643

00:26:15,912--> 00:26:20,000

-Yeah. Yes, because poetry being

644

00:26:20,000--> 00:26:23,908

rather tricky to translate.

645

00:26:23,932--> 00:26:25,468

I always avoid  
poetry like the plague.

646

00:26:25,492--> 00:26:28,000

I can't do it.

647

00:26:28,000--> 00:26:29,348

It's so difficult.

648

00:26:29,372--> 00:26:34,000

Um... Uh, we've got,  
um, several questions

649

00:26:34,000--> 00:26:35,948

in the Q&A, let me have a look.

650

00:26:40,000--> 00:26:42,268

Okay, um, from Kathy.

651

00:26:42,292--> 00:26:48,000

Uh, "it seems there are translators who want to simply sit down and translate.

652

00:26:48,000--> 00:26:52,000

In other words, to get the reader's experience as they discover the book.

653

00:26:52,000--> 00:26:54,468

And there are those who want to read the entire book first.

654

00:26:54,492--> 00:26:56,548

Which one are you, each of you?"

655

00:26:59,000--> 00:27:00,200

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



-David, do you want to start?

656

00:27:00,224--> 00:27:01,708

[laughs]

657

00:27:01,732--> 00:27:05,268

-I would like to be able to  
simply sit down and translate,

658

00:27:05,292--> 00:27:07,508

but I feel like I need to  
read the whole book first.

659

00:27:07,532--> 00:27:08,532

-Okay.

660

00:27:08,556--> 00:27:10,000

-Sometimes it  
feels like, uh, yeah.

661

00:27:10,000--> 00:27:11,268

Sometimes I feel impatient

662

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:27:11,292--> 00:27:14,300

having to wait to get to  
work until I've done that, but....

663

00:27:14,324--> 00:27:17,328

-So, so in this case, did you, did  
you read through the entire thing?

664

00:27:17,352--> 00:27:19,748

-Yeah, yeah, I read  
through the entire thing.

665

00:27:19,772--> 00:27:22,788

There were parts that I skimmed,  
but I read through the entire thing first,

666

00:27:22,812--> 00:27:24,428

because I wanted to  
have the big picture,

667

00:27:24,452--> 00:27:26,468

since I wasn't actually  
working on the first draft

668

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:27:26,492--> 00:27:28,000

of the whole thing myself, yeah.

669

00:27:28,000--> 00:27:30,348

-And for me, it's

also a consideration

670

00:27:30,372--> 00:27:33,000

about whether you actually

want to translate the book.

671

00:27:33,000--> 00:27:35,908

If you have... if you're being

offered different projects

672

00:27:35,932--> 00:27:37,908

and you have to decide

which ones you want to do,

673

00:27:37,932--> 00:27:40,000

then it's good to have

read the book first.

674

00:27:40,000--> 00:27:42,348



**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



Um, because... and sometimes...

675

00:27:42,372--> 00:27:44,668

Sometimes you can  
be in for a big surprise

676

00:27:44,692--> 00:27:47,000

if you just go on the  
prologue or the first chapter.

677

00:27:47,000--> 00:27:48,548

So, I mean, I've...

678

00:27:48,572--> 00:27:51,148

I've read, um, you know, I know...

679

00:27:51,172--> 00:27:54,000

I know of some books  
where the first chapter is...

680

00:27:54,000--> 00:27:56,628

is, you know, some of the  
best writing I've ever read,

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



681

00:27:56,652--> 00:27:59,508

and then... and then the  
other 300 or 400 pages

682

00:27:59,532--> 00:28:00,708

are just kind of like...

683

00:28:00,732--> 00:28:01,828

[Laughs]

684

00:28:01,852--> 00:28:03,708

It just fizzles out  
slowly or quickly,

685

00:28:03,732--> 00:28:05,000

and then just drags along.

686

00:28:05,000--> 00:28:07,588

So... so, I mean...

687

00:28:07,612--> 00:28:11,388

I would kind of  
really find it difficult

688

00:28:11,412--> 00:28:14,228

to translate a 4  
or 500-page book

689

00:28:14,252--> 00:28:16,000

that I wasn't  
enthusiastic about.

690

00:28:16,000--> 00:28:18,348

And the only way to  
know if you're enthusiastic

691

00:28:18,372--> 00:28:20,000

is to read the book.

692

00:28:20,000--> 00:28:21,000

-Yeah.

693

00:28:22,000--> 00:28:25,868

-Um, is it also possible

694

00:28:25,892--> 00:28:27,828

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



to know whether it's  
going to be difficult

695

00:28:27,852--> 00:28:29,508

to translate by  
reading the book,

696

00:28:29,532--> 00:28:32,508

because I have,  
certainly in the past,

697

00:28:32,532--> 00:28:33,988

accepted projects that I've...

698

00:28:34,012--> 00:28:35,668

I haven't read all  
the way through,

699

00:28:35,692--> 00:28:36,988

because I'm a... I'm a...

700

00:28:37,012--> 00:28:39,000

I'm a discover it with  
the reader person.

701

00:28:39,000--> 00:28:40,748

Um, but I've read things...

702

00:28:40,772--> 00:28:44,000

I've translated things

where I've looked at it

703

00:28:44,000--> 00:28:45,748

and I've even read,

you know, sections

704

00:28:45,772--> 00:28:48,088

from all the way through,

and thought, yes, this is fine.

705

00:28:48,112--> 00:28:52,000

And then when I actually get into it, it's

like, oh my god, why did I accept this?

706

00:28:52,000--> 00:28:54,228

-Yeah, you certainly

learn more by sitting down

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



707

00:28:54,252--> 00:28:56,268

and actually trying it  
out, by seeing how...

708

00:28:56,292--> 00:28:58,628

but even then, you can  
miss the difficult parts, I think,

709

00:28:58,652--> 00:29:00,668

when we... when we...  
as David was saying,

710

00:29:00,692--> 00:29:02,948

when we agreed to do  
those two bits of the book

711

00:29:02,972--> 00:29:05,000

as a test translation,

712

00:29:05,000--> 00:29:07,428

we had no idea that the  
second passage we had chosen

713

## #SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay

Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:29:07,452--> 00:29:09,188

was so unusual, had...

714

00:29:09,212--> 00:29:11,708

I'm not sure the audience  
heard this part, actually,

715

00:29:11,732--> 00:29:15,068

but we did these two test  
translations for the book,

716

00:29:15,092--> 00:29:18,000

um, because they were  
considering another translator as well.

717

00:29:18,000--> 00:29:19,868

One was the prologue,  
which you heard,

718

00:29:19,892--> 00:29:22,388

and one was  
another, uh, piece of it,

719

00:29:22,412--> 00:29:24,000

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



and... which looked very...

720

00:29:24,000--> 00:29:26,308

kind of pedestrian

on the face of it,

721

00:29:26,332--> 00:29:28,328

but once we started

looking at it more carefully,

722

00:29:28,352--> 00:29:31,148

we realized it was all based

on a syntactic construction

723

00:29:31,172--> 00:29:32,908

that needed to be

totally taken apart

724

00:29:32,932--> 00:29:35,000

and rejigged in English, so...

725

00:29:35,000--> 00:29:36,000

Yeah.



**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



726

00:29:36,000--> 00:29:38,548

-But I think it's always  
more difficult than you think.

727

00:29:38,572--> 00:29:42,000

Even if you think it's  
going to be difficult.

728

00:29:42,000--> 00:29:45,000

-Yeah, that's where  
it gets really tricky.

729

00:29:45,000--> 00:29:46,000

-Yeah.

730

00:29:49,412--> 00:29:51,108

Yes, and then a  
follow-up to the...

731

00:29:51,132--> 00:29:55,000

a follow-up to that  
question, um, if you, um...

732

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**

Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:29:55,000--> 00:29:57,908

If you, uh, only re...

733

00:29:57,932--> 00:29:58,948

Only...

734

00:29:58,972--> 00:30:01,348

If you re...

735

00:30:01,372--> 00:30:02,508

if you work...

736

00:30:02,532--> 00:30:05,000

work on it without  
reading it in advance,

737

00:30:05,000--> 00:30:06,828

how do you, um...

How do you do it if

738

00:30:06,852--> 00:30:10,000

you're starting in the middle of  
a, um, a book, but that doesn't...

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



739

00:30:10,000--> 00:30:12,168

That doesn't relate to you,  
because you both read it.

740

00:30:12,192--> 00:30:13,988

-No, I mean, I  
can't say that, um...

741

00:30:14,012--> 00:30:17,000

Because... because we're, um...

742

00:30:17,000--> 00:30:20,068

Working on... in tandem,  
starting in different places.

743

00:30:20,092--> 00:30:21,588

So, um...

744

00:30:21,612--> 00:30:25,000

You know, I relied on David's

745

00:30:25,000--> 00:30:27,988

decisions for a lot of the,

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



um, terminology that kind of

746

00:30:28,012--> 00:30:29,468

worked through the whole book,

747

00:30:29,492--> 00:30:30,868

although we did discuss things.

748

00:30:30,892--> 00:30:33,228

So, but then I could kind of...

749

00:30:33,252--> 00:30:35,148

if I put a holder in place

750

00:30:35,172--> 00:30:36,548

until he got up to that section,

751

00:30:36,572--> 00:30:39,268

then I could change it, so I didn't

need to rack my brains too much

752

00:30:39,292--> 00:30:42,068

about how I translated

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



something relating to the 1930s,

753

00:30:42,092--> 00:30:44,008

because I knew that

David was going to get there

754

00:30:44,032--> 00:30:46,000

and solve that

problem for me.

755

00:30:46,000--> 00:30:48,548

-Yeah, but we were working at

the same time for the most part,

756

00:30:48,572--> 00:30:50,588

so we could... we could

rely on each other that way.

757

00:30:50,612--> 00:30:52,468

I could take a solution

from a later chapter

758

00:30:52,492--> 00:30:54,068

and use it in an

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



earlier one as well.

759

00:30:54,092--> 00:30:55,092

-Yeah.

760

00:30:55,116--> 00:30:56,116

-Yeah.

761

00:30:56,140--> 00:30:59,508

Um, Sue asks,

762

00:30:59,532--> 00:31:00,948

"is the experience different

763

00:31:00,972--> 00:31:04,188

if the original author

is no longer living?"

764

00:31:06,000--> 00:31:07,588

-Um...

765

00:31:08,932--> 00:31:13,000

The author is another

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



party to the whole

766

00:31:13,000--> 00:31:15,708

proceeding, and that has  
pros and cons of its own.

767

00:31:15,732--> 00:31:16,868

I think it was wonderful...

768

00:31:16,892--> 00:31:18,628

We had a lot of wonderful help

769

00:31:18,652--> 00:31:21,000

from the author in  
this case, and actually

770

00:31:21,000--> 00:31:24,388

went down to... to  
Brussels at one point,

771

00:31:24,412--> 00:31:29,000

and... We were, um... and he has...

772

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:31:29,000--> 00:31:31,188

Shall I tell the story  
about his law office?

773

00:31:31,212--> 00:31:32,308

[laughter]

774

00:31:32,332--> 00:31:33,748

Yeah. He has...

775

00:31:33,772--> 00:31:35,628

he has his office organized,

776

00:31:35,652--> 00:31:39,000

um, with the sources  
he used for each book

777

00:31:39,000--> 00:31:41,748

in the order that  
they're cited in the book,

778

00:31:41,772--> 00:31:43,068

first cited in the book,



779

00:31:43,092--> 00:31:44,628

so that he can easily find them

780

00:31:44,652--> 00:31:47,000

when he's checking

something in the book.

781

00:31:47,000--> 00:31:48,908

Um, so they're not

in alphabetical order,

782

00:31:48,932--> 00:31:50,768

they're not in any order

that would make sense

783

00:31:50,792--> 00:31:54,000

to anybody else until you

open up the book and...

784

00:31:54,000--> 00:31:56,268

Um, and presumably

in his mind as well.

785

## #SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay

Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:31:56,292--> 00:32:00,468

And he looked up all the old,  
um, transcripts of interviews

786

00:32:00,492--> 00:32:02,948

and all kinds of things for us,

787

00:32:02,972--> 00:32:06,108

and we had a list of about 100  
questions for him that we worked on.

788

00:32:06,132--> 00:32:08,028

So that was wonderful,  
and of course,

789

00:32:08,052--> 00:32:10,588

you don't get that if the  
author's not alive, so you...

790

00:32:10,612--> 00:32:12,000

you miss those kinds of things.

791

00:32:12,000--> 00:32:13,000

-Yeah.

792

00:32:13,024--> 00:32:15,308

-Um, and then there's...

793

00:32:15,332--> 00:32:18,748

it can be more of a stylistic  
challenge if it's older language

794

00:32:18,772--> 00:32:21,188

and so the more stylistically  
challenging the book is,

795

00:32:21,212--> 00:32:23,508

the harder it can  
be to do that job of

796

00:32:23,532--> 00:32:26,376

coordinating your style.

797

00:32:26,400--> 00:32:28,908

Um, I think for those...  
any... not just older books,

798

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:32:28,932--> 00:32:30,948

but anything that's  
stylistically challenging,

799

00:32:30,972--> 00:32:33,000

you really need to, um...

800

00:32:33,000--> 00:32:34,948

It works a lot better if

801

00:32:34,972--> 00:32:39,000

one of the two translators  
says, okay, I'll... I'll...

802

00:32:39,000--> 00:32:41,068

take this over at some point

803

00:32:41,092--> 00:32:43,068

and work on making the  
whole thing consistent.

804

00:32:43,092--> 00:32:45,428

So then it's a really  
different kind of partnership,

805

00:32:45,452--> 00:32:47,148

not quite, you know, the same...

806

00:32:47,172--> 00:32:51,000

You're not dividing it half-half  
in exactly the same way, yeah.

807

00:32:51,000--> 00:32:53,708

-Yeah, one advantage  
of a living author

808

00:32:53,732--> 00:32:55,000

is that if you have, um,

809

00:32:55,000--> 00:32:57,828

passages in the book that  
you feel you need to tweak

810

00:32:57,852--> 00:33:00,000

for the English edition,

811

00:33:00,000--> 00:33:03,028

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



um, you can rely on  
the author's authority

812

00:33:03,052--> 00:33:05,468

by kind of presenting  
them with that question

813

00:33:05,492--> 00:33:07,588

and presenting  
them with the options

814

00:33:07,612--> 00:33:09,000

and asking their approval.

815

00:33:09,000--> 00:33:10,828

And, um, you know,

816

00:33:10,852--> 00:33:14,000

sometimes if the author's  
not alive, then you kind of

817

00:33:14,000--> 00:33:16,388

feel a bit inhibited  
about changing the...

818

00:33:16,412--> 00:33:19,828

I mean, maybe other people  
feel less inhibited, I don't know.

819

00:33:19,852--> 00:33:22,000

I mean, I sometimes

820

00:33:22,000--> 00:33:23,948

rack my brains about that a bit.

821

00:33:23,972--> 00:33:25,148

But if the author's there,

822

00:33:25,172--> 00:33:28,000

you can just ask  
them or explain it, and...

823

00:33:28,000--> 00:33:29,508

Yeah, so for instance, um...

824

00:33:29,532--> 00:33:32,188

There was one

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



passage where the author

825

00:33:32,212--> 00:33:35,676

gave a lot of examples

of Dutch words that had

826

00:33:35,700--> 00:33:36,900

been borrowed by Indonesian.

827

00:33:36,924--> 00:33:40,268

Things like "kantoor" or

"amplop" from envelope,

828

00:33:40,292--> 00:33:41,308

or things like that.

829

00:33:41,332--> 00:33:45,028

And we felt it was important to

point out that the title, Revolusi,

830

00:33:45,052--> 00:33:47,868

comes from the Dutch

pronunciation of the word revolution.



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Wednesday 3 July 2025



831

00:33:47,892--> 00:33:51,108

And so the Latinate  
words in Indonesian

832

00:33:51,132--> 00:33:52,428

are actually Dutch.

833

00:33:52,452--> 00:33:55,700

They're written differently, but they're  
pronounced the same as they are in Dutch

834

00:33:55,724--> 00:33:57,264

which most English  
speakers don't know.

835

00:33:57,288--> 00:33:59,908

They just think it's a bit of a  
weird way of writing revolution.

836

00:34:01,000--> 00:34:02,068

-Yep.

837

00:34:02,092--> 00:34:07,000

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



Um, uh, next question,  
this is from Andrea.

838

00:34:07,000--> 00:34:10,000

"This by a long chalk,  
is my book of the year.

839

00:34:10,000--> 00:34:12,228

Absolutely brilliant  
and so readable.

840

00:34:12,252--> 00:34:14,868

And like Jane, I knew  
Nothing", with a capital N,

841

00:34:14,892--> 00:34:18,000

"about Indonesia and  
Dutch colonization.

842

00:34:18,000--> 00:34:19,468

I even had to get the Atlas out

843

00:34:19,492--> 00:34:22,000

to see exactly which territory it covers.

844

00:34:22,000--> 00:34:27,000

You mentioned about having to add  
extra information for readers like me.

845

00:34:27,000--> 00:34:28,388

Can you give us some examples?

846

00:34:28,412--> 00:34:29,668

Was it a lot of information

847

00:34:29,692--> 00:34:32,068

and was this done in the coordination with  
the author too?"

848

00:34:32,092--> 00:34:34,508

Well, you've kind of just  
partially answered that.

849

00:34:34,532--> 00:34:38,000

Um, but what other things...

850

00:34:38,000--> 00:34:43,000

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



Can you think of anything else  
that you had to explain or

851

00:34:43,000--> 00:34:46,000  
add extra information?

852

00:34:46,000--> 00:34:48,228  
-I think there were  
individuals who came up

853

00:34:48,252--> 00:34:50,148  
who would have been  
familiar to Dutch readers

854

00:34:50,172--> 00:34:53,028  
and so we added more  
explanation of who is this person,

855

00:34:53,052--> 00:34:54,768  
what else did this  
person do in their life

856

00:34:54,792--> 00:34:57,000  
outside of the anecdote

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



that's being told...

857

00:34:57,000--> 00:34:58,688

told here, there were  
some cases like that.

858

00:34:58,712--> 00:35:01,268

Um, and...

859

00:35:01,292--> 00:35:05,268

Particular words that have  
connotations for Dutch speakers

860

00:35:05,292--> 00:35:07,000

that have to be  
spelled out about

861

00:35:07,000--> 00:35:10,828

the colonial regime  
and Dutch history,

862

00:35:10,852--> 00:35:12,348

or ethnic groups, you know.

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



863

00:35:12,372--> 00:35:15,788

A lot of sensitive language  
around ethnicity and things like that

864

00:35:15,812--> 00:35:18,988

that we had to kind of unpack  
and rebuild in English, yeah.

865

00:35:22,000--> 00:35:24,388

-Um...

866

00:35:24,412--> 00:35:26,000

"Is there anything

867

00:35:26,000--> 00:35:29,308

that you would do differently  
after this joint effort?"

868

00:35:30,812--> 00:35:32,548

This is from Sabine.

869

00:35:35,000--> 00:35:37,428

-I think it's gone

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



pretty well, so...

870

00:35:37,452--> 00:35:39,508

perhaps not, or

do you have any...?

871

00:35:39,532--> 00:35:41,588

Does anything

spring to mind, David?

872

00:35:41,612--> 00:35:44,228

-I don't think so, yeah,

I think this one went

873

00:35:44,252--> 00:35:45,988

about as smoothly

as it could have.

874

00:35:46,012--> 00:35:48,308

Yeah, even with the

editors, too, it all went...

875

00:35:48,332--> 00:35:51,228

The editing was light, it

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



all went very, very smoothly.

876

00:35:51,252--> 00:35:53,388

Collaboration with  
the author as well.

877

00:35:53,412--> 00:35:56,000

So this was sort  
of the ideal project

878

00:35:56,000--> 00:35:58,228

and still very labour-intensive.

879

00:35:58,252--> 00:36:02,468

I mean, these co-translations  
are very labour-intensive to work on,

880

00:36:02,492--> 00:36:05,000

so it's an investment  
for me and

881

00:36:05,000--> 00:36:06,628

having company  
while you're doing it,



882

00:36:06,652--> 00:36:09,508

and in continuing education,

883

00:36:09,532--> 00:36:10,848

because you learn so much from...

884

00:36:10,872--> 00:36:13,000

from working with someone else.

885

00:36:13,000--> 00:36:14,250

-Yeah, and of course, you know,

886

00:36:14,274--> 00:36:18,588

because we admire the

book and think it's important,

887

00:36:18,612--> 00:36:21,668

so that that helps

to, you know, if...

888

00:36:21,692--> 00:36:25,000

Give you a good sense afterwards

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



that you've done something worthwhile.

889

00:36:25,000--> 00:36:26,000

-Yeah.

890

00:36:26,000--> 00:36:29,228

-Um, Sabine's just given us a  
follow-up question about that.

891

00:36:29,252--> 00:36:31,708

What about in your own work,

892

00:36:31,732--> 00:36:36,000

your own solo work, has  
this project, has collaborating

893

00:36:36,000--> 00:36:40,548

in this way, made a difference to  
anything that you do individually?

894

00:36:44,000--> 00:36:47,508

I think, uh, I'm  
always impressed

# #SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay

Wednesday 3 July 2025



895

00:36:47,532--> 00:36:50,000

by, um, by David's

896

00:36:50,000--> 00:36:52,108

style, uh, when

he's translating,

897

00:36:52,132--> 00:36:56,000

particularly, you know, his

vocabulary, the way he, kind of,

898

00:36:56,000--> 00:36:57,988

often finds just the right word,

899

00:36:58,012--> 00:37:00,300

whereas, you know, I

think, oh, that's a good word.

900

00:37:00,324--> 00:37:02,588

So... so having been

exposed to that intensively

901

00:37:02,612--> 00:37:05,000

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



for such a long period,

I think that kind of

902

00:37:05,000--> 00:37:09,228

encourages me to... to try and  
emulate that a little bit sometimes.

903

00:37:10,000--> 00:37:13,468

-Yeah, yeah, oh, that's...  
that's mutual, of course, and...

904

00:37:13,492--> 00:37:16,388

and I think, in  
general, like, doing...

905

00:37:16,412--> 00:37:20,000

doing co-translation and  
collaborative translation,

906

00:37:20,000--> 00:37:22,548

makes... makes me a  
more communicative person

907

00:37:22,572--> 00:37:23,988

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



and a more

communicative translator,

908

00:37:24,012--> 00:37:26,188

so even when I'm doing  
a translation on my own,

909

00:37:26,212--> 00:37:29,628

I'm more inclined  
just to, uh, call up the...

910

00:37:29,652--> 00:37:32,428

call up the author or get  
someone else involved,

911

00:37:32,452--> 00:37:34,348

get the editor  
involved, and say,

912

00:37:34,372--> 00:37:35,828

hey, let's work  
on this together.

913

00:37:35,852--> 00:37:38,148

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



Let's, let's, you know,  
let's look at this together.

914

00:37:38,172--> 00:37:41,000

So, yeah, it makes  
me feel more like...

915

00:37:41,000--> 00:37:42,308

less like it's my  
thing that I'm...

916

00:37:42,332--> 00:37:46,000

keep huddling up against my  
chest in my office alone, so...

917

00:37:46,000--> 00:37:48,000

Yeah.

918

00:37:48,000--> 00:37:50,388

-Um, Ian says,

919

00:37:50,412--> 00:37:52,828

"you are speakers  
of different English's.

920

00:37:52,852--> 00:37:55,508

Was that an advantage  
or a disadvantage

921

00:37:55,532--> 00:37:57,948

in your collaboration  
and translation?"

922

00:37:59,000--> 00:38:01,948

-Well, the lead publisher  
was a British publisher,

923

00:38:01,972--> 00:38:04,468

so, um, we both  
had to more or less

924

00:38:04,492--> 00:38:07,000

do a translation  
in pseudo-British.

925

00:38:07,000--> 00:38:09,908

Um, so as an Australian  
speaker, that was

926

00:38:09,932--> 00:38:15,000

probably easier for me, or  
closer to my variety of English.

927

00:38:15,000--> 00:38:16,548

Um, and I think that helped,

928

00:38:16,572--> 00:38:18,488

because I feel much  
more comfortable doing that

929

00:38:18,512--> 00:38:22,000

than I do trying to  
produce pseudo-American.

930

00:38:22,000--> 00:38:23,908

Um, but, um...

931

00:38:23,932--> 00:38:27,308

And David's worked for many  
British publishers in the past,

932



**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**

Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:38:27,332--> 00:38:28,576

so he's used to it as well.

933

00:38:28,600--> 00:38:29,600

Yeah.

934

00:38:29,624--> 00:38:30,748

-So I think that...

935

00:38:30,772--> 00:38:34,000

I think we didn't really have  
too much trouble on that score.

936

00:38:34,000--> 00:38:36,088

-Yeah, it was probably nice  
to have a middle ground

937

00:38:36,112--> 00:38:38,868

where neither of us was the  
British translator who was the...

938

00:38:38,892--> 00:38:41,000

who had the final word on what,

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



939

00:38:41,000--> 00:38:44,000

what the right answer

was to everything, yeah.

940

00:38:44,000--> 00:38:49,000

-And the book was also being  
published in the States as well, so...

941

00:38:49,000--> 00:38:54,348

So, it's probably not too bad if  
the translation wasn't super British.

942

00:38:57,000--> 00:38:58,788

-Um, uh, Christine asks,

943

00:38:58,812--> 00:39:01,988

"did you make notes while  
reading the book in advance?"

944

00:39:04,000--> 00:39:07,100

-That's one of those good ideas that I  
never get around to doing, I'm afraid.

945

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:39:07,124--> 00:39:08,228

[laughter]

946

00:39:08,252--> 00:39:10,228

-Yeah, thanks for  
the suggestion, yeah.

947

00:39:10,252--> 00:39:12,000

[laughter]

948

00:39:12,000--> 00:39:13,308

-Something for the next time.

949

00:39:13,332--> 00:39:15,668

Um, Kasia says,

950

00:39:15,692--> 00:39:17,588

"how does collaboration  
on non-fiction

951

00:39:17,612--> 00:39:20,068

compare with  
fiction and or verse?"

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



952

00:39:21,000--> 00:39:22,908

-Um, I...

953

00:39:22,932--> 00:39:25,268

I would think twice before  
collaborating on verse.

954

00:39:25,292--> 00:39:29,148

I mean, and that has to do, again,  
with stylistic difficulty and idiosyncrasy,

955

00:39:29,172--> 00:39:32,708

and then... and I... If you... if it's  
something you need to wrestle with

956

00:39:32,732--> 00:39:34,988

and kind of intuitively  
find the right voice

957

00:39:35,012--> 00:39:37,508

and it's... and it's hard  
to express explicitly

958

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:39:37,532--> 00:39:39,308

what all those  
stylistic decisions are,

959

00:39:39,332--> 00:39:42,000

then that makes  
co-translation more challenging.

960

00:39:42,000--> 00:39:43,988

-But we do... we do often

961

00:39:44,012--> 00:39:48,000

ask each other's advice  
when translating poetry.

962

00:39:48,000--> 00:39:50,208

Um, but that's different  
from, you know, again, that's...

963

00:39:50,232--> 00:39:52,000

that's where we both retain the right to...

964

00:39:52,000--> 00:39:56,576

To take it or leave

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



it. Um, so, I mean...

965

00:39:56,600--> 00:39:58,708

Which is different to  
this kind of collaboration,

966

00:39:58,732--> 00:40:01,200

where we have to really both  
agree with something, so...

967

00:40:01,224--> 00:40:02,908

So I think with...  
with Verse, it's really

968

00:40:02,932--> 00:40:06,000

an individual expression,

969

00:40:06,000--> 00:40:08,000

verse translation.

970

00:40:08,000--> 00:40:10,388

-Um, this...

971

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:40:10,412--> 00:40:14,000

this idea that you have to reach  
consensus, was there anything...

972

00:40:14,000--> 00:40:16,588

Um, were there points... I'm not  
saying, tell us what they were,

973

00:40:16,612--> 00:40:18,788

but were there points where you

974

00:40:18,812--> 00:40:20,868

each kind of went  
away dissatisfied,

975

00:40:20,892--> 00:40:22,500

thinking that, you  
know, well, we've...

976

00:40:22,524--> 00:40:25,388

We've, um... we've come  
to consensus on this,

977

00:40:25,412--> 00:40:27,308

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



but neither of us  
are entirely satisfied,

978

00:40:27,332--> 00:40:31,000

but it's kind of the best  
thing we're going to come to.

979

00:40:31,000--> 00:40:33,188

-Well, I think, um, you know,  
because we wanted the...

980

00:40:33,212--> 00:40:37,000

the styles to  
resemble each other

981

00:40:37,000--> 00:40:38,528

in the different  
sections of the book,

982

00:40:38,552--> 00:40:41,000

so we... we both

983

00:40:41,000--> 00:40:47,000

agreed to, um, to be a bit more



accepting of the other's criticisms

984

00:40:47,000--> 00:40:49,828

than we would otherwise,  
with the idea that if I...

985

00:40:49,852--> 00:40:51,988

if I kind of lower my...

986

00:40:52,012--> 00:40:54,748

lower my resistance  
and just take on...

987

00:40:54,772--> 00:40:57,868

take David's ideas on board  
and he does the same with mine,

988

00:40:57,892--> 00:41:00,000

then the two halves will

989

00:41:00,000--> 00:41:02,388

merge more stylistically.

990

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:41:02,412--> 00:41:04,988

So... so that made it easy,

991

00:41:05,012--> 00:41:07,748

because then I'm thinking,  
oh, is that... is that a good idea?

992

00:41:07,772--> 00:41:09,000

I kind of like my bit better.

993

00:41:09,000--> 00:41:12,000

Then it's just like, okay, then.

994

00:41:12,000--> 00:41:15,308

-Yeah, yeah. But then you get  
into that mindset, and you're very...

995

00:41:15,332--> 00:41:16,708

[laughs]

996

00:41:16,732--> 00:41:19,068

and it's nice to have the  
other... the other voice,

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



997

00:41:19,092--> 00:41:21,768

nice to have someone telling  
you, oh, let's try it this way instead

998

00:41:21,792--> 00:41:23,000

and to be able to...

999

00:41:23,000--> 00:41:24,388

Yeah,

1000

00:41:24,412--> 00:41:26,000

try something different.

1001

00:41:26,000--> 00:41:29,548

Um, Sue asks, "how  
long did this project take?

1002

00:41:29,572--> 00:41:31,508

My imagination thinks  
quite a long time."

1003

00:41:34,000--> 00:41:37,748

-I think that between

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



actually starting the first draft

1004

00:41:37,772--> 00:41:39,428

and sending it to the publisher,

1005

00:41:39,452--> 00:41:41,208

so there was quite a

bit of work after that

1006

00:41:41,232--> 00:41:43,388

with the publisher on the

edits and things like that,

1007

00:41:43,412--> 00:41:45,100

what was it, a little

more than 6 months?

1008

00:41:45,124--> 00:41:48,000

Something like that? Does

that sound right? 6 to 9 months?

1009

00:41:48,000--> 00:41:49,440

-I really don't

remember, maybe more...

1010

00:41:49,464--> 00:41:50,868

maybe closer to 9.

1011

00:41:50,892--> 00:41:53,000

But, as I said, you know, um...

1012

00:41:53,000--> 00:41:55,508

I was working on other  
projects at the same time.

1013

00:41:55,532--> 00:41:58,468

I think it was probably, like, 9  
months, maybe a little bit longer.

1014

00:41:58,492--> 00:42:00,000

-Yeah. Yeah.

1015

00:42:00,000--> 00:42:02,828

-And then with not  
working on it full-time.

1016

00:42:02,852--> 00:42:04,788

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



Yeah.

1017

00:42:06,000--> 00:42:11,668

-Um, would you both advise other translators to try out co-translation?

1018

00:42:16,000--> 00:42:18,748

-I would certainly advise people to try collaboration

1019

00:42:18,772--> 00:42:21,988

of one kind or another, to try to see

1020

00:42:22,012--> 00:42:24,508

how you can work with other people, learn from other people

1021

00:42:24,532--> 00:42:26,548

in a way that makes sense for the work that you do.

1022

00:42:26,572--> 00:42:29,068

And that may not be

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



co-translation, but it... yeah.

1023

00:42:31,000--> 00:42:34,068

Find something that gets  
you out of your closed...

1024

00:42:34,092--> 00:42:38,000

closed office mindset, yeah.

1025

00:42:38,000--> 00:42:41,508

I think you can experiment  
with co-translation, definitely,

1026

00:42:41,532--> 00:42:44,868

and if you have a  
co-translator in mind

1027

00:42:44,892--> 00:42:49,000

and you already know that you...  
that you kind of really are peers

1028

00:42:49,000--> 00:42:54,508

and you can work well together, if  
you know that in advance, then sure.

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



1029

00:42:54,532--> 00:42:55,532

Why not?

1030

00:42:57,000--> 00:43:00,388

-Okay, um, sadly, that's

all we have time for.

1031

00:43:00,412--> 00:43:06,000

I would like to say an enormous  
thank you to David and David

1032

00:43:06,000--> 00:43:08,148

for joining me

for today's event,

1033

00:43:08,172--> 00:43:11,000

and thank you to everybody  
who's been here today.

1034

00:43:11,000--> 00:43:14,708

Thank you to Ambre Morvan  
for moderating today's event



**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



1035

00:43:14,732--> 00:43:17,000

and being there  
in the background

1036

00:43:17,000--> 00:43:19,868

and doing things, which  
has been invaluable.

1037

00:43:19,892--> 00:43:21,068

If you've enjoyed this event

1038

00:43:21,092--> 00:43:24,000

and you aren't yet a member  
of the Society of Authors,

1039

00:43:24,000--> 00:43:28,000

please consider joining our community  
with our special SoA at Home offer.

1040

00:43:28,000--> 00:43:31,108

You can get 20% off for  
the first year of membership.

1041

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Wednesday 3 July 2025



00:43:31,132--> 00:43:33,228

Use the code "SOATHOME20",

1042

00:43:33,252--> 00:43:36,000

and Ambre has just  
pasted that into the chat.

1043

00:43:36,000--> 00:43:39,868

Our next SoA at Home event

1044

00:43:39,892--> 00:43:43,000

takes place on  
Thursday, the 10th of July,

1045

00:43:43,000--> 00:43:46,308

with an In conversation event  
with English classicist Mary Beard.

1046

00:43:46,332--> 00:43:49,268

You can find out more  
and you can book your ticket

1047

00:43:49,292--> 00:43:50,548

for this or other events

1048

00:43:50,572--> 00:43:55,000  
at [societyofauthors.org/events](https://societyofauthors.org/events).

1049

00:43:55,000--> 00:44:00,108  
A reminder, this SoA at  
Home event is free to all,

1050

00:44:00,132--> 00:44:01,308  
but if you can afford to,

1051

00:44:01,332--> 00:44:02,948  
please consider donating

1052

00:44:02,972--> 00:44:05,000  
to our Society of  
Authors Access Fund

1053

00:44:05,000--> 00:44:07,708  
where we suggest a  
minimum donation of £5.

1054

00:44:07,732--> 00:44:11,308

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



You can also help the  
Society of Authors Access Fund

1055

00:44:11,332--> 00:44:14,000

by making a purchase  
on our virtual bookstore

1056

00:44:14,000--> 00:44:15,388

on Bookshop.org,

1057

00:44:15,412--> 00:44:17,148

where you can  
find books by writers

1058

00:44:17,172--> 00:44:20,000

taking part in the SoA at  
Home events programme.

1059

00:44:20,000--> 00:44:24,108

Um, and one final  
thank you to the David's

1060

00:44:24,132--> 00:44:27,000

and everyone who has

**#SoAatHome | How we translate – in conversation with David Colmer and David McKay**  
Wednesday 3 July 2025



been here for this event.

1061

00:44:27,000--> 00:44:32,000

Please do continue the  
conversation on social media

1062

00:44:32,000--> 00:44:36,428

with the festival  
hashtag, #SoAatHome.

1063

00:44:36,452--> 00:44:39,508

And thank you all  
very much for coming.

1064

00:44:39,532--> 00:44:40,628

-Thank you.

1065

00:44:40,652--> 00:44:41,652

-Thank you.