

# EMPOWERING PEOPLE THROUGH TRANSLATIONS



Language is power. It opens doors and changes lives, and if you're an immigrant in a new land where you do not speak the native language, it can be a barrier to entry—as a student, a homeowner, a customer, a patient, and an employee. BMC's home city of Houston, Texas, recently regained its ranking as the [most diverse city in the United States](#). Over 140 languages are spoken here; in the pre-pandemic times, when we were out and about, you could hear different languages and experience different cultures every day.

The uptick in remote learning—and living—over the last year has created opportunities for translation services to enter the technology space. Tarjimly is a technology non-profit with the mission of eliminating humanitarian language barriers, and BMC is a proud supporter of the company.

The United States has more immigrants than any other country in the world, and while English is the native language, [only 53 percent of immigrants](#) are proficient in English. Translation services are key to bridging cultures and languages, opening doors, and creating personal and professional opportunities. I discovered this firsthand as a young girl when I began translating for my parents after we immigrated to Houston.

## Putting translations in the palm of your hand

As with so many things in technology, there's now an app for that. The Tarjimly mobile app trains and connects bilingual and multilingual volunteers with refugees, immigrants, and humanitarian organizations to provide instant translation and interpretation.

As part of our Monthly Diversity Speaker Series, Tarjimly co-founder and executive director Atif Javid

spoke to our multinational, multilingual workforce and encouraged volunteerism through our BMC Cares organization. Tarjimly's innovative use of technology as an interventional tool is a perfect fit for BMC Cares and also seamlessly aligns with the [United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals](#).

## A personal connection

If you aren't familiar with Houston, there are just two things you should know: 1) there are *a lot* of bumper stickers that read, "I wasn't born in Texas but I got here as fast as I could" and 2) Houstonians love mentioning how their city is the most diverse in the United States (like I just did above). This just about sums it up. Houston is a great and diverse place to be.

My parents knew that and immigrated our family to Houston when I was young. When we arrived, they were extremely eloquent and well-versed in their mother tongue, Arabic, but English was an obstacle for them. They both enrolled in English night classes at our local community college, but that eventually fell to the wayside as they struggled to juggle their education with their existing roles as providers and caregivers for my siblings and me.

Meanwhile, I was afforded a formal English education by way of the public schooling system. I was taught to read, write, and practice my speaking over the span of eight hours a day, five days a week. Naturally, this led to me becoming a resource whose responsibility it was to bridge the language barrier gap in our day-to-day lives. I became an interpreter for my parents and was entrusted to decipher restaurant menus, warranty details, bills, forms, documents, and everything else that presented a language challenge.

## Translating as a path to growth

This experience allowed me to have a truly authentic relationship with my parents from a very early age. Information I would've otherwise been kept from, such as financial records or health issues, became a collection of secrets I was in on as well. I was quick to pick up on the vulnerability of their circumstance and didn't shy away from the responsibility.

The emotional element strengthened my familial bonds and enabled me to develop an amount of emotional intelligence that would later inform my behavior and values into adulthood. The role of interpreter itself helped me hone my language skills and often forced me to be creative. At times, figuring out how to deliver idioms or metaphors to my parents felt like completing a puzzle.

While I look back on my experience as a child interpreter with pride, and I'm extremely proud of the person I turned out to be, I recognize that may not be the case or experience for many others, and some families may have no one available to them as a translation resource. That's why Tarjimly means so much to me.

BMC Cares is dedicated to inspiring and empowering BMC's workforce to invest in people and enrich global communities through digital literacy, interventions, and accessibility with tools like Tarjimly. By doing so, we hope to create an [Autonomous Digital Enterprise](#) that includes everyone and advances a more equitable world. If you'd like to join BMC in helping to eliminate language barriers, open doors, and create opportunities, visit [www.tarjimly.org/cares/bmc](http://www.tarjimly.org/cares/bmc) and download the app today.