



The language variable in educational research: an exploration of researcher positionality, translation, and interpretation

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ABSTRACT

In qualitative educational research, the languages spoken by the participants and the researchers can greatly impact the quality of the data collected. This paper will explore the advantages and disadvantages of being an insider researcher by virtue of speaking the same language(s) as the participants. Whether the researcher is a linguistic insider or outsider, he or she will need to make important decisions with regard to translation and interpretation when conducting cross-language research. Such linguistic decisions can also impact the quality of the data collected and the trustworthiness of the research. The advantages and disadvantages of translation and interpretation in qualitative educational research will be explored. This paper offers researchers and students suggestions for conducting cross-language educational research in an ethical and transparent manner.

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Context

As a Canadian teacher and researcher focused on second language education, language has always been at the heart of my life and my research. My research focuses on the educational experiences of French minority-language speakers who live in a province where English is the language of the majority and where French has the official language status nationally. Because I am a French-minority speaker but also a speaker of the language of the majority, English, I must admit that my linguistic positionality has influenced my research. It is the intent of this paper to bring linguistic positionality to the forefront and to discuss potential issues that may arise in cross-language research so that other researchers and students who might be wrestling with the same issues might have a space to begin exploring them. Perhaps, one of the biggest challenges I encountered while conducting research was the lack of publications in educational research about the issues surrounding the languages spoken by the participants and the researcher. In particular, the ways in which language influences or impacts issues of positionality, translation, and interpretation were rarely debated in educational research. As a language teacher and researcher, it is clear that language plays an important role in research and that an exploration of some of the ways in which it can impact educational research is warranted. As such, this paper will attempt to fill that gap by exploring those issues as they pertain to an often unexplored variable, the language variable.

Firstly, with regard to positionality, linguistic positionality matters. When a researcher does not speak the same dominant language(s) as his or her participants, data collection is impacted. In this case, the researcher's dominant language becomes a form of power he or she holds over the

participants. Ultimately, issues of power must be dealt with in any research project especially since Scott and Morrison (2006, 179) admit that in educational research issues of power are often 'ignored or marginalized'. The most popular way to address power in research is to practice reflexivity which will be discussed later on (Scott and Morrison 2006). However, it is first and foremost important to acknowledge that linguistic positionality, as a form of power, deserves a deeper exploration in educational research.

On the surface, linguistic insiders, that is, researchers who share the same dominant language as their participants, may believe that issues of linguistic power are non-existent or of no concern. However, a factor that cannot be ignored is the complexity of identity, that is, a researcher may speak the same language as his or her participants but may be very different on other levels of identity such as race, ethnicity, or religion. Moreover, although a researcher may be considered a linguistic insider, he or she may very well speak a different dialect or have a different accent which may also impact the degree of his or her insider positionality. This was the case of Hallion Bres (2006) who conducted research with Canadian Francophones. She felt that her linguistic positionality as a Franco-phone from France impacted the data by influencing participants to speak more formally with her (Hallion Bres 2006). In the end, whether they are linguistic insiders or outsiders, all qualitative researchers should address linguistic power issues by firstly being aware of their linguistic positionality and then by being empathetic towards their participants.

Nevertheless, even if positionality is clearly identified, it does not resolve the other linguistic power issues that can occur. When conducting any type of research where more than one language is spoken by the participants and/or the researcher or the participants and the researcher speak different languages, translation and interpretation should be reflected upon before the onset of data collection. This is because translation and interpretation are also forms of linguistic power that can have a direct impact on the validity of the data collected. Researchers need to be aware of these threats to validity but also need to reflect on how they will go about translating or interpreting. In particular, decisions need to be made with regard to when and how to translate as well as how the translation will be edited and how it will be presented in the final research document. Reflecting on these issues is an important step towards representing the participants as faithfully as possible no matter the language they may speak. The following sections will delve further into the topics mentioned here. Firstly, insider/outsider positionality will be discussed with a special focus on linguistic positionality as this is a topic rarely explored. This will be followed by a presentation of the linguistic power issues that can arise when translation and interpretation are employed. Suggestions on how to address these issues will be offered in every section.

Linguistic insider researchers

An insider researcher is defined as someone who shares 'common languages, themes and experiences with their participants' (Kim 2012, 264). In general, it is considered advantageous to be an insider researcher for several reasons (Gair 2012). Insider researchers have 'intimate knowledge of the context' and of the participants which allows them to pick up on cues, either linguistic or contextual, that outsider researchers may not notice (Blackledge and Creese 2010). Moreover, insiders generally have easy access to their participants and to local contexts (Hult 2014) and more facility in obtaining informed consent (Kim 2012; Oriola and Haggerty 2012). With regard to interviews, a common research technique employed in qualitative research, insiders can make participants feel more comfortable because they can evoke 'a sense of belonging' (McNess, Arthur, and Crossley 2015, 301). This can have a direct impact on how open a participant is which leads to the generation of rich data (Couture, Zaidi, and Matlicka-Tyndale 2012). Finally, because insider researchers belong to the same group as the participants and can empathize with them (Perryman 2011), it is believed that they are less likely to cause them harm (Kim 2012). Since many factors impact the degree of positionality, these points may be considered generalizations. However, it is interesting to note that linguistic insider researchers are generally viewed positively.

Most of the literature on insider/outsider researcher positionality deals with ethnicity and race, yet language is also an important position to explore (Hult 2014). In fact, multilingual researchers can 'operate between languages by drawing strategically on different codes to invoke localized meanings in ways that structure relationships with others in any given situation' (Hult 2014, 66). Knowledge of the participants' languages is useful for understanding the data while it is being collected and being able to work with it later on. This was certainly true when I conducted research on French/English bilingual school shifters (Cormier 2012). Although their interviews were conducted in English, instances of code-switching occurred. Since bilinguals will only code-switch when code-switching will be accepted (Ljosland 2011) and when they ascribe group membership to the listener (Auer 1998), the instances of code-switching show that the participants considered me a legitimate group member and knew I would understand them. Moreover, my linguistic positionality enabled me to transcribe and analyse these instances of code-switching. Additionally, Gorter (2012) feels that being a minority-language speaker makes him more aware and responsive to minority-language participants, even if they do not speak the same language. Sharing a language and its minority status tends to result in a more faithful representation of the participants' perspectives (Witcher 2010). It is clear that there are numerous advantages that may be associated with being able to speak the same languages as the participants.

However, there are reported disadvantages with being an insider researcher. Insiders are often described as being 'subjective' (Kanuha 2000, 441), 'biased' (Bilecen 2013, 53), or too close to their participants to ask hard questions or to accurately analyse responses. In interviews, an issue that can occur is that the insider researcher does not question or elicit clarifications because they intuitively understand the participants. Participants as well may not give a detailed answer especially if they feel the researcher knows what they mean. As mentioned previously, when my participants chose to code-switch, they did not bother explaining these terms since they assumed that I would understand them. This can have a negative impact on the richness of the data. Insider researchers have to be careful not to take their shared knowledge for granted and need to insist that the participants elaborate or clarify their meanings (Kanuha 2000).

Another problem linguistic insider researchers may encounter is the difficulty of ensuring anonymity when all the community members know each other and know the researcher (McNess, Arthur, and Crossley 2015). This is especially true with regard to linguistic minorities who often belong to small, close-knit groups. Another related concern is that community members may assume that an insider researcher would never publish anything negative about their community (Couture, Zaidi, and Maticka-Tyndale 2012). In many research topics, a critical stance is necessary but clearly this stance may be more compromising for an insider researcher than for a stranger. Moreover, Savvides et al. (2014) note that just because the researcher and the participants share a language or a culture that does not automatically result in trust or that the researcher will be viewed as an insider by the participants.

Linguistic outsider researchers

In contrast, outsider researchers are often defined as 'neutral' (Blackledge and Creese 2010, 87) and 'objective' (McNess, Arthur, and Crossley 2015, 301). As such, participants may feel more comfortable talking about political issues or sensitive topics with outsiders who are not involved in the same way as an insider researcher (Cortazzi, Pilcher, and Jin 2011; McNess, Arthur, and Crossley 2015). Moreover, outsiders are free to report on the issues they deem pertinent, even if this involves being critical of the community. Outsiders may be less worried about how the community will react to their research, since they do not have any 'loyalties' (Couture, Zaidi, and Maticka-Tyndale 2012, 93). However, the main disadvantage an outsider researcher faces when conducting cross-language research is not being able to speak the participants' dominant language (Dávila 2014). Gorter (2012) suggests that a way to resolve this issue is to learn the participants' native language, even if it is just a few words, because this shows them respect. Although Hallion Bres (2006) spoke the same language

as her participants (French), she decided to hire a French-Canadian interviewer in order to limit her influence on the data collected in her further research projects (Hallion et al. 2011). In fact, Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest designing research teams that combine both insiders and outsiders. This way the research benefits from the advantages of both positions. However, these strategies do not always resolve the linguistic power issues that may arise simply because there are inherent issues with the insider/outsider debate.

Problems with the insider/outsider debate

Although it may seem that being a linguistic insider researcher is preferable, when an effort is made to match participants with researchers based on language or other identity facets, it does not always result in a better relationship between the participants and the researcher. The concept of 'matching', which entails matching the racial or ethnic identity of the researcher to the participants', is related to the insider/outsider debate because it presumes insiders are better equipped to conduct research on members from their own community (Cabral and Smith 2011, 537). This strategy has most often been used in research on health care but could also be applied to other types of qualitative research if a linguistic insider researcher is preferred. In the field of health care, a therapist and patients can be matched based on race, ethnicity, or language (Cabral and Smith 2011) and sometimes even based on age and socio-economic status (Lee, Sulaiman-Hill, and Thompson 2014). Essentially, the principle is: the more similar therapists are to their clients, the better. However, even though a therapist is matched on many levels with their clients, Temple and Edwards (2002) found that difference was guaranteed due to levels of education and language proficiency. Moreover, after consulting patients about whether or not they preferred to be matched with a caregiver who spoke their dominant language, they stated that 'a therapist's cultural responsiveness and understanding of their worldview' was more important than 'ethnic-matching' (Gallardo 2012). In fact, Savvides et al. (2014) agree and are less concerned with whether researchers are insiders or outsiders and more concerned with how empathetic they are. An important quality all qualitative researchers should have, no matter their positionality, is the ability to listen to participants and to demonstrate empathy towards them (Gair 2012).

Nevertheless, over the years, researchers have questioned the insider/outsider debate altogether (Hult 2014; Humphrey 2013; McNess, Arthur, and Crossley 2015; Merton 1972; Nakata 2015; Savvides et al. 2014), indicating that researcher identity is not black or white but instead it is grey or even a mixture of colours, shades, and nuances. The main issue with the insider/outsider definition is that it presumes that the researcher is either an insider or an outsider when in reality he or she can be both at the same time (Hult 2014). A researcher can also share specific aspects of his or her identity with participants, for example, occupation, but not others, such as language. Some researchers (McNess, Arthur, and Crossley 2015, 311) call this the 'third space', stating that a researcher is never entirely an insider or an outsider but works 'in between' the two. In fact, Nakata (2015) develops the notion of the third space by exploring eight different dimensions of the insider/outsider position. Furthermore, currently, identity is viewed as dynamic and fluid (Couture, Zaidi, and Maticka-Tyndale 2012; Srivastava 2006). Some aspects of identity can change according to the context which results in shifts between insider and outsider positions (McNess, Arthur, and Crossley 2015). Individuals also have 'multiple identities' (Hult 2014, 65; Savvides et al. 2014, 423) and it is perhaps more important to explore the intersections between these identities instead of isolating them. Couture, Zaidi, and Maticka-Tyndale (2012) agree, stating that 'it is unreasonable to dichotomize insider/outsider status and think of them as exclusive since they are based on our numerous intersecting identities, which are inherently complex' (93). Whether the insider/outsider position is viewed as static, fluid, on a continuum, or context dependent, the fact of the matter remains that positionality has an impact on the research process.

What seems to be more important for research is not whether researchers are insiders or outsiders, a combination of both or somewhere in between but rather if they are aware of their

positionalities. Qualitative researchers must ‘situate themselves relationally, socially, personally, and politically in their research’ (Kouritzin, Piquemal, and Norman 2008). Being upfront and reflexive about positionality allows readers to situate the research adding an element of trustworthiness to the research (Reyes 2005). However, Court and Abbas (2013) warn that reflexivity is not only describing one’s positionality towards the research, it also entails reviewing one’s positionality during data collection and describing how the data may have been impacted by positionality and the context. Savvides et al. (2014, 416) agree, indicating that qualitative researchers should aim for ‘critical reflexivity’ by explaining the researchers’ positionality vis-à-vis the participants and the research topic; doing so ensures rigour and reliability. With regard to linguistic positionality, researchers should be upfront about the languages they speak and whether or not they belong to specific linguistic communities.

In line with this idea, it is important to reiterate that I am a bilingual researcher; fluent in English and French. It may be thus inferred that I am biased and that if I state that it is advantageous or even preferable to be a bilingual or multilingual researcher, this is because I am one. I want to, however, clarify my position. I am not arguing that researchers who do not speak the participants’ dominant language should not conduct research on them. I am only saying that it is important to put into place measures that will treat participants respectfully. This means not imposing the researcher’s language on them. Without speaking the participants’ language, researchers may still be experts on the topic being studied and their contributions may be essential. Unilingual researchers, just like bilingual and multilingual researchers, need to reflect on their positionality and think ethically about how they will deal with the language variable. Such language predicaments may be resolved by including translators, interpreters, bilingual or multilingual community members, and/or research assistants in the research. However, such practices are not solutions without risks.

The next section will review the advantages and disadvantages of using translation and interpreters in cross-language research. It will also explain what options are available for researchers who will be using translation in their research. Finally, it will offer suggestions on how translations of transcript excerpts can be presented in a final research paper.

Issues with translation

In qualitative research, considering the amount of international studies, it is surprising that there are not more articles pertaining to the issues involved in translation and the use of interpreters (Fersch 2013; Halai 2007; Srivastava 2006). For the purpose of this text, the simplified definitions of translation and interpretation will be used: a translator ‘makes a written transfer of a message or statement’ between two languages, while an interpreter ‘conveys a message or statement verbally’ between individuals who do not speak the same language (Lee, Sulaiman-Hill, and Thompson 2014, 2). When translation is mentioned in research articles, it is often thought of as a ‘logistical or technical’ issue (Shklarov 2007, 529). As such, the power dynamics involved in translation are rarely mentioned. Moreover, researchers rarely critically reflect on the methods they use to translate (Williamson et al. 2011). Pennycook (2001, 14) identifies some of the main issues with translation, showing that there is a need for researchers to consider the issue of translation in cross-language research: ‘the tendencies of translations to domesticate foreign cultures, the insistence on the possibility of value-free translation, the challenges to the notion of authorship posed by translation’. These issues will be explored in more detail in the following section.

Firstly, when translating, cultural concepts pose a serious problem for the translator because there are often no equivalences in the target language. This is why Pennycook (2001, 14) states that this process tends to ‘domesticate’ culture as it has to be explained in another language, through that language’s cultural framework. Halai (2007, 345) describes this process as ‘cultural decoding’ which is never a neutral practice. In order to even attempt cultural decoding, the translator needs to have a deep understanding of both languages and cultures as these types of translations cannot be found in bilingual dictionaries (Santos, Black, and Sandelowski 2015). Dalby (2003) agrees,

stating that perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of translation is conveying tone which is culturally imbedded in the original text.

Due to the scarcity of educational research that mentions translation, this section will review some health studies that identified issues with translation. For example, Shklarov (2007) describes how there is no Russian equivalent for the English term empowerment. In order to translate the word in a just manner on international surveys, an entire sentence is required to explain the concept (Shklarov 2007). Even when words have equivalent terms in another language, they may not always carry the same connotations. This often occurs in Spanish/English translations of self-rated health questionnaires that translate fair to *regular* in Spanish (Viruell-Fuentes, Miranda, and Abdulrahim 2012). In Spanish, *regular* is more positive than fair and this induces Spanish-language speakers to describe their health differently than they would 'if they were responding in English' (Viruell-Fuentes, Miranda, and Abdulrahim 2012, 1306). As shown, translation can have a direct impact on data validity.

These same translation issues are also a concern for qualitative researchers. One of the main concerns of translating interview data is that it may not accurately convey a participant's rich description. This then impacts data analysis because the participants' experiences are either not understood or misinterpreted (Kosny et al. 2014). Squires (2009) indicates that translation quality should be of utmost concern for qualitative researchers, since 'poorly translated concepts or phrases will change what themes emerge from the analysis and may not reflect what the participant actually said' (2769). In sum, researchers need to be aware that 'no one language directly matches any other' (Dalby 2003, 271). Thus, cross-language researchers should expect translation dilemmas.

Another issue with translation in research is power dynamics. When words are spoken in a minority language and then transferred and written in a majority language, this can result in the 'further marginalization of minority voices' (Cahnmann 2005, 246). This is especially true when in many studies minority languages are rendered invisible when all the results are published in English (Temple and Young 2004). The simple fact that a translation is required for the research to take place puts the researcher in a position of power since the participant's words need to be transferred into the researcher's language (Strowe 2013). Moreover, Kouritzin (2002) demonstrates that minority-language speakers can be misrepresented when their words are oversimplified in translations. In an analysis of Wolf's (1992) translations of Taiwanese, Kouritzin (2002, 130) states that 'the sentences could well have been graceful and poetic, but in Wolf's translation they come across as awkward and uneducated'. This shows how, through translation, researchers can inflect the words of the participants' with 'their own codes and ideologies' (Venuti 1998, 12). This results in untrustworthy data and a misrepresentation of the participants.

The invisible translator

In research studies, translation is done by the researcher, by a research assistant, or by hiring a professional translator. In all these cases, the translator is rarely mentioned and plays a silent role. Caretta (2014) notes that the extent to which bilingual research assistants are included in texts generally consists of a brief thank you in the acknowledgements section of a paper. Interpreters as well are left out of research reports; they are 'seen but not heard' (Shklarov 2007, 532). There is a tendency to render the practice of translation and interpretation invisible in research. Wallin and Ahlström (2006, 723), upon reviewing the literature, found that the roles of translators and interpreters, when mentioned, were 'sparsely described'. Even when an interpreter was involved in the data collection, 'the results were presented with quotations as if the study participants were fluent in the target language' (Wallin and Ahlström 2006, 732). Kosny et al. (2014, 839) describe how interpreters are meant to be invisible, they 'are the voices of others but do not have their own emotions, thoughts or input'. Because of the invisible role translators and interpreters are meant to play, little is written about the decisions they make as cultural decoders (Munday 2008).

Issues with interpreters

Because of fear of inaccuracy, it is even often suggested that the researchers avoid the use of interpreters (Brämberg and Dahlberg 2013). Some of the disadvantages associated with hiring an interpreter are that it can be costly and interpreters often do not have experience conducting qualitative interviews (Kosny et al. 2014). After having conducted research with interpreters, Kosny et al. (2014, 841) concluded that interviews with interpreters were ‘socially awkward. They were often filled with stops and starts, interruptions, and misunderstandings’. This is especially true when an interpreter has to stop a person in the middle of their story to interpret. If this happens often, the participant has a tendency to shorten his or her responses so that the interpreter has less to convey (Kosny et al. 2014). This results in short, to-the-point answers which is not the type of data qualitative researchers generally want. Cahnmann (2005) notes that professional interpreters are trained to be efficient, and therefore, they often do not explain details. In her study, interviews with interpreters tended to be shorter than interviews with native speakers even though it was theorized that interviews with interpreters should take more time since the information would have to be said twice (Cahnmann 2005).

Some of the same issues reported with insider researchers have also been reported with interpreters. Interpreters, who are sometimes family members or friends, can be biased. Participants may choose not to share sensitive information with the researcher because it involves sharing this information with the interpreter as well (Kosny et al. 2014). Interpreters may also feel the need to protect the participants by not translating exactly what they have said. Williamson et al. (2011, 389) give an example of how an interpreter in their study changed the participant’s words:

According to the graduate research assistant’s memos, a grandfather said that ‘in China, we can hit and yell at the kids to discipline them’ and the interpreter reported that the grandfather had said ‘in China, the parent needs to be strict ... very strict’ ... We offer the example here because it enhances understanding of the influence that interpreters can have on the validity of data when they selectively re-phrase participants’ words that they deem to be inappropriate in some sense.

In this situation, it is possible that the interpreter chose to euphemize the participant’s words in order to protect him. It is clear that the use of translators and interpreters in cross-language research can pose many challenges and can even threaten data validity.

However, this does not mean that researchers should avoid conducting research that requires translation or interpretation, as this may exclude minority-language participants from research. It simply means that researchers must be aware of the potential threats to validity and put into place safeguards that can help reduce translation and interpretation dilemmas. The next section will present some ways in which this can be done.

How to avoid translation and interpretation dilemmas

The next sections will bring together examples of good translation and interpretation practices from various fields in order to offer educational researchers ideas to consider when conducting cross-language research. As mentioned previously, it is preferable to avoid the use of an interpreter. However, if the research topic entails speaking with individuals from many different language backgrounds, it may be impossible to avoid the use of interpreters. If interpreters are used, they need to be briefed about the research topic and be allowed to test out the interview questions before they start interviewing (Brämberg and Dahlberg 2013). This can be done by letting them observe interviews done by the researcher, allowing them to see how the researcher prompts the participants to obtain rich data (Williamson et al. 2011). Researchers also need to decide if the interpreter should translate the questions in the first or the third person (Wallin and Ahlström 2006). If interpreters use the third person, they erase themselves from the research, saying ‘he or she wants to know’ instead of ‘I want to know’. If they use the first person, it will be as though they are asking the questions which is perhaps a practice more in line with an authentic conversation.

Brämberg and Dahlberg (2013) suggest that interpreters also use the first person when translating the participants' responses. Whichever format is selected, it is important for the researcher to prepare the interpreter by making his or her guidelines and expectations clear.

In the same way that it is important for the researcher to declare his or her linguistic positionality, it is important to describe the translator and/or the interpreter's positionality. This entails describing his or her professional background since 'being bilingual does not always correspond with having the required skills to undertake translation' (Sutrisno, Nguyen, and Tangen 2014, 1342). Wallin and Ahlström (2006) suggest that other interpreter and/or translator characteristics should also be described, such as age, gender, languages spoken, level of proficiency in those languages, and any relationships he or she might have with the participants. As well, interpreters and translators should be considered 'key informants' and as such researchers should make them visible by interviewing them about their beliefs (Temple and Edwards 2002). Interpreters should also sign a confidentiality agreement and participants should be informed that they have done so (Kosny et al. 2014). In the final paper, all these procedures should be described in order to demonstrate transparency. Rubin and Rubin (2005, 76) define transparency in qualitative research:

Transparency means that a reader of a qualitative research report is able to see the process by which the data were collected and analyzed. A transparent report allows the reader to assess the thoroughness of the design of the work as well as the conscientiousness, sensitivity, and biases of the researcher. Interviewers maintain careful records of what they did, saw, and felt and include portions of this record in their final write-ups.

These suggestions to increase transparency in research are also relevant with regard to the use of interpreters and translators. Interpreters and translators are employed to assist in data collection or analysis and as such researchers should 'maintain careful records of what they did' (Rubin and Rubin 2005, 76). This means being upfront about the dilemmas that researchers may have encountered in the interpretation and translation process (Small et al. 1999). To work towards transparency, it is important to indicate when translation occurred, before or after data analysis, for example, and to indicate the language in which coding was done (Squires 2009).

In order to avoid employing interpreters, researchers can include a bilingual researcher on the team or hire a bilingual research assistant. When a researcher is bilingual or multilingual, he or she can often also act as the translator. Of course, when the researcher is the translator, it is still important for him or her to describe his or her positionality and the procedures used to translate (Sutrisno, Nguyen, and Tangen 2014). Whether the researcher is translating or another person is, it is crucial for the translator to have a high level of proficiency in both languages (Reyes 2005). When hiring a translator, researchers should attempt to hire someone who has knowledge or experience with the research topic as well, since they will already have specialized vocabulary in the subject area (Nurjannah et al. 2014; Santos, Black, and Sandelowski 2015; Srivastava 2006). This is why, whenever possible, bilingual or multilingual researchers or research assistants are well placed to translate, since they already have knowledge and vocabulary on the research subject. Nurjannah et al. (2014, 5) agree, affirming that 'the researcher will be better-placed than a professional translator to acknowledge and affirm the nature of the research work, including the contextualization of data in its transformation from one language to another'. Other advantages of the researcher doing the translation are that it is less expensive and the researcher will have a better understanding of the data, since he or she will have worked with it in two or more languages.

Translation decisions

Whether the researcher is translating or hiring a translator, decisions need to be made on translation procedures. In translation, there are two main ways of approaching the task; translators can aim for lexical or conceptual equivalence. Lexical equivalence is essentially a word-for-word translation, where most of the focus is on obtaining the most exact word equivalences (Sutrisno,

Nguyen, and Tangen 2014). On the other hand, conceptual equivalence emphasizes ‘the translation of ideas’ and translation occurs more so at the ‘sentence level’ (Sutrisno, Nguyen, and Tangen 2014, 1359). In general, conceptual equivalence is preferred for qualitative research, since it is a method that translates participants’ ideas instead of their words (Shklarov 2007). Wallin and Ahlström (2006, 733) believe that ‘meaning must, therefore, have priority over form’. Since languages do not all have the same grammatical functions or syntax rules, the form has to be altered in translation. Moreover, Munday (2008, 151) believes that translators should focus on conceptual equivalence while paying particular attention to the ‘literary value’ of the translation and ensuring that tone is not lost in translation. However, there are others who remain adamant that in order to truly respect a participant, his or her words have to be translated word-for-word. For example, Brämberg and Dahlberg (2013) recognize that it is not always possible to achieve lexical equivalence; researchers should try to translate the participants’ words as faithfully as possible. Ultimately, researchers must decide which method they prefer and should also justify their choice.

Once researchers have decided whether their translation focus is lexical or conceptual, they also have to consider how the translation will be done. There are three translation methods that are commonly used in qualitative research: single translation, back-translation, and parallel translation (Sutrisno, Nguyen, and Tangen 2014). Single or forward translation refers to translating the transcripts from the original language into the target language (Nurjannah et al. 2014). Back-translation involves two translators. The first translator completes a single translation. Then, the other translator ‘translates the data back from the target language to the source language without knowing the original source language version’ (Sutrisno, Nguyen, and Tangen 2014, 1340–1341). The original transcript and the back-translation are then compared with the goal of obtaining the best conceptual equivalence. Parallel translation also involves two translators. Each translator creates a single translation on their own and then they meet to discuss the differences between their translated versions (Sutrisno, Nguyen, and Tangen 2014).

Although some researchers favour back-translation (Lee, Sulaiman-Hill, and Thompson 2014; Nurjannah et al. 2014; Richard and Toffoli 2009) while others prefer parallel translation (Santos, Black, and Sandelowski 2015), they all agree that a more trustworthy and accurate translation involves more than one translator. However, hiring multiple translators who will also have to meet to discuss their work is a costly, laborious, and lengthy endeavour (Nurjannah et al. 2014). In order to reduce some of the costs, researchers can involve community members (Lee, Sulaiman-Hill, and Thompson 2014), bilingual researchers, or research assistants (Sutrisno, Nguyen, and Tangen 2014) in parallel or back-translation, asking them to read the translations to ensure that they are understood in the target language. In fact, Small et al. (1999, 391) found that a group of bilingual community members were especially helpful since they were able to notice where the translation was ‘too literal’ and when words were ‘too sophisticated’ which resulted in an awkward, unnatural read. When participants are bilingual, translation review can be built into the member checks. This is perhaps the most trustworthy way of conducting a translation, as the participant reviews his or her own translation and ensures that his or her ideas have been properly communicated (Li 2011). Shklarov (2007, 537) also believes that getting the participants to review the translations as a part of the member checks are beneficial as they are ‘a way of sharing power’.

Cross-language researchers also need to consider when they will translate. This can be done early on with the use of an interpreter whose words are then transcribed. The interview can take place in the participants’ dominant language and then the entire transcript can be translated. Researchers can also collect the data and analyse it in the participant’s dominant language and only translate the excerpts of the transcript that will appear in the final paper. In general, late translation is preferred since the participants’ words remain in their language as long as possible (Nurjannah et al. 2014; Srivastava 2006; Sutrisno, Nguyen, and Tangen 2014). In fact, Temple and Young (2004, 174) argue that practising late translation can be a way for the researcher to empower the minority language:

The decision to delay translation into English for as long as possible may be based on a political recognition of the ontological importance for people of their first language and the implications of colluding, through early translation, with the invisibility of some languages and their users.

However, if the researcher does not speak the participant’s dominant language, the transcripts will need to be translated in order for analysis to take place (Santos, Black, and Sandelowski 2015).

Another decision all educational researchers working with interview data need to make, even those who share the participant’s dominant language, is how they will edit their transcripts. Since the goal of translation in research is to convey meaning, while at the same time to preserve the participant’s thoughts, how a researcher chooses to edit the transcripts can impact the validity of the translation. Weiss (1994, 192) indicates that there are two different approaches to editing: ‘preservationist’ and ‘standardized’. Researchers who practice preservationist editing believe that participants’ words should not be altered in any manner; doing so misrepresents them (Weiss 1994, 193). Preservationist researchers are against cleaning up speech to make it more readable. In contrast, researchers who believe in standardized editing feel that written text needs to follow writing conventions and this involves cleaning up transcripts (Warren and Karner 2005). In standardized editing, expressions like ‘I was gonna’ should be changed to ‘I was going to’ but actual words should not be changed (Weiss 1994, 193). Dávila (2014) employs standardized editing by correcting grammatical errors in transcripts when working with second language learners. He believes that this is necessary because ‘vernacular writing can perpetuate stereotypes, undermines authority and intelligence, and gives negative impressions of consultants’ (Dávila 2014, 28). Thus, both preservationist and standardized editing can misrepresent participants. To support this idea, Li’s (2011, 27) participants wanted the researcher to correct their ‘bad English’ as they did not want what they had said to appear that way in writing. Therefore, it is important to keep this in mind when editing transcripts and ultimately to select the method that will preserve the participants’ ideas, while at the same time preserve their dignity.

Finally, researchers will need to decide how they will visually present transcript excerpts in their final paper. Within cross-language studies, there is no golden rule on how to present quotations and there exists a great deal of variety. Table 1 summarizes various ways in which researchers have chosen to present quotations in their papers. Some researchers choose to present only the

Table 1. Presentation of translated interview data.

Presentation of translated interview data		
	Description	Example
1	Only translated data are presented, an endnote explains that the quotations are translations	And each school ... hmm ... is so far apart ... Now here [in the city] we [women] can go too [to drop off or pick up children] ¹ ... (Anita Raj, migrant to Lucknow) ¹ Interview excerpts are translated from Hindi (Srivastava 2007, 505, 512)
2	Entire quote first in original language followed by translation	No sé poner las conversaciones bien así, me siento más en español, hablando español porque mi mamá siempre está hablando español. [I don't know how to have good conversations so that's why I feel more in Spanish, talking in Spanish because my Mom is always talking in Spanish]. (Cahnmann 2005, 238)
3	Translations directly follow each person's quotation	Luis: No cuentan el mismo. [They don't count the same.] Ms. M: Que no tenían el mismo valor. Tú quieres traducir, dale bien. Yo termino. [That don't have the same value. You want to translate, go ahead, do it. I'll finish.] (Cahnmann 2005, 241)
4	Original language presented in left column, translation in right	DF: estamos de paseo con la maestra <i>we're out walking with the teacher</i> <i>por eso yo no /vine that's why I didn't come</i> (Kramsch and Whiteside 2008, 649)

Note: Brackets or italics indicate change in language.

English translations of the quotes. This decision is sometimes justified due to lack of space (Srivastava 2006). However, it is generally agreed upon that only presenting the translation renders the minority language invisible (Temple and Young 2004). When the participants' original words are presented alongside the translations, it honours 'their voices and their experiences' as well as validating the use of the minority language (Li 2011, 28). Moreover, this gives bilingual readers the opportunity to read the original version and to judge the translation's validity. Gorter (2012) believes that it is crucial for minority languages to appear in academic writing as this can contribute to the development of knowledge and further research in minority languages. Researchers who decide to use the participants' original words alongside the translation have to decide how they will present these quotations. It is preferable to place the minority language in a position of power (above and to the left of the dominant language). Examples 2–4 in Table 1 show how this can be done in different ways.

This section has shown that researchers have many options with regard to translation and interpretation. Researchers should choose the methods that best match their research topic. In qualitative research, the languages researchers and research team members speak will influence which options are available to them. No matter what options are chosen, it is essential to be reflexive and to describe what has been done. If other people are involved in the research, what they have done and their linguistic positionalities should also be described. Moreover, it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that translators, interpreters, community members, and research assistants are all adequately prepared for the tasks they will undertake. Practising reflexivity and allowing all the individuals involved in the research to play an active role result in a study that is more transparent and as a result more trustworthy.

Conclusion

In brief, whether a researcher is a linguistic outsider or insider plays a role in any research. Not only can it have an impact on the reliability and validity of the data, it also impacts the relationship between the researcher and the participants. At first glance, if the researcher is a linguistic insider, is empathetic, ensures anonymity, and elicits clarifications, this seems to resolve many tensions. Nevertheless, cross-language researchers will inevitably encounter tensions and be required to make decisions throughout the research process simply due to the language variable. In order to build a trustworthy research project, it is essential to reflect upon linguistic positionality and to address the power issues involved with translation and interpretation.

Researchers need to decide to what extent translation and interpreters need to be used in the project and whether or not a bilingual research assistant or community members may be beneficial. Since the final report will most likely be written in a majority language, researchers who work with minority-language speakers need to decide when and how they will translate with the ultimate goal of obtaining a transparent, trustworthy representation of the participants. In sum, researcher positionality, translation, and interpretation add complexity to the research process. Although the suggestions in this paper do not eliminate the complexity involved in the process, they are meant to offer options to researchers so that they may address the language variable in their research instead of suppressing it.

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