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## **Representing the Translator: Making Sense of Translation in Cross-Language Qualitative Research**

### *A Review of Bogusia Temple's Recent Investigations in Research and Translation*

That language is not a transparent medium, that words do not clearly and directly correspond to the things and concepts they are meant to identify, is today a rather commonsense, commonplace notion, one widely accepted across the humanities and social sciences. Those disciplines transformed by the insights of poststructuralist theory—that is, the vast majority of the social sciences—have long since absorbed the ideas of thinkers like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, recognizing that language constructs and shapes rather than delineates. Still, recognition of theory does not always translate to the implementation of practice; as researchers aim to better understand people and their behaviour, issues of representation have only lately begun to emerge as significant within such disciplines as sociology, anthropology, philosophy, cultural studies, and sociolinguistics. But though questions concerning the “politics of representation” have yet to be addressed fully, we must further our understanding of language by considering the complexities wrought by moving among languages, by the exigencies of translation. As qualitative research increasingly looks beyond communities of English-speakers, investigators must contend with the ontological, epistemological, and ethical implications of representation across languages.

“The difficulties for the translator are due to the fact that...[the] word does not have the same evocative impact every time, in every culture or country,” Umberto Eco notes in *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation* (Eco 2003, 107). But how does the translator go about resolving such difficulties? And how does the researcher whose work demands the use of translation account for the problems of transformed representations? Bogusia Temple, Professor of Health and Social

Care Research at the University of Central Lancashire, begins to address some of these issues in a series of articles—some co-written with other researchers—concerned with the ethics and the politics of translation in cross language research. In what follows, I will examine four articles published by Temple (two of them co-authored) in the five-year period from 2004 to 2009, so as to trace and analyse her recent engagements with issues of translation in qualitative research.

Temple, by her own account in “Qualitative research and translation dilemmas” (Temple and Young 2004), grew up bilingual, speaking Polish until she entered school but today seeing it as a language secondary to English in her life. She has led a range of research projects in which data in multiple languages has been collected, including studies in which the language of the participants has not been the language of the researcher, and for over fifteen years has been involved in narrative research with Polish people living in England, a project that has further complicated her understanding of the significance of translation in relation to representation. In “The Same but Different—Researching Language and Culture in the Lives of Polish People in England” (Temple and Koterba 2009), published online in *FQS Forum: Qualitative Social Research* and the most recent article to address her work with Polish migrants, Temple and her translator Katerzyna Koterba demonstrate that multi-lingual people may present themselves differently in different languages. They observe too that “all languages are internally differentiated and who translates influences the findings” (Temple and Koterba 2009). Thus, Temple and Koterba conclude, issues of translation, pertaining to both research participants and research directors, must be acknowledged as a significant part of any project involving the translation of collected data.

But perhaps to best, to fully, appreciate the significance of this conclusion, we must first take a step back into Temple’s own thinking process, her development as a scholar of research and representation across languages. In “Nice and Tidy: Translation and Representation” (2005) an article appearing in the online journal *Sociological Research Online*, Temple discusses some of the different ways various researchers have looked at issues of cross-language representation. She identifies three main methods: some researchers leave any mention of the issue out of their

accounts, some acknowledge the potential complication but suggest there is no way to resolve the issue and some attempt to work out a solution. Noting that at the time of the article's writing "the issue of how [people whose first language is not English] are represented [in the rapidly growing volume of writing on such groups] remain[s] unexamined" (Temple 2005), Temple cites the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Lawrence Venuti, academics who have shown that language is far from neutral and that translation does not simply copy but actively creates. As Spivak, perhaps the most prominent commentator on the "politics of translation," notes in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (1993), unexamined translation has the tendency to turn all speech into a kind of "translatese," making no distinctions between languages, eliding power relations and falsely suggesting that such relations do not exist and do not matter.

Taking Spivak's work into account, Temple makes a persuasive case that, when the complications of translation are discounted, relegated to no more than footnote status, two significant aspects of representation are ignored (2005). First, "there is the question of whose perspective on concepts is being used. The researcher, even though they may speak the relevant language, cannot represent a whole community"; second, "this kind of research neglects the importance of the written text," failing to account for how the acts of transcribing and translating alter the content and context of the communication, the terms on which it is presented and received. In other cases, the importance of language is acknowledged, accompanied by the researcher's surrender to the seeming impossibility of resolving the issue of translation. Without active engagement with the issue, however, researchers who make the choice to proceed in this way risk "colonizing" or domesticating the text, producing a narrative in which difference, though admittedly important, is hidden and smoothed over. But foregrounding the matter is also not without potential pitfalls. Researchers who try to signify difference, to refuse domestication, by deliberately keeping quoted testimony "untidy," as advocated by Lawrence Venuti in *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (1998), risk confirming stereotypes about non-native speakers of English as ignorant, incoherent, and suspiciously alien, thus subverting their own attempt to emphasize identity and individuality.

Ultimately, Temple is not looking, in “Nice and Tidy,” to answer the question of methodology, not looking to settle the issue of translation in research once and for all. Rather, her contribution lies in raising the question, in illustrating the implications of cross-language research for ethics and epistemology. These implications are at the center of Temple and Alys Young’s article “Qualitative research and translation dilemmas” (2004), which adds another dimension in addressing the “hierarchies of language power, situated language epistemologies of researchers, and issues around naming and speaking for people seen as ‘other’” (Temple and Young 2004, 162) by considering translation between signed languages (such as British Sign Language and American Sign Language). In tackling the addition of translated “modalities,” the movement from a visual/gestural language to one that is sound/print-based, Temple and Young are able to expose more explicitly the vestiges of power relations, of language oppression and of language (in)visibility. In rendering a visual sign into a printed icon, translation from sign language threatens to obscure the significance of expression and gesticulation, of individual meaning-making. Because those in Deaf society may have experienced what many perceive as an undervaluation of their language, their participation in qualitative research is especially fraught with potential conflict. Temple and Young note that “hearing” translators may help confirm the notion “that hearing society ‘does’ things to Deaf society...and [that] hearing culture...negotiates and filters the meaning of Deaf people’s lives” (169). The translator is not merely an observer then but an active maker of meaning and frequently its final arbiter. Though this may be more readily evident in those cases involving signed language, the role of the translator is intricate and problematic in all circumstances. “There is no neutral position from which to translate and the power relationships within research need to be acknowledged,” Temple and Young conclude (164).

Some possibilities for acknowledgement are offered by Temple in the recent article “Narrative analysis of written texts: reflexivity in cross language research” (2008). Advocating reflexivity, Temple insists on the use of auto/biography for all those who participate in the research, whether the subjects, the translators, the researchers. The goal, finally, is to contemplate and incorporate complexity, to avoid the artificial and misleading smoothing out of differences. It is not the

“best” nor the final translation that is made possible in exposing the stories, and consequently the perspectives, the positions, the biases, of those who carry out the research; rather, what is achieved is the opening up of a debate that is, Temple reminds us, “epistemologically, methodologically, and ethically necessary” (Temple 2008, 361).

It is this, the auto/biographical, method that Temple uses in “The Same but Different,” her explication of her long-term research on narratives of language and identity amongst Polish people in Greater Manchester, England. The method allows her to examine her own position as a researcher who speaks Polish and to recognize that she is separated and differentiated—by generation, by migration cycle, by class and social position—in her usage of Polish from many of the research participants. In constructing a “linguistic ethnography” for herself and for her translator, Katarzyna Koterba, as well as “translation histories” documenting the decisions made about word choice in the course of translation, Temple hopes to create not so much a perfect translation as one that is transparent. And here, then, is perhaps the real significance of translation: if what may be lost is accuracy, the immediacy of words spoken by a single, reliable self, what is gained is a far better understanding of how such a self is continuously constructed and what makes it possible for that self to speak as it does. In tackling the difficulties and complications of translation, we are confronted with the difficulties and complications of language itself, that opaque medium through which the self and the world around it are constructed.

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