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Foreword

Translation: the construction and representation of people's lives

This special issue aims to encourage debate about language difference and translation within research. Much of my research has involved working with people who do not speak English or who feel more comfortable using another language. This is an area that I have been writing on for a number of years - for example, Temple (2002) and more recently Temple (2008) - and I welcome the opportunity this special issue provides for a critical interdisciplinary engagement with the challenges involved in conducting research that crosses linguistic boundaries.

My interest in translation and interpretation in research is relatively recent and has resulted from a growing awareness that much of the cross language research that I come across in my field of expertise - health and social care - moves across languages as if the actual languages used are irrelevant, or a matter for methodological footnotes only. Within my own research in the 1980s and 1990s, I had been writing about being prepared to be reflexive about many aspects of the research process, including the researcher's position, but had put to one side something I had learnt growing up speaking both Polish and English: the language I speak affects how I present myself and how I am perceived by others. In research involving people who speak languages other than English, translation is often simply presented as a technical exercise in finding the 'correct' translation, rather than a process of constructing a version of lives lived in other languages and represented from the translator's particular position in the social world.

In this short piece I present some of my reasons for becoming interested in translation. I argue that all researchers who work with translators, or *are* translators in and of their own research data, should actively investigate *how* translation has been carried out. I also argue that such a questioning of translation practices should not be solely the concern of

sociolinguists or researchers who are focusing on the narrow topic of language use, but of social scientists more broadly.

As part of concerns about extending reflexivity within research to questions of translation, a large body of cross disciplinary literature points to the role of language in the formation of cultural meanings and identities, and of translation as an active process within this (see for example, Eco 2003; Cronin 2006; Poirier 2006; Baker 2005). For example, the writings of Eva Hoffman (1998), who migrated as a child from Poland to Canada and then to America, present a vivid account of how learning a new language and writing in it involves *writing yourself*, rather than merely describing who you are using other words. She notes: “I know that *I have been written in a variety of languages*” (1998: 275, my italics). In a similar vein, Gayatri Spivak (1992: 177-178) argues for the importance of viewing translation as a way of getting around “the confines of one’s ‘identity’ ...[Language] is only a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries.” These writers view language as actively constitutive of self and ‘other’. This suggests that reflection on and about the process of translation should be an important aspect of conducting social research in a reflexive way. This special issue provides a forum for highlighting and discussing such reflections and shows the impact they can have on research methodologies and outcomes.

The question of whether people who speak and write different languages construct and express their social worlds in the same way has exercised many researchers, some of whom I mention here (Eco 2003; Pavlenko 2005). Wherever researchers lie on the spectrum of views expressed, and the position of translation within this, many researchers would agree that we cannot assume that the languages people speak have no influence on how they express themselves, how they are perceived or ‘read’ by others, or that there is some neutral place from which to judge whether a translation is ‘correct’ or not. There is recognition across disciplines that the researcher’s social location influences research; this insight applies equally to translation and scholars have produced accounts of translation as active reconstructions of written texts rather than literal transfers of meaning across languages (Derrida 1987; Eco 2003; Temple 2006, 2008). Umberto Eco (2003) has written about translation as negotiation: a process of deciding how best to try and present people’s lives across languages. This may, he has shown, involve decisions to substantially change what has

been written for effect, to present substantial amounts of information for the reader or to change the structure of texts. I have argued above that these choices have implications for how people are represented in texts.

This means that when researchers are translators or use others' translations, these translations should be subject to scrutiny. This implies a need to discuss the influence of all researchers on their research, including community researchers who are often employed to interpret and translate as if their own use of language is irrelevant (Temple and Koterba, forthcoming). It matters whom you choose to interpret and translate. The researcher's social location and translation history should be a concern in research and in investigating how researchers choose to carry out translation (see Temple and Young 2004 for a discussion of the different ways of working with translators). Arguing for the importance of such an engagement with issues of positionality should not be taken to mean that languages can be tied in any deterministic relationship to perspectives, cultures or representations of emotions, self-expression or 'self' generally. The researcher's/translator's task is to enable the possibilities around language difference to emerge, without implying that we are essentially and necessarily different because of the languages we speak. The role of the researcher/translator is also to reflexively interrogate practices of translation in the research process and the specificity of the positions from which they are conducted. For example, in my own research I discuss the influence of the fact that I learnt Polish in England, sometimes define myself as a second generation Polish woman and translate as a feminist. The papers presented in this special issue demonstrate the need for, and insights derived from, such reflexivity. As Mona Baker (2005) has argued, there is no in-between cultures from which we can choose translators.

I am sometimes told that translation issues have been 'solved' in research by employing bilingual researchers. Do bilingual researchers all use their languages in the same way? My experience in research, and in using Polish researchers, suggests that bilingual researchers' experiences of languages vary, and that this impacts on how they translate (see below and Temple 2006). Employing bilingual researchers to carry out research and to translate interviews therefore does not 'solve' the issues of representation of others in languages they did not use. There is no one way to experience being bilingual or multilingual; and these

experiences affect our translations. Aneta Pavlenko's (2005) work is interesting here in that she is concerned with what happens when we move across languages – something cross language researchers should be interested in, as the language that ends up in reports is often not that which was used by participants. Discussing what it means to be bilingual, Pavlenko suggests that people may present themselves differently in different languages and may be 'heard' differently. The language we use/choose involves issues of representation of self and other. Pavlenko shows how people learn languages in different ways and experience them differently. In much the same way as Hoffman, Pavlenko is concerned with *translation of lives* across languages and the possibilities for re-invention of self in translation.

Moreover, an increasingly multilingual and English speaking world does not 'anchor a new global culture' (Poirier 2006) in which we are all the same regardless of what languages we speak or how we use English. For example, it has been argued that in a transnational age migrants and the children of migrants can keep their source language and culture "in view". They may become *more* rather than less aware of their roots and feel "that there are two languages, two cultures (each with its own internal complexity), which come to determine or influence the dialogical self" (Cronin 2006: 62).

How we translate and move between languages in social research is therefore an ethical and political project (Spivak 1992; Venuti 1998). The work of Jan Blommaert (2001: 415) is useful in relation to the ethics and politics of translation in that he is concerned with how '(re)structuring talk into institutionally sanctioned text' results in power asymmetries. Blommaert describes the consequences of the different ways in which people present themselves, how they are received across languages, the significance of turning speech into written text and the consequences of using one language as a baseline for all (that is, deciding what is an 'authentic' presentation according to the expectations of people who speak another language, usually English). It strikes me that the assumption that speakers of all languages present themselves in the same way is what makes many researchers farm out the translation/interpretation issues within their research without evaluating what the process involves. Contributors to this special issue attempt to disrupt this dominant tendency of the literature by examining some of the ethical aspects of translation in a variety of cultural settings, for example in relation to experiences in Bosnia and Nicaragua (Fickin and Jones),

with Israeli bus drivers (Perez) and with deportees in the Dominican Republic and Jamaica (Martin-Johnson).

My concern with how researchers represent others has led me across a range of disciplines, including as discussed above much valuable work on being bilingual. My reading across disciplinary boundaries has opened up, and challenged, my thinking about the significance of moving across languages within research. There is much to be gained in collaboration between social scientists and scholars from the arts and humanities. In particular, I have suggested elsewhere that sociologists and linguistics/translation and interpretation scholars could usefully collaborate. Sociologists have produced some valuable work on memory, discourse and emotion, for example, all of which are relevant to theorising translation, since the latter involves using memories of words and experiences of social worlds to produce texts. Recent developments in psycho-social approaches to research could also provide useful avenues for exploring aspects of language use that we may be less aware of. Multidisciplinary collaboration could help investigate the effects of using one language baseline to judge all language speakers, as noted above. Indeed, Alvanoudi's article in this special issue suggests the need to widen the definition of translation to include the movement of ideas across disciplines, whilst Hutta and Tremlett (also in this issue) suggest that the act of translation can itself serve as an analytical tool.

As its title - *Lost (and Found) in Translation* – shows, this special issue's interdisciplinary focus on translation is both critical *and* constructive. It enables readers to begin, or continue, to engage with some of these very thorny epistemological, methodological and ethical issues in interesting ways. It points to the value of reflecting on the methods we use, and on the ethical and political responsibility we bear, when we traverse language differences to write about people's lives.

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