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Qualitative research and translation dilemmas

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ABSTRACT The focus of this article is an examination of translation dilemmas in qualitative research. Specifically it explores three questions: whether methodologically it matters if the act of translation is identified or not; the epistemological implications of who does translation; and the consequences for the final product of how far the researcher chooses to involve a translator in research. Some of the ways in which researchers have tackled language difference are discussed. The medium of spoken and written language is itself critically challenged by considering the implications of similar 'problems of method' but in situations where the translation and interpretation issues are those associated with a visual spatial medium, in this case Sign Language. The authors argue that centring translation and how it is dealt with raises issues of representation that should be of concern to all researchers.

KEYWORDS: *BSL, cross language, deaf people, epistemology, translation*

Introduction

This article is concerned with qualitative research studies where data are collected in more than one language and the research process, at whatever stage(s), involves acts of translation between languages. Whilst situating the debates we raise within translation/interpretation studies in the broad sense, our primary focus is on the identification and exploration of key questions that the involvement of translation within a qualitative study will provoke. In particular we will address: Does it matter if the translation act is identified or not? Does it matter if the identity of the researcher and translator are the same? When is a translator not a translator – that is, how far into the analysis do you involve a translator? Clearly these are not the only questions that this subject raises but we have chosen them because their answering inherently

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involves those other issues that just will not go away – hierarchies of language power, situated language epistemologies of researchers, and issues around naming and speaking for people seen as 'other'.

As a means of pushing further the scope of the debate around our chosen questions, we are also going to examine these issues with reference to qualitative research involving sign languages such as BSL (British Sign Language) and ASL (American Sign Language). Sign languages are not visual representations of the spoken word, but have their own grammatically distinct structures as capable of complex and abstract expression as any spoken language might be (Sutton-Spence and Woll, 2000). What they introduce into this discussion is the issue of modality, or more precisely visual modality. In other words, when considering translation between signed and spoken languages one is also considering the implications of translating between modalities (one sound/print-based, one entirely visual/gestural and with no print base). Furthermore, sign language and their users have experienced centuries of oppression (Ladd, 2003, Lane, 1992). In considering the implications of the relative power of languages, what is often a metaphorical debate about rendering languages 'visible' becomes quite literally incarnated when working with sign languages. Issues of language oppression and language (in)visibility are elided, but what are its implications?

Finally, by way of introduction it is important to situate ourselves within the issues we will be debating (the reasons for this relate to our epistemological position and will be spelt out below). Both professionally and personally we have extensive experience of working and living across languages and being involved in the dilemmas of translated worlds. Temple grew up a Polish/English bilingual and spoke no English until she went to school. She uses her Polish with her family and for work but now sees it as a valued second language. She has managed a range of research projects where data is collected in multiple spoken languages, and published extensively on methodological issues where the language of the participants is not that of the researcher. Young has worked for many years as a hearing academic in Deaf studies. Although BSL may be her second language she will never attain native fluency. Personally, her extended family uses four spoken languages with no common language between everyone, thus rendering everyday translated communication entirely normal. She has a long-standing interest in Deaf/hearing professional relationships and their implications for research practice.

Does it matter if the translation act is identified or not?

In this section we ask if it matters that the issue of translation is often not identified, let alone discussed, in research with people who do not speak English. We examine this question by considering the influences of two factors: the epistemological position of the researcher and conditions

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pertaining to specific languages, including issues of language power and hierarchy. Clearly these are not completely distinct categories of concern and elide into fundamental considerations of representation. We separate them out here, however, to begin to uncover some of the layers of complexity associated with this question of identified or hidden translation.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITION OF THE RESEARCHER

There is now a huge literature on different perspectives in qualitative research that we do not want to rehearse again. We point readers to Stanley and Wise (1993), Atkinson (1990), Holstein and Gubrium (1995), Hammersley (1995), Ladd (2003) and Young I.M. (1997) for a range of views (see also Duranti, 2003, for a discussion of the development of different paradigms around language in U.S anthropology). We only engage in the debate here to point out that the answer to the question we have set depends in part on the researcher's position in this debate. If researchers see themselves as objective instruments of research then the elimination of bias becomes one of their chief concerns. The question is, therefore, whether and how translation within the research process potentially introduces bias and how to ensure agreement on the translation of source data. Edwards (1998), for example, discusses critically techniques such as back translation used to ensure agreement of a 'correct' version of a text. Researchers interested in translation and interpretation issues from this perspective generally discuss validity in terms of 'correct' interpretations, register, ethics, matching of social characteristics and neutral stances (see for example Harrington and Turner, 2001; Phelan and Parkman, 1995). Analysis is then a matter of examining findings within the text. Who controls the analysis is irrelevant if objectivity is achieved in the research process. The researcher can represent others by dint of this objectivity once translation problems are 'solved'.

This is the predominant model in much cross language research, if only by default. Researchers within a qualitative reflexive paradigm who ignore issues involved in translating across languages implicitly use this stance. Much of the huge amount of research 'on' minority ethnic communities in Britain, particularly the 'grey' literature, is written without any reference to language issues. Results are presented as if interviewees were fluent English speakers or as if the language they used is irrelevant. An example is Khanum's (2001) ethnographic research with Bangladeshi women in Manchester. The discussion of definitions of household and family types is comprehensive but the reader is given no information about the research process. What language was the data collected in? At what stage were the interviews translated and transcribed? What translation and transcription issues were there? The opening quote could be from a woman speaking English or it could be from an interview in another language that has been translated, presumably by the researcher. What is the researcher's relationship to the interviewees and were they given a chance to define their own household patterns?

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It is difficult for the reader to engage with the text in work where there is no available information on the research process and the source language or languages of the research are seen as problems that have been overcome or appropriately managed. This is a model of research where the researcher gathers information and presents it to readers as a collection of facts, although usually stated to be from 'informants' and therefore representative of their position. Both the translator and the act of translation are considered irrelevant to such representation and to the reader's engagement with that representation.

But why should it matter if translator and translation disappear? After all the final result is still aiming to be representative of the source. Taking on board alternative research paradigms, including within translation studies, anthropology and sociolinguistics (Simon, 1996; Duranti, 2003; Bradby, 2002 respectively), it is possible to come up with another answer to the question 'Does it matter if the act of translation is discussed'? This view is based on an epistemology that has variously been named as social constructionist, interpretative, non-positivist and many other labels (see Hammersley, 1995; Stanley and Wise, 1993; Young I. M., 1997, for a debate of epistemological issues). All these approaches to knowledge and how it is produced acknowledge that your location within the social world influences the way in which you see it. If you subscribe to this view of social reality, then translators *must* also form part of the process of knowledge production. There is no neutral position from which to translate and the power relationships within research need to be acknowledged (the relationship between the researcher and the translator is discussed below). Researchers working with people who speak/sign different languages rarely address the implications of their relative positions within language hierarchies. The final text in English writes out the terms on which it was produced. The debates around perspective in qualitative research, and translation studies specifically, are ignored as the spoken word or signed language becomes fixed on paper.

For people who do not speak the dominant language in a country, the idea that language is power is easy to understand. If you cannot give voice to your needs you become dependent on those who can speak the relevant language to speak for you. Academics have long recognized the importance of language in constructing as well as describing our social world. As Michele Barrett (1992) has pointed out, researchers 'have accepted to varying degrees the view that meaning is constructed in rather than expressed by language' (p. 203) and that this is not a neutral exercise (see also Bradby, 2002, and Duranti, 2003). However, methodological and epistemological challenges arise from the recognition that people using different languages may construct different ways of seeing social life. The relationships between languages and researchers, translators and the people they seek to represent are as crucial as issues of which word is best in a sentence in a language.

Many writers with an interest in the power of the written word and the

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process by which it is produced, have argued that there is no single correct translation of a text. Meaning is constructed through a discourse between texts (Barrett, 1992; Derrida, 1978; Foucault, 1989; Simon, 1996; Spivak, 1992). Spivak (1992), for example, argues that translation is not a matter of synonym, syntax and local colour. She sees language as rhetoric, logic and silence and the relationships between these. In a similar way, Sherry Simon (1996) shows that it is not a matter of finding the meaning of a text in a culture:

> The solutions to many of the translator's dilemmas are not to be found in dictionaries, but rather in an understanding of the way language is tied to local realities, to literary forms and to changing identities. Translators must constantly make decisions about the cultural meanings which language carries, and evaluate the degree to which the two different worlds they inhibit are 'the same'. These are not technical difficulties, they are not the domain of specialists in obscure or quaint vocabularies. . . . In fact the process of meaning transfer has less to do with *finding* the cultural inscription of a term than in reconstructing its value. (pp. 137–8, emphasis original)

For these writers, there is no point in looking for the meaning of a text solely within the confines of the written page given to the researcher by a translator. Phillips (1960) describes the position of conceptual equivalence across languages as: 'in absolute terms an insolvable problem' since 'almost any utterance in any language carries with it a set of assumptions, feelings, and values that the speaker may or may not be aware of but that the field worker, as an outsider, usually is not' (p. 291). The reader produces an understanding of a text during the act of reading by reference to their own understanding of concepts and debates filtered through their own experiences. No one can be sure of which concepts or words differ in meaning across languages and which do not, or if this matters in the context of the translation.

THE INFLUENCE OF CONDITIONS PERTAINING TO A LANGUAGE

This issue of disappearing translators and the English language baseline is particularly interesting in relation to working with BSL in qualitative research. It is an example of how language specific conditions may influence, or be cast as influencing, whether translation is recognized and how its relationship with the final research product is conceptualized.

Given that BSL is a visual language with no written form, translation into English is often viewed as having little more than a *practical*, rather than epistemological, significance. For example, by translating video-recorded BSL interview data into written English one is also 'freezing' a text that is otherwise in constant movement, thus making it amenable to content analyses that depend on the segmentation and rearrangement of a fixed written text. Similarly, the use of simultaneous translation from BSL into English at the point of data collection, as in interpreted focus group work, for

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example (Griggs, 1998, Young, 2003), allows for the easy transcription of the data from the spoken English 'live' interpretation and thus makes the data amenable to traditional forms of qualitative data handling. After all, computerized sort and retrieve programmes such as NUD*IST may be able to handle data in languages other than English but only if that language is written down.

In other words, in these situations, translation is regarded as a practical imperative for dealing with a non-standard data *form*, rather than with possibly substantially different entities. Translation, in effect, packages the data into a form that fits the tools we have for handling it. Translation and translator disappear into seemingly self-evidently practical data-handling procedures.

The problem here of course is not just potential semantic loss or the well rehearsed difficulties inherent in translating the cultural meanings embedded in linguistic expression (Simon, 1996). The fundamental issue is how the expediency of translation reinforces the invisibility of the source language – an issue that is both political and methodological.

Within a societal context BSL, in common with other sign languages, has endured centuries of denial that it actually is a language. In the UK it only gained formal recognition as such in May 2003, although linguistic evidence has existed since the 1970s, (e.g. Brennan, 1976; Deuchar, 1979). For its community of users there has been a close link between the denial of the language, and experiences of oppression and social control by those who would prefer deaf children and adults to 'speak' (Channel 4, 2000). In quite literally writing out the source language, methodological expediency continues to reinforce the political invisibility of the language and its users.

Ladd (2003) discusses at some length how the requirement to produce direct quotation in English within the reporting of qualitative research with Deaf sign language users creates a host of dilemmas many of which are associated with the structure and conditions of the source language. For example, BSL in common with other sign languages is not grammatically structured in a linear subject – verb – object structure. Rather it is a topic – comment language in which inflection is produced through facial expression, visual orientation, movement and spatial location. It is thus possible to produce complex multi-layered expression in what may seem to be a very short sign utterance but which in fact corresponds to an awful lot of English words and long sentences. Consequently, Ladd (2003) argues that the amount of direct quotation one can actually reproduce in written academic text is relatively small given the constraints of formal word limits.

It is interesting that in his work as a Deaf academic who uses BSL, Ladd (2003) often chooses to self-consciously represent the translation act in the English rendering of data originally produced in BSL. (Typically he 'translates' the BSL into atypical English grammatical forms with added contextual information and extensive use of ellipse and phonetic play). However, in doing

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so he is not simply demonstrating the problems of language equivalents as others have done in adopting such strategies in reporting between two spoken languages (e.g. Steinberg et al, 1997). He is also using the strategy of making translation visible to make Sign Language visible through drawing attention to the structural differences of signed and spoken/written languages and celebrating the failure of fit between the two.

The above example illustrates that it is not only words that may be value-laden, but languages also. The perspective of one language-using community on another is rarely neutral and the perceived status of languages rarely equivalent. Such differences in power between languages also influence the translation of meaning. The way researchers represent people who speak other languages is influenced by the way they see their social world. Spivak (1992) recognizes the power differentials between languages and between countries. Whilst accepting that transnational hybridity may challenge fixed notions of 'otherness', she argues that this is via a process of 'linguistic and aesthetic assimilation' by Anglo-American writers. Her 'politics of translation' highlights the hierarchies implicit in translation for both the individuals and countries concerned. The interaction between languages is part of the establishment and maintenance of hierarchical relationships (Corson, 1990; Kalantzis et al, 1989) with English often used as the yardstick for meaning.

Speaking for others, in any language, is always a political issue that involves the use of language to construct self and other (Alcoff, 1991; Back and Solomos, 1993; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 1996). If researchers see themselves as active in the research process then they have a responsibility for the way that they represent others and their languages. When they don't speak the same language as research participants this means that they have to question the baseline from which they make claims about them. They have to ask themselves about the implications of choosing someone to do the translation or doing it themselves.

Does it matter who does the translation?

Turning again to epistemology, if researchers see themselves as neutral and objective transmitters of messages, as discussed above, the translation act itself poses technical issues that can be overcome. If the researcher is objective it does not matter if they carry out the translation or if someone else does it. The result will be the same. For researchers who do not subscribe to this view, there is a question of who can represent whom in cross language research. It may seem that researchers who can translate themselves are automatically best situated to do cross language data analysis. However, apart from the fact that this would mean we can only do research with people who are like us, there are aspects of this argument that are problematic. In what follows we will explore this question of whether it matters who does the translation with

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reference to two different conditions: the researcher as translator; and translators working with researchers. As will become clear, there is not one variety of each of these conditions and each has a range of implications for how the validity of the research product can be constructed.

THE RESEARCHER AS TRANSLATOR

The situation where the researcher is fluent in the language of communities she is working with is rare. It offers opportunities in terms of research methods that are not open to other researchers in cross language research. The researcher can use the experience of translating to discuss points in the text where she has had to stop and think about meaning. Some researchers who also act as translators regard the discussion of the translation processes as a check to the validity of interpretations (e.g. Young and Ackerman, 2001). However, this is not meant to imply that the final text is nearer 'the truth' since the researcher is herself situated in many and sometimes competing ways in relation to the languages she is working with (see below).

The question of who is best able to represent others when translating has many parallels with discussions by researchers in race and ethnicity and the 'racial matching' of interviewers. However, it is increasingly recognized that the insider/outsider boundaries cannot be as easily drawn as racial matching suggests. Twine (2000) summarizes well the pitfalls of this position and points out that race or ethnicity is not the only, or always the over-riding, social signifier. Insider status is not as unproblematic as is sometimes suggested and, Twine argues, difference may be a stimulator as well as a block to communication, suggesting a further epistemological and ontological point:

> We see, then, that the utility of racial matching is contingent on the subordinate person having acquired a particular subjectivity. . . . In my experience . . . they [US scholars] presume that different ideological positions are attached to one's location in racial hierarchies. It should be evident, however, that when racial subalterns do not possess a developed critique of racism or idealize the racially privileged group, race matching may not be an efficacious methodological strategy. (Twine, 2000: 16)

In other words, epistemology cannot easily be tied to social location. The researcher/translator role offers the researcher significant opportunities for close attention to cross cultural meanings and interpretations and potentially brings the researcher up close to the problems of meaning equivalence within the research process. But as we have illustrated, this researcher/translator role is inextricably bound also to the socio-cultural positioning of the researcher, a positioning, whether intended or ascribed, that will also give a meaning to the dual translator/researcher role. That meaning shifts with insider/outsider status (Edwards, 1998; Jones and Pullen, 1992; Stinson, 1994) and is in turn linked to how the validity of the work is itself constructed.

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In Deaf studies qualitative research, the 'researcher as translator issues' have increasingly become focused on debates surrounding language oppression, and liberation research (Ladd, 2002). As previously discussed, in working with/within BSL one is working with a language whose very status as a language has been and remains contested. It is also the case that the vast majority of academics instigating and leading research in cultural deafness are themselves hearing and unlikely to be first language BSL users (including one of the authors of this article). Consequently, when hearing researchers, regardless of their fluency in BSL, fulfil both roles (the researcher/translator) this very embodiment raises, for Deaf producers and consumers of research, what has been described as the 'whiff of colonialisation' (Ladd, 2003).

There are two interconnected issues. First, that in hearing people taking on the combined researcher/translator role they are reinforcing long-standing and dominant inter-community power relations – namely, that hearing society 'does' things to Deaf society (in this case research) and crucially that it is hearing culture that negotiates and filters the meaning of Deaf people's lives (in this case through the act of presuming they can both research and translate). Second, the dual role raises questions about whether and how BSL as a language is valued. To function in predominantly hearing society Deaf people make enormous adaptations to be understood and to understand. These often include modifying their BSL to include a range of English grammar constructions (and in some cases with added vocalizations) in order for hearing signers to understand better (Young et al., 1997). Such an adaptation is more than language hybridity because it once again raises the issue of acceptable and unacceptable modalities and the inherent power society subscribes to the spoken rather than the signed word. Therefore, whilst from the hearing researcher/translator perspective, doing away with mediated communication (through an interpreter) might give rise to more direct, comfortable and elaborated data, from the Deaf respondents' perspective it might equally give rise to constrained expression to someone with whom a different kind of signing is required, including in some cases a collusion with a modality that is constructed as politically more powerful and for some inherently oppressive.

The complexity of the issues involved is illustrated in the study of Deaf community and culture by Jennifer Harris (1995), a hearing ethnographic researcher. Harris openly admits to being a learner signer *and* to fulfilling the researcher/translator role (Harris, 2002). She is in no way attempting to deceive. Indeed, for her there is a fundamental value in the unmediated communication through which both parties have to work hard to make themselves mutually understood and extract agreed meanings. Whilst this transparency about the researcher/translator issues and the inherent limitations it produces are offered as markers of validity in her work, they still do not address the social meanings of her translator/researcher embodiment. Her choice of the dual translator/researcher role exists in a wider context of

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intercommunity power relations that inevitably subscribe meanings to her choice, which in turn are linked to the validity of the research. However, at least in Harris' work some of these issues have become open. There are plenty of examples in research, including our own, where they are not discussed and their implications remain obscure (see, for example, Young, A., 1997).

If we turn the debate on its head, the researcher/translator dual role for Deaf academics leading qualitative research in Deaf studies has a totally different significance. As Ladd (2003) exemplifies, researching with, from and inside the language and its community of users can be an emancipatory epistemological position that can *only* be fulfilled by the Deaf researcher/translator who shares the common culture of those researched. Indeed in this situation, it is the hearing/speaking/writing communities for whom any acts of translation occur in the dissemination of the research to predominantly text-based, hearing academia. Taking this position does not mean that a Deaf researcher necessarily produces better research than a hearing researcher, just different research.

TRANSLATORS WORKING WITH RESEARCHERS

Researchers working with translators have begun to examine some of the ways in which they could be made visible within research. The work of Edwards (1998), Neufeld et al. (2002), Riessman (2000) and Temple (2002) are all examples of a move away from an attempt solely to find equivalence between words across languages and reflexively debate with the translators the choices they had to make in producing written text. For example, Temple's work with Asian Support Workers (2002) involved the two workers collecting the data and carrying out research on mental health issues with Asian communities. The Workers translated and transcribed the data, which was then discussed with the researcher, as were the translators' perspectives on the issues and the transcription process. Edwards (1998) also focuses debate on written texts agreed with translators employed to work with homeless mothers and fathers about their housing and family circumstances, and uses these as bases of discussions in her reflexive interviews with translators. Neufeld et al.'s (2002) ethnographic study of how immigrant Chinese and South Asian women caregivers in Canada accessed support from community resources used a similar method of employing translators to collect data, transcribe it and participate in discussions about its interpretation.

Edwards (1998), Neufeld et al. (2002) and Temple (2002) specifically concern themselves with word and concept choice and the transcription/translation process. Edwards made a decision in her research to encourage the interpreter/translator to use the third person rather than translate literally what someone had said. This was to mark the speech and written account as in part constructed by the translator. Edwards (1998) argues that if we treat interpreters as 'key informants' rather than as neutral transmitters of messages, then a conversation about possible differences in perspective can

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begin. Temple (1997) points out that these key informants' intellectual biographies form a central plank in any move away from a baseline of understanding that situates the English-speaking world at its centre. Without talking to interpreters about their views on the issues being discussed the researcher will not be able to begin to allow for differences in understandings of words, concepts and worldviews across languages.

Riessman (2000) moves furthest away from any attempt to examine formal aspects of language – for example, lexical choice and how things are said. In relation to her research with childless women in South India, she argues that:

> Attention to certain formal aspects of language – precisely *how* something is said and lexical choice – requires verbatim materials in the speaker's language. Instead I create structures from the interview texts to convey the sense I've made. A kind of textual experimentation, I use poetic stanzas (groups of lines about a single topic) and other units of discourse . . . as rhetorical devices to make my analysis of the organisation of a story clear for the reader. . . . I also attend to the sequence and contexts in which topics appear in the interview, how they are talked about, and my shifting understandings of them. (p. 130)

She acknowledges that she cannot reproduce aspects of a language she does not speak and moves away from any attempt to do this. The choice of a structure for people's translated words that they did not use themselves constantly reminds readers that the text is the researcher's view of what the translator has produced rather than any attempt to show that she knows their 'actual' meaning.

All these researchers move away from any entirely written textual analysis of research findings to engage with diverse cultural reasonings. They remain concerned with context and attempt to give a flavour of the interviews and the languages involved that consists of more than the written words. This strategy does not guarantee an opening-up of perspective but provides foundations on which differences may be discussed.

When is a translator not a translator?

Most researchers have to rely on translators at some time. Even when the significance of the translator's identity is acknowledged in its influence on the collection of the data itself and on the interpretations that are made from it, there is still a question of how far to involve the translator. In the research discussed above where the translator is deliberately brought out of the shadows of the research process, such as that of Edwards (1998), the boundaries between the roles of translator and other roles in the project become blurred. The translator always makes her mark on the research, whether this is acknowledged or not, and in effect some kind of 'hybrid' role emerges in that, at the very least, the translator makes assumptions about meaning equivalence that make her an analyst and cultural broker as much as a translator.

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As the above discussion points out, all authors and 'speakers' are not situated equally. There may be advantages to separating out the role of translator in that it can begin to open up the differences within communities. Temple's research with Polish communities (1997) is interesting here in that what started out as a practical decision to employ an interpreter/translator when the researcher herself spoke Polish, turned out to be an opportunity to explore some of the different views about what being Polish meant to people differently socially located within the community. The choice of an interpreter/translator is therefore as problematic as the choice of the researcher. As qualitative researchers have long argued, the researcher influences the research, but no one researcher has been responsible for being the repository of meaning for all English speakers in quite the same way as individual non-English translators and interpreters have been assumed to be. Service providers often employ link and key workers as translators and interpreters of 'their culture' without recognizing that non-English speaking communities are as internally differentiated as English speaking ones (see Bradby, 2002).

We have indicated that much research with translators assumes the debate is about the 'correct' transfer of meaning. There is some recognition about interpreters'/translators' roles in terms of whether they should be neutral, advisers or advocates (see for example, Thomson et al., 1999). Interestingly in Deaf studies qualitative research, the notion of Deaf people as 'translators' has been little debated. In fact much of the literature on cross cultural research between Deaf and hearing people has totally ignored issues of translation (e.g. Pollard, 1994). The more central issue has been the 'role' – a role discussed largely in ontological and functional terms, rather than in epistemological ones (Kyle, 1996). The problem is essentially that until very recent times there have been almost no Deaf academics (Stinson, 1994) and translation has been established as the profession of hearing people (providing an interpretation service between BSL and English). The involvement of Deaf people as research collaborators becomes, therefore, an issue of role and function:

> . . . deaf people . . . are treated as *experts* in the comprehension of the language, though *assistants* in the planning and conduct of the research itself. (Baker-Shenk and Kyle, 1990: 67) [emphasis original]

Beyond an acceptance of the necessity of involving Deaf people if one is researching about/with Deaf people, without academic status as co-researchers or professional status as translators, what Deaf collaborators do and how much power they have in the research process becomes problematized. A range of functions are discussed: gateways to the community; cultural advisers; data collectors in first language; credibility givers (if Deaf people are involved research is not being done 'to' but 'with' Deaf people);

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accessors of Deaf networks, knowledge and know-how; contributors to the interpretation of the data (Baker-Shenk and Kyle, 1990; Hauser 1994; Kyle, 1996; Stinson, 1994).

If the above list feels like one in which Deaf people are constructed as 'the other' then this is largely a reflection of the academic reality and one that has led to vigorous debate about the relationship between the hearing and the Deaf researchers. Indeed typologies have been proposed illustrative of different kinds of power relations between the two, different kinds of integration into each others' communities and different approaches to collaborative working (Kyle,1996). But, as Jones and Pullen remark (1992), such typologies rather miss the point in failing to recognize that *how* a Deaf and a hearing person collaborate within an actual research process is an epistemological question because that interaction is part of the social construction of the research product.

The point about the focus of debate being around the roles of Deaf researchers will be familiar to race and ethnicity researchers, feminist researchers and everyone interested in research 'with' users, including the current interest in 'community researchers' as a way of involving or engaging or empowering people (see for example Schwabenland, 2002). As researchers begin to move from a researcher-driven model of research to one of research with communities, the issue of how far the translator/community researcher/ user should be involved in research is foregrounded. How do we deal with the fact that most research projects go through a very prescriptive format for funders who will not accept that the questions will be set later with representatives/translators from communities? Leading on from this, if community researchers/translators have not been involved in the setting of the research questions at the outset, how can the researchers be said to have redressed the power balance? How can you train translators in the short time span often available to hold their own in issues in research methodology? Short methods courses are all that there is often time for and they rarely equip translators to challenge researchers with years of training on an equal playing field.

Researchers have dealt with the question of how far to involve translators in different ways. Most often translators are employed for short spells to work only on translating the actual interviews. This is the approach first used by Temple (Temple and Edwards, 2002) and subsequently abandoned as ignoring the translator's own active construction of meaning. As argued above, it is also the way most cross language researchers work. More recently, researchers have attempted to acknowledge the cultural brokering role that translators and interpreters play by carrying out the research with them as key informants (Edwards, 1998) and focusing on intellectual autobiographies (Temple, 2002) as a move towards more active inclusion of translators in data analysis. Recent research with community researchers attempts to move further down this road (Schwabenland, 2002), although language issues are

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rarely acknowledged even in this approach. None of these moves, however, can negate the power differential between the community researchers and the academic researchers holding the resources.

Discussion

In this article we have been arguing that discussion of epistemological and methodological issues around translation across languages has been neglected in cross-cultural social science research. This is more than an issue of the neglect of adequate research detail but has epistemological and ontological consequences. Language constitutes our sense of self as well as enabling us to communicate the ways in which we are similar to and different from others. The lack of a one-to-one relationship between language and meaning does not absolve the researcher from investigating the role of language in cross language research. Instead, it indicates that the boundaries around languages are permeable. Although the conversation with people who use other languages is difficult, it is possible, and probably essential, if we are to move on from the objectifying gaze on difference.

The research examined in this article acknowledges the importance of language to different degrees. At one end of the spectrum are researchers who fail to mention translation issues at all. Other researchers have attempted to deal with language differences at various points in their research. In Venuti's (1998) words, they have attempted to 'domesticate' the research at different points. The choice of when and how to translate is in part determined by the resources available to the researcher – for example, whether she can speak all the languages involved, the time period and funding available for the research. Translating into English is expensive and translating in the way advocated in this article involves more than employing translators for very short time periods and not engaging them in any discussion about perspective. This has funding implications if researchers are to carry out more than a tokenistic involvement with people who speak different languages.

Moreover, there are methodological, epistemological and ontological consequences in choosing particular methods. The early 'domestication' of research into written English may mean that the ties between language and identity/culture are cut to the disadvantage of non-English speakers. The baseline becomes mainstream English as soon as possible. This is not to deny that insights may come from the cut-off itself but it is merely raising the possibility of an all too early termination of dialogue. 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.

It is not just a question of the problematic nature of meanings across language but of the status of the languages involved *and* the status of the

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users of the language within the translation enterprise. In the case of BSL, and in some ways for other languages such as Sylheti where there are no written equivalents, the researcher is faced with complex issues of medium as well as power. Translation itself has the power to reinforce or to subvert long-standing cross-cultural relationships but that power rests in how translation is executed and integrated into research design, not in the fact of translation per se. Indeed, as we have illustrated in relation to some research in BSL, the clumsiness and lack of fit of translation that arises in part from a modality 'problem' can be successfully foregrounded to resist the assumptions of a more socially powerful linguistic form, not just a more socially powerful language.

The practical questions about who does the translation, how much of the analysis the translator gets involved in and when the language changes from that of the participants to written English are also grounded in theoretical and epistemological/ontological issues. We have been arguing that these practical decisions have consequences for how our research is produced and received. There is no one way to engage with people who speak languages other than English. Readers will recognize some of the issues discussed above in relation to other research areas such as race and ethnicity or feminist research. The issues we discuss are relevant to all research. For example, all researchers should ask how they represent other people. However, the point remains that this debate, however complex, about how to begin to discuss language difference should be brought into mainstream social science research and not remain the domain of sociolinguistics or anthropology or a matter of a methodological note.

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