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Enhancing ethical data translation in educational qualitative research

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Many educational researchers conducting studies in non-English speaking settings attempt to report on their project in English to boost their scholarly impact. It requires preparing and presenting translations of data collected from interviews and observations. This paper discusses the process and ethical considerations involved in this invisible methodological phase. The process includes activities prior to data analysis and to its presentation to be undertaken by the bilingual researcher as translator in order to convey participants' original meanings as well as to establish and fulfill translation ethics. This paper offers strategies to address such issues; the most appropriate translation method for qualitative study; and approaches to address political issues when presenting such data.

Keywords: ethical translation, translated data, educational research

Introduction

The theory and the design of research must meet ethical as well as academic requirements so that researchers are able to preserve the credibility and social beneficence of the findings. This includes satisfying the questions such as ¹⁶ what are the beneficial consequences of the study and how can the study contribute to enhancing the situation of the participating subject, of the group they represent, and of the human condition (Mitchell & Irvine, 2008). Then after the potential participants are identified and approached, researchers also need to consider ethical conducts when interact with the participants (Fahie, 2014) and to consider about what questions will be issued in the

interviews.

Prior to conducting any research, researchers must embrace an ethical research philosophy and respect to their participants as a member of particular group of society as well as individuals. Stutchbury and Fox (2009) present a provisional set of ethical grid developed by Flinders (1992) relevant to situation in which the research involves other people as research participants. ¹ The point of the grid is not that it will solve researchers' ethical dilemmas, 'but that it provides a moral framework for thinking about them' (p.496) and it aimed at developing sharper ethical awareness. However, literature discussing about a more specific ethical issues related to data translation remains absent despite the increasing number of research conducted in non-English speaking context. In this paper, therefore, I share my experience when handling my qualitative data that was collected from Indonesia.

Ethical translation

The issue of ethical translation has emerged as an important topic resulting from the more global dialogue and a more communicative around research. Ethical translation reflects ethical research since it is aimed to respect the participants as well as respect the cultural context from which the participants speak and act. This paper, therefore, suggests that ethical translation becomes an essential condition of ethical research.

There are multiple approaches to translating a text. A translator might approach the task as ²⁸ word-for-word translation, literal translation, faithful translation, semantic translation, idiomatic translation, and communicative translation (Newmark, 1988). In this way, a translator may decide which approach best suits the type of text—depending on the genre of the translated text, the status of the data in the design, and the research question—or may combine two or more methods in order to capture and convey the

intended meaning. In terms of the text to be translated, this paper will limit the discussion to interview texts obtained from participants whose language is not English.

Venutti (1995), Spivak (1993), and Guavanic (2001) suggest that translators necessarily work with regard to the culture/context in which the source text was generated and make the effort to understand and represent the otherness. Translators are advised to also make the source text evident, rather than translating the source text into 'fluent' targeted language presenting the new text as if it is not a translated version.

Prior to this, therefore, translators need to have cultural knowledge of the source language and its context (William, 2005). William indicates that translators' lack of cultural knowledge might adversely affect the outcomes of translation. From this point, researchers whose cultural identity is similar to what being researched, such as me in my doctoral study, have such capacity.

Maintaining ethical translation: the researcher's dilemmas and resolutions

Temple and Young (2004) outlined dilemmas that regarding translation data in qualitative research. These include the way the process of translation is explained/acknowledged to the readers, and the dual identity of the researcher as the translator. This paper adds to the set of dilemmas in translation outlined by Temple and Young (2004) and provides a discussion around the ethical tensions. An additional dilemma regarding how the translated interview/observation data should be presented will be discussed and exemplified in this paper.

My data was taken from interviews with nine English as foreign language (EFL) teachers working in Indonesian schools. In this way, my participants and I shared a common culture: we speak the dominant language in our country, work in similar workplace settings, and are all bilingual to some degree. The epistemological and methodological challenges were reduced since the researcher/interviewer and the

researched could both speak the same language (Temple and Young, 2004). Although my research participants could speak Bahasa Indonesia and English, the interview was conducted in the participants' first language, ¹ Bahasa Indonesia, to allow teachers to more freely express their ideas, beliefs, and feelings. The aim of the interview was to explore teachers' experience and dilemmas in implementing new curricular reforms in their particular school settings.

Temple and Young's (2004) first dilemma was about whether the process of translation needs to be acknowledged. The information regarding the language used for gathering the data before interviewing the research participants need to be informed. When both researcher and the participants could speak both language, there can be a choice by the research participants regarding the language used in interviews. Next the researcher needs to acknowledge the approach(es) to be used in any translation process and the thinking or rationale behind the use of such approach(es). More importantly who undertook the translation ²⁴ needs to be inform to the audience as well: a third party translation agents or the researcher as translator. Such information is important to let the readers understand how well the data was managed, and helps qualitative researchers build their credibility. The information regarding the decisions made should be given in research design/methodology chapter.

Objective translator or researcher as translator?

Being the translator in a research as either a third party translator or researcher-as-translator has both risks and benefits. Researchers may employ independent translators in order to protect or enhance notional research credibility. In this way, the researcher could validate a translation by back translation, or translator triangulation. Back translation is a method of checking the accuracy of a translation. For example, the first translation might translate an item, for argument's sake, from Bahasa Indonesia to

English then a second translator translates the English translation back into Bahasa Indonesia and then the two texts are compared. Hence, back translation involves at least two translators, the forward translator and the back translator (Ozolins, 2009). Ozolins' (2009) study on back translation that presents a case study of the translation of a medical diagnostic tool for prioritising hip and knee surgery in Australia suggests the unexpected effects of back translation. The study indicated that despite the validity, the second translator in particular saw this methodology as inevitably being flawed, breaking from a detailed comment because the second translator never saw the full original document. So Ozolin (2009, p.10) reported that the feeling of being 'ambushed' was apparent in several instances in this approach. Similarly, critics of the back-translation approach point to its basis in positivism, arguing that the technique makes general assumptions that the same meaning in the source language can be found easily in the target languages (Jargosh & Bourdeau, 2009; Larkin & Dierckx de Casterlé, 2007). Therefore, a common result of backtranslation to qualitative interview script has been 'confusion over whether a particular finding should be attributed to lack of cultural equivalency or to substandard translation' (Jargosh & Bourdeau, 2009, p.104). Further, Ozolin argues that methodology of back translation can perhaps unexpectedly put the translator in a position of having a voice vis a vis the researcher as their client (2009).

As I was the translator in the study, I benefitted in two ways: translation requires that the researcher interacts with the data more intensively hence know the data very well. This intensive interaction will inevitably benefit the researcher in the analysis stage. More importantly, the spoken language performed in the interview in the first moments was often full of hesitations, pauses and incomplete sentences and teachers in this study used various specific expressions that another translator might not grasp.

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Hence, my understanding of the subject matter and similar professional background to the research participants helped to minimise lost or distorted meanings.

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However, researcher-as-translator has risks dealing with the ‘interpretative validity’ (Johnson, 1997, p.285). Interpretive validity is achieved to the degree that the participants’ viewpoints, thoughts, intentions, and experiences are accurately understood and portrayed by the qualitative researcher. When researchers translate the data prior the interpretation, they inevitably act as interpreter as well. From this point, the domination of researchers’ subjectivity could challenge research validity since translation is an inherently political matter (Brownlie, 2007): the subjectivity of the researcher as translator in making judgments around wordings inevitably influenced the translated transcripts. This paper argues that although constructivist- interpretative paradigm has subjective ontological stance, strategies to promote this dimension of validity need to be performed through rigorous and ethical translation, transcription and reportage of the participants’ interview accounts. Therefore, despite researcher’s (as translator) subjectivity, the voice of the participants needs also to be taken into account in the process of data translation. The following section considers possible solutions to eliminate the tensions between the researcher and translator roles in qualitative research.

Data presentation

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It is important for researchers to enable the reader to experience participants’ voices and personal meanings as well as the premises for interpretations. The prior utterance of the researcher either in terms of direct or indirect speech of the interview question generating the participant’s response. By presenting the preceding question, the researchers have sought to enable readers to make such links as their eyes move line by line down the excerpts. Ochs (1999) suggests that when the readers have not

understood the research participants' utterances, they are able to look back to the immediately preceding line (See Figure 1).

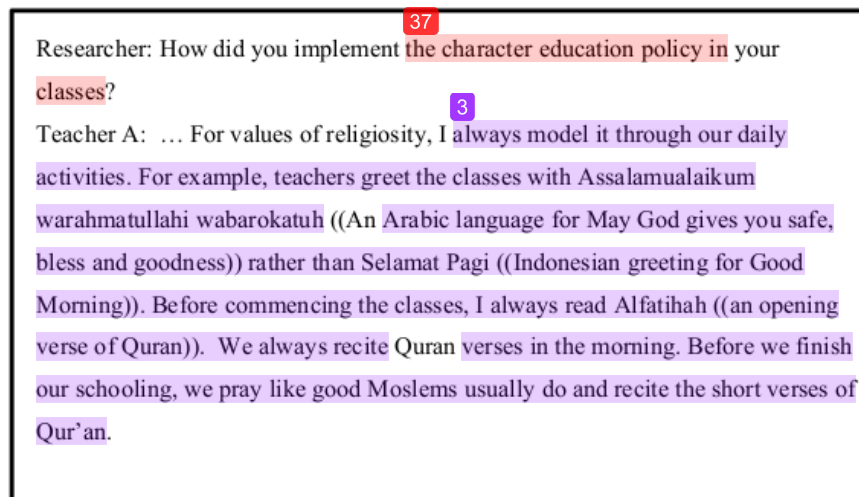


Figure 1. An example of translated data presentation

As can be seen in the Figure 1, the transcript was written and arranged based on my translation and transcription convention such as underline and double bracket. I kept the Bahasa's colloquial and gave them the closest meaning. These are indicated with underlining alongside the possible translated meaning in parentheses.

Another important aspect to consider in the data presentation is the transcription and translation convention. Researcher need to provide detailed convention in certain section prior to presenting the data. This convention aimed to enable researchers to self-regulate at data presentation. The Table 1 presents an example of translation convention that I made for my study.

Table 1. transcription and translation convention

<u>Underline</u>	Indonesian Expression
(parentheses)	The closest meaning in English or English explanation
((double parentheses))	Additional information
‘quotation’	Name of stipulated or intended CE values
...	Beginning or continuation of talk omitted
“double quotation”	Participants’ utterance in English

I decided the above transcription and translation convention because there is no particular rule of making such convention. Likewise, any researcher could make their own transcription and translation convention. No matter the convention would be, the most important thing to consider is the consistency of the use of the transcription and translation. Once the transcription and translation convention is made, it is necessary for the researchers to consistently follow the convention they made.

Conclusion

To summarise, researchers’ conception of the world and its nature, the research problem, and the topic in which they are interested will lead them to adopt a certain paradigm. The ontological and epistemological stances of the researcher then will inform methodological choices, including ethical data translation. More importantly, these stances must inspire researcher to act ethically in the whole process of the research

The bilingual research participants need to be involved in the data processing, including member check of the translated data. In order to meet ethic criteria in translation, the approach of foreignizing translation need to be chosen. This approach is

considered more ethical since it regard the source language's culture. For the purpose, transcription and translation convention needs to be made to help the readers to understand the verbal data easily.

Additionally, empirical research undertaken in settings beyond English-speaking ones that requires data translation is necessary to contribute to the international literature and to correct Euro-centrism in the scholarly field. Despite challenges in translation, such research will contribute to the emergence of research-based knowledge from non-Anglo-phone settings to enrich and develop social theory.

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