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More than just translation: challenges and opportunities in intercultural and multilingual research

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Abstract

Aspects of intercultural and multilingual research are receiving increasing attention from the academic community in human geography and the wider social sciences. Current debates in this area highlight concerns around linguistic hegemony, but this article argues that intercultural research presents opportunities as well as challenges. The three authors here found common ground based on their first-hand experience of the complexities of doing research in intercultural settings and working in "multilingual constellations". In this article, they seek to address some practical issues of dealing with multilingual research, with reflections on using a translator, interviewing in a second language and communicating academic terms. Within this context, it is argued that the key to a better understanding is to unpack and unravel the complexities of such research settings, with translation as one particular aspect of this rather than a dominant frame of reference. Here, cross-cutting themes of language, communication and representation, which it is argued are similarly significant in intercultural research, are also explored. Scholars have drawn attention to significant differences between culturally-specific academic discourses, and the "cultural gaps" that need to be bridged when doing intercultural and multilingual research. Operating in multilingual contexts involves moments of friction and hesitation, and it is this particular moment where our thinking is challenged by new ideas and thoughts – be it while speaking with an interpreter, while reflecting on our positionality or while striving to transfer meaning from one culture into another – that moves things forward in constructive ways. Intercultural research in multilingual settings is thus about critical reflexiveness, a point which it is worth extending to human geography in general.

1 Introduction

Aspects of intercultural and multilingual research are receiving increasing attention from the academic community in human geography and the wider social sciences.

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Comparative cross-national and cross-cultural research projects have become common practice; multilingual research ventures jointly undertaken by academics with different language backgrounds are more and more common; and the increasing mobility of academics across national, cultural and language borders, as well as changing publishing practices, have pushed intercultural and multilingual aspects to the foreground of academic debates. This article's three authors found common ground based on their first-hand experience of the complexities of doing research in intercultural settings and working in "multilingual constellations" (Meyer and Kameyama, 2007:12). Negotiating our ways through different intercultural and bilingual settings brought a number of aspects to the fore that had not originally been at the core of our research agendas. In this paper, we explore some of these themes. Drawing on our respective experiences as intercultural researchers operating in specific bilingual settings, we address some issues that we consider to be particularly relevant for further debate. Each of our contributions has a distinct focus, reflecting our personal experiences and individual thoughts. As three distinctive voices with quite different viewpoints, it is hoped that this discussion will add to current debates.

The theory and practice of intercultural research in multilingual constellations opens up a broad set of issues for consideration, some of which are outlined below. Within the context of these broader debates, however, we feel that the relatively limited term "translation" (as suggested in this special issue of Social Geography) does not adequately express the complexities of intercultural and multilingual research. Rather than offering another term, we think the key to a better understanding is to unpack and unravel the complexities of such research settings, with translation as one particular aspect of this. We further suggest that a key consideration for researchers negotiating different intercultural research settings and multilingual contexts should be communication. Here, communication is understood as the process of exchanging information between human beings through a medium with the intention to "*to make oneself understand* and to *understand others*" (Werlen, 2007:15, emphasis in the original). It is of crucial importance for communication that all parties involved find a language that is

mutually understood. There is also a sender-receiver dimension to communication, as information is conveyed from one individual (the sender) to another (the receiver), and vice versa. The fundamental challenge this poses for researchers working in intercultural and multilingual contexts is that language itself is a "socially situated cultural form" (Saville-Troike, 2003:3, quoted in Werlen, 2007:16). As such, language is the bearer of different norms and values representing the traditions of different societies, and hence conveys meanings that go beyond words and semantics. Researchers in intercultural and multilingual settings therefore need to take account of potential differences, subtleties and traps. Indeed, in order to be understood and to understand others, they must develop a deep understanding for both the cultures and the languages in which they are operating (Booth, 1993).

Looking beyond these particular concerns, a growing body of literature dedicated to intercultural and multilingual issues is emerging from within human geography, urban planning and other related disciplines. Scholars (such as Booth, 1993; Helms et al., 2005; Müller, 2007) have drawn attention to significant cultural differences between culturally-specific academic discourses, and the "cultural gaps" that need to be bridged when doing intercultural and multilingual research. Other scholars have reflected on issues related to the dominance of the English language within geography, criticising, for example, the "general lack of thought invested in reflecting on the positions of non-English speakers as well as a linguistic power imbalance within 'international geography' " (Helms et al., 2005). A perceived "Anglo-American hegemony" (see for example Aalbers, 2004; Rodríguez-Pose, 2006; Hassink, 2007) has been explicitly related to the dominance of English language journals in the academic mainstream, and the subsequent marginalisation of off-network scholars (Belcher, 2007). This has also been linked to the issue of power, as "linguistic hegemony empowers some (native speakers mainly) while disempowering others", allegedly leading to a less rich, diverse human geography (Hassink, 2007:1282). However, as other authors have pointed out, the issue of language can be an emotional one, and there has been a tendency for emotive arguments to obscure the more constructive dialogic endeavours to address

these issues (Rodríguez-Pose, 2006). There is also an implicit assumption about native English speaking researchers' willingness to subject themselves to some of the uncomfortable situations described by non-Anglophone colleagues, perhaps reflecting the lack of publications by native-English researchers about carrying out research in non-Anglophone environments (although see Smith, 2003; Deans, 2004; Watson, 2004).

A further related current of academic thought focuses on the transferral of meaning within the specific act of translation in intercultural and multilingual contexts. Müller (2007), for example, discusses the concept of power in relation to translation. He argues that translation is complex, political and subjective. Müller's account looks beyond semantics to emphasize the agency of the translating geographer and the critical potential of translation, which requires addressing the institutionalisation of a naturalised meaning hegemony. In this vein, the conception of translation can be further pinned down and described as making sense of and transferring meaning from one time-space context into another; beyond the translation of language, it also involves translation of social and cultural practices and artifacts. It could therefore be argued that translation involves comparison between two authenticities. It seems, then, that translation demands from geographers a high degree of sensitivity to contextual factors, including cultural difference and similarity, and uneven power relations (Smith, 2003). Seeing language as a reflection of different cultures also allows for reflection on issues of positionality perhaps otherwise overlooked, including aspects such as age, class and gender. It may be that the "hybrid spaces" which Smith (1996) identifies between intercultural researchers and their respondents should be treated not just a language issue, but rather as the spaces which exist between all researchers and "others". Similarly, the issues at stake here, rather than being confined to intercultural and multilingual research, may be related to wider concerns about research in human geography.

Here, the authors of this paper, who are all based at Sheffield University, each write about their experiences of doing research in intercultural and multilingual contexts, and about the implications these particular settings had for their research projects. One of

us, a British and native English language research student not familiar with the Hungarian language, chose to research Hungarian nourishment cultures. She discusses here her experiences working with a translator and interpreter for the words of others in her work. The second author, who is British and a native English speaker, carried out research on informal urban development in Mexico in a Spanish speaking context, using Spanish as a second language. She found that that her experience of doing research there raised certain issues around positionality and identity, and gave rise to a deeper level of reflexivity than may otherwise have been the case. The third author of the paper, a native German student, has carried out research on the local politics of housing demolition and urban renewal in Eastern Germany while being based at an English university. With English being his second language, his challenge has been to take ideas from culture to culture, and to enable an Anglophone audience to understand the evolution of local policy-making in the context of the housing and wider urban crisis in Eastern Germany.

2 Operating in different languages

There are many roles that can be taken in intercultural research. Each one of the situations described in this article has approach intercultural research in a slightly different way. The first reflection here deals with the issue of using a translator in research. The approach that has been used has drawn on a wide collection of past academic experiences of using a translator and others working with different languages. Importantly, it has not only stuck to literature on translation; the approach has also drawn on social and cultural theory surrounding the understanding of different cultural contexts (Best, 2003). The author of this first section found that the process of translation using a translator allowed space for questions to be raised that lead to increased understanding of that particular cultural context, and although at times using a translator was limiting, conversely it meant that arresting spaces, similar to what Smith (1996) calls hybrid spaces, were created and new meanings were fashioned in both cultural

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contexts.

The reasons for expanding beyond my own linguistic context was because of the common critique of past projects that had dealt with food and family, in that they were from a United Kingdom and American perspective. This context presented an opportunity to design a research project to contrast the UK with a country of a completely different social and economic history. Hungary has a very different recent social and economic history to the UK, but has recently had to deal with European Union legislative frameworking in all areas, particularly with regard to food production and consumption, to achieve accession to the European Union in 2004. This seemed like an opportunity like no other. However there was one barrier, I did not speak Hungarian; but I still wanted to explore for myself the context in which food was being produced in families. Due to time constraints and resources I was not able to become fluent in Hungarian in the time that the project had to be delivered. This meant that a Hungarian research assistant was employed by the project, and she would carry out and translate the interviews. However, for me, learning Hungarian was an important part of the project. To be able to converse with people that were taking part in the project was vital, for them to understand that I was more than a foreigner passing through. So I did embark on an intensive language course and then living in the area. The research assistant and her translations became a vital gatekeeper to my understanding of Hungary, not just of the Hungarian language.

Often in transnational research the role of the translator in negotiating different situations is acknowledged. Twyman et al. (1999) discuss how the translator, in the context of simultaneous translations, when listening back to the recordings away from the pressure of an interview situation, may explain words as something slightly different. Similarily, the translated interviews received via email, before visiting Hungary, did not make sense. There were issues that were beguiling to both the research assistant and me. The nuances in each other's languages meant the same words often had slightly different meanings. In this case, it was when going through the translations with the translator that she often revealed her own dissatisfaction with her choice of

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written translation. This process highlighted these small discrepancies, which were often passable translations, enough for the basic meaning to be understood, but which often glossed over the intended meaning of the interviewee.

Through the course of this process there were many examples of this. I have chosen one that seems to be most appropriate. This is an extract from one of our interviews:

I try to buy it somewhere else, yes. Because it is scary... Well, meat... I don't like to buy meat in the Tesco, as I am not really satisfied with it. That means, if I have the opportunity, and I do a bigger meat-shopping, then – well, the other day I was ~~susceptible~~ inclined to go to the butcher's in Szamos street, as I trust in butchers more than in the meat counter at the hypermarkets.

In this example the word "susceptible" is the direct translation in accordance with the dictionary, but when the meaning of the word was examined, this translation was not what the translator believed was being expressed. The word "susceptible" may lead the reader to believe that the interviewee feels that she is being tricked into going to the butchers. However the word "inclined" was used as an alternative definition which does not hint that the interviewee feels that she has lost control. This word was used because it best reflected the way that the interviewee saw this process through the eyes of the translator. It is not that this was a mistranslation or a bad translation, but it did not best reflect the full meaning or limited meaning of the word in this case. It also added another perceived meaning into the mix.

In this way, discussing the translations not as static text but fluid in their construction and meaning, meant things started to appear more interesting. For example as part of the semi-structured interviews we had asked to be carried out, one of the questions was: "do you consider food as an expression of love?" When we were going through the translation of the interviews I asked the translator why people had focused so much on their partners and not on their children in their answers. She explained that in Hungarian there are two words for "love". One denotes a love for a lover, and the other love for a family member or an object. When she was asking the question she was only using the word that meant love for a lover. In analysing these transcripts it would

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have been easy to infer meaning that was not there. The different translations were vital in understanding the meaning of what was being expressed. These differences can be vital in understanding what is being said, without being able to be translated. The words suggest so much, but often that is what becomes absent in another context.

As the interviews were spoken, everyday language was used, presenting an interesting interplay between current cultural contexts in both languages. Often the translator would say to me, "but you don't have a word for this in English". This was true. It is often difficult to keep the exact translations of each word, and compromises have to be made in order for it to be understood. We would often however find that it was more than this; it was often because the words were "slang"[1]. These words were culturally and contextually specific; their meaning would change over time, so what is "cool" now, tomorrow might be "phat". We decided that we would do our best to keep to the informal way in which these words were being said to maintain their meaning. This brought to light interesting use of language that would not have been used by English speaking people. For example the word "grubs" was used instead of "meal". "Meal" was too formal for the context, and it set the wrong tone for what participants were trying to depict, which was somewhere in between what they saw as a meal and a snack. This identified an interesting area in which the data could then be analysed. In conclusion, acknowledging and discussing slang or alternative meanings of words can play an important part in looking at intercultural settings, in the way that the meanings of language can become arresting and cause moments of contemplation for the researcher.

[1]OED defines slang as informal language that is more common in speech than in writing and is typically restricted to a particular context or group.

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3 Multilingual challenges and opportunities for a native English speaker: space for reflexivity

Language is a crucial aspect of almost all social science research, but one that may only be considered in depth when it is found to be problematic, as suggested by recent debates on the "Anglo-American hegemony" in human geography (discussed above), and the perceived reluctance of the Anglophone research world to address this issue. On the other hand, the apparent lack of reflection by Anglophone researchers who have carried out research in other languages may also have added to this perception. In an attempt to contribute constructively to these debates, I discuss here some of my own experiences as a native English speaker at a UK university doing research in a Spanish-speaking setting, relating to the challenges and opportunities that intercultural research presented. In particular, I found that carrying out research in a bilingual setting gave rise to increased reflexivity, relating to wider questions of identity and positionality, and to the task of representation within the research process.

During 2006 and 2007, I spent around seven months in Mexico undertaking fieldwork in Xalapa, a medium-sized city in Mexico, as part of research on placemaking in urban informal neighbourhoods there. I interviewed local people, including residents of informal neighbourhoods and local government officials, in Spanish without an interpreter, in order to try and get as close to the language and its meaning as possible (Müller, 2007). The sensation of missing nuances and subtleties in interviews was sometimes present, but the excitement of actually doing research in a foreign language overtook this. However, the analysis and writing stage back home in an English-speaking context afforded further opportunity for reflecting on my experiences of intercultural research, in particular relating to language. For example, re-listening to interviews where one's understanding is constrained by the limits of one's language may lead one to reflect on "what a dolt one is" (Watson, 2004). The issue of how to analyse material in a "foreign" language, while writing about it in my own "native" language, was another concern. The limited guidance available on how to approach this suggests carrying out inter-

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view analysis in the original language, and only translating excerpts at the final version stage, with footnotes explaining the significance of different terms (Smith, 2003). This technique is known as "holus-bolus", a strategy for maintaining "intellectual honesty" which also draws attention to the "contingency of meaning" (Müller, 2007:210). The aim is to produce richer insight into diverse cultural understandings of concepts, as well as maintaining an awareness of the different implications of different terms.

But even using strategies such as these, the issue of language becomes particularly problematic in terms of representing respondents' words and meanings. Even if the researcher only translates excerpts from transcripts, how does she make respondents' voices as authentic as possible when she has changed every word? Literal translation into English is sometimes inadequate to express the subtleties of the concept at hand; or worse, may lead to "translating the untranslatable" (Hassink, 2007:1286) and the "Anglicisation" of the text. There may be no easy solution to this, although strategies such as multilingual texts help to deepen understanding of the issues at stake. Translating may involve mapping ideas and meaning between and across cultures, and the politics of language use may require attention (Smith, 2003). But this also relates to the wider problem of representation in research, which occurs at all levels to some degree, as "[r]epresentation is fundamentally problematic" (Smith, 2003:190). The issue is that "we can never not work with 'others' who are separate and different from ourselves; difference is an essential aspect of all social interactions that requires that we are always everywhere in between or negotiating the worlds of me and not-me" (Nast, 1994, quoted in Smith, 2003:188–189). In this sense, translation may be seen as a task that every researcher needs to reflect on, at least within the social sciences, in "translating" the words and meanings of respondents into academic text.

Doing research in a linguistic setting where I was a non-native speaker also emphasised certain facets of my own identity as a researcher, and as an "outsider". For example, as a 30-year-old woman interviewing state officials who were around my age, it was hard to know whether to use the polite or informal version of "you" ("*usted*" or "*tu*"). This was brought to the fore when one interviewee, the head of a state depart-

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ment who had studied in Europe, insisted I used "*tu*". His aim seemed to be to put me at ease, based on his knowledge of English which has only one form of "you". However, my experience of Mexico's quite formal etiquette (where people use "*usted*" even with their parents) made me extremely uncomfortable with this arrangement, to the point where it detracted from the quality of the interview. This also revealed certain assumptions which the respondent may have made about the identity of the researcher, which were perhaps quite different from my own view of my positionality (Herod, 1999:324).

On the other hand, it has been suggested that both positionality, and the categories of insider/outsider are more fluid than is sometimes imagined (Herod, 1999). Indeed, my own positionality shifted depending on the situation, and as a white, middle-class English woman, I sometimes felt that aspects of my identity other than culture or language were important. For example, my economic status separated me more markedly from some of my respondents than language; while conversely, being a woman afforded me unexpected identification with others. It seems that intercultural research forces the researcher to reflect on issues around positionality and reflexivity that might otherwise be less thoroughly considered (Helms et al., 2005).

Similarly, making the effort to understand a subject area in a different language affords a different perspective on it, which may lead to a deeper understanding of the issues at hand. In fact, the question of how to address the perceived "Anglo-American hegemony" in human geography reflects wider issues of how to accommodate difference and diversity. On a purely practical level, given the limited capacity for most people to learn more than a few languages, and the rise of a global academic community in the context of globalisation (Hassink, 2007), I argue that there is a need for some agreement on one or several lingua(s) franca. The English language domination may reflect a power imbalance within the academic world; but this may go beyond, and cut across, language divisions. Alongside linguistic hegemony, there are other issues relating to resources and genuine marginalisation from debates, which require "scholars in privileged western environments ... to find responsible and ethical ways to engage with, learn from and promote the ideas of intellectuals in less privileged places"

(Robinson, 1994:549–550). Multilingual dialogue may be one aspect of doing this, in the spirit of a "truly global human geography" (Hassink, 2007:1286). But in redressing the linguistic imbalance, we must not lose sight of the wider opportunity to "give the 'Other' a greater voice and a greater capacity to influence the agenda in human geography"(Rodríguez-Pose, 2006:610).

4 Making ideas travel from culture to culture: unravelling norms and values embedded in specific time-space contexts

Multilingual and intercultural issues turned out to be major, if not the greatest challenges in the course of my British-German PhD research venture. One of the key issues for me – a German academic who is based at the University of Sheffield in the UK – has been to make ideas travel between different cultures and languages; in this case, between the German and the Anglo-American culture and language contexts. Negotiating my way through this complex and challenging setting involved, firstly, the unravelling of norms and values specific to each cultural context and, secondly, the development of an appropriate language in order to be able to communicate these characteristics. In other words, it involved the unpacking of what is specifically "German" about my research, and it required developing both sufficient English language (my second language) as well as professional language skills.

Though making ideas travel between cultures, at a first glance, sounds pretty straightforward, a deeper engagement with this issue has revealed it to be an extremely demanding task. When reviewing both the German and English language literature on subjects related to my research on "Housing and urban renewal policy-making in Eastern Germany", a first finding was that the German and the Anglophone academic world do not speak to each other. The impression I got during the reviewing process was that there are two largely separate bodies of literature out there, and links between the two have yet to be made. What made the literature review even more difficult (and disappointing) was that Anglo-American academics publish only in English; virtually no liter-

ature written by Anglo-American scholars has been published in the German language (or translated into it). German scholars, however, aren't much better: although more and more German scholars read English-language publications, their own research is almost exclusively published in the German language. And if there is a publication in English by a German academic, very few references are generally made between the different bodies of literature available in the two languages. Given this lack of communication I came to the conclusion that, on either side of the English Channel, there must be relatively little knowledge and understanding available about the Anglophone and German-speaking academic world respectively. Even more importantly, I realised that the existing literature was of relatively little help to me in making my ideas travel from one culture into another.

With this observation in mind, I proactively tried to make sense of the different bodies of literature myself, to relate them and to make ideas speak to each other. The aim of these efforts has been to gain the most from this particular intercultural setting I had exposed myself to and let both bodies of literature inform my research. Hence, I reviewed the writings of the Anglophone academic world as well as the thoughts produced in my native German language. What I found, however, were not only missing links between the two bodies of literature, but also that many concepts and theories simply lack the capacity to travel across cultural and national boundaries. What generated optimism was that a small number of scholars share this concern. There seems to be a growing awareness among scholars in human geography and related fields that many concepts used in these areas do not travel very far beyond the context in which they have been developed. Pierre, for example, comments that theories and concepts are characterized by an "implicit ethnocentrism" (Pierre, 2005:448), and for this reason, he claims, they are not easily transplanted from one context into another. As early as the 1960s, Elias made a similar observation, criticising the "natio-centric" (*natiozentrisch*) (Elias 1969) nature of much (US-American) sociological thought. It is exactly this implicit ethnocentrism of concepts that I encountered in my own work, and it was what made it so difficult to convey my ideas to and discuss them with my English-speaking audience.

The following two examples should reinforce the point made above. The research on urban policy, housing and urban renewal led me to explore the concept *behutsame Stadterneuerung*. *Behutsame Stadterneuerung* – which translates as "careful urban renewal" – has emerged out of a specific West German urban renewal context from the 1970s, and it has evolved into a highly regulated policy regime since then. The concept is deeply embedded in specific ideologies around the German welfare state, German federalism, and normative ideas of the "urban" built environment as well as the social sphere. Against this backdrop, it does not surprise that *behutsame Stadterneuerung* is negotiated in a manner that is distinct to the way urban renewal concepts are currently discussed in the Anglo-American world (cf. Ley, 2000). *Behutsame Stadterneuerung* has largely kept its relatively strong social welfare connotations, its decentralised procedural nature, and a comparatively low importance of economic rationales over the decades (cf. Hämer, 1990; Bernt, 2003). Just to translate *behutsame Stadterneuerung* into "careful urban renewal" would not be sufficient to enable those readers who are not familiar with this particular time-space context to understand the complexity of the term; the underpinning values and norms of the concept as well as the practices need explicit or "careful" unpacking. In relatively few cases such debates about the transferability of concepts from culture to culture seem to have taken place. "Urban regime theory", a concept used in the USA to explain urban development as the result of the co-operation of powerful public-private governing coalitions aimed at generating economic growth, stands for a good example for a lively debate about the transfer from one "culture" (or time-space context) into another. However, the critical stance of scholars such as Wood (2004), Bahn et al. (2003) and Gissendanner (2002) who discussed urban regime theory with respect to the UK and the German context respectively, again point to this "ethno-centrism" and "natio-centrism" highlighted by Peters and Elias (cf. above).

The implicit ethnocentrism of concepts has proved to be the major obstacle to making ideas travel, and the fact that Anglo-American and German academics hardly speak to each other has not contributed to a better understanding of the respective worlds either. What made the whole intercultural and multilingual research setting even more difficult

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to me was the sender-receiver dimension of the act of communication referred to in the introduction of this paper. To me, it became soon clear that it was not only me who was required to unpack those social and cultural values and specific norms that underpin my research – be they my "personal" ones or those more commonly associated with the (Eastern) German context, which I have been studying. The same applied for the people I was communicating with. This specific intercultural and multilingual setting required them to become more explicit about what values and norms underpinned their comments and thoughts. This would not only be rewarding in terms of avoiding misunderstandings, but it would also create a mutual learning experience. What I found was that those people with a more "international" background have a much greater awareness for these issues than those without.

To sum up, making ideas travel from one cultural context into another has proved very difficult as, at least in human geography and related fields, Anglo-American and German academics do not communicate much with each other. Furthermore, the implicit "ethno-centrism" of theories and concepts developed in specific time-space contexts requires a much more careful unravelling by, and intellectual engagement of, academics with their subjects than is often the case. In order to be able to successfully communicate with researchers in an intercultural setting, all sides involved in the discussion need to develop a sufficient understanding of both language and cultural contexts. Assumed there is such intellectual openness, the challenge to make concepts travel becomes a rewarding and mutual learning experience.

5 Concluding thoughts

The aim of this paper has been to highlight a number of issues related to doing research in intercultural and multilingual contexts. Drawing on our own experiences, we have touched upon a small number of aspects we found to be particularly relevant in each settings. Rather than making use of a single concept such as translation, our aim has been to open up debates we think need further exploration. We approached this

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article in a discursive way that enabled us to reflect on each of our personal research experiences. Consequently, our conclusions reflect these different approaches and individual experiences rather than a single viewpoint. There is much common ground in our thinking, although on a small number of issues we have maintained different positions as well. As the intention of this paper has not been to give definitive answers, but to increase awareness about a number of particular aspects, we do not regard this as problematic.

This consideration notwithstanding, there are a number of points of congruence across the three authors' reflections, where we find our common ground. Recent debates around language in human geography have tended to focus on relatively negative issues of power and marginalisation. But we have found that intercultural research gives rise to as many opportunities as it does challenges, the crucial point perhaps being how these are then capitalised on. Firstly, we find that doing research in intercultural and multilingual settings is a challenging, but intellectually highly rewarding task. It opens up new ways of thinking, and it challenges ideas that are normally taken for granted. It forces the researcher to become more explicit in his or her thinking and communication, and its requires the academics to position himself or herself much more clearly than may be the case in other research settings. It requires making values and norms explicit, and unpacking the implicit "ethno-centrism" of theories and concepts, as well as developing an understanding of more than one research context.

Secondly, we argue that such intercultural and multilingual settings require much more intensive, reflective and careful thinking about the researcher's identity and positionality in the research process. This means that while the role of language in perpetuating academic hegemonies should be acknowledged, researchers in privileged positions, whether on the basis of language, or resources and other types of power, should also be encouraged to constantly examine their position in the wider research world, and the implications this has for others. Discussions about language may therefore have potential to provide a space for reflexivity for human geography as a discipline, as well as individual researchers. Of course, there is the ever-present danger of academic

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navel gazing; but maintaining a vigilant position on this should not necessarily detract from the often richly rewarding process of reflexivity.

The third aspect we would like to highlight is that intercultural research and working with a translator marks out and draws together places through the mediation of language through a third party. This creates not just an opportunity to share different ideas, but also spaces where nuances can be shared as different, in perhaps more positive ways. Whether we are fluent in one or more language, practitioners of geography should be reaching out and embracing the challenges that people face on a daily basis in communicating with one another. Specifically, using a translator means that often the act of translation is seen as something that is complete, but rather it has been something that is continually evolving and adapting, which has been both as positive and negative.

The fourth and concluding aspect we would like to touch upon is that we find that intercultural and multilingual research is more than translation, and it can happen in a variety of contexts. To us, it always involves a moment of friction and hesitation, and we argue that it is this particular moment where our thinking is challenged by new ideas and thoughts. It is this little break – be it while speaking with an interpreter, while reflecting on our positionality or while striving to transfer meaning from one culture into another – that moves things forward in constructive ways and creates those "hybrid spaces" Smith (1996) is referring to. Intercultural research in multilingual settings, as well as research as a whole, is about critical reflexiveness. This means that these ruptures in knowledge have the potential to open up new horizons, and one must allow for these and explore them further in order to create greater understanding.

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