Methodological Issues and Challenges in Researching Transculturally

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Edited by

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Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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This book first published 2022

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-8746-0
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-8746-5

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is a book full of "secrets." Revelation. Inspiration. Exhilaration. The authors unveil the issues and challenges they experienced while researching transculturally.

I am deeply indebted to the contributors of this volume for their willingness to put themselves under scrutiny—exposing their own vulnerabilities, ethical dilemmas, and self-doubts— in hopes that readers, research students, and early career researchers, might take away tiny embers of fire to illuminate their own way forward. I have learnt much from them and am humbled by their capacity to uncover the ephemeral realities of research which are often shrouded in mystery.

I would like to express my appreciation to those people who helped make this book possible. First, special thanks go to Rebecca Gladders (Commissioning Editor) who was always helpful and prompt in replying to my queries; Sophie Edminson (Designer) who worked with me on the book cover design; and Amanda Millar (Typesetting Manager) who was very patient with my edits and corrections.

Lastly, my sincerest thanks go to my niece and best friend, Krizia Victoria, for her insightful comments on the drafts; for inspiring me, nurturing my creative ideas, and showing me how to live a dazzling and dynamic (if slightly more complicated) "transcultural" life.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION
RESEARCHING TRANSCULTURALLY: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

MABEL VICTORIA

Chance Encounter on a Bus

Mabel: *Kumusta ka na?* (How are you?)

Teresa: *Mabuti naman. Kaya lang, eto mahirap pa rin. Kamamatay lang ng asawa ko.* (I'm fine, but it's been very hard. My husband passed away recently).

Mabel*:* Oh, condolences.

Teresa: *Kahit inabuso nya ako, mahal ko pa rin sya. Hirap na hirap na ko talaga. Kailangan kong makahanap ng trabaho*. (Although he was abusive towards me, I still love him. I'm really struggling, barely coping. I have to find a job)

The excerpt above is taken from my research journal, 21 September 2009. It was written after a chance encounter in a bus with Teresa, one of the participants of my doctoral study in Edmonton, Canada. Teresa and I spoke in Tagalog, our shared Filipino language, during the 40-minute bus ride. She detailed the physical, mental, and emotional abuse she suffered in the hands of her deceased husband. I struggled to hide my shock and discomfort. I had not expected an intimate self-disclosure of such nature. It seemed "as if our common language had created a protective bubble that shielded us from the other passengers, who could hear but not understand what we were saying" (Victoria 2011, 75). Indeed, the very public nature of the bus contrasted with the intimate and personal nature of our talk. In my research journal entry at the end of that day, I kept asking myself if our encounter had ruined her day or if she was harmed in any way by re-living the horrors of her abuse. I

wanted to ask my supervisors, who were based in the UK, for advice but I was worried about exposing my deficiency and indecision. Would they question my competence? Would they be disappointed in me and consider me as undeserving of a funded PhD? I felt very unsettled and a profound sense of self-doubt and uncertainty "followed me around like a cloud of exhaust smoke" (Tombro 2016, 149). The experience proved to be my baptism by fire in academic research.

To this day, more than ten years after I completed my field work, the "emotional labour" and "mnemonic traces" on my body of that bus incident continue to haunt me, provoking an emotionally laden and unfinished, ongoing conversation with the ghosts of the past and the present (Derrida 1994; Zembylas, Bozalek, and Motala 2020). Indeed, it can be argued that the researcher's "positionalities, histories, methodological and theoretical choices, as well as our engagement with participants and the stories they tell us, shape how we engage with what unfolds before us, and *continues to do so, time and time again* (Thorneycroft 2020, 2 my italics). In other words, research never really ends, "potentially haunting the researcher, unflaggingly" (Ibid.).

This volume engages with the "seldom heard voices" (Fenge et al. 2019) of the researchers themselves casting an intense critical examination of the haunting—issues and challenges—they encountered while researching transculturally. Unlike in traditional academic research where the authors "speak from the position of nowhere" Shope (2006, 163), the contributors in this volume make their positionality evident.

Conceptualising the Transcultural

The fact that I shared the same linguistic and cultural background as the participants lulled me into thinking that I would have less of a difficult time by virtue of my simplified notion of in-group membership (Victoria 2011). I initially rejoiced in the development of rapid intimacy with Filipino participants as there were no national cultural or linguistic differences to traverse. The realization that this was a very flawed assumption hit me with intensity and made me doubt my own ability as a doctoral candidate. Elliott (in this volume), who shares linguistic and cultural heritage with her participants, explores the unexpected challenges of this common ground with her bilingual English and Slovak participants. Shi's autoethnography of Chinese diaspora puts the spotlight on the complex and multi-faceted notion of what it means to be "Chinese" researching other Chinese.

The point I wish to clarify at the outset is the use of "transcultural" in the title Researching trans**culturally.** The combination of the prefix 'trans' and the loaded term 'culture' might immediately invoke solid boundaries of linguistic and nation-based cultural differences between the investigator and the informants. However, focusing on the boundaries obscures the complex and multiple identities of the researcher and the participants such as gender, social class, sexuality, language, religion, age and so on. Thus, the use of "**trans**cultural" in this collection, is an attempt to capture the fluidity, the unfixity and constantly shifting identities of the researcher as they navigate their way through the "multiple spatial-temporal scales simultaneously present" (Baker 2021, 8) in the research process. My example of that bus encounter with a research participant from the same linguistic and national background, and Elliott's and Shi's study (in this volume) with "their own people" demonstrate the intricacies of what it means to research transculturally. Instead of the essentialist, monolithic notion of nation-based culture, the "cultural" aspect of the transcultural in this volume refers to the researchers' simultaneous membership in different small cultures and large cultures as well as multiple, unstable and intersecting identities and positionalities.

It must be acknowledged however, that just like the widely used terms in the field such as "intercultural" and "cross cultural", the term "trans**cultural**" still carries with it the implication of a binary and separateness, and therefore of negotiating discrete cultural boundaries; and this is because the expression still contains the word "culture". At the same time, employing the prefix "trans" means there is the danger that there might be a blurring of the fact that boundaries are still being made salient (Busch and Franco, in this volume). There is a difference though because the centre piece of the chapters in this collection is the unique perspective of each contributor and how they navigated, that "nebulous space" and pushed beyond, across and through these demarcations in order to inform and thus transform practice (Dooly and Vallejo Rubinstein 2018). Rather than presenting a reconciled view of what it means to research transculturally, this edited collection seeks to open a space of possible contradictions and multiple interpretations to provoke dialogue.

When the call was made for this collection, I did not have a pre-set notion of how transculturality was to be conceptualized. Therefore, the contributors who come from diverse disciplinary orientations—sociolinguistics, intercultural communication, language teaching, linguistic anthropology, and ethnography—had the freedom to explore transculturality in all its complexity as it applied to their specific contexts. For example, transculturality

has been conceptualized as: a dynamic space where linguistic and cultural borders are constantly blurred, transgressed, and transcended (Ratz, in this volume); those transformative moments where the "reflexive self meets the creative self" in its desire for social, political, personal change (Kitsiou, in this volume); a given condition for all humanistic research that takes into account the dynamic and unstable positionality of the researcher (Shi, this volume). Some of the contributors emphasize that researching transculturally requires an understanding of the temporal and spatial elements that are negotiated in interaction (Kanaki, in this volume); an awareness of our personal biases and an openness to broader ways of knowing and being that are different to ours (Arafat, in this volume); fluidity in research design that can allow the researcher to engage in multiple unfolding sites, time and relationships, (Shi, in this volume); and a keen sense of flexibility that comes from being positioned as an insider and outsider (Elliott, Xu and Sauerwein, McLatchie, in this volume). On the other hand, for Busch and Franco (in this volume), the very idea of transcultural research should be critiqued. Indeed, they argue, from the perspective of post qualitative paradigm, that researching transculturally can lead to epistemic violence.

Regardless of how each contributor conceptualizes the "transcultural" in their particular context, the unifying thread of the ten chapters is the authors' awareness and subsequent examination of their ever shifting, fluid and evolving trans/cross/intercultural positionality as they inhabit the liminal and nebulous spaces of encounter with their research participants.

What are this book's aims?

This edited volume is an attempt at "telling the other half of the tale" – that half that does not often end up in published articles or monographs; that other half that remain hidden in hundreds of pages of research journals, ethnographic memos, field notes and rough audio transcriptions. As Charmaz and Mitchell (1996, 300) emphasize, "We do ourselves and our disciplines no service by only telling half-tales, by only reporting finished analyses in temperate voice, by suppressing wonder or perplexity or dread." Indeed, while the readers usually get a front-seat view of the research participants' stories and "rites of passage," the "rites of passage" of the researchers, through whose eyes and selective filters we interpret the world of the respondents, are usually either shrouded in mystery or mentioned in passing as part of a methodology chapter (Magolda 2011). This book tries to unearth those behind-the-scenes processes of perplexity and dread that are made invisible in neat and tidy manuscripts written up for publication—

still the "gold standard for tenure and professional prestige" (Starn 2012, 414). In contrast to the published research for public consumption, unpublished field notes, Taussig (Taussig 2012, 516) argues, have the power to "capture ephemeral realities, the check and bluff of life."

Let me emphasise that this volume does not focus on the contributors' particular research projects which are included merely as backdrops for contextual understanding. This volume is about the researchers' meta-reflection of what they thought, felt, and did while/after conducting their research—how they captured, lost and made sense of ephemeral realities. Through fearless reflexive accounts, they expose their vulnerability, methodological setbacks, dilemmas, and successes for the readers' close inspection. Taking inspiration from a recent volume by Robert Gibb, Annabel Tremlett and Julien Danero Iglesias (Gibb, Tremlett, and Danero Iglesias 2019), "Learning and using languages in ethnographic research," whereby the editors sought to demystify the "mystique" surrounding learning languages for research purposes, the chapters in this book build on and broaden the discussion to go beyond language-related concerns. Thus, another important aim of this collection is to offer some practical suggestions and reflections for the readers regardless of what stage they are in their research.

What this book is about and who it is for

The contributions in this collection will be useful to researchers at any stage in their careers but especially helpful to research degree students and early career researchers. It is hoped that they will find it empowering to be reminded that "anxieties, crises of relationship, and the experience of outright repudiation in the field" (Bautista & Bräunlein, 2014, 505) do not mean that they are somehow inadequate or incompetent; these unpleasant emotions are not meant to be replaced by "more congenial sensations of comfort" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, 90) but to be transformed into provocations or invitations for an inward journey and mined for their analytical gifts. This book is also for the more experienced researchers who have, like me, continued to feel haunted by a lingering sense of unease from methodological issues previously encountered.

Let me be clear that the transcultural issues explored in the different chapters in this book are not new or unique nor are they of the "red letter variety" where the researchers find themselves "on the horns of a dilemma" (Guillemin and Gillam 2004, 265). Nonetheless, as the contributors show,

the micro-decisions made in the everyday conduct of the research carry with them hard-to-predict ramifications.

The Chapters

The chapters in this collection are divided into four parts. Part 1 "Researching transculturally and language" consists of chapters that deal with methodological challenges that concern communication and translation issues when researcher and participants do not share the same linguistic repertoire. In contrast to Part 1, the chapters in Part 2 "Researching the transnational and translocal ethically" show that even shared linguistic, national or institutional background cannot guarantee problem-free fieldwork; common ground between researcher and participants presents its own set of complex questions and tensions. Part 3 "Researching transculturally in educational contexts" includes three chapters that scrutinize teaching in higher education, collaborating with transnational colleagues and conducting research with primary school pupils and their teachers. Part 4, "Researching transculturally and post-qualitative approaches" consists of one long chapter which serves as the "reflexive" component of this volume. It interrogates the very nature of "transcultural" and points to post qualitative approaches that can be considered as an ethical way forward.

In Chapter 2, "Spaces of linguistic non-understanding in qualitative research: translation challenges and analytical opportunities," Ella van Hest and Marie Jacobs draw upon multilingual examples from their linguistic ethnographic fieldwork in an abortion clinic and two immigration law firms in Belgium. They use the notion of linguistic non-understanding (LNU) to refer to instances in their fieldwork setting where they encountered interactions in languages that are not part of their repertoire. These spaces of LNU are created when a client and a third person (typically an interpreter or a companion) use a language the researchers have no command of. Van Hest and Jacobs explore how these spaces are implicated in their fieldnotes and multilingual transcriptions of audio audio-recordings. While this process might seem self-explanatory and straightforward, they argue that it is far more complex requiring detailed and closer inspection.

Research degree students and early career researchers will benefit from unpacking the strategies that the contributors deployed to demystify the collaborative, interpretative endeavour as they reflect on how they minimised the filtering role of translation practices in translators. Van Hest and Jacobs posit that those spaces of LNU present rich analytical opportunities and unexpected rewards. Thus, they suggest that reflexive

sense making should not stop when the fieldwork concludes but should also be an integral part of data processing and analysis.

In Chapter 3, "Puzzle(s)/(d) in a hybrid superdiverse sociolinguistic space: Researcher's immersion in the everyday life of a hosting centre for unaccompanied minors", Roula Kitsiou, takes us on a vicarious journey into the routines and spaces of an institution in Athens that hosts minors from different countries. Set against the pandemic as backdrop, Kitsiou puts the spotlight on her field relations with Arabic-speaking minors. Using illustrative examples from her field narratives, reflection drawings from her research diary and pictures that evoke deep examination into the crevices of the research process, she leads the readers by the hand to visualize and experience those vivid moments of perplexity during and after fieldwork. She makes salient and visible the behind-the-scenes practices that do not usually end up in the published paper given the conventions of academic writing spaces.

The author suggests that for most novice researchers, there is a fear of vulnerability when sharing affective aspects of the research located at the intersection of the researcher's multiple identities. Drawing from her own experiences of self-doubts and bafflement, she offers some practical suggestions—artistic expression, political imagination, and creativity—as resources for sensemaking.

Continuing the conversation of the previous chapters, Chapter 4, "Grappling with Methodological Challenges When Researching Multilingual/Multicultural Issues in Therapy Settings", by Nahed Arafat, also challenges the widespread tendency in academic publication that obfuscates, albeit inadvertently, methodological dilemmas faced by the researcher. To demonstrate, while the use of questionnaires translated into the informant's mother tongue is an accepted practice in multilingual studies, the micro decisions taken, and challenges encountered during the translation are often not explicitly described. And yet, these language-related choices taken by the investigator involve complex reflexive activity that inevitably permeate and influence the process.

Arafat posits that while "knowing the language" and being a "cultural insider" have definite advantages, this does not mean that problems associated with interpreting and translating the participants accounts are necessarily eliminated. Indeed, consonant with van Hest and Jacobs (in this volume), she argues that not knowing the languages of one's participants can be transformed into an invaluable reflective resource. She gives

accounts of the processes she took to collect and interpret "translated" interview and questionnaire data.

Chapter 5, "From transnational to translocal: An autoethnography (re)searching Chineseness in the diaspora" is an exploration of Lili Shi's fieldwork in Chinatown in Brooklyn, New York. She describes "personal flashpoints" that capture her encounters with various identifications of Chineseness within the community. She recounts how she was perplexed by the complex Chinese transnational histories and identities that seemed "foreign" to her as a self-identified Chinese transnational and diasporic subject who was used to seeing the American "college-town" Chineseness as the generic and normal. One of the challenges she had not expected was the role that linguistic backgrounds played in establishing rapport with women in Chinatown. While Shi spoke Mandarin and married outside her race, she found that most of the participants spoke Fujianese and were with partners that were from similar linguistic and economic regions in China. Indeed, she was initially considered as an outsider despite being a Chinese person in Chinatown.

Shi's autoethnography illustrates the inherently fluid nature of one's positionality and intersectional identities. One is never just a nationality or a speaker of a certain language. The researcher is simultaneously a pregnant woman heavy with child, a consumer, a friend and the recipient of maternity advice. Shi examines the nuanced spaces of her shifting roles and identities with inherent implications for how she positions herself and is positioned by her participants.

Like Shi in Chapter 5, Zuzana Elliott delves into the intricacies of insider-outsider cultural membership in Chapter 6, "Becoming an in-group immigrant: fieldwork challenges in host and home countries." Drawing from her doctoral research, Elliott evaluates the fieldwork techniques she herself employed while researching three different participant groups. The objective was to explore how language learners acquire English pronunciation in the immigrants' home community, in this instance Slovakia. Elliott emphasises that securing an in-group status does not necessarily provide a "gateway to problem-free data collection" (Elliott, in this volume). Indeed, this in-and out-group membership proved to be not only malleable but also unpredictable. While establishing in-group solidarity by way of common language and national background seemed straightforward, Elliott found that the participants' perceptions of her and her approaches to data collection were far more complex than anticipated. For example, interview approaches that proved effective with the immigrant

group in Scotland were less effective with Slovak-English bilinguals in Slovakia. This chapter concludes with learning points of how other researchers might negotiate the in-between of in-group/out-group status.

Chapter 7, "Longitudinal research on students – transcultural aspects and ethical questions", by Sibylle Ratz, teases out the difficult ethical dilemma of "using" one's own students as research participants. The situation becomes even more precarious with the unequal power relations between researcher/academic and students which could lead to the students feeling being misrepresented. Working as lecturer and programme-leader for a Scottish university, Ratz conducted a longitudinal study from 2016-2020 with ten linguistically and culturally diverse participants who were all undergraduate students. The four-year investigation proved to be a particularly challenging time against the backdrop of the Brexit vote in June 2016 and the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020. Ratz adapted her data collection methods to explore how her super-diverse participants navigated through restricted freedom brought on by Brexit and feelings of isolation and anxiety arising from covid-related issues. Despite having concluded her research project, the sense of unease still lingers as she continues to ask herself whether it is ethical to craft narratives and write commentaries based on data collected in times of crisis.

In chapter 8, "Reflections on Transcultural Methodology through a Sino-Austrian Research Project", Frank Xu and Leena Sauerwein focus on a Sino-Austrian COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) project in order to understand the online learning experiences of postgraduate students in Austria and undergraduate students in China, with complications arising from the corona virus context. As bicultural researchers, the authors wrestle with methodological challenges relating to participant recruitment, ethical (re)consideration, geopolitical intervention and language issues. They also reflect on their role as insider researchers and how this role is implicated in the conduct of the research. Simultaneously, they explore the impacts that English has as the lingua franca on the collaborative online project. They cast a critical eye on the applicability of ethical criteria formulated in western academia into the Chinese context.

Chapter 9, "Empathy and alienation: negotiating the insider/outsider landscape in cross-cultural research" by Joan McLatchie, captures the researcher's methodological accounts as she explored the lived experiences of Indian academics within a transnational degree programme. As a white, UK-born academic, investigator and collaborator with counterparts from a transnational university in India, McLatchie's multiple identities became

very salient. As she claims, she was considered an 'insider' by virtue of belonging to the same community of academics, and at the same time an 'outsider' because of sociocultural differences. In this chapter, she reflects on how she worked her way from the 'outside' to the 'inside' in order to establish trust and rapport with her participants, which made the data collection a rich and personally rewarding experience.

While the insider-outsider dilemma dominates researcher reflexivity in Chapters 6, 8 and 9, Chapter 10, "Considering 'chronotopes', 'scales' and 'scale-making' in transcultural research", by Argyro Kanaki, illuminates the complexity of "context" in research. Kanaki argues that unnoticed confusions and misunderstandings often occur when working across linguistic and cultural differences. Therefore, a rethinking of the notion of context could open new pathways of seeing. Kanaki emphasises that context is liquid, malleable, unpredictable and in constant construction; its meaning always subject to negotiation by the social actors involved. Indeed, transcultural research can be enriched by employing a "sociolinguistic paradigm" whereby meticulous attention is directed to the invocable, semiotic elements of time, space, past and future. Kanaki maintains that "chronotopes", "scales" and "scale-making", which are explained in detail in the chapter, are important in navigating the specific research context and its multifaceted nature. As she puts it, transcultural researchers and scholars should be able to critically examine their positionality in relation not only to their participants, but also with dominant ideologies and practices.

Chapter 11, "Post-qualitative approaches to researching transculturally: The challenge of 'the new new'", by Dominic Busch and Emilian Franco, serves as a practice in reflexivity for the whole collection. The very notion of researching transculturally is critiqued and viewed with suspicion. The authors argue that transcultural research can lead to epistemic violence, which comes because of the researchers "interpreting the researched against the background of their own knowledge and considering this to be true, unique and valid". They posit that one way to avoid epistemic violence and to minimize othering the 'Other' and decrease power imbalance between the researcher and the participant is through the use of post-qualitative methods such as arts-based research, participatory research and autoethnography—all detailed in the chapter with specific examples. Busch and Franco highlight that the positionality of the researchers and the participants should be made explicit and that the participants should be able to speak for themselves rather than through the lens of the investigator. Additionally, they suggest that readers of academic publications should be

encouraged to interpret for themselves with a view to circumventing the researcher's analysis.

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PART 1:

RESEARCHING TRANSCULTURALLY AND LANGUAGE

CHAPTER 2

SPACES OF LINGUISTIC NON-UNDERSTANDING IN LINGUISTIC ETHNOGRAPHY (AND BEYOND)

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1. Introduction

The notion of reflexivity, which we understand here as "the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher" (Denzin and Lincoln 2018, 246), has been instilled to qualitative researchers. Moreover, it can be considered as one of the "constitutive features" of ethnography (Rampton, Maybin, and Roberts 2015). For linguistic ethnography in particular–a research methodology aimed at unravelling "how people use language, what they believe about language, and why" (Heller 2008, 250)–one might assume this reflexivity to–among other matters–concern the researcher's own linguistic repertoire and the language varieties involved in their research (Martin-Jones, Andrews, and Martin 2017). This seems especially pertinent in the current era of globalisation and superdiversity (Vertovec 2010), in which doing ethnography in institutional settings often implies encounters with linguistic diversity (Blommaert and Rampton 2016; Piller 2016). Researchers like us who are interested in multilingualism and language barriers in institutional settings, will inevitably interact with participants whose "native" languages and sociocultural backgrounds are different to their own while conducting fieldwork.

There is, however, little scholarly reflection about how linguistic issues influence ethnographic research projects, at the level of data constitution, analysis or dissemination (Gibb and Danero Iglesias 2017). Ethnographic curricula seem to downplay the methodological complexity of doing research in the face of linguistic differences by presenting attempts to gain understanding in a multilingual setting as straightforward (Holmes et al. 2013). Discussing linguistic ethnography in particular, Costley and Reilly (2021) call it ironic how a discipline which is focused on meaning-making

and which has contributed extensively to the discussion of multilingual interactions, has given little attention to the linguistic dimension of its own analytical practice. How can a research tradition which attaches great importance to reflexivity overlook the impact of linguistic support (in the form of translations by professionals or scholars)?

The reluctance among (linguistic) ethnographers to extend their reflexivity to this dimension of their research can be linked to the influence of so-called "impostor syndrome", i.e., the idea that a researcher's authority might be undermined when they are transparent about language issues and the way in which those impact the process of data gathering and analysis (Borchgrevink 2003; Rosales 2021). Indeed, the anthropological ideal of being fluent in the native language of the group one studies has been so persistent in ethnography, that methodological issues regarding language have long been "silenced" (Borchgrevink 2003; Gibb and Danero Iglesias 2017; but see Gibb, Tremlett, and Danero Iglesias 2019 for rich descriptions regarding the learning of a second language for conducting ethnographic fieldwork). According to Pavlenko (2005, 20) there is a "contradictory combination of linguistic arrogance and insecurity" among linguistic anthropologists, which causes them to ignore "the linguistic aspect of cross-linguistic research". Surprisingly, reflections about the limits of the researcher's own linguistic repertoire, the use of translation and interpreting in research, and the analytical implications of translation and interpreting are more common in other scholarly disciplines (for overviews see Hennink 2008; Resch and Enzenhofer 2018). Within this significant body of literature (which incorporates accounts from sociology, psychology, health research, and nursing), the term "cross-language research" is used to refer to research practices in which there is a mismatch between the linguistic repertoire of the researcher and that of the researched. Although these efforts towards reflexivity are important, they consider language as a mere methodological issue rather than the core focus of research, as is the case for us as linguistic ethnographers.

This chapter responds to pleas urging to demystify this "under-discussed area of researcher praxis" (Holmes et al. 2013, 286) and calls to create awareness and transparency about the effect of the ethnographer's (limited) linguistic repertoire (Rosales 2021). In doing so, we attempt to contribute to a "methodological multilingual turn" (Costley and Reilly 2021, 5), a paradigm shift deemed necessary to install "a contemporary linguistic ethnography" (ibid., 10). Secondly, this chapter also grew from the unease we ourselves felt as early career ethnographers. Unaware of the experiences of other scholars on this topic, we worried about how–during interpreter-

mediated consultations in our institutional fieldwork settings–we did not understand everything that happened in real time. It was only afterwards–at the level of analysis, after independent translators were called upon–that we were able to comprehend all linguistic utterances. Lastly, this chapter also aims to demonstrate how this ethnographic tension constitutes a possibility rather than an inconvenience only, by describing how the role of language in "ethnographic misunderstanding" (Fabian 1995) can offer potential analytical opportunities. All in all, we believe it is worth sharing our honest, ethnographic reflections about the multilingual obstacles we face, because (a) it might alleviate the risk of alienating (early career) researchers who–when encountering linguistic issues during fieldwork–feel alone in their experience, as common educational practices do not provide practical guidance, and (b) it renders particular linguistic tensions visible and therefore turns them into a conceptualised object of discussion which allows researchers to examine its nature and share frustrations, or even best practices about how to navigate the issue. To do so, this chapter introduces the concept of "spaces of linguistic non-understanding", a notion which addresses the fieldwork presence of a language in which the researcher is not proficient. The chapter will show how the concept is particularly useful in the context of institutional ethnographies as it focuses on interpreter-mediated interactions, which require a second level of language support at the stage of analysis, while also highlighting the ways in which it can be extrapolated to other types of research.

First, in section 2, we discuss the scarce literature available on the topic. Section 3 provides a conceptualisation of spaces of LNU, applied to our own doctoral research projects. In the same section we also outline the temporal aspect of spaces of LNU, by showing how they get filled and (re)adjusted over time as they pass from data collection to data analysis. Section 4 outlines our strategies and recommendations with regards to working with translated data transcripts and sheds light on our interactions with translators when revising their work. In section 5 we argue that while language difference may hinder grasping the intricacies of the complete multilingual encounter, these spaces of LNU simultaneously entail analytical opportunities for understanding the emic perspective of certain research participants, i.e., the service providers. Finally, in section 6 we present our conclusions.

2. Researching multilingually

Although concrete reflections about the management of linguistic differences between researcher and research participants are scarce, we can find ontological conceptualisations about what it means to do multilingual research, both in linguistic ethnography (Martin-Jones, Andrews, and Martin 2017) and applied linguistics (Andrews, Holmes, and Fay 2013). Holmes et al. (2013; 2016), from an ontological perspective, coined the term "researching multilingually" and define it as follows:

> "The process and practice of using, or accounting for the use of, more than one language in the research process, e.g. from the initial design of the project, to engaging with different literatures, to developing the methodology and considering all possible ethical issues, to generating and analysing the data, to issues of representation and reflexivity when writing up and publishing." (Holmes et al. 2016, 101)

Accordingly, Holmes et al. (2013) propose a theoretical and methodological framework containing two conceptual dimensions: the dimension of spatiality, and that of relationality (see also Holmes et al. 2016; Andrews et al. 2020; Holmes, Reynolds, and Ganassin 2022). With regard to the spatial dimension, they describe "researching multilingually" as taking place in four different multilingual research spaces: the researched phenomena, the research location, the researcher's linguistic resources, and the representational possibilities (see Ganassin and Holmes 2020 for an application of the framework). The relational dimension, on the other hand, concerns the people with whom the researcher collaborates, as well as the languages involved in those relationships. There are some parallels with the three principles put forward by Costley and Reilly (2021), which were designed in light of conducting linguistic ethnography specifically. Their first principle is called "researching multilingually" and addresses the impact of language, in a holistic manner: not only in relation to data collection and analysis but by creating a space in which research can be multilingual in every aspect, including the language used between researchers in meetings, emails, and dissemination. The second principle, "researching collaboratively", comprises the decentralisation of epistemic authority: instead of romanticising the "lone ethnographer", research projects should acknowledge all involved participants and collaborators. Although, Costley and Reilly (2021) do not mention them explicitly, we can only encourage this endeavour to also render the translators and interpreters employed in the research project visible. Finally, the third principle "researching responsively" states that linguistic ethnography must be

flexible, and that researchers need to adapt their projects to the (linguistic) circumstances. Researching multilingually can thus be seen as "a theoretical and philosophical stance that any researcher operating in multilingual contexts can adopt" (Ganassin and Holmes 2020, 850). The breadth of the frameworks and principles put forward by Holmes et al. (2013) and Costley and Reilly (2021) implies that "researching multilingually" can be conceived of from many different points of view, including cases in which researchers are fluent in the languages of their participants, as well as research where translation and interpreting is used for languages the researcher has no command of.

From a methodological perspective, there is some literature which provides insights on how to carefully revise translated data to ensure validity of findings, as erroneous translations can lead to erroneous conclusions (Thompson and Dooley 2020; Pavlenko 2005). Pavlenko (2005, 241) for instance stresses the need to use professional translators and interpreters to minimize the influence of translation "mistakes" on research findings. Also, according to her (2005, 244), "[n]ative speakers should assist the researcher with a low level of L2 competence both in checking the transcripts of the recordings and in offering interpretations of their own and others' performances" (see also Bashiruddin 2013). In doing so, Pavlenko (2005) follows Gumperz' (1982) approach of collaborative analysis to check understandings with participants. Thompson and Dooley (2020) propose "bilingual comparison and testing" as a translation technique, in which groups of bilinguals are asked to evaluate the equivalence of source and target text.

Concerns about validity and methodology tie in with epistemological reflections on the local implications of multilingualism in research. Winchatz (2006) for instance focuses on the analytical opportunities of language difference. In her discussion of ethnographic interviewing in a lingua franca, she noticed that the occurrence of linguistic misunderstandings and their subsequent repairs were highly valuable, as they triggered a process of further discovering the emic perspective (see section 4 for a definition of this concept) behind her participants' language use: when she asked her participants the meaning of a certain word, they found themselves instigated to describe it in more detail. In doing so, their account of the actual topic became more explicit. In a similar vein, Duran (2019) offers an extensive account of the linguistic diversity in her research into the multilingual resources of Burmese refugees. Obstacles she faced included participants who intended to help her with her research but stated they could not do so due to their limited English skills. Realising that certain stories