

Afterword

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Researchers in the Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences are increasingly confronted by human problems that intersect across geopolitical spaces, human relations and languages. Normative research approaches are no longer sufficient in understanding human experience in these complex contexts, and where people, through the languages they speak and other forms of communication, jostle for recognition and survival. The authors of the 16 chapters in this edited research volume illustrate sensitivity to the crucial shaping role of languages in the research process. We asked the contributors to focus on the political aspects of languages in their research, for example, how languages are positioned in the research domain; how researchers handle decisions about languages in their research in these geopolitical linguistic spaces; how they make use of their own linguistic researcher resources; how they negotiate power in intercultural and interpersonal relationships; and whose voices are listened to when languages, and those who speak them, are marginalised or silenced.

The studies presented in this edited volume intersect across four key themes that illustrate the political dimensions of researching multilingually. These include: critically confronting the language ideologies present in hegemonic structures; purposefully working to transform power relations brought about by the privileging of certain languages over others in research relationships; decolonising researcher methodologies in order to open up knowledge construction that recognises the multiple languages, forms of engagement and modalities employed in local contexts, and where individuals and groups are marginalised through forced and economic migration, conflict, occupation and other forms of oppression; and finally, through researcher awareness, decolonising languages by questioning the primacy of a 'named languages' approach and instead surfacing and prioritising the diversity of language and communicative practices characteristic of many research contexts. As such, the researchers have discussed their successes, challenges and failures as they have decentred and decolonised approaches to languages in various ways in their research. In doing so, they draw attention to researching multilingually as social and political action. We discuss these two

aspects of researching multilingually next in relation to the researching multilingually framework (Holmes *et al.*, 2013, 2016) and drawing on recent work on language and intercultural communication research as social action (Ladegaard & Phipps, 2020a; see also Zhu, 2020).

<A>Researching Multilingually as Social Action

Researching multilingually as social action begins with an awareness of the researcher's own linguistic resources and those of others in their research; recognition of the spaces in which the research is conceptualised, planned, conducted and disseminated; understanding and engaging with the relational aspects of the research at all stages and levels; and then, throughout the research process, making intentional decisions about how languages, linguistic resources and embodied forms of communication matter and are foregrounded (Andrews *et al.*, 2020; Holmes *et al.*, 2013).

Zhu Hua, following Weber (1968), describes research as social action with social justice as its purpose: 'research is as much about understanding and interpreting behaviours of others as interacting with and influencing others' (Zhu, 2020: 206). Through their research, researchers can raise awareness, which triggers discussions leading to action in response. We argue that a focus on languages in the research process is crucial in promoting research as social action: to become appropriately aware of our own impact, as a speaker of language(s), on the world we inhabit, and to ensure engagement with those people whose voices—and languages—are marginalised [and pushed to the periphery] in the research process. As the researchers in our volume have illustrated, a focus on language throughout the research process is not just about named languages, but also, and of equal import, about travelling, colonial and tribal languages, translanguaging, other forms of representation and multimodal and embodied communication.

Zhu (2020), drawing on studies by researchers undertaking research as social action (Ladegaard & Phipps, 2020a), highlights five key questions that seek to inform and promote debate about research as social action leading to social justice. The first concerns the values that motivate the researcher to undertake the research. In researching multilingually as social action, researchers in our volume have highlighted their values concerning languages: an intentionality towards foregrounding language, including their own linguistic resources, in their researcher praxis (e.g. the role they ascribe to interpreters and translators and their evolving relationships in co-constructing the research).

The second key question concerns who is involved: researchers, as well as other social actors (participants, community groups, policymakers, key influencers, funders). Our researchers recognised the crucial role of their decisions concerning languages in enabling the participation of social actors whose voices need to be heard: which languages and which other ways of communicating should be prioritised, when, where and why? Who has agency in mobilising forms of communication? What structures obstruct whose languages are permitted or listened to?

The third key question focuses on the relationship between the researchers and the social actors. Here, Zhu (2020) points out that ‘participants’ in research as action are partners and co-agents of change in the research. The researching multilingually framework focuses on this relational aspect, and many of our chapters illustrate the importance researchers placed on linguistic choice and negotiation in managing relationships, languages, translanguaging and multimodal communication in the research process—with all stakeholders connected to the research, especially at the community level where the outcomes of the research matter the most.

The fourth key question concerns who benefits from an understanding of research as social action. Zhu (2020) argues that not just the ‘participants’ and communities benefit, but also the researchers themselves as they are transformed through their research processes and interactions. The researchers in our chapters have illustrated transformation through their reflections on their researching multilingually approaches in their research and through reflexive and reflective accounts of how they handled their own linguistic resources. Others pointed to the societal impact of the research outcomes when the languages of the social actors are accounted for.

The final key question concerns evaluating the success of research as social action and demonstrating its impact. Zhu Hua suggests that research as social action is a stance or approach, which possibly creates difficulty in measuring the impact of research, especially within the current neoliberal educational climate of league tables and world rankings. Thus, she points to the need for a serious conversation, although she is not explicit about who should be involved. Presumably, any such conversation must include not just the researchers, but all social actors involved in research, including funders and research policymakers; and above all, those with and for whom the research is being undertaken. The emergent conclusions and implications offered across the 16 chapters open up lines of thinking for a serious conversation concerning how researchers mobilise and manage their own and others’

linguistic resources in their research as they investigate the difficult questions confronting human beings in the 21st century. Their documentation of their researcher approaches and decisions concerning the role of hegemonic structures and (intercultural) communication in power relations offer stimuli for this discussion and for further exploration. Some of the chapters also highlight the importance of theoretical and methodological approaches that seek to decentre named and established languages for local and other forms of communication.

<A>Researching Multilingually as Political Action

In bringing together this volume, we have adopted the position that social action in research is of necessity also political action. This position stems first from our broad understanding of what is political: the struggle for, and negotiation of, any form of social power and/or influence (Chilton, 2004: 1). In research, it stems from the recognition that language use involves the negotiation of power relations between individuals and groups, bringing in inherently political issues of identity and voice (see the Introduction). This positioning is implicit in discussions of research as social and political action (Ladegaard & Phipps, 2020b; Phipps & Ladegaard, 2020; Zhu, 2020), which involves ‘the creation of a space that allows the Other to participate in the production of knowledge, and promotion of social justice through multilingual and intercultural communication’ (Yohannes, 2020: 213).

In researching multilingually as political action, the researchers in our edited research volume have highlighted in their various ways the political nature of their work when language is foregrounded, and their developing researcher awareness and response. From their examples, and from the discussion above, we propose a three-dimensional approach to research as political action in support of social justice, and in support for the foregrounding of languages in the research process.

First, researchers might reflect on their own linguistic resources, as well as the languages in play in their research. These linguistic resources are not reified, objectified and countable researcher tools, but ways of making meaning, and being human together. Through languages, languaging—as human embodiment, emotion and lived experience (Phipps, 2019)—and translanguaging—drawing on all available linguistic and other semiotic resources in communication (Canagarajah, 2013; Zhu & Li, 2020)—researchers, as social and political actors, do their work, make research happen and support people and communities to flourish. As many of our contributors have argued, researchers must engage in this task with a critical and reflexive awareness of the political and ideological implications of the

language(s) present in their research spaces and act upon this awareness in the whole research process and across all its stages—from the inception of the study to dissemination and impact.

Second, in dealing with power relations, researchers need to recognise and account for the political structures, hierarchies and communicative processes in the research context that privilege or silence certain languages and voices over others: whose languages and actions matter—when, where and why? What role do the researchers' own linguistic and communicative resources play in negotiating their positionalities vis-à-vis other stakeholders in the research process (e.g. funders, research beneficiaries, gatekeepers and when is it appropriate, or not, to call on interpreters and translators)? Thus, researchers may need to transparently discuss language issues in publications, or have open and frank discussions with stakeholders regarding language practices and choices.

And finally, in negotiating power structures and hegemonies in research praxis, researchers might consider the importance of theories and methods that prioritise communication with those whom the research is supposed to benefit. This stance invites researchers to question conventional social science methodology as a potentially 'retroactive, knowledge-producing operation that makes things stand still, ... [risking] closure and stasis' (MacLure, 2013: 659). It also invites them to recognise the dangers of generating knowledge in contexts of all forms of oppression, social injustice and colonisation, which is then synthesised and disseminated among the educated, powerful and global elites in education and governance (whether in developed countries or elsewhere), potentially sidestepping those who should benefit from it (Smith, 1999/2012). Instead, researchers might consider adopting critical and decentring approaches that highlight the importance of drawing on local knowledge and experience, and the languages in which these experiences are articulated and represented; foregrounding everyday communicative practices that recognise and resist politically-constructed linguistic categorisations imposed from above; and then feeding back outcomes locally and in communicative forms understood by those whom the research outcomes should benefit (Smith, 1999/2012; Walsh & Mignolo, 2018). Central to this decolonising, decentring stance is, for the researcher, a recognition of and action on the role of language, and linguistic and cultural diversity.

We suggest that researchers, in recognising these complexities in their research, can adopt theoretical and methodological approaches that lead to research as social and political

action and that explicitly engage with the politics of researching multilingually. Many of the chapters in our edited research volume exemplify this stance.

<A>Implications and Future Directions

Recently, research funders have begun to encourage multilingual, transnational and multidisciplinary research which aims to tackle the large, difficult questions confronting humanity, society and the environment in the world today.¹ However, not all researchers will participate in large, multilingual, multidisciplinary, transnational teams; many will undertake research in multilingual, intercultural contexts in their own localities and communities, and under difficult conditions where structural hegemonies, inequalities and power relations marginalise languages and voices, as illustrated by many of the studies in this volume. All of these projects mandate the need for researchers to attend to languages and (intercultural) communication in their research approach and processes, and in its dissemination. Then, people in all communities—including refugees and others forced to migrate, whose voices and languages often go unheard—might have the opportunity to participate and exercise agency in bringing about change.

If we, as researchers, hope to make a difference by undertaking research as social action (Zhu, 2020), and as political action, we will need to be alert to and adopt a researching multilingually stance that seeks to: (i) decentre theories and methodologies that are blind and resistant to knowledge and social practice in the periphery; (ii) resist normative understandings of languages that prioritise certain languages over others, and in doing so, be ‘astute in ... [the] use of language, in its slippages into imperial forms’ (Phipps & Ladegaard, 2020: 219); (iii) be open to translanguaging and other non-linguistic forms of intercultural communication; (iv) ensure inclusivity of voices that matter through co-creation of the research and (v) be respectful and inclusive of cultural and linguistic practices of those involved in and who will benefit from the research (Smith, 1999/2012).

Further ways forward, although not the focus of the studies here, include posthumanist and new materialist approaches that foreground multimodal and creative arts methodologies (Burnard *et al.*, 2016; Frimberger, 2016; Harvey *et al.*, 2019; Pennycook, 2018; Phipps & Kay, 2014). New materialism recognises (intercultural) communication as an embodied, emotional and relational experience that includes but also transcends language. New materialist and posthumanist approaches open up ways for researchers to resist language as the main ‘professional means of making sense of and to ourselves and others’ (Phipps, 2013:

339) and to demote it from its lead position in the hierarchy of knowledge in higher education (Harvey *et al.*, 2019).

We finish by drawing attention to the conclusions stated in the final report of the Arts and Humanities Research Council's 'Translating cultures' theme on its closure in 2019. The authors of the report highlight the importance of research practice which 'listens to, and learns from, the multilingualism of communities and of research practice itself' (Kamali *et al.*, 2019: 64). They suggest the following checklist for researchers when undertaking their research, developed from similar questions posed by Professor Alison Phipps in her own research:

- 'To what extent do I acknowledge linguistic and cultural diversity in my research?'
- 'To what extent do I recognise that the contexts on and in which I work are themselves multilingual?'
- 'To what extent do I understand the various processes of translation on which my research depends at every stage of its development, from conceptualisation to dissemination?'
- And finally: 'Can I live with my answers to these questions with integrity?' (Kamali *et al.*, 2019: 64)

The studies assembled in this volume evidence the importance of these questions and, in doing so, showcase the political dimensions of researching multilingually. We invite readers to take inspiration from the experiences of the contributors to our volume and to also respond to these questions. In doing so, researchers will need to be attentive to the political dimensions of languages, languaging, translanguaging, intercultural communication and other multimodal forms of communication. Further, in accounting for the politics of researching multilingually in their own research, researchers may begin to initiate a researcher trajectory of developing research as social and political action.

Note

1. For example, United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) is the UK's largest funding body that works in partnership with universities, research organisations, businesses, charities and government. Under the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), UKRI supports research that engages with cultural and historic contexts, knowledge bases, creativity, languages, diverse voices and beliefs in lower- and middle-income countries. See

<https://ahrc.ukri.org/funding/internationalfunding/the-global-challenges-research-fund/>

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