

Interactive comment on “Interview and translation strategies: coping with multilingual settings and data” by B. Filep

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Received and published: 22 April 2009

General comments

This article discusses the relatively neglected role of language in geographical research, concentrating on conducting fieldwork in the multilingual and multicultural settings of the Carpathian basin in central Eastern Europe. Supported by his/her own fieldwork, the author concentrates on two issues: the role of translation as a strategy to be incorporated in the data-gathering stage; and the role of translation as a technical element inherent in analysing textual data. The author presents some very interesting discussion on the epistemology, ontology, and politics of translation, supported by evidence from other studies, particularly language as a methodological consideration, although engagement with more theoretical linguistic scholarship is less frequent. The

C9

main weakness of this article is its structure; it includes discussion on several examples to varying degrees: some are explored in a considerable depth, while others appear anecdotal in comparison. The difference between some examples is sometimes unclear, with some sections containing too many examples at the expense of the discussion of their significance. The article is well-written, although there are some small errors which need attention. Nonetheless, the article flows well, is free from academic jargon, and the author's meaning is, with one or two exceptions noted below, clear throughout the article.

Specific comments

The introduction sets up the article's discussion of the epistemological and methodological role of language and translation in social research. As the focus is more practical-methodological than theoretical, discussion is more engaged with the literature concerning language and fieldwork than with linguistic concerns. There is also discussion on how the world is both constructed by and experienced through language, allowing scope for more theoretical literature to be engaged with.

The second section gives some context to the research location of the Carpathian Basin. In many ways it is this section that needs the most attention. While it gives a context of the area's multilingualism and multiculturalism, it is not enough for those who are unfamiliar with the region. What is defined as the Carpathian basin? Which areas does this transnational zone encompass? Perhaps it would be worth revising this section to incorporate some historical context included on pp 41-2.

The third section deals with the strategical decisions that are undertaken as part of the research process. While the author alludes to the type of people interviewed during his or her fieldwork in a footnote, perhaps more information is needed. What is the focus of the research? Who are deemed 'interesting as persons with certain experiences and perceptions'? What are these experiences and perceptions? Who are these experts? These could be included instead of discussion stemming from line 20 on page 32

and finishing on page 33 focuses on the structuring of questions, which is available elsewhere. It would also be helpful to include information on the languages spoken by the author, and possibly a table indicating the different language abilities of participants, the languages interviews were conducted with, and whether interpreters were used. The author could also mention how he or she acted when faced with some of the situations / challenges encountered in this section (e.g. which term/phrase to use).

Section 3.2 includes some very interesting discussion on the importance of discerning specific meanings out from the process of translation during the interview. This section carefully incorporates examples from the author's research to give grounded examples. While the majority of these are well-placed and are explored to a good standard, there is a need to develop the example cited on lines 10-14, page 37, which seems slightly anecdotal compared to others.

The fourth section also draws heavily on the author's own research, and is well integrated into the discussion, which explores the task of appropriately translating transcriptions (4.1), the task of translating specific meanings (4.2), and translating irony, jokes and proverbs (4.3). As the examples cited in section 4.2 are concerned with demonyms and territorial identity, it felt at times as though discussion could be coupled with section 3.2. However, these themes also sit neatly within a wider discussion of post hoc translation and the search for meaning.

The conclusions give a good synopsis and convergence of the points raised in the paper, highlighting that meanings is often lost 'not in but by translation'.

Major points

- 1) As this paper is primarily concerned with methodology, perhaps it would be beneficial for the author to outline his/her own research interest to provide context.
- 2) The author could give readers an idea of the regions in which fieldwork was conducted, the type of people being interviewed, the medium of the interviews, and

C11

whether interpreters were used.

3) It would be helpful to delineate what specifically is referred to as 'the Carpathian Basin'. The author may also wish to incorporate some historical context from other sections into section 2.

4) Line 22, page 30 states that having Latin as the official language of the area 'avoided the domination of a nationality' – is this strictly true? Was it dominated in political, if not cultural forms, by the institutions of the Austrian Empire? While this may be an ethnically or a proto-nation rather than a nation (at least, at this stage in history, as the author suggests), is language here read as nationality? There is a need to support how one nation did not dominate. The two sentences that follow may also need to be revised.

5) There may be too many examples in section 3.2. While the author makes an important attempt to pay attention to the idiographic differences, it feels at times as though these are subtle variations on a theme. It may be better to include fewer examples, but more discussion on their significance.

6) As with the above point, as well as many other examples, it would be beneficial for the author to illustrate how he or she acted to solve/lessen the impacts of such problems or avoid conflicts during the course of the fieldwork.

Minor points

1) Lines 17-21, page 31 – the author states that 'minority students learn the respective majority language not as a foreign language but as if it was their mother tongue. This is problematic, because multilinguality or at least bilingualism is a necessity. . .'. It would be helpful if the author could draw these problematic elements out.

2) It would be helpful for the author to explain why it would be preferable for research to be conducted in a language that is neither the interviewer nor the interviewee's mother tongue.

3) Perhaps the relationship between language and culture could be explored some

C12

more? Rogers Brubaker's (2004) *Ethnicity without Groups* would be helpful in this respect.

Technical corrections 4) Lines 10-12, p 27 – the first sentence of the paragraph is too complicated. The word 'phenomena' appears three times and it is unclear whether these 'local' and 'single phenomena' are the one and the same.

5) Line 7, p 28 – replace 'talk' with 'speak': talk refers to the process of speaking (i.e. moving of lips and jaw to make sounds), and implies a one-way, unstructured direction of conversation.

6) Line 10, p 28 – replace 'a few or more' with 'a few', 'multiple' or 'several': 'a few' suggests an undetermined, small number, thus being followed by 'or more' is somewhat paradoxical.

7) Lines 5-7, page 29 – the author should stick to either the French or English terms here to avoid confusion. As this is the only time Saussure's name is mentioned perhaps this would also be a suitable place to introduce relevant discussion of his work?

8) Line 12, page 29 – omit 'as I will show below'.

9) Line 17, page 29 – replace comma with semi-colon.

10) Line 11, page 32 – is 'scientifically' the most appropriate word here? There is a suggestion that the author is emphasising the need for situated knowledge of the cultural aspects of language, which is generally considered at odds with a value-free science.

11) Line 10, page 45 – omit 'As I have shown in this paper'. Move 'especially in multi-lingual and multicultural regions' to the end of the sentence.

12) Line 21, page 45 – omit 'I tried to show that'.

13) Line 26, page 45 – change 'we can' to 'can we'.

C13

Interactive comment on Soc. Geogr. Discuss., 5, 25, 2009.

C14