Responsible Research Methods Symposium
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Foreignization strategies in written research accounts: English, languages and translation perspectives

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What is International Research (in Business and Management)?

• Particular themes or topics? (e.g. Global supply chain management; women as global leaders);
• Anything located within International Business Research?
• Involving international research teams and collaborations?
• Anything cross-cultural or comparative? (across national boundaries)?
• Publication in ‘international journals’? – in English? So that research accounts become accessible to a ‘global’ readership?
‘Something to do with English’

• Knowledge is coded in language and as academic knowledge workers we work with symbols (number or words)’ and we do so mainly through the medium of the English language;

• Yet, each language codes knowledge differently from another language in its own unique way (linguistic relativity);

• No language, including English, is able to code/capture/represent all possible knowledge or situations as they occur;
‘Something to do with English’

• The default assumptions of most business and management research is:

  That English as a global lingua franca of knowledge is an unproblematic, neutral tool to understand and analyse the social world. This position ascribes universal expressive power to English (‘a language to bind them all’); assumes that there is a total equivalence of meaning between all languages – i.e. If a need for translation arises at all, it is a mechanistic act (see Chidlow et al. 2014 for critique); that language use is ‘outside’ historical-political process.
English as a global lingua franca of knowledge

• It works and you need to develop high competence in it!
• Represents the ‘global’, progress, modernity, it also bestows validity and legitimacy to knowledge and knowledge accounts;
• It provides connectivity and sharing of knowledge across diverse cultural, national and language boundaries;
• There a clear historical-political reasons for its status as our contemporary lingua franca;
English as the dominant lingua franca

• The use of English is taken for granted in such a way that diminished other languages/ways of thinking and cultures and this has happened within particular historical-political context, where English was the language of the victorious forces: linguistic imperialism (Philippson, 1992); it now is part of a legacy of colonial encounters, based on assumptions of Western economic and cultural superiority (e.g. Westwood and Jack, 2007: 250) Materially, this refers to the universities and research centres, the publishing industry and the governing institutions and associations that manage and police knowledge pertaining to the field.

• In my view, this process becomes visible in the taken for granted use of the English language and concomitant assumptions of its neutrality and universality.
How to use English, but not by assuming its neutral or universal! Xian (2008)

- Empirical study into the experience of successful female managers in IT industry (life stories, career histories, feelings, attitudes); data collected in Chinese;
- Xian needed to translate the data into English as she was doing a PhD at a British University and the doctoral thesis needed to be in English;
- she was both the author and translator of the data.: She found that in translation knowledge was produced rather than just: translation is not a technical task only. Translation is part of data analysis and thereby part of methods!
- examples of data which difficult to translate included different use of tenses and gendered relationships; metaphorical expressions and images; proverbs and sayings; particular institutional settings or historical events
Translation of qualitative data is not a straightforward process

- **Linguistic problems:**
  - gender and tenses were added into English text;

- **Socio-cultural problems:**
  - metaphorical expressions; e.g. 'hero from greenwood': translated as: I think the software development business in China now is still at its initial stage. And you know when everything is not in order and ir-regulated, whoever with guts and strengths, will become a hero. At this stage, you could do anything.
  - job allocation: ... a top-down career system in the planned economy, in which an individual was assigned to a job in a state-owned organisation, where the individual was believed to contribute most to the social evolution;

Xian describers her approach to translation empirical data (Chinese) to English at this stage as:

I tended to avoid translating culture-specific idioms, metaphors, provers or phrases derived from ancient Chinese philosophies. I also tended to avoid translation words and concepts that only exist in Chinese society. Instead, I tried to replace them with similar English expression that 'function' in the same way as the original expression do in Chinese... The Chinese word *dan wei*, for instance, was translated as 'organisation';
Translation of qualitative data is not a straightforward process

• **Methodological problems:** does translated data trigger the 'right' response in the reader (target culture)
  
  – the word and meaning 'saint': *I think generally speaking, we are not saints. If you had goals at the beginning, most of the time those are not right goals. You have to stick with your goals, but at the same time to amend some of them...*
  
  – triggered different responses from critical readers and audience: *saint* and its meanings and how these were interpreted differed! Interpretation mediated by religious background of one reader: saint implying its immediate opposite 'evil'; the author's take was that saint means Confucius as 'the perfect figure' in a Confucian society. So in her view the above data meant: *We are just normal human beings. We are not as smart as Confucius and we cannot predict the future. Therefore the early career goals may be found incorrect in a later stage.*
  
  – Xian later on used the word 'prophet' instead of change.
  
  – Xian continued to consult native English speakers whether they understood her translations... She states.....
Re-writing the text through translation?

- I realized that what I had translated about Chinese women's careers was not much different from literature about Western careers. Some cultural elements in the original data were lost in translation! I started to wonder whether I was simply translating the data, or, by translation, I was rewriting them to conform to styles and themes that currently prevail in the target culture.

- (for theoretical discussion see Chidlow et al., 2014 Steyaert and Janssens, 2013; Tietze, 2004; Tietze, 2018)
Translation as intercultural representation

In my research, I was using my power as researcher and translator to speak for the Chinese women in another language for the purpose of developing career theory in the Chinese context. The women participants had entrusted me to make statements on their behalves to a global audience. I felt I had the responsibility to report these stories as original as possible. However, I was unsure whether this goal has been achieved after my very 'skilful' adjustment of their stories in English.
Huiping's dilemma

To report these women's stories as original as possible, I inevitably had to introduce some Chinese concepts and sentence structure into the translated text, which my Western audience might find 'odd' or 'hard to read'. ... Consequently, I struggle to find a middle ground between fulfilling my responsibility of telling the Chinese women's stories faithfully in a different language and the need to make the stories appealing to my Western audience [added ST: including journal editors!]
How to use English, but not by assuming its neutral or universal

- Mika and O’Sullivan (2014): A Māori approach to management
- The authors locate their paper in discourses of indigeneity, post-colonialism and critical management studies to establish Maori management as distinctive form of management with Aotearoa New Zealand;
- They investigate differences and similarities in terms of the four functions of management adopted from the principles first proposed by Fayol in 1949; and from thereon they propose a distinct model of Maori management.
Mika and O’Sullivan (2014)

• Traditional Māori management
• What is a Māori organisation?
• What is Māori management?
• A Māori approach to planning
• A Māori approach to organising
• A Māori approach to leading
• A Māori approach to controlling
• A model of Māori management: *Te Whakahaerenga Māori*
A glocal world

- Glocalization is the ‘the process in which the global and glocal constitute each other’ (Druri et al., 2014);
- In language terms: English presents ‘the global’ and local languages the ‘local’;
- The meeting of English (e.g. In different stages of research, in particular the ‘writing stages’) with the local (in particular as in empirical data) is then also mutually constitutive of each other (as in Mika and O’Sullivan, 2014), but in most research account the ‘local’ gets deleted.
- Translation offers a mechanism to examine and unpack the glocal process in multilingual research and monolingual publication demands.
So, what can one do?

- We are working in an English-dominated knowledge world where our material and symbolic well-being is dependent on successful publications, in English-language journals; the majority of which are deeply rooted in domestication strategies of writing (Venuti, 1991);
- Tietze and Dick (2013) report how management academics (non native speakers of English) respond to such pressure to ‘domesticate’ their data and perspectives;
- Use, whenever possible, foreignization strategies; leave ‘the local’ visible and expect your readership to be able and willing to follow your accounts: leave words visible; make translation process visible (in methods); use footnotes; other devices to disrupt the text?
- senior academics: to challenge; to support; to change?