

Research on the edge: language issues surrounding research with diaspora communities

Anne Wiseman

This talk will describe the research undertaken with groups of expatriate Iranian communities in Turkey and Dubai.

The research was commissioned by the British Council in order to find out the location of the groups, the demographic makeup of the groups and the needs of the groups in terms of what the British Council, as the UK's leading cultural organisation could offer them as part of the agenda of building cultural relations between Iran and the UK.

The research took place between November 2010 and March 2011 in Turkey, and the research in Dubai from October 2011 – January 2012. It was conducted by the market research company DJS Research.

Methods used were qualitative and quantitative; online and face to face via e.g Facebook groups, British Council teaching centres, Survey Monkey and its equivalents, focus group discussions and one to one interviews.

In order to ensure that communication was clear and that we therefore received answers which were reliable, as far as we could evaluate, we requested that the company used a local research company to conduct the face to face interviews in Farsi, or Turkish if preferable, and the online surveys were translated into Farsi. The Facebook group users all used English to communicate: a point I shall investigate further in the talk. I shall also look at how English is used as a *lingua franca* within the Farsi speaking community and discuss the possible rationale for this.

I will also look at the role of other languages used in Iran, in addition to Farsi and how these were addressed during the research.

There other issues hurdle to overcome during the course of the research, in addition to the use of appropriate language, was the perceived dangers of the interviewees from being both involved in any research of this nature and of being placed in a group with other Iranians. This indirectly affected what was said by whom and in what context, and needed to be taken into account when analysing the data.

From a research point of view we also needed to define the market groupings within the Iranian communities i.e those who were 'long stay' expatriates and who had settled for good in their chosen country, those who were temporary by choice and those who were temporary via force of circumstance – political, economic or social. Again, this sometimes affected the choice of the language they used to communicate in with the researchers.

The talk will elaborate on the above difficulties, describe how they were overcome and describe the results of the research. The talk will also make a comparison between the results of research with the Iranian groups in Dubai and the groups in Turkey.