

Title: Intentionality, convention and fashion in researching multilingually

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Preferred venue: Manchester (but may be convinced to go to Bristol)

This paper explores different motives for engaging with and/or disengaging from multilingual dimensions of research activity. The starting point is my own previous and ongoing research experiences (including doctoral studies at the University of Leeds with a multilingual dimension), as well as my experiences (since arriving at the University of Manchester in 2005) of supervising Masters and Doctoral projects with multilingual dimensions.

The first part of the paper attempts to extrapolate, from the above described experiences, a systematic set of motives for how the multilingual dimension of research may be approached. This includes engagement motivated by: a) multilingual elements present in research aims and/or research questions; b) multilingual categories of analysis and/or frames of interpretation; c) a wish to enhance research quality (reliability/validity/credibility/other); d) practicalities (time, technology, linguistic competence of research team members, dissemination, and more), and e) 'lingua-political' (see note) considerations. These motives are provisionally contrasted with engagement or disengagement grounded in: f) conventions related to languages present in academic, professional and/or social environments, and g) what may be the 'fashion' of the day. This analysis does not exclude the possibility of motives combining and interacting in researching multilingually.

In order to move beyond a descriptive and perhaps non-comprehensive listing of motives, the above approaches are further theorised using concepts from ecological psychology. The paper offers a theoretical discussion of how each of the identified motives may be realising 'research-relevant affordances' (see Stelma 2011). Research-relevant affordances are defined as 'intentional' (as in purposeful) and as situated in particular research activity. The ecological perspective also offers a theorised view of the influence of 'conventions' (following Norman 1999). Conventions may have originated in previous research activity, but uncritical 'application' of conventions to new research activity may not add any value. Hence, approaches to the multilingual dimension of research can range from realising intentional research-relevant affordances in the moment and within particular research projects ... to ... conforming to 'generalised' conventions with little or no sense of underlying intentionalities. To the best of my knowledge, the ecological psychology literature I draw on has not (yet) attempted to explain 'fashion'.

The paper concludes with an explicit valuing of the ability to consciously, i.e. intentionally, realise research-relevant affordances within a research project. This ability may turn the multilingual dimension of a research project into a source of strength. Conversely, the paper warns against letting convention or fashion shape how the multilingual dimension of research is approached.

References:

Norman, D. (1999). Affordances, Conventions and Design. *Interactions*, 6(3), 38-43.

Stelma, J. (2011). An ecological model of developing researcher competence: the case of software technology in doctoral research. *Instructional Science*, 39(3): 367-385.

Note: The term 'lingua-political' was suggested by Achilleas Kostulas in an email exchange on the topic of researching multilingually.