

Interlinear glossing for multilingual research

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International students in the UK conducting discourse-analytic research on languages other than English, either at MA or PhD level, face three major hurdles: the first is in understanding what is meant by ‘contributing to knowledge’, the second is in applying ‘Anglo-Saxon’ models in contexts in which those models may be inappropriate or require adaptation, and the third is in presenting foreign-language data in such a way as to be understandable to supervisors and examiners who may have no knowledge of their language.

This paper addresses the second and third of these issues with a concrete focus on the interlinear gloss, its advantages and limitations.

By ‘interlinear glossing’ I refer to the glosses commonly used in linguistics to capture structural differences between languages at a morphological level and exemplified in publishers’ style-sheets, such as that provided by John Benjamins:

- a. *Ed en Floor gaan samen-wonen*
Ed and Floor go together-live INF
‘Ed and Floor are going to live together’
- b. *Maarten en Stefanie zijn uit elkaar*
Maarten and Stefanie be out RECP
‘Maarten and Stefanie have split up’

In this example, a morpheme-by-morpheme gloss in the second line allows the non-Dutch speaker to grasp the literal meaning of the text and its syntactic and morphological structure, while the second line between inverted commas gives a fluent English translation, conveying the sense. I will argue that dual glossing of this sort might be further developed for researching multilingually. Researchers working in a discourse-analytic framework, who are not trained linguists, may find morpheme-by-morpheme analysis over-technical. What is more, morpheme-by-morpheme analysis may not capture features of the source language which require explication in order for their significance to be fully understood.

Drawing on examples from discourse analysis conducted on German and Mandarin Chinese, with attendant ‘gloss’ translations, the paper will air the problems and propose some solutions.

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