

## Researching Multilingually

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Preferred location: UWE on 26<sup>th</sup> April. (Unfortunately I am unable to attend on April 25<sup>th</sup>).

### **Paper title: Researching in English with refugee students**

This paper discusses the PhD research that I am currently analysing and writing up. I have been working with a small group of refugee students who were undertaking programmes of study at universities in England and Wales during the academic year 2010-2011. Within the participant group there was a range in HE experience; some had already completed an undergraduate degree in the UK before progressing into their current MA/PhD studies, while others were engaged in full time undergraduate degrees, or in very part-time community-based undergraduate study. The time participants had already spent in the UK before engaging with the research also varied, between 10 and 5 years.

English fluency was high across the group, indeed for some participants English was a first or additional language that was used in their home country. As interaction with other participants was an intended part of the research design, English was a common language for all. However, I was aware that while participants were likely to have been thinking in English, they also may have been thinking and translating from a first language into English, thus changing or losing meaning, or struggling to translate to English what they were thinking. Furthermore, participants were being asked to represent themselves as 'refugees', and thus frame themselves (and respond to framing by me) with the language of the UK asylum system. A notable aspect of our research discussions is the way in which asylum terminology and the word 'refugee' was used by participants, in relation to forms of legal status, access rights to Higher Education, and with regard to understandings and usage of this language in UK society more generally.

The paper is underpinned by consideration of a question raised by Lisa Mazzei, *what do we seek when we seek to give 'voice' to our participants, what are we listening to/for in our effort to constitute voice?* (2009: 47) To do so, I firstly discuss how the design was constructed to take into account the multilingual dimension of the research, and how that worked out in practice. Secondly, I explore some examples of how the language of asylum was used by participants in order to frame, and re-frame, their self-representations.

#### Reference:

Mazzei, L.A. (2009) An impossibly full voice. In: Jackson, A.Y and Mazzei, L.A.,Eds., (2009) *Voice in Qualitative Inquiry*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp.47-62