Working with multilingual data in workplace discourse research

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Overview

• The workplace as a research site
• The role and responsibility of the researcher
• Multilingual data and representation of talk
• Raising the issues
The field of workplace discourse

• 1980s/1990s and the discourse turn

• Everyday talk at work (e.g. Clyne, 1994; Holmes, Stubbe and Vine, 1999; Sarangi and Roberts, 1999; Sarangi and Slemrouck, 1996; Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997; Roberts, Davies and Jupp, 1992, and so on).
The ‘workplace’ as a research site
(Angouri, 2010)

• Notoriously difficult--Access
• Confidentiality, anonymity
• Time limitation
• Ethics
• Habitus [...]

• Research design
• Sampling
• Datasets
• Analyses [...]

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The multilingual workplace

• Lingua Francae
• Local languages

• Language policy vs. language practice
• Complex linguistic landscapes
Researching Multilingual sites

• Socio/linguistic research
• Critical ethnography
• Self reflection-positioning- the role of the researcher (e.g. diaspora studies)

What happens when the focus of the reported research is different?
Commonly reported issues

• Speaker representation-- Different levels of competence (NS vs. NNS speakers)
• The researcher’s linguistic competence
• Local languages
• Translatability-Idiomatic language
Dilemmas

• Mary: “It’s not ideal I know but I translate my data [...] I’m not a translator of course so I guess I follow my instinct but what else can I do”

• Jenny: “I get very annoyed when they ((researchers)) translate data and don’t even mention it in the method. I do my own translations but always get a second view”

• Sarah: “I think I am guilty of very rough translations in the past so now I just avoid using ((multilingual/L2)) datasets”

• Mina: “Things are lost in translation that’s for sure but the translation is not what I am writing about”
Recording

Transcription

Theoretical Approach

Constraints Imposed on researcher

Languages used

Researcher’s identity/agency

Understanding of Context

Methodological boundaries

Representation of participants’ realities
An illustration
Examples of good practice?

- Inherent limitations does not mean ‘anything goes’
- Good practice—ethical
- Consistency and explicitness
- Training of the next generation of researchers
Thank you!