

## **Multilingual literacy practices and doctoral supervision: Exploring hidden voices, identities and texts**

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The main goal for PhD students and supervisors working in UK universities is to produce a thesis written in English. With this emphasis on the final monolingual text, there can be a tendency for both students and supervisors to downplay, or even be unaware of, the multilingual communicative practices and other kinds of texts that often shape the researcher's overall journey. For instance, an international student conducting field research in their 'home' contexts has to decide whether to use their first language for interviewing respondents, or the respondent's mother tongue (if different from the researcher's) or perhaps English, if this is a dominant language in schools and workplaces. These decisions might be explained briefly in a methodology chapter, with a practical justification that this is the language widely understood or that data need not be translated later if English is chosen. However, such research interviews can be characterised in practice by both parties code-switching between different languages and literacies – giving unique insights into the multi-layered identities and relationships between researcher and researched. From my own experience as a doctoral student conducting ethnographic research in Nepal, I realise that I had chosen not to make this dimension visible. Though respondents and I spoke in a mixture of Nepali, English and Newari, I had often translated our interactions into English before I even wrote up my 'scratch notes' (Sanjek 1990) as fieldnotes, in my attempts to convey the 'meaning' of what we had said.

Since working as a doctoral supervisor at UEA, I have become even more aware of what students choose not to include within their thesis and what they sometimes prefer to exclude from supervision discussions too. The reasons lie partly in practical concerns about how to explain these complexities to an 'outsider', who is not familiar with the student's language or culture and may only have conducted research in monolingual situations: the dilemmas of translating data (including possible multiple interpretations) or how to share ongoing analysis of data collected in an unfamiliar language. However, there are also ideological reasons: some supervisors and/or students begin from the premise that English language texts (whether research

literature cited or fieldwork notes) should be privileged over another language, particularly within the context of PhD research which has to be presented as a thesis in the English language.

My seminar contribution would draw on research conducted with international doctoral students at UEA (see Robinson-Pant 2005, 2009, 2010; Magyar and Robinson-Pant 2011), focusing particularly on the ways in which some have challenged these assumptions around the construction of PhD knowledge and texts. I will introduce some theoretical concepts from academic literacies research (see Lea and Street, 1997; Ivanic 1998), which might help us to discuss the complex interplay of voice, identity and texts within multi-lingual doctoral research.

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