Researching Multilingually:

Researcher reflections on the methodological complexities and possibilities

Many researchers nowadays find themselves in research contexts where the use of more than one language is perhaps necessary and certainly has advantages given the source language(s) of relevant literature, given their participants' preferred language(s), and given the researcher's linguistic relationships with these participants. Further, researchers might wish or need to use one (or more) languages in the processes of data generation and analysis but another when reporting the study (in a doctoral thesis for example). When research is undertaken multilingually, the practices of interpreters or/and translators (often the researchers themselves but not always so) assume a central but often under-discussed importance. In such research, researchers face methodological, practical, and ethical dilemmas as they interpret and explain differences in linguistic intent and meaning, and as they seek to guard against participants feeling misrepresented through the processes of translation and interpretation.

This presentation draws on initial findings from the AHRC-funded UK project "Researching Multlilingually" which seeks to foreground the methodological insights of researchers from a range of disciplines whose research involves more than one language. These insights relate to the researchers' use of literatures and to their research design, instruments, data collection and generation, interpretation and translation, and writing up of research.

The presentation addresses two key questions: What issues emerge as researchers reflect on their operationalisation of a multilingual research design? And what challenges and complexities of translating cultures do they identify when researching multilingually? Specifically, the presentation will examine how researchers: use literatures in different languages; translate, analyse, interpret, and report collected and generated data (dialogic, mediated, virtual, textual) from one language to another; explore ethical issues in the representation of data across more than one language; identify methods and techniques that improve processes of researching multilingually, including processes of collaboration, e.g., working with an interpreter or a translator when researching in contexts where languages are not shared by research participants and researchers; and theorising the processes of researching multilingually.