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Bogusia Temple  
University of Central Lancashire, UK

## Representation across languages: biographical sociology meets translation and interpretation studies

### **Abstract**

Biographical approaches are increasingly being used with people who speak and write a range of languages. Even when an account is originally spoken, the final version usually ends up written in the language used by the majority of the population. Researchers have shown that adopting a language that is not the one an account was given in may change how someone is perceived. Yet little has been written by sociologists using biographical approaches about the implications of moving accounts across languages. Researchers within translation and interpretation studies are increasingly tackling issues of representation across languages and developing concepts that can usefully be applied in biographical research. They question the assumption that accounts can be unproblematically transferred across languages and argue for strategies and concepts that “foreignise” texts and challenge the baseline of the target, usually for these writers, English language. However, these concepts bring issues of their own. In this article I examine these developments and give an example from my own cross language research that show that these concepts can begin to open up debates about meaning and representation.

### **Keywords**

cross language research; biography; narrative; translation; interpretation

### **Introduction**

Before the armoured divisions have withdrawn from the city limits, while the soldiers are still patrolling the streets, English teachers will be facilitating the policies that the tanks were sent to impose (Julian Edge referring to the American led invasion of Iraq in 2003, quoted in Gaffey, 2005).

Writers across a range of disciplines, including sociolinguistics, philosophy, biography, sociology and anthropology, argue that language matters in a multitude of ways (Foucault, 1972; Derrida, 1976, 1987; Barthes, 1977; Smith, 1982, Bourdieu, 1991; Spivak, 1992; Bhabha, 1994; Roberts, 2001). Gaffey (2005), for example,

points to the integral role of language in the formation of personal and distinctive cultural meanings and identity and to its economic and political role, as shown in the quote above. In this paper I argue that sociologists using biographical approaches across languages would benefit from work that has been done in the translation and interpretation literature. I begin with a brief examination of the epistemological debates within biographical research and translation and interpretation research, noting similarities in recent developments. I then relate some of the issues that come out of these debates to a research project that I worked on. This article is from the perspective of what translation and interpretation studies have to offer biographical approaches. There are many instances when the reverse applies and I point some of these out. The examples I give discuss interpretation and translation into English but the points made about representation apply whatever the original language used and the language of the target audience.

I take as my starting point Roberts' (2002: 176) definition of biographical research as "research undertaken on individual lives employing autobiographical documents, interviews or other sources and presenting accounts in various forms (e.g. in terms of editing, written, visual or oral presentation, and degree of researcher's narration and reflexivity)". This definition has the advantage of being inclusive. There is no consensus on the boundaries between terms such as narrative, biography, life history or life story and researchers use the terms in overlapping and different ways. Roberts shows the benefits of including research that spans across differently labelled research to learn from the debates rather than to try to adjudicate between definitions of what constitutes a particular kind of research. He documents some of the debates that have been tackled by these exchanges. For example, he has shown how biographical research has benefited from multi-disciplinary approaches in areas such as the role of memory, the significance of time and concerns over representation and referentiality. Moreover, when carrying out research across languages or translating in order to enable a new audience to appreciate works they could not read themselves in the original language, it is counter-productive to prescribe definitions of what can be included as biography or life history or narrative. It would, in effect, be another form of closing down perspective and dialogue to understanding difference.

Roberts points out that in many of the social sciences the result of the recent "cultural or linguistic turn" has resulted in an emphasis on language and representation and the detailed analysis of "texts". This he feels has "produced a diminution or disappearance of the creative, active role of individuals" (Roberts, *ibidem*: 4). This tendency is also evident within translation and interpretation studies but has been challenged by researchers who question the non-problematic acceptance of referentiality within written and oral accounts of lives and who go on to analyse the way language is used to create, challenge and change people's lives (see below). In this view language is more than text alone and the focus moves to discourse and how people create and describe their social worlds. Moreover, within cross language biographical sociology, concerns over language and representation have been *under scrutinized* in terms of the languages used and how accounts relate, if at all, to the lives of people who do not use the language of the target audience (see here also Fantini, 1995).

Chamberlayne, Bornat and Wengraf (2000: 13) note the influence of translation within debates on biographical methods and acknowledge the effect that editing may have in "flattening out" cultural and philosophical differences. Authors within their collection of papers begin to address some of these concerns. For example, Andrew

Cooper's (2000) contribution directly discusses comparative biographical research and Corinne Squire (2000: 205) spells out the importance of foregrounding structures of language.

In a similar way, Coupland, Sarangi and Candlin (2001) discuss the value of cross-disciplinary research in relation to sociolinguistics and the role of language. They argue that there is now an "intellectual climate that is, more than ever, open to the theoretical interchange between linguistic and social research" (Ibidem: xvi). Munday (2001) makes the same point. In this article I argue that researchers using biographical approaches would benefit from research carried out in translation and interpretation studies that is concerned with just such structures and their effects on representation.

Some researchers within biographical research have directly tackled issues of representation and language (Riessman, 2004; Temple, 2002; Temple and Edwards, 2002; Temple and Young, 2004) but the surface has only just been scratched in terms of the potential benefits of a debate between biographical sociologists and researchers interested in translation and interpretation studies. Alongside this insistence on the importance of language, there is a growing body of research in England with people who speak languages other than English. Within health, social care and housing research there is a rapidly growing volume of research using biographical approaches on, and sometimes with, people whose first language is not English. It is, however, still rare within this research to find any engagement with issues of representation across languages (see for example Bagnoli, 2004; Corsten, 2005; Scheibelhofer, 2005). In part this is because "the language issue" is seen as a technical concern rather than an issue of voice and representation.

### **Common ground? Epistemological debates within translation and interpretation studies and biographical sociology**

Debates within translation and interpretation on the status of research mirror similar debates within biographical sociology. This is evident in reading Roberts (2002), the edited collection by Schaffner (2004) and that by Chamberlayne et al. (2000). Within auto/biographical and narrative research issues of representation, reflexivity and voice have been addressed by Stanley (1990; 1994), Gubrium and Holstein (1998) and Riessman (1993, 2000), amongst many others. Stanley, for example, developed the concept of the "intellectual auto/biographies", which she defines as:

...an analytic (not just descriptive) concern with the specifics of how we come to understand what we do, by locating acts of understanding in an explication of the grounded contexts these are located in and arise from.  
(p. 62)

Elsewhere (Temple, 1997) this concept has been linked to the translation and interpretation field as a way of introducing reflexivity into cross language research. I position my biographical research within broadly defined interpretative/social constructionist/deconstructionist traditions of research as discussed for example by Chamberlayne et al. (2000), Derrida (1976, 1987), Harding (1987), Alcoff (1991) and Temple (1997), Edwards (1998), Overing (1987), Simon (1996) and Venuti (1995, 1998, 1993/2000) within translation and interpretation. This epistemological position acknowledges that there is no way to make "objective" knowledge claims from

outside of your position in the social world. It does not mean that there is no reality. As Roberts (2002: 49) states, “while texts are not ‘purely’ referential, they are constructed within or mediate reality”. Gee (1999) focuses on the importance of Discourses with a capital D rather than on written or spoken words out of context:

...that is, different ways in which we humans integrate language with non-language ‘stuff’, such as different ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, believing, and using symbols, tools, and objects in the right places and at the right times so as to enact and recognize different identities and activities, give the material world certain meanings, distribute social goods in a certain way, make certain sorts of meaningful connections in our experience, and privilege certain symbol systems and ways of knowing over others. (p. 12-13)

In relation to translation, writers such as Derrida (1976, 1987) concur with the position that all translation is conditional, that is, it depends on the context it is written within. Simon (1996) sums up well this position:

The solutions to many of the translator’s dilemmas are not to be found in dictionaries, but rather in an understanding of the way language is tied to social realities, to literary forms and to changing identities. Translators must constantly make decisions about the cultural meanings which language carries, and evaluate the degree to which the two different worlds they inhabit are ‘the same’. These are not technical difficulties, they are not the domain of specialists in obscure or quaint vocabularies. They demand the exercise of a range of intelligences. In fact the process of meaning transfer has less to do with finding the cultural inscription of a term than in reconstructing its value. (p. 137-138)

Within interpretation there are similar approaches (see Wadensjo, 1998; Roberts C., 2001). For example, Wadensjo (ibidem) analyses talk not as narrowly prescribed text but as interaction. These authors allow for epistemological and methodological differences within and across disciplines and view the exchanges as beneficial.

However, just as some researchers using biographical methods still seek to position themselves as outside of the text they produce, much current interpretation and translation practice attempts to remain “faithful” to the language structures of the target audience and encourages the use of one baseline, usually for these writers English (see for example, Esposito, 2001 and Pham and Harris, 2001). This has been challenged as silencing alternative ways of constructing the social world through language. For example, Venuti (1995, 1998) wants to send the reader abroad by what he calls “foreignization” of texts rather than standard translation practice that “domesticates” and tames texts for readers. My arguments and examples are around translations into English but the issues arise in all cross-language research. I return to the concept of foreignization in my research below.

Venuti’s (1998) work on the domestication of text and the role of the academy and publishers in how translation is approached is relevant here:

The popular aesthetic requires fluent translations that produce the illusory effect of transparency, and this means adhering to the current standard dialectic while avoiding any dialectic, register or style that calls attention to words as words and therefore pre-empts the reader’s identification. As a result, fluent translation may enable a foreign text to engage a mass readership.... But such a translation simultaneously reinforces the major

language and its many other linguistic and cultural exclusions while masking the inscription of domestic values. Fluency is assimilationist, presenting to domestic readers a realistic representation inflected with their own codes and ideologies as if it were an immediate encounter with a foreign text and culture. (p. 12)

Venuti (1995: 34) argues that translators should flaunt their partiality instead of attempting to conceal it. He calls for resistancy where the text is non-fluid or estranging in style and is designed to make the translator visible. His translation project seeks to emphasize identity and ideological stance. He states that “the point is to use a number of minority elements whereby one invents a specific, unforeseen, autonomous becoming” (Venuti, *ibidem*: 11).

In a similar way, Spivak (1993) argues that standard translation practice obliterates the significance of language difference as everyone is portrayed as the same:

In the act of wholesale translation into English there can be a betrayal of the democratic ideal into the law of the strongest. This happens when all the literature of the Third World gets translated into a sort of translatese, so that the literature by a woman in Palestine begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man in Taiwan. (p. 399 - 400)

Spivak believes that the local context of production and the history of interaction of languages are important for the researcher (see also Roberts C., 2001: 331). Issues of representation are present in all research. However, these writers argue that in cross language research the languages themselves form part of the context of interpretation with hierarchies of representation between them. Spivak (1992) has shown that the relationship between languages forms part of the process of constructing meaning. This relationship, she argues, should form part of the debate about representation. Rather than respecting the norms and expectations of readers or listeners (Viezzi, 2005) there may be a case for disrupting and challenging these.

There are benefits for biographical sociologists in engaging with this translation and interpretation literature. As Fantini (1995: 152) argues “Those who have never experienced another culture or labored to communicate through a second language are, like the goldfish, often unaware of the milieu in which they have always existed”. There are also benefits for the researchers within translation and interpretation studies in immersing themselves in developments within biographical sociology on inter-textuality and audience/readership (for example Roberts, 2002; Stanley and Morgan, 1993), as well as from debates around memory and representation (Skultans, 1998; Passerini, 1992; Tonkin, 1995). I explore this briefly below.

### **Biographical researcher, interpreter and translator: lessons from a research project**

In the research described below, I use the concept of foreignization (Venuti, 1998) and translatese (Spivak, 1993) in relation to biographical research funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on the experiences and understandings of people who need interpreters to access services (Alexander, Edwards and Temple, 2004). The researchers looked at the views of fifty people in Manchester and London from Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Kurdish, and Polish groups who needed interpreters in order to use social care and other services. Researchers were employed to carry out

the interviews in the participants' preferred language. They provided translated transcripts of the interviews in English. The five minority ethnic groups were chosen to include a range of established and recent migrant views. Given these different migrant histories, each group had access to varying formal and informal networks of people who could act as interpreters.

The approach in the research is narrative (Roberts, 2002; Riessman, 1993; Gubrium and Holstein, 1998). There is no consensus about what a narrative approach looks like (see Roberts, 2002 for a discussion). I have described above my position in relation to the status of biographical research and within this narratives are one way in which people construct accounts that they position themselves within to persuade researchers of a particular point of view. My analysis of narrative is akin to that of Riessman (1993) and Gubrium and Holstein (1998) in its concern with both the structure and content of people's accounts. The researchers believe that decisions about who to use as an interpreter depend on the constraints and resources available to people and these vary within and across language communities and that a narrative approach can include discussions of context dependent perspective.

The project had a built in recognition of the active role of interpreters/translators who were employed as researchers on the project, particularly around the concept of intellectual auto/biography described above. They were briefed before the project began on its aims and trained in issues in interpreting and translation. Participants were asked to tell us about how they had come to England, why and about their lives in England. They were then asked questions about their use of formal and informal interpreters, their links to communities and how their views related to their experiences since arriving in England. Each interview was followed by a de-briefing session with the researcher, part of which included discussion of concepts/words that had caused difficulty or that the researchers felt potentially signalled different meanings across languages were discussed. After the research had finished each researcher was interviewed about their views on the topic and their social and political position within their language community, if any. This was in the spirit of reflecting on everyone's role in the research and discussing representations we were making in our research (Stanley, 1990; Temple, 2002; Temple and Young, 2004).

I carried out the narrative interviews in Manchester with Polish people who needed interpreters. The interviews were recorded and transcribed from Polish directly into English. In this article I give a few examples of my translation choices to point to the advantages and also to signal some of the issues in working this way.

The first example is from an interview with Anita Topolska (name changed). She had originally arrived seeking asylum and then stayed as an economic migrant. She was in her thirties and lived with her three children in social housing. Her husband had recently left her. She described her life in Poland as one of poverty with no future. She had English lessons when she first arrived but found them impossible to fit in with her job in a residential home and looking after her children, especially during the holidays. She then described her experiences in England. Her narrative could be read in relation to discourse (see below) in the media concerning the "deserving asylum seeker". There were a number of newspaper articles that were widely discussed amongst Polish people that gave the impression that people seeking asylum were invading England and becoming a drain on health and social care services. There was also concern amongst Polish refugees who had arrived after the Second World War that recent arrivals from Poland were more interested in marriage and economic migration than fleeing persecution. Anita was aware that

these feelings were being expressed and set her account against this backdrop to try and persuade me that her claim was “genuine”. She pointed out that she had tried to learn English and did work in England but has also had problems settling in here. Referring to her recent experiences in England she said:

At first...at first...it was mixed. I work with English people. There are no people..yes...there is one lady at work who bothers me [*dokucza* – bothers, annoys, bullies, spites, torments?]. Because I don't know how to speak, read or write much English. There is one such lady. But everyone has a problem with her.

My first translation of her words was:

The beginnings...the beginnings were mixed. I work with the English. There is not that kind of people...yes...there is one lady at work...who bothers me [*dokucza* = annoys, bullies, spites, worries, vexes, torments?]. Because I don't speak, read, write much English ...There is one lady...with that woman everyone has problems.

I had chosen “bothers” because I felt that she was indicating that this woman at work did not particularly single Anita out and that in comparison with her experiences in Poland she saw those in England as less severe. The word “bother” as a translation of *dokucza* was also a result of the connections in my mind with the way it had been used when I was a child. Godard documents this connection between the experiences of the translator and the choice of words used in translation. She describes translation as an “ongoing appeal to memory” (quoted in Simon, 1996: 24). Developments in biographical research around memory discussed by Roberts (2002) could usefully be developed here in relation to the processes involved in trying to transfer meanings across languages.

The choice of suitable word or concept equivalence is integral to interpretation/translation and is rooted in the experience of the translator/interpreter. It cannot be solved by technical manoeuvres such as back translation. A range of words can be chosen to translate *dokucza* into English. They could all be judged to be “correct” and readers can discuss whether they agree with my choice. However, in most translated texts they are not given any choices.

The second example is from an interview with Irena Zielonska who was a Polish Roma seeking asylum. She was in her late 40s. She described why she came to England:

They bullied us terribly all the time [can mean annoyed, worried or tormented but choose bullied when she described what they had done]. We were attacked [or assaulted] at home. My husband had his head cut open twice. He had his arms broken.

This translation provided difficult for a variety of reasons. The first reason was the connotations that I felt *dokucza* has for me (see above) and the way I had translated previous interviews such as that of Anita discussed above. Could I use the same word to indicate experiences that differed so much? Also, I did not recognise the word she used initially to describe the boys she said were involved. She went on to describe them as “the bald ones”, referring to the rise of nationalistic skinhead gangs in Poland who attacked Polish Roma. My knowledge of the Polish language is one that has developed by talking mostly with people who came to England after the First World War. There are differences in language use within the “Polish

community” that influenced the way I spoke to Irena and how I phrased questions and probed her answers. A translator brought up in Poland may have worked differently with the Polish language in this interview, but could come across similar issues around language use in talking to people who had lived in England for many years.

Following Venuti’s (1998) call to foreignise translation and Spivak’s (1993) warnings about translatability and challenging expectations of a common baseline of understanding, one of my initial attempts to keep the structure of what Irena said resulted in the following:

They did not give us to live the boys.... Terribly us they bullied [annoyed, bothered, tormented]. They attacked us in our home. My husband had twice his head cut open. His arms he had broken.

The choice of “bullied” here was made in part as a result of connecting this account with that of Anita’s recent experience in England. My own memories of word use and my “translation history” have both been relevant to the final product. However, the relation of translation histories and the role of inter-textuality have rarely been the centre of attention in translation studies in the way that the experiences of researchers within biographical sociology have been.

I have found Pavlenko and Lantolf’s (2000) analysis of Eva Hoffman’s (1989) move from Poland to North America particularly relevant here. Hoffman (1989: 107) writes about her “inner language which used to be my nighttime talk with myself...Nothing comes”. They write about the ties between language and Hoffman’s “self” and of the changes to “self” that having to speak English brought about. This is a reflexive exercise that examines changes in language use and representation of ideas and persona. It does not involve assumptions that the languages involved provide deterministic clues to meaning but allow the writers to discuss possibilities. Holliday, Hyde and Kullman (2004) tie Pavlenko and Lantolf’s work to that of theorists such as Vygotsky (1986) and Bakhtin (1984) and quote Vygotsky:

Thought is not merely expressed through words; it comes into existence through them. Every thought tends to connect with something else, to establish a relationship between things. Every thought moves, grows and develops, fulfils a function, solves a problem...Precisely because thought does not have its automatic counterpart in words, the transition of thought to word leads through meaning. (p. 85)

However, meaning is not tied to a particular language and we cannot identify “Polish” and “English” traits and meanings within translations. Changing the language we speak may change how we see the world and the language we use is relevant to how we situate ourselves within our social worlds and within translations, but not in any deterministic exercise of meaning attribution. Biographers who translate or interpret other people’s lives across languages have a difficult and often unrecognised balancing act between denying the importance of the language used and implying that language is tied to meaning in a deterministic way. This is the balancing act that Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) attempt but which is neglected in cross language biographical research.

It seems ironic that the research was with people who struggled to express what they needed in English and yet we had to produce written accounts showing them as fluent English speakers. Even after some “tidying up” of the quotes one article



reviewer stated that our research might not be trustworthy as the English grammar in the quotes was questionable.

### **Solutions or more issues?**

Researchers have suggested techniques that they argue would address my dilemmas, for example, back translation and using professional translators (see for example Esposito, 2001; Pham and Harris, 2001) to check whether a translation is “correct”. The problem with this is the wealth of research and the examples above that show that there are many words that the translator can choose to select from and the “same” words may have different connotations across languages. Also, in reference to Anita and Irena such a position ignores the reader/listener. As described above, they both, from my perspective, set out to convince me of the legitimacy of their asylum claims. This is the perspective I translated from and how I represented them. There was information given to me outside of the interview from a variety of sources, including the participants themselves, which led me to view the data in this way. Readers, including “back translators” judge the accounts from within a different context but still face the wealth of word choices I did, with possibly different connotations for them.

I am not arguing that engaging in debate with a translator or interpreter solves representational issues. The employment of community researchers, key workers, and bi-lingual workers in service development and research per se does not solve issues of representation but raises questions about how that person was chosen, whom they represent and how accountable they are (Temple, 2002). Twine’s (2000) points about the difficulties of attributing insider and outsider positions within accounts are relevant here. Holliday, Hyde and Kullman (2004) also review the evidence that beliefs, attitudes and values are tied to particular languages and demonstrate the problematic nature of this assumption, particularly in relation to bilingual speakers.

In her research with childless women in India, Riessman (1993) recognises that how something is said is as important as what is said and that she cannot reproduce a “correct” representation across languages. She argues that in this particular research, as she is unable to speak the language and can’t re-produce the structure in her written text, she will not try:

Attention to certain formal aspects of language – precisely *how* something is said and lexical choice – requires verbatim materials in the speaker’s language. Instead I create structures from the interview texts to convey the sense I’ve made. A kind of textual experimentation, I use poetic stanzas (groups of lines about a single topic) and other units of discourse...as rhetorical devices to make my analysis of the organisation of a story clear for the reader. (p. 131)

She uses textual experimentation to make clear that this is her way of constructing the written account. Riessman worked with an interpreter in the interviews but produced her own written account. Her choice reflected her desire to carry out the interviews herself and to make her role in the research clear.

However, approaching this from a perspective such as that of Spivak (1992; 1993 and Venuti (1995, 1998), it could be argued that Riessman's choice to abandon any attempt to re-produce the structure of an account in a language she did not speak, and my own neat and tidy quotes in reports for funding bodies, are both forms of colonialism and domestication of texts that erase the interpreter/translator from the picture as soon as possible. The structure and presentation of the words of a woman, from India or Poland, read as if they are English speakers. My many versions of translations, and those of the other researchers on the interpreters research, end up as one version with words/concepts presented as if there were no choices to be made. Alternative words and explanations of choices are not given for readers to discuss.

There is evidence that researchers cannot control what a text represents as the reader and listener is also active in constructing meaning (Venuti, 1998; Smith, 1982; Derrida, 1976, 1987). As all translators construct identities of "others" for domestic audiences within text (Venuti, 1998) there is an issue here about readership and possible re-enforcement of negative stereotypes when translators choose to foreignize texts with different styles and grammatical practices that are not those of the target language (see here discussion by Standing, 1998 on what happens to how people are "seen" in accounts in research that is not tidied up). This is well illustrated in the field of interpretation by the work of Sandra Hale (2002). She found that court interpreters constantly alter the style of witnesses' answers and potentially influence the outcome of cases. Style is important and using hedges and fillers such as "you know" may be important for evaluating witness credibility in that they give an impression of vagueness.

Not tidying up accounts therefore also has consequences. People may look "incoherent" and "shady". We all paint a picture of people with the words we use and even though we cannot determine the way readers will read our accounts we have to be aware of the dangers of re-enforcing stereotypes. Readers expect written accounts to be logical, consistent and well thought out, whilst oral exchanges do not have to live up to these strictures (Oates, 1999). Writing down oral accounts raises questions about which conventions researchers follow. Whilst thwarting some expectations by trying to "foreignize" written accounts issues of representation remain.

## **Conclusion**

Biographical sociology and research into translation and interpretation both make valuable contributions to debates about representation of people's accounts. Within both researchers debate issues of referentiality, that is the connections texts make with social reality. However, within biographical research there is an almost complete absence of debates about the influence of the language used, and the effects of structuring accounts using a language baseline that is not that used by the participants in the research. The other side of the coin is that within translation/interpretation research there is an equal silence about inter-textuality, discourse and memory as contexts for understanding.

I have discussed some of the concepts, such as intellectual auto/biography and foreignization, that could usefully be applied to cross-language biographical research and noted that they do not "solve" issues of representation. However, they may be tools that could be applied to begin to question expectations that people who speak

and write languages other than the one used by the majority in the country understand the world in exactly the same way. I am not arguing that meanings are tied to particular languages but neither is the language used completely irrelevant, as the quote at the beginning of this article shows.

Which approach a researcher chooses is in some measure influenced by the resources they have, the purpose of the written text and by academic and publishing traditions. As Venuti (1998) has argued persuasively, both academic life and the publishing world effect how research is produced. The assumption within publishing is that there is an “original” author and a translator who is “faithful” to the author’s intentions. The translator is not seen as an active author of a written account. A “correct” and tidy translation is important in publishing. In research the translator’s task is again seen as remaining faithful to the “original” and not questioning the privileged status of the target language. Researchers who try to break out of this mould are restrained by these limits. Their solution is often to present what is likely to be accepted in the arena they are writing for and to leave epistemological/methodological debates for other occasions. A brief reference to “methods” around language is all that is often possible. However, this is at least a recognition that there is something to debate around language difference and is preferable on epistemological and methodological grounds, I have argued, to the view that translation and interpretation are neutral processes and there is no need to discuss issues of representation across languages.

In this article I have argued that language and discourse should be central elements for both cross language researchers within biographical sociology and researchers within interpretation and translation studies. Venuti (1998: 13) describes what he calls an ethics of translation that aims “to alter reading patterns, compelling a not unpleasurable recognition of translation among constituencies who, while possessing different cultural values, nevertheless share a long-standing unwillingness to recognize it”. The aim of such an approach is to “decenter the domestic terms that a translation project must inescapably utilize” (Venuti, *ibidem*: 82). He argues that “this is an ethics of difference that can change the domestic culture” (Venuti, *ibidem*: 82). This plea for recognition of difference is why I prefer to engage in debates around versions of translations rather than ignore representational issues or dismiss them as insoluble. It is a view of translation that is based on a decision to try to discuss possible differences in meaning across languages. Using Fantini’s (1995) terminology, it is about exploring the nexus between language, culture and world view. This is an ethical, methodological and epistemological position, but one that is restrained by academic publishing norms. Sometimes researchers have to present people in a report as if they were fluent speakers of the target language. This is a judgement call and depends in part of the willingness of publishers and funders to accept that neatness does not imply “good” research. Biographical sociology has neglected developments that could help examine issues of representation in cross language research. This is not to say that translation and interpretation studies have the solutions to these issues, just that the field can open up debates about world views and perspectives.

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## Author

Bogusia Temple (PhD) is a Professor of Health and Social Care Research at the University of Central Lancashire. Her interests are in methodology generally but in particular in relation to language and ethnicity. She is currently working on a national evaluation of Early Support services for disabled children 0-3 funded by the Department For Education and Skills in England.  
Contact: BTemple1@uclan.ac.uk