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Linguistic hospitality and listening through interpreters: Critical reflections and recommendations on linguistic power relationships in multilingual research

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Abstract

This chapter reflects on my experiences of conducting interviews with staff from development organisations in Kyrgyzstan about the role of languages and culture in their work. These thirty-four semi-structured interviews, conducted in January 2018, were collected for a case study as part of a larger project that aimed to raise the profile of languages in the development sector, and particularly in contexts in which international NGOs claim to listen to their so-called beneficiaries. The theoretical concept of 'listening' was central to the project. In this chapter, I describe how I used the concepts of listening and of linguistic hospitality (Ricoeur 2006) to reflect on my own linguistic practices as a translation studies scholar, who visited Kyrgyzstan as an outsider from a privileged background and who did not speak the local languages but worked with an interpreter. I demonstrate that using these concepts helped me to gain insights into the personal, institutional and sociopolitical issues that influenced my linguistic choices and assumptions. To conclude, I offer practical recommendations for researchers that can help in designing, delivering and reporting on multilingual research in a more linguistically equitable way.

This chapter explores the linguistic characteristics of my research visit to Kyrgyzstan in January 2018, during which I conducted thirty-four interviews with staff from non-governmental organisations (NGOs). As a Western researcher who did not speak Russian or Kyrgyz and worked with an interpreter for half of the interviews, I reflect on how my linguistic choices and limitations as well as the sociopolitical and institutional context affected the research process. Throughout my stay in Kyrgyzstan, I drew on the theoretical concepts of 'listening' and 'linguistic hospitality' to help me identify and redress skewed power relationships in my research to the extent possible, and I here share these experiences as well as lessons learned.

My research visit to Kyrgyzstan was part of a larger three-year research project called 'The Listening Zones of NGOs: Languages and cultural knowledge in development programmes', which aimed to raise the profile of languages in the work of international UK-based development NGOs (University of Reading, 2020). The project explored the way in which international NGOs (INGOs) listen to the communities that they aim to serve as part of their efforts to be more accountable to them, and to address any overemphasis on accountability to their institutional donors (Crack, 2013; Banks *et al.*, 2015). These donors, often

Western government departments, are considered as powerful agents in shaping the international aid agenda, and this power is also manifested through language. English is the lingua franca of the international development sector, and many of the concepts that shape the sector have their roots in Western frameworks of economic progress (Cornwall & Eade, 2010). In the Listening Zones project, we aimed to investigate the powerful role of English, and how it shaped INGO listening. An important part of the data consisted of three country case studies on Kyrgyzstan, Malawi and Peru, in which one researcher per location conducted approximately 30 interviews with staff from international and national NGOs on their linguistic and cultural experiences of working in partnership. This chapter relates to my listening experiences in the Kyrgyz case study, for which I was responsible.

In the early stages of the project, I became increasingly aware of the irony of exploring this topic as a Western researcher affiliated to an English-speaking university, where our working conditions were influenced by similar neoliberal forces as those that determine the working spaces of INGOs: we were aiming to deliver clearly defined objectives as part of a fixed-term project that had been designed largely in response to the agenda that was set by our funder, the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Much emphasis was placed in our project on creating 'impact' outside academia, an aspect of research that has become prioritised in recent years in the UK under impulse of structural frameworks for evaluation such as the Research Excellence Framework. This was similar to the growing pressure that INGOs experience in needing to demonstrate 'value for money' by measuring project progress against strictly defined indicators and tight timeframes (DFID, 2014). Furthermore, similar to INGOs, much of our work was by default conducted in English. As a research team, we needed to consider the multilingual dimension of our work and how unequal power dynamics may be reflected in our relationships with research participants, in data collection, and in disseminating research findings.

In recent years, researchers have started to place more emphasis on the role of languages in research, such as through the AHRC-funded projects on researching multilingually ("Researching Multilingually," 2020; "Researching Multilingually at the Borders," 2020) and the Multilingual Matters book series with the same name (Multilingual Matters, 2020). Other publications have addressed the challenges involved in working with interpreters or multilingual research assistants in fieldwork, most notably Borchgrevink (2003), Temple and Edwards (2008), Turner (2010), Caretta (2015), and Evans *et al*. (2017). However, little has been said about the role of research funders and other stakeholders such as non-academic partners in influencing researchers' language choices. In an academic climate in which intersectoral and interdisciplinary research collaboration is encouraged (often also between those based in the Global North and the Global South, see e.g. UK Research and Innovation (2020)), I argue that researchers need a broader framework that allows them to take into account how all stakeholders in the research may influence researchers' linguistic decisions. A key contribution that this chapter aims to make to researching multilingually theory is to offer the concepts of 'listening' and 'linguistic hospitality' as theoretical lenses that allow us to become more conscious of (a) our linguistic choices as researchers; (b) how they may be influenced by broader sociopolitical and institutional constraints or expectations; and (c) what we could do to address some of the resulting skewed power dynamics between researchers and participants.

The second key contribution I aim to make is to my home discipline of Translation Studies. There is a widespread presumption that 'researchers working in some specialisms (e.g. translation studies) are likely to be aware of some of the intricacies of researching multilingually' (Holmes *et al.*, 2013: 296), and this is the case both outside and within Translation Studies (see e.g. Saldana and O'Brien, 2014: 46). My argument is that whilst it may be true that translation scholars, like myself, are more aware of the implications of working across different languages, it does not automatically make them well equipped to make informed decisions and to spot potential multilingual challenges early on in the research process. There is a need for more guidance on these issues in a discipline that is starting to engage more overtly with sociological contexts in which power relationships are unequal, such as translation in refugee and asylum settings, crisis and development (Federici & Declercq, 2019; Delgado Luchner, 2020). In addition, as Translation Studies as a discipline is making efforts to break the pattern of being 'Eurocentric' (Van Doorslaer & Flynn, 2013), discussions on how to collect, analyse and represent multilingual data become all the more relevant.

In what follows, I first discuss the concepts of listening and linguistic hospitality. I then reflect on my listening practices during research by drawing on fieldnotes, journal entries and interview quotes. I conclude with a brief set of recommendations for researching multilingually in a linguistically hospitable way.

Conceptual Framework: Listening and Linguistic Hospitality

Listening generally tends to be associated with passivity and is often considered as an easy task, expressed through everyday phrases like 'just listen'. In academic work, scholars have given priority to exploring aspects of voice rather than of listening. Yet Wolvin (2010) has argued that a solid theoretical foundation for understanding the listener is critical to an integrated theory of communication. In an overview of listening research, he describes that efforts to define the concept have referred to at least four dimensions of listening: the physiological (how a message is received physiologically), the psychological (how the listener constructs meaning from the message), the sociological (how the listener responds to the message; and how the response is conditioned by sociocultural influences), and the communicative (the listener takes an active role by sharing the responsibility for the outcome of communication and by following up on what was said). Covering aspects of these four dimensions, the International Listening Association has proposed a definition of listening as 'the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages' (Wolvin 2010: 9).

When relating this definition to NGO listening, the notions of shared responsibility and following up on outcomes are important. When INGOs speak of listening to local communities, this tends to refer to formal activities organised in the shape of focus groups, interviews and community consultations, intended to collect the voices of those participating in aid programmes (Footitt *et al*., in press). These processes are protracted over long periods of time: from the initial stages of project preparation to final reporting. Therefore, it is helpful to understand listening as a long-term, interactive process (Purdy, 2000).

This understanding also draws more attention to the various actors involved in a listening event. In the case of INGOs, these would not just be INGO workers and project participants, but also institutional donors, partner organisations, translators and interpreters. All of these actors influence listening practices: what shape they take, when and where listening takes place, who is being listened to and who is doing the listening, what exactly is being listened to, what action might be taken as a consequence of listening, and, of specific interest here: in which language(s) listening takes place. Equally, we can apply the concept of listening to academic research by asking questions about how the sociopolitical and institutional contexts of our research influence who we listen to, when, and in what language (Tesseur, 2019). Asking these questions can help researchers identify the inherent power dynamics of their listening.

In addition, Ricoeur's concept of 'linguistic hospitality' or 'hospitalité langagière' (Ricoeur, 2004; 2006) can assist researchers in thinking through how they may redress some of the linguistically skewed power dynamics. Ricoeur extensively discusses the nature of translation, which he considers as more than just a means of communication: it is an ethics of exchange with the Other. For Ricoeur, a good translation implies being open to the Other, aiming to host the foreign without claiming that our own language is sufficient. Linguistic hospitality then refers to 'the act of inhabiting the word of the Other paralleled by the act of receiving the word of the Other into one's own home, one's own dwelling' (Ricoeur, 2006: 19-20). The concept refers to openness, a willingness to learn others' languages and cultures. More radically, linguistic hospitality is a form of activism that resists pretentions of self-sufficiency and cultural hegemony, but that instead fully allows the foreign to mediate (Ricoeur 2006: 4). Finally, the notion of linguistic hospitality is accompanied by a strong sense of humility: a recognition that we cannot completely know others through translation. In development work and humanitarian aid, but also as academic researchers, it is important to remember that as outsiders, we cannot fully understand the local context and we will always be learners (O'Mathúna & Hunt, 2019).

Researching Listening and Languages in Kyrgyzstan

Before I discuss my linguistic experiences, some basic background information on the linguistic make-up of Kyrgyzstan is in order. When Kyrgyzstan became independent in 1991, Kyrgyz gained the status of national language. This was an important move in the country's efforts to establish a stronger national identity. However, Russian still has the status of official language in the country, which means it continues to be used widely in official settings, in business, and in higher education. Kyrgyzstan's capital Bishkek is largely Russian-speaking, and ethnic Kyrgyz citizens in the city often do not speak Kyrgyz. Rural communities, on the other hand, tend to be Kyrgyz-speaking. English has little currency as an international language: an estimated 0.5% of the population speak English as a foreign language (Aminov *et al*., 2010). However, it is more widely spoken in the international development sector. In what follows, I reflect on how the linguistic characteristics of my research visit influenced the research process.

Listening to whom? Recruiting participants

One of the first steps in preparing the case study was establishing connections with potential research participants. In other words, decisions needed to be taken on who would be listened to during data collection. Our selection strategy for the Listening Zones country case studies was to interview a wide range of NGO representatives, who worked on various development issues and were funded by different donors. Within this selection, it is important to reflect on who was included or excluded from the study, and on the role that language played in this process.

I used a two-pronged approach to select participants for the Kyrgyz case study. In the first instance, I recruited participants who worked in INGOs through INTRAC (International NGO Training and Research Centre), a UK non-profit organisation. INTRAC was the official non-academic partner organisation in the Listening Zones project, and its role was to help the research team to establish connections with INGOs. It had a small office in Bishkek, where it supported local civil society through training and support programmes. The contacts that INTRAC helped me to establish were complemented by interviewees from local and national NGOs, which were recruited through my interpreters' professional and personal networks. Contact with two interpreters who spoke Russian, Kyrgyz and English was established two months before fieldwork. One interpreter later fell ill and did not participate in the actual interviews, yet my other interpreter, Cholpon[1], and I still visited some of the NGO contacts that the first interpreter had provided. It is also important to note that I focused on NGOs based in Bishkek and in the country's second biggest city, Osh. This was because of time and practical restrictions, such as the difficulty to reach rural areas in winter due to snow and ice.

Both selection strategies had drawbacks and advantages, and I briefly reflect here on their linguistic characteristics. Interviewees from INGOs were mostly Kyrgyz nationals and spoke English. This was not a deliberate selection strategy. Rather, it was a case in point of what interviewees related about the Kyrgyz INGO sector, i.e. English proficiency was a key criterium in INGOs' recruitment strategies. These interviewees shed light on informal translation practices in the Kyrgyz NGO sector: although translation work was not usually part of their job descriptions, they often found themselves translating documents or interpreting conversations.

Recruiting interviewees through my interpreters gave me access to staff from local and national NGOs who spoke Russian or Kyrgyz. The initial stage of listening (as recruitment) was thus influenced, firstly, by my interpreters' understanding of the project goals and what type of NGOs were needed to reach those goals, and secondly, by their networks. The following extract from my field journal illustrates my interpreter's role as a gatekeeper. It describes the scene of an interview we conducted in a café early in the morning.

> This interview went really well, but it also revealed all the more to me how much I need Cholpon to make this research work, not only in terms of translating for me but also as a gatekeeper. This lady, whose breakfast I paid, said she felt bad about me paying because I wasn't eating. I told her that I had already had breakfast in my hotel, and said: 'But I am so grateful you came, I want to pay'. She said: 'But you know if Cholpon asks something, I cannot say no!'. When she and Cholpon greeted each other and when they said goodbye, they hugged. There were conversations about this lady's grandson, because he is ill, and she has to take care of him. It is amazing to realise that with this pressure, she still agreed to meet us today. After our meeting she leaves straight away to return to her grandson.

This extract illustrates that the existing relationship with my interpreter played a key role in convincing potential interviewees to participate. My experience is certainly not unique. Academics, journalists and development practitioners frequently rely on interpreters' personal and professional networks to recruit participants for studies or interviewees when they are working in contexts where they are outsiders. Interpreters who fulfil these tasks are often referred to as 'fixers' or 'brokers' (Lewis & Mosse, 2006; Palmer, 2019). Their position as gatekeepers has been problematised, as interpreters may have diverging loyalties: to local actors, to the researcher, or they may rather have their own (financial) benefit in mind (Bierschenk *et al.*, 2000). Reliance on interpreters' networks for participant selection also raises questions on study representativeness. By combining my two recruitment strategies, I was able to widen my sample of participants, and this presented a broader picture of the NGO sector in Kyrgyzstan.

Nevertheless, despite these efforts, my recruitment strategies had one major drawback, which points to broader structural and sociopolitical characteristics of the development landscape in Kyrgyzstan and to my identity as a Western researcher: with my interpreter, we conducted twelve interviews in Russian, but only three in Kyrgyz. The low number of Kyrgyz speakers in the interviews raises questions particularly because an estimated 71.4% of the population speak Kyrgyz as their first language (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). Two underlying issues for the limited number of Kyrgyz speakers in interviews are, firstly, my focus on conducting interviews in urban areas, where Kyrgyz is less widely spoken, and secondly, my reliance on my interpreter to select participants. Because most of my interpreter's assignments were for international donors and larger NGOs, she did not have pre-existing connections with Kyrgyz-speaking NGOs. Coming into the country as an outsider, it took me a while to understand this. The same type of limitation applied to INTRAC: because INTRAC was based in Bishkek and did not employ Kyrgyz speakers, most of its connections were with organisations in urban areas and who spoke Russian.

The way in which the Kyrgyz NGO sector is shaped points to two dominant hegemonic influences in the region. Linguistically, the widespread use of English in the INGO sector is an illustration of the West's hegemonic influence and its efforts to support the growth of a local civil society sector ever since the breakup of the USSR (Buxton, 2011). In addition, Russia continues to have influence in the country, which is reflected in the sustained high status of the Russian language. The fact that so few interviewees were Kyrgyz-speaking can be understood as an illustration of this hegemonic architecture, where those who speak Russian and English have easier access to well-paid jobs, international contacts, and financial means (Simpson, 2010). Despite my efforts to listen to a wide range of NGOs and to practice 'linguistic hospitality' by ensuring that I was listening to 'the word of the Other' (Ricoeur, 2004: xvi), those who are often excluded from international aid assistance were also largely excluded from the study because of some of the very issues that I was studying, such as language barriers.

Researcher roles during interview listening

My identity as a Western outsider who communicated in English also affected rapport-building with interviewees. When the researcher and interviewee do not share the same language, establishing rapport can be challenging. Researchers such as Borchgrevink (2003) and Caretta (2015) share strategies to enhance rapport-building in these situations, such as maintaining eye-contact with participants during interviews with interpreters, or learning short phrases in the participants' language to demonstrate interest and respect. I followed this advice and learned short phrases in Russian and Kyrgyz to be able to introduce myself and thank interviewees for their willingness to participate. In contrast to Borchgrevink's (2003) and Caretta's (2015) experiences, my interviewees did not tend to respond to my efforts.

By contrast, the fact that I was visiting interviewees with a local interpreter who spoke both Russian and Kyrgyz had a more pronounced positive effect. Participants' responses to my interpreter's presence can be better understood when relating it to the wider sociopolitical context. As mentioned, Kyrgyz is mainly spoken in rural areas. International organisations were frequently described by interviewees as 'consulting with the wrong people' when preparing and delivering development projects in Kyrgyzstan (KYR 8, Director of national network, Bishkek), meaning with 'government agencies at the central level', but not with rural communities. Interviewees shared that when international organisations did visit rural areas, they would often do so with an interpreter who spoke Russian, and no or limited Kyrgyz, which meant that local people only had limited opportunity to interact with the international visitors. The following interview extract provides more details.

> Most of the freelancers [=interpreters] in Bishkek, they are either ethnic Russian, or, even if they are ethnic Kyrgyz they cannot speak Kyrgyz. So, when they go to rural areas, not only in terms of knowing culture, but first of all the language, it means that Kyrgyz people, who cannot speak Russian, either they have to keep silent, because they know that the interpreter will not be able to translate, or if they start speaking Russian then they cannot really express themselves 100%, so they have to look for words. So for them it's really important that the interpreter speaks Kyrgyz. (KYR 11, professional linguist, Bishkek)

According to my interviewees, one reason for not recruiting an interpreter with the appropriate skill set was that international visitors often had flawed assumptions about language use in Kyrgyzstan, such as the idea that Russian was widely spoken, or that a Kyrgyz interpreter would logically speak Kyrgyz. Another reason was a lack of interpreters who could work between English and Kyrgyz. Thus, the fact that I was working with an interpreter who could deliver interpreting between English and Kyrgyz gave me legitimacy in the eyes of interviewees. Even though we only conducted three interviews in Kyrgyz, interviewees were told that they could chose the interview language. The mere availability of Kyrgyz interpreting demonstrated my respect for the country’s national language and culture. In addition, the topic of my research also helped in establishing rapport: in nearly all interviews, participants expressed their appreciation for the topic of the research.

> It's for the first time that such kind of research is being conducted and I think that the topic of the research is very important because the language barrier is a serious barrier in addressing issues, because donors, governments and local communities, organisations, they all come together to address a problem, to resolve a problem for local people, and if you speak one and the same language it helps a lot to understand each other and to address the problem. (KYR 8, Director of SNGO, Bishkek).

Although these experiences were positive, in some cases my very presence and the questions that I was asking created distorted expectations. Rather than an empathic outsider, participants sometimes cast me in the role of aid funder, or at least as someone who could have an influence on organisations’ funding income. This tended to happen in interviews with organisations that my interpreter did not have a pre-existing relationship with. For example, in one of these interviews, we visited a local health clinic. In my journal entry of that day, I wrote:

> What stood out for me for this interview and how it was different from others up until now: I got a tour of the offices and the health clinic they built, because apparently, giving tours and showing people their offices has helped them before in securing funding.

The realisation that some interviewees attributed me the role of funder took some time to materialise. The most striking example was when my interpreter and I visited a small Kyrgyz-speaking organisation, whose contact details I had received through a British organisation that had given them a funding award for their work with underserved children. The following journal extract describes the welcome that I received at the organisation when I visited for what I thought would be a one-hour interview with the director.

> The taxi drops us at the gate. There is a lady in an elegant blue cardigan eagerly awaiting us. We greet each other and she leads us onto the porch. There are three children waiting for us in traditional clothing. They are carrying trays of baking and an accompanying dipping sauce. Cholpon tells me: 'This is a traditional Kyrgyz welcome'. There are three more girls in this welcome committee, who are slightly older. As we enter the office, another four people are waiting for us. I wonder if they just come to say hi and will then be off to return to their work while we talk to the director, but I am completely wrong. They all stand in a circle, and make us sit down. Then one of them stands up and takes the lead: she welcomes us, says how happy they are to have us there. She continues: 'We will now all introduce ourselves.' We go around the circle. Cholpon and I are also asked to introduce ourselves. Then they announce: 'Now we will start the performances!' One of the girls is asked to play the komuz, a traditional string instrument and a well-known national symbol. It's beautiful.

The visit lasted for several hours and involved more live music, singing and food. In my e-mail to my research colleagues that evening, I wrote that I was welcomed like a celebrity or an international ambassador, and that 'I was starting to get worried that they hadn't understood I was just a researcher coming to ask about language'. Yet during my visit, it had soon become clear that the purpose of my visit had been very well understood. While seated in a circle, each person had given examples of the language challenges that they had encountered in their activities with the NGO. The reason for the warm welcome, besides being part of Kyrgyz tradition, became clearer to me as I listened to my hosts:

> Then the only man present, who is the Chair of a larger, umbrella organisation, asks if he can add a few words. He says how important he thinks the work that I am doing is, that the language barrier for them is a very big obstacle in their work. He acknowledges several of the points I made in my 'introduction', and how good it is that I am here to speak to them and listen to their experiences. I am very touched by

> their welcome. The amount of effort that they have put into preparing this, the eagerness, apparently, with which they have awaited me, how they have looked forward to this day. Why? Apparently, it is because I am taking the time to come all the way here, with my interpreter, and listen. They tell me this has happened once before, an American lady from the UN came, listened, took pictures. This has had huge impact for them, because it meant their stories were published in English, and people all around the world could read them. I now understand better why they value my visit so much.

The combination of my association with their British funding organisation and their previous experience with an international visitor meant that I was perceived as a powerful gatekeeper. In this case, this power did not directly relate to potential financial gain, but rather referred to my linguistic skills, i.e. I spoke English, and I would be able to share the organisation's experiences in an international context. As Kyrgyz speakers, members of this organisation faced pervasive challenges in accessing training activities, information on NGO work, and international aid funding, for which English or Russian were generally required. The visit drew my awareness to a critical gap in our reporting plans for the Listening Zones research, i.e. we had not planned to produce research outputs in local languages. A linguistically hospitable approach that demonstrated active listening in this case implied sharing back the research findings with this NGO in their language. I discuss the implications of this realisation later when I describe the Listening Zones' reporting strategy.

Listening through Western, hegemonic concepts?

Another challenge of working through translation in international development is that many of the key concepts of development are rooted in Western culture and tradition, which makes it difficult to translate them with clarity into other languages (Cornwall & Eade, 2010: 4). The Listening Zones interviews provided an opportunity to explore how translation of such concepts was dealt with during interpreted encounters. Interviewees shared a plethora of examples of Western concepts that were difficult to translate:

> For a lot of people in the country, if you say human rights, these are just two empty words for them. And normally… they think that, it's not here, it's somewhere else, and some people will say: "ah, human rights, it's there! These are European values." And let alone the concepts like sexual rights or reproductive rights… So, if you want to have a dialogue with someone about these concepts, then you have to unpack these words for this person. You need to explain exactly what is meant by that. (KYR 10, Director of SNGO, Bishkek)

The Listening Zones project itself was framed around frequently used development concepts: it explored INGO 'listening' as a way in which INGOs aimed to be 'accountable' to their so-called 'beneficiaries'. I here reflect on how the term 'beneficiary' was dealt with in my interviews as an illustration. Development concepts often exist in other languages as loanwords. This is the case for the term 'beneficiary', which is translated in Russian as 'бенефициар' ('benefitsiar'). During interviewing, I did not use the word 'beneficiary' in my questions, because it has become a somewhat contested concept in development circles. The term suggests that what is received is good ('bene'), and implicitly places beneficiaries in a relationship of dependency where they are portrayed as passive and where their right to expect that NGOs are accountable for their actions is undermined (Crack, 2013). However, after one of the first interviews, I noted in my fieldnotes: 'I noticed that Cholpon used the word 'beneficiaries' in Russian in the interview, while I try to avoid using it in English. I have to ask her about this.' Although I adapted my language use, this passed by unnoticed in the interview context, and the language of dependency crept back into my questions when they were being translated. Adapting the terminology is an important first step in changing a system that is characterised by unequal power dynamics, yet the example shows how closely related (imported) terminology and people's understanding of development as a (Western) system are. Changing the words does not automatically dissolve the exported Western aid framework in which local communities are constructed as depending on international aid.

The role of the interpreter in how discourse is presented in translation is apparent in this example. A key skill for interpreters is often considered as 'the ability to accurately and faithfully interpret what is said' (UNHRC 2010: 33). However, research has shown that interpreters frequently engage in linguistic mediation, meaning that they make choices on omitting, expanding or linguistically adapting speech in a way that is appropriate to participants' cultural background and knowledge to ensure understanding (Baraldi & Gavioli, 2015). Furthermore, interpreters are influenced in their translation choices by their personal, cultural, institutional and sociopolitical identity and positioning. In other words, an interpreter's linguistic choices may influence the meaning and understanding of what is being said.

Because interpreters are active participants in knowledge construction, I wondered how my interpreter's translation choices affected my understanding of typically Kyrgyz or Russian concepts or traditions. As part of my approach to linguistic hospitality, I asked interviewees for examples of Kyrgyz or Russian concepts that were difficult to translate. Interviewees did not tend to engage with this question extensively. However, by using a process in which I asked my interpreter to transcribe and translate interview recordings after the interview and by comparing this translation with her live interpreting, I came to understand that in some cases, my ambition to 'inhabit the word of the Other' (Ricoeur, 2004: xvi) was hampered by my limited knowledge of the Kyrgyz language and culture, and that in some cases, my interpreter's efforts of linguistic mediation meant that Kyrgyz expressions were not translated. This is illustrated in the extracts below, which present one interviewee's response to my question on challenges with translating concepts between English, Russian and Kyrgyz. Extract A contains the interpreting that was provided during the interview, and Extract B is the translation that was produced later based on the Russian transcript of the interviewee's response.

Extract A: Interpreting during the interview

> There is always a problem with concepts and terminology, because it's one thing when you are providing a training, or when you are organizing an event, you can speak in simple language, either Russian or Kyrgyz, but when you are writing up a report, a project proposal, when you are writing a document, then you have, you cannot use very simple language. You have to use terminology and concepts, and, because, you, you want to show to people who read the document that you are an educated person, so in those terms, terminology they are a challenge, and uh, also in, uh, translating into Kyrgyz or from Kyrgyz, just recently we were laughing that in Kyrgyz there are a lot of words that mean absolutely different things in different phrases. And, so, yeah, language differences they are a challenge. (KYR 3, Director local NGO, Bishkek)

Extract B: Translation based on Russian transcript

> Sure. Even if I'm confident about my Kyrgyz or Russian, when you're writing a document, you cannot write it in a simple language. The language must be intelligent and accessible. It is like your face. So it is difficult. They will judge about your level of competence based on this document or knowledge of terminology. In Kyrgyz there are a lot of words that do not have direct translation. If we do direct translation then we may lose the meaning. How can I say correctly…. Just recently we were laughing: why Kyrgyz people very often use the word "blue". It can have different meanings depending on the context. Just a simple example.

While both renderings may give the same overall message, the second translation provides more detail that is related to Kyrgyz culture, such as the reference to expressions with the word 'blue'. In Kyrgyz culture, colours are closely related to nature, and 'blue' primarily refers to the sky, while 'red', for example, refers to the sun. While my interpreter related that she omitted the example of 'blue' in the live interpreting so as not to digress into a cultural explanation that seemed irrelevant to the interview question, I myself perceived the reference to 'blue' as one that could enrich my limited understanding of Kyrgyz cultural values, in which nature plays a central role. The example emphasises the need for a sense of humility when aiming to conduct multilingual research, and to recognise that despite our efforts, interviewees' responses may well be stripped of their cultural richness and subtlety in translation, and we simply cannot fully understand the local context. I purposefully did not include the Russian transcript here to convey these limitations.

The difference between the two translations problematises the act of conducting research in languages that one is not familiar with, and of translating research data. Although I had planned to use the strategy of comparing translated transcripts throughout the case study, I was only able to do so for the first three interviews because of time and financial restrictions. The strategy is uncommon (although note Evans *et al.* (2017) for an impressive example), and the role of translation in academic guidance on interviewing and transcription tends to receive little attention. If it is discussed, the problematics of how meaning may change in translation is largely overlooked (see for example Copland & Creese (2015)). Because translation does not tend to be problematised, it can be challenging to finance its cost from research budgets. However, the example above shows that not spending additional time and resources on the effects of using an interpreter for data collection may hamper researchers' listening efforts.

Learning from listening: adapting reporting and dissemination strategies

As mentioned, while listening to interviewees I became aware that as a research team we had overlooked the need to produce research outputs in local languages. Interviewees frequently complained about INGOs' not sharing results in local languages, as illustrated in the following extract.

> All international monitors and evaluators… their working language is only English. Reports of local monitoring groups are all translated into English. Not all final monitoring reports are translated [into Russian or Kyrgyz]. The wider public does not have access to them. We have very little understanding of what's going on there. (KYR 02, Director of national NGO network, Bishkek)

INGO reports were primarily intended to demonstrate value for money to donors. By not translating them into local languages, INGOs made their learning inaccessible to local organisations. The parallels between INGO listening and our own practices as UK-based researchers became evident again here: we too had planned outputs targeted at our funder and our key stakeholders, namely UK-based INGOs, but not at local organisations that provided the input for our case studies. There was thus a crucial power imbalance in the way in which our project was conceptualised and designed. Aiming to become more linguistically hospitable, we adapted our output plans and translated our final report into five languages: Chichewa, French, Kyrgyz, Russian and Spanish. In addition, we invited guest speakers from each of our case study countries to our final project conference to share their views on the report. For the Kyrgyz case study, we invited my interpreter as a speaker, thus aiming to acknowledge her important contribution in conducting the fieldwork and in knowledge construction.

Another important aspect of listening as a long-term event was to continue to engage the participants in the research after our country visits. One of our strategies was to share our draft report with participants, so that they could give feedback before we finalised it. Maintaining this multilingual dialogue was challenging. For example, the draft was translated into Russian and into Spanish for comments, but we only succeeded in producing the Kyrgyz translation almost a year later. Part of the problem was a lack of translators who could translate from English directly into Kyrgyz. In fact, this was a challenge that several interviewees had mentioned when discussing translation of development-related material. A common solution, which we also opted for, was to translate the report into Russian first, and then from Russian into Kyrgyz. Because of time pressure to finalise the report before the end of the project, Kyrgyz participants could not be included in the report’s feedback process. Overall, there were at least two stages for the Kyrgyz case study where Kyrgyz-speaking organisations were disadvantaged: during participant selection, and during feedback and receiving information about results. Structural and inherently political constraints resulted in Kyrgyz-speaking voices largely being silenced in the case study, despite our efforts to listen to them.

Recommendations and conclusions

In my discussion, I have aimed to illustrate how the concepts of listening and linguistic hospitality helped me understand and address some of the unequal linguistic power dynamics in my research. Drawing on my learning, I provide a set of recommendations to multilingual researchers in Table 1 in parallel to the recommendations to INGOs that we shared in our Listening Zones final report (Footitt *et al.*, 2018). Given the many parallels between NGO development projects and academic research projects, this seems fitting. Naturally, the list is non-exhaustive and is not applicable to all research contexts.

For the Listening Zones project, one of the key gaps identified in our own practice was the lack of initial planning of research outputs in local languages. The concept of linguistic hospitality was helpful in aiming to redress some of these identified gaps and tensions, although there were also issues that were beyond my own power or capacity, such as the inability to continue with producing contrastive translations of interviews, or our inability to produce outputs in other formats for participants due to a lack of planning, and financial and time constraints. From participant feedback, we know such outputs would have been welcomed, and this is why the recommendation has been included in Table 1.

Recommendations from the Listening Zones project for INGOs (Footitt *et al.*, 2018)	Recommendations for multilingual academic research projects
When planning international development projects: • Think about language at the design phase of a project. Listen to the words that the community uses in the needs assessment stage. • Provide language support during early discussions with communities, helping to facilitate a dialogue, and to create relationships of trust. • Include a budget line for translation and interpreting.	When planning multilingual research projects: • Think about language at the design phase of a project. Who speaks which language, which languages (skills) will you need to conduct the research and to report on the research? Which words are appropriate to talk about your project with your participants? What literature (from where, in what language) is shaping your research? • Seek out colleagues in your research context that you can collaborate with and co-publish with, potentially in other languages. Think of working with participatory research methods. • Include a budget line for translation and interpreting. Think about costs during all stages of your research: preparation, data collection, analysis and writing up results.
When starting a project and during monitoring and evaluation: • Translate successful project applications into local languages so that partners and communities can have an in-depth understanding of what is planned. This will give them access to the information and knowledge needed to increase involvement and local ownership. • Work with local interpreters wherever possible and seek to establish a register of translators and interpreters who have worked in and have an understanding of development. This register, and good practice in interpreting, could be shared with partners and communities.	During data collection, analysis and reporting: • Translate project-related information into the languages of your participants (next to consent forms), e.g. translate your project website • Work with local interpreters who have relevant contacts and who are familiar with research processes. Allow sufficient time to brief and debrief, and to discuss the translation of concepts and questions that are central to your research. • Reflect on linguistic power dynamics with the research team regularly and be open to adjusting plans if necessary. Share your emerging findings with participants in

• Feedback regularly to the community to check that the project is meeting original expectations, and make necessary amendments. • Translate reports into local languages and feed back to partners in their first languages.	their languages (e.g. draft reports, presentations) and take their feedback into account. • Translate reports into a language accessible to your research participants and end-users. Think of other formats that might be more appropriate, such as video or audio messages. Think about dissemination events: where do these take place, in what language, and who can access them?

Table 1. Recommendations for multilingual academic research projects

These recommendations indicate openness and present a deliberate effort to move into the realm of the Other and to receive the Other into one's own home (Ricoeur 2006). While they hopefully provide useful guidance for researchers, my analysis has also demonstrated that there is a need for the structural frameworks surrounding academic research to help researchers in devising more linguistically hospitable approaches. For example, research funding application forms often ask about outreach to the wider community (of where the funder is based) and about gender issues in research, but do not tend to ask about feeding back to research participants and about language (budget) needs. Furthermore, while much emphasis may be placed on equality (e.g. equal numbers of male and female participants), the notion of 'equity' and how to ensure equal access to the design, operation, feedback and outputs of the research is given little attention. These are inherently political issues, in which language plays an important role. They are not only important considerations for researchers, but are particularly relevant for those academic funders who have started to place emphasis on the need to work more collaboratively with colleagues and partners in the Global South and who aim to fund projects that will lead to co-creation of knowledge. If funders truly intend for such processes to emerge, it is necessary that they take into account how specific language choices or assumptions may exclude people from participating and that conducting collaborative work in languages other than English may lead to more equitable relationships.

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Endnotes

(1) My interpreter Cholpon has given explicit and enthusiastic consent to be named in this chapter.

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