

Axis 1 – Linguistic resources and intercultural (communicative) competence: roles, dynamics, and intersections

Competence or purposefulness: How researchers harness their multilingual and intercultural resources when researching multilingually

Keywords

Intercultural competence, researcher purposefulness, researching multilingually, ecology, intercultural communication

The linguistic resources people bring to their intercultural encounters are often investigated through the concept of intercultural competence. However, the term and the conceptualisations underpinning it are being increasingly critiqued (e.g. Crosby, 2014; Dervin, 2014; Ferri, 2014; Phipps, 2014). In this paper, we adopt a similarly critical stance as we propose a different conceptualisation of the ways in which individuals harness their linguistic and intercultural resources when interacting with others. In particular, we suggest that this process can be more usefully understood in terms of purposefulness than competence. Our thinking is derived from a parallel we make with researchers who draw upon diverse linguistic and other communicative resources in their studies, i.e. those who are researching multilingually (RM-ly) and intercultural. Rather than understanding their task in terms of 'researcher competence', we draw on ecological thinking (Holmes et al., 2013; Stelma et al., 2013) in order to focus on the purposeful decisions these researchers must make in their research design, for example, decisions about: ethical practices; literatures and conceptualisations in different languages; fieldwork practices and relationships; data collection, generation and analysis; representation issues in writing up research and disseminating findings. Thus, we are concerned with researcher purposefulness rather than researcher competence. The goal of purposeful decision-making is one which invites researchers to consider and value how they draw on the linguistic and other communicative resources at hand—their own and others in the research site and endeavour (whether co-researchers, participants, supervisors, funders)—when they plan and undertake their research. Using our ongoing RM-ly project data, we illustrate and discuss how such researcher purposefulness manifests itself in the context of multilingual, intercultural researcher decision-making and practice. These examples illustrate how researchers grapple with the ethics, relationships, communication dynamics, intersections, and roles involved in their research. Having established what we mean by researcher purposefulness, we conclude by proposing a similar move from competence to purposefulness for intercultural communicators as they grapple with these matters in their interactions.

References

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