
1. Conducting cross-cultural research qualitatively in social science: setting the scene

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, cross-cultural research has become increasingly essential. In multicultural societies such as the UK, the USA, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, there has been an increasing number of people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Meeting the needs of our multicultural society requires a cultural awareness of the diversity and commonality of people's beliefs and practices.

The need for culturally competent social and health care requires knowledge of the social and cultural contexts of the people and this can be obtained by research, and particularly the qualitative approach (Smith, 2008, 2021; Liamputtong, 2010, 2020; Atherton et al., 2020). Many researchers have started to conduct projects with vulnerable and marginalized people in a cross-cultural context. But it is crucial that the researchers ensure that their research is conducted ethically and that they take into account the cultural integrity of the participants. With these considerations in place, their research may not harm but benefit local people who take part in it (Cram, 2009, 2019; Liamputtong, 2010, 2020; Atherton et al., 2020; Broesch et al., 2020; Chilisa, 2020; Gromkowska-Melosik, 2021; Smith, 2021; see chapters 9 and 10 in this volume).

Despite the increased demands on cross-cultural research, discussions on “culturally sensitive methodologies” are still largely neglected in the literature on research methods including qualitative research. As a result, researchers who are working within socially responsible research in cross-cultural settings often confront many challenges with very little information on how to deal with these difficulties. Conducting cross-cultural research is rife with ethical and methodological challenges (Hennink, 2008; Liamputtong, 2010; Atherton et al., 2020; Broesch et al., 2020; Sposato & Jeffrey, 2020; Gromkowska-Melosik, 2021). This book is born out of this necessity.

In this chapter, I shall discuss the essence of qualitative research in cross-cultural research. I shall then discuss some ethical issues and cross-cultural research as well as some theoretical standpoints that I believe sit neatly within the framework of cross-cultural research. The last two parts will be dedicated to the positionality of researchers and language issues in cross-cultural research.

QUALITATIVE INQUIRY AND CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH

Research methodologies need to be aware of new requirements coming from society and, in this point, qualitative inquiry is a basic pillar to bring real transformative social impact. (González, 2021: 11)

In this *Handbook*, the use of qualitative research inquiry is strongly advocated. Qualitative research is essential when researchers have little knowledge of a research area that deals with subjective experiences and situational meanings of their research participants (Liamputtong, 2020). Additionally, the qualitative approach provides a great opportunity for “conveying sensitivity” (Davies et al., 2009: 6). Thus, it helps to eliminate or reduce the distrust that individuals from different cultural groups may have toward research and the researchers (Davies et al., 2009; Denzin & Salvo, 2020; Liamputtong, 2010, 2020).

Qualitative research relies heavily on “words” or narratives that people tell researchers. The focus of this approach is on the social world instead of the world of nature (Cardano, 2020; Liamputtong, 2020, 2022). Fundamentally, researching social life differs from researching natural phenomena. In the social world, we deal with the subjective experiences of human beings. Thus, our understanding of people’s realities can change in different social contexts and over time (Cardano, 2020; Denzin & Salvo, 2020; Liamputtong, 2020). As Goitom (2020: 551) suggests, “the qualitative research paradigm is engaged with understanding how social experiences are created and given meaning.”

Interpretation and flexibility are the focus of qualitative research (Liamputtong, 2020). The interpretive and flexible approach is necessary for cross-cultural research because the focus of qualitative research is on meaning and interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Cardano, 2020; Liamputtong, 2020, 2022; Maxwell, 2020). Qualitative data are trustworthy as they capture the world from the perspective of the research participants rather than presenting it from the researcher’s perspective. Most qualitative researchers embrace the notion that, to understand people’s actions, we must attempt to understand the meanings and interpretations that people give to their actions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Donà et al., 2019; Cardano, 2020; Liamputtong, 2020, 2022; Maxwell, 2020).

Due to its flexibility and fluidity, qualitative research is suited to understanding the meanings, interpretations, and subjective experiences of individuals (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Donà et al., 2019; Cardano, 2020; Liamputtong, 2010, 2020, 2022; Maxwell, 2020). Qualitative inquiry helps the researchers to be able to hear the voices of those who often are “silenced, othered, and marginalized by the dominant social order” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2005: 28; Denzin & Salvo, 2020). The in-depth nature of qualitative methods allows the participants to express their feelings and experiences in their own words (Bryman, 2016; Padgett, 2012, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Donà et al., 2019; Cardano, 2020; Liamputtong, 2020, 2022). This approach is particularly appropriate and essential for researching those commu-

nities who are historically oppressed but who want to be able to take better control of their lives. Here, I refer to many Indigenous communities and other oppressed groups around the world (see Denzin & Salvo, 2020; Smith, 2021; see chapters 2, 3, and 4. in this volume).

Qualitative research, according to Morris (2007: 410), acts as “the sociological vanguard” for exploring cross-cultural issues (see also Donà et al., 2019; Denzin & Salvo, 2020; Goitom, 2020; O’Rourke et al., 2022; Lawrence, 2022). Due to the ability of qualitative approaches to closely follow social processes as they emerge and change, the inquiry is particularly useful for examining race, culture, and ethnicity as “the product of social interaction” (Morris, 2007: 410). O’Rourke et al. (2022: 13) put it clear that, as cross-cultural qualitative research attempts to understand the meaning and experiences of individuals within their own socio-cultural context, it “is known for its ability to meaningfully include, give voice to and to hear from cultural minority groups who are silenced or bothered by the dominant social order.”

I have argued all along in my writing and teaching that cross-cultural research cannot be too “objective” as in positivist science. According to Bishop (2008: 171), much positivist research has been conducted using “researcher-determined positivist and neopositivist evaluative criteria, internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity.” As a result, this has “dismissed, marginalized, or maintained control over the voice of others” (see also Broesch et al., 2020). It is impossible to “measure” people or to “generalize” people if the researchers wish to understand people within the context of their society and culture. We are at the juncture of social turmoil in the 21st century, with too many people struggling with inequalities and difficulties in their lives. Social researchers have a moral obligation to do something to improve the lives of people in different cultures, particularly those who are marginalized and vulnerable. It is more likely that a qualitative approach will allow us to accomplish this task than the quantitative approach that relies heavily on numbers (see Liamputtong, 2007, 2010; Denzin & Salvo, 2020).

ETHICS AND CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH

[Researchers] need to engage with ethics in order to minimize harm, increase the sum of good and pursue justice, cope with new and challenging methodological and social problems, and to assure public trust and promote broader moral and social values. (Hay & Israel, 2022: 24)

Ethics is a set of moral principles that aim to prevent research participants from being harmed by the researcher and the research process (Israel, 2016; Tolich & Iphofen, 2019; Hay & Israel, 2022; Liamputtong et al., 2022). Ethical and moral responsibility is essential in any research, but it is more so when it comes to cross-cultural research as the researchers are likely to work with individuals who have been exploited, who are more marginalized and vulnerable in so many ways. Often, they are people living in poverty, do not have enough education to deal with formality in research, and feel too powerless to express their concerns or to resist the power of researchers

(see Howitt & Stevens, 2016; Broesch et al., 2020; Gergan & Smith, 2021; Henn et al., 2022). Researchers must be more responsible when they perform cross-cultural research. It is crucial that researchers take their ethical responsibilities very seriously (see also chapters 6 and 7 in this volume).

Researchers have questioned the ethical and moral conduct of researchers in cross-cultural settings (Birman, 2006; Broesch et al., 2020; Smith, 2021; Henn et al., 2022). Some of the major concerns regarding cross-cultural research include exploitation, damage of the community group, and reporting inaccurate research findings. Although these moral issues can be applicable to people in general, individuals from different cultural settings may be affected more due to many complicated historical, political, social, and cultural agendas (Birman, 2006; Broesch et al., 2020; Smith, 2021; Henn et al., 2022).

When embarking on any cross-cultural research, but particularly research concerning the historically marginalized groups, researchers need to consider the relevance of their research to the cultural groups and the likely outcomes. Research can only be justified if the outcome will benefit the community rather than cause further damage (Broesch et al., 2020; Liamputtong, 2020; Smith, 2021; Hay & Israel, 2022; Henn et al., 2022).

The principle of *primum non nocere* (First, do no harm) has become accepted ethics in all research disciplines. When undertaking research that involves people from cross-cultural settings, researchers must keep the aim of “First, do no harm” in mind at all steps of the research process: from the selection of the methodology through the data collection process and the dissemination of the research findings. The researchers must be vigilant about the harm that may befall their participants in cross-cultural research (Ziersch et al., 2019; Hay & Israel, 2022; Liamputtong et al., 2022). Researchers have a responsibility to ensure the physical, emotional, and social well-being of their research participants. The researchers must ensure that they will not be adversely affected by participating in their research (Ziersch et al., 2019; Liamputtong et al., 2022).

Conducting research may lead to unintentional danger to the participants (Liamputtong, 2010, 2020). Hence, special attention needs to be paid to risks to the participants throughout the research processes. By taking part in our research, some participants may have to deal with the consequences of our research actions as well as with the disclosure and publishing of our research findings (Liamputtong, 2010, 2020; Ziersch et al., 2019). Apart from physical and social harms, psychological and emotional distress can also occur to the participants in cross-cultural research.

“Cause no harm” also applies to how the researchers present their findings. In writing their findings, researchers must ensure that these people or their community will not be easily identified by the research findings (Liamputtong, 2010, 2020; Dickson-Swift et al., 2008; Broesch et al., 2020). In reporting their findings, researchers may adopt different ways to protect the identity of their research participants. For example, the research sites where researchers conducted their research can be disguised by giving them a fictitious name. When presenting the participants’ verbatim explanations (commonly practiced in qualitative papers), their pseudonyms

are used rather than their real names (Fryer, 2019; Liamputtong, 2010, 2020). This is what I have done in my writing, and many other qualitative researchers have also adopted a similar practice.

EMBRACING ETHICS OF CARE

Ethics of care gave to the world a way of thinking which shed new light on these issues and provided possible solutions. (Govrin, 2014: 1)

The “ethics of care” theorized by Carol Gilligan (1982) is valuable for conducting qualitative cross-cultural research (Brannelly & Boulton, 2017). The ethics of care underscores care, compassion, and relationships (de Panfilis et al., 2019; Branicki, 2020; Parsons et al., 2021). It demands that researchers must embrace care and compassion as well as their interpersonal relationships with research participants in their ethical research (Israel, 2016). It dictates how the researchers relate to individuals with whom they come into contact during their research and their lives (Israel, 2016; Liamputtong et al., 2022). It embraces marked implications for moral and ethical issues in doing cross-cultural research.

One important ingredient of morality is that individuals have their responsibilities toward others (Gilligan, 1982, 2003). A moral person will be concerned about the well-being and reputation of others. Following Gilligan’s position, Trimble and Mohatt (2006: 333) recommend that researchers must seriously consider framing their research “around the formation and maintenance of responsible relationships.” One way to do this is by establishing community partnerships and collaborative arrangements with the participants. This principle is essentially important in research regarding Indigenous people around the world. As most Indigenous people have been exploited, abused, and robbed of their knowledge for centuries, the researchers have moral responsibilities to ensure that Indigenous people will not be further marginalized (Smith, 2021). Ethical research projects need to be conducted collaboratively with Indigenous peoples. Additionally, the researched communities should receive benefits from opportunities generated by the research, such as training and employment.

Denzin and colleagues (2008: 15) call for the Indigenous ethical and moral model that refers to “a collaborative social science research model” obliging the researchers to be more responsible toward their research participants. This model emphasizes “personal accountability, caring, the value of individual expressiveness, the capacity for empathy, and the sharing of emotionality” (Denzin et al., 2008: 15). The Māori moral position, for example, is based on “an ethic of care and love and personal accountability that honours individual uniqueness and emotionality in dialogue” (Denzin et al., 2008: 14). Thus, it “privileges storytelling, listening, voice, and personal performance narratives” (see chapters 9, 11, 12, 13, and 16, this volume).

The Indigenous ethical and moral model promotes “collaborative, participatory performative inquiry.” Forcefully, it “aligns the ethics of research with a politics of

the oppressed, with a politics of resistance, hope, and freedom.” The model compels researchers to “take up moral projects that respect and reclaim indigenous cultural practices.” The result of this model is the production of “spiritual, social, and psychological healing.” This healing, in turn, “leads to multiple forms of transformation at the personal and social levels” (Denzin et al., 2008: 14).

RELATIONAL ETHICS: COLLABORATION WITH LOCAL PEOPLE

Human love, human caring, will be quite enough on which to found an ethic. We must look even more closely at that love and caring. (Noddings, 2013: 27)

Relational ethics requires researchers to act from our hearts and minds, acknowledge our interpersonal bonds to others, and take responsibility for actions and their consequences. (Ellis, 2007: 3)

Closely related to an ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 2013), the concept of “relational ethics” is crucial if researchers wish to be more responsible toward their research participants (Ellis, 2007; Clandinin et al., 2018; Caine et al., 2020). Relational ethics embraces “mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness” between researcher and participants as well as between researchers and the communities with which they work (Ellis, 2007: 4). It demands researchers to act from their hearts and minds and to recognize their intersubjective alliances with others. It is “anchored in relationships of mutual caring in the ongoing research process” (Phillips et al., 2022: 762; see also Brannelly & Boulton, 2017; Clandinin et al., 2018; Ellis, 2017; Groot et al., 2022).

Wallace (2006: 67–68) contends that relational ethics is based on “a mutual and respectful” dialogue between the researchers and the individuals and communities of research to ensure that “the values, hopes, and concerns of participants will be reflected in the design, implementation, and interpretation of research.” Through the relational ethics approach, the research participants will learn how the research can be used to improve the health and well-being of themselves and of their communities. At the same time, the researchers will become knowledgeable about the expectations and concerns of the individuals and community that may smooth or hinder the research process. Relational ethics also considers “historical memories, attitudes toward research, and notions of ethical principles” among the participants and communities of research (Wallace, 2006: 68).

An essential component of relational ethics is community consultation. The aim of community consultation is to include “potential participants as partners in solving the ethical dilemmas posed in designing research” (Wallace 2006: 72). In research involving African Americans, Wallace (2006: 73) suggests that the researchers should not underestimate or dismiss their suspicion and fears about research. The researchers who claim to be “relational ethicists” are very “proactive in addressing scientific mistrust.” Relational ethicists attempt to reduce the power imbalance

between the research participants and the researchers by establishing relationships between the community and research institutes. Community consultation is used by relational ethicists before they begin the process of recruitment to understand or examine “community conceptions of the ethical principles that guide the research process, to deliberate risk and benefits, and to enhance participants’ understanding of research procedures, including informed consent” (Wallace, 2006: 73).

Community consultation situates the researchers within the context of the research community. It requires the researchers to make decisions whilst taking into consideration the cultural relevance of the research groups. Potentially, then, it can gain the trust of individuals and communities of research. Through community consultation, people can increase their understanding of the research process, which can enhance their participation rates, particularly in biomedical and behavioral research. This in turn may “help to decrease the disparities” in social and health outcomes among African Americans (Wallace, 2006: 73).

Based on relational ethics, the concept of collaborative research has emerged (see Groot et al., 2019; de Smet et al., 2022; Phillips et al., 2021). Cross-cultural researchers have called for a collaborative approach in research concerning ethnic minority and Indigenous groups (Broesch et al., 2020; Liamputtong, 2010, 2020; Smith, 2021). As Mohatt and Thomas (2006: 95) suggest, “failure to use a collaborative approach often results in published data with scant useful feedback to the communities of concern, as well as intentional or unintentional exploitation of community knowledge.” This is referred to as the process of colonization by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021; see also chapters 2, 3 and 4 in this volume). Research evidence has pointed to the fact that collaborations between the researchers and the communities are likely to produce research that is “appropriate, relevant, and respectful” as well as provide research findings that are more “accurate and effective” (Mohatt & Thomas, 2006: 95).

Collaborative research is characterized by equal relationships in the planning and management of the research between the researchers and the communities (Higginbottom & Liamputtong, 2015; Broesch et al., 2020; Liamputtong & Rice, 2022). The methodology is indeed distinctive from other research frameworks where the researchers have more or sole power and control over the research process, and the communities are treated as only passive recipients in research. As such, collaborative research can address “ethical pitfalls” that have occurred in the research regarding minority communities and Indigenous peoples (see also chapters 16, 17, and 18 in this volume).

DECOLONIZING METHODOLOGY

A decolonizing research methodology is an approach that is used to challenge the Eurocentric research methods that undermine the local knowledge and experiences of the marginalised population groups. (Keikelame & Swartz, 2019: 1)

Research has been referred to as “a colonising construct” (Mutua & Swadener, 2004: 1; Cram, 2019). Colonizing refers to a process where a foreign settler creates a new colony in a new land, and over time, takes away the livelihood and suppresses the identities of many native peoples (Cram, 2019; Chilisa, 2020; Smith, 2021). This has resulted in a significant loss of culture and ways of life, impacting on the well-being of local people (Bartlett et al., 2007; Cram, 2019).

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2008, 2021) argues that, through the refusal to recognize non-Western perspectives as “legitimate knowledge,” the colonial research traditions have made cultural knowledge silent (see Cram, 2019; McPhail-Bell et al., 2019; Broesch et al., 2020; Kelley, 2021; Urassa et al., 2021; see also chapters 2, 3, and 4 in this volume). This is referred to as the “methodology of imperialism” (Said, 1995: 21). To counteract this hegemony, the perspectives of Indigenous people must be “adopted and valorized in the research process” (Bartlett et al., 2007: 2372). Indigenous researchers such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2008, 2021), Fiona Cram (2019), Bonnie Duran and Eduardo Duran (2000), and Chilisa (2020) call for decolonizing methodology to recognize and undo the damage caused by the colonial authority.

Decolonizing methodology questions colonial models of understanding the Indigenous reality and “challenges dominant modern methods of knowing and reinforces Indigenous identity and discourse” (Habashi, 2005: 771). This methodology accepts Indigenous standpoints, processes, and ways of learning and knowing (Bartlett et al., 2007; Brooks et al., 2008; Vannini & Gladue, 2008; Cram, 2019; Smith, 2021; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021; Tuia & Cobb, 2021). It aims to create research that allows for Indigenous self-determination. It is guided by the values, knowledge, and research of Indigenous people (Bartlett et al., 2007; Prior, 2007; Cram, 2019; Smith, 2021; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021; Tuia & Cobb, 2021). Therefore, the methodology can begin to address the suspicion and harm that previous research has created in Indigenous communities. Decolonizing discourse assists in developing trust in the researcher and the researched relationship through respect, reciprocity, collaboration, and cooperation throughout the research.

Decolonization requires a centering of the concerns and worldviews of the colonized “other” (Chilisa, 2020; Smith 2021; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021; Tuia & Cobb, 2021). To do so necessitates having a critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations, and values informing research practice (Smith, 2021). Thus, the decolonization of research involves research reform according to Indigenous peoples’ aspirations of empowerment and self-determination (Chilisa, 2020). McPhail-Bell and colleagues (2019: 1545) write:

Decolonization is a question for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Decolonizing research involves liberating the “captive minds” of both the colonized and the colonizer from oppressive conditions that silence and marginalize the voices of the colonized. It requires a consensus of effort but also recognition of the different voices involved.

Thus, decolonizing methodology attempts to change research practices that have damaged Indigenous communities in the past. Rather than accepting traditional scientific methodology, research application, from design to dissemination, the methodology deconstructs research to reveal hidden biases (Brooks et al., 2008). This methodology strives to empower Indigenous communities and respect their culture and traditions (Brooks et al., 2008). To adopt a decolonizing methodology to the research, the voices of Indigenous researchers, those who live and work in Indigenous communities, are privileged (Bartlett et al., 2007; Cram, 2019; Smith, 2021; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021; Tuia & Cobb, 2021).

Methodologically speaking, traditional positivist research has often denied the agency of Indigenous (the colonized) populations. This has led to methodological resistance among decolonizing researchers. Denzin and colleagues say this clearly: “Indigenists resist the positivist and postpositivist methodologies of Western science because these formations are too frequently used to validate colonizing knowledge about indigenous peoples” (2008: 11). Instead, decolonizing researchers advocate “interpretive strategies and skills fitted to the needs, languages, and traditions of their respective indigenous community. These strategies emphasize personal performance narratives and testimonies” (Denzin et al., 2008: 11). Thus, the use of qualitative research inquiry and more innovative methods are promoted in decolonizing methodology (see Bartlett et al., 2007; Bishop, 2008; Brooks et al., 2008; Vannini & Gladue, 2008; Smith, 2008, 2021; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021).

Importantly, community-based participatory action research (PAR) is an important method within the framework of the decolonizing methodology (Bartlett et al., 2007; see chapters in Part 2 of this volume). The principle of PAR makes it likely that the research process and its outcomes will be more related to and beneficial for Indigenous individuals and communities. The research process and sequences also provide empowerment among those individuals involved (Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Higginbottom & Liamputtong, 2015; Liamputtong, 2020; Smith, 2021; Tuia & Cobb, 2021; Middleton et al., 2022).

Decolonizing methodology does not only apply to researching “exclusively in contexts where the geopolitical experience of colonization happened, but indeed among groups where colonizing research approaches are deployed” (Swadener & Mutua, 2008: 35). The methodology can be applied to those who are non-Western, marginalized people such as those living in poverty and ethnic minority groups. Decolonizing methodology offers Indigenous cultural ways of undertaking research with other groups of people for researchers (Bartlett et al., 2007).

AN INSIDER/OUTSIDER PERSPECTIVE

Researchers take on different positionings dependent on the situation that we may be in, the people we are interacting with and familiarity of the linguistic and socio-cultural norms.
(Milligan, 2016: 240)

The position of the researcher in cross-cultural research has received more attention recently (see Innes, 2009; Liamputtong, 2010; Gair, 2012; Manohar et al., 2019; Giwa, 2015; Milligan, 2016; Ochieng, 2010; Obasi, 2014, 2019; Ryan, 2015; Suwankhong & Liamputtong, 2015; Miyazawa, 2018; Gromkowska-Melosik, 2021; Hill & Dao, 2021; see also chapters 3, 6, 8, 9, and 19 in this volume). The notion of insider/outsider status, according to Gair (2012: 137) refers to “the degree to which a researcher is located either within or outside a group being researched, because of her or his common lived experience or status as a member of that group.” In her writing, Gair discusses “common wounds” that are encountered by both researchers and participants. Although they are referred to as a common “wound,” it is argued to be a positive element to bring to the research relationship (Angotti & Sennott, 2015: 438).

BEING AN INSIDER

It has been suggested that every researcher who undertakes cross-cultural research should be an “insider.” This means only those who share social, cultural, and linguistic characteristics with the research participants would be suitable for conducting research (see Bishop, 2008; Kerstetter, 2012; Cui, 2015; Beals et al., 2020; Hill & Dao, 2021; Smith, 2021). This is what Ramji (2008) refers to as “cultural commonality.” Insider status will reduce cultural and linguistic barriers. Cultural “insiders,” according to Bishop (2008: 148), may be able to carry out research “in a more sensitive and responsive manner than ‘outsider’” researchers. Birman (2006: 172) too argues that “cultural insiders have the additional advantage over outsiders because they have facility with the language and culture that allows them access to the cultural community, which can be extremely difficult to gain even by sensitive and knowledgeable outsiders.” Participants tend to believe that they have common experiences and viewpoints with the researchers who have the same race or ethnic background (see also Suwankhong & Liamputtong, 2015; Smith, 2021; see chapters 5 and 6 in this volume).

Having suggested that insider researchers are in a better position to carry out cross-cultural research, we should not treat an insider status as unproblematic. There have also been some discussions of difficulties faced by researchers who have the same social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds as those of research participants (see for example, Mand & Wilson, 2006; Chawla, 2007; Subedi, 2007; Ramji, 2008). Also, insiders may be biased, and they can be “too close to the culture” and neglect to ask crucial questions (see also Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2005). Bogusia Temple and Alys Young (2008: 97) suggest, “it is increasingly recognized that the insider/outsider boundaries cannot be as easily drawn” as in racial and ethnicity matching. Gawlewicz (2016: 31) too cautions us as follows: “[T]he assumption that people perceived as insiders can interpret informants’ stories more correctly is a dangerous form of essentialism as it (re) produces binary categorizations which do not capture

the intersections – complexity and diversity of experiences and views – within as well as between various groups.”

BEING AN OUTSIDER

Some cross-cultural researchers have also argued that being an outsider may carry some advantages (Sin, 2007; Coloma, 2008). Being an outsider may allow the researchers to scrutinize certain problems more closely instead of seeing them as common phenomena, or not seeing them at all (Banks, 1998). As Coloma (2008: 15) suggests, “becoming an outsider also has its own usefulness, such as providing different perspectives on cultural and community norms, asking questions that require more detailed explanations, and developing other forms of interactions and spaces often relegated to non-members.”

When the researchers do not have the same experiences as their participants, new or different perspectives may be discovered (Carter, 2004). In his research with nurses from ethnic minorities in the UK, Carter (2004: 351) asked the participants several questions about racism. As he is a white researcher, he thought that he would have problems getting them to discuss their experiences. However, his whiteness was not the impediment he had anticipated. In particular, the participants from African–Caribbean backgrounds often articulated their experiences of racism “in ways that made explicit their feelings and responses to discrimination and hostility.” Being white is not always an obstacle, Carter argues. Even when the research requires a discussion on a sensitive issue such as racism, people are prepared to talk openly about their experiences and opinions. People from ethnic minorities often say that they would not have done so with another ethnic person. In Carter’s research (2004: 348), “it is the gap in experience between interviewer and interviewee that creates a space for respondents to describe and tease out meanings and assumptions that may otherwise remain unspoken.”

THE “INBETWEENER”: BEING BOTH AN INSIDER AND OUTSIDER OR SPACE IN BETWEEN?

According to Chawla (2007: 2), “an ‘authentic’ insider is contestable.” In some situations and contexts, the researchers can be both insiders and outsiders. The position and identity of the researchers may shift “amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations” (Narayan, 2008: 269; Arthur, 2010; Greene, 2014; Milligan, 2016; Obasi, 2019; Hill & Dao, 2021). Arthur (2010) argues that the positionality and identity of the researchers can change, and this depends on the status of a researcher as an insider or outsider who responds to the social, cultural, and political values within a given context or circumstance. This has been termed “the inbetweener” as coined by Lizzi Milligan (2016). When researchers are simultaneously insider and outsider, they have come to “‘the space between’, where they will occupy different

roles and spaces depending on the specific context of the research project” (Hill & Dao, 2021: 526; see also Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; chapters 5, 6, 9, 16, and 19 in this volume).

In her research with Latina mothers in North Carolina, Villenas (1996) tells us about being both. She describes her dilemma of being between the “colonized” and the “colonizer” in her research. In other words, Villenas was placed as an insider and outsider by the community and those who serve them. Chawla (2007: 2) says this clearly, “whether native or other, we are all ‘another’s’ in the field, because there will always be facets of ourselves that connect us with the people we study and other factors that emphasize our differences.” In her writing, Obasi refers to this insider/outsider as “Inside Looking Out or Outside Looking In?” and tells us:

Being Black and being female is central to who I am as a researcher. It is also central to who I am as an individual. These aspects of my identity will always be visible and have an impact on how I am perceived by the research participants. However, given my research area, my position as a hearing person[,] which is often taken for granted outside of my working life, also becomes much more significant in conducting the research with Deaf women. During the research[,] there were clear shifts in positioning that challenged my own location[,] casting me both as “insider” and [as] “outsider” in the same research study. (2019: 1587–88).

Although the researcher is an insider, his or her insider status can also become an outsider within the same social groups and geographical locations.

CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH AND LANGUAGES

Language conveys understandings and assumptions commonly held by a socio-cultural group; and often determines acceptance and participation in events, rituals and social phenomena. (Al-Amer et al., 2015: 1152)

Often, in carrying out cross-cultural research, the researchers are linguistically and culturally distant from their research participants (Hennink, 2008; Lincoln et al., 2016; Fryer, 2019; Mackenzie, 2019; Stevano & Deane, 2019; Schmidt-Sanem, 2020). Differences in the language spoken and the meanings that are conveyed can create problems and this has implications for the findings of their research (Lincoln et al., 2016; Krzywoszynska, 2017, 2020). It is also an ethical issue, as misunderstanding may occur, and this may result in the misinterpretation of the research findings (Lincoln et al., 2016; Goitom, 2020; Krzywoszynska, 2017, 2020; see chapters 2, 10, and 16 in this volume).

In qualitative research, language is crucial not only to the research process but also to the resulting data and its interpretation (Fryer, 2019; Gawlewicz, 2016; Lincoln et al., 2016; Krzywoszynska, 2017, 2020; Liamputtong, 2020; Schmidt-Sanem, 2020). Language allows the research participants to identify meanings of the world. It permits the researchers and the participants to interact to produce an understanding of the social world of the participant and the interpretation of this context (Hennink,

2008; Fryer, 2019; Gawlewicz, 2016; Lincoln et al., 2016; Mackenzie, 2019). Language is, therefore, a fundamental tool that allows qualitative researchers to understand human behavior, their socio-cultural processes, and cultural meanings (Krzywoszynska, 2017, 2020; Fryer, 2019; Goitom, 2020). In her recent writing, Fryer says:

Language expression and comprehension is fundamental for in-depth qualitative interviews[,] representing both the data and the communication process by which data [are] generated. When participants are from multiple language groups, there is greater complexity and additional challenges in the research process to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of interview data and its interpretation” (2019: 1655).

In conducting cross-cultural qualitative research, the role and influence of language in qualitative research are more complex. Many qualitative research projects are undertaken by researchers who are not familiar with the language of the research participants. This can be seen in cross-national research where the language of the researchers is markedly different from that of the participants, and they are seen as an “outsider.” It can also be seen in national research where the researchers carry out research with minority groups such as immigrants who may prefer to speak in their own language.

It is often assumed that, when researchers carry out cross-cultural research, we must use the language of the participants so that researchers will have a fuller understanding of the issues under investigation (Lopez, 2003). However, this may not be true for all cases. Some participants may be very fluent in English. This is particularly so for some immigrant groups who have established themselves in a host country, like the UK, Canada, the USA, New Zealand, and Australia. These people speak English very well and they may be more than happy to be interviewed in English rather than their native language.

BI-CULTURAL RESEARCHER

A bi-cultural (or bi-lingual) worker is a research assistant who will be employed to work on the research project to overcome linguistic barriers in cross-cultural research (Shklarov, 2007; Hennink, 2008; Davies et al., 2009; Salma et al., 2017; Stevano & Deane, 2019; O’Rourke et al., 2022). Bi-cultural researchers share not only the language with the participants but also many social and cultural aspects. They are individuals who are more likely to have the best of knowledge of the groups (Davies et al., 2009; Salma et al., 2017; Stevano & Deane, 2019; O’Rourke et al., 2022). They are people who can “convey the underlying cultural meanings of participants’ words and expressions to the researchers” (Hennink, 2008: 25). They play a vital role “in the creation of knowledge and its cultural interpretation, both of which are the bedrock of qualitative research” (Hennink, 2008: 25).

Due to their knowledge of the culture and familiarity with the local language, bi-cultural researchers are in the best position to conduct cross-cultural research. The advantage is “embedded” in their ability to “identify and understand adequately the concerns.” Bi-cultural researchers are likely not only to be able to “protect the participants from any possible harm (in a broad sense)” (Shklarov, 2007: 534), but they can also produce more “honest and sound scientific results” free of any distortion that might result from language difficulties. And this can maximize the research benefits (p. 535).

Bi-cultural researchers, with their deeper insider’s knowledge of the issues or people, are in a better position to conduct cross-cultural research than monolingual researchers working with interpreters (Salma et al., 2017; Stevano & Deane, 2019; O’Rourke et al., 2022). Knowledge of the culture under study can take a considerable amount of time for English-speaking, monolingual researchers. But for bi-cultural researchers who commence the study within their own culture, “these concepts might be a natural part” of their identities. And it is this natural understanding that “secures an ideal basis for protecting the rights of research participants and avoiding any possible harm to them without leaning toward paternalistic attitudes.” However, it is also crucial to realize that the in-depth knowledge can also “bring more doubt and become a reason for challenges” for the bi-cultural researchers (Shklarov 2007: 535).

Bi-cultural researchers perform a dual role in cross-cultural research (Salma et al., 2017; Stevano & Deane, 2019; O’Rourke et al., 2022). As an interpreter, Svetlana Shklarov (2007: 535) suggests, he or she is “‘in the middle’ of cross-language exchange” and becomes “a single-stop ‘filter’ of the meanings, the key tool of communication.” The bi-cultural researchers assume “great power by taking this role.” There is also “a high level of responsibility attached to it.” The double role of bi-cultural researchers “can carry even greater power than the role of translators” because the bi-cultural researchers are “associated with a perceived air of a ‘monopoly’ on interpreting” their own research findings.

However, the intrusive impact of bi-cultural researchers, especially when they play a crucial role in explaining the participants’ expressions within a culturally sensitive area such as sexuality, needs to be warned. Shklarov (2007: 531) also points to the problem of adequacy of cultural representations that the bi-cultural researchers claim. Mand and Wilson (2006: 619) also suggest that bi-cultural researchers do not represent the voices and concerns of “the population from which they come” and they are “being biased by age, education and often gender and they produce translations that are too formal and literary for most people.” Shklarov (2007: 531) also suggests that bi-cultural researchers tend to be people who are long-time immigrants and most of them have been educated in the Western tradition. Due to this, they tend to be “culturally distant from their non-English-speaking compatriots.”

The language, culture, and values of some bi-cultural researchers who have lived in Western society for a long period of time, may also be “frozen in time” (Temple & Edwards, 2002). Shklarov (2007: 531) contends that these people may still hold on to the cultural meanings since they have left their countries, but the cultures and languages of their home countries have been changing. They may not know

about new meanings of the old words or expressions in their own countries or new words or meanings that people have constructed in their mother tongue. Therefore, in some situations/circumstances, bi-cultural researchers may be seen as “alien” by either the participants or both the participants and other researchers in cross-cultural communication.

TRANSLATOR/INTERPRETER PERSPECTIVE

Under certain situations, researchers may need to work with translators/interpreters in cross-cultural research (Hennink, 2008; Temple & Young, 2008; Williamson et al., 2011; Fryer, 2019; Mackenzie, 2016, 2019; Helmich et al., 2017; Krzywoszynska, 2020; see also chapters 6, 10, and 11 in this volume). According to Fryer (2019: 1657), “when multiple languages are spoken by participants, it is necessary to work with multiple interpreters and translators. Interpreters enable the shared understanding between researcher and participants for informed consent and data collection in qualitative research.”

However, there has been some debate about working through translators/interpreters. The use of a translator/interpreter, Temple (1997: 614) contends, is not simply a technical matter that has little influence on the outcome. Rather, “it is of epistemological consequences as it influences what is ‘found’.” Working with translators/interpreters, Temple (1997: 608) suggests, researchers have to depend on them “not just for words but to a certain extent for perspective.”

As a translator or interpreter, the person is “a gatekeeper who has the power to elicit, clarify, translate, omit, or distort messages” (Kaufert & Putsch, 1997: 72; Helmich et al., 2017; Krzywoszynska, 2020). Larkin and others (2007: 468) also contend that the translators/interpreters can potentially influence research significantly by “virtue of [their] attempt to convey meaning from a language and culture that might be unknown to the researcher.” Temple and Young (2008: 101) say this clearly:

The translator always makes her mark on the research, whether this is acknowledged or not, and in effect, some kind of “hybrid” role emerges in that, at the very least, the translator makes assumptions about meaning equivalence and make[s] her an analyst and cultural broker as much as a translator.

Working with a translator or an interpreter may not be as efficient as working with a bi-cultural worker and some researchers have reported difficulties associated with working with interpreters/translators. Interpreters/translators are often engaged for short periods, and they rarely become involved in the research. They, hence, do not have a full understanding of the research aims and questions. Working through interpreters/translators can be tiring for all involved. Often, people cannot continue for a very long period without a break. The interpreters/translators may become bored in the interview situation, and instead of translating the participant’s responses,

they may simply say, “Same answer as the others.” In the interview situation, the researchers may only focus on verbal language. But the verbal exchange is only a part of a culture. Other non-verbal communication and symbols are also of significance in communication. Hence, some important information in the interview situation might have been lost, and this could affect the quality and meanings of the data obtained (see chapter 11 in this volume).

It is well known that concepts cannot always be translated across languages and cultures (Bujra, 2006; Hennink, 2008; Helmich et al., 2017; Krzywoszynska, 2020). Due to subtle differences in meaning, translating from one language to another can be very complex and problematic (Bujra, 2006). As a consequence of cultural differences or non-equivalent words, some words cannot be translated into English properly (Krzywoszynska, 2017, 2020). As Shklarov (2007: 531) puts it, “Language translation is not a simple linguistic exercise. Cultural and contextual interpretation always plays its part, because the meanings of words often carry subtle nuances and cultural connotations that have to be captured in translation.” She also contends that a precise equivalency of expression of the concept in different languages can be difficult to obtain. Hence, a complex situation may happen. Some of the common Western conceptual meanings can be difficult to understand in other cultures. This is also applicable in translating cultural meanings into English. Western researchers may not be able to appreciate the complexity of concepts that are common in other cultures. Translating concepts and words hence becomes, as McLaughlin and Sall (2001: 206) argue, “a question of culture before being a question of vocabulary.”

In qualitative research, the context is extremely important; without it, misunderstanding can easily be created (Temple & Edwards, 2002; Larkin et al., 2007; Shklarov, 2007; Krzywoszynska, 2020; Lincoln et al., 2016). This problem tends to occur when working with interpreters/translators. Temple (2002: 847) points out, “researchers often use translators and interpreters as if they were transmitters of neutral messages across languages, ignoring the linguistic imperialism central to an unquestioning use of English as a baseline language.” But, as I have suggested, concepts can move problematically across cultures. We cannot assume that, because an individual speaks a particular language, he or she can represent a culture. Being able to speak the language may be insufficient in cross-cultural research.

However, researchers have also discussed ways in which they can engage meaningfully with an interpreter/translator (see Fryer, 2019; Mackenzie, 2016, 2019; Lincoln et al., 2016; Krzywoszynska, 2020). Their writings can be useful guides to many who need to work with interpreters in their cross-cultural research.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The lingua franca scholar must be willing to let go of their assumptions. They must also have an open mind and heart. They must be curious about the culture. They must be patient with themselves. They must approach the task at hand as a student. (Fradkin, 2020: 8)

Cross-cultural research has become hugely important in this postmodern world where many people have been made, and are still made, marginalized and vulnerable by others in more powerful positions, such as colonial researchers. In this chapter, I have suggested that qualitative research is particularly appropriate for cross-cultural projects because it allows us to find answers that are more relevant to the research participants. I have also provided a different theoretical framework that cross-cultural researchers may adopt in their research. By now, as readers may have realized, most methodological frameworks I have proposed are based on love, compassion, reciprocity, respect for culture and people's dignity, and calls for collaborative efforts with local people. They are methodologies that will allow us to see the world through the eyes of the research participants. They are methodologies that will ensure that our research products provide benefit to the participants instead of harming them.

Conducting qualitative cross-cultural research is exciting, but, as will be shown in the chapters that follow, it is also full of ethical and methodological challenges. It is crucial that we, as qualitative researchers, speak loudly about the challenges and rewards that we come across in our research endeavors, and continue to do it so that new researchers and students can learn from our experiences. This is my intention for this book.

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