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The interviewer's linguistic incompetence as aesthetic key moment,

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Abstract

This paper explores the author's embodied experience of linguistic incompetence in the context of an interview-based, short, promotional film production about people's personal connections to their spoken languages in Glasgow, Scotland/UK. The paper highlights that people's right to their spoken languages during film interviews and the embodied, translingual dimensions manifested through their languages, poses important methodological questions for research contexts where more than one language is present. In order to understand the relationship between the interviewer's discomfort when not being able to linguistically connect, and people's rights to speak their languages, the article draws on existing concepts in language studies such as 'linguistic incompetence' (Phipps 2013) and 'translingualism' (Canagarajah 2013). Mieke Bal's (2007a, 2007b) 'migratory aesthetics' and Sara Ahmed's (2000) notion of 'hearing as touch' are used to frame the embodied and aesthetic dimensions of the overall film production. It is argued that the interviewer's bodily discomfort during multilingual film interviews and the ethical and methodological considerations it triggered, reveals the film production as a space for imaginative acts. The article suggest that such imaginative acts can resist monolingual expectations and dignify people's language practices.

Keywords: Migratory aesthetics, hearing as touch, multilingual film interviews, linguistic incompetence, film pedagogy, translingual practice

(9189 words)

Introduction

Afonso tells me during our film interview that words have a flavour, a taste. When you say certain words in certain languages they can bring memories, sensations. Portuguese, for Afonso, tastes earthy; a down-to-earth, melancholic language. I ask him to repeat what he has just said in English, in Portuguese. He smiles into the camera, repositions on his chair and, in his best Portuguese accent, tells me about the Portuguese coast, its history and sunsets.

The above is my personal reflection on interviewing Afonso, one of about 20 multilingual interviewees who volunteered to take part in the making of a short documentary which aimed to celebrate the languages we carry with us. In this short excerpt, Afonso suggests that the act of 'saying certain words in certain languages' is an emotional and embodied affair which can evoke memories and even bodily sensations. In other words, he reminds us that languages are an essential part of who we are as human beings. Tsuda (2010), proponent of linguistic pluralism, puts it this way: 'Languages are instruments of communication and can be, even more so, a source of dignity and of human pride' (p. 261).

In this article, I argue that people's right to their spoken languages and the emotional and embodied dimensions manifested through their languages, pose important methodological issues for multilingual research contexts. I reflect on this embodied dimension of multilingual exchange and the methodological challenges in the context of the above mentioned promotional short film production, entitled *Speaking your language*. The film explored people's personal connection to their spoken languages in Glasgow, Scotland. The challenges of a multilingual research praxis are not normally explored through the practice of filmmaking or the discussion of film (-making) aesthetics, but are more

commonly centred around reflections regarding more traditionally qualitative research designs. My approach draws on the Freirean (1996; 2005) use of the term 'praxis' in which action (the filmmaking process) and critical reflection (on its multilingual and embodied dimensions) come together. My aim is to formulate an arts-based research praxis that values people's languages as sources of dignity and human pride.

The paper is organised in two parts. The theoretical and methodological background to the article discusses the conflicting language-related objectives of the *Speaking your language* film production. It is set against the reality of institutional, English language expectations and ensuing criticism of such overall dominance of the English language in academia. The paper also builds on those conceptual and pedagogical developments in language studies oriented towards the social, affective and multimodal aspects of multilingual exchange which necessarily rupture these monolingual expectations.

I explain how the article's key terminology - Mieke Bal's (2007a, 2007b) 'migratory aesthetic' and Ahmed's (2000) notion of 'hearing-as-touch' - connect to these developments in language studies. In the subsequent part, I discuss the production of *Speaking your language* through the lens of my key terms and based on two reflective points. The first reflective point centres on my (the interviewer's) bodily felt experience of 'linguistic incompetence' (Phipps, 2013) during multilingual interviews. This led to a focus on the non-verbal aspects of communication and listening 'beyond the register of speech'. I argue that such a form of 'hearing-as-touch' (Ahmed, 2000) during multilingual interviews renders the act of interviewing a form of imaginative engagement (Appia, 2006) as a multimodal meaning-making practice (Canagarajah 2013). The second reflective point focuses on the effect of bodily discomfort on the artistic decisions taken in the editing phase of the film.

I embarked on the film production as a bilingual German -English researcher, together with a monolingual, English-speaking filmmaker based in Glasgow. My changing positioning throughout the

film production - as co-producer and researcher-interviewer brought to bear multiple reflexive stances. As co-producer I worked with a view towards the filmic aesthetic end product, negotiating its multilingual stance against the academy's traditional English-language expectations. In my role as interviewer and researcher I negotiated in-situ, and later reflected on the embodied and ethical implications of the multilingual interview encounter as it happened.

The film: Speaking your language

Speaking your language (2014) is a short, 11 minute-long, interview-based documentary film. It is a reflective documentary piece that explores 'the richness of our languages, our personal connections to the languages we speak and the human connections we make through language' (from the email invitation sent to potential participants/interviewees). The film visually represents people's personal connections to their languages, through interviewees' multilingual songs, spoken welcomes and their reflections on notions of home as well as the sensory quality in the hearing of languages. Interviewees for *Speaking your language* consisted of twenty multilingual staff and students (undergraduate and postgraduate) across all disciplines at the University of Glasgow. Film-interviews were conducted in English, with participant responses partly recorded in English as well as in their respective spoken languages. The film is available for viewing at <http://researching-multilingually-at-borders.com>.

The film production served a twofold objective. It was produced as an outward-facing promotional video with English as the default language of public engagement in a UK university setting. It was also the predominant language of communication during interview, which can also be ascribed to the interviewer's linguistic limitations, as a bilingual German-English speaker. However, the film aimed to celebrate multilingualism and thus rupture an English-only discourse in the university environment. This entailed a commitment to work from within a multilingual stance during all phases of production,

despite the interviewer's linguistic limitations. These partly conflicting aims - to produce a multilingual film against the background of monolingual expectations - are however not mutually exclusive. Canagarajah (2013) reminds us in his concept of translingual practice to acknowledge hybrid, multilingual practices during *processes* of production. Although our film, in its final aesthetic, partly adheres to the monolingual conventions of public engagement products, its making process was strongly marked by negotiation practices that drew on diverse (e.g. non-verbal) semiotic codes.

Theoretical frame

The *Speaking your language* film production is set against the reality of the overall dominance of the English language across the globe and the 'English-only' language expectations of many academic institutions. It is also embedded in ensuing critical discourses of such 'English language hegemony' (Tsuda, 2010; Macedo, Dendorinos, Goumari, 2003; Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994) and 'linguistic imperialism' (Phillipson, 1992; 2003; 2009). Most importantly, the film production connects to those conceptual and pedagogical developments in the area of intercultural communication and language studies which emphasise alternative, critical multilingual pedagogies (e.g. Canagarajah 1999, 2013; Phipps, 2013). Tsuda (2010) reminds us in this context that a person's linguistic rights should be considered in all forms of communication:

Language, especially the mother tongue, is not merely an instrument, but it is a source of human pride and dignity. Therefore, language rights should be established as an essential part of the right to be oneself. Everyone is entitled to the right to use the language(s) s/he chooses to speak and this right should be honoured in all forms of communication. (Tsuda, 2010, p. 261)

Considering people's spoken languages as sources of their human pride and dignity was a significant aspect of the *Speaking your language* film production. It had set out to celebrate people's personal connection to their languages. The commitment to produce a film that worked from a multilingual stance, then had to involve careful reflection on how people's right to use their languages during film interviews were respected methodologically and artistically.

How did I, as the interviewer for the film, decide to honour people's languages, not just as an instrument of communication during interview, but as the source of their human pride and dignity? Pavlenko & Blackledge (2004) suggest that the construction of an authentic multilingual voice, as well as the facilitation of a multilingual interview space (I would add), is a challenge faced by many multilingual writers and researchers wishing to develop multilingual methodologies in the academy:

The challenge therefore is this: although we cannot speak outside discourses and institutions, we should not conform to them wholesale. We have to negotiate a position in the interstices of discourses and institutions to find our own niche that represents our values and interests favourably. This is how we construct a voice for ourselves. (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004, p. 268)

The solution, so the authors propose, does not lie in the mere rejection of the English language as the dominant language of academic discourse. The challenge is to carve out an in-between position which can function within institutional language expectations at the same time as rupturing them through a multilingually conceived work practice. Canagarajah (2013) suggests that such in-between position does not only require a focus on the 'multilingual value' of final products (text-based or digital) but a close attention to the hybrid practices manifested during the making process of such products. The author describes the diverse, verbal and non-verbal meaning-making practices that can take place as

'translingual practice' (Canagarajah, 2013). Here, languages are not conceived as closed systems that function independently of environmental and contextual factors. Instead, communication - be it in one or multiple languages - is already always considered a highly embodied affair that draws on more than 'just' language.

Communication involves diverse semiotic resources; language is only one semiotic resource among many, such as symbols, icons, and images. (...)Semiotic resources are embedded in a social and physical environment, aligning with contextual features such as participants, objects, the human body, and the setting for meaning. (Canagarajah 2013, p. 7)

The pedagogical and aesthetic orientation underlying the film production can then be described as translingual. It acknowledges that 'successful' communicative and aesthetic practices (e.g. interviewing, editing) are marked by multimodal forms of engagement that are embedded in affective and somatic dimensions. In the particular context of our film interview this led for example to reflections around the specific affective and somatic effects of my (the interviewer-researcher's) 'linguistic incompetence' (Phipps, 2013). My embodied experience of being linguistically out of control during interview revealed the ethical dimensions underpinning translingual work practices. These prioritise relationship-based aims over notions of 'perfected' verbal exchange. Phipps (2013) explains how being turned into the position of a non-speaker of a language during research encounters, can open these important reflexive dimensions.

This 'fabulous' dimension of engaging in research, in multilingual fields, where I did not possess the languages, means I have found myself open to important ethical dimensions and have experienced research from a position of considerable humility, lack, limitation, wound and partiality – the

very qualities which Butler determines as necessary for an account to be received and for ethical social relations to form. (Phipps 2013, 8)

With reference to Judith Butler's book 'Giving an account of oneself', Phipps (2013) describes the experience of linguistic lack and incompetence (on the side of the 'powerful' researcher) as the very precondition for acts of (re-)making more equitable social relationships during research encounters.

Critical educators and scholars in the field of intercultural language education (e.g. Guilherme & Phipps 2004; Guilherme 2006; Phipps 2014; Levine & Phipps 2012) have long advocated for intercultural language pedagogies and research practices that can work from within the learners'/research-participants' complex and often contested lived experiences and material conditions. In their ecological view of language learning, Phipps & Levine (2012) remind us for example to read notions of (language) competency not solely as open-ended potentiality, located within the individual and dependent on best efforts and harder work. Instead, they ask us to consider how education and research environments, and the wider societal structures that hold these in place, enable and nurture, or equally often, disable the individual's disposition to 'flourish' through the social practices at one's disposal. In a similar vein, Canagarajah (1999) suggests a 'reflexive resistance paradigm' (p. 35) which works from the multiplicity of people's' social practices and material conditions. 'Communication transcends words and involves diverse semiotic resources and ecological affordances' (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 6). By placing people's diverse translingual communication practices at the centre of pedagogical considerations, the larger ideological implications of monolingual expectations can be questioned and ideally be ruptured (and replaced).

Methodological considerations

Translingual practice is thus best understood as an *orientation* rather than a fixed concept (Canagarajah, 2013) that can produce fully universal methodological guidelines. Accordingly, Holmes, Fay, Andrews & Attia (2013) remind us of the significance of the individual researcher's efforts to clearly map the multilingual, or as Canagarajah (2013) would say 'translingual', possibilities of their respective fields:

Once an initial awareness of possibility has been raised, researchers, in the absence of a fully-articulated guide, must begin to navigate and map the particularities and possibilities of their study for themselves. Third, having taken stock of the possibilities in this manner, researchers should then be in a good position to make informed choices about: (i) research design – planning, designing, implementing, monitoring and fine-tuning (e.g. responding to unexpected contingencies in) their research and its multilingual dimensions; and (ii) representation – the production of research texts (e.g. theses, articles) which are also shaped by purposeful decisions regarding multilingual possibilities. (Holmes, Fay, Andrews, Attia, 2013, p. 297)

The wish to produce a film that celebrated people's spoken languages might have been proof of my 'initial awareness of possibility' for multilingual, even translingual research. But how did I map the particularities of a film production? And more importantly, how did I respond to the unexpected contingencies that emerged from the film production's multilingual dimension?

My first step in mapping my researcher praxis in relation to the making of *Speaking your language*, is through the lens of what cultural theorist and video artist Mieke Bal has first termed a 'migratory aesthetic' (Bal 2007a, p. 26). 'Migratory aesthetic is a non-concept, a ground for experimentation that

opens up possible relations with the 'migratory', rather than pinpointing such relations' (Bal 2007a, p. 23). Bal describes migratory aesthetic not as a concept, that is, an abstraction or generalization from the experience of migration, but rather as a space of experimentation in itself; one where an aesthetic is conceived and shaped through the various manifestations of contemporary, migratory experiences (Bal, 2007a, 2007b). The author's concept of migratory aesthetic compliments a translingual orientation because it frames research encounters through a wider 'aesthetic' rather than just 'linguistic' lens. Not unlike Canagarajah's (2013) translingual practice, migratory aesthetic asserts modes of relationship-building, experimentation and process over the fetishisation of (linguistically, culturally) hybrid end products.

Within the experimental space of migratory aesthetics, the distinction between the act of making an aesthetic 'as form' and the experience of migration 'as content' collapses. A translingual orientation does not consider languages as closed systems but embedded and shaped by environmental and contextual factors. Migratory aesthetic is equally not considered a self-standing aesthetic either. The interview and overall film aesthetic was shaped by the *content* of the interview. Interviewees' reflections and language performances during the interview did not only have an effect on how the interview was conducted in-situ. It also influenced how the interview footage was aesthetically treated afterwards. Dasgupta (2007) also describes the reverse movement:

The materiality of the art work always intervenes in the 'theme' it is supposed to convey. This materiality of the art work becomes one of the resources through which the cognitive and aesthetic experience of encountering a theme, such as migration, is enriched. (Dasgupta, 2007, p. 92).

The 'materiality of the art work' during the film production phases might be defined as the various modes of aesthetic, multimodal engagement during a film production. This involves modes of encounters with participant during the process of the film interview, as well as the structuring and representing of images and comments in the editing phase. Working from a migratory aesthetic and translingual orientation thus meant to be open to people's language practices as manifestations of their migratory experiences. It also required me, in my various roles as producer and interviewer, to reflect and negotiate: how did the 'materiality of the art work' itself, in this case the making of a film, intervened and shaped the cognitive and aesthetic experience of encountering the theme of the film – 'celebrating people's personal connection to their languages'.

In a further step to map the film production in the context of migratory aesthetic, I also investigate a practical example – Bal's & Entekhabi's film *Lost in Space* (2005). It is a film that presents statements on the 'triple notion on home, security and borders' (Bal, 2007b, p. 111) by people who have themselves been geographically and linguistically displaced. Bal's practice example illustrates how the process of filmmaking can be shaped by people's translingual negotiation practices. Bal's filmmaking example sets up my subsequent analysis of *Speaking your language* which equally worked from within the overlap of embodied, ethical and aesthetic negotiation strategies.

Making 'Lost in Space'

Bal's experience of linguistic incompetence when interviewing Daryush, a 32-year old Greek and Farsi speaker who had been a refugee for half his life, becomes an ethical and aesthetic key moment: 'The world as we knew it, art as we knew it, the limits and concepts and distinctions by which we lived, were all transformed by the brief sensation of losing clarity' (Bal, 2007b, p. 28). The transformation of an expected (interview) discourse 'as we knew it' was triggered by the loss of a common language between interviewer and interviewee and their inability to communicate instantly. After being invited to give his

statement in Farsi, Daryush refuses to instantly translate his act of self-expression: 'I asked him what he had said but he only smiled and did not tell me' (ibid). This moment of 'losing clarity' and being linguistically incompetent, seemingly impeded instant connection and easy, linguistic flow. At the same time, however, it allowed Daryush's language to become a source of dignity (Tsuda, 2010). Because of Daryush's refusal for instant linguistic transfer, translation had to happen after Bal interviewed him. This asserted the value of his language expression over the need for the researcher's instant linguistic clarification. It turned out what Daryush most missed about home was speaking his language (Bal, 2007b, p. 28). His insistence on his linguistic right to shape the rhythm, sound and flow of his interview exposed the 'inequality built into the predominance of English as the lingua franca of the globe' (Bal, 2007b, p. 112). His untranslated Farsi comment ruptured the usually expected, English-only interview aesthetic. In other words, Daryush's migratory experience manifested in his Farsi language 'outburst', intervened with the filmmaking process and its associated language expectations. It also had to, by the nature of the filmmaking procedure, result in an artistic decision. 'What makes an aesthetic is the sentient encounter with subjects involved' (Bal, 2007a, p. 26). Bal, in her role as filmmaker, allows this moment of losing clarity to shape her ethical and aesthetic decisions. Although Bal cannot linguistically decode Daryush's words, she draws on a diversity of semiotic code. She is able to tell from his body language and facial expressions that he speaks about something deeply meaningful to him. Bal cannot respond in Farsi but acts 'translingually' on her impulse in the situation. She negotiates the conversation in an embodied way, takes Daryush' hand, and he hugs her, with tears in his eyes: 'This moment of mutual non-understanding was the most communicative moment of the encounter' (Bal, 2007b, p. 113). The experience of losing clarity led to a moment of non-verbal, embodied encounter. Unable to cloak the sharp edges of their intercultural exchange in a lingua franca, the breakdown of communication led to an act of making 'contested community' between interviewer and interviewee (Ahmed, 2000, p. 94).

The lack of common identity becomes reinscribed as the pre-condition of an act of making: How can we make a space that is supportive? How can we become friends? The process of estrangement is the condition for the emergence of a contested community, a community which "makes place" in the act of reaching out to the out-of-placeness of other migrant bodies. (Ahmed, 2000, p. 94)

Ahmed describes this transformation from a loss of human connection (e.g. through the loss of language) to a conscious act of re-establishing such connection (e.g. non-verbally), as a form of community-making that is 'contested'. It never fully resolves its tentative state. The community space that Ahmed describes is fragile and can't be presupposed. It has to be constantly re-built and re-conceptualised in the light of new relationships and modes of engagement. 'Difference is the norm on which communicative success is built' (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 17). The author reminds us that we can only learn about how communication is negotiated everyday through such focus on difference and the non-shared. Contested community space, in the same vein as Bal's (2007a, 2007b) migratory aesthetic, can thus be considered an experimental ground. Here, community aesthetic is shaped by people's manifested migratory experiences as well as a mutual desire for 'sentient encounters' across diverse communication practices (Bal 2007a, p. 26).

Valuing experiences of linguistic incompetence in research and filmmaking as potential moments for sentient encounter, highlights the significant role of translingual modes of engagement in multilingual encounters. Such a shift, which considers the act of losing clarity as key artistic, interpersonal and ethical moments during the film production, hence focuses attention on the here and now of encounters. As a result of the interviewer's linguistic incompetence, Bal is led to *listen* in a multimodal way - and beyond linguistic, even auditory perception.

To think of hearing as touch is to consider that being open to hearing might not be a matter of listening to the other's voice: what moves (between) subjects, and hence what fails to move, might precisely be that which cannot be presented in the register of speech. (Ahmed, 2000, p. 156)

Daryush, who asserts his right to construct his voice during the interview situation, moves Bal into a stance of hearing-as-touch, because she cannot interact linguistically. *Lost in Space* is thus aesthetically shaped by the filmmaker's and interviewee's translingual negotiation strategies which emerged from their hearing-as-touch encounter.

The film tears apart the different manifestations of language. First, in an extensive credit sequence, all speakers are shown saying what they say in the film. But only their mouths and hands speak; no voice is heard, only street noise. When the film proper begins, we hear the voices and see, in yet a different manifestation of speech, the translated utterances in screen-filling script. (<http://www.miekebal.org/artworks/films/lost-in-space/>)

The editing of the film, by tearing away the expected, linear manifestations of language, reflects the migratory aesthetic at the heart of *Lost in Space*. The sequencing of the film denies instant auditory decodification to the audience. The moment of losing clarity became the key aesthetic moment of the production.

I drew on the conceptual notions of 'migratory aesthetic' (Bal, 2007a, 2007b) and 'hearing as touch' (Ahmed, 2000) and exemplified these through Bal's (2005) making of *Lost in Space*. I illustrated how migratory aesthetic can develop in filmmaking practice through experiences of linguistic incompetence. These can transform the multilingual interview situation into 'hearing-as touch'-encounters, in which translingual communication and sensory perception come to the fore. I now turn to the process of making *Speaking your language* to expand my analysis. Building on Bal's work, I give an example of 'hearing-as-touch' as a form of bodily-felt translingual practice that shaped the film's migratory aesthetic.

Making 'Speaking your language'

The film interviews that formed the basis for the film *Speaking your language* took place in Glasgow, Scotland, in April 2014. The film was produced for the launch of the UK-based research project *Researching Multilingually at the Borders of Language, the Body, Law and the State (RM Borders)*, in May 2014. The RM Borders' project works across five research sites located in the academic fields of Language & Arts Education, Psychology, Law, and Anthropology. It aims to research interpretation, translation and multilingual practices in contexts where language use is marked by different kinds of institutional, psychological and political pressures. The film production and its ensuing academic reflections are embedded within the broader aims of the research project. It especially focuses on the role of arts-based work practices in multilingual research contexts.ⁱ

In the following section, I focus on two reflective points that emerged during the making of *Speaking your language*: my experience of linguistic incompetence during multilingual interviews, which manifested as a bodily sensation of discomfort *and* the artistic decisions that ensued. Thinking from

these two concrete reflective points allows a view on a multilingual research praxis through the film production's embodied dimensions.

First Reflective Point: Bodily discomfort during film interview

Second day of filming. The School of Education's drama lab. We have set up a studio for interviews and are filming since 9 am non-stop without lunch break. Interviewees' languages include: Swahili, Gaelic, French, Romanian, Hungarian, Arabic, Italian, Greek, Finnish, Ukrainian, Russian, Mandarin, Lithuanian, Polish I have adapted my interview technique from yesterday; my question had been too narrow, too specific. It was difficult for interviewees to reply to my question 'What does your language mean to you?'. It was a challenge to 'abstract' from their own language and reflect on aspects of personal experience and meaning through a foreign language (English)'.

In this excerpt from my fieldnotes, I describe how my interview questions were adapted to acknowledge the embodied dimension of the multilingual interview situation. The question I posed on the first day (e.g. What does your language mean to you?) was too focused on abstracted linguistic expression. Such 'intellectualised' approach did not acknowledge the affective and embodied dimension of people's language practices. The expression of affinity (or equally rejection) of one's language is a highly embodied and performative affair. My question could thus only take on meaning through participants' language performances' rather than their abstracted analysis only.

My co-producer and I decided the best way to capture this performative dimension of people's relationship to their language was to initiate conversations *in* people's languages, and in a way that was more personal and immediate. Instead of starting with an abstract question (What does your language mean to you?), I now asked interviewees more concrete questions. These connected to people's memories and material experiences. I asked what 'home' might mean to them, what 'home' feels like in terms of tastes and smells and how interviewees attempt to 'make home' in Scotland.

Afonso, who teaches Portuguese at the university and who I cited in the opening for this article, explained how language use is deeply interwoven in affective and somatic dimensions. He described the sensory quality of Portuguese which 'tastes earthy and melancholic' and emphasised the performative dimension of language use (e.g. during Scottish 'Burns Night'). Afonso's interview excerpt is a good example of how my adapted interview question allowed for a more translingual orientation of the interview.

Afonso: *I think, I tell this to my students as a joke, but I think words have a flavour, they have a taste and there are certain words when you say it in English, that bring memories and a sensation and Portuguese as well (...) the same when we read for Burn's night, we do the address of the Haggis, so I'm trying to do my best Scots, you know, all flawed, but there's a different flavour to that, you feel somebody, you feel something else when you're speaking those words, an emotional connection.*

Interviewer: *That's interesting you described the taste of the language. How does Portuguese taste like when you had to describe it as a taste?*

Afonso: *Earthy. Very earthy. Very down-to-earth. And very melancholic, that's how it tastes (...)*

Karolina, an undergraduate student with a distinct Glasgow accent when speaking English, also touched on these embodied dimensions of her relationship with her mother tongue Romanian:

Karolina: *This is the language in which I learned to read, the language in which I was told I love you for the first time, the language in which I talk to myself. All these little things, they just define who I am and when I think about myself and what I want to do and what I am, I always think about Rumania and the Rumanian language. Evidently, it's just me, it's who I am.*

Karolina does not think of the Romanian language as a separate, mentalist system that exists outside her body. Instead it is deeply interlinked with affectionate memories and significant life experiences. Being able to speak Romanian is an inseparable part of her identity in the world.

Joyce, a Pare and Swahili speaker who just finished her PhD in Glasgow also spoke about this embodied dimension of language use. She explains how being able to talk in Swahili in Scotland, makes her 'feel at home':

***Joyce:** There are those Swahili people, Tanzanians I didn't know before but when I came to Glasgow I met them. And sometimes we call and we speak that Swahili. The moment we speak we just talk the real Swahili. It feels home. It feels nice. It feels right (giggles and brings her hands together). I also met a Glasgow person who has lived in Tanzania, so he speaks some of the Swahili words. So when we chat, it's very nice when you say 'Habari', 'Hu jambo'.*

Joyce underlines her experiences of feeling at home when being talked to in Swahili in Glasgow (even if just greeted with a few words) with a distinctly elegant hand gesture. She smiles, brings the back of her two hands together in front of her body and curls her fingers into her palms whilst saying 'it feels home, it feels nice, it feels right' (at 4:19 min. into the film).

Afonso's second interview extract also illustrates the non-verbal dimension of the interview:

Interviewer: Could you tell me about the coast in Portuguese? Just the same experience [you just described in English], standing on the coast and looking out and connecting with the sailors who went out. Could you tell me the same in Portuguese?

Afonso: Oh, in Portuguese?

Interviewer: Yes, so we can hear the beauty of ...

Afonso: Oh the sound, (giggles) ohh that's nice, I'll do my best Portuguese accent then.

In the interview's unedited video footage, Afonso leans forward and repositions on his chair before starting to speak in Portuguese –as if getting ready for a significant performance, and doing so in his 'best' accent.

As Afonso's, Karolina's and Joyce's examples show, this 'new', translingually-oriented interview situation, invited a performative unfolding of meaning - *through* interviewee's sensory reflections *on* their language, the speaking *of* their language, and the non-verbal expressions that accompanied the communication. 'This perception that language and identity are enmeshed, underlines the power of the vernacular, and asserts its embodied and potentially subversive qualities' (Nicholson, 2007, p. 167). The embodied quality of people's spoken languages manifested during this second interview day in a translingual way - through people's verbal as well as non-verbal expression. Interviewees expressed the relationship to their languages sometimes in English, in their chosen language, and also non-verbally. Although still located within the dominant discourse of our mostly English-based interview, the interview situation however became a space where people's languages (and non-verbal expressions) could 'hurtle, fly and sing' (June, 1985, p. 30 quoted in hooks, 1994, p. 173). Asserting these translingual dimensions - e.g. the embodied power of people's spoken languages (Nicholson, 2011) and its subversive qualities (June, 1985) - has a clear political dimension: "If we lived in a democratic state our language would have to hurtle, fly, curse, and sing; (...) (June, 1985, p. 30 quoted in hooks, 1994, p. 173). Interviewees sang beautifully in Gaelic (at 7: 48 min. into the film) and Maori (at 1:35 min. into the film) and languages 'hurtled' in a way that had a physical, discomforting effect on me.

When initially exposed to those language rhythms out of my already limited linguistic comfort zone, my body literally stiffened. As a bilingual German-English speaker and trained foreign language

teacher, I value language learning as a deeply enriching, human activity. I know the value of exposing oneself to new language sounds and am normally not afraid of facing my own linguistic vulnerabilities when trying to learn new words. In the face of this interview situation, however, my values and knowledge did not seem to easily translate into a form of bodily comfort when sitting and listening to this vast array of (for me) unfamiliar sounds. As the interviewer and researcher in the room, I felt I had lost control. I could not interview people in their own language. I was not able to 'usefully' steer the conversational flows. I couldn't connect. In my role as interviewer, a role normally imbued with power over the conversational, semantic flows of the interview situation, I had lost power. Unable to fully decode the unfamiliar words and songs that 'hurtled' towards me, although they sometimes only constituted a repetition of things that were already said in English, I was rigid in my seat and feeling physically uncomfortable at not being able to linguistically connect. My experience of linguistic incompetence was mirrored in my feeling of bodily discomfort; it produced the physical manifestation of a rigid body posture. Hearing these new language sounds had become a form of touch that I was able to internally locate in my body. My tummy felt queasy, my body felt awkward, I uncomfortably sat in my seat, smiling (probably awkwardly) at interviewees. What linguistically 'failed to move' (Ahmed, 2000) between interviewer and interviewee manifested instead non-verbally, in a bodily sensation. My discomfort, however, was not the endpoint of communication. It required my conscious decision to accept being partly linguistically out of control of the interview situation. And it required the decision to listen as a conscious, aesthetic act – despite my bodily discomfort.

My decision to derive meaning from the interviewees' multilingual language performances rather than from a form of abstract, verbal reflection *about* their languages in English, exposed the embodied power of people's spoken languages and their subversive quality in unexpected ways. This new mode of encounter during interview was not only linguistically but physically challenging in a way that reconnects to Ahmed's (2000) notion of 'hearing as touch'. The physically manifested experience of linguistic

incompetence points towards the ways in which hearing new words and language rhythms can touch a person to a degree that might be experienced physically, in a form of bodily sensation (e.g. discomfort). This forced me to face my (linguistic) insufficiencies and make a conscious decision to listen as an act of valuing people's spoken languages as 'sources of pride and dignity' (Tsuda, 2010, p. 261). This moment of linguistic incompetence led to self-reflection and the need for concrete action. How was I to act in the face of my own linguistic insufficiencies? What ethical and even artistic decisions will ensue from my experience of losing clarity?

Not unlike Phipps (2013), Ridout (2009) and Nicholson (2011) attribute to those moments of messiness a potential for personal learning and even for the generation of a personal ethics:

We learn most from moments of messiness. (Nicholson, 2011, p. 161)

It is in the situation of doubt, in the moment of choice, when you ask yourself "How shall I act?" that you are opening up the space of ethics.

(Ridout, 2009, p. 12)

Expanding on the ethical and aesthetic potential of such messy moments, Nicholson (2009) draws on Bhabha who describes the facing of one's vulnerabilities as a political act. Facing one's insufficiencies – in my case my obvious linguistic ones – can then lead to concrete acts, efforts and negotiations to connect as human beings despite, and because of difference:

Facing the insufficiencies of the self in ways that create openness to others is, for Bhabha, a political act that relies on a combination of imagination, narrative and performativity. Without 'the dream of the world made whole', it becomes possible to break the complacency he associates with

Nussbaum's grander portrait of a common humanity and consider the political significance of the everyday and vernacular. Because this position is not based on projecting the humanist principle that there is a single, common humanity – and nor would we want everyone to be 'just like us' - that we have to face the delightful, painful and sometimes difficult negotiation of values and everyday practices that we do not share".

(Nicholson, 2011, p. 158)

Rather than assuming a humanist principle and values common to all, which are thought to naturally allow for instant connection, Nicholson suggests that openness to one another is only achieved through an act of negotiating not commonly shared values and everyday practices. Phipps (2013) and Canagarajah (1999, 2013) equally assert that we can only learn about 'successful' communication through a focus on how people negotiate the non-shared and deal with the power-dynamics unveiled in the process. These complex acts of negotiating our values, discomforts and loss of (linguistic) power then requires imaginative acts (Appia, 2006) as well as narrative and improvisational skills. More than everything however, it involves an openness to face one's (linguistic, ethical) insufficiencies and learn from moments of messiness (Nicholson, 2011).

My experience of linguistic incompetence was thus a necessary pre-condition for a stance of working towards a more democratic interview situation, in which interviewees multiple languages were valued as sources of pride and dignity. Working towards a more equitable, multilingual dimension then involved specific acts of negotiation and decision-making. Concrete questions that arose were for example: How can the power of people's spoken language be valued in the context of a mostly English-based interview? How can the interviewer's bodily discomfort and the feeling of being out of control

(and losing power) be dealt with? And how can these messy moments benefit the continuation of a film production that seeks to celebrate multilingualism?

Next, in my second reflective point, I analyse this last question: How can these (ethically and linguistically) messy moments benefit the continuation of the film production? I will analyse in particular the effects of a hearing-as-touch habitus on the artistic decisions during the editing phase of the film.

Second reflective point: Artistic decisions

In an effort to re-create the experience of being-touched by unfamiliar language sounds in the editing process, interviewees' spoken languages had to be re-conceptualised as a mode of artistic expression - beyond the level of sole linguistic transfer. In accordance with Bal's (2007a, 2007b) migratory aesthetic, the interview experience and 'texture' of the film mutually shaped the final output. Within the experimental space of migratory aesthetic, artistic decisions were also driven by underlying ethical considerations. What ethical and artistic decision then concretely ensued from facing my bodily discomfort and the linguistic insufficiencies underlying it?

Firstly, I made a practical and an ethical decision. I had to consciously relax my body and accept my linguistic vulnerability. I still wanted to connect with people and value their multilingual self-expression, even if my linguistic insufficiency was momentarily 'in the way'. Rather than feeling threatened by my linguistic loss, I decided to reconsider the interview situation, not as an act of straight linguistic transfer and translation, but as a form of 'imaginative engagement that you get when you read a novel or watch a movie or attend to a work of art that speaks from some place other than your own' (Appia, 2006, p. 85). In other words, I consciously adapted my listening habit to pay attention to the aesthetic, embodied - and thus translingual aspects - of people's language performance. I focussed on the non-verbal aspects of our communication beyond linguistic meaning, namely language rhythm, melodies, ways of intonating and speakers' facial expressions. My body started to relax and I was able to open myself again

to the here and now of the interview encounter. In the interview situation that 'what (linguistically) failed to move' (Ahmed, 2000) had manifested as a physical, bodily sensation of discomfort. This however also led to the concrete decision to 'hear' beyond linguistic expression and focus on the non-verbal aspects which *did* move in the conversation. The migratory aesthetic of the interview situation was thus shaped by an experience of incompetence. It resulted in efforts to negotiate the unshared in a way that valued participants' multilingual self-expression.

When sitting in on the edit with my co-producer after the interviews, we encountered a similar decisive moment for the film's migratory aesthetic. We had just finished a first draft of the edit. Each interview scene opened either in English or with a non-English song, and closed with the interviewee repeating what was just said in English, in their respective language. We 'intuitively' placed the beautiful (non-English) Gaelic and Maori songs as opening scenes (at 1:55 min. in the final film). Most participants however hadn't sung in their languages but 'just' spoken. These non-English spoken sequences hadn't been chosen by us as opening scenes. We had simply treated them as 'translated versions' of the English interview sequence in the edit. Interestingly, when watching this first draft, The sequencing didn't quite work; the edit failed to move us. The scenes that *opened* with people's songs (sung in their chosen language) drew us in, touched us beyond our inability to linguistically decode them. Those scenes that opened in spoken English and *ended* with people speaking in their chosen languages, as a mere translation of their English statement, left us cold. Although logically and linearly arranged according to traditional language expectations – the English version first and the non-English version second, the sequencing of people's multilingual expressions at the end felt more like an aesthetic afterthought. Positioning their language expression at the end of the scene felt more akin to a form of editing as multilingual tokenism. In this first draft, we had not dared to edit against the grain of dominant, linguistic expectations. When discussing the edit, we realised that we had not considered interviewees' non-English, multilingual speech with the same imaginative engagement (Appia, 2006) as we had done

with people's multilingual songs. Interviewees' musical offerings were chosen to open scenes because they seemed to more obviously inhabit a place of embodied narrative that could touch people beyond mere linguistic codes. The artfulness and embodied power of song communicated more obviously something universal from 'some place other than your own' (Appia, 2006, p. 85). Multilingual speech in itself was not imbued (by we editors) with the same aesthetic and embodied power to move an audience beyond the register of language.

This process of reflection during editing reveals how migratory aesthetic took shape from within conflicting ethical and artistic dimensions. The key moment for the production was the shift of focus from a sole view on aspects of linguistic transfer onto the 'artful' aspects of multilingual speech. Here, people's vernacular was equally imbued with the embodied power to carry communication (and ultimately human connection) beyond the realms of speech. Thus, the final edit of the film artistically expresses our decision to acknowledge the embodied power of people's spoken languages in the face of our linguistic incompetence. Interview scenes, in the final edit, open with non-English speech in the same way as they open with non-English song.

Additionally, the Maori (at 1:36 min) or Gaelic (at 8:04 min.) songs for example do not abruptly stop and then start again with the spoken section. Song and speech overlap for a few seconds (e.g. at 1:53 min.). They are 'multimodally' interwoven on screen and then transition into a mono-modal form afterwards. This overlap edit between song and speech in the final film equally emerged out of our shift of focus on the 'artful' aspects of communication. By presenting song and speech simultaneously, even if just momentarily, their equal status - as powerful embodied expressions which can touch listeners beyond linguistic decodification - is mirrored aesthetically.

In the overall edit of the film, this embodied power of translingual practices is also expressed in the very first opening sequence (0:00-1:30 min.). Here, interviewees say 'Welcome to Glasgow' in their spoken languages, thus asserting their linguistic presence in the city of Glasgow and rupturing any

'purely' monolingual expectations with regards to our filmic output instantly. This first multilingual 'Welcome' sequence was also created for use by the Scottish Refugee Council's 'I Welcome Refugees' campaign as part of Refugee Festival 2014. Seen in this particular campaigning context, interviewees' spoken, multilingual welcomes (to potential refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland) might be seen as acts of artful, linguistic resistance and 'digital' community-building on screen, and in the face of monolingual set-ups which do not acknowledge the significance of people's (e.g. refugees') language practices as sources of dignity and human pride. The final edit of our film thus puts languages' embodied aesthetics - its' sounds, rhythms and melodies – and inherent ethical dimensions (as sources of dignity) before the (monolingual) audience's need for instant linguistic clarification.

In conclusion from these two reflective points, I contend that the final film version of *Speaking your language* is one example of how migratory aesthetic can evolve out of interviewing and editing as imaginative acts. Our filmmaking, from production to post-production, was shaped through what Bal calls the 'sentient encounter with subjects involved' (Bal, 2007a, p. 26). This resulted in concrete artistic decisions that impacted the film's aesthetic. At the same time, however, this was not a pure movement from content to form, where people's manifested migratory experiences, through their spoken languages, 'touched' the interviewer and shaped the interview and final aesthetic of the film. The materiality of our documentary film is located within conflicting, language-related objectives. It was produced as a public engagement tool *and* celebration of multilingualism, and both equally intervened in the content it carried. The film's dominant language is still English; as filmmakers we did not reject institutional language expectations wholesale. The film, with English as its main language, was screened to our interviewees and the launch audience. As such, *Speaking your language* functions within academic language expectations and doesn't fully artistically force back the 'linguistic imperialism' (Tsuda, 2010) associated with the global, English language dominance in the academy. At the same time, however, the film *ruptures* these language expectations by carving out a researcher praxis and film

aesthetic that is shaped through translingual encounters and embodied experience. Canagarajah (2013) urges us to look beyond the product-oriented level of multilingual texts and focus on how translingual meaning-making strategies manifest during the making process (p. 11). I consider this article as part of this move from product to process. The film's production phases were marked by a reflexive arts-based research praxis. Here, my co-producer and I worked from within emerging linguistic, ethical and aesthetic questions *towards* a final film. Within the film's 'contested' migratory film aesthetic, there is however no 'pure' multilingual voice emerging. It is a tentative, multilingual voice. It is rooted in the researcher's attempts to map and navigate (ethically and artistically) the concrete possibilities and challenges of a translingually-oriented film production about people's personal connection to their languages.

Conclusion

The right to speak one's language and the fact that 'languages can be a source of human pride and dignity' (Tsuda, 2010) poses significant methodological questions for research context where more than one language is present. This article built on the work of scholars who emphasise the embodied dimensions of language use, e.g. in the concept of 'translingual practice' (Canagarajah 2013), and consider the emerging ethical dimensions of experiencing 'linguistic incompetence' (Phipps, 2013). These scholars call for a focus on the non-shared (languages, values) in research contexts in order to arrive at a more holistic and process-based understanding of how communication functions. I mapped the possibilities and particularities of a translingually-oriented short film project in light of my various, and sometimes conflicting positionings as producer and researcher-interviewer. I have started to theorise the role of arts-based methods, such as filmmaking, in a translingually-oriented research praxis. In our particular context, the art method's outlook was partly promotional and methodological reflections were embedded within sometimes conflicting public-engagement objectives. I used two key

concepts to understand the implications of arts-based methods for a translingually-oriented research praxis in more depth. *Migratory aesthetic* (Bal, 2007a, 2007b) allowed me to think through the multilingual (film) interview aesthetically - as a space where participants' multiple language performances can have an embodied effect on the interviewer, her ethical decisions in the interview situation, and the form of the filmic output. *Hearing-as-touch* (Ahmed, 2000) acted as a framework to understand the embodied dimension of such translingual practice more explicitly. It allowed an insight into how listening during a multilingual film interview might become a form of *imaginative engagement* (Appia, 2006), especially when the interviewer doesn't speak the language of the interview. *Migratory aesthetic* and *hearing-as-touch* academically value the researcher's vulnerable position of (linguistic) incompetence as a key moment on the way to a reflexive, translingual and arts-based research praxis. In a mostly monolingually-oriented UK university environment, researcher vulnerability, especially in relation to the act of mastering multilingual research situations, is often equated with insufficient preparation and loss of professionalism. The article re-claims these moments of powerlessness and messiness on the side of the researcher as a rich source for reflection and resistance against monolingual expectations. This process-orientation did not result in a final product that fully reversed the dominance of English language expectations in the academy. However, by making transparent how translingual practices are acts of imaginative engagement, e.g. when negotiating linguistic incompetence in the interview and editing phase, the academy's monolingual expectations were called into question. Through the act of making a promotional film and reflecting on the process of doing so from within the dominant language expectations at play in the academy, I have negotiated an 'in-between' position. This is the result of inter-sectional negotiations between multiple reflexive stances and artistic work principles and practices. The final film reflects the possibilities of art-making in research contexts underpinned by a translingual orientation and with a view to a migratory aesthetics. Filmmaking is one example of an art-making pedagogy that can enable a translingual orientation in multilingual research

contexts. Beyond the research context however, this translingual overlap of affective, ethical and linguistic dimensions in communication can also be seen as constituting elements of an 'everyday migratory aesthetic' which manifests as part of living in a globalised world. The experience of difference and discomfort during multilingual interactions, and in transnational relations more widely, does not need to be 'solved' or 'overcome' in a quick pedagogical or artistic fix, so we can in more 'undisturbed' multilingual spaces. Instead, migratory aesthetics reminds us that discomforts and differences are core critical and creative catalysts within translingual interactions. These messy moments reveal the power dynamics and ultimately political dimensions underlying our multilingual interactions in society. At the same time however, these messy moments also hold the potential for collective imagination and creation as artful acts of resistance against monolingual paradigms. Such artful resistance can then also be the beginning for acts of translingual community-building, or what Bal (2007a) calls 'sentient (transnational) encounters', which acknowledge people's language and social practices are key sources of dignity and human pride.

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ⁱThe project's research aims are stated in detail on the project website <http://researching-multilingually-at-borders.com>