



## Multilingual issues in qualitative research

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### ABSTRACT

This study is a reflective account of how problem solving was accomplished during the translation of semi-structured interviews from a source language to a target language. Data are drawn from two qualitative research studies in which Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to obtain insights into the lived experience of parents of children with disabilities in India and Turkey. The authors discuss challenges to interpretation that arise when participants and the main researcher speak the same non-English native language and the results of the study are intended for an English-speaking audience. A common theme in both the Turkish and Indian data relates to parents' understanding of their children's symptomology and the prognosis. Implications include the need for both reflective conversation within the research team to address the translation of problematic utterances, and documentation of the translation process in the presentation of research findings.

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There is a growing awareness and interest in developing knowledge that is culturally informed and language sensitive so medical services can be provided worldwide (Smith, Chen, & Liu, 2008). We extend those concerns to the provision of family-centred speech therapy services, particularly with reference to the needs of families in which there is a child with autism. It has been argued that the optimal method for obtaining such knowledge requires the use qualitative inquiry methods, specifically an ethnographic approach, since this line of inquiry allows a deeper understanding and a thick description of authentic human experience in its natural context (Schwandt, 1998). This approach relies on a set of data collection tools, including interviews, participant observations, artefacts and other relevant documentation to grasp a better understanding of people's lived experience. However, when these tools are used in a cross-cultural study, the data collection and data analysis processes become more complicated because of the inherent inseparability of the human experience and the language spoken in a culture (Smith et al., 2008).

Qualitative methodology relies on fidelity at successive stages of data preparation. Prior to the translation process is the transcription process, which itself demands attention to many aspects of fidelity (Poland, 1995). These issues will not be addressed in this paper directly, but we note that many similar concerns are also relevant in the translation stage.

### ***Translation as a tool in qualitative research and clinical practice***

Translation is one of the basic tools used in cross-cultural research, when there is a difference between the native languages of the audience and the collected research data itself. An assumption sometimes held by consumers of research, including clinicians, is that translation is an objective and neutral process, in which the translators are ‘technicians’ in producing texts in different languages (Wong & Poo, 2010; personal communications at professional conferences in 2015 (Kaniamattam, Oxley, & Damico) and 2016 (Kaniamattam, Günhan, Oxley, & Damico)). The picture gets even more complicated when the translation is related to research conducted in a language that is not the language of the ultimate output and requires extra layers and considerations (Kusssmaul & Tikkonen-Condit, 1995). In such a case translating the collected data into the presentation language is fraught with methodological pitfalls related to the handling of colloquial phrases, jargon, idiomatic expressions, word clarity and word meanings (Kaniamattam, Günhan, Oxley & Damico, 2016; Kaniamattam, Oxley & Damico, 2015; Wong & Poo, 2010). Moreover, although instinctively one might assume a ‘verbatim’ or ‘word-for-word’ translation of the data into the presentation language would be a safe path to preserve participant meanings, use of such translation strategy is frequently not adequate to account for linguistic and cultural differences. It cannot always be assumed that a particular concept has the same relevance across cultures (Elderkin-Thompson, Silver, & Waitzkin, 2001). Things get even more complicated when we consider ‘meaning’ to be the product of complex interaction among participants in discourse, their beliefs, their shared understanding of the words they use and much more (Schwandt, 1998) from a social constructivist stance. Thus, when considering translation for research involving perspectives of participants in discourse, interpersonal dimensions of the meaning-making process have implications here, not just the inter- and intra-textual dimensions. By exploring the products and processes of translation used by researcher-translators, we might be able to shed additional light on the challenges of the bracketing one’s preconceptions to allow the participants’ meanings to reveal themselves. The way words and phrases are translated has the potential to offer a window into the unconscious preconceptions of researchers that could influence interpretation.

### ***Decision-making for the translation process***

The handling of the translation process requires attention to several matters, each of which is addressed below: the choice of the translator; the within-language translation of potentially ambiguous words and phrases in terms of technical vs. lay usage; the within-language translation of terms used in different ways by individual disciplines; and the choice of the language to be used for data analysis.

### ***Translator***

The initial consideration is the choice of the translator: Will it be a professional translator who is not the researcher or the researcher who collected the data and who may or may not be an experienced translator? This binary choice is available only

when the researcher speaks the interviewee's language. When the interview is conducted in a language that is not spoken by the researcher a translator or an informant must be present, but this unavoidable physical presence will impact the interpersonal dynamics of the interview (Elderkin-Thompson et al., 2001). A characteristic of data-collecting researcher/translators is that they might share not just the language, but also the same cultural backgrounds with the interviewees; however, this shared background does not guarantee the interviewer and the interviewee share the same ideoculture. Nevertheless, it can be postulated that their shared cultural background is much larger than that shared by the interviewees and the research audience.

### *Translating technical words*

The second issue, which is a within-language matter, concerns the translation of words and phrases that have general and technical denotations and connotations for the lay people and professionals, respectively; for example, a well-known source of confusion comes from the medical usage of the terms *positive* and *negative* used to describe test results. Medical usage implies the presence or absence of whatever was tested. In everyday usage, the phrase 'negative' has the connotation that the result is undesirable. This mismatch has resulted in changes in the way patients are informed of test findings, so that meaning is preserved from the patient's perspective (Haga et al., 2014). Indeed, the choice of words used by professionals 'can shape or reinforce a patient's coping strategies' (Vranceanu, Elbon, Adams, & Ring, 2012, p. 293). Vranceanu et al., reporting on language use within an orthopaedic context, claimed that words have the potential to 'diminish affective, peace of mind, and control' and 'may reinforce (1) inaccurate perceptions of disease severity, (2) negative coping strategies such as pain catastrophizing, avoidance and anxiety, and (3) overall disability'. Their conclusions are potentially relevant to the issue of translation of parents' perspectives on parenting children with autism.

### *Inter-professional language use*

The third issue, also a within-language concern, is that there can be a lack of uniformity in terminology used across the professions whose members work with families of children with autism. Lack of consensus on terminology threatens team work and has implications for quality of care. For example, although speech-language pathologists (SLPs), among others, use the terms communication, language and speech to denote overlapping, but distinct phenomena (e.g. American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 1993), other people use the terms interchangeably in everyday discourse. Miscommunication can arise when people misinterpret SLPs' technical reference to a favourable prognosis for a child's eventual development of 'communication' (i.e. use of augmentative and alternative communication) or 'language' (i.e. the abstract language system), and take it as a favourable prognosis for the development of natural speech (Millar, Light, & Schlosser (2006). The fact that the researcher-translators of the specific projects that provide the data here both have backgrounds in allied health professions with professional perspectives and language usage that are potentially different for those of lay people, including external professional translators, adds yet another complexity level to the aforementioned concern.

### **Language of analysis**

Last is the decision concerning whether to use the original or the translated transcript as the basis for coding data and conducting a thematic analysis. Analysis can proceed more smoothly when the researcher uses the language that best accords with her technical first language. However, being fluent in one's first language does not guarantee possession of a technical vocabulary commensurate with the vocabulary developed while obtaining additional professional training through L2 (Al-Amer, Ramjan, Glew, Darwish, & Salamonson, 2016).

### **Motivation and aim**

Although the complexity of undertaking qualitative research with non-English-speaking informants has become increasingly recognized, few empirical studies exist which explore the influence of translation on the findings of the study (e.g. Al-Amer et al., 2016). The motivation for this study grew out of conversations among the authors concerning how to assure the trustworthiness of not just the transcriptions (Mason, 2012) and also the translation process itself while undertaking a multi-lingual research project (Birbili, 2000). Because translation is inherently an act of interpretation, it is important for successive layers of analysis that researcher-translators acknowledge their own filters that shape the translation process, and document procedures used to account for these filters, along the lines suggested in the literature for thematic analysis (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Rodham, Fox, & Doran, 2015).

The aim of this study is to examine the effects of research procedures conducted in L1 on the English presentation of findings. Through this examination, insights can be obtained into the respective contributions of the translator and the translation itself and their potential impact on data validity in qualitative research with non-English speaker participants.

### **Method and data**

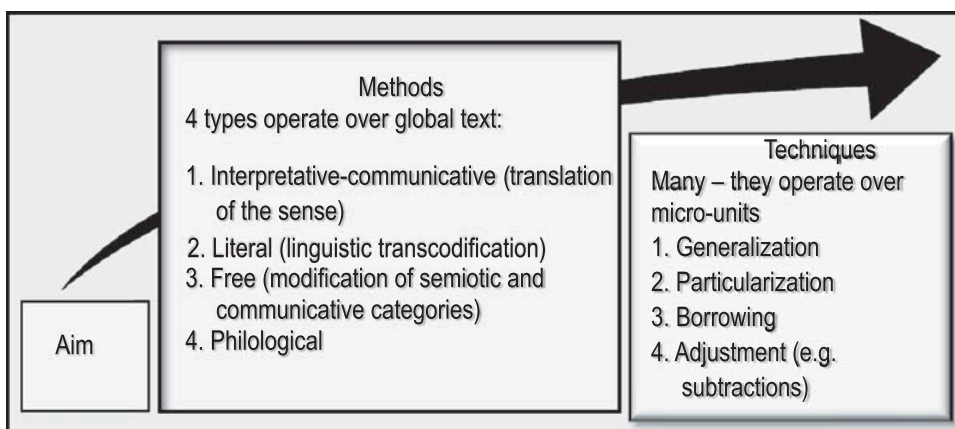
This is a reflection and a methodological review paper. We use two data sources to illustrate methodological issues arising from translation in cross-cultural research. The first source is the field of translation studies, and the second source includes research findings from the authors in Turkey and India. Both data sets came from semi-structured interviews undertaken with parents of children with either autism (Turkey) or disabilities including autism (India) to explore their lived experience of parenting such children. Purposive samples of parents were obtained, with 5 parents from Turkey and 16 parents from Kerala. The participant-parents reflected diverse backgrounds in terms of all socioeconomic indices, including education, work history, languages spoken, ethnicity and religion. The common feature was being the parent of a child diagnosed with a complex communication challenge including autism. The audio-recorded semi-structured interviews were first transcribed within their respective languages (i.e. Turkish and Malayalam) and were subsequently translated into English and analysed using the procedures of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis as outlined in Smith and Osborn (2003) and Smith, Jarman, and Osborn (1999). The

reflections in this paper will be on the translation process itself, and factors that contributed to it.

In the interests of simplicity and goodness of fit with the nature of the data collection procedures used in the projects that provided the basis for this reflective account, we focus mainly on a research design in which the researcher also serves as the translator. We will also describe a second translation method in which a professional translator who is not part of the research contributes a gist-translation. Translation and transcription proceed simultaneously to provide information as quickly as possible to those requiring it. We will identify several potential sources and types of threats to meaning quality in the translated transcripts that serve as the basis for subsequent stages of qualitative analysis. The theme, prognosis, which appeared in both studies, will be used to illustrate how the quality of meaning can be compromised through the translation process. While acknowledging that 'error' itself is socially constructed and open to multiple interpretations (Poland, 1995), we offer a few suggestions for minimizing (i.e. avoiding, detecting and remedying) these threats. In so doing, we hope to contribute the best possible representation and understanding of the experiences of the participants and thereby to assure the validity of qualitative research. For researcher-translators, the translation stage starts only after the video or audio data have been fully transcribed. One of the initial translation-related decisions is to determine which translation method to use. For the present study, we refer to a translation model by Molina and Hurtado Albir (2002), which provides a framework for understanding and explaining the translation decisions we come across in our data set, and a set of recognized solutions.

### **Translation model**

Molina and Hurtado Albir (2002) present a model of translation with four components, comprising the aim, the method, use of strategies and techniques (Figure 1). This model draws on the translation literature from diverse traditions and attempts to resolve some of the conflicting uses of terminology that have arisen overtime. Within this model, the translation exercise is guided by the translator's overall aim, which in turn determines the



**Figure 1.** Strategic use of text, words and context to determine a technique to capture meaning.

choice of a particular method, itself a global choice affecting the whole translation. The four methods identified include the 'interpretative-communicative (translation of the sense), the literal (linguistic transcoding), the free (modification of semiotic and communicative categories) and the philological (academic or critical translation)' (pp. 507–508). No matter which method is used, the act of translating can be seen as a problem-solving process requiring the deployment of strategies, which are 'related to the mechanisms used by translators throughout the whole translation process to find a solution to the problems they find' (p. 507). 'Techniques (...) describe the result and affect smaller sections of the translation' and 'can be used to classify different types of translation solutions' (p. 507). Molina and Hurtado Albir draw a sharp distinction between these strategies, which are process oriented and techniques, which reflect the outcome (results) of strategic decisions.

### ***Our aim and method***

In our studies, the overarching aim was to balance two demands: to present a faithful rendition of the interview data, while simultaneously completing a cultural transfer in the English translation so that meanings were preserved for analysis. According to Molina and Hurtado Albir, the aim of the bible translators, including Nida (1964), was to accomplish just this aim, and they did so by using techniques of adjustment (e.g. additions, subtractions, alterations and footnotes). Nida called for the need to go beyond the mere matching of symbols to presenting 'the equivalence of both symbols and their arrangements. That is to say, we must know the meaning of the entire utterance' (p. 4).

### ***Our strategies and problem solving***

Several factors can influence the problem-solving process, including the individual translator's experience and his/her aptitude for the translation task. In their studies of novice and expert translators, Kussmaul and Tirkkonen-Condit (1995) revealed the complexity and scope of the problem-solving process encountered in the process of translation, and also characteristics that separate successful from unsuccessful translators. They found that successful translators subordinated local decisions to global ones; in short, they were guided by an overall aim. They were also disposed to using their own world knowledge and inferences about the text to guide their problem-solving. By contrast, they observed how less successful translators 'were governed by local decision making. . .proceeding word by word or sentence by sentence . . . (were) linguistically rather than communicatively oriented' (p. 190). They concluded that without the key attribute of linguistic and stylistic talent, neither possession of expert knowledge and bilingualism nor training and professional expertise in translation could alone guarantee translation skill. Thus, there is a profound influence of the translator on qualitative research and clinical processes that demand translation services (Rodham, Fox, & Doran, 2015).

### ***Our techniques***

In our study, part of the problem-solving process was the need to find solutions to translating words and phrases in ways that captured the special significance they had to the parents who used them. Molino and Hurtado Albir (2002) compiled and defined an extensive classification and list of techniques, which reflect the results of the problem-solving decisions. Our examples will illustrate three of these: borrowing, particularization

and amplification. Their definition of borrowing is taking a word or expression straight out of another language, with or without alterations to spelling rules and so forth. They describe particularization as the use of a more precise or concrete term. Amplification includes the introduction of details not formulated in the source text and is equivalent to Nida's footnotes.

### ***The team***

The team comprises four members, a native speaker of Turkish, a native speaker of Malayalam, who, respectively, serve as translator-researchers and two who are researchers who do not speak Turkish or Malayalam. When conducting research with teams of such diverse skills and when there is a language barrier between the audience and the researchers, it is crucial to fully describe the translation process itself, and the details of how translation matters were resolved during the research process (see Birbili, 2000 for a detailed explanation of the need to give greater attention to this issue). We will describe ourselves, the researchers, in the interest of assuring that due attention is given to the matter of trustworthiness of interpretations (Rodham, Fox, & Doran, 2015).

### ***Translator-researchers***

The second author has several roles. She is a practicing language specialist who works with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their families; a professional translator; and a researcher. The third author is an Indian SLP who works with children with autism and their families, and is currently a doctoral student. Both were tasked with translating their respective parent-interview transcripts into English so that the data would be accessible to the first and fourth authors, both of whom are university faculty members and SLPs. A second reason for translation of data was that the researcher-translators obtained much of their professional training in English, and so felt more comfortable with using English for academic discourse.

### ***Non-translators***

The first and fourth authors served as readers of the translations. Because the data were from cultures and languages not their own, their role on the research team was to ask probing questions and at times challenge the translators about word usage. For example, during a discussion, one translator was asked whether a parent had actually used certain technical terms in the interview (e.g. prognosis, hyperactivity), as it appeared from the English words in the transcript. This question led to a much a deeper discussion about the translator's filter as an SLP and the possibility that her professional knowledge was causing her to take the parents' words and translate them using professional instead of lay equivalents. It was through this collaboration that a set of difficult-to-translate terms was identified, along the lines of consultation advocated by Birbili (2000) and Elderkin-Thompson et al. (2011).

### ***To bracket, or not?***

To address the double hermeneutic inherent in Interpretative Analysis (IPA), a technique used in the investigation, Smith argued that instead of attempting to bracket their own views and understandings at the outset of analysis, researchers should coordinate the two

stances of hermeneutics (i.e. one centred on empathy and meaning, and the second on hermeneutics of questioning, of critical engagement) (Smith, 2004 cited by Rodham et al., 2015). These dimensions of IPA methodology appear to be relevant to the task of the translator-researcher, who is challenged to translate interviews in such a way as to remain faithful to the speakers being transcribed, but also to afford readers a means of drawing from the transcripts a sense of meaning that is as close as possible to that which was conveyed in the original interview recordings.

Providing background information about the translator-researchers highlights how personal translation-related experiences affect the way each translator approached translation challenges. The act of translation requires an on-going, active interpretation of the source data and details. The source for translation, whether it is a text or an audio file, for example, will have considerable impact on the final 'feed' for the actual analysis. The data at hand allow us to have a wider perspective regarding the end translation product since one of the translator-researchers is a novice in translation, who requested the support of a professional translator to ensure trustworthiness of the data, whereas the second translator-researcher was a professional translator who relied more on her own experience in that aspect. The following section provides the reflections of the two translator-researchers.

### ***Researcher-translator's reflections: Second author***

Two main areas will be addressed. First, there are comments concerning the task of conducting the semi-structured interviews in Turkish. Next, there is presentation of three issues relevant to the translation process itself.

#### ***Conducting interviews***

I was introduced as a researcher who is getting education abroad. I met all parents in an institutional setting (therapy centre-special education centre). Being an insider-outsider (insider by language and culture; outsider by (foreign) education and identity as researcher), the power relations between the interviewee and myself were complicated and variable (changing from participant to participant). During the interview I was 'the expert'. The interaction was semi-formal. I was addressed in the 'plural you', which indicates respect and distance. Age or gender of the participants did not change this. I was introduced to the parents' group (Note: Only one parent is from a different setting) after I gave a seminar on Floortime therapy (Greenspan, 2009). I had a chance to chit-chat with some parents before I asked to interview them. I was doing participant observation at the site so I was a familiar face for most of the parents.

#### ***The translation process***

Three issues become relevant during the translation process. First, I have been working as a freelance translator for 15+ years, and during this time I have transcribed and translated interviews (mostly from Turkish into English); hence, the process is quite familiar. Second, I was my own commissioner and thus had a clear idea about what I needed to preserve during the translation. Being a student in the USA gave me insight regarding the cultural background of my audience (first and foremost the University of Louisiana at Louisiana faculty and the international community of scholars who may



one day read my dissertation). Third, I was guided by one basic aim, which was to make the translated text as transparent as possible for the target audience while trying to preserve the authenticity of the data. This aim can be accomplished through the procedure referred to as naturalization by Nida (1964, cited in Molina & Hurtado Albir, 2002). To achieve authenticity (and to ensure that the translated nature of the text is visible) while simultaneously taking the risk of sounding alien and risking ease of reading, I kept certain Turkish phrases as is (i.e. an almost verbatim translation) (this would be classified as 'borrowing' Vinay and Darbelnet, 1958 cited in Molina & Hurtado Albir, 2002, p. 499). I also added footnotes, another of Nida's techniques used to serve two main functions of adjustment: 'to correct linguistic and cultural differences... (and) to add additional information about the historical and cultural context of the text in question' (Molina and Hurtado Albir, p. 502). The participants had different backgrounds regarding education and socio-economic status, but I was able to infer these from their word choices and use of language; however, the nature of their background was not very pronounced in the translation. In line with naturalization, I made sure to keep certain tokens closer to the Turkish original rather than using an approximation or equivalence of them. For example, a particular way of using the Arabic borrowed word 'İnşallah' (God willing, hopefully) in Turkish may imply the speaker is of a religious background; it is a very common word used by religious (i.e. Muslims) and secular people in Turkey or Turkish speaking non-Muslims/foreigners; however, when used in particular ways/frequency it may indicate the person is a devout Muslim (Note: This is all part of my ideoculture, though coming from a family of orthopraxis). Another example was the use of the honorific 'hoca' (teacher) when referring to the doctors, because it indicates the status of doctors from the perspectives of the general public and the caretaker.

### ***Researcher-translator's reflections: Third author***

In general, my researcher-translator's knowledge of the language and the culture of the parent participants informed and supported the interview process and the subsequent translation task. The following factors can be considered supportive to these two tasks.

### ***Conducting interviews***

First, I had to address the power imbalance that exists because of the higher status I possess as a rehabilitation specialist. While interacting with all the young parents, I was able to take the role of a friend or a peer female, and by interacting with them in a casual manner I believe I was at least partially successful in overcoming the power imbalance. While interacting with the older parent participants who were closer to my parents' age, I noticed that a power balance was accomplished as a result of a good match between my professional status and their elder status; they treated me as a young adult. My second challenge was to overcome cultural barriers, which exist at the level of community, not just region. My previous experience of working and studying in the local rehabilitation centre helped me to relate well with the everyday experiences they shared (i.e. the socio-cultural understanding of the context in which participants respond).

### *The translation process*

Four factors guided the translation process: (a) my experience of having studied and worked in the centre where I conducted the interviews; (b) my experience of having studied in the USA for four years, and my English language training (i.e. the socio-cultural understanding of the context and language in which the research is presented); (c) my 'intimate knowledge' (Frey, 1979 as cited in Birbili, 2000) of cultural difference behind the participants' actions and decision; and (d) my experience of living in many regions of Kerala. The consequences of these experiences were important.

Because I understand the cultural connotations associated with the words in Malayalam and English, I emphasized those distinctions and hence tried to maintain the meaning of the words spoken in the language other than English by describing the cultural context. Thus, I provided sufficient information, usually through the use of Nida's adjustment technique of supplying footnotes for making the text culturally accessible to the English readers (Nida, 1964).

My experiences of having lived and studied in nine different schools all around Kerala by the time I had completed my 12th standard education helped me to understand the parents' different dialects of Malayalam and the dialect-specific usages of words and phrases. Variations in spoken language between fathers and mothers who participated were prevalent. These variations are based on not only on participants' place of origin, but also their religious orientation, education and social class. The online resource provided by the Language Information Service Project (Central Institute of Indian Languages) provides a comprehensive review of Malayalam from which the following information has been selected. The Malayalam language is primarily spoken in the state of Kerala, but there are 12 distinct dialectal regions within the state. Several dialects of Malayalam have also been influenced by the religious heritage of their speakers (i.e. Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities). Christian dialects have elements from Latin, Greek, Portuguese and English; Muslim dialects have elements of Arabic and Urdu; and Jewish dialects have Hebrew, Syriac and Ladino loanwords. English is frequently used during the conversation. This style of speaking in English and incorporating a lot of English words into Malayalam conversation is a mark of higher status in society and observed in conversation between similarly educated people.

### *Major concerns and challenges*

Reflecting back on the translator's role, I believe my biggest concern was achieving a faithful translation: Am I inadvertently inserting or removing words from the participant's mouth? A particular concern as a researcher-translator was maintaining the meaning of the participants' ideas during the processes of translation and presentation. I often found it difficult to attain the 'conceptual equivalence or comparability of meaning' (Birbili, 2000, p. 2) of parent's language because of the very different views on disability held by the parent participants compared with views held by the general public in the Kerala. For example, the weight and consequences of social stigma associated with having a family member with a disability in Kerala (and elsewhere around the world) cannot always be conveyed in direct translation of the words used to describe the unacceptability of children's behaviours (e.g. those associated with cognitive rigidity, described below). On balance, I believe that addressing these concerns was facilitated by my dual roles as researcher and translator.

## Translation procedures

The interview data sets collected by the two researcher-translators were in Turkish and Malayalam, respectively. They were first transcribed in the respective languages and then the transcription was translated into English by the researcher-translators, only one of whom is also a trained translator. To ensure accuracy of the translation, selected parts of the sections that were directly quoted were back-translated (i.e. translated into Turkish or Malayalam again) by either a professional translator who had not seen the original Turkish text, or a native speaker of Malayalam who was also fluent in English. The resulting text was examined to see if it still yielded the original meaning. Back-translation can be helpful, but as with all methods, it is imperfect (Birbili, 2000). Another technique, amplification, was used to allow readers to follow the translation. Where required, certain words or expressions that are implied in the original language or that are required by English syntax are added in square brackets. When it was not possible to provide ‘verbatim’ translations (for instance, for idioms and culture specific expressions with no English equivalent), explanatory footnotes (i.e. amplification) were provided.

For the Malayalam data, a first-pass verification procedure was also used, in which a professional translator was given access to one audio-recorded interview and asked to produce an independently developed and translated transcript. The purpose was to ensure that the researcher-translator captured truthfully (i.e. the gist of their message) what the parents were saying according to their particular dialect of Malayalam. The type of translation procedure employed here was close to translation that occurs in medical settings, and the sample provided below will illustrate how conveying the gist of a parent’s meaning, no matter how accurately, can compromise the complexity of what the parent is actually conveying. Romanization conventions for written Malayalam text are based on conventions set forth elsewhere (United Nations, 2016).

## The data

The translated data sets used for the respective Turkish and Malayalam projects yielded sections where the translator-researchers translation choices has obvious sense-altering impact. We chose to use some examples that appear under the common theme of prognosis, which emerged as parents were explaining their understanding of the child’s condition. The transcripts contained numerous examples of this type, but we are presenting just a few for illustration.

### Example 1

The Turkish word *iyileşmek*, which can be glossed simply in English as ‘get better’, ‘get well’, ‘become good’, or ‘recover (from an illness)’, has been used to represent different types of understanding related to parents’ expectations with regard to outcomes of autism therapy (Günhan, 2015) (Table 1).

### Example 2

The Malayalam data provide a different sort of translation problem to be solved because the interviews contain two different expressions that may mean ‘getting better’, including നന്നാവൂ, *nannavum*, which means ‘be better’, and ഭേദം ആയി, *bhedam āyi*, which

**Table 1.** Connotations of the Turkish word iyileşmek.

Connotation 1: <i>iyileşmek</i> = ‘get better’	Connotation 2: <i>iyileşmek</i> = ‘cure’
NH: We live very far away, we come from the other side [of the town] [...] We change four [public transportation] vehicles [to get here]. But it’s OK, so long as my child <b>gets better</b> [...] I mean the therapists here, too, they tell us, all gets nicer with education, this child I mean can <b>get better</b> you know, with his own [...] peers he can go to school [...] but as an inclusion student [...] I mean <b>this is an illness that will always be on him</b>	RN: After he got the diagnosis, I was very sad, I cried a lot. But later I said, no I mean this needs <b>be cured</b> , if I behave like this [...] This child needs to get education [...] he [the doctor] says. He will receive education and <b>turn to normal</b> . This is a child who can <b>pull through</b> .

Note. Use of **bold** indicates passages that support a translated meaning, and that were used strategically by the translator choose a word.

**Table 2.** Malayalam words നന്നാവൂ, Nannavum and ഭേദം ആയി, *Bhedam āyi*.

Connotation 1: <i>nannavum</i> = ‘be better’	Connotation 2: <i>bhedam āyi</i> = ‘be better’, or ‘completely cured’ (ambiguous)
PP:[...]We comfort each other ‘no problem, our time will also come, our children will become better.’ So saying all that, we comfort each other. So when we talk to each other in this positive and supportive manner, we will develop a confidence in ourselves that things will get better.	PP: If tomorrow they get completely cured, <b>and be proper in the society</b> even if they [family, friends] don’t ask directly to the child, they will keep asking us, the parents, ‘How is your child, is there a change, is he completely cured.’ Heheh... ‘completely cured’ these are all what they keep asking. There are problems like, how much ever they improve, <b>such problems will be there</b> . Maybe <b>tomorrow</b> if we are searching somebody for marriage or some other things, <b>this history will affect</b> [these possibilities].

Note. Use of **bold** indicates passages that support a translated meaning, and that were used strategically by the translator choose a word.

means ‘be better’ and also to ‘be cured’ (Kaniyamattam, Oxley, & Damico, 2015) (Table 2). To complicate the translation process more, the latter expression, *bhedam āyi* is ambiguous with respect to inherent word meaning; the word may indicate a range of meanings, from a simple improvement of the condition to a complete cure.

In both of the cases, the translator-researchers both chose to combine use of an interpretive-communicative method (i.e. translation of sense) and literal translation method (i.e. linguistic transcodification) for these passages to overcome the possible meaning loss. The problem for translators here is resolving the need to convey the parents’ sense of the degree of improvement, but perhaps at the expense of focusing on the local expressions. To solve the problem, they reviewed the broader passage and employed the most appropriate translation technique, which in this case is particularization. A full understanding of the complex and emotionally loaded concepts of ‘improvement’ and ‘cure’ are thus tied to word choices made by the parents themselves, and then to the translator’s choice of words for the presentation language.

**Translation for conveying gist of meaning: Lost meanings**

It is not an uncommon practice to call upon the services of professional translators to provide both a transcript and translation of an interview in a research project. As mentioned earlier, the third author also used such a service to ensure translation accuracy. The professional translator had been provided with an audio recording and asked to

translate it with the purpose of generating an alternative transcript to the one produced by the researcher-translator. A review and comparison of the third author's translations with those done by a paid translator (JK) reveals several differences that have a direct bearing on the researcher's tasks of analysis and interpretation. It appears that with the overall goal of verifying gist of meaning (i.e. to produce an equivalent communicative effect), the professional translator selected some techniques of adjustment (Nida, 1964), in particular, the use of subtractions, which remove unnecessary repetitions, specific references, conjunctions and adverbs. The examples in the section below illustrate the impact of the professional translator's choice of using these techniques on what is available and not available for the audience to see after the translation.

### **Comparison of gist and verbatim translations**

Both the professional translator (JK) and the researcher-translator (MK) translated the parent's topic setting sentence (Table 3, (i)) in the same way, but a comparison of the remainder of the respective translations reveals how much detail JK omitted (Table 3, (ii)). The comparison illustrates a loss of descriptive richness that the data analyst would draw upon for identifying the theme of social isolation as experienced by this particular parent. What is lost in translation here is parent's subjective impression of being left out of the birthday party at her child's school. This multi-layered information is essential to the reader's understanding of a variety of concerns raised by the parent and also how she experienced not just her son's exclusion from the classroom community, but her own. The first point is that at the 'full text school', only two children have disabilities (one is deaf, the other has autism), but apparently only the child with autism is excluded from activities, such as a classmate's birthday. This comment exemplifies a situation, commonly reported in the literature, that particular disabilities carry more stigma than others, and the accompanying stigma affects families, not just children (Gray, 2002). A second loss to meaning is the chronicity and severity of the mother's social isolation: the others totally ignored her, and did not even tell her to leave.

The next example illustrates the translation of descriptions of various clinical features of autism specified in DSM-V concerning cognitive rigidity and its behavioural sequelae,

**Table 3.** Comparison of detail present in translations completed by JK and MK.

Professional translator (JK)	Researcher-translator (MK)
(i) I will tell you about one of my experiences at a birthday function...	(i) I will tell you about one of my experiences at a birthday function...
(ii) Although I used to sit there from 10 AM to 1 o'clock, nobody cared to ask us. <i>My son alone was autistic.</i> That was a full text school. Then <i>I discontinued, because it was of no use.</i> Even at the time of birthday celebration, they never included us.	(ii) I used to be there. But never, have they invited me. Never called me or my son for that. There were only two children like this over there. <i>My son alone was autistic.</i> The other child was deaf, he used to be there in the school every day. They never invited us. I used to sit in the school the whole time. <i>Although I used to sit there from 10 AM to 1 o'clock, nobody cared to ask us.</i> I sat there for one full year, after that <i>I didn't sit there, because there is no use.</i> My son is simply sitting there, jumping around, playing with other children. That is it. They never told me, to just eat some rice and go because it is this Child's birthday, my kid is also a child right? I will be sitting like that in front of them, me and my son. They will never say anything to us.

and also some aspects of hyperactivity (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The mother always used the (Malayalam) word, വാശി, *vāshi*, although sometimes she used the English word violent; but the word was translated variously as stubborn, adamant and angry. The word's connotations suggest obstinacy and stubbornness. Comparison texts are presented in Table 4. Both translators JK and MK agreed on 'adamant' and sometimes preferred 'stubborn'. The translators differ in how choose to translate *vāshi* when there is a sense of something with stronger connotations. MK prefers to translate it either as 'restless' or 'angry, and uses the word 'violent' only when the mother herself uses the English word. She relied on particularization to solve the problem, and drew upon the surrounding text to choose the particular aspect of meaning she felt the mother was

**Table 4.** Comparison of translations of വാശി *Vāshi* provided by JK and MK.

(a) വാശി <i>vāshi</i> translated as 'stubborn'	
JK	MK
	(1) Hmm not that much. Since one year I am not training him much, because he is very <b>stubborn</b> . If his <b>stubbornness</b> had decreased a bit, then I could have trained him better. (2) Recently we were in (town), when my son had fever. We went to meet a doctor. There were many people sitting outside, and my son was becoming <b>angry and stubborn</b> . At that time people asked us to go first and meet the doctor. (3) My son is <b>stubborn</b> . He is fond of attah.
(b) വാശി <i>vāshi</i> translated as 'adamant'	
(1) My son is <b>adamant</b> . He is fond of attah. (2) They say that this child talks loudly, becomes <b>adamant</b> , spits, beats... (3) He can remember very well. He can say from A to Z., A for Apple, etc. He is <b>adamant</b> , I will have to repeat several times to teach him.	(1) Maybe because they have never seen a child like this. It is like a new thing for them right such a big kid is becoming <b>adamant</b> , spitting, beating, the child talks loudly. So it is like a new experience for them, 'oh god why is this kid is spitting, biting
(c) വാശി <i>vāshi</i> translated variously as 'angry' 'violent' or 'restless'	
(1) He becomes satisfied. However, when I stopped this for a few days, he became <b>violent</b> . As you know, we cannot do everything with him. When he comes back from school, he takes entry with demand for attah, attah, attah. (2) When we plan a trip, I tell others what to bring to and what not to. My son is like this, and he becomes <b>violent</b> . Being a child, he goes to toilet, sometimes he beats me. (Note: mother uses the English word "violent") (3) I know when he is <b>angry</b> . When he is <b>angry</b> he throws away things. I know this rice he is not going to eat.	(1) There was queue to meet the doctor. My child was getting restless, but nobody told me to go in the front. He was becoming <b>violent</b> . <b>I was finding it difficult to control him</b> , so I went inside the doctor's room and told the doctor that <b>my son does not sit</b> , and so to please consult my child and allow us to go. (2) When we plan a trip, <b>I tell others what to bring to and what not to. My son is like this, and he becomes violent</b> . (Note: mother uses the English word "violent") (3) Then I know all his habits, <b>I can warn my mother that he is going to beat her at that moment. When he is angry he doesn't beat me, but my mother</b> . So I am able to tell her that "Mom—you are going to get a slap now" like that. (4) Yes, I know when he is <b>angry</b> . <b>When he is angry he throws away things</b> .

Note. Use of **bold** indicates passages that support a translated meaning, and that were used strategically by the translator choose a word.

highlighting. By contrast, JK consistently translates it as ‘violent’. Two possible explanations exist. JK was aware that autism is a psychiatric disorder, and this knowledge could have influenced the word choice. It is also likely that because the mother herself used the English word twice, her words influenced the translation of other instances of *vāshi*. It is not clear why the mother alternated use of the English word violent, and the Malayalam word *vāshi*. It seems plausible that the English word carried a more intense connotation than its Malayalam equivalent. The use of English also reflects the mother’s desire to interact with the interviewer as a social equal (i.e. both are well-educated professionals). For the researcher, the different ways *vāshi* is used by the mother reflect a continuum of behaviours: some were merely unpleasant or annoying for other people, but somewhat ordinary; whereas others were socially unacceptable forms. To understand the mother’s mind set regarding the range from complete cure to relief of symptoms of autism, the researcher must have access to these nuanced meanings. Ultimately, a thematic analysis will draw upon these examples. The translator’s role is ensure that the various senses of meaning are brought out in the translation.

The interviews with parents were often emotionally charged, and parents repeated the same idea, over and over again. These repetitions were sometimes verbatim, and sometimes expressed in slightly different ways, each conveying a slightly nuanced version of the underlying idea. Parents also provided the interviewer with numerous examples of behaviours their children exhibited, which taken together, conveyed a larger meaning for the parents, but also provide the researcher with insight into how parents understood their children’s disabilities (i.e. their lived experiences). These repetitions of information, which are considered redundant when gist is the goal, are not redundant from the IPA perspective. In clinical settings where clinicians are trying to understand parents’ perspectives through interpreters, and vice versa, something can be lost when the translator uses subtraction techniques to expedite the translation process (Elderkin-Thompson et al., 2001).

### **Conventional translation procedures and challenges posed by borrowed words**

The data collected in Turkish and Malayalam included examples of use of medical terminology. Given the prevalence of Western medicine in both countries, it is not surprising to find the medical terms used in both languages are closely connected to their western (i.e. English) counterparts. Translation might appear to be straight-forward, but owing to the complex nature of language use, there is the peril of losing (or not including) crucial meanings intended by parents. When faced with borrowed medical terms, the researcher-translator has to be careful not to overlook connotations that are a part of the familiar term. Recall that professionals and lay people sometimes use words and phrases differently from one another, as when the professional uses a word diagnostically, but the parent uses it descriptively. Words can suggest narrow, technical meanings to a professional, but those same words might be used interchangeably by parents (e.g. language, speech, communication). A researcher-translator has the task of recognizing these different usages and completing the translation task in such a way as to be faithful to the ideas actually expressed by the parents, but also mindful of how translations will be interpreted by readers.

One such example in our data set is the concept of ‘hyperactivity’. The corresponding word for the term in Turkish is a simple transliteration, *hiperaktivite* and *hiperaktif* for

hyperactive (i.e. ‘naturalized borrowing’, according to Molina & Hurtado Albir, 2002, p. 510). In Malayalam, the words are borrowed directly from English without any orthographic or phonetic change (i.e. ‘pure borrowing, p. 510). What needs to be considered here is that, despite the resemblance (or likeness) of the word form, the implications related to the term can be quite different for the utterer of the term and the Western expert who comes across it as the audience of the research the translation is used for.

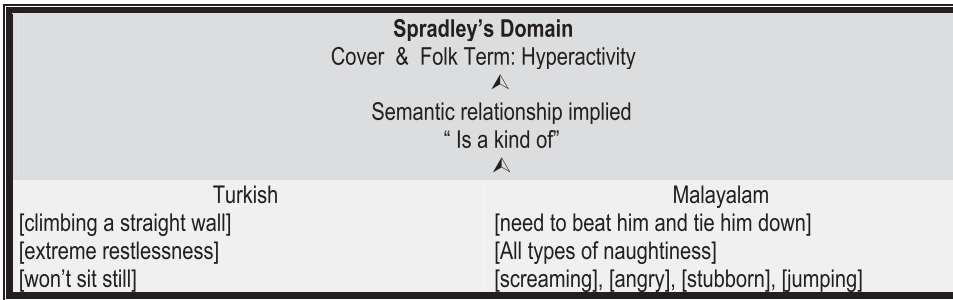
When we take a closer look at the data, we see that in both Turkish and the Malayalam context, when the word hyperactive/hyperactivity is used, it is used in relation to prognosis. Parents have appropriated this medical term to describe a behavioural condition (i.e. not merely a symptom) that has milder (and possibly positive) connotations compared to a more severe diagnosis of autism. In the Turkish data, a mother of a child with autism uses the borrowed term *hiperaktif* in contrast to a diagnosis of autism; her utterance ‘she is just hyperactive’ implies that child is better off, and maybe even curable, unlike a child with autism. Despite being medical terms, *hiperaktif* and *hiperaktivite* found their way into the popular discourse in Turkish. Apart from the contrastive use of the term with autism, there is another local connotation, which is positive. Sometimes, when a child is referred to as ‘hyperactive’ (i.e. is moving a lot and hopping from one activity to another), the speaker is suggesting the child is way due to his/her superior cognitive skills (i.e. quickly solves problems and gets bored with the presented activity) (see for instance the magazine article Dirier, 2013). Thus, when the audience of the text sees the Turkish data, they will recognize both meanings: hyperactivity is something less severe than autism (thus more manageable), and that it might even reflect superior cognition. Without the cultural connotations present in the original data, readers of a word-for-word ‘reborrowing’ in the presentation language would lose this second connotation. There are also parallels in the Malayalam data in which parents attribute hyperactivity to the folk wisdom of ‘boys being boys’. The questions here seem to be if and how it would be possible to capture these cultural connotations in the target text that will serve as the basis for analysis, which is the fundamental concern identified by Nida (1964). The next question is whose duty it is to capture these connotations, the translator or the researcher?

If, as is the case in the present study, the translator and the researcher are the same person, this automatically resolves the latter question. With regard to the initial question, we have to revisit the translation model provided above. Regardless of which overarching translation method the translator-researcher is using in the overall text, his/her options for applying a particular technique to make cultural connotations visible are limited because what is at issue is a borrowed expression. One way that the problem can be solved is the use of a translator note as a translation strategy, to bridge the gap between the (possible) sense of the original utterance and the target text the audience will access. Guided by the footnote (or amplification), the researcher can follow through with an analysis of a cultural domain, ‘...a category of cultural meaning that includes other small categories’ (Spradley, 1980, p.88) (Figure 2). Ideally, native language questions asked during the interviews would contribute to a fuller understanding.

## Discussion and conclusion

Thematic analysis requires layers of coding, and so wording can be crucial to outcomes. Challenges arise in multicultural and multilingual research because every step of the





**Figure 2.** Domain analysis (Spradley, 1980) of parents' illustrations of the signs of hyperactivity.

research process must be undertaken with care: the interview process will be influenced by the sensitivity of the interviewer, which in turn is informed by knowledge of culture and language; the transcription process must preserve the richness of the interviewees' contributions, without omissions or additions; then the translator must have a firm grasp of the aim of the translation, and be knowledgeable about overall methods of translation, problem-solving strategies, and techniques that reflect solutions to the translation problems. The translator's linguistic and cultural knowledge acts as the initial interpretive 'funnel' in making the participant's meaning viable to the target language audience who may participate in thematic analysis of the translated data. Without this combination of steps, the validity of the translated data for qualitative research can be compromised. We have learned two lessons from our translation experience.

First, it is worthwhile, as a team, to be reflective about the translation process and accord it the attention it should have. Research teams bring to the table diverse perspectives that can contribute to the trustworthiness of translated transcripts. As we discovered, listening to one another's use of language allowed us a window into what might have been unconscious preconceptions that were influencing word choices in the target language, English. It also accomplishes what Kussmaul and Tirkkonen-Condit (1995) recommend through their 'think-aloud protocol analysis in translation studies', which is to promote mentorship for novice translators. Overall, this reflective process also provides a supplement to the basic practice of bracketing.

Second, our experience adds support to the procedure of documenting the translation process, with the same attention as is given to other phases of qualitative research (Smith, Chen and Liu, 2007). It is thus transparent to research consumers how the translation task was informed and accomplished, and what steps were taken to achieve a trustworthy translation for use in subsequent analysis.

Translation concerns arising from qualitative research experiences can inform clinicians about hidden assumptions that might interfere with clinical decision making when clients and clinicians must rely on translation of history, presenting problems, and clinical recommendations. First, we need to understand how belief systems and knowledge sets influence a speaker's choice of words. Second, we need to recognize how choices of translated words affect 'meaning' in terms of how it is understood, or conveyed. Third, meanings that arise from word choices made during the translation process itself, such as the notion of 'getting better' can have clinical consequences in terms of professional and lay expectations.

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## Declaration of interest

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

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