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## Chapter 2

# Language learning as research rehearsal: Preparation for multi-linguistic field research in Morocco

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*Abstract: In this chapter I discuss several ways in which language learning was a valuable process in itself for my research in Morocco. Pre-research language learning cannot be expected to completely mitigate the risks and limitations of being an outsider in a foreign research context. However, I found that cultural learning was an inherent and invaluable element of my language preparation in both French and Moroccan Arabic. Unpicking the illusionary goal of becoming fluent in the language(s) and culture(s) of research contexts, I illustrate how some of the costs of learning a language may not be as insurmountable as many assume. I show how my stay at a language school provided a forgiving and powerful environment for research preparation, acting as a variety of rehearsal space. Finally, exploring the value of untranslatable and in-between linguistic terms, I consider how they helped build an understanding of the social phenomena of my research.*

## Introduction

'Between coffee shop and coffee shop, there is a coffee shop.' (Moroccan saying included in a language learning text, March 2015.)

'I passed several cafés before choosing one. I have not seen one single woman in a single café in the whole city, except a little girl greeting her Dad'. (Excerpt from journal during excursion alone to small city while on pre-research language learning trip, May 2015.)

There were many things that I learnt during the course of my language learning (Moroccan Arabic, MA), that were not about the language, or rather went beyond language learning.<sup>1</sup> The 'coffee shop' text I was given in class one day was a good example. This seemingly innocuous topic of discussion, the coffee shop, turned out to reveal to me deep gendered and spatial social norms. In this case, and many others, the language school became a space of exploration not just of language but also of culture and meaning. 'Between coffee shop and coffee shop there is a coffee shop'. Why? The text, prepared by the language school, went on to discuss possible explanations for the vast number of coffee shops typically filled with men that the text described: perhaps men spent time in the coffee shops because it was too noisy at home; perhaps this was their space to relax, while the home was the space of women. Yet was this really the case in modern Morocco where men and women were often seen together in coffee shops around the capital?

One language teacher tasked me to make a short survey and sent me off around the school to ask all the Moroccan women I could find, including administrators, kitchen staff and other teachers, whether indeed they went to coffee shops. Having spent only a few months in Morocco and most of this in large cities I was quite surprised at some of the responses. One new teacher from a rural town told me categorically, 'absolutely

not, never'. Another said, perhaps with her husband's permission, while another said, 'of course, we have every right to be in any public space'. Yet the general consensus seemed to be 'sometimes, but mainly in big cities'. The seemingly uncontroversial text on the coffee shop, therefore, not only gave me a grounding in basic vocabulary for sharing beverages but also prepared me with both nuances of meaning and social narratives for finding myself later (a lone female researcher) inside and outside these ubiquitous semi-public spaces. It gave me the relative concerns to weigh up: thirst/need to stop versus trespassing social norms and perhaps being perceived as overly-confident with men. With this in mind, when travelling a little during my language learning stay, I treated coffee shops as normal stopping places despite the scarcity of women in them. Later, however, I decided not to go in to them at all during my more intensive period of ethnographic research in 2016 in which I was based in a small town.

The research preparation discussed in this chapter was for my PhD fieldwork in 2016 in the region of Chtouka-Aït Baha, Southern Morocco. Following previous work in Southern Spain (Medland, 2016), my PhD project focused on the case of seasonal workers in the intensive region of production for tomatoes (and related crops) for export to the European market during the winter months. The high season for export is October-May, although many people remain in the region of Chtouka-Aït Baha year-round. My interest was in how dynamics related to the global food system, for example supermarket 'orders' and time schedules, manifested for workers on a daily basis in such a context of intensive agricultural production.

The workers in this context are internal migrant workers, mostly rural migrants from relatively poorer regions of the country. My research included both women and men however, the work is mainly carried out by women who make up around 70% of the workforce (Fairfood, 2014). In relation to the choices that I made for my research, in

the first section of this chapter I will discuss various early considerations in developing a language learning strategy. This included considering *whether* I should learn a language and how it could contribute to the nature of my research. If so, I had to decide *which* language to learn and finally, *how* I would go about this. My ultimate decision was to learn both Moroccan Arabic (MA) and French for my PhD fieldwork.

In the second half of this chapter I will focus on some of the experiences of my intensive period in a language school in Morocco (January – May 2015). Here, I will look at how the school provided me with a space for cultural exploration, similar to rehearsal. Furthermore, the deeply gendered and cultural experience was a preparation for many of the conversations that I would later have as part of fieldwork. Finally, one of the most interesting elements of being hyper-aware of language for the research process was the discovery of non-translatable concepts and the possibilities for how these might help me understand some deep socio-economic processes at the heart of my research.

### **First considerations: *Why learn? Which language? How to go about it?***

My preparation for fieldwork in Morocco involved a multi-lingual strategy to learn both French and MA. This involved ongoing learning of French several hours a week for three years (2013 – 2016) and an intensive pre-fieldwork language-learning stay in Morocco to learn MA (January – May 2015). This language learning contributed directly to my main stay in Morocco for fieldwork (August – December 2016).

The question of language arose in my research design because I needed to come to a level of understanding to be able to communicate with communities that I would not have been able to contact using the languages that I spoke prior to starting my

PhD (English and Spanish). I was following an interpretative approach to research which was influenced by ethnography, grounded theory and participatory action research. The foundation of the research was ethnographic observation; however, in the final stage of the research I also facilitated group work and in-depth interviews with workers in the region. I wanted my research to reach an understanding of seasonal work and mobility and how these processes were entangled with global food systems. Particularly in the case of Morocco, I also wanted the research to be primarily grounded in the experiences of workers. For this reason, I considered early on how language learning might play an important role in increasing my understanding of this case and in particular of workers' experiences.

### ***Why learn languages for research?***

In qualitative research, and particularly ethnographic observation, we seek to understand the social reality of the participants of our research projects. Yet, how do we engage with participants: in their linguistic framings or in our own? By actively reflecting on our linguistic options for research we can go a long way towards recognising the cultural and politically loaded connotations of the languages we plan to use. By engaging with the language, or languages of participants, we discover not only new words and meanings, but also important cultural concepts. These can be pivotal for understanding research and may not translate back into our own languages at all.

Many metaphors have been used to describe the role of language in qualitative research. Languages have been described as 'filters' through which meaning is obtained and interpreted, as 'houses of being', or as particular forms of art (Watson, 2004: 61). Furthermore linguists, philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, and

others have struggled for centuries over the question of linguistic relativism, or the question of whether the language that we speak affects our thinking (Sidnell & Enfield, 2012). Many scholars are still working on developments of theories of linguistic relativism and the nuances of the so-called Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, which holds that linguistic forms affect non-language related thought (for example, Sapir, 1929; Sidnell & Enfield, 2012). If we broadly recognise that the language spoken is more than a question of replaceable words, perhaps like our careful choice of methodology, we should recognise that our choice of language is likely to have profound implications on the knowledge and meanings that we are able to access and interpret.

Questioning the linguistic means through which we engage with our research participants is not just a question of which language is most accessible to the researcher. Watson (2004: 63) argues that in choosing a contact language we should consider who will and *will not* be able to participate. Furthermore, while difficulties might be presented for the researcher, there are definite advantages for participants, and therefore for the research, where it is conducted in the mother tongue of participants:

by holding a dialogue in the others' language, and according to their customs, the understandings and knowledge that is produced is likely to be more in their control and (literally) more on their terms (Watson, 2004: 63)

Avoiding seeing research through our own linguistic 'filter' and endeavouring to feel the importance of a term in its own context is particularly important in research about social relations. Different languages condition us in the negotiation of our different social roles and will therefore affect the positionality of the researcher. This is partly due to the character of the languages, the modes of interactions which they engender, and the contexts which they are associated with. Therefore, in considering which

language or languages to learn, the consideration that I prioritised was to make sure that I could understand the seasonal workers who were at the centre of my research.

Like Caretta (2015), I had to acknowledge that it was possible that I would still need to use translators and interpreters in my research due to neither French nor MA being universal first languages in the country, and to my unguaranteed ability to gain sufficient fluency in a short time. Nevertheless, the aim of 'perfect translation' was not necessarily the only goal. Any intersubjective encounter involves the intention to communicate meaning from one language or culture to the next. Becoming aware of language as a filter might be even more significant as we become conscious of the imperfections in our own linguistic filters. Smith (1996) argues that in inter-subjective research encounters 'in-between', 'hybrid' spaces of meaning are created. She argues that while it is unreasonable to expect to be able to reveal the 'truth' about another culture or research setting, in the 'hybrid spaces' between 'home' and 'foreign' language, new spaces of insight and meaning can be created (Smith, 1996). Such spaces may play the significant role of de-naturalising and displacing the home language of the researcher and therefore their assumptions that their home language is clear in meaning (ibid.). Finally, she suggests such a focus may draw us away from the routine of exploring 'out there' and bringing meaning 'back home', a research practice that was associated with colonialism and imperialism (Smith, 1996). When researchers are directly involved in the negotiation of language, they can be more alert to the 'hybrid meanings' and the potential holes in their own linguistic filters, and understandings of research contexts.



### ***What to learn?***

In working out a plan for language learning for fieldwork, one important first step was to consider my own likely potential for acquiring any useful language skills for use in fieldwork in Morocco. I am sure that everyone has a relationship with language learning; I do too. I did not excel in languages at school, and even gained my lowest secondary school exam grade in the only language that I took (German). However, during my twenties I had slowly built up knowledge of Spanish, and reached a solid fluency in it several years before starting my PhD research. I had therefore had the vital experience of knowing that learning another language was in fact a possibility. However, I also knew that gaining the kind of competency in Standard Modern Arabic (the official first language in Morocco) that would allow me to rely on it to both read and communicate with gatekeepers in Morocco was probably out of my reach. By considering the languages spoken and used in Morocco and after also considering my own limits and abilities I decided to adopt a mixed approach.

Considering my research context, there were at least four potential languages that could in some way help me with the research, all widely spoken in Morocco. These were: Standard Modern Arabic (SA), Moroccan Arabic (MA), French and a variant of the Tamazight (Berber) languages. Taking into account, therefore, that fluency in all four of these languages would be far beyond reach, I considered the role of language in relation to the project and the research process.

In Morocco, SA is the main official language. However, MA is the version of Arabic spoken in everyday contexts, including in homes and on the television and radio. It is very different to SA, with some arguing that it should be recognised as a language in its own right (see discussion in Elinson, 2013). The contexts in which SA is used in Morocco are most often formal ones and those in which highly educated people are

involved. In such contexts, French is also widely used and while French is not an official language of Morocco, many documents and much practical information such as government websites and reports, road signs, and statistics are printed in both SA and French. The widespread expectation that foreigners speak French also meant that whether I chose to learn French or not, Moroccans would often speak to me in it. Considering that I already spoke Spanish, I realised that it was feasible for me to use this foundation in Spanish to build a working competency in French due to the proximity of the two languages. Furthermore, French was an accessible language to learn from the UK, where I was based. The function of the language would not necessarily be to do the research itself, but rather to gain access to the research context in a way that was expected of me as a foreigner. The limitations of the usefulness of French in Morocco were however significant enough to consider other language options for research. Its effect on my positionality in the research context seemed to be likely to increase the prospective differences in perceived social position forcing me to adopt formal 'vous' (the formal address for 'you' in French) forms of speaking and placing me in a role widely perceived in Morocco as being from a known 'high-class' foreign space due to the strong colonial and post-colonial relationship with France.

MA, or Darija as it is known in Morocco, is the version of Arabic most widely spoken in Morocco. It is MA and Tamazight (the native language of the Amazigh or Berber people of Morocco) that are spoken in more everyday, and particularly lower class and rural Moroccan, contexts. Both languages are informal in differing ways. MA is by definition informal as it not recognised in the constitution and is simply considered a dialect of SA. Tamazight, by contrast, was recognised as the second official language of Morocco as part of constitutional reforms of 2011 following mounting pressure for the recognition of Berber peoples as part of Moroccan protests during the Arab Spring

(Morocco 2011). However, learning Tamazight would be both difficult due to a lack of resources, and would not fit the context of my research project. There are three varieties of Tamazight spoken in Morocco. The local version of this language in the region I was researching is called Tashlhit. However, my case study was of seasonal workers who are primarily internal migrants having come from other regions of Morocco. Therefore, although Tashlhit was the local native language it was not the primary language of greeting, exchange and conversation in the region I was studying. The varieties of Tamazight are sufficiently different that MA is used as a 'vehicular language' between Moroccans who speak different versions of Tamazight (Hachimi, 2012). This meant that MA was also the common language among the internal migrant workers of the region I was studying. In Morocco in general, although MA is not found in formal materials, it is easy to access on television, in the streets and on the radio. Tamazight speaking Moroccans who attend school (most seasonal workers have at least a primary education) also learn MA in the process of learning to read and write SA. Therefore, I hoped that MA would be the language that could give me access to Moroccan everyday life in the region where I would carry out my research.

Morocco is not a unique case of a complex linguistic context. Perhaps it is more representative of the common situation in countries in the Global South. This situation is a linguistic mixture of European languages (due to a history of colonialism and the more recent processes of globalisation), as well as dominant regional languages, and more local and indigenous languages. Furthermore, languages are often overlapping and used in the same contexts. In practice it is very difficult to identify *the* language necessary for fieldwork.

Overall, this linguistic mixture of French and MA allowed me to carry out fieldwork in 2016, although I was still learning MA when I started my ethnographic work. Despite

the more in-depth language training that I did in MA, when I approached the research context, my first contact and negotiation with gatekeepers was indeed in French. Later, in the town in which I lived, the language use was mixed or primarily MA. For example, on one occasion I attended an NGO training of local child-minders of the children of seasonal workers I was working with, and this was carried out simultaneously in MA and Tamazight, yet local trade union meetings were held in a mixture of SA and MA. Meanwhile, meetings with regional and national NGO representatives and academics would always involve a mixture of French and MA, as well as a small amount of English.

To add to the complications of multiple and overlapping language use, there is also the sheer difficulty of learning non-dominant languages. A clear plan can be constructed if we decide to learn French, Spanish, or a similar dominant language. However, finding resources, language schools, teachers and people who understand what we are trying to do, becomes a whole new challenge when learning a non-dominant language. Such challenges can almost inspire researchers to either give up, stick to their native language, or choose a different research problem. However, while both these conclusions might be valid decisions in some situations, I think that there is also much to gain from entering into the maze of language learning as part of research.

### ***Limitations and possibilities: Balancing aspirations of fluency with progress in research***

At the mention of language learning, costs become immediately apparent. These costs are principally time-costs, but also often involve financial costs and the self-questioning of whether it is even possible to learn the target language. Yet, like other

scholars, I have found that there are also often opportunities, options and compromises which can be reached.

In order to fund my MA learning I applied for support from the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, 2016). This was useful to support a dedicated period of language learning which I felt was necessary to learn this complex language after only minimal prior exposure to SA. I did not know how far this intensive course would take me but I was sure that it would provide both a basic grammatical structure and the experience of immersion as I opted to stay with a host family during the time I was at the school. I supplemented this before, during and afterwards with free language exchanges with students and others who I met with an interest in learning English.

The idea that we must reach an almost bilingual proficiency in order to gain anything useful from the effort of learning can also stop our journey of language development before it has started. In fact, I have found that many levels can be useful at different stages in removing language barriers, allowing space to develop relationships. Reasonable pronunciation of basic greetings can be a good starting point for basic orientation. An introductory awareness of grammar and vocabulary allowed me to deduce the topics of most conversations going on around me. An intermediate level has allowed me to gain impromptu information in unexpected settings, for example about the local infrastructure whilst sitting in a taxi next to a water engineer, or an opportunity to arrange an interview. Although getting to competent language level might seem daunting, some concepts can be relatively more and less complex from one language to another and therefore some terms which a learner might not expect to understand may appear relatively soon. For example, in my language classes I soon learnt that a vegetable being 'in season' was referred to as it being 'the time of' the

certain vegetable, I learnt the word 'time' early on, so this was relatively accessible vocabulary.

Both Watson (2004) and Crane et al. (2009) point out that there can even be advantages in research to having imperfect language skills. Crane et al. argue that moments where they were not quick on picking up following questions, or where interviewees had to explain their situation in two different ways, were useful and insightful. Crane et al (2009) also point out that assumptions about the researcher's identity in non-native linguistic contexts often revealed power relations. Furthermore, such experiences emphasise that identity categories and insider-outsider categories are fluid, with other aspects of identity, such as gender, age or 'foreignness' becoming points of identification and trust-building with some interviewees, once initial language barriers have been negotiated. Finally, Watson (2004) argues that learning a language places the researcher in a 'childlike position', which she explained meant people felt that they could 'explain' things to her in ways that they might not with native speakers. The adoption of this childlike status is something that I very much relate to from my language learning and research experiences. In Morocco, the host family that I stayed with whilst at the language school were quick to point out and explain my cultural, as well as linguistic errors, attributing me perhaps teenager, rather than child status. Later, during the research stay in 2016, although my language (and cultural) sensitivities improved, I found that I could still draw on the childlike freedom of an outsider and imperfect linguist to ask, *why?*

Although imperfection in language skills is not an asset in itself, there are benefits that it can provide which I believe should be enough to indicate that learning a language can be worth it even where it is unlikely that a point will be reached where every word is understood. Furthermore, the appearance of imperfections can break down barriers,

invite explanations, stimulate interest, build rapport and perhaps above all demonstrate our commitment and desire to gain a deep understanding of the context in which we are carrying out research.

Thus, even though the language process can be difficult, expensive, time-consuming and imperfect, it can also be valuable in and of itself. This can form part of a broader process in which researchers can influence the personal and political dynamics of research in positive ways (Watson, 2004: 67).

## **Experiences in a new language**

### ***The language school as a rehearsal room***

My experience of language learning in a language school in Morocco felt very much like a rehearsal for negotiating the research context itself. MacKenzie (2015) has emphasised that field assistants can play important roles as interpreters and cultural guides. Likewise, language teachers and the language school certainly played an important role in assisting me with my research itself. The language school for me became a direct and indirect rehearsal room for my research. In the field of tourism and language studies, Phipps (2006) has previously offered an in-depth analysis of the language learning process as a rehearsal. She describes the dialogues given to language students as being like scripts and says that they are 'in many ways identical to the rehearsal processes for the staging of drama' (2006: 105).

In my language school in Morocco, I feel that I gained at least as much cultural knowledge as I did linguistic skills. In the case of MA, a lack of specialist teaching materials forced the school and teachers to construct courses based on primary materials in the language such as songs, or texts written by the school itself. Only one month's worth of teaching materials existed in which the curriculum focused on

grammar and formal exercises. Beyond this time, when the emphasis turned to stimulating conversation, each day I was presented with a new theme that the school judged relevant for foreigners in Morocco to understand. This meant that every day I had one-to-one or small group discussions with my teachers about 'social phenomena' as diverse as 'Migration in Morocco', 'Marriage in Islam', 'Friendship' and 'Un-married Women'. My experience was that the context of the language school was additionally useful to prepare myself for research because I was able to interactively investigate cultural insights *before* starting the research. I therefore saw it as both a space of cultural interpretation and as a *rehearsal room* for research.

The language learning environment provided a variety of a forgiving space where cultural and linguistic *faux pas* could be made in a context where there was likely to be minimum consequence. In Morocco for example, the language school was an environment in which most of the otherwise taboo topics of conversation often arose in classroom contexts, and could be discussed to a lesser or greater degree. Generally taboo topics such as the political situation in Western Sahara could be carefully broached in the school, and religion could be openly talked about. This allowed me as a researcher to sketch out the limits to acceptable and non-acceptable topics of conversation. It was extremely useful for me to discover the relative reactions to other social phenomena in this forgiving context in order to be prudent in research-related contexts outside of the school later on. For example, I found that divorce, although controversial, could be openly discussed. However, mentions of past relationships or anything that indicated sexual relationships outside of matrimony were severely frowned upon, and in particular, homosexuality appeared to be so extremely taboo that our teachers refused to provide a translation of the term. This relevant cultural knowledge, obtained without the need for a research assistant but gained as an extra



benefit to linguistic skills, is something that researchers considering the relative costs and benefits of language learning for research should be aware of.

When using qualitative and particularly ethnographic methods of research, trust is gained and rapport is built often through the careful explanation of the researcher's personal, as well as academic situation. In Morocco, I found these personal questions constant, and of vital significance. Knowing how to answer such questions, feeling calm that I could admit that my parents were divorced, but that I should be careful about revealing that I am not married and do not live with my family, were key to negotiating culturally sensitive entrances to my research setting.

As a socio-cultural mediator, the language school or teacher is also a mediator from which researchers can eventually become independent. Language learning can prepare for attentiveness to social and linguistic meaning in communication which researchers may not otherwise achieve by being solely reliant on a research assistant or interpreter. Having learnt a language researchers are able to negotiate their own access into various contexts and this may make access wider whilst still allowing for the option to work with a research assistant or interpreter where this would be additionally helpful. For example, in the case of Morocco, many of the environments in which I was able to speak with women was in their homes. Without having to rely on an interpreter when I was invited to someone's home in the context of my research, I was able to accept independently.

### ***Safe spaces and gender***

In my case, my language classes were also deeply gendered. Perhaps by the decision of the school, or perhaps by chance, my teachers were always female. For the vast majority of the time I was learning, due to the low demand for the course, the

lessons were also one to one, with just the teacher and me in the classroom. The women-only environment in which I learnt MA, in the deeply gendered context of Morocco, meant that I was given many personal insights into how women were expected to act, and how I might be interpreted according to both the language and the behaviour I adopted. This gendered language-learning experience meant that I had insights into some of the dynamics of female-only spaces and how I might be allowed to share in some of the more open conversations that happened between women and some of the topics of concern to women and how they are managed. More than anything, this female-only space added to my sensation of the language school, and the spaces that I found in it with my teachers, as a *safe-space* within which to explore many of the themes which I was later confronted with in the research context. Domestic violence, contraception, the work-home balance of looking after children, and maternity leave, were all mentioned in this language learning context. Rather than reading from pre-written scripts as are prepared in modern-language textbooks, in these classes the teachers and I devised the lessons and the vocabulary needed, based on my ethnographically positioned needs as a relatively young, un-married researcher of seasonal work in Morocco.

### ***Learning what can't be learnt: The untranslatable and in-between***

One of the most interesting elements of learning a language is discovering what is not translated. The role of the untranslatable in the Moroccan context is pervasive. As a language of mixture, and of change, MA leaves many linguistic concepts in-tact, integrating particularly French, but also Spanish, English, and Amazigh terms with SA (Elinson, 2013). Moroccans are well known for being multi-lingual and therefore having a mixture of linguistic resources at hand is important both practically and in grasping

connotations and meanings in Morocco. One interesting element of studying MA, and engaging in the linguistic practices used in Morocco, is noting what is *not* translated. My experience in Morocco suggested that the mixture of languages used in an interaction could reveal something of both the entrance of a social or cultural phenomena into Moroccan society, or a mode in which a certain activity is carried out. For example, when asking if I could speak with any workers on the tomato farms in a pre-research visit to the region, the workers of each greenhouse said that they could not speak because the 'Patron' (the 'boss') had gone home. In the area, the prevalent use of both the French words for 'boss' and for 'greenhouse', reveal the European socio-economic links that have accompanied the installation and growth of the agricultural sector for export in the region. Attention to languages and what is and is not translated or translatable can therefore signify insights into deeper socio-cultural connections and how they are sustained or may have come about.

The question of translating the 'untranslatable' is also a topic of concern in social science debates on translating in qualitative research (Smith, 1996). Some feel that it is the untranslatable concepts that often provide clues regarding little understood social phenomena. There is also some debate regarding whether or not such terms should be translated at all (Hassink, 2007). When the researcher is involved in the translation process they have the advantage of being able to repeatedly use, try-out, and potentially verify the meaning of concepts *in situ*. While it was frustrating not to have an interpreter, a dictionary, or a text cleanly translated, using the language of the context did seem to bring me, as a researcher, close to the terminology, and therefore many of the meanings of the situated knowledge regarding seasonal work. Thus, in my experience in Morocco, like qualitative research itself, language learning required not a blinkered or formulaic approach but an openness to communication and meaning

which was most insightfully discovered when working from inside the (linguistic) context that I hoped to understand to the fullest degree possible.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter was first drafted after I returned from the language school visit in 2015 and re-written after I returned from fieldwork in 2016. To date, I have managed to carry out all my fieldwork independently, using French and MA to communicate with my participants. Language learning is a continuous and enriching element of my research that remained part of my analysis, related reading and contact with participants and others in Morocco. However, in the case of both languages I reached a level of development (or maturity) that meant that I was able to use them to complete my PhD fieldwork.

Reasons for language learning depend on the research project and personal goals and opportunities. Perhaps the most obvious benefit of learning a language is access to direct communication. This applies not just in the research setting, but also in related settings allowing for contextual understanding and the verification of meanings in contexts outside of formal research settings. However, as explored in this chapter, there are other benefits to language learning in preparation for field research. Associated costs may not be as insurmountable as some might assume. Building on the commentary of Watson (2004) I have emphasised how reaching bilingual proficiency is not the sole goal of language learning and imperfections in language skills can lead to insights and opportunities in the research process.

Exploring my own experience, I have considered how the language school itself could be interpreted as a *rehearsal room* for research, allowing researchers to learn cultural skills and explore terminology and contextual norms in a forgiving space.

Finally, in the context of Morocco I have suggested that developing the ability to recognise the 'untranslatable' may lead to valuable insights into non-language related processes such as those to do with socio-cultural and economic transformations.

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