Re-examining Ethical Considerations in EFL in View of Multi-/Plurilingual Research Practices

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Abstract

In this contribution I examine and partly reframe ethical considerations in view of current multi-/plurilingual research practices. Many research endeavours are multilingual by default, but this aspect often remains implicit and is not reflected upon. By way of two examples, I will delineate the scope of ethical considerations in the field of Foreign Language Education and argue that they go beyond rules and practices of good conduct. Once I have established the foundations and a model of research ethics, I will elaborate on the question which language choices need to be considered in multi-/plurilingual research from an ethical perspective.

Key terms: research ethics; multi-/plurilingual research; model of ethical considerations; ethics of care; language choice; advocacy research

Abstract

In diesem Beitrag untersuche ich ethische Überlegungen im Hinblick auf aktuelle multi-/plurilinguale Forschungspraktiken und modelliere sie teilweise neu. Viele Forschungsbemühungen finden in mehrsprachigen Kontexten statt oder werden durch plurilinguale Beteiligte ausgeführt, aber dieser Aspekt bleibt häufig implizit und unreflektiert. Anhand von zwei Beispielen skizziere ich die Reichweite ethischer Überlegungen in der Fremdsprachenforschung und argumentiere, dass diese weit über die Befolgung von Regeln guter wissenschaftlicher Praxis hinausgeht. Nach der Diskussion theoretischer Grundlagen und der Präsentation eines Modells zur forschungsethischen Reflexion diskutiere ich, welche Aspekte der Sprachenwahl in multi-/plurilingualer Forschung aus ethischer Perspektive zu berücksichtigen sind.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Forschungsethik; mehrsprachige Forschung; Modellierung ethischer Überlegungen; Fürsorgeethik; Sprachenwahl; advocacy research

1. Introduction

Research ethics, i.e., considerations on values, norms and good practices that inform, constitute and regulate research and researchers' choices and actions, have gained considerable interest in the field of Foreign Language Education and can be considered an integral part of many research endeavours and reports (cf. Legutke & Schramm, 2016; Riemer, 2014; Viebrock, 2015, 2019a, 2019b). The purpose of this contribution is to take up the current debate, rethink and, possibly reframe ethical considerations from the perspective of empirical multi- and plurilingual research. It follows from increasingly multilingual societies as well as the linguistic resources of individual plurilingual speakers/researchers, that many research endeavours are multilingual by default. This means that they focus on plurilingual speakers or multilingual practices (cf. Council of Europe, 2007, p. 10) as a topic and at the same time employ these as their modes of operation. Surprisingly, this has largely remained an unreflected practice as only very few explicit considerations on the impact of multilingualism on research practices can be found (cf. Viebrock, Meier & AlSabahi, 2022 for an overview).

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The question I wish to elaborate on in this paper is how research in Foreign Language Education is impacted by ethical considerations and how multi- and plurilingual research may demand a reconfiguration of research ethics. In order to tackle this question, I have structured this contribution in two parts. The first is geared at a general introduction to research ethics in Foreign Language Education. I will pursue an inductive approach by first discussing two example studies to illustrate some dimensions that will allow for a systematic view and (tentative) model of ethical considerations in Foreign Language Education research. I will then look at the scope of ethical considerations and introduce a framework for guiding researchers' actions and decisions in the research process. I will provide some theoretical underpinnings and briefly sketch the core ideas of deontology, consequentialism, social contract theory and a specific form of virtue ethics (cf. Hursthouse & Pettigrove, 2016), namely the ethics of care, which inform ethical decision-making. I will end this part by explaining possible choices for each researcher in a personality-related dimension, a pragmatic and a systemic dimension. After the more general discussion of research ethics, I will reconsider and re-examine it from a multilingualism perspective by discussing which aspects related to research on multilingualism or to multilingual research are particularly important for ethical considerations.

2. The Scope of Ethical Reasoning in Foreign Language Education – Two Examples

2.1 Example 1: Outcome Accountability

The first example I have chosen to illustrate the dimensions of ethical concerns in research is a longitudinal study of early foreign language learning in school (Jaekel et al., 2017a). I will briefly outline the specifics of this particular study to provide an understanding what it was about, but what is of particular importance in the context of research ethics is what happened after the results of the study were published and the question who is responsible for this. Jaekel et al. investigated the effects of the onset year of foreign language learning in primary school on the learners' competence development. Drawing on a large sample of more than 5000 participants in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany), they distinguished 'late starters', who had taken up English as a foreign language in year three and received 140 hours of instruction when first tested, from 'early starters', who had taken up English in year 1 and received 245 hours of instruction when first tested. The groups differed in the family income, which was higher for the early starters, and the 'cultural capital' (indicated by the number of books present in each household), which was lower for the early starters. Moreover, the early starters had more learners with L1s other than German. There were no differences between the groups concerning the distribution of age, sex, cognitive abilities and the grades for English at the end of year 4 (which is the end of primary school in North Rhine-Westphalia). The study used well-established standardised reading and listening comprehension tests that had been used in Germany in the EVENING study (Engel & Ehlers, 2013) and the VERA comparative studies (IQB, 2014) as well as a cognitive abilities test.

The results from the first testing wave yielded findings close to expectations: The early starters with about 100 hours more of instruction achieved significantly higher scores in reading and listening comprehension when tested at the beginning of year 5. Yet, the results turned when the participants were tested again in year 7, where the late starters outperformed the early starters in both categories. The authors of the study suggest these findings to be „in line with a growing body of research that confirms older learners to be at an advantage (in the long run) in learning a foreign language over students in early foreign language education with minimal input“ (Jaekel et al., 2017a, p. 19). They draw two possible, yet diverging conclusions from their study, the first being a plea for increasing the amount of exposure from year 1 onwards. The second, is a suggestion to move the onset of foreign language instruction into year 3 or even 5, also provided the intensity of the instruction is increased.[1]

The research report by Jaekel et al. has generated an extensive media response, which may also have been promoted by the university's press release[2] announcing the findings to the general public. The headlines, which were collected by Wiley Online Library[3], appeared in local or regional as well as national media. They are quite graphic in stating that early English language instruction is „less effective than expected", that starting English lessons in grade 1 is „not worth it" or that the early English programmes „may not stick" (partly my translations). What can be observed is an explicit sloganisation of research results (cf. also Schmenk et al., 2018) here as none of the media sources engage in an in-depth discussion of the study or its results. The media coverage has also led to a parliamentary inquiry in the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia by the representatives of the *Alternative für Deutschland* (*AfD*), initially a centre-right conservative party founded in 2013, which has since then been voted into the parliaments in most German federal states, but also moved considerably further to the right. The intention of their inquiry was the abolition of early English language education for the sake of extending lessons in German and Mathematics.[4] None of the five advisory opinions on this issue that were contributed by experts in the field as a response to the *AfD* motion – Jaekel (2018), Schlüter (2018), Frisch/Diehr (2018), Thurn (2018) and GEW (2018) – advocates the abolition of early English or supports the claim that this conclusion inevitably results from the study's outcome.

The question of ethical relevance that this case illustrates particularly well, concerns the accountability of individual researchers for the outcomes and aftereffects of a study that in itself observed scientific rigour. In how far could and should the authors of the study have anticipated the strong political response that the interpretation of their results has created? What could or should they have done to allow for a more differentiated interpretation of their results and the avoidance of simplistic sloganisation? Have they by way of their initial discussion and the press release – willingly or unwillingly – contributed to an unbalanced reception of their study and enabled oversimplified conclusions? What is also affected here, are considerations on research communication for the general public. Should this be a more explicit part of researchers' professional development and training?

The point I wish to make by asking these questions is that ethical concerns are not limited to a narrow understanding of the research process, rules of good conduct, method control and the like, which were observed by the study, but also comprise what Nida-Rümelin (2005) has called 'outcome accountability' (my translation, *Wissenschaftsfolgeverantwortung* in the German original).

2.2 Example 2: Researcher-Participant-Relationships

The second example is of a completely different nature. It stems from my own small scale, qualitative PhD study on CLIL teachers' mindsets (Viebrock, 2007). My interview study focused on individual

[1] Interestingly, the influence of year 5 and 6 on the study carried out in year 7 was not explicitly questioned. The lower performance of the early starters in that study was attributed to the relative inefficiency of early English, but not to any influences from teaching in the lower secondary years. What is also interesting to know is that the results of a third test carried out in year 9 were in line with results from the test in year 5: The early starters outperformed the late starters again (cf. Jaekel et al., 2017b).

[2] https://news.rub.de/presseinformationen/wissenschaft/2017-05-08-grundschule-frueher-englischunterricht-weniger-effektiv-als-erhofft (retrieved September 1, 2022).

[3] https://wiley.altmetric.com/details/19868881/news (retrieved September 1, 2022).

[4] https://www.landtag.nrw.de/portal/WWW/dokumentenarchiv/Dokument/MMD17-794.pdf (retrieved September 1, 2002).

teachers and applied an established communicative validation procedure, including member checks. A comprised version of my interview interpretation was given to the participants for review before a second interview, which was then conducted to clarify any misunderstandings and inconsistencies. The procedure was not without challenges, as I will illustrate in the following: In the first interview, one of my interviewees said, „I do like to keep control [in the classroom]"[5] and used the expression "I would like to hold the sceptre in my hands", which in the German original is an idiomatic expression for keeping control. Focusing on the imagery, a sceptre evokes an idea of the classroom as a 'monarchy' with the teacher taking the role of the ruling monarch. In my interpretation, I assigned my interviewee's statement to the category 'self-image' and identified the notion of keeping control as a central aspect of my interviewee's self-image as this was mentioned directly and metaphorically in the interview. Sensing a potential for irritation during the member check procedure, I was careful to phrase my summary of what I had identified as the teacher's mindset in a considerate and unoffensive way.

This is the written response I received before conducting the second interview:

> Initially, I found it very difficult to deal with the text in a factual way. After reading it for the first time, I put the script aside for two weeks before I wrote the notes to the passages. [...] I didn't think that dealing with my self-image would be so 'painful'.

What insights can be drawn from this? First, the interviewee confirms my interpretation by explicitly validating the category 'self-image' and by implicitly validating the notion of keeping control, calling the reflection "painful". But she also makes clear that the emotional response to the message overshadowed the factual content. This observation is particularly interesting from the perspective of research ethics and instigates a number of important questions: Are researchers allowed to cause their participants pain? Obviously, no physical pain is meant here as might be the case for ethical considerations in medical research, but the interviewee clearly indicates some mental distress. Would this already be a violation of the principle of nonmaleficence research is obliged to (cf. also section 3)? Or would this kind of damage have to be endured for the sake of academic advancement? To put it more bluntly, is it tolerable to mildly hurt one's research participant in the process of obtaining deeper insights into a field of study? Similar to the previous example, my study observed the rules of good conduct and was committed to accepted quality criteria. Of course, the teachers participated voluntarily and could always have withdrawn from the study. The requirement of informed consent was fully observed. Yet again, the example shows that these only cover a limited perspective on questions of ethical concern.

3. Scope and Model of Ethical Considerations

Both examples serve to illustrate the scope of ethical dimensions, which may oscillate between what Kubanyiova (2008) has called the 'macroethics of principle' and the 'microethics of practice'. A microethical approach to research practice particularly focuses on the relationship between the researcher and participants in personal encounters as described in the second example. It shows "that even a 'benign' method, if not handled with care, can have harmful effects on research participants by undermining their professional self-esteem and leaving them with feelings of profound inadequacy" (Kubanyiova, 2008, p. 509). On a macroethical level, Nida-Rümelin (2005) juxtaposes 'epistemic rationality', i.e., academic honesty and scientific rigour, with 'outcome accountability' (my translations). His argumentation is more complex than I can replicate here, but as the first example showed, the scope of research and research ethics goes beyond carrying out a methodologically well-crafted

[5] The interviews were carried out in German originally. I provided the English translations for this contribution.

study that would meet the criteria of epistemic rationality. In this sense, each study is also always a political statement in what it makes topical and what it leaves unsaid, what it highlights in the discussion or conclusion, in how it chooses words and expressions and in how it is introduced to the scientific community and wider social discourses. One of the questions that arises from the claim for outcome accountability is how the individual researcher can anticipate the reception of their study, including specific contexts that are prone to sloganisation or unexpected developments as illustrated by example 1.

With both macroethical and microethical perspectives, the core question of research ethics is: What are appropriate actions and decisions in narrower and wider contexts of research? In order to provide some orientation, I will first sketch the model of Kitchener and Kitchener (2009) and then move on to some theoretical foundations which inform ethical decision-making (cf. section 4). Kitchener and Kitchener's model (cf. illustration 1) is also based on a distinction between a micro perspective, called the 'immediate level' in their model, and a macro perspective, called the 'critical evaluative level'. The model takes concrete cases as a starting point and considers the context-specific decisions to be made. These are influenced by professional rules that may be implicitly acquired as a professional ethos or explicitly learned if laid down in codes of conduct, for example. Basic ethical principles such as fidelity, justice, respect for persons, nonmaleficence or beneficence are the cornerstones of the professional ethos of researchers. These principles are based on different ethical theories, but do not emerge from them in an algorithmic way. Rather, ethical theories serve as heuristics for reflecting on the principles as well as justifications for decision-making in the case of contradicting principles. Returning to the second example (cf. section 2.2), it could be seen where beneficence and respect for persons interfered: even though the research project was accompanied by knowledge gains that are to be considered useful for the academic discourse and even though the researcher's attitude was characterised by a general respect for the interviewees, not all problems at the micro-ethical level could be avoided. Meta-ethical considerations justify which of the possible ethical theories have greater relevance or plausibility in a specific context.

Meta-Ethics
↕
Ethical Theory
↕
Critical Evaluative Level: Ethical Principles
↕
Ethical Rules (professional codes, laws)
↕
Immediate Level: Particular Cases

Information about the Situation Ordinary Moral Sense

Figure 1: Model of ethical decision-making (Kitchener & Kitchener, 2009)

A pronounced ethical awareness in research contexts would demand to go through the different levels of the model in order to derive recommendations for decisions and actions in the research process. This procedure is much more extensive than simply following the rules of good conduct. It may have far-reaching consequences with regard to methodological decisions or the assessment of the relevance of the research questions pursued. The scope and quality of reflections on research ethics may thus become a central quality criterion for any research report.

4. Theoretical Foundations

In this part, I will briefly address four strands of ethical theories, which – among others inform considerations on research ethics in the current debate: deontology, consequentialism, contract theories and a feminist version of virtue ethics, the ethics of care. I will depict the main ideas and assumptions of each theory, but not all intricacies of the different philosophical approaches, and show their relevance for ethical decision-making in the field of Foreign Language Education. Deontology and consequentialism are fundamental ethical theories that start from essentially different assumptions, the former being rule-driven, the latter outcome-oriented. Contract theories have been included here on account of their supposed relevance for research contracts such as informed consent, but I will explain that the link is not as straightforward as the term might suggest. The ethics of care have been included as they focus on small-scale human relationships and, thus, cover an innovative perspective that has not been taken up by the other theories, but might be highly relevant for specific research approaches.

Both consequentialism and deontology deal with the question which actions are necessary and which are not. They do so by applying different evaluative norms. Consequentialism assesses actions according to their outcomes. Expected positive and negative consequences of an action – in comparison to possible alternatives – must be determined for both the acting person and the potentially affected person. Decisions are, therefore, subject to certain ‘cost-benefit’ considerations. On the one hand, consequentialism enables actions where the end justifies the means. On the other hand, not every action that has positive consequences for those affected is justifiable if it turns out to be unreasonable from the perspective of the acting person.

Consequentialism follows the tradition of utilitarianism (Lat. utilitas: use, usability, advantage) according to Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), which is concerned with actions of greater social scope, e.g., those of state institutions. Utilitarianism is based on the greatest-happiness principle, i.e., the greatest benefit for the largest possible number of people. When thinking of minor everyday actions, a large-scale examination of constraints and benefits is difficult to carry out for reasons of time, complexity and capacity. Against this background, Mill has introduced secondary principles for guiding actions or decisions (cf. Brink, 2014). These secondary principles, which cannot be directly justified through utilitarianism, include honesty, fairness or fidelity. Given its focus on the outcome of actions, consequentialism takes into consideration the dimension of accountability as described in example 1 more clearly. Consequentialism facilitates an understanding of research as fulfilling a social function and not merely as an individual researcher’s actions, which one may or may not ethically approve of. Consequentialism’s perspective on a larger social context thus implies that research projects predominantly need to be questioned for their social significance, which may even justify ambiguous individual actions.

Deontology (Gr. deon: duty) is a formal ethics of duty (cf. Werner, 2011). It is based on the assumption that absolute rules and universal principles exist, such as respect, justice and honesty, which must be observed regardless of possible consequences. Actions are therefore judged according to their intention. In contrast to consequentialist approaches, the universal principles are not secondary principles, but fundamental components of the deontological concept of ethics. Eventually, both sets of ethical principles are very similar.

A representative of deontology is Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who attempted to establish a single moral principle, a generally applicable norm of orientation. A derivation of his 'categorical imperative' (Kant, 1785), the basic formula of which is: “Act as if the maxim of thy action were to become by thy will a universal law of nature"[6] is known as: "So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as means only" (ibid.). This derivation problematises a possible instrumentalisation of human beings. A fairly direct reference to research may be established here if, for example, research participants are purely understood as data providers. This would render them merely as a "means only", but not necessarily "as an end" themselves.

The third strand of ethical theories I wish to mention here are contract theories. They are based on the assumption that human beings are guided by rationality, sensibility and shared norms and employ these in their actions. Originally, contract theories deal with the moral, institutional and legal legitimation of state systems or social systems. Well-known theorists are Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), John Locke (1632–1704) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778). The starting point for contract theories is an analysis of the conditions of social cooperation. Its central concept is a – potentially acceptable – consensus, which is not an actual contract, but a hypothetical construct that "takes place exclusively in the minds of philosophers" (Kersting, 2011, p. 165).

Despite their much broader foundation, contract theories have been directly linked to informed consent in research contexts (cf. Irrgang, 1995). In contrast to the hypothetical contracts of (social) contract theories, informed consent is an actual contract that is usually documented in writing between the researcher and the participant before the start of data collection. Both kinds of contract have some aspects in common, though: Behaviour or actions which are based on mutual consent are seen as morally correct. Individuals are understood as autonomous and rational beings. In the field of Foreign Language Education, similar aspects have been discussed as fundamental ideas of man (*Menschenbildannahmen*, cf. Kurtz, 2003). Autonomy and rationality are seen as important traits of both researchers and research participants. Strictly speaking, however, neither the researcher nor the participant can foresee the exact course of their cooperation when an agreement is made. The study described in chapter 2.2 is an example of how consent-based agreements do not prevent challenging interpersonal situations. [7]

The dialogical nature of human relationships which becomes particularly visible in research approaches focusing on a small number of cases and employing methods of data collection with close interpersonal contact (e.g., interviews, classroom observation) is at the core of an 'ethics of care' (Mauthner et al., 2012). Edwards and Mauthner (2012) claim that in interpersonal relationships, moral decisions and ethical evaluations need to be made situationally and reflexively. Concepts such as care, compassion and responsibility are highlighted, which seem to be particularly helpful for micro-ethical decisions explored in section 2.2. Not only do proponents of an ethics of care suggest different ethical principles, they also explicitly position their approach as a feminist point of view (cf. Norlock, 2019; Tong & Williams, 2009): According to Tong and Williams (2009, n.p.), the ethics theories explained before have highlighted "rules, rights, universality, and impartiality" and characteristics that were traditionally associated as 'male', such as autonomy, intellect, rationality and dominance. In contrast, ways of thinking that were traditionally associated as 'female' and related concepts such "relationships, responsibilities, particularity, and partiality" (ibid.) have been neglected. More recent considerations on feminist ethics question gender binarism, separatism and other kinds of essentialism and highlight the expansive potential of pragmatism (cf. Norlock, 2019). What is important, however,

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[6] Cited from https://gutenberg.org/files/5682/5682-h/5682-h.htm#link2H_4_0010 (retrieved September 1, 2022).

[7] This point is also nicely illustrated by the cartoon of two archaeologists at an excavation site who only find dust in a sarcophagus where they expect to be a mummy. One exclaims: "Amazing! The inscription [on the sarcophagus] appears to be an ancient consent form for an experimental mummification process!" (McMaster University, 2007).

is that an extended range of ethical principles should be used that potentially encompasses more contexts and situations of ethical decision-making.

5. Preliminary Conclusions

From the previous considerations, a number of preliminary conclusions can be drawn that I have structured along three dimensions: a personality-related, a pragmatic and a systemic dimension. All of them are interrelated and should not be understood as merely additive elements that can simply be ticked off a check list. I understand ethical decision-making as adopting a reflective and caring attitude that shows through in all dimensions.

The personality-related dimension focuses on the individual researcher and their choice of actions. Integrity has been identified as the most important trait of character – or as Dörnyei (2007, p. 66) puts it:

> […] at the heart of research ethics lies the moral character of the researcher. In fact, the term 'ethics' derives from the Greek word 'ethos', which means character, and although in our modern world ethical principles can easily be equated simply with 'complying to laws', this is not merely a legalistic issue but concerns basic human honesty and trust.

Thus, integrity is to be understood as acting respectfully, consistently and with strong ethical principles. It privileges behaviour that respects the dignity of other individuals and strives for their well-being. A reflexive attitude is of particular importance in this context as it recognises the contextual nature and conditionality of one's own knowledge and behaviour and critically reveals one's prerequisites and limitations: "What we need is a contextualized and flexible approach to ethical decision making, relying more on the researchers' professional reflexivity and integrity in maintaining high standards" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 72). One may argue that the reflexivity dimension in Dörnyei's considerations can be linked to Mill's principles mentioned above, but Dörnyei himself does not reveal explicitly which theory informed his thinking. Stressing a "contextualized and flexible approach", which may also be interpreted as an expression of an ethics of care, Dörnyei takes a rather pragmatic approach in reflecting upon the ethical dimensions of different steps and actions to be taken during the research process. At the same time, he is careful to highlight that the researcher's integrity should be the bedrock of all practical decisions.

The pragmatic dimension is mainly concerned with these practical decisions of ethical relevance in research. One example could be the observation of institutional regulations, a code of conduct or good scientific practice in general. Furthermore, a sustainable "working alliance" (Legutke & Schramm, 2016, p. 109, my translation) with the participants needs to be established, including accepted quality measures such as voluntary participation and obtaining informed consent. Privacy issues must be dealt with carefully. However, in my contribution it has become clear that these pragmatic and often formal procedures only cover a small part of research and the researcher's activities. Referring to Dörnyei's quotation again, a simple compliance with formalities does not suffice and is not necessarily helpful for microethical decision-making. A merely pragmatic perspective does not represent a differentiated understanding of research ethics.

The social functions and responsibilities of research require a more extensive reflection and discussion of the systemic dimension. On the one hand, this includes the anticipations of possible conflicts of interest that might stem from the different institutions involved in the research process, the different perspectives of the persons involved or the different roles individuals need to adopt. On the other hand, the systemic dimension also includes a critical examination of the conditions of scientific and scholarly work, i.e., the structural, socio-political or financial conditions within which research takes place and within which the results are communicated, used and exploited.

While these fundamental considerations of research ethics might apply to any research endeavour and the three dimensions could serve as guidelines for reflection for any researcher, the topic becomes increasingly complex when considering the perspective of multi- and plurilingual research. Viebrock, Meier and AlSabahi (2022) have developed a framework for analysing multi- and plurilingual research in the field of language education that briefly touches on ethical issues (as one of six dimensions). In the following section I wish to provide some additional considerations research ethics from the perspective of multi- and plurilingual research.

6. Re-examining Research Ethics from the Perspective of Multi- and Plurilingual Research

Research in multilingual teams by plurilingual researchers and/or with plurilingual participants – regardless of the discipline – can be considered a common practice in increasingly multilingual societies. Nonetheless, it has only been reflected upon in a selected number of publications (cf. Andrews et al., 2018; Ganassin & Holmes, 2013; Holmes et al., 2013, 2016; Kull et al., 2019), none of which focus on research ethics. The main question that needs to be addressed in this context is which language choices researchers should make in a multilingual world. Looking at research from a multilingualism perspective, it becomes visible yet again how power dimensions are framed by language. Prestige is assigned differently to different languages and often related to global dominance, economic power, or the political impact of nations where these languages are spoken. In the international academic community, a case in point would be the hegemony of English as a reflection of the high prestige assigned to that language (cf. Viebrock, Meier & AlSabahi, 2022 for more detailed reflections).

That an English-dominated language bias is often taken for granted, has a number of implications: First, it may disadvantage those researchers who have not been socialised in an English-speaking academic environment (cf. Turner, 2004). Second, it has been shown how through the often exclusive use of English in academic communication, knowledge may be 'circulated away' from the local communities where it was produced and where it might be used to improve local practices (cf. Curry & Lillis, 2014, p. 3). The first example is indicative of these tendencies. Third, the deliberate inclusion of a greater linguistic diversity in research yields the opportunity to make audible and mediate the voices of population groups or individuals that would otherwise remain unheard. This may apply both to researchers from different contexts, and even more so to research participants from diverse language backgrounds. Pennycook (2001) highlights a political and ultimately ethical understanding of "voice", which he describes as "the opening up of a space for the marginalized to speak, write or read ... so that the voicing of their lives may transform both their lives and the social system that excludes them" (ibid., 101). In a similar vein, Delandshere (2007) argues for advocacy research as a matter of principle. In her opinion, any kind of research is obliged to aim at policy making, social change and transformation. From this, I conclude that advocacy research should not only include a profound reflection of the significance of research for the participants involved, but also of the language choices made in the different parts of the research project (e.g., data collection, coding, dissemination). According to Delandshere, research participants are often subjected to the rules of academia. This may in particular be seen in large-scale test-based research approaches, where individual voices are usually left aside. In the first example described above, the learners were neither able to voice their perspectives on the English language instruction nor received comment on the outcomes or possible consequences. Delandshere (2007, p. 137) concludes that „[t]here is a sense in which the people involved in these studies have been hidden in these articles written to contribute to the machinery of scholarship, which requires publications in professional journals unread outside the profession". As I have argued before, "the machinery of scholarship" is also inevitably linked to a language bias.

Matters of prestige do not only apply to different national languages, but also to different registers within languages. Similar to what I have discussed in the previous paragraph, the notions of voice and advocacy may also be applied to users of different registers within or across languages. These registers need to be mediated in order to achieve social change and transformation: The academic register is seen to be more prestigious than everyday language, which means that a fair amount of language transformation in both directions may be necessary and that power issues need to be considered in order to provide disempowered groups with a voice and, conversely, ensure that the outcome of research is fed back into and becomes relevant for the communities studied. The second example mentioned above may serve as a case in point here, where power issues (between university and school) become visible even though both researcher and research participant were roughly the same age and had followed a similar educational trajectory.

Existing power differences may also be reinforced if use of different registers coincides with unequal (foreign) language competences and skills. In general, (conceptual) literacy is seen to be more prestigious than (conceptual) oracy (cf. Koch/Oesterreicher, 1986 for a fundamental definition), thus as a researcher in Foreign Language Education one may have to consider transformations from (oral) data in one language to their abstract presentation in another language and register. The collection of data in multilingual primary classrooms may serve as a case in point here, where careful linguistic choices concerning both language and register would have to be made in order to be able to obtain data from plurilingual speakers with different abilities in the different languages that may be used, in order to create a safe space for them and feed the outcome of a research study back into the local community that was studied (cf. also Meier, 2012).

It is also important to consider that different registers, or (conceptual) oracy and literacy for that matter, deal differently with notions of proximity and distance as well as with abstractness and concreteness. Both a critical reflection of distance and proximity as well as abstractness and concreteness are closely related to what an ethics of care is concerned with. Again, these considerations show that an ethical stance is a matter of principle, but it is also a matter of concrete language choices.

Coming to a conclusion, I have shown that both language choice and the use of register should be understood as decisions taken as part our research praxis. Therefore, they also pose questions for fundamental ethical concern. A broader language choice and the opportunities that emerge from it can be truly empowering for both researchers and participants in their different contexts. Both within the narrower context of academia and broader social contexts a choice of language and register other than the dominant language and register may be more reflective of the diversity at hand, and thus more inclusive and transformative. Bringing together the two perspectives this contribution was concerned with, research ethics and multi-/plurilingual research, it needs to be said that multi- and plurilingual research alone may not be a more ethical endeavour as such, but it is certainly an important dimension that needs to be reflected in the light of other vital categories such as the researcher's integrity, practices of good conduct or the general function of research. Conversely, the three dimensions I have identified for ethical reflection and decision-making (personal, pragmatic, systemic) may profit from an additional consideration of a multilingualism perspective as this brings in supplementary arguments for each dimension.

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