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Title of paper: Interpreting 'grief' in Senegal: language, emotions and cross-cultural translation in a francophone African context

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56 **Interpreting 'grief' in Senegal: language, emotions and cross-cultural translation in a**
57 **francophone African context**

58

59 **Abstract**

60 This article reflects on the profound complexities of translating and interpreting 'grief', and
61 emotions and responses to death more broadly, in multilingual, cross-cultural contexts.
62 Drawing on qualitative research conducted in urban Senegal, West Africa, we discuss the
63 exchange of meanings surrounding grief and death through language, including the process of
64 translation, in its broadest sense, between multiple languages (Wolof, French, English). Our
65 experiences demonstrate the crucial importance of involving interpreters and field researchers
66 throughout the research process, to gain fundamental insight into the cultural nuances of
67 indigenous languages and how these are translated and potentially re-framed in the process.
68 We reflect on our iterative process of discussing emerging interpretations with participants in
69 follow-up workshops and with our interpreter. This approach helped shed light on language
70 use surrounding 'grief' and how this is bound up with wider socio-cultural norms which make
71 particular emotions surrounding death and experiences/meanings of death and bereavement
72 possible and 'speak-able'. Our research calls for greater recognition in death and bereavement
73 studies of the cultural specificity of conceptual frameworks developed in minority European
74 socio-linguistic contexts and demonstrates the need for greater engagement with theoretical,
75 empirical and methodological insights gained in diverse cultural contexts in the Majority
76 world.

77

78 **Key words:**

79 Grief

80 Bereavement

81 Mourning

82 Widowhood

83 Translation & interpretation

84 Language & emotions

85
86 **Word length: 8986**

87

88 **(French version of title, abstract and key words)**

89 **Interpréter le 'chagrin' au Sénégal : Langue, émotions et traduction interculturelle dans**
90 **un contexte africain francophone**

91

92 **Résumé**

93 Cet article reflète les complexités profondes de la traduction et de l'interprétation du
94 'chagrin', des émotions et des réponses face à un décès d'une manière générale, dans des
95 contextes multilingues et interculturels. En nous appuyant sur une recherche qualitative
96 menée dans le Sénégal urbain, Afrique de l'Ouest, nous discutons des échanges de
97 significations qui entourent le chagrin et la mort à travers la langue, incluant le processus de
98 traduction, dans son sens plus large, entre différentes langues (wolof, français, anglais). Nos
99 expériences démontrent l'importance cruciale d'impliquer les interprètes et les chercheurs sur
100 le terrain dans tout le processus de recherche, d'avoir une connaissance approfondie des
101 nuances culturelles des langues autochtones et de comprendre comment celles-ci sont
102 traduites et potentiellement reformulées dans le processus. Nous réfléchissons sur notre
103 processus itératif de discussion des interprétations émergentes avec notre interprète et avec
104 les participants lors d'ateliers de suivi. Cette approche nous a permis de mettre en lumière
105 l'usage de la langue relative au 'chagrin' et de voir comment celui-ci est lié à des normes
106 socioculturelles plus larges qui rendent possibles et 'exprimables' les émotions particulières
107 entourant un décès, et les expériences/significations de la mort et du deuil. Notre recherche
108 appelle à une plus grande reconnaissance, dans les études sur la mort, de la spécificité
109 culturelle des cadres conceptuels développés dans les contextes sociolinguistiques de la
110 minorité européenne et démontre le besoin d'un plus grand rapprochement avec les
111 connaissances théoriques, empiriques et méthodologiques acquis dans le Monde majoritaire.

112

113 **Mots clés**

114 Chagrin/peine

115 Deuil

116 Veuvage

117 Traduction & interprétation

118 Langue et émotions

119

120 **(Wolof version of title, abstract and key words)**

121 **Diangate 'Nakhar' si Senegal: Lakk, yeuk-yeuk ak tekki si ada ak thiossane bou woute**
122 **si pathioup afric yiy lakk nassarane.**

123

Teunk

Mbide mi day wané diafe diafe you khoote yi am si tekki ak wakh li nek si «Nakhar», si yeug
yeug ak tontou yi waar si Dée sokay khayma, si waal you bari si ay lakk ak thiossane ak ada.
Sougnou soukandiko si guestou bougnou def si deukou takh yi si sénégal, Afric sowou
diante, gnou ngi wakhtane si wethienete teki ay baat si li eumbe Nakhar ak Dee diaraleko si
ay lakk (Wolof, nassarane, ak angalais).sou gnouy diangate wane nagnou solo bi am si bolee
si tekki kat ak ay guestou kat si terrain bi si liguey bi yeup. Am kham kham bou deugueur si
woutee si am si doundine ak lakk yi si deuk yi ak kham boubakh naka lagnou lene di tekkee
bou lere si guestou bi yeup. Gnou ngi khalate si sougnou diakhalanete bi si tekki kalamayi
ak sougnou tekkikate ak gni bok si wakhtane yi. Yone wowou dimbalinagnou si leral yi
gnouy dieufeundiko lakk bi dieum si nakhar ak guis naka la lakk bi andee ak doundinou
askan wi li lak mo meuneu am tey wane yeuk yeuk yi nite di am sou dee ammee ak li dee ak
nakharlou di tekki. Sougnou guestou daf ay dieumelee si nangou guestou yi gnou def si dee ,
ada yi am si doundine lakk yi li gueuneu touti si nassarane yi te day wane sokhla bi am si
diegue kham kham yi yag yi, you teew yi ak si walou dokhaline bi gnou nango si gni eup si
adouna bi.

140

Li gnou sokhal

Nakhar

Deuthie

Tendji

Tekki & diankhate

Lakk ak yeuk yeuk

147

148

Introduction

Empirical work on the emotional and social aspects of death and bereavement in the Majority world[1] is sparse. With some notable exceptions, understandings of death and bereavement which dominate death studies have been based on research and theorising in the Minority world, particularly in the US and UK. Indeed, social science theories and understandings of society are often fundamentally based on Anglophone perspectives, which reflect colonial legacies, global and local power relations and axes of social difference such as gender, ethnicity and class (Ribbens McCarthy et al, 2016). Attending closely to the process of cross-cultural translation can offer a means of illuminating the cultural specificities of language and thereby reveal 'the presumptions and biases of academic theories and deconstruct hegemonic concepts' (Maclean, 2007, p.789). Translation can be understood as 'any form of conversion from one semantic space to another' and is central to interpretation and knowledge production (Africa N'Ko project, 2015). The process of translation thus 'raises vital questions of alterity, difference and how we define the Other' (ibid). In view of the importance of categorisation and verbalisation in communicating and interpreting emotional experience, and cultural differences in the scope and semantic differentiation of emotion lexicons, 'the issue of translation, or that of the translatability of emotional experience and discourse from one culture to another becomes central' (Ogarkova, Borgeaud and Scherer, 2009, p.348). Yet issues of interpretation and translation are often glossed over in contemporary research (Bielsa, 2014; Gibb and Iglesias, 2016).

This article reflects on the methodological complexities of translating and interpreting emotions and meanings surrounding death in cross-cultural contexts, as explored in our research in Senegal, West Africa. The feminist ethic of care perspective we adopted prioritised listening to the voices of participants, although at the outset we recognised the complexity of this, particularly in cross-cultural studies. Working with multiple languages to research meanings of death in a Majority world cultural context has provided important insights into the cultural specificities of language surrounding 'grief' and emotions. This article explores the challenges of working with multiple languages (Wolof, French, English) and interpreting the responses of participants with very different socio-cultural and material frames of reference to those of most of the research team. This paper discusses, first, the cross-cultural exchange of meaning through language, including the dynamics of working with interpreters, and secondly, the cross-cultural interpretation of emotional responses to death. Our experiences reveal the complexities of translating and interpreting emotions in varying cultural contexts. We demonstrate the importance of teasing out the cultural nuances of key signifying words and phrases used by participants, translators and researchers in order to understand the socio-cultural expectations and taken-for-granted assumptions which construct 'grief' and experiences/meanings of death and bereavement in particular ways.

Interpreting 'grief' and emotions in cross-cultural, cross-language contexts

Our cross-cultural approach to interpreting 'grief' in Senegal needs to be situated within a wider discussion about emotions, which we understand as complex theoretical constructs, involving both thinking and embodied feeling, and existing in-between people, things and places (Soloman, 1997; Palmer and Occhi, 1999). Furthermore, anthropologists Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987, p.28) pose the question, 'Is any expression of human emotion and feeling – whether public or private, individual or collective, whether repressed or explosively expressed - ever free of cultural shaping and cultural meaning?'. From a different disciplinary perspective, linguists ask whether and how words, as cognitive ways of framing the world,

195   can be said to convey particular emotions in all their cultural embeddedness (Palmer and
196   Occhi, 1999).

197   These questions about the cultural embeddedness of emotion words are particularly pertinent
198   to research on grief and responses to death, whether studies adopt a cross-cultural perspective
199   or are based on research 'at home'. Indeed, there is little agreement about the meaning of the
200   word, 'grief', even in the Anglophone literature. Grief is defined by Murray-Parkes (2000,
201   p.23) as 'the intense and painful pining for and preoccupation with somebody or something,
202   now lost, to whom or to which one was attached'. This implies that grief is an individual
203   emotional response, in contrast to 'mourning' which is regarded as the social expression of
204   grief within particular religious and cultural contexts (Klass, 2014). In contrast, Klass (2014,
205   p.4) argues that grief is 'intersubjective' rather than 'what happens in individual persons' and
206   that defining grief as an emotional response is misleading, since the response is made up of
207   many emotions, which he understands as comprising thoughts and affective states.

208   In studying death in Senegalese families, we have drawn on Klass' notion (1999) of
209   'responses to death', in order to move away from the dominant Minority world discourse of
210   the experience of the death as an individualised journey of 'grieving' (Rosenblatt and
211   Bowman, 2013). Rather, grief can be regarded as inherently social, emerging through
212   (changed) relationships, obligations and expectations (Jakoby, 2012; Walter, 2000). This
213   understanding of grief is particularly salient in our research context, where 'family'
214   relationships in the widest sense of the word (including neighbours and friends) and social
215   support networks are central to identity, belonging and social status, as well as to survival and
216   security.

217   When discussing the cultural nuances of language surrounding death and bereavement in a
218   post-colonial African context, the colonial legacy and continuing neo-colonial power
219   imbalances in linguistic usage must be acknowledged. Africa is characterised by a rich
220   linguistic diversity, yet globally, it is minority European languages that dominate (Nkuna,
221   2013). Colonial languages' hegemony continue in the post-independence era, with most
222   African countries retaining colonial languages as official languages of government and as
223   languages of instruction (ibid).

224   While Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) points out, '…any language has a dual character [as] a
225   means of communication and a carrier of culture', Nkuna (2013, p.81) observes that for black
226   Africans, the four languages of Arabic, English, French and Portuguese are 'only the means
227   of communication and do not carry African cultures'. In contrast, he regards indigenous
228   African languages as conveying African cultural values and ways of thinking. The notion of
229   *Ubuntu* (humanness, being human), in particular, which is found in African languages
230   throughout the continent, is regarded as conveying 'a person is only a person because of other
231   people' (Boon, 2007 p.26, cited in Nkuna, 2013), or 'I am because we are one' (Nel, 2008,
232   p.141). This inherently relational understanding of identity and personhood, conveying the
233   profound connectedness of human existence, resonates with the Wolof word, *Dimbalanté,* or
234   togetherness*,* mutual *solidarité* and reciprocity which has long been considered central to
235   family and community life in Senegal, and has been much in evidence across our interviews
236   with family members.

237

238   **The research**

239 This article draws on our experiences of conducting cross-cultural qualitative research on the
240 material and emotional significance of an adult death in diverse families in urban Senegal[2].
241 We identified a purposive sample of 30 families who had experienced an adult relative's
242 death in the previous five years living in two major cities, Dakar and Kaolack. The majority
243 of interviewees were Muslim (46), reflecting the religious affiliation of the vast majority of
244 the population, and from the three largest ethnic groups (Wolof, Hal Pulaar, Serer), while 12
245 were Roman Catholic of Serer and other minority ethnicities. Although Senegal is classified
246 by the World Bank as a lower-middle-income country and our sample included participants
247 of varying socio-economic status, the majority were living in very difficult material
248 conditions. In total, we conducted in-depth interviews with 59 family members and with 23
249 key informants (imams, priests, local leaders, NGO staff, government and other strategic
250 professionals), in addition to four focus groups with 24 women and young people from
251 women's and youth associations (see Evans et al, 2016 for further information).

252 Wolof is the most widely spoken of the six indigenous African languages in Senegal, not only
253 by those of Wolof ethnicity (the largest ethnic group) but also by those of other ethnicities,
254 together with French, the official language, and Arabic, to varying degrees[3]. Interviews were
255 conducted in either Wolof or French depending on which language interviewees felt most
256 comfortable with. Ruth Evans and Joséphine Wouango are largely fluent in French and
257 English and only know a few words of Wolof, Jane Ribbens McCarthy and Sophie Bowlby
258 have differing levels of proficiency in French and no Wolof, and thus the UK research team
259 were reliant on Fatou Kébé, who is fluent in Wolof and French but with limited English
260 proficiency, to provide French-Wolof interpretation. Audio-recorded interviews and focus
261 groups were transcribed in French or translated from Wolof into French by Fatou, and the
262 French transcripts were translated into English by a translator. A thematic coding framework
263 was developed and the English transcripts were coded by Joséphine using Nvivo software
264 and individual and generationally interlinked analyses for each family were developed by the
265 team.

266 The multiple positionings of the research team influence not only relations in the 'field', but
267 also how we are understood as 'outsiders' or 'insiders' and positioned as 'strange' or 'familiar'
268 to each other (Evans et al, in press). In terms of nationality, race, religious affiliations and
269 career stage, Ruth, Jane and Sophie are white British women academics and are based in the
270 UK, who identify respectively as being of Church of England heritage, as a Quaker or as
271 having no religious affiliation; Fatou is a black Senegalese researcher of Muslim faith,
272 belonging to the *Mouride* brotherhood and based in Dakar, Senegal; Joséphine is a black
273 Burkinabé postdoctoral researcher of Roman Catholic religious affiliation, a Belgian resident;
274 and our French-English translator is a white, Irish woman of Roman Catholic heritage who
275 has lived in Dakar for many years. We all have varying experiences of personal losses of
276 close or more distant family members. These personal experiences and positionings and our
277 academic allegiances and training affect our expectations and interpretations of emotions
278 following a death.

279 We adopt an approach of 'uncomfortable reflexivity' and a contextual ethic of care (Edwards
280 and Mauthner, 2012) when analysing and interpreting the data (Evans et al, in press). We
281 held reflexive conversations between team members about cultural norms surrounding death
282 in our country of origin and interviewed each other about our experiences of the death of a
283 relative, using our interview schedules to understand more about our emotional responses and
284 the feelings aroused by being interviewed on this topic. We sought to prioritise interviewees'
285 own 'voices' in the data analysis and interpretation, and avoid, as far as possible, imposing

286 our understandings of bereavement and grief drawn from existing literature (and our own
287 lives) in the UK, or our own religious/spiritual understandings. Our analysis therefore sought
288 to attend closely to the language and words that people used in talking about their
289 experiences.

290 Following data analysis, a series of participatory workshops were held in the selected
291 neighbourhoods with 45 participants who had participated in family interviews or focus
292 groups a year and a half previously. Workshops aimed to provide participants with feedback
293 about our initial findings and explored in more depth some of the responses we found
294 particularly challenging to interpret, especially around recurrent phrases used such as 'it's
295 hard' and religious and cultural widowhood-mourning practices. We also asked participants
296 to rank nine policy and practice suggestions, the results of which were reported in the two
297 policy workshops (one in Dakar, one in Kaolack) we held with 29 government and non-
298 governmental representatives, Muslim religious and local leaders. Workshop discussions
299 were transcribed and translated into French and informed our revisions to the final report
300 (Evans et al., 2016) and our subsequent interpretations.

301 **Languages and the cross-cultural translation of meanings**

302 Cross-cultural research can be regarded as a process of translation, literally and figuratively,
303 that helps to reveal how emotions are embedded in their cultural contexts (Scheper-Hughes,
304 2004; Maclean, 2007). Some anthropologists have sought to deal with such issues by
305 learning the indigenous language for themselves, at the start of a long-term commitment to
306 working in a particular field site (Gottleib, 2012, discussed by Gibb and Iglesias, 2016), but
307 not all cross-cultural research can be based on such an approach. There is often a pervading
308 silence about language and interpretation issues, linked to 'romantic notions' or 'myths' about
309 fieldwork in Majority world contexts, which is only just starting to be addressed (Gibb and
310 Iglesias, 2016, p.3; Caretta, 2014). Since fieldwork is regarded as the central and defining
311 characteristic of anthropology, it is often placed outside the scope of serious critique, leading
312 to a lack of critical examination of key assumptions and practices, particularly those related
313 to language learning and working with interpreters (Borchgrevink, 2003, cited in Gibb and
314 Iglesias, 2016). This section seeks to address this critique by reflecting on how language and
315 translation issues shaped our project. Language and translation affected not only interactions
316 with participants, but also communication within the research team, the specificities of
317 knowledge production, and the possibilities for explicating understandings across linguistic
318 boundaries.

319 *Cultural nuances of 'grief', 'loss' and 'mourning'*

320 When working with French and Wolof, we found it difficult to translate from English specific
321 aspects of the experience of death and grief, denoted by particular words and phrases. Table 1
322 summarises some of the Wolof phrases and the equivalent French and English translations
323 used in our dataset. Challenges were experienced when translating both ways across the
324 three languages. Given the differing language proficiencies of team members, we did not
325 have sufficient capacity or funds to undertake 'back-translation' of transcripts by independent
326 translators/ transcribers fluent in Wolof, French and English. While this could be regarded as
327 a limitation, it also highlights the 'messiness' and compromises that often characterise
328 qualitative research of this nature which relies on field researchers to provide translation
329 between indigenous languages and minority European languages. Efforts were made,
330 however, to question and understand interpreters' choice of words and phrases in the English

and French transcripts to tease out the Wolof and French meanings that participants sought to convey. Table 1 and the discussion below summarises some of these meanings.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Klass (2014) highlights the fact that many languages have no word that corresponds to the present, narrow use of 'grief' in English, used to refer to an individual emotional response. The English word 'grief' (defined as: 'intense sorrow, especially caused by someone's death': Soanes and Stevenson, 2004, p.626) was difficult to translate precisely, since the words used to convey these feelings in Wolof and French do not refer specifically to emotions associated with loss or death. One Wolof word commonly used by participants to describe their feelings following a death, *métite*, can be translated by the French nouns, *chagrin*, *peine* and *douleur*. Indeed, the expression in Wolof, *'âme metite'* was often used by young people, which translates to French as, *'j'ai eu mal'* or *'ça m'a fait mal'*, literally, *'I felt bad/ pain'*. In one interview conducted mainly in French, Fatoumata, a young woman described her feelings on hearing the news of the death of her brother as: *'Des douleurs, ça m'a fait si mal'*. This was translated by our French-English translator, *'Pain, it made me feel awful'*: While these expressions carry a depth of emotions that English speakers might associate with 'grief' following the death of a significant other, they are nevertheless somewhat broader in their connotations, and thus differ from more specific Anglophone phrases which might have been used, such as 'I was grieving', 'I was grief-stricken'.

Participants also used the Wolof word, *nakhar* to refer to their feelings following their relative's death. The response of one mother whose son had died was simply, *'dama amone nakhar'*, translated in the French transcript as, *'j'étais peinée'*. This was rendered by our translator as *'I was grief-stricken'*, but could have been understood to convey something a little less overwhelming. In other interview transcripts, this phrase has been translated as, *'I was saddened'* or *'very upset'*. We have sought to pay attention to the translation of such terms to understand the meaning in the context of the interview, checking the French transcripts and discussing the Wolof words used with Fatou.

A range of words are used in English to refer to death and those who have died, including the dead and the deceased and those who have passed away/passed over. In French, the words *le décès* (the death) and *la personne décédée* (the deceased) were used most commonly by participants, ourselves, and the translator of our report, in preference to the more stark word, *la mort* used in French to refer to 'death' more generally. These terms map onto the Wolof words, *dee bi*, used most commonly for 'death' and *ki dee* for 'the deceased'. *Ganiou* was also used to talk about a *death* (Fr: *décès*), often as a polite way of sharing the news of a death with someone, particularly by Wolof speakers from Saint Louis and the surrounding regions in Senegal. Fatou explained that, in addition to being linked to regional language use, people use the word *ganiou* to reduce the pain of loss; rather than directly referring to a relative having died, *ganiou* can also mean 'ill', resonating with euphemisms such as *'passed away'*, *'departed'* used in English.

We found it difficult to translate 'bereavement' into French or Wolof when formulating our interview questions. The word, *deuil* in French, which may be translated as 'bereavement', can also refer to 'mourning' and 'funeral procession' since there are no separate words for these. Similarly to French, these multiple meanings are reflected in one Wolof word *deudji*,

10

377 which refers variously to the death, the funeral period, and funeral and mourning practices.
378 This contrasts with the specific words used in English to denote these different aspects of the
379 experience of death and loss.

380 The Wolof word *téndeu* was translated into French by the word *veuvage,* or *widowhood* in
381 English. Yet, while Anglophone and Francophone speakers may understand this term as
382 referring to the situation of any woman whose husband has died, the Wolof term only refers
383 to the specific mourning period for widows, which usually lasts for four months 10 days for
384 Muslim women and six months to one year for Roman Catholic women in Senegal. The lack
385 of a precise equivalent term in English to refer to widows' mourning practices has meant that
386 we have resorted to using the hyphenated phrase 'widowhood-mourning' to refer to this
387 period and the practices observed.

388 Further, the Wolof word, *dieutour*, is specifically used to refer to a widow observing
389 mourning practices, but she is no longer referred to by this term once this period of mourning
390 has come to an end. Few participants used this term during the fieldwork, but in the
391 workshop, older women confirmed that they were aware of the meaning of this Wolof word.
392 Young and middle-aged widows face considerable pressure to re-marry and in one workshop,
393 an older woman explained that in the past, even older widows who died had to be hastily re-
394 married, in name at least, before they could be buried, due to the Muslim prescription that all
395 women should be married. There is no equivalent word for 'widower/ *veuf*' in Wolof, since
396 men whose wife has died do not undergo specific mourning practices and they are free to re-
397 marry as soon as they wish after the death, although observing a short period of abstinence
398 was expected among some ethnicities, such as the Serer. Indeed, nationally, a higher
399 proportion of women are recorded as widows (8.2 % of women already married) than the
400 number of widowers (1.1 % of men already married) (ANSD, 2014). This disparity appears
401 to be linked to the larger numbers of women affected by polygamy, in addition to social
402 expectations of men of all ages to remarry within a shorter time period compared to widows
403 and hence they are not reported as widowers (ibid). Understanding this cultural context of
404 marriage helps to understand the cultural nuances of the terms for 'widow' and 'widowhood'
405 in Senegal.

406 Further nuances of language are revealed by the words for 'loss'. When developing our
407 interview schedules, Jane argued for the cautious use of the word 'loss', since it potentially
408 makes assumptions about the significance of the death being discussed (Ribbens McCarthy,
409 2006). Ruth, Fatou and Joséphine who conducted the fieldwork thus tried to avoid
410 introducing this term ourselves in interviews and focus groups. Participants in Senegal,
411 however, commonly referred to the death of a relative and the effects of the death on those
412 left behind using the words, *niak /perte* [loss]. In these instances, we followed participants'
413 lead when they had introduced this expression and felt more comfortable using this, rather
414 than using the more direct words, *'la mort'* or *'le décès'* (the death), since this was often
415 deemed more appropriate by participants. As Henry (2012,p.535, emphasis in original)
416 observes, 'emotions are not *only* a matter of who we are and what we feel but *also* of where
417 we are and what is expected of us'.

418 When the Wolof word, *niak* [loss] is used as an adjective, it can mean *lacking*, *nothing to lose*
419 or *poor*. Our research has revealed that the material, social and emotional dimensions of
420 death are intrinsically interwoven. A family death could cause a myriad of material, social,
421 and emotional disruptions to the everyday lives of children and adults, particularly among
422 poorer families (Evans et al., 2016). The multiple meanings of the Wolof word *niak* here are
423 thus particularly pertinent in understanding how the death of a relative may affect family

424 members, with interlinked emotional and material consequences, which is not conveyed
425 through the French or English words. Without probing further into the inflection of the Wolof
426 word, we would not have gained this insight.

427 The literal translation from English to French of the phrase expressing sympathy in our
428 interview schedule, *'I'm sorry for your loss'* (French: *'je suis désolé(e) de votre perte'*), used
429 when introducing the conversation about the death, did not seem appropriate to Fatou and
430 Joséphine. They suggested instead, *'Nous vous presentons nos condoléances'* (French),
431 (literally: *'We present our condolences to you'*), translated into Wolof as, *'Niou ngi lene di
432 dialer/Massawou',* which conveys the sense of compassion. The choice of words here appears
433 perhaps more formal to Anglophone speakers, but is more culturally accepted in Francophone
434 and Wolof contexts than expressing that one is 'sorry' for the death. Klass (2014, p.6) points
435 out that in English, we no longer use the word 'condolence' as a verb - 'to condole someone' -
436 but it means to 'suffer together'. The word has Latin roots; *dolere*, to feel hurt or suffer pain,
437 and *con*, with (ibid). As our research has also suggested, silent co-presence and sharing in the
438 suffering of those who are bereaved may be a particularly important means of expressing
439 solidarity in African contexts and demonstrating that those who have lost a family member
440 are not alone, thereby helping to restore the social world (Jackson, 2004; Klass, 2014).
441

442 These examples reveal how teasing out the cross-cultural translation of terms used to refer to
443 death, grief and mourning can bring insight into the significant nuances of cultural
444 expectations and assumptions in both Minority and Majority worlds. We recognise, however,
445 that the meaning of particular words is only a small part of the linguistic expression of
446 emotions (Palmer and Occhi, 1999)[4]. As Berman (1999) observes, emotional speech (and
447 silence) are both individual responses as well as '...the site where rules, traditions, and social
448 control are inscribed' (p.69). We sought to pay attention not only to the language used, but
449 also to what is not said - the silences, gaps, change of topic - as well as to embodied effects of
450 grief and signs of emotion in interviews and focus groups (see also Evans et al, in press).
451 Recognising the importance of the emotionality of the interview setting, the next section
452 explores the dynamics of working with an interpreter in qualitative interviews.

453

Interpretation in the 'field'

455 While interpreters enable the researcher to talk to participants in the language in which they
456 are most fluent, it can create distance between the researcher and interviewee (McLennan,
457 Storey and Leslie, 2014). Interpretation also makes interviews a longer, more tiring process,
458 involving time-delays that can disrupt the flow of the conversation. This may pose particular
459 challenges when conducting research on 'sensitive' emotional topics, such as responses to
460 death.

461 Ruth and Joséphine conducted interviews directly in French with professionals, priests and
462 with some young people and adult family members (mainly men) who had received
463 secondary education and had a good level of French. Some of these interviews appeared
464 richer and provided a longer qualitative narrative compared to those conducted in Wolof and
465 French. This may be due to the lessening of language barriers and the more direct rapport that
466 can be built, as well as possibly interviewees' greater familiarity with European customs
467 surrounding the articulation of emotions and reflexivity, as we discuss in the next section. In
468 contrast, in French-Wolof interviews, Joséphine found working with an interpreter created
469 distance between herself and interviewees and informal conversations after the interviews

470 ended, which often enriched the understanding of the family context, usually only took place
471 in Wolof with Fatou. Meanwhile some interviews conducted in French with young people
472 required the presence of Fatou to sometimes provide Wolof interpretation. The balance of
473 power thus shifts between academic researchers and interpreters at different stages of the
474 research process (Edwards, 2013).

475 A further challenge of working with interpreters relates to the fact that academic researchers
476 inevitably receive the information second-hand (McLennan et al, 2014) and are reliant on
477 interpreters as gatekeepers of understanding in interpreting the 'cultural and linguistic
478 inflexions of interviews' (Edwards, 2013, p.511). Interpreters can help to provide context for
479 the participant's words but this role can be problematic if the interpreter 'filters' the interview
480 (Watson, 2004), adding explanations or summarising responses, which makes it difficult for
481 the researcher to provide meaningful follow-up questions. When we received the English
482 transcripts, including Fatou's interpretations during the interview, we found that sometimes
483 additional information had been given, which Fatou reported was usually to help Joséphine or
484 Ruth understand the meaning and wider context. The UK team were surprised, for example,
485 about the additional detail given in Fatou's simultaneous interpretation during the following
486 interview with Toufil, a young widow (aged 25):

487

488   Fatou (Wolof): How do you feel when you think a lot about your husband?

489   Toufil (Wolof): When I think about my husband I remember the atmosphere and the
490   joy there was at home.

491   Fatou to Joséphine (French): They're memories which make her happy because she
492   often thinks of when they were together; how she was with her husband; chats,
493   discussions.

494

495 Fatou later explained that the Wolof phrases used here, *'Kaafbi'* and *'ak Diam bi ak nieup'*
496 could be interpreted in different ways and encompass many things which she had tried to
497 convey to Joséphine at the time. Alternative translations include: remembering *'his joking*
498 *behaviour and the peace that there was at home'* or *'his openness and discussions with*
499 *everyone at home'*. When transcribing and translating the audio-recording, Fatou felt that the
500 participant was emphasising her husband's behaviour and the atmosphere at home, resulting
501 in the French translation, '*Quand je pense à mon mari je me rappelle de l'ambiance et la joie*
502 *qu'il y avait à la maison*', which was subsequently translated into English. This demonstrates
503 the crucial and challenging role of interpreters and translators in producing data, both in the
504 interview setting and when transcribing and translating interviews (Caretta, 2014).

505 At other times, the nuances of our interview questions were not always conveyed and
506 additional prompts were used, particularly with young people. For example, the UK team was
507 surprised about Fatou's follow-up question in an interview with Hawa (aged 16):

508   Hawa (Wolof):   What's most marked me since I was a child; it's me who is in
509   charge of the house even if I'm sick.

510   Fatou (Wolof):   Are you lazy?

511   Hawa (Wolof):   No, no.

512 Fatou later reported that she had been teasing the young woman, who seemed to be
513 complaining about her responsibilities, and spoke to her as she might to her younger siblings.
514 She added that the young woman was educated and understood that she was joking. This
515 exchange needs to be understood in the context of wider generational norms which mean that
516 elders more senior to oneself are regarded as having a moral duty and responsibility to
517 socialise those who are younger (Evans, in press). Fatou's prompt in the interview was based
518 thus on a deeper cultural understanding of the participant's response and their relational
519 positionality than that revealed by the written words themselves.

520 These examples draw attention to the multiple layers of meaning involved in the production
521 and interpretation of interview transcripts, and the ways in which the emotional dynamics,
522 tone of voice and joking exchanges during an interview may potentially be lost in translation.
523 They also show that translators are 'active producers in research rather than neutral conveyers
524 of messages' who exercise power over meaning (Temple, 2002, cited in Caretta, 2014, p.10).
525 This highlights the importance of involving interpreters and field researchers in data analysis.
526 We have discussed translation issues regularly with Fatou and occasionally with the French-
527 English translator, as we continue to reflect on these cultural meanings and assumptions.

528

Cross-cultural interpretation of emotions

530 In reading the interview transcripts, the UK team have been struck by the powerful brevity
531 and frequency of participants' common responses to questions about their feelings and
532 responses to death, in comparison to our own interviews and those of participants in previous
533 research in the UK (e.g. Valentine, 2008). The Wolof phrase, *dafa meti* (*c'est dur/ it's hard*),
534 for example, was used in the vast majority (80%) of the family interviews, often multiple
535 times. It was used both to describe emotional responses to the death, as well as difficult
536 material circumstances and struggles to support the family in other parts of the interview. It
537 was often used almost as a standalone phrase and sometimes was followed by a little more
538 elaboration. For example:

539　　　　*'I was saddened. It was very hard. The people and her friends who came weren't*
540　　　　*worried about the children; it was me they worried about'* (Malang, 47 year old
541　　　　widower).

542

543 Many participants also described feeling *alone* or *lonely* (adjective W:*weet*; Fr:*seul*) and
544 experiencing *loneliness* (noun W:*weetay*, Fr:*solitude*) following the death. The frequently
545 reported feelings of being *alone* seemed to conflict to some extent with the sense of the
546 presence of the deceased that many reported feeling after the death, particularly in
547 homespace, raising significant issues of interpretation. References to feeling *alone* also
548 appeared somewhat surprising, as most participants lived in large, extended family
549 households and seemed to be surrounded by the company of relatives, friends and
550 neighbours, particularly after the death. N'diaw, a widower living in a poor neighbourhood in
551 Kaolack, emphasised how important family and community solidarity was in providing
552 consolation after a death: *'you're never really alone* [laughs]*'* [...] *'The house is filled; people*
553 *are there but you are comforted. During the eight days* [after the death]*, you don't have a*
554 *problem. The presence of people comforts you'.*

555 The striking use of the language of being *alone* in participants' interviews thus seems to
556 imply something more fundamental about the gap and emptiness left in their lives by the
557 absence of the deceased, which led to feelings of loneliness and being alone despite the

558 presence of others. Given the importance of people's intricate and extended family and social
559 networks for daily survival, it seems that the significance of a family death is not only about
560 the end to a relationship, but also the disruption of familial roles and generational hierarchies.
561 Jacquemin (2010) suggests that rather than being a choice, solitude and isolation in Africa
562 (more than elsewhere) appears to be a sign of a loss of social status and support, and indeed,
563 implies greater suffering, which perhaps relates to the significance of *Ubuntu/ Dimbalanté*,
564 discussed earlier. As a representative of one women's NGO commented: *'If the person is*
565 *alone, they will suffer more'*.

566 Several participants speaking in French also used the adjective or noun *vide* and on a few
567 occasions, Fatou translated the Wolof words *weet* [alone] and *méti* [pain] as *vide*. *Un vide*
568 was translated by our French-English translator using the very powerful, emotive word, a
569 *void,* which in English almost conveys an existential dread. The French word can also be
570 translated as a *gap, emptiness* or *absence* (noun) or as *empty* (adjective), which interviewees
571 used to refer to the atmosphere at home and their feelings about the loss of the deceased and
572 their role within the family. These related meanings are conveyed in one young man's words
573 (in French):

574   *'I felt really alone [seul].[…] Even at the time that you're talking, you feel that there's*
575   *a complete void [un vide] there'* (N'diogou, aged 29, mother died 5 months
576   previously).

577

578 When we reviewed the transcripts, we noticed this sense of a void or emptiness was only
579 conveyed in Wolof in a few interviews. Fatou's choice of the French words *seul, solitude* or
580 *vide* to translate *weet/weetay* varied according to the context. For example, Dieumbe (young
581 woman, aged 19) used the word *weet* to express the emptiness associated with her mother's
582 death:

583   I felt alone [W:*Dama Weetone*; Fr: *Je me suis sentie seule*]. *I went to school and on*
584   *my return, the house was empty* [W:*dafa Weetone*, Fr:*vide*] *without her; and the*
585   *loneliness overcame me* [W:*weetay diap ma*, Fr. *la solitude m'envahissait*], *so I cried.*

586 Fatou explained that these phrases could also be translated in the perhaps less emotive
587 language of *'her absence* [Fr: *absence*] *was felt in the house, I felt alone/lonely...'*. Chérif's
588 interview (young man aged 26), when talking of the loss of the care provided by his father,
589 used a different Wolof phrase to convey this: *'Every time I think of that, I feel 'loumay méti'*
590 [literally, a pain/ sorrow in me]. Fatou translated this as: *'je sens un vide en moi'*, translated
591 into English by our translator as *'I feel emptiness in me'*.

592 Interpreters' and translators' choice of words when translating across multiple languages, and
593 hence the multiple layers of meaning involved in the production of transcripts, is rarely
594 queried or made visible in published work, but can thus provide important insights into how
595 emotions and responses to death are mediated, filtered and inflected with cultural nuances.

596 The follow-up workshops enabled us to discuss further our preliminary interpretations. When
597 asked about their feelings of being alone, participants commented that the presence of family
598 members, neighbours and friends in the immediate aftermath of the death consoled them and
599 they *'share with you the pain that you feel'*. Many however said that the person was
600 *'irreplaceable'*, particularly a mother or a father, and while the presence of others helped to
601 console you, *'it did not allow you to forget the loss'*. One young woman (aged 20, Muslim)
602 whose mother had died when she was young, spoke powerfully about this:

603　　　*'You wake up one day, you lose your mother or your father who is someone that is*
604　　　*close to you. I say that no one can replace a mother or a father. That's why he/she*
605　　　*feels alone despite the support of the family'.*

606　Phrases such as *feeling alone*, *it's hard* and the deceased relative being *irreplaceable* which
607　were used commonly to denote emotional responses to death appear to be idioms, or key
608　signifiers, of the material, social and emotional dimensions of loss. Within our team
609　discussions, we have considered whether the – largely unexpected - brevity of responses in
610　Senegal is related to: the ways in which participants were informed about the interview
611　process; a dominance of structured rather than a life-history style of interviewing in previous
612　research experiences (either among field researchers or participants); or, to participants'
613　expectations about what may be shared with others, whether strangers or those who are
614　familiar.

615　We suggest, however, that these responses need to be understood within a wider cultural
616　context in which the interview format and individual self-revelation and self-explanation, on
617　which Western autobiography is based, are less familiar (Gal, 1991). Indeed, the in-depth
618　qualitative interview may itself be predicated on the notion of the reflexive self that can be
619　articulated, or produced for the sake of the interview (Ribbens McCarthy et al, 2000). Palmer
620　and Occhi suggest a general difference between English and Asian languages, such that,
621　'…speakers of English, American and Canadian at least, have an unusual proclivity to
622　verbalize the domain of emotional experience' (1999, p. 11). Furthermore, Jackson (2004)
623　argues that the focus on one's inner feelings and thoughts is far less pronounced in Africa
624　than in the Minority world. This is linked to wider African notions of *Ubuntu/ Dimbalanté*
625　and relational understandings of personhood (Nkuna, 2013), whereby the elaboration of
626　individual emotions may potentially be seen as contradicting the assumption of shared
627　experience and the collective self. Indeed, silence and co-presence in response to suffering
628　appear to be valued as a form of healing that helps to restore the social world (Jackson, 2004;
629　Couto, 2009). In addition, while silence may sometimes be understood to indicate lower
630　social status or the subjection to power (Berman, 1999), in Senegal, a sense of reserve and
631　inarticulateness is often expected of high caste nobles and is regarded as a sign of a Wolof
632　man's elite identity (Irvine, 1979, cited in Gal, 1991).

633　At the same time, our interviews with each other about the death of a relative have helped us
634　to recognise the difficulty of articulating emotions about loss (Frank, 2001). When we
635　analysed our team interviews, we found that Jane also frequently used the phrase *'it's/it was*
636　*hard'* when talking about her feelings about her husband's death. She also explicitly sought to
637　communicate the emotional and embodied sense of the word: *'But, so emotionally I, it was*
638　*incredibly hard but physically it was incredibly hard too'*. This phrase was also used by the
639　other team members, but much less frequently, perhaps reflecting the differing nature of our
640　emotional ties to the deceased relative we were referring to. The phrase, *'it's/ it was difficult',*
641　was used frequently by the UK team and Ruth and Sophie felt that they were struggling to
642　convey and make sense of their feelings during the interview. Thus, differences between
643　participants' and our own narratives of a family death were perhaps not as stark as we first
644　thought.

645　When asked about their use of the phrase, *dafa meti* (it's hard) in the workshops, participants
646　emphasised how difficult the death of a relative was in financial terms, particularly if a man
647　died who was supporting a wife and children. However, they linked this to the emotional
648　aspects of bereavement and the loss of a close relationship with a significant other with

649 whom they were used to sharing their life. In one of the workshops, N'diougou, a young
650 man, spoke powerfully (in French) about the emotional inflection of the word:

651   *'Death is always hard* [Fr: *La mort est toujours dure]. To lose someone is hard. Death*
652   *is awful* [Fr: *atroce]....If this someone is the family's support and one day suddenly*
653   *you lose them, you can't find any other terms except hardness* [Fr: *la dureté]'.*

654 The workshop discussions thus confirmed our findings that the material and emotional
655 dimensions of loss are inextricably interwoven, conveyed through the Wolof phrases, *dafa*
656 *meti*, *niak, weet(ay)* and the crucial importance of '*Dimbalanté/ Ubuntu* - togetherness and
657 mutual *solidarité* - for survival, security and belonging.

658

659 **Conclusion**

660 Our experiences of cross-cultural research concerning responses to death in urban Senegal
661 have revealed the complexities of translating and interpreting emotions in varying cultural
662 contexts. Emotions are part of culture and are constructed and produced in language and
663 through human interaction (Scheper-Hughes, 2004). Discussing and reflecting on the nuances
664 of how key signifying words and phrases were used in Wolof and French by participants,
665 translators and researchers, has shed light on the cultural specificities of language and wider
666 socio-cultural expectations and taken-for-granted assumptions which construct 'grief' and
667 experiences/meanings of death and bereavement in particular ways. Emotions in all their
668 material, visceral, embodied, and cognitive dimensions are constituted and (re)created in
669 ways made possible through the cultural resources available to people in their particular
670 social worlds. While there is no doubt that our interviewees were expressing profoundly
671 difficult feelings in response to a family death, culture and language provided the frameworks
672 through which such emotions could be brought to meaning and articulated. Box 1 provides a
673 summary of our insights on language, translation and cross-cultural interpretation when
674 researching responses to death, and emotions more generally, in multilingual, diverse
675 contexts.

676

677 INSERT BOX 1 HERE

678

679 This article intends to give Minority world death and bereavement researchers pause for
680 thought. As part of the broader postcolonial project, our research calls for greater recognition
681 in death studies of the cultural specificity of conceptual frameworks developed in minority
682 European languages and for greater engagement with theoretical, empirical and
683 methodological insights gained in the Majority world. It is important to work across linguistic
684 boundaries, where possible, and investigate diverse socio-cultural and religious
685 understandings of death in languages other than English, both in the Minority and Majority
686 worlds. Only then will we be able to develop more culturally nuanced understandings of
687 responses to death in diverse contexts.

688

689 **Endnotes**
690 1. We use the terms Majority and Minority Worlds to refer to the global South and global
691 North respectively in order to acknowledge that the 'majority' of the world's population and
692 land mass are located in the former. While we recognise that these terms are problematic,

693 since all dichotomised terms risk homogenising and obscuring complex and extensive
694 diversities, the terms nevertheless can help to shift the balance of worldviews that frequently
695 privilege 'western' and 'northern' perspectives (Punch, 2003).

696 2. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Reading Research Ethics Committee in
697 2014.

698 3. While some object to the growing 'Wolofisation' of Senegal, whereby Wolof is becoming
699 the language spoken by the majority of the population, others welcome the use of an
700 indigenous African language as the main means of communication, rather than French, which
701 continues to be the language of communication in government, law and other professional
702 and educational settings.

703 4. More extensive discussion of theoretical approaches to emotions and to language are
704 beyond the scope of this paper. See Berman (1999) and Ogarkova et al (2009).

705

718

719

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Table 1: Wolof phrases used and French/English translation

Wolof	French	English
âme metite from *métite* (noun)	J'avais mal/ je me sentais douleur *douleur, mal*	*I felt bad, pain* *pain*
am nakhar from *nakhar* (noun)	*avoir de la peine, peiner* *peine* *chagrin*	*to feel pain, saddened, upset, grief-stricken* *sorrow, sadness, distress* *sorrow, affliction, trouble*
deudji (noun)	*deuil*	*bereavement, mourning, funeral period*
téndeu (noun)	*veuvage*	*widowhood, widowhood-mourning practices*
dieutour (noun), rarely used in interviews or focus groups	*veuve*, used more commonly, including by Wolof speakers	*widow*, literally, widow observing mourning practices
No Wolof word	*veuf*	*widower*
niak (noun)	*perte*	*loss*
niak (adjective)	*manque, pauvre*	*lacking, nothing to lose, poor*
dee bi (noun) *ganiou,* more common among Wolof speakers from Saint Louis and surrounding regions of Senegal	*la mort* *le décès*, of a specific person, *la mort, le décès*, of a specific person, *être malade*	*death,* general term for death *the death*, usually of a specific person *death, the death* of a specific person, *to be ill*
ki dee (noun) no specific Wolof word, some Wolof speakers say: *gni lakhou; gni dee; gni djitou; gni ganiou.*	*la personne décédée* *les morts*	*the deceased,* usually a specific person *the dead*

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818 **Box 1: Insights and practical tips to be considered when researching responses to death**
819 **and emotions in multilingual, diverse cultural contexts**

820 **Overarching considerations:**

821 - Consider how far responses to death have been understood through Anglophone assumptions
822 and theoretical perspectives, bound up in the English language. How can English-speaking
researchers put their assumptions about 'grief' on hold?
823 - Consider how spoken words may or may not be part of the general expression of emotions for
824 participants in the study. Meaning-making about responses to death may occur through other
means (eg. silences and everyday embodied activities) that do not require individual
825 introspection.
826 - Recognise how far 'translation' involves much more than a technical exercise of finding
equivalent words. Cultural diversities are intrinsically bound up in language, evoking
827 assumptions and nuances that require much thought and attention to explicate for readers of
828 varying linguistic communities.

829 **Practical tips and insights:**

830 1. Adopt an approach of 'uncomfortable reflexivity' and recognise how the multiple positionings
of the research team, including language proficiencies, influence all stages of the research
831 process.
832 2. Reflect on the everyday language that different team members use to talk about emotions
surrounding responses to death through transcribed discussions and/or through interviewing
833 each other about personal experiences.
834 3. Develop an on-going dialogue with field researchers, interpreters and transcribers throughout
the research process in order to attend closely to key words and phrases surrounding responses
835 to death in different languages, including:
836 - words used in topic guides,
- language used in interview/focus group settings
837 - translation and transcription of audio-files
838 - coding frameworks.
Discuss and transcribe explanations of the translation process and keep a list of the nuances of
839 key words and phrases that pose challenges for translation and interpretation.
840 4. During the analysis and interpretation phase, pay full attention to the contexts in which
particular words and phrases are embedded. Tease out the cultural nuances of words and
841 expressions commonly used by participants in indigenous and European minority languages
842 through discussion with field researchers, interpreters, transcribers and translators. Questions
to consider:
843 - What cultural meanings and frames of reference do people draw on in making sense of
844 the death and emotions surrounding the death?
845 - Which words and phrases are commonly used? Which languages are these expressed
in?
846 - How have these words and phrases been translated into different languages? Does the
translation differ in different transcripts?
847
848 - What anomalies, unexpected or unfamiliar interactions or forms of linguistic
expression do you notice? These may indicate a point of cultural diversity that needs
849 to be explored and understood.
- How and why have we come to these interpretations?
850 5. Share and discuss preliminary interpretations and meanings of key signifying phrases with
participants, field researchers, interpreters, transcribers and translators. Transcribe discussions
and integrate these understandings and nuances into cross-cultural interpretations.
6. Attend closely to how key words and phrases related to the findings and their wider contexts
© are reported in different languages in publications.