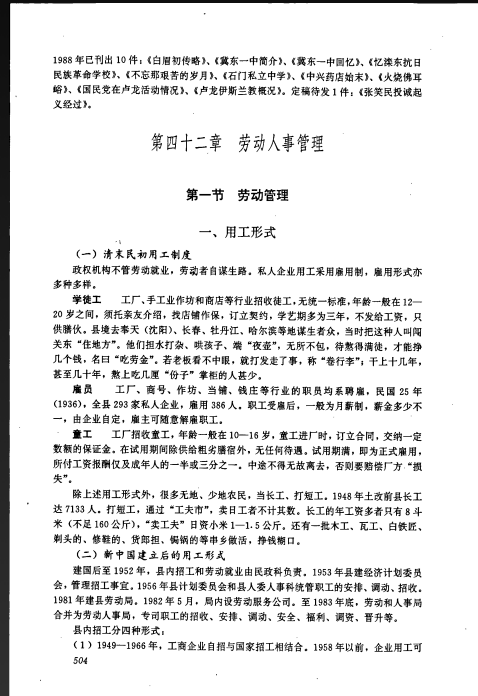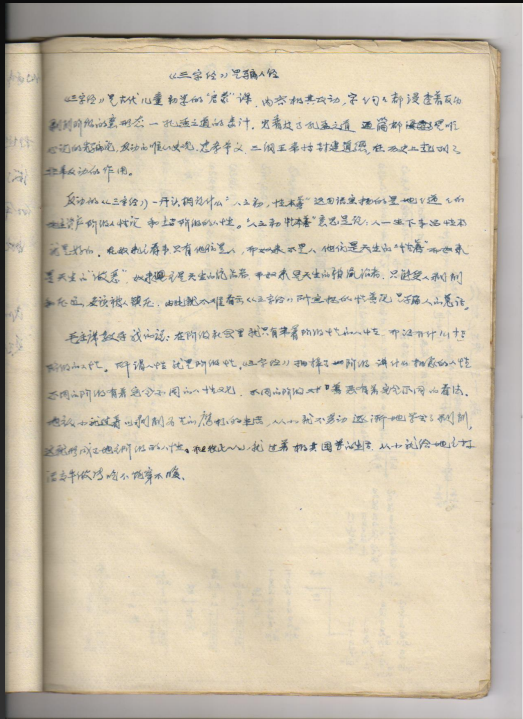# THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF EQUIVALENCE

Critical Theory and Translation in Qualitative Research

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Research Scenario I

108　被访者：然后我就跟我妈说，我说妈那要不我也不上学了，我看鸡。不会干别的，那时候太小了，
109　太小下地不会干别的。我说我看鸡，然后不挣点工分吗。然后你叔一般的情况下不管，家里头啥事
110　也不管，就包括我上学后来说非得让参加高考什么的你叔也不管，很少说一句话，都是你婶说。我就
111　跟我妈说，我妈说那你不上就不上被，跟那个大姐看鸡去吧，我说中。我妈就跟人家生产队长说去了，
112　然后就说看鸡去了，就不上了。不上了时候不是一天比一天暖和，然后都在院子里吃饭。在院子里吃
113　饭有一天下午，中午吃饭其实都工夫唠嗑干什么的，下午吃饭也不算太晚。然后墙上不知道是谁写的，
114　其实说不一定就是我这家人写的，写了一个机器的机，就在那个砖上的墙上用粉笔写了一个机。
115　　　然后吃饭前我拿筷子拿碗就看到这个字了，还有哪的我都不记得了，反正就是指着这个字，我说
116　念机。你姥爷也在外头做着呢，你的姥过来过去都听我说了。我说这个字念机，好像是我老叔说你看
117　鸡吗，就是那个鸡。我说不是，我说这个是织布机的机，那时候家里都织布，不知道机器，就是知道
118　织布机那个机，我说不是，我说这个是织布机的机。
119　　　然后我爸一听，哎呀这玩意，你说这孩子还是得上学，你说说这还没上一年学就知道这个是织布
120　机的机，不是看鸡的那个鸡，这要不上学你说知道这个。然后就又琢磨了，又琢磨让我上学，就跟我
121　说。其实我也不是说不愿意上学，说实在的学习也不累，然后之后就上去了。就这么着反反复复弄了
122　三回，不上，一到感觉到家里压力太大、太困难的时候就担心回家挣分，不上完了之后就在家干一段，
123　然后再回去上去。一般的情况都是到春天需要看鸡的时候，他别的不会干不是，差不多给这看鸡这一
124　段过去了，这会再回去上去了。
125　被访者：一到看鸡这时候就有辍学的念头。
126　被访者：闹了三回就在小学期间，接着文化大革命，文化大革命怎么呢。文化大革命其实你婶我

Sample qualitative data in Chinese, from left to right: An essay written by a research participant, a local chronicle, an interview transcript

Research Scenario II

* Are you targeting subjects who cannot speak/read English?

● Yes ○ No

8.1   Describe what languages these subjects speak/read:
Mandarin Chinese

8.3   You must attach informed consent forms translated into the languages of the non-English speaking people you seek to enroll. Describe who translated the consent forms, their qualifications:

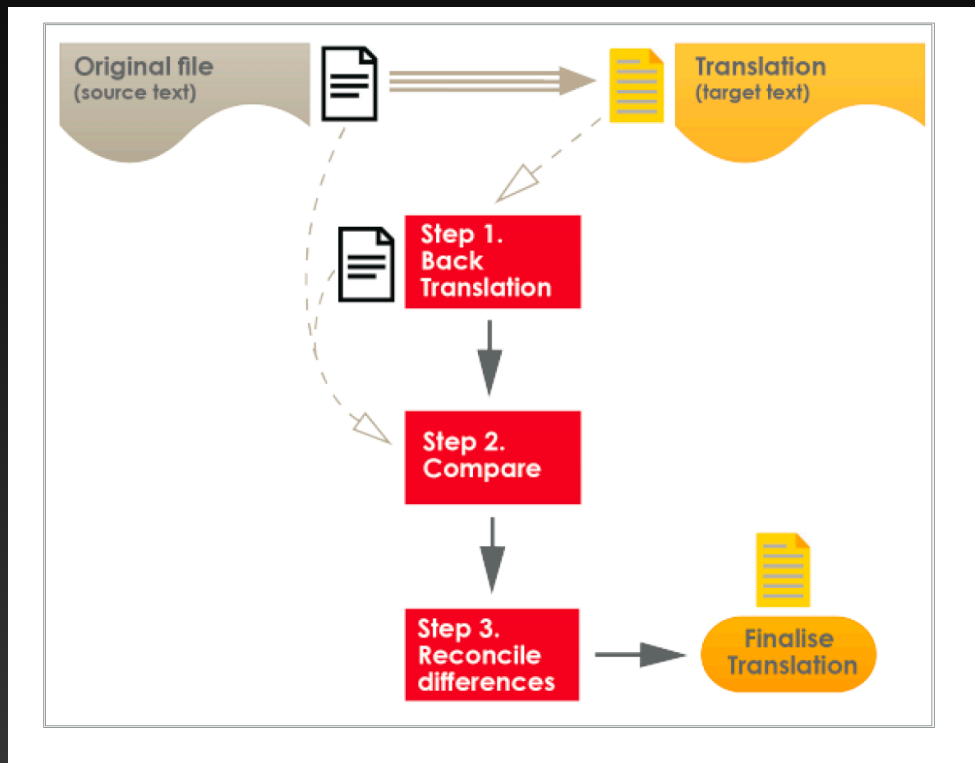8.4   Upload the back translation of the consent forms, assent, or information sheets here:

Name	Description
There are no items to display	

Sample questions about translation on an electronic IRB review form

Research Scenario II

BACK TRANSLATION?

Source: *4 Simple Keys to Better Back Translation*

Research Scenario III

Translation of Survey Instruments and Interview Protocols in a mixed methods study based in Florida, U.S.

Spanish
Haitian Creole
Korean
Mandarin Chinese
Portuguese
Vietnamese

7,000+

Languages spoken in today's world

What does this mean to qualitative research?

The invisibility of translation

Language—Languages

Voice-Voices

Translation and Qualitative Research

"Translation dilemma":

…whether methodologically it matters if the act of translation is identified or not; the epistemological implications of who does translation; and the consequences for the final product of how far the researcher chooses to involve a translator in research. (Temple & Young, 2004, p.161)

Today's Presentation

An outline to put translation and critical theory in conversation with each other in qualitative research

- Problematizing the search for equivalence in translational practice
- Three shifts to move away from such a pursuit for equivalence
  - ✳ On the level of onto-epistemology
  - ✳ On the level of research ethics and politics
  - ✳ On the level of research practice

The Search For Equivalence in Translational Practice

- Translatable or not, that is a question (eg. Walter Benjamin, Emily Apter)

- Equivalence: "a procedure in which the same situation is replicated as in the original but different wording is used" (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995, p. 32)

- Semantic equivalence and beyond

Problematizing Equivalence

Translatability— Equivalence—Invisibility

Under the regime of fluent translating, the translator works to make his or her work "invisible," producing the illusory effect of transparency that simultaneously masks its status as an illusion: the translated text seems "natural," i.e., not translated. (Venuti, 1995, p.5)

New Space For Methodological Conversations

What does it mean to move away from a translational practice that searches for equivalence?

- On the level of onto-epistemology: The theories of meaning and validity

- On the level of research ethics and politics

- On the level of research practice

On the Level of Onto-epistemology

- At the center— the understanding of meaning

- Cultural typification

- Understanding meaning as a range of possibilities vs. correspondence (Carspecken, 1996; Zhao, et al., 2021)

On the Level of Research Ethics and Politics

- The dominant role of English

- The role of translator in qualitative research

- Asking the key questions of whether to translate or not, as well as into what languages and for what purpose we translate

On the Level of Research Practice

- Explicate and critically interrogate the very often messy and porous process of researching and translating

- Ask the question of what norms are foregrounded and recognized, or neglected and concealed through the translational practice

- Foster reflexivity and strive for an equitable, democratic research process

Implications for Qualitative Researchers

Qualitative research: Praxis vs. Procedures

1. Enacting a more dynamic theory of meaning

2. Visiblizing translators

3. Reflecting upon the power relationship in deciding whether to translate or not

4. Centering your key audience

5. Promoting multilingual practice and increasing multilingual awareness

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Thank you!

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