Reviewer's report

Title: Translating language and culture: A key issue in international public health research

Version: 1 Date: 22 October 2004

Reviewer: Alexander Bischoff

Reviewer's report:

General

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

The major drawback is the fact of using a non-professional interpreter (and only one). How can you infer conclusions about translation with just one non-professional interpreter? And: just four transcriptions are not enough. As it stands now, it looks scientifically unsound.

Comments

P 1 The title of this paper is far too vague. Why culture? Is it about translation or interpreting/interpretation? More attention should be given to definitions. Same comment on conclusions: Terminology! Use the terms interpreter and translator consistently.

P 5 'paper reflects on the process of translation...' What is the study question? Study objectives?

P 6 More work on a conceptual framework should be undertaken. Refs? As such it looks rather trivial. Triadic model should be at least discussed.

P 7 'partly influenced from the research questions...' etc: too fuzzy for a scientific paper.

P 7 Results: the section starts with remarks that belong to a conclusion or discussion section

P 9 Discussion: Model in Figure should have been dealt with already in the introduction

P 10 'Hybrid use of language' looks like a quote. Does not make much sense without further explanation

P 10, is this paper about lay interpreting?

P 10: The tensions: the result section should provide findings about this

P 11: Who is in charge of the research? Responsibility? Authority? You write ‘…meant that the agreed procedure was not always followed': this equals to admitting that the interpreter did not behave according to the research plan; this is not according to research ethics and thus scientifically unsound. Is it even malpractice? If the research assistant does not do what was agreed on: this may cause harmful consequences!

P 12: Table 1 belongs to the results sections (this are important data).

P 13 cultural interpreter: this should have been introduced earlier, and also if you use the term ‘cultural’ you ought to elaborate on this.

P 13 reflexions on insider, outsider, otherness: has nothing to do with this paper.

It looks as if this paper is a by-product of other research (probably interesting research). Same remark on p 15 (last sentences of the discussion): interesting, but not relevant in this context.

P 14: N=1! (ie one interpreter) is not a number based on which you can write an article on translating language and culture.

P 16: Referring to minority ethnic groups is important, but it is different (European) context, and nothing can be said about this topic in this study.

A concluding remark: I welcome the idea of writing about interpreting in a public health journal. But because of the considerable methodological flaws, I could not accept the publication of this version
of the paper. I would recommend writing an entirely new paper on the available data in a case study matter: methodologically fine-tuned, without sweeping statements, with more conceptual work on it, but still - the fact of addressing the dimension of language interpreting remains a merit of this paper. - highlighting the relevance of working with interpreters.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

none