

# Addressing the multilingual global challenge

## CASE STUDY



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## MIDEQ: MIGRATION FOR DEVELOPMENT & EQUALITY

Research on migration in the Global South is invariably conducted in, and/or disseminated in English, occasionally with French, Spanish or Portuguese. This means research conceptualisation and reach occurs mostly monolingually and in a language which is rarely the language in which the challenges are experienced in the countries of the Global South. This has profound cognitive, experiential, sensory and intellectual ramifications for how research is conducted multilingually. Where research taking place in these countries responds to local language needs it does so through limited uses of translators at the point where data is gathered, but not in multilingual co-design; in burden of translation; or in participatory approaches to linguistically equitable partnerships. It is rare for English-speaking researchers to experience what it is like not to understand research, data and dissemination. In addition it is only since the advent of the nascent field examination multilingual researching as a methodology and ethic of care and equity that the dimensions of sensory, cognitive, intellectual and ethical burden and rigour have begun to be a subject for study or reflection.

This linguistic inequality is exacerbated for migrants. For those who are internally displaced or forced to migrate the element of linguistic choice is also missing so ability to access and engage in new language learning is fraught and cognitively difficult. Research has shown that choice is a critical component in second language learning and where this is absence but coerced by the state or circumstance then language acquisition will be hampered. Linguistic sensitivity in participatory research and in constructing linguistically equitable partnerships is a difficult task as there are no readily available technical fixes. Whilst moderately suitable translation tools are now available for use online, the accuracy is restricted to major world/ former colonial languages. Indigenous languages and migrant languages are rarely represented. The digital divide also means that peripheral groups do not have access to either the education or digital means through which such tools might be used. Equally, there are no easy short cuts to gaining fluency in a language, especially where access to appropriate indigenous or migration language education may not be available and where resources are not well developed. Working with translators both on and offline is a skill needing practice. Furthermore, the way in which migration and inequality are conceptualised in migrant languages and indigenous languages means that great linguistic care is needed in translation for accuracy and rigorous research to occur and to be trusted.

Multilingual working is an overall responsibility of the Hub but is led by WP11 based at the University of Glasgow and draws on learning from previously funded projects including *The Listening Zone* and *Researching Multilingually at Borders*. WP11's work in addressing the multilingual language challenge faced by the MIDEQ Hub is significant for the following reasons:

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- Monolingual approaches to migration research in the Global South, especially in communication and dissemination, have been replaced by regular and frequent multilingual outputs from across the Hub. Content on the [MIDEQ website](#) is available in four languages (English, French, Arabic and Brazilian Portuguese). The *Story of Migration* animation (outlined above) is available in six languages with more anticipated. Resources have been allocated to our Global South partners for translation and interpretation. Language is now considered in a similar way to other protected characteristics which means that there are mechanisms for translation where appropriate and the Hub has a multilingual research strategy which allows for equity in the modes and means of knowledge production;
- Publication of a [multilingualism and knowledge production](#) concept note has embedded the core principles relating to conflict resolution, inequality and language rights within the Hub's work. The concept note shifts enables reflection on the fundamental role language plays in migration research. This is unprecedented in migration research led from the Global North. Capacitation of multilingual research across the Hub, notably inverting linguistic norms, has allowed the burden of linguistic inequality to be: a) acknowledged and b) practically addressed, and has opened new vistas for interdisciplinary research because a wider range of knowledge and conceptualisation is now included;
- A journal article working with multilingual concepts of migration will shortly be published as part of the special issue of *Zanj: The Journal of Critical Global South Studies* (see below).
- Arts outputs have been generated and many examples can be found on the MIDEQ website which begin and end in languages other than those that dominant knowledge production and research output. The use of the arts as a 'third term' in multilingual work is a significant methodological approach being tested in MIDEQ.

Multilingual dimensions have been well integrated into the project from the proposal stage with the aim of addressing SDG 10: Reducing Inequality. Multilingual sensitivity and practice have been rigorously applied by Work Package 11 and designed to work across all corridors and work packages, including, crucially, Hub operations, enabling and capacitating action and reflection cycles on the inclusion of languages. This meant treating languages functionally in the same way as gender in UKRI reporting structures, ensuring robust critical attention and heightened rigour across all elements of the Hub's work. This informed ways to achieve multilingual working, for example: when or when not to resort to digital translation e.g. Google Translate; how to use interpretation channels on Zoom; remuneration costs of translators; how to work with key concepts e.g., migration multilingually; how to frame workshops and symposium using languages other than English or other than dominant translation channels.

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From a situation where English was assumed as the only working language to one which could use community translation in French, Arabic, Chinese and Portuguese with ease, to ensuring appropriate remuneration of translators, the MIDEQ Hub has pioneered innovative, interdisciplinary and practical approaches to translation. During Share In sessions not only is translation present but space is given for reflection on the power dimensions and inequalities in play when working in a language other than your mother language or first language of instruction. Furthermore, from an assumption at proposal stage that outputs would be written in English, the Hub now publishes blogs in any language appropriate to the research context and researchers.

MIDEQ's work in addressing the multilingual global challenge has made an important contribution to understanding and knowledge in the field by: strengthening capacity and firmly centring the multilingualisms and sociolinguistics of the Global South as opposed to the monolingual reporting mechanisms of the Global North; centring migratory languages within the Hub's work, or at least starting the process of acknowledging the need to centre migratory languages; changes the narrative by change the means and modes of conceptualisation and representation. In particular:

- By understanding languages as key categories in identity and a key element in knowledge production, this innovative approach to addressing inequality can support good outcomes across UK Government key priorities. The rapidly evolving technical landscape of language support, language learning and language continue to require critical engagement;
- By practically enabling multilingual research and multilingual working we acknowledge the dominant mode of being and living for the majority of world's population. An estimated 95% of the world's population are multilingual, and in migrant groups multilingualism takes on additional valences. Migration cities are centres of multilingual and polyglottic concentration requiring differing linguistic methodological engagements to those in rural areas. Border towns and cities offer additional multilingual complexities;
- Multilingualism is a core ethical issue and value, and central to consideration of inequalities in knowledge production. Without multilingual knowledges and methodologies languages other than colonial languages of the academy will remain peripheral. To embrace the interdisciplinary epistemologies and methodologies of the periphery, multilingualism is now practiced, reflected upon critically and adapted as a permanent methodology and site of epistemological growth;
- By beginning the process of acknowledging the need to centre migratory languages the Hub address key UK Government priorities through centring mother language (women and girls); conflict resolution – by using terminology appropriate and sensitive to context; by privileging translation to allow for

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conflict to be mediated and controlled; by ensuring rights are protected through attention to linguistic rights; crucially addressing health inequalities and the many instances of failed health communication where only dominant languages have been used in translation; economics and trade, where multilingual innovation is found to be widespread; and

- By bringing multilingual perspectives front and centre in decision making and policy forums vital knowledge can now be included. For the first time multilingual migration policies which robustly integrate multilingual sensitivity and resource are ready to be actualised in global migration policy.
- By using the arts as a facilitating, bridging and enhancing method within multilingual communication and producing high quality artistic outputs, from the MIDEQ animation to the blogs and videos and live performances the value of opening up migration research to its multilingual potency can readily be seen.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

[Lungulugu, Kpordomi](#) - video

[Se anomaa entua obua da: 'The bird that does not fly does not eat'](#) - blog

[Hamadzi, memory as silence: memory, language learning and remembering a forgotten language](#) - blog

[Objects series: Burkina Faso](#) - blog

[Multilingualism and Knowledge Production – concept note](#)



## **Cover image**

Peace and love from A-Z. Photo by McKay Savage/Flickr . CC BY 2.0.

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