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

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Abstract

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

Key words:

Grief

Bereavement

Mourning

Widowhood

Translation & interpretation

Language & emotions

Word length: 8986

(French version of title, abstract and key words)

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

Résumé

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

Mots clés

Chagrin/peine

Deuil

Veuvage

Traduction & interprétation

Langue et émotions

(Wolof version of title, abstract and key words)

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

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.

Li gnou sokhal

Nakhar

Deuthie

Tendji

Tekki & diankhate

Lakk ak yeuk yeuk

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,

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

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

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

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

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

The research

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

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

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

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

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

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

Languages and the cross-cultural translation of meanings

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Interpretation in the 'field'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fatou (Wolof): Are you lazy?

Hawa (Wolof): No, no.

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

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

Cross-cultural interpretation of emotions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

INSERT BOX 1 HERE

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

Endnotes

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

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

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

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

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

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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) *niak* (adjective)	*perte* *manque, pauvre*	*loss* *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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Box 1: Insights and practical tips to be considered when researching responses to death and emotions in multilingual, diverse cultural contexts

Overarching considerations:

- Consider how far responses to death have been understood through Anglophone assumptions and theoretical perspectives, bound up in the English language. How can English-speaking researchers put their assumptions about 'grief' on hold?
- Consider how spoken words may or may not be part of the general expression of emotions for 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 introspection.
- Recognise how far 'translation' involves much more than a technical exercise of finding equivalent words. Cultural diversities are intrinsically bound up in language, evoking assumptions and nuances that require much thought and attention to explicate for readers of varying linguistic communities.

Practical tips and insights:

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 process.
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 each other about personal experiences.
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 to death in different languages, including:
    - words used in topic guides,
    - language used in interview/focus group settings
    - translation and transcription of audio-files
    - coding frameworks.

    Discuss and transcribe explanations of the translation process and keep a list of the nuances of key words and phrases that pose challenges for translation and interpretation.
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 expressions commonly used by participants in indigenous and European minority languages through discussion with field researchers, interpreters, transcribers and translators. Questions to consider:
    - What cultural meanings and frames of reference do people draw on in making sense of the death and emotions surrounding the death?
    - Which words and phrases are commonly used? Which languages are these expressed in?
    - How have these words and phrases been translated into different languages? Does the translation differ in different transcripts?
    - What anomalies, unexpected or unfamiliar interactions or forms of linguistic expression do you notice? These may indicate a point of cultural diversity that needs to be explored and understood.
    - How and why have we come to these interpretations?
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.

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