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# Methodological Considerations in Conducting a Bilingual Study

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**ABSTRACT**
*This methodological reflection is developed from a nursing research study that compared health systems in Canada and Saudi Arabia, using both English and Arabic languages for data collection. Conducting research in a language not spoken by all the research team members is relatively common, yet addressing the nuanced details of implementing bilingual work has limited guidance within extant literature. This includes consideration of promising practices for concept development, translation, data analysis, and presenting the findings. This article discusses the strengths and limitations of bilingual research and recommendations regarding these issues from our own experiences. Ultimately, it is proposed that via bilingual research, the accumulation of knowledge pertaining to qualitative research concepts, translation, analysis, and dissemination of comprehensive frameworks can be enacted, ultimately enhancing the rigor of qualitative research and increasing confidence in applying knowledge created in the chosen language of participants.*

**KEYWORDS:** Methodology, language translation, cultural-bilingual study, qualitative study

Since knowledge is produced by humans, meanings of phenomena are shaped by cultural and linguistic contexts; as Temple (2002) mentions, "language constructs the social world at the same time as it describes it" (p. 844). Although conducting research in one language and publishing in another language, typically English, is common, researchers who make decisions on how to approach framing concepts, doing translation, analyzing across languages, and reporting data rarely provide all the details of these decision processes in research reports/papers. The lack of systematic guidelines for cross-cultural, bilingual studies could reduce the quality and accuracy of analysis and knowledge generated from such data (Abfalter et al., 2021). This is particularly true considering the absence of language reporting in qualitative research reporting frameworks such as Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (Tong et al., 2007) and Standards for Qualitative Reporting (O'Brien et al., 2014).

This article discusses the strengths and limitations of conducting bilingual research, challenges encountered, and considerations for future approaches grounded in our experiences. The concept that generated this reflection was 'governance', which, when used in a comparative study across Canada and Saudi Arabia, provided a particularly challenging concept to translate and

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analyze. The concept of governance is divided into several levels and indicators for measurement and analysis purposes. Sometimes, governance is understood from macro, meso, and micro levels (Saltman et al., 2011), while others refer to governance as a binary concept: good governance and bad governance (Huss et al., 2011). This study applied two governance indicators: government effectiveness and perceived corruption in the health system at the macro level in Canada and Saudi Arabia.

## Literature Review

Conducting research in a language not spoken by all the research team members or with a group of participants belonging to a different culture than the majority of the research team members is widely adopted, yet addressing issues related to framing concepts, doing translation, analyzing across languages, and dissemination of data are critical and less reported in such research (Lee & Zaharlick, 2013; McKenna, 2022). This could be attributed to the high degree of complexity that reporting on these four points (concepts, translation, analysis, and dissemination) adds to the research process, compounded with little guidance on how to report bi-lingual and cross-cultural processes in qualitative research. Existing literature is next considered pertaining to framing concepts of the study, doing translation, analysis, and dissemination.

## Framing Concepts

For our study, the idea of exploring the concept of government effectiveness and perceived corruption originated from their presence as sub-concepts of governance. Several studies have found that high quality of governance enhances the situation of the economy within a country, public investment, and social infrastructure and reduces mortality rates (Gupta et al., 2002; Kaufmann et al., 1999; Mauro, 1998; McKinney & Moore, 2008; Verhoeven et al., 1999). It is from this standpoint that the role of the government in making decisions and implementing policies related to the health sector is seen as a crucial factor in determining the health of the population (Kaufmann et al., 2009; Rockers et al., 2012).

In the literature on health governance, the term ‘governance’ varies in conceptualization and definition between leadership, stewardship, regulation, and oversight (Travis et al., 2002; World Health Organization, 2000). Good governance is a term used to describe the values, principles, and priority concerns of governance (Sheng, 2009). The United Nations Economic and Social Commission reports that the term ‘good governance’ relates to the fundamental values and beliefs of governance that tend to reduce conflict and fight corruption (Sheng, 2009). Effective actions taken by the government in leading the health sector improve citizens’ daily conditions and quality of life, which ultimately increases people's well-being and health (Kakwani, 1993). Less effective governments take poor actions or no action to respond to their citizens’ needs and fail to improve socio-economic determinants of health. As a result, the health of the population is compromised (Commission on Social Determinants of Health & World Health Organization, 2008). A comprehensive understanding of how governance is defined in research is essential to grasp the core meaning of governance as it relates to health. Yet, for us, it also meant that participants often had significantly varied perceptions of the concept, including some translation challenges into Arabic.

Framing the concept of the research study requires considering several factors related to keeping the meaning of concepts and terms intact across languages (Esfehani & Walters, 2018; Regmi et al., 2010). Some scholars who engage in bilingual research use specific strategies to convey the meaning of the study concepts to the other language prefer to keep the main study concepts in English due to a lack of equivalent translation in the other language or because a word is commonly used in English even in the other language context. Halai (2007) wrote about conducting research in Urdu and English and explained that due to the nature of the study of discussing science concepts, she conveyed all study concepts in English even though the interviews were mainly conducted in Urdu due to the unavailability of the translated meaning of such concepts in Urdu. Halai (2007) added that "even if they are [available], they are so difficult and uncommon that both teachers and students prefer to use English words" (p. 346).

While using English concepts in bilingual research might facilitate the process of collecting data and conducting analysis and interpretation, some researchers make the decision to delay translation to a later stage as English cannot convey the literal or equivalent meanings; therefore, researchers avoid translating the concepts from the source language to the target language (Donohoe & Lu, 2009; Holod, 1983) even through publication. This results in using the study concepts in the source language during the data collection and analysis phases to preserve historical and cultural meanings and a footnote to explain the concepts in English.

## Doing Translation

Knowledge created from research conducted in more than one language requires careful planning to ensure rigor and trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017). Researchers who pay close attention to issues arising from translation demonstrate a level of validity and quality in the findings. Two methods of translation are often identified in research. Forward translation and back translation (also called reverse translation). Forward translation refers to translating from the original, or source, language that was used during data collection to the target language in which the data will be ultimately presented (Abfalter et al., 2021). Back translation is when researchers translate the translation back to the source language to examine the quality of translation in keeping the intended meanings intact during the process (Abfalter et al., 2021). This later method has received a variety of criticism for being implemented poorly by researchers (Ozolins et al., 2020).

Translation of research data can be high risk because poor translation leads to poor interpretation and could result in poor findings. Some issues related to translation in research have been identified in the literature. Loss of intended meaning in the translated text can corrupt the data and later negatively impact the analysis and interpretation (McKenna, 2022). For example, direct translation of metaphors may yield a different meaning in the analysis language than the source language.

A framework developed by Abfalter and colleagues (2021) suggested that reporting the translation process of qualitative research should include the following queries: why the data were collected in the source language when the team started translating during the study, what content has been translated, who did the translation, how the translation was done, where the translation took place in terms of the translator's social identity and positionality, and finally what means (tools) have been utilized for translation (e.g., dictionaries or IT programs).

Abfalter et al. (2021) distinguish between hermeneutic and technicist approaches when researchers decide how to translate. The hermeneutic approach maintains a meaningful interpretation of the original language, whereas the technicist approach is concerned with the accuracy, validity, reliability, and quality of the original language. In the end, both approaches aim to reduce distorted translation and convey the closest meaning. In a similar way, Al-Awawdeh (2021) addresses translation by its main typologies, literal translation and free translation. Literal translation is the act of conveying meanings from the source language to the target language that is greatly restricted by the original text, while free translation is a reproduction of the general meanings of the text (Al-Awawdeh, 2021) with more freedom taken in choosing terminology. It has been noticed that scholars and researchers use a wide range of terminologies that fall between the essence of literal and free translation. Word-for-word and direct translation are used interchangeably to refer to literal translation; however, semantic, non-literal, cultural, and figurative translations encompass closer features of free translation.

Temple and Young's (2004) discussion about translation issues in qualitative research converges with Abfalter et al.'s (2021) in that the identity and position of the translator should be clearly identified, as well as the stage at which data were translated and transcribed. Temples and Young emphasized the importance of reporting on translation work in qualitative research and argued that qualitative research falls under social constructionist, interpretative, and non-positivist paradigms. All these approaches acknowledge the researcher's location and position in influencing the way to conceive reality and consequently synthesizing knowledge. Thus, translation work is not seen as a neutral exercise since it constructs and describes the meaning of our social world. With the same logic, translators do not provide an objective perspective during the translation process. As a result, translation issues should be considered an integral part of the research process and be reported accordingly so the readers can have enough information to judge the research quality and effective use of knowledge. Whether acknowledged or not, Translators in qualitative research are positioned to represent the study population through their work of translation (Temple & Young, 2004).

**Analyzing across Languages**

Providing enough details about how the data analysis was conducted is crucial to demonstrate the rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative studies (Nowell et al., 2017). More specifically, when making attempts to uncover cultural nuances and core values of a group of participants and reflect on how such cultural aspects shape the participants' experiences, researchers are expected to construct their study, including analysis, and creating knowledge in a way that reflects how the culture in whole or in part plays a role in shaping the meaning of participants' experiences.

The involvement of culture in any research can be seen and analyzed from four dimensions according to Hofstede (1983), as presented in Elsayed-EkJiouly and Buda (1996). These dimensions are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, and masculinity versus femininity (Hofstede, 1983). Scholars who are engaged in cross-cultural research will encounter at least one dimension of how culture influences people's experiences. Whether these dimensions were implicitly or explicitly integrated into the study analysis, researchers need to have a conceptual framework or analytical process on how to address the impact of the studied culture on the phenomena of interest. For example, if conducting a comparative study between two distinct cultures in terms of individualism and collectivism, researchers should consider how the cultural structure and context impact the experiences of the participants in the individualist culture versus participants living in the collectivist culture. Such a description can create valuable knowledge that would have been lost if it had not focused on some aspect of the culture as an underlying factor that shapes people's views of the world. The same can be said about exploring a specific phenomenon in a patriarchal culture and matriarchal culture where people are subjected to follow specific cultural roles and meet certain expectations. If the researchers intentionally or unintentionally ignore these cultural aspects and social systems that influence people's decisions and behavior, the quality of the knowledge created may be jeopardized.

In a large-scale study conducted by Todorova et al. (2021), data were collected from diverse cultural participants from 14 countries on four continents using the study survey in 17 languages to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their lives and how they constructed meanings as a result. Qualitative data generated from each language were coded separately. Codes and categories were then compiled across languages/cultures. The authors provided enough details on how the data were dealt with. Even though the authors did not explicitly talk about power issues in research, country-level analysis has been conducted in the participants' local language. This practice helps to narrow the issue of power between researchers and participants. The end product of the analytical process, findings, and results did not present any distinctions between participants in each culture (or continent, race, ethnicity, language). Even though there was a mention of country code at the end of each quote, basic aspects of what constitutes a culture have not been incorporated into the composition of the findings. For example, there was no knowledge that supported how participants in the US created a different meaning of the COVID-19 pandemic from the people in China. Linking participants' experiences with the larger cross-cultural contexts was absent, and processes, beliefs, and events across cultures would likely have added to the depth of analysis.

## Dissemination of Data

The findings section of a research report is supposed to speak to the experiences of the study population and communicate the new knowledge extracted from the data to both the same cultural audience and the general audience who are not necessarily familiar with the culture under study or in which a study occurs (Lee & Zaharlick, 2013). Dissemination of the data should provide a contextual understanding of the culture in which the data were collected and raise awareness about the interactions between people and their local culture (Lee & Zaharlick, 2013). Recommendations for the involvement of participants to confirm translation or interpretation made by researchers to create accurate knowledge have been highlighted in the literature (Lee & Zaharlick, 2013; McKenna, 2022). This technique is called member checking, which is undertaken to ensure the credibility of the study. This occurs by taking the findings back to the community or participants to confirm if the narrative accurately reflects the participants' stories and experiences (Lee & Zaharlick, 2013; McKenna, 2022).

Writing the final report with a detailed explanation of not only the individual's behavior or values but also the multilevel factors, socio-cultural and political systems, that contextually shape the phenomenon under investigation is essential to multilingual research. Without taking this into account, the story told about specific participants may not be accurate or meaningful without its contextual justifications (Lee & Zaharlick, 2013).

There is an increased recognition of the significance of addressing conceptual, translation, analysis, and dissemination issues of multilingualism and their implications in qualitative research. There is also a lack of frameworks that guide reporting the translation/interpretation decisions made during the study process. This article provides a detailed explanation of how bilingual research was conducted across cultures and proposes recommendations for qualitative researchers interested in doing bilingual studies.

## The Study We Conducted

To understand health systems in Canada and Saudi Arabia an exploratory collective case study per Stake (1995) was adopted with each of the two countries' health systems serving as a case. The epistemological viewpoint we held was that knowledge is constructed instead of discovered, and findings are a form of interpretations rather than pure facts (Stake, 1995). Per Stake (1995), a case is "a bounded system" that is specific but complex (p. 2).

## Data Collection Methods

Data for this study were collected in two languages, Arabic and English. The involvement of translation was not intended at the beginning of undertaking this study, yet we planned for requests to speak in Arabic from some Saudi participants. The initial plan was to collect data in English because one of the inclusion criteria for participants from both countries was that the participants could speak or understand English. However, during the pilot phase, some bilingual participants in Saudi Arabia preferred to use the Arabic language during interviews for linguistic comfort. That means we had two groups for data collection: one who used English for the entire interview and the second who used a mix of Arabic and English. After obtaining written ethical approval from both Western and Saudi Research Ethics Boards (REB) for the translated documents, translation occurred during the data collection and analysis stages to accommodate this group of participants. Because the interviews with the Saudi participants who preferred to speak Arabic were mixed between Arabic and English, no translation occurred for medical terms. The main concepts of the study were kept intact since they have a direct translation in Arabic. We performed two sampling strategies to recruit our participants. First, a maximum variation where we posted the study materials on social media and advertisement boards in healthcare settings and invited those who meet the study criteria through email publicly available on the internet. Second, we used snowball sampling, which assisted us in targeting those who have specialized knowledge and in-depth experiences in health system governance. In addition to conducting individual interviews, official documents related to the health system governance were also collected.

## Data Analysis Methods

After conducting the preliminary analysis, the main researcher shared the preliminary findings report with the participants for confirmation and to ensure their voices were well represented in both Arabic and English. All comments and views of participants were incorporated at this stage. The preliminary findings were also shared with the research team members in English. This helps strengthen the rigor of the study through the triangulation approach. The main researcher presented the preliminary findings to the team, which was followed by a session of questions and discussion.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) proposes that any discourse constructs, maintains, and legitimizes inequalities (Van Dijk, 1993). CDA examines how language is used to describe social and psychological phenomena while emphasizing that any language has a powerful source (Willig, 2014). CDA is concerned primarily with relations of power in an attempt to uncover abuse, injustice, and inequalities that are impeded in a given system (Van Dijk, 1993).

To build a body of knowledge from the two separate cases, cross-case analysis was performed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By using cross-case analysis, comparisons between the units of analysis between the two cases are possible. Since this analysis follows a comparative case-study design, the comparative nature was demonstrated in this stage when bringing the two cases together. Cross-case analysis introduced by Miles and Huberman (1994) consists of three major steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction was performed during the analysis of each separate case. After conducting qualitative (separately for each case), data display facilitates creating charts and tables to summarize the key findings from both cases where all data have been already translated into English. This allowed us to present areas for agreement and disagreement between cases and organize data by sub-concepts. Then, qualitative findings (codes and categories) were compiled to propose themes that cut across cases to produce the ultimate findings.

## Discussion

In considering the methodological challenges of cross-cultural, bilingual research, it is worth considering some of the general complexities of linguistics, including linguistic characteristics of English and Arabic. People speak Arabic with different dialects and accents and in two different fashions: formal and informal. The Arabic dialect that was spoken in this study was the informal Saudi dialect, with the exception of a few formal terms used by some participants. The main researcher is bilingual (Arabic and English) and was born and raised in Saudi Arabia. She has extensive experience across languages, personally and professionally. The main researcher conducted all the study interviews and did the translation work herself from Arabic to English, which means that the identity of the translator and main researcher is the same. This is important because the main researcher, with co-researchers, prepared the study plan, including conducting literature reviews, identifying the research problem, designing the study questions and protocol, carrying out the data collection, undertaking analysis and interpretation, and synthesizing knowledge and recommendations. This meant having an in-depth knowledge of the study concepts and research languages. This allowed for seeking conceptual equivalence during the translation process from Arabic to English and vice versa, which is consistent with the study's epistemological foundations.

## Translation of the Study Concepts

The core concept used in the health system comparison in the study was 'governance', which is complex to explain and equally complex to present well in two different languages and cultural contexts. When using complex or relatively new concepts, researchers will use definitions established within existing literature and consider synonymous and related concepts. Since participants in Saudi Arabia and Canada are situated in different social and political climates, their understanding of the word governance at face value was different. At the outset, qualitative questions simply asked about 'governance', which led to many participants asking what was meant by this term. This led to the necessity of explicitly stating our definition of the term, including the level of governance we were focused on; however, we left room for hearing the participants' understanding of the concept to avoid steering the conversation in one particular direction. This proved valuable in ensuring congruence across the Canadian and Saudi data collection and in making sure that cultural conceptualizations of core concepts were explored and accounted for.

In allowing participants to participate in either English or Arabic (or both), we also created the necessity of ensuring interviews in either language were discussing congruent issues (Halai, 2007). This bilingual approach involves having direct translation for the main concepts ready in case translation to Arabic is requested. The word governance has a literal translation in Arabic to 'Hawkamah حوكمة '. In a similar fashion, the use of the term corruption has a direct translation in Arabic 'Fasad فساد '. All terms in Arabic and English were used interchangeably in the interviews with the Arabic-speaking participants (Governance-Hawkamah and Corruption-Fasad).

This was more complicated with one of the study sub-concepts: 'Government Effectiveness'. Because this is not commonly considered as a measurable concept within public vernacular, there is no single word for direct translation in Arabic. So, rather than exploring this sub-concept directly, we used proxy questions that encompass the aspects that constitute 'Government Effectiveness' as measured in health systems research. For example, we asked questions that addressed aspects of health quality, government commitment, and political influence in the health system. Examples included: how would you rate the overall quality of the health system in your province? Quality in terms of access, effectiveness, and equity. To what extent does politics influence the health system in your province/area? Do you feel Canada/Saudi Arabia is making progress on the SDoH or falling behind? In what ways? The use of the proxy technique in qualitative research has been well-documented when researchers study sensitive or new topics or when the community of interest is difficult to reach (Cammett, 2019).

The concept of governance draws academic attention in Canada since it is fairly commonly used in health system research. By contrast, in Saudi Arabia, the concept was explainable but not of use if just asked directly without definition. This was even more challenging when interviewing front-line healthcare providers, as aspects of leadership, policy-making, and politicking incorporated in governance are not necessarily a part of their regular work lives.

The decision to use English or Arabic to conduct interviews with Saudi participants came during the pilot study alongside other considerations. One example stood out during the pilot study pertaining to the use of the word "politics" and its role in the health system. To explore the concept of government effectiveness, it was logical to use the word 'government' as the first consideration. However, because the data collection started on the Canadian site, where there is more than one political party and different governments rule at different times, the word government could mean the current political party in office and their particular political leanings or the public servants who deliver government services. As we wanted to capture some of the political nuances of shifting priorities, we had to be clear we were including the elected government and public sector employees in the discussion with Canadian participants. The same cannot be applied to the Saudi context since there is only one government under the monarchy. From initial interviews, it was clear that the word "politics" would make participants from Saudi Arabia uncomfortable in sharing their authentic views as this word is culturally used with a negative connotation or about diplomatic relations and does not translate to the idea of shifting government priorities internally. Therefore, to speak with Saudi participants about policy priorities, we talked more generally about government decision-making rather than the politics of healthcare. Shifting priorities was a relevant framing as the current National Health Transformation plan in Saudi Arabia has been recently initiated by the Saudi government, so participants were interested in talking about new directions.

Discussing sensitive topics about government attitudes and corruption in the health system with participants from different cultures necessitates a gentle start to the interview. For that, we carefully designed the interview guidelines (interview protocol) to reflect a smooth transition to the discussion. Our technique involves highlighting positive aspects of the local health system in each country at the outset of the interview to emphasize a less threatening attitude and mitigate the sensitive nature of the study topic. This strategy requires familiarity with the health system's performance and knowledge of local culture to anticipate what may work with a particular group of people.

## Bilingual Methods

Study findings, as reported, are supposed to speak to the experiences of the study population. When it is written in a language different from the source language (mostly English), the issue of a potential imbalanced power is notable. Scholars highlight the issue of power in qualitative research, which can arise in bilingual studies wherein researchers make process decisions that impact how the words of participants are presented. If a language constructs reality through meanings and contexts, then people with different languages construct different realities (Simon, 1996; Spivak,1992). This sheds light on the existing yet inherent power between the researcher, translator, and participant. Therefore, using the primary language of participants during data collection provides high-quality information since it leads participants to use the language they are most confident with and allows them to generate ideas with deeper contextual meanings

(Carless, 2008; Gawlewicz, 2016: Welch & Piekkari, 2006). Participants were able to speak English, but many preferred to conduct interviews in their first language, maintaining more balanced power between them and the interviewer, who might have had more fluent English than some participants. Especially in exploring deeply nuanced and, at times, controversial topics, such as corruption within health systems, allowing participants to share in their language of choice can also make for a safer research environment.

Having the same person who designs the study, collects data, and also does the translation work arguably increases the validity of qualitative research in terms of the appropriateness of the data collection process, analysis, and interpretation (Leung, 2015; Quintão et al., 2020). The social location and positionality of the translator or interpreter must be factored in to reduce translation limitations and distortion. Translation within the socio-geo-political context of the source or target language can influence translation decisions (Temple & Young, 2004). In our case, the positionality of the main researcher helped in achieving relevant translation since the social, geographical, and political circumstances of the source language were considered and accounted for, so contextual information is preserved. Since the distance between the source language and the social location of the main researcher was null, original meanings were presumably kept intact. Also, the main researcher, being perceived as an insider, has facilitated data collection and participant recruitment as the work was done by a Saudi graduate student interviewing people of her own national background. A similar structure in other research led to statements by participants such as, "It's my pleasure to help out another person from the homeland," or "This is the least I can do for a fellow Taiwanese Chinese" (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 407).

The timing of when to start the translation process can have a direct influence on the data collection process and steer certain decisions. Scholars speak about the timing of translation and offer different perspectives based on the purpose of the translation (Santos et al., 2015). Translating prior to data collection serves to create a linguistic instrument that guides the translation work and allows for back translation (Brislin, 1970; Larkin et al., 2007). Translation during data collection is when the researcher/interpreter engages in simultaneous translation that conveys the study questions from the target language to the source language in order to obtain information about participants' experiences (Wallin & Ahlström, 2006). The translation that takes place during data preparation means that the translation work starts after collecting data in the source language and is then converted to the target language (Lopez et al., 2008). Translation during data analysis refers to when researchers and translators translate the concepts and categories of the study verbatim during interviews (Chen & Boore, 2010). Translating at the dissemination stage is when one or more research reports are translated after data collection and analysis in the source language have been carried out (van Nes et al., 2010).

If the translation occurs in the early stage of the study, researchers may want to consider hiring a translator, or they could decide that translation is done by a research team member. Also, researchers should plan in advance how the main terminologies or concepts of the study will be handled and how the intended meanings of concepts will be maintained during the translation process. This can be done by creating "a trail of atypical words" to maintain a reference for local slang and jargon across interviews (Al-Amer et al., 2014). If the translation takes place at a later stage of the study, considerations of the language used for analysis and dissemination should be well thought out. In our case, we did three translation activities. The first translation act was done right after the pilot study of the research documents and materials. In this step, the main researcher used the Microsoft Word translator feature to translate formal English to formal Arabic, which yielded decent translations that were then reviewed and improved by the main researcher. The second translation was at the time of preliminary analysis, where data collected to that point were read and analyzed in the source language, and the preliminary findings were drafted in English for sharing with the research team. The third translation work happened for the final analysis when all interviews were translated from Arabic to English. Doing the preliminary analysis from Arabic interviews and the final analysis from translated interviews provides layers of interpretations and confirms the findings, which increases confidence in our research reports. All the interview data were translated by the main researcher by listening to the interviews in Arabic and transcribing them into English; no IT program was used for the translation of these data.

We came to the translation with the goal of maintaining meanings as opposed to necessarily offering literal translation. This is because the data were spoken in the informal Arabic Saudi dialect; therefore, the literal translation would not construct clear meanings. As explained by Abfalter et al. (2021) and Al-Awawdeh (2021), the hermeneutic approach and free translation aim to maintain a meaningful interpretation of the original language. This approach of creating understanding with and through English eventually leads to providing a good quality of the translated materials by highlighting intended meanings and equivalence in terms of denotation and connotation rather than literal and exact meaning. Here is an example of a different translation where a participant used a mix of formal and informal Arabic words to describe health policies and legislations across different administrations of the Saudi Ministry of Health.

<u>Verbatim quote in Arabic:</u>

أنت اليوم تخلق كيانات جديدة, ب, خليني أقلك, كيانات جديدة قد تكون بعقليات نوعا ما قديمة, ماهي مواكبه للتغير و التطوير. لكن في تداخل نعم في التشريعات نوعا ما, في إقرار أن هالتداخلات موجودة, وفي مشروع قائم اليوم لخلخلة هالتداخلات والتفريق بين الجهات (بصوت مرتفع قليلا).

<u>Literal translation by IT program:</u>

> Today you are creating new entities, b, let me tell you, new entities that may be with somewhat old mentalities, which are keeping pace with change and development. But there is a somewhat overlapping of legislation, in the recognition that these overlaps exist, and in a project that exists today to disturb these overlaps and differentiate between the regions (a little loudly).

<u>Literal translation by a research team member:</u>

> You are today creating new entities, b, let me tell you, new entities might be new with somewhat old mentalities, they are not keeping up with the change and development. But, there are overlaps, yes, to some extent, there is recognition that these overlaps exist, and there is a standing project today to refine overlaps and separate between the regions (Slightly elevated tone).

<u>Non-literal translation by a research team member:</u>

> Today, you are creating new entities [health administrations at the macro level], hmm, let me tell you that they are new entities operated by, kind of, old mentalities. These mentalities cannot keep up with the change and progress. It is true that there are overlaps between the legislation of these entities to some extent, but there is an acknowledgment of such overlaps, and there is a project, in progress, to refine the overlap and draw boundaries between these entities' activities (Slightly elevated tone).

In this example, the IT program was unable to catch the negation in the Arabic sentences, which creates an opposite meaning about old school administrators not keeping up with the new changes. This is because the translation was conducted from informal Saudi Arabic to formal English, which does not reflect accuracy between the levels of two different languages. If the participant, however, spoke in a formal Arabic language and then translated to formal English, a more meaningful translation can be anticipated. The non-literal translation shows more coherence and cohesion than the word-for-word translation done by a bilingual research team member. It is important to note that the text that was added between square brackets was added by the research translator to provide context and improve the meaning of the participant's phrase so other researcher team members can understand what is meant by 'entities' when reading the transcribed interviews. These additions are embedded wherever necessary for all interviews. Rounded brackets show comments about body language and tone of voice.

Quality translation for the purposes of research analysis involves differentiation between literal translation of words and translation to match the presumed meaning of the speaker. If we accept that "there is no single correct translation of a text" (Temple & Young, 2004, p. 165), more attention should be given to capturing the cultural meaning and values rather than synonyms and syntax, especially when sentences in Arabic are structured opposite to sentences in English. It is noted that there is also the possibility to include multiple translations within the transcript, for example, both a literal and a meaning-focused translation of the same statements, using things like brackets to indicate the difference (Abfalter et al., 2021; Al-Awawdeh, 2021). For example, the phrase "we will die from hunger" has been said by a Saudi mother who protested against police involvement in a domestic violence incident. The mother brought her daughters to the emergency room, suffering from severe physical injuries as a result of domestic violence. "Dying from hunger" is a slang Arabic phrase that refers to facing hardships when making major life decisions, in this case, reporting the abuser to the police. It often implies that the person could fall into poverty as a consequence of a specific action, but it does not mean a literal death from starvation. The interpretation of the previous phrase as a life crisis is confirmed by the mother linking falling into homelessness to "dying from hunger". During translation, the main researcher captured both the literal meaning and the metaphoric meaning.

Finally, it's noted that sometimes, with specific local terms or terms created for particular businesses, there may be no translation at all (Seibert, 2022). This practice has been adopted by Halai (2007), who stated, "Those words or phrases that defy translation are used intact in the text with the closest meaning given in brackets or in a footnote" (p. 352). In our case, the Arabic word can be kept in the transcript with a note regarding why it was not translated. The only limitation we faced in our approach was that, with no other bilingual members of the research team, we did not have the opportunity to confirm the translation internally.

## Presenting the Data

Researchers need to weigh the benefits and implications of the timing point of translation. Starting the analysis from the source language or deferring analysis and interpretation until the translation is completed have different implications. Proponents of early translation argue that the analysis effort that engages with translated interviews can carry stories closer to what has been told by participants (Santos et al., 2015). Even though translated interviews go through extensive work of translation, they remain relatively reflective of participants' experiences than delaying translation at the dissemination stage, where analysis and interpretations, as well as translation, color participants' perspectives (Santos et al., 2015). On the other hand, proponents of later translation recommend staying as long as possible in the source language during the data collection, analysis, and interpretation stages to reduce the gap and minimize the distance between data and analysis (Temple & Young, 2004). Scholars who support the previous view avoid doing translation and refrain from cutting ties with cultural and social aspects of the source language at an early stage (Temple & Young, 2004). Dissemination of research study findings usually occurs in English, but the possibility of translating the research report into the source language should be considered to acknowledge participants' contributions and extend scientific knowledge beyond English. Translation at a later stage involves close collaboration between all researchers to critique the final research report and raise issues of non-clarity or confusion, especially if analysis and interpretation occur in the source language that not all the study researchers understand (Santos et al., 2015).

In our study, the preliminary analysis was extracted from interviews conducted in Arabic and English to reduce errors and limitations; however, the final analysis was based on the English-translated data to align with the dissemination language. Because another group of Saudi participants had their interviews entirely in English, the member-checking materials were provided in the two languages. This involved a written preliminary analysis in English and a pre-recorded PowerPoint presentation in Arabic to accommodate both groups' language preferences and time. Translation of the written preliminary report from English to Arabic was challenging because of limited time; however, this study's final report will be translated into Arabic to optimize dissemination in both countries.

Including quotations in the participants' original language has been regarded as a positive point to enhance the rigor of the findings (Seibert, 2022). When participants use culturally nuanced words that do not translate well into English, and these quotes are important for inclusion in dissemination, it is also reasonable to provide a quote in the primary language to maintain rigor and truthfulness of findings, even if the report is mostly in English (Seibert, 2022). Including quotes in Arabic and their translation in English ensures the agreement between what has been said in Arabic and what has been translated into it and helps with further interpretation during the analysis stage. It also enhances the validity of the study and the representation of participants in the dissemination stage as well as offers greater transferability in different settings.

## Recommendations

Cross-cultural and bilingual research raises a variety of methodological questions, from how concepts are discussed to when translation occurs and who does the translation. As with any other methodological decision, it is important for researchers to explain their process within a methods section and to provide a rationale for decisions taken. To assist in this, we offer a variety of promising practices grounded in our experiences (a summary table can be found in Appendix A):

### Initial Planning: A Cornerstone for the Translation Process

In many studies, the goal of collecting data in a language other than English is decided upon upfront. In this case, preparing the study materials and translation process can be well organized regarding what contents are to be translated and who will do the translation. Justifications for such decisions should be considered and presented in the early stages. However, when there is a possibility for using another language to collect data or disseminate the results, but researchers are not certain whether bilingual participants would stick with English or choose their native language, special preparation should occur before going to the field. It is easier to write the study documents, including information about the study and consent form, as well as recruitment materials, in a way that facilitates translation to the other language if needed. In our case, the main researcher prepared the study documents in English, with the possibility that the English language used in these documents could be easily translated into Arabic. That ensures there is at least an accurate translation of main concepts and categories.

Translation decisions are better taken during the initial planning of the study. The identity of the translator in qualitative research is important. If one of the researchers plays the role of the translator, this is going to bring several advantages in terms of paying considerable attention to issues in meaning and equivalence. However, the researcher/translator role does not guarantee that the text is going to be translated to actual meanings because of positionality and social location, which influence how the researcher interprets meaning (Temple & Young, 2004). These are important features of the researcher and translator that should be acknowledged in the translation of data in qualitative research. If the translator is not part of the research team, the translator must be involved in meetings and training sessions about the study in order to absorb the process of research and be aware of the caveats related to qualitative research bias during translation. This becomes critical if the research team decides to translate their final research report into the source language, where the translator must have some knowledge about technical/scientific writing. Reflexive interviews between researchers and translators can ensure the discussion of different perspectives on interpretations and meanings of words and concepts (Edwards, 1998; Neufeld et al., 2002). Some scholars think that treating translators as key informants and writing the translated text in the third person provides the foundation of multiple perspectives and understandings and reminds readers that the knowledge produced is by the researcher and translator's understanding of the language (Edwards, 1998; Riessman, 2000).

**Pilot Study: An Eye into Subsequent Processes**

Whether the study was deliberately planned to deal with bilingual data or not, a pilot study is valuable to gauge your population's understanding of the translated content or if they feel confident enough to speak in English. A pilot study permits researchers to gain prior knowledge about how the data collection tool(s) or interview guides are received and assessed by the study population. Piloting your study provides a guide that can be helpful in determining whether the data tool should be modified or whether some items or questions are superfluous and therefore removed. It also tells if you have missed certain aspects of your research that should be included in the interview guidelines that came up when carrying out the actual data collection. Also, the pilot study allows the researcher to assess if their translation makes sense and helps to gather data that are epistemologically aligned with one's methods and could possibly answer the research questions. Cultural appropriateness is another reason for conducting the pilot study since you will explore what and how to apply your data tool in a culturally acceptable manner. The need to replace certain terms to facilitate further discussion could arise, as in the aforementioned example of politics and government.

**Cultural Differences: Participants Across-Cultures**

Conducting research necessitates effective communication with potential participants. Cultural differences between participants and researchers may be national, ethnic, or sub-cultural. This begins at recruitment, as preferred means and times of communication vary widely. Some groups of participants may prefer to use emails to inquire about the study and arrange a time for interviews, while other groups may share cell phone numbers to be contacted through direct messages such as via WhatsApp. Regarding the time of doing interviews, some groups of participants request to have the interview during working hours, while other groups are available after working hours based on cultural and professional considerations. Conducting interviews after working hours could be related to work schedules, expectations of the workplace, or a desire for greater privacy. Therefore, to avoid losing potential participants, attention and flexibility should be given to the needs of participants in different groups. This is important to protect participants' autonomy and avoid losing potential participants.

While doing cross-cultural research, different ways of communication should be anticipated. Some participants will initiate communication about their interest in participating in the study, while others would expect the researcher to contact them, explain the study, and invite them after the researcher is given the initial permission to make contact. In terms of sampling methods, snowball can assist in recruiting more participants in a context where trust from those making a referral to friends or colleagues is important for bridging cultural divides.

**Technicalities: Recruitment and Member-checking**

The identity of the main researcher can unintentionally shape the recruitment process across cultures. In both countries of our study, recruitment, and data collection was a positive experience for a female nurse researcher who is a Saudi citizen and falls under the immigrant category in Canada. Being a nurse and a researcher at the same time established a sense of solidarity and familiarity with healthcare providers and academics in both settings. With strong traditions and cultural values in Saudi Arabia regarding sex and gender, the female identity of the main researcher has helped in accessing both male and female environments. Although less female representation characterizes the Saudi sample, interviews with Saudi female participants included removing the hijab, which allowed for a more collegial interviewing environment. Body language and facial expressions have been included in the analysis as they offer detailed information about participants' engagement in the dialogue. For example, when a participant was asked about the drawbacks of the government's strategies to curb corruption, the participant took a deep breath, sat back, and gently geared the conversation to the advantages of such strategies. The participant's body language and response to the question gave the main researcher the idea that there are critical opinions that remain unshared. Participants' use of cultural titles such as sister or daughter in reference to the main researcher reflects the degree of trust and respect, which contributed to participants acting as key informants to distribute the flyer of the study, which supported recruitment.

Pre-defining the core concepts of the study in the recruitment materials has two different implications that were felt during the data collection process. It was beneficial because it drew the attention of knowledgeable participants about specific concepts. For example, clearly stating corruption as a main concept of the study allows to recruit participants who are interested in sharing their experiences and observations specifically about corruption in the health system. Where mentioning the study concepts was a drawback, we could have lost some potential participants because of the complexity of the term 'governance' and the sensitivity of the term 'corruption'.

Research procedures and terminologies risk being overly complicated, unclear, or uninteresting to those outside of academia. When approaching participants, all research terms should be explained in lay language or a language most congruent with the relevant technical environment. If researchers plan to conduct member-checking interviews, the purpose and procedures of such activity should be explained to potential participants at the beginning of recruitment. This is helpful as it could encourage higher engagement in a second data collection point if participants are given an early sense of collaboration in creating the study findings.

**Limitations**

Although we initially assumed that all participants from both countries would be using English during individual interviews, having discussions prior to conducting the study with the key informants and engaging in the pilot study revealed that some potential participants in Saudi Arabia would prefer to speak in Arabic despite being fluent in English. This realization helped with an early translation of the study documents. With the main researcher being the only team member speaking Arabic, not applying internal validation of translation was a noted limitation. However, the member-checking activities and approving the preliminary findings serve as a strong basis for establishing rigor and trustworthiness.

## Conclusion

Representing others carries with it a huge responsibility of quality and dependability. In qualitative research, where knowledge is produced based on co-constructed reality, researchers become active agents to convey the stories of participants who carry their cultural beliefs and values and contribute at times in a different language than the research team. When conducting research across languages, unique methodological considerations related to selecting the concepts of the study, collecting data, and translating, analyzing, and disseminating should considered. Selecting the study concepts requires having enough knowledge of the cultures under investigation or within which an investigation is taking place to know how specific concepts are understood and perceived in each culture. Since bilingual research requires translation work, researchers should be cognizant of the decisions they make in relation to who and when to do the translation and the implications of these decisions. The end product of analysis should reflect how some cultural aspects will alter how human experiences are understood. Providing clarity in research papers regarding translation and interpretation choices strengthens the usefulness of study findings. Bilingual, cross-cultural research is of continued importance, and decisions made in doing such research should always be made explicit, and many of these decisions can be thought out well in advance of starting a study.

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Appendix A

| **Recommendations** | |
|---|---|
| 1.Initial Planning: A Cornerstone for the Translation Process | 1. Translation decisions should be considered and presented from the early stages.<br>2. If researchers are not certain whether bilingual participants would stick with English or choose their native language, special preparation should occur before going to the field.<br>3. It is easier to write the study documents, including information about the study and consent form, as well as recruitment materials, in a way that facilitates translation to the other language if needed.<br>4. The identity of the translator in qualitative research is important<br>5. The researcher/translator role does not guarantee that the text is going to be translated to actual meanings because of positionality and social location that will influence how the researcher interprets meaning.<br>6. If the translator is not part of the research team, the translator must be involved in meetings and training sessions about the study in order to absorb the process of research and be aware of the caveats related to qualitative research bias during translation.<br>7. Some scholars think that treating translators as key informants and writing the translated text in the third person provides the foundation of multiple perspectives and understandings and reminds readers that the knowledge produced is by the researcher and translator's understanding of the language. |
| 2.Pilot Study: An Eye into Subsequent Processes | 1. A pilot study:<br>• Permits researchers to gain prior knowledge about how the data collection tool (s) or interview guides are received and assessed by the study population.<br>• Provides a guide that can be helpful in determining whether the data tool should be modified, or whether some items or questions are superfluous, and therefore removed.<br>• Tells if you have missed certain aspects of your research to be included in the interview guidelines that came up when carrying out the actual data collection.<br>• Allows the researcher to assess if their translation makes sense and helps to gather data that are epistemologically aligned with one's methods and could possibly answer the research questions.<br>2. Cultural appropriateness is another reason for conducting the pilot study since you will explore what and how to apply your data tool in a culturally acceptable manner. |
| 3. Cultural Differences: Participants Across-cultures | 1. Effective communication with potential participants.<br>2. Cultural differences between participants and researchers may be observed in the preferred means and times of communication. |

| | |
|---|---|
| 4.Technicalities: Recruitment and Member-checking | 1. The identity of the main researcher can unintentionally shape the recruitment process across cultures:<br>• Being perceived as an insider established a sense of solidarity and familiarity with<br>• The female identity of the main researcher could help in accessing both male and female environments.<br>• Female identity could create a more collegial interviewing environment.<br>2. Body language and facial expressions must be included in the analysis as they offer detailed information about participants' engagement in the dialogue.<br>3. Pre-defining the core concepts of the study in the recruitment materials has two different implications:<br>• It is beneficial because it draws the attention of knowledgeable participants about specific concepts.<br>• It is a drawback since you could have lost some potential participants because of the complexity of the study term.<br>4. The use of lay language or a language most congruent with the relevant technical environment is essential.<br>5. For member-checking interviews, the purpose and procedures of such activity should be explained to potential participants at the beginning of recruitment with fewer academic terms. |

Table (1): Summary of recommendations for conducting a bilingual study.