How can autoethnography help to understand researcher positionality?

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This paper focuses on researcher positionality and autoethnography. Drawing on ongoing ethnographic research in two multilingual neighbourhoods in the City of Munich, I discuss questions of positionality, power relations and subjectivity from an autoethnographic perspective.

While all ethnography is interested in self reflexivity and considers it a crucial part of the research process, autoethnography emphasizes the researcher and his/her biography within the research process: ”Autoethnography can be described as a qualitative research method that utilizes ethnographic methods to bring cultural interpretation to the autobiographical data of researchers” (Chang, 2008). The aim is thus to systematically involve the researcher’s biography into the research process and to make it part of the data which can be analysed in the same way as collected data in the field.

My own biography is closely connected to the field since I live(d) in the field which I am researching. My own social upward mobility from a working class environment to the academic environment of university changed my linguistic repertoire and shaped my ideologies towards so called ”sociolects”. But also growing up with a Bavarian dialect and having to assimilate to standardised German when I entered school shaped my view of language standardisation. In my research I was confronted with new and old biographical loyalties. Therefore a range of complex questions around researcher positionality, subjectivity and my biographical involvement in the field has accompanied my research from the beginning of the research process.

In the paper, I will discuss autoethnographical data like my own linguistic biography and language portrait to show how it helped me make sense of my own preconceptions of the field and as such proved fruitful for the understanding of positionality in the field.

References

Chang, Heewon (2008): Autoethnography as method, Walnut Creek, Calif.

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