

# The Research Interview

## Reflective Practice and Reflexivity in Research Processes

Steve Mann

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Steve Mann

*University of Warwick, UK*

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THE RESEARCH INTERVIEW: REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND REFLEXIVITY IN RESEARCH PROCESSES

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*For Fiona, Rosie, and Rob with love*

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# Preface

I've had interviewing on my mind for some time now. It started with conversations with my colleague Keith Richards, but working with a number of PhD students increasingly brought home to me that qualitative research interviews are an important but neglected area. In 2010, Keith Richards and Steven Talmy asked me to write an article critiquing the treatment of qualitative interviews for their special issue of *Applied Linguistics*. I was grateful for their guidance and support because this opportunity gave me a chance to provide an initial statement of the topic. However, this process raised more questions than it answered. I felt 8,000 words allowed only a few etchings on the surface. This book is a chance to probe further into some of the issues raised.

There was one point in particular when I realised that the general topic of interviews had seeped deep into that part of the brain that mulls things over while we are engaged in quite different tasks. I found myself on stage at the Everyman Theatre in Cheltenham helping to give a packed audience a stirring tribute to Sheila Mander who, well into her 70s, is still working with numerous young actors and actresses in Gloucestershire. She has been doing this great work since the 1960s. What I intended to say was something like 'Sheila has influenced thousands of young people over the years'. What came out of my mouth was 'Sheila has interviewed thousands of young people'. I corrected myself and struggled on. A few sentences later, I made the same mistake again. Sheila is a talented and versatile director and producer but I don't think she's done a great deal of qualitative research. The point is that I'd clearly got interviews on the brain. I still have.

A couple of things perplexed me early on. Nearly all the qualitative PhD theses I read (and all the MA dissertations) had between one and five pages on the differences between structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. Then they went on to say that, after careful consideration, semi-structured interviews have been chosen. And that was usually that, as though these categories were self-explanatory. Evidence of reflexivity also seemed to be rare. Statements such as 'learning from the pilot interviews' were not backed up with any detail or insight.

Consequently I found myself having similar worries to those expressed below (about a lack of reflexivity):

Too often, I see researchers paying lip service to reflexivity, assuming that the job is done when the interviewer's interests or subjectivity has been declared. For me, the value of reflexivity is the critical analysis that takes place when examining how the researcher (or research relationship/context) influences the research. Reflexivity is a tool to understand better. (Findlay 2012: 318)

Researchers need to at least engage with how their methodological choices, interests, and subjectivities influence the data collected: They need to do more than pay 'lip service' to reflexivity. Reflexivity in qualitative interviewing is a crucial element of ensuring quality. Without it researchers are likely to add to Potter and Hepburn's suspicion that 'interviewing has been too easy, too obvious, too little studied and too open to providing a convenient launch pad for poor research' (2012: 555).

The purpose of this book is to encourage more reflective thinking about qualitative interviews. In attempting to do this, the book foregrounds the voices and experiences of qualitative interviewers. Some of them are novices and some of them are more experienced. All of them provide insight into the process of collecting, analysing, and representing interview data.

Shortly after I had the idea for this book, I came across a really useful resource concerning 'how many interviews is enough' (Baker and Edwards 2012) and this also features early-career researchers and more established academics who provide insights into this question when designing research projects. Not surprisingly the riposte to the question of 'how many' from most contributors is 'it depends'. However, the consideration brings to light a range of epistemological, methodological, and practical issues and I hope this book does something similar. I also hope that this book does something different in that it focuses on actual interview interaction. Putting interview interaction at the heart of the book makes it possible to provide a data-led response to the central question for this book – 'what does being reflexive actually mean when conducting and analysing qualitative interviews?' The range of voices featured here offer individual and unique reflexive perspectives on this question.

## **Key themes and organisation of the book**

A perusal of the contents page (p. vii) shows that the book begins with a consideration of reflective practice, the importance of the reflective

practitioner, and a discussion of the difference between the terms 'reflective' and 'reflexive' (Chapter 1). The second chapter provides a critical overview of challenges for the qualitative interview. These are the very challenges with which a reflexive account needs to engage. Chapter 3 is also an important 'early' chapter because it establishes the fundamental part that context plays in understanding how interaction is shaped. Chapter 4 provides an overview of different types of interviews, providing comment on the orientation and make-up of each type. Taken together, the first four chapters provide important background information and lay out the fundamentals of qualitative interviewing.

Chapter 5 provides a practical view of choices and decisions that a qualitative interviewer faces and concentrates on the real-time, moment-by-moment nature of interview management. This is followed by Chapter 6, which focuses on recurring dilemmas and puzzles and ways to open out and engage with corresponding discursive choices. Chapter 7 recognises that the interview is not always a one-to-one affair. Sometimes there is more than one interviewee. Sometimes interviewers are working in teams and this places important demands on the way interaction unfolds. In a similar way, Chapter 7 recognises that interviews are not always face-to-face and new mediums of communication have important consequences on interview interaction. Chapters 5–7 are all concerned with considering ways in which the interview interaction is determined by participants, medium, and the choices the interview makes in the way the interview is conceived.

Chapter 8 provides comment on analytical choices and procedures for the qualitative researcher. Chapter 9 then provides a short consideration of how the research process, analysis, and subsequent findings and claims can be represented. The last chapter (10) contains suggestions for helping novice researchers develop a data-led reflexive approach in dealing with qualitative interviews.

## **Who are you?**

The nature of qualitative inquiry is complex and demanding. If you are picking this book up as a relatively novice researcher, you may well be feeling daunted and more than a little overwhelmed. I have two responses to that. First of all, that's a natural way to feel and it's undoubtedly a healthy attitude to adopt given that each research project is unique and needs unique responses. Secondly, many of the researchers featured in this book felt the same at many points. There are guidelines in the qualitative research literature, but working in

an interpretative paradigm means that there are no detailed recipes to follow. Each researcher needs to embrace the articulation of the nature of their data collection and analysis process and reflexivity is key to this pursuit (Stake 1995; Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2009). If you are more experienced, you will know that reflexivity is something that is ongoing. Being reflexive is an iterative process. It never gets finished but it is something we understand better by sharing our experiences.

## **How to use the book**

If you are a Master's or PhD student, you should read Chapters 1 and 2, as they will provide you with a good basis for developing a reflexive approach to your interview practice. You might then select other chapters which are most relevant to your research project. Each chapter has several tasks that are designed as a stimulus for engagement with the content; they encourage the discussion or reflection on an important aspect of the chapter. The tasks combine with the vignettes to help you to think about key decision and aspects of interviews. They also help you to develop a data-led perspective on interviews.

If you are a trainer or leading a process of developing skills in qualitative research, you have the option of using the suggested tasks. However, in addition to the use of the tasks, I would suggest you use some of the chapters' reflexive vignettes in stages. Show the context description and transcript first and let the participants predict what the reflexive comment is likely to concern. Participants can then compare their predictions with the actual interviewer's reflexive commentary. I have found this procedure produces very interesting discussion.

## **The role of reflexive vignettes in the book**

Each chapter has at least one reflexive vignette. These vignettes usually have three parts. They:

- make clear important elements in the interactional context of the interview;
- provide a transcribed extract of the featured qualitative interview; and
- foreground key reflexive issues in the extract.

Consequently these vignettes play a crucial role in the book. Not only do they foreground the voices and experience of qualitative researchers

(both novices and more expert practitioners), they also show the importance of reflecting on and learning from interactional experience (through transcripts and vignettes). Unless otherwise indicated, the researchers' real names are used in the introduction to each vignette. Borer and Fontana (2012: 45) say that today, instead of focusing on constructing and deconstructing meta-theories about the nature of society and the self, 'we focus on smaller parcels of knowledge; we study society in its fragments, in its daily details' (Silverman, 1997). In this book the goal is somewhat similar with regard to interviews and reflexivity. The focus is on how individual researchers view the daily detail of their interview fragments thereby providing insider views of the process. Given the situated and complex process of qualitative interview, my belief is that it is necessary to open out the practice through more sharing of actual interview interaction and corresponding reflexive accounts from interviewers. I hope that this book will help in meeting this challenge.

# Acknowledgements

I have a number of people to thank in relation to this book. Firstly, Julian Edge has always been a source of inspiration and his book *The Reflexive Teacher Educator in TESOL* has been important in showing how a series of autobiographical and reflexive episodes can reveal a great deal about being a committed practitioner. To a large extent this is what I have tried to do with the subject of qualitative interviews. Many of the insights in this book have arisen from engagement with some excellent PhD students in recent years and working on their data has also shaped my thinking. In particular, I would like to thank Sarah Banks, Reem Doukmak, Flori Dzay-Chulim, Jennifer Heo, Manuel Herrera Montoya, Timi Hyacinth, Shefali Kulkarni, Mohammad Manasreh, Bulara Monyaki, Imam Shamsini, Joan Sim, George Skuse, Jane Spinola, Elaine Tang, Wayne Trotman, Seetha Venunathan, Mikio Iguchi, Nicolás Pino-James, Yvonne Fowler, Elena Oncevaka, Priya Kumar, Nasy Pfanner, Ann Wiseman, Douglas Bell, Ian Nakamura, Oula Kadhum, Samaneh Zandian, Harry Kuchah, Rose Nguyen, Ernesto Vargas Gil, Jo Gakonga, Heeyang Park and Sixian Hah. However, Bushra Khurram has been particularly generous in her willingness to offer useful feedback on drafts. There are many other students who I have worked with at Aston University, University of Birmingham, and University of Warwick. In all three institutions, I have learned a great deal from working with such committed qualitative researchers. In addition, I am grateful to many more experienced researchers for their generosity in providing reflexive vignettes which provide an important data-led dimension of this book. These individuals are named in the various chapters, except where they have indicated that they prefer to remain anonymous. Kathy Roulston and Keith Richards have been generous in offering training tasks for Chapter 10.

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I would like to thank my family for their support during the writing process. Fiona Copland has been an important critical friend. The conversations I have with our two young adults (Rosie and Rob) provided many a break in the process. Olly (the Boxer) hasn't got a clue what an interview is but is also always there for a walk down to the meadows by the River Trent.

I would like to end by paying special thanks to Keith Richards. I read his book *Qualitative Inquiry in TESOL* as it was being drafted. It gave me a real insight into the way a book like this might be approached. It also gave me a goal in terms of its quality and commitment to data and detail. Since then I've shared the job of teaching Master's and PhD level modules with him and teaching qualitative interviews to students in Warwick's Doctorate Training Centre. Such shared teaching and resulting conversations have been enormously useful in shaping this book.



# 1

## Interviews as Reflective Practice

### Task

Julian Edge in his book *The Reflective Practitioner in TESOL* (Edge 2011) uses Icarus and Narcissus as his central and organising metaphor to highlight our human potential to both act and reflect (and to get that balance right).

- What do you see as the important 'actions' for qualitative researchers and what do you think qualitative researchers need to reflect on?
- How do you think this question relates to Icarus and Narcissus? (If you are not familiar with the stories of Icarus and Narcissus, a short version is reproduced below).

#### *Icarus and Narcissus*

*Icarus was the son of Daedalus, imprisoned on the island of Crete by King Minos. To make their escape, Daedalus created wings from leather, wax, and feathers for both himself and Icarus. His last words to his son were to 'follow me closely,' and 'do not set your own course!' However, Icarus disobeyed his father's instructions and tested the limits of his flight. Unfortunately the heat of the sun melted the wax and Icarus fell into the sea and drowned.*

*Narcissus was a beautiful young man. Women and men, humans and nymphs, all fell in love with him but he rejected all of them. One of these broken-hearted suitors, Alpheius, committed suicide and called on the gods to avenge him. Artemis decreed that Narcissus should fall in love but be*

*denied any kind of consummation. Consequently Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection, putting down roots as he stayed so long. Finally, he, too, killed himself and as his blood soaked into the ground a white Narcissus flower grew.*

## **Introduction**

I have been working with researchers in education and applied linguistics for over 20 years and I would say that interviews are the most frequently used method in qualitative research. This is a view endorsed by others. Dörnyei, for example, sees the reason for the frequency being that interviews are the most 'natural and socially acceptable way of collecting information' (2007: 134). The common use of qualitative interviews is also undoubtedly due to their potential to provide in-depth information related to 'participants' experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic' (Turner 2010: 754). In addition, interviews are widely held to be a fundamentally useful way to understand informants' beliefs, experiences, and worlds. As Kvale (2008: 9) tells us, they provide 'a unique access to the lived world of the subjects, who in their own words describe their activities, experiences and opinions.' However, the fact that qualitative interviews are common can lead to a 'taken-for-grantedness' and a lack of critical attention to their use and management. As Kvale and Brinkman say, it 'seems so simple to interview, but it is hard to do well' (2009: 1). There are many aspects of qualitative interviews that might be taken for granted. This is one of the reasons why ongoing commitment to reflection is important. Any professional activity can be better understood through attempts to reflect on practice and this is no different in the case of qualitative interviewing. Ongoing commitment entails adopting a reflective approach early and sustaining it. As Finlay says, 'the process of reflection and reflexive analysis should start from the moment the research is conceived'. In other words, reflexivity is not something that should just get 'done at the end' (Finlay 2002: 536).

This chapter therefore presents an overall argument that, as reflective practice is important in any professional enterprise, it is also essential to the quality and transparency of the use of qualitative interviews. The chapter then attempts to define some of the key terminology in this enterprise, particularly focusing on distinguishing 'reflective practice', 'reflection', and 'reflexivity'. This is not necessarily a clear-cut distinction but a consideration of the connotations, coverage, and nuance of these terms is a good starting point for this book. This chapter also

considers some dangers, pitfalls, and challenges in adopting a reflective approach.

In summary, Chapter 1 frames the whole book because it establishes the value of reflective practice in designing, managing, and analysing qualitative interviews. Later chapters open out related questions: What do novice and more experienced interviewers reflect on? How can you manage interviews in a more reflective way?

## **The role for applied linguistics**

You don't need any linguistic background whatsoever to understand the linguistic points made in this book. However, a key theme of all the chapters in this book is that a focus on the actual language of interviews can be insightful. In other words, a language-based perspective has a special role to play in considering the way talk in interviews is conducted and can be analysed. We can refer to the 'stuff' of interviews as talk, language, interaction, discourse or conversation. Whatever we call it, it is important to pay attention to the dynamics of turn-taking, the type of questions and the variety of other moves made in the interview. This concentration on interview discourse means that we should move away from 'the standard antilinguistic, stimulus-response model' of interviews to 'an alternative approach to interviewing' that recognises that an interview is 'discourse between speakers' (Mishler 1986a: 32).

This book shows how applied linguistics has a special role to play in helping researchers become more sensitive to interview discourse, discursive choices, and the management of interaction in interviews. All the reflexive vignettes featured in this book are centred around a transcribed extract from a qualitative interview and this will help open up what is meant by a discursive approach to reflexivity (although Chapter 6 concentrates on this perspective in great detail). This focus on transcripts allows us to focus on talk as action. Talk is social action and this is evident in the language we use to explain talk itself, most obviously in the term 'interaction'. When Holstein and Gubrium (1995) talk about the 'active interview' they have in mind the recognition that interviewers are necessarily 'active', whether or not we consciously adopt the position that interviews are co-constructed speech events or not. The interview is made up of various 'speech acts' (Austin 1962; Searle 1969) which are the most fundamental aspect of any kind of spoken discourse. As Jensen puts it:

Each statement is defined literally as an instance of linguistic action. Language does not simply, or even primarily, work as a descriptive

representation; through language, people perform a variety of every day acts. (2002: 34)

Qualitative interviews can be treated as a form of professional practice, where reflection can help raise sensitivity to speech acts, as well as other aspects of language used and choices made. Across a range of areas of professional practice (health care, education, business) practitioners need to reflect on language choices. This usually starts in some kind of training or induction process but ideally continues as practitioners develop their sensitivity and understanding. In interviews, such sensitivity involves both the interviewer's language choices and also sensitivity to the interviewee's contributions. Mann and Walsh (2013) provide an argument for the special status of applied linguistics in revealing the nature of reflective practice. This present book argues that reflection on language can make discussion of qualitative interviews more concrete, transparent, and data-led. Qualitative research interviewing is a linguistic practice and therefore a 'real world' challenge for applied linguistics, which is concerned with 'the theoretical and empirical investigation of real-world problems in which language is a central issue' (Brumfit 1995: 27). There are those who would draw a sharp distinction between the linguistic practices of the real world of naturally occurring data and those of research interviewing (e.g. Potter and Hepburn 2005; Silverman 2007). Their important objections to the way in which interviews can be uncritically assumed to be windows on the real world will be taken up later. However, especially for novice qualitative interviewers, the challenge of dealing with qualitative interviews certainly feels like a real-world dilemma.

### **Task**

Language is always a central issue in interviews. Some aspects of interview language are obvious, others are less so. Look at Extracts 1.1 and 1.2 below.

1. What do you think is the focus or topic of the interview?
2. What do you notice about the language of each?
3. What questions do you want to ask about the context of each interview?

**Extract 1.1**

1 I: is there anything (.) in particular (.) that y:ou  
2 (.)really do treasure about [country] °then°  
3 B: (0.4) anything particular  
4 I: anything (.) you know it could be foo:d music  
5 (.) [people  
6 B: [y:es (.) yes I love the music  
7 I: mm  
8 B: (0.2) and er (.) is here I miss that music (.)  
9 I do (.) when I play in the car my children don't  
10 like it ((laughter))  
11 I: [right  
12 B: oh mammy put English one on ((laughter))  
13 I: right yeah  
14 B: so I miss (.) but I do I miss it but (.)°yeah°  
15 A: (.) so what do you treasure about living in York  
16 then

**Extract 1.2**

I: In your opinion, which is the most anxiety-provoking aspect of the lesson?

Z: I am usually anxious about the time I am given by the teacher to work on a writing task, an essay. As for speaking, I always feel I have to think a lot before I say something in English. It's so different from speaking in Greek. And also when I speak in Greek, I don't make mistakes. I mean that native speakers of any language normally don't make mistakes, unless you speak too fast for example. I don't want to make mistakes in English though, but it can often be difficult to express certain ideas in another language. And of course the level of anxiety differs across situations, for example a one-to-one lesson, or in a classroom, with other students, where you also become anxious about what you will say in the presence of others.

I: How do you think that could affect you?

Z: When I speak English in class, I have to think if I've used the grammar and vocabulary correctly. It's difficult to clearly say what you want to say in English as

you are used to speaking Greek most of the time. And my anxiety doubles because I am in a classroom with other students and I have to speak in front of them. I have to think of what I'll say in front of people who might be stronger students than I am. I wouldn't call it competitiveness, but students should be of an equal level of proficiency and should have similar abilities. Is this possible? I don't know. No, no, I am competitive, because I don't want other students to perform better than me.

There are a number of differences between Extract 1.1 and Extract 1.2 that will be fairly obvious. The interview language looks very different on the page. Extract 1.2 is presented in sentences (with full stops, commas, and capital letters). Extract 1.1 has line numbers and pauses, and shows interactive features like backchannelling and overlap. In Extract 1.1 the interviewer is doing more work to elicit responses and the interviewee is more hesitant and the responses are limited in length. In Extract 1.2, the interviewee seems to be more fluent and the responses are longer. There are differences in the way the talk has been represented but it also obvious that the interviewer in Extract 1.1 is doing (or having to do) more supportive work (elicitation, backchannelling, acknowledgement tokens). There are lots more obvious differences. However, one aspect of the interviews may not be immediately obvious. You might have guessed that the interviewee in Extract 1.1 is not a native-speaker of English (Bengali is her mother tongue). However, there is no way of knowing from the transcript in Extract 1.2 that this interview was conducted in Greek and has been translated into English. This process is often undertaken without reflexive comment. The process of interviewing in one language and then presenting a version in English is often not as smooth and unproblematic as it might seem from the presented transcript. A researcher who is informed by applied linguistics will be interested in the language of interviews and this is not just a question of which questions are asked (the form of the interview) but also which language is used (the language medium) and how the language used is presented in a transcript (the language representation).

At this point you might want to read the reflexive vignettes written by the two researchers. You can find Dasha's/Appendix 4 on p. 287 and Christina's/Appendix 5 on p. 289). There you will find out more about the context of these interviews and each researcher's reflexive comment on the interview language. Dasha reflects on how attention

to interview language has informed her analysis. Christina provides reflexive comment on the coding the interview data, as well as issues like the 'Hawthorne effect'.

## **Reflection and reflective practice**

### **Definitions**

Before we turn our attention to qualitative interviews, it is worth attempting definitions of (and distinctions between) terms like 'reflection', 'reflective practice', and 'reflexivity'. This is because these closely related terms will be used throughout the book. However, this is not an easy matter. Finlay (2008: 1) warns us that:

Within different disciplines and intellectual traditions, however, what is understood by 'reflective practice' varies considerably (Fook et al., 2006). Multiple and contradictory understandings of reflective practice can even be found within the same discipline.

Part of the problem is that the nature of reflection is often ill-defined (Hatton and Smith, 1995). Durkheim warns us of the inherent slippery quality of language but also of the even greater danger of not engaging in definition:

For the words of everyday language, like the concepts they express, are always susceptible of more than one meaning, and the scholar employing them in their accepted use without further definition would risk serious misunderstanding. (Durkheim 1897: 41)

One option is to treat 'being reflective' and 'being reflexive' as interchangeable and indeed plenty of writers seem to do this. But as Finlay warns us 'the terms reflection, critical reflection and reflexivity are often confused and wrongly assumed to be interchangeable' (2008: 6). I hope that by the end of the book a full sense of these terms and their use in improving the quality of qualitative interviews will be apparent. However, this a longer-term goal and we need a starting point here and so we will begin with 'reflection' and 'reflective practice'. We will then look separately at the concept of 'reflexivity'. In each case, aspects of the origins will be included.

At its simplest level, reflection means thinking about something. It is usually an introspective process but can be facilitated by tools and

collaborative processes. In other words, reflection might happen ‘in the head’ or through writing (e.g. diary writing) or talk (e.g. collaborative exploratory talk). Reflection might be a relatively transient and informal event but, as Boud et al. suggest, reflection can yield more when it is more sustained:

Reflection is an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull over and evaluate it. It is this working with experience that is important in learning. (1985: 43)

Such reflection, encompassing various ‘intellectual and affective activities’ can ‘lead to new understandings and appreciation’ (1985: 3).

### Origins and definitions

It is possible to see the roots of current views of reflection in Plato’s *Meno* (see Grimmett, 1988) and Kant’s *Critique of Practical Judgement* (1789) but Dewey and Schön have been particularly influential in the development of the concept of reflection. Dewey’s book *How We Think* (1933) is widely credited with turning serious attention to reflective thought. It was originally published in 1910 and its emphasis on practical problem-solving has had an important influence on the development of practitioner inquiry and action research, as well as reflective practice. Dewey focused attention on the importance of experiential learning and reflective thought as the ‘sole method of escape from the purely impulsive or purely routine action’ (Dewey 1933: 15) and is concerned principally with the relationship between experience, interaction and reflection. Moving beyond impulsive and routine activity ‘enables us to direct our activities with foresight and to plan according to ends-in-view or purposes of which we are aware, to act in deliberate and intentional fashion, to know what we are about when we act’ (1933: 17). Dewey’s conceptualisation of reflection emphasises serious, active, and persistent engagement with a doubt or perplexity and can involve close examination and inviting criticism.

Schön (1983) picked up Dewey’s arguments and distinguished between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action is synchronous with the professional act (thinking on your feet) and reflection-on-action is asynchronous (reflecting after the professional incident or action). Killian and Tødne (1991) added the perspective of ‘reflection-for-action’. This is a process of consciously forward looking and identifying goals, steps or guidelines to follow, in order to succeed in a given task or activity in the future. ‘For-action’



pushes the process in more sustained and systematic directions and so overlaps with notions of research (e.g. action research and action learning). In terms of reflection on qualitative interviews, there may not always be time for much reflection-in-action in the already demanding process of maintaining concentration on what the interviewee is saying and timing and formulating the next question. However, as later reflexive vignettes in this book will reveal, good interviewers are able to monitor how the interview is progressing (e.g. whether the interviewee is comfortable). Certainly reflection-on-action and reflection-for-action are important dimensions of a reflective approach to qualitative interviews.

To summarise, reflective practice is a process of learning from experience through some form of reflection. This might involve reflecting on various dimensions of work/practice, the methodology and handling of that practice, or how to handle it differently or better. Reflective practitioners might reflect on themselves, the relationship between themselves and their practice, how they relate to their practice, how their home-life and work-life affect each other, relationships with others, and connections to their immediate and wider social and cultural context. Such reflection might take place within the work/practice or away from it. All serious professionals engage in reflective practice, although some might not do this formally or in a sustained or systematic way. Reflective practice often has outcomes in changes in practice – not necessarily large changes (they might be small ‘tweaks’ and adjustments).

There are numerous frameworks, classifications, dimensions, statements of level, and types of reflection that have been produced (e.g. van Manen 1977; Ward and McCotter 2004; Jay and Johnson 2002; Zwozdiak-Myers 2012; Farrell 2015). Such typologies can be useful for the analysis of reflection but need to be treated with caution when introducing reflective practice to novice practitioners. In essence, reflective practice needs to be built up through the experience of it (rather than being over-theorised and unnecessarily conceptualised).

There are a number of accounts that question the value of reflective practice and that see problems with the way it is managed and operationalised. Many of these critical perspectives relate to the institutional nature of reflection. For example, Gray and Block (2012) argue that the prevailing climate of ‘instrumental rationalization’ does not facilitate the development of reflective practice but, often due to institutional constraints, ends up restricting opportunities for reflection and professional learning. There is also a common problem that novice practitioners (e.g. in education or health care) are assessed on their ability to be reflective and so end up either ‘faking it’ or aligning their reflections

to what they suppose their tutor wants to read. There is not space here to do just to this substantial literature (Ixer 1999; Akbari 2007; Hobbs 2007; McGarr and Moody 2010; Atkinson 2012; Gray and Block 2012; Beauchamp 2014). However, any serious attempt to promote reflective practice needs to consider these limitations and challenges.

### Critical reflection

Before we move on to reflexivity, it is worth saying something about the term 'critical reflection'. Two elements of many definitions of reflection are 'action' and 'critical', although there are huge variations in emphasis. However, it is worth noting that some writers foreground the critical element (e.g. Brookfield 1997; Bailin et al. 2007). Mezirow (1991) suggests that learning is only possible through critical self-awareness and critical reflection of presuppositions. In a similar vein, Zeichner and Liston (1996) see it essential that practitioners should move beyond questions concerned with whether or not their practice is working, to the critical examination of values and ideologies. Encouraging critical reflection is more likely to challenge assumptions, interrogate the ideological status quo, question institutional norms and confront inequality, discrimination, gender bias, and marginalisation.

### Reflexivity

#### Task

1. In this section of the chapter we are going to focus on the terms 'reflexive' and 'reflexivity'. What do they mean for you?
2. Read the following text written by James Shapiro who is talking about his book *'Contested Will'* and his engagement in the vexed question of Shakespeare's authorship. Think about the use of the word reflexive in the passage.

I first explored the idea of writing this book some years ago, a friend unnerved me by asking, 'What difference does it make who wrote the plays?' The reflexive answer I offered in response is now much clearer to me: 'A lot'. It makes a difference as to how we imagine the world in which Shakespeare lived and wrote. It makes an even greater difference as to how we understand how much has changed from the early modern to modern times. But the greatest difference of all concerns how we read the plays. We can believe that

Shakespeare himself thought that poets could give to 'airy nothing' a 'local habitation and a name.' Or we can conclude that this 'airy nothing' turns out to be a disguised something that needs to be decoded, and that Shakespeare couldn't imagine 'the forms of things unknown' without having experienced it firsthand. It's a stark and consequential choice.'

### **Response to task**

We might note a number of elements of reflexivity here. The first is the contrast between the 'reflexive answer', with its sense of automaticity (knee-jerk reactions), being contrasted with the fuller more considered understanding and articulation of that answer over time (more like reflection). We might also note the emphatic use of the reflexive pronoun (Shakespeare himself). It would be possible to write this sentence without the reflexive pronoun. However, its inclusion is part of the construction of the 'stark and consequential' choice being presented and the strong argument for Shakespeare's authenticity and agency.

The concept of reflexivity has risen to prominence in a variety of disciplines including sociology, education, ethnography, and psychology (e.g., Clifford 1986; Latour 1988). Reflexivity is becoming increasingly important in research which crosses boundaries. In an era of increasingly multi-disciplinary, mixed-method, and multi-methods research, it is crucial to contemplate synergies, relations, and the points of congruence and dissonance. As Drew et al. tell us:

In place of images of scientific work that suggest a unity of method and theoretical outlook among colleagues, we are increasingly confronted with the reality of difference among ourselves and the unavoidable necessity of dialogue across these lines of difference. (2006: 102)

Reflexivity clearly has an important role to play for both individuals and teams of researchers (see Barry et al. 1999). However, it is a difficult concept to pin down, even though it is worth trying. Macbeth puts it like this:

The program's consensus is not easily described, and the play of reflexivity in the literature is far more diverse than single, or several, positions can account for. And although this diversity assures us that any account of it can only be tendentious, it may still be useful to try to build one. (2001: 35)

Like reflection, reflexivity suffers from a lack of exemplification (particularly supported by data). Watt shares her experience of this fuzziness and lack of explicit form: 'Although convincing on a theoretical level, as a new researcher I had little idea what this meant in concrete terms' (Watt 2007: 82). One of the reasons for this is that some researchers who claim to be reflexive are not consistent in their use of term, neither do they reveal it in tangible ways. Watson also pinpoints typical muddled thinking about reflexivity:

The muddle consists, in the first place, in paying lip service to relativism while stubbornly clinging to realism and, in the second place, in claiming to confront reflexivity while merely managing it. (1987: 29)

D'Cruz et al. (2007) show how the use of the term reflexivity does not guarantee reflexive attention in articles on social work. They found that some authors used the keyword 'reflexivity' to define the focus of their work (Boud 1999; Briggs 1999; Rea 2000; Mosca and Yost 2001). Some used this concept interchangeably with 'reflection' and 'critical reflection' in the actual article (Kondrat 1999; Potter and East 2000; Ruch 2000, 2002). However, others did differentiate between 'reflexivity' and 'reflectivity/reflection' in relation to their professional practice (Raffel 1999; Deacon 2000; Sheppard et al. 2000).

In order to clarify this term and its value for this book, it is worth spending some time teasing out different elements of its grammatical make-up and origins, as well as various other dimensions and considerations.

### **The grammar of reflexivity**

As a starting point, we have already noted the inherent grammar of reflexivity in the Shapiro text above. This grammar is centred on the relationship to the self. In the text above we can pick out two elements of the grammar of reflexivity. The first is the knee-jerk reaction related to self (one thing directly causing another with connotations of muscle memory and lack of conscious intentionality). The second, the use of the reflexive pronoun, in this case 'himself' (stressing agency and the actions of the self). Aspects of reflexivity are therefore hardwired into our language choices, especially in the use of reflexive pronouns (I am teaching myself to play bass guitar) and this division of the self into both subject and object is important:

What I find here is a concept of reflexivity as involving a unitary whole that is at the same time divisible: my self is divisible into an 'I' and a 'me', a subject and an object, a nominative and an accusative. This distinction has a wide-ranging resonance – one which takes us back to Kolb's evocation of the individual wanting to be the subject of his or her life, rather than only an object in it ... (Edge 2011: 33)

Of course we can be both the subject and object of action. In 'I'm teaching myself to play bass guitar', this is the case. This mix of possible agency (in the actions we take, the way we act on ourselves, and the way we can also be the subject of action), the things we do 'to' and 'for' ourselves, and their outcomes are the heart of reflexivity. Having provided a short grammar focus, we will turn to the origins of the term, especially for the field of social science.

### **The roots and origins of the concept of reflexivity**

Socrates' precept – 'know thyself' – is sometimes seen as an origin of reflexive practice (it was carved in a plinth at the temple of the Oracle of Delphi). Actually Foucault (1988) pointed out that in its original context it functioned as a ritual warning against hubris in relation to the gods. However, there is enough reported evidence that, for Socrates, his life-journey was one of ongoing reflection. When he was asked by his friends if he was making preparations for his trial, where he faced the death-penalty, Socrates replied: 'Do you not think that I have been preparing for it all my life.' This life-long pursuit of self-knowledge is something that should be at the heart of education. As Noddings puts it 'unexamined lives may well be valuable and worth living, but an education that does not invite such examination may not be worthy of the label education' (2006: 10). So far, such focus on self might be called 'reflection'. How can we differentiate reflexivity from reflection?

In terms of the origins of reflexivity in the social sciences, we need to go back to Thomas and Thomas (1928: 572) who state that 'if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences'. Merton (1976: 174) claims that this was 'probably the single most consequential sentence ever put in print by an American sociologist'. Certainly Merton helped establish the importance of what came to be known as the 'Thomas theorem'. This theorem is concerned with self-fulfilment; where the researcher and the research subjects behave in a way to fulfil the prophecy of the research. This might not necessarily be conscious bias but the notion of self-fulfilling prophecy is a particular challenge

for the social sciences. Returning to our focus on actions, the danger is that, if researchers start out with a hypothesis, then they may shift their actions so that their outcomes or findings are congruent with their original hypothesis. The prediction or hypothesis therefore has a constitutive impact on the outcome. This is what Popper (1950: 117) called the 'Oedipal effect'. This is an important focus for reflexivity.

### **Mutually shaping**

Another important dimension of reflexivity is what might be called back and forth or bi-directionality. This sense of mutual shaping and bi-directionality is particularly important for considering qualitative interview interaction. Particularly in ethnomethodology, the concept of reflexivity has been important for capturing the way social action is tied to context (e.g. Garfinkel and Sacks 1970). Garfinkel and Sacks conceptualisation of action and context is that they are necessarily reflexively-configured. This will be taken up further in Chapter 3.

For Rawls (1989) self and meanings are emergent, locally produced, sequential achievements of people in interaction but they also draw on previous constructions. Following this, working from a constructivist position, one of the main themes of this book is that ideas and awareness are shaped by articulation and articulation is shaped by ideas and awareness. This reflexive configuration is also an important element of notions of genre (see Swales 1990). In short, in the genre of interviews, any one interview is both genre dependent (having associated forms and expectations) and also genre renewing (helping to reinforce such forms and expectations). This is something that we will look at more closely in Chapters 4 and 5.

Edge (2011: 35) foregrounds bi-directionality in the 'ongoing, mutually shaping interaction between the researcher and the research'. He also offers a distinction that helps to distinguish elements of the bi-directionality in his own professional practice:

When talking specifically about the effect of the person on the work, I shall use the term, prospective reflexivity. When talking specifically about the effect of the work on the person, I shall use the term, retrospective reflexivity. (2011: 38)

Halling and Goldfarb (1991: 328) capture this sense of back and forth in a dance metaphor as they attempt to describe embodied reflexivity:

The recognition that one is an embodied being includes the acknowledgement that even in a situation of being an observer one is an involved observer – someone who is being affected by and is affecting

what is taking place. Being a researcher ... requires that one becomes fully and thoughtfully involved. It is as if one is engaged in a dance of moving forward and moving back: one steps closer and steps away, has an effect and is affected, all as an embodied being. (1991, p. 328)

The Roman god Janus can also provide a useful metaphor for capturing the interface between the past and present inherent in reflexivity. Janus is the god of beginnings and transitions, and is therefore associated with gates, doors, passages, endings, and time. He is usually depicted as having two faces, one looking to the future and one looking to the past. Reflexivity is both forwards and backwards looking. Like the Roman god Janus, it requires us to look simultaneously backwards and forwards. Embracing a reflexive view necessarily questions a linear cause and effect relationship.

So, a reflexive dimension to research can involve concentration on how the research has changed you. It can also involve focusing on how the researcher's beliefs, values, and way of conducting the research have had an impact on the research outcomes. In either case, one thing is acting on or influencing the other. Therefore reflexivity is commonly viewed as 'the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality' as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome (Berger 2015: 2).

Considering the possible effects of the researcher's self and modus operandi can be anticipated, or at least taken into account. What difference will it make that I am male, white, and an academic in my 50s? What differences will it make if I start the interview with these questions? Morgan (2012: 162), talking about focus groups, says:

Making decisions about research design is a process of anticipating what difference it would make to conduct focus groups in one way rather than another, and this deliberation of our possible actions and their likely outcomes is at the core of pragmatism.

### **Task**

Here is a working definition of reflexivity based on what we covered so far. How far do you think this is adequate? Would you add anything else to this definition?

Reflexivity is a conscious process of thought and articulation centred on the dynamics of subjectivities in relation to the interviewer, the interviewee(s), and the research focus and methodology.

### Focus on self-awareness

One of the key differences between reflection and reflexivity is that reflexivity is narrower in focus and more centred on self-awareness. Reflexivity 'is a stance of being able to locate oneself in the picture' where we 'appreciate how one's own self influences actions' (Fook 2002: 43). Finlay (2012: 317) makes the following short distinction:

The terms *reflection* and *reflexivity* are often confused. Reflection can be defined as 'thinking about' something after the event. Reflexivity, in contrast, involves on ongoing *self*-awareness.

This distinction works well, although as we said earlier reflection can happen during and before an event (and not just 'after') but, nevertheless, Finlay's focus on self-awareness in relation to the research itself and its methodology is core. This ability to refer to self is emphasised by Roulston (2010: 116), who says that 'reflexivity refers to the researcher's ability to be able to self-consciously refer to him or herself in relation to the production of knowledge about research topics'.

### Dimensions of reflexivity

Representing research in traditional, neutral, objective, and value-free ways has been the subject of critique from those associated with a 'reflexive turn' in social research (e.g. Van Maanen 1988; Atkinson 1990; Holstein and Gubrium 1995). There are plenty of other candidate turns (e.g. 'textual turn', a 'postmodern turn', a 'poststructuralist turn', a 'narrative turn', or a 'literary turn'). The use of the term 'turn' draws attention to a process of 'registering a new space' for research and theorising across the disciplines (MacLure 2003: 4). In terms of establishing the importance of space for reflexivity, there are a number of styles, distinctions, levels, and taxonomies of reflexivity (e.g. Wilkinson 1988; Marcus 1994; Davis and Klaes 2003). Lynch (2000) is a good starting point because it lays bare the dangers of adopting an uncritical view of reflexivity but also in provides an overview of various 'reflexivities' (mechanical, substantive, methodological, meta-theoretical, interpretative, and ethnomethodological).

Finlay (2012) identifies five ways to go about reflexivity – introspection, inter-subjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique, and discursive deconstruction – and discusses utilising these techniques in order to understand the interviewer's role in the interview context and how to use this knowledge to 'enhance the trustworthiness, transparency, and accountability of their research'.

Drawing on these various accounts of reflexivity, Table 1.1 picks out main themes and foregrounds some important considerations and



Table 1.1 A reflexive focus

<b>Essential element of research</b>	'Without some degree of reflexivity any research is blind and without purpose'.	Flood (1999: 35)
<b>Taking stock of the interviewers actions and role</b>	The ability of researchers 'to take stock of their actions and their role in the research process, and to interrogate systematically research relations'.	Temple and Edwards (2002: 2)
<b>Standing outside</b>	Standing outside and reflecting: 'the ability of the researcher to stand outside the research process and critically reflect on that process'	O'Leary (2004: 11)
<b>Ongoing and evolving</b>	Reflexivity 'is neither a given or a static element' and is an 'ongoing dialogic element that is continually evolving'. It is both socially situated and in motion and involves a willingness to maintain engagement with complexity.	Clark and Dervin (2014: 2)
<b>Impact of identities and relationships</b>	Reflexivity as understanding of the impact of identities and interpersonal relationships in the field; 'researchers need to reflect on the ways in which they, as individuals with social identities and particular perspectives, have an impact on the interpersonal relations of fieldwork'.	Temple and Edwards (2002: 10–11)
<b>Understanding 'self' in relation to knowledge</b>	Researchers need to increasingly focus on self-knowledge and sensitivity; better understand the role of the self in the creation of knowledge; carefully self monitor the impact of their biases, beliefs, and personal experiences on their research; and maintain the balance between the personal and the universal.	Berger (2015)
<b>Interrogating representation</b>	A process of standing back from the text and its claims. We need continually to interrogate and find strange the process of representation as we engage in it (being an 'ethnographer of the text').	Woolgar (1988:29)
<b>Source of data</b>	Reflexivity as a source of data. Reflexivity allows us to observe our feelings and positionality and the analysis of this dynamic becomes an important source of data in its own right.	Takeda (2013)
<b>Questioning interpretations</b>	A reflexive researcher does not simply report facts or 'truths' but actively constructs interpretations of his or her experiences in the field, and then questions how those interpretations came about.	Hertz (1997: viii)

dimensions of a reflexive focus. In choosing the following aspects, the focus is on the nature and perceived value of reflexivity.

### **Dangers**

It is important to keep reflexivity at an appropriate scale. This is partly in order to avoid accusations that this is all a form of qualitative ‘navel gazing’ (Sparkes 2000: 21; Finlay 2002: 215) and a narcissistic self-preoccupation (at the expense of getting on with the research), or that it privileges the researcher’s voice rather than the informants’ voices. It is probably true that we need more reflexive and context-sensitive attention to the co-construction of interview interaction. It is true that we need more attention to the management of interaction in interviews but we also need to avoid the ‘epistemological horrors’ (Woolgar and Ashmore 1988: 7) or, as Ashmore puts, it the ‘monster: the abyss, the spectre, the infinite regress’ (1989: 234). Lynch (2000: 46) uses similar metaphors to explain this danger:

The idea of infinite regress suggests that a reflexive application of relativism opens the door of a hall of mirrors in which the real object becomes indistinguishable from the infinite play of its images ... or, to use another image, reflexivity is likened to a demonic machine that, once set in motion, devours everything in its path and then turns on itself.

It is also worth considering the danger that implicit or explicit censorship may lead researchers to showing less reflexivity – whereas they would, in fact, want to be represented as more reflexive. Clark and Dervin (2014: 4–5) recount an episode related to a review of their work (criticising the use of ‘I’) where the exchange between journal and authors culminates in the editorial view that ‘the use of ‘I’ can ruin the credibility of the work’. These are issues that will be taken up in Chapter 6 in more detail and also in Chapter 9 (where we think about ways to represent reflexivity).

### **Task**

Etherington (2004: 11) poses four questions to enable the researcher to develop a reflexive perspective on research purposes, ethics, and associated dilemmas. These are questions for us all and we will return to them at various points in the book but, especially if you are

currently engaged in a research project, it might be worth thinking about them now:

1. How has my personal history led me to my interest in this topic?
2. What are my presuppositions about knowledge in this field?
3. How am I positioned in relation to this knowledge?
4. How does my gender/social class/ethnicity/culture influence my positioning in relation to this topic/my informants?

### **Towards reflexivity**

This next section of the chapter considers ways of being reflexive. In particular it introduces the importance of keeping a diary, reflexive bracketing, subjectivity statements, and the use of transcripts and forms of conversation analysis.

*Keeping a journal or diary* is desirable if not essential in qualitative research. This is an important element of reflective practice where you can focus on the reflexive dimensions of your research. The journal is a vehicle to explore a dialogue between theory and experience, and identity. It helps make explicit your assumptions and evaluate how these shape the interview interaction. A diary provides a space in which an organised qualitative researcher records dilemmas, concerns, and troubling ethic questions, as well as breakthroughs and realisations. If we have a look at the following two short diary entries we get an insight of how initial assumptions about an interview might change. In the first one (Extract 1.3) the interviewer is relatively happy with the interview. However, the second (Extract 1.4), written a week later, records new information about the interviewee's perceptions about the nature and status of the event:

#### **Extract 1.3**

*'Pen today and a really good interview with Annette. We seemed to be getting behind things, opening up territory which will throw light on all sorts of things...'*

#### **Extract 1.4**

*'Before we began this week she asked me for reassurance about my use of data because she'd realised after last week's session that she's said far more than she'd ever planned, expected or wanted to, and that she felt that it had been a session with her analyst.'*

Extract 1.4 raises ethical questions for the interviewer. I asked the researcher (Keith Richards) about these diary extracts and he added the following clarifying comment:

What happened in the first (life history) interview was that Annette [a pseudonym] told me about something that had happened in her professional life that had been devastating and that she'd never shared with anyone else: 'I think that was probably the worst part of my career, almost one of the worst things in my life ... I was devastated.' In the end we spent nearly all the interview talking through its impact on her and at the end (unprompted by her) I said that I wouldn't use that part of the interview. She was too upset to take this on board but since the life history interview had stopped at that point she agreed to have another interview to cover the ground that the original interview intended to cover. That was the second interview referred to in the diary entry.

My view of the interview was that it had led me 'behind the scenes' and although I couldn't use it I felt that I not only had a better understanding of the way the team worked but also that I'd finally been accepted as someone who could be trusted with sensitive information. Trust was very important because I'd been introduced to the team by the school owner and for the first three months of my research they'd assumed I was a 'spy'. So this was an important moment and I felt that the interview had gone well, albeit not for the reasons I'd originally intended. Her check at the beginning of the second interview confirmed my view that she had really opened up and I was happy to confirm that I wouldn't use that part of the first interview.

Taking into account the original diary entries and then the subsequent comment, there are two points to make here: sometimes things happen that change the nature of the interview, and in some circumstances you have to go with that; sometimes the content of an interview can be less important than what the interview represents or offers in terms of the bigger ethnographic project.

Keeping a diary also helps build greater sensitivity to bias, interactive behaviours, subjectivities, and how these play out in the interviews. If it is integrated into the account of the research, it can also help the reader of the research in evaluating the credibility of the research outcomes and the transparency of the research process. Therefore a reflexive

journal adds another dialogic option in relation to other data sets. In simple terms, a diary provides a first-hand account of the interviewer's concerns, decisions, and choices. As Watt says:

Although many of the benefits of journaling were apparent while I was engaged in the initial inquiry, before working on the current paper I did not appreciate the extent to which writing and reflection had pushed that project forward. (2007: 4)

Although there is general agreement that keeping a research diary is a good idea and that the process encourages reflexivity though recording beliefs, assumptions, and shifts in thinking, 'there is relatively little literature on the use of reflective journals in the research process, and limited guidance for novice researchers as to the purposes of keeping a reflective journal from a methodological perspective and how to use their reflections as an integral part of the research process' (Ortlipp 2008: 695).

Blaxter et al. (2001) show the value of keeping a research diary in maintaining a reflexive approach to qualitative research. They suggest separating this into four sections to cover different aspects of the research process and the construction of research knowledge:

- Observational notes describe events such as observations and interviews.
- Methodological notes focus on the researcher's actions and role.
- Theoretical notes concentrate on articulating initial explanations from the data.
- Analytical memos bring together inferences through review of other notes and literature and work towards patterns and themes.

*Reflexive bracketing* is one method that can be built into a research diary or sit alongside one. Tufford and Newman (2012) is a good starting point for considering aspects of reflexive bracketing. Bracketing is a method used by qualitative researchers to guard against 'the deleterious effects of unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research and thereby to increase the rigor of the project' (2010: 81). The method encourages the researcher to maintain some distance between the researcher and the research topic. Ahern (1999) offer the following bracketing tasks:

1. Identify some of the interests that, as a researcher, you might take for granted in undertaking this research.

2. Clarify your personal value systems and acknowledge areas in which you know you are subjective.
3. Describe possible areas of potential role conflict.
4. Identify gatekeepers' interests and consider the extent to which they are disposed favourably toward the project.
5. Recognise feelings that could indicate a lack of neutrality.
6. Is anything new or surprising in your data collection or analysis?
7. When blocks occur in the research process, reframe them.
8. Even when you have completed your analysis, reflect on how you write up your account. Are you quoting more from one respondent than another?
9. In qualitative research, the substantive literature review often comes after the analysis.
10. A significant aspect of resolving bias is the acknowledgment of its outcomes

*Subjectivity statements* are another option that can be incorporated into diaries and draw on personal histories, cultural worldviews, and professional experiences (see Preissle 2008). Their purpose is to help researchers identify how their personal experiences, beliefs, feelings, cultural standpoints, and professional predispositions may affect their research. They also form data to convey these perspectives to other scholars (increasing transparency, credibility, and overall quality). Jootun et al. (2009), in the area of health care, make the case for including a reflexive account featuring subjectivity statements to increase the rigour of the research process. They argue that the relationship between, and influence of, the researcher and participants should be made explicit.

*Transcripts.* One of the key suggestions in this book is to increase the use of and attention to transcripts and recordings. Briggs (1986) argues for the importance of 'employing reflexivity in the research process as a whole' but particularly recommends the microanalyses of interview data (see Briggs 1986: 93–111). This is part of sustained and data-led approach to reflexivity (see also Mann and Walsh 2013). Applied conversation analysis has an important role in developing awareness and interviewer training (see ten Have 2004; Roulston 2006; Richards 2011).

CA (conversation analysis) has been used for reflexive purposes in other areas. For example, Seedhouse (2004) adopted a CA approach for the analysis of classroom discourse. He demonstrates how a CA approach enables reflexivity in understanding the shaping of the interactional organisation of classroom discourse. Seedhouse shows that the classroom is fluid and mutually constructed by participants. Such

a reflexive model allows us to handle both the ‘micro’ and the ‘macro’, where we can detail the specificity and diversity of instances of L2 classroom discourse at the micro level, but also see commonalities between them at the macro level.

### **Nathan Page’s Extract**

At this point in Chapter 1, a reflexive vignette is featured in order to exemplify a researcher’s reflexive ‘take’ on the interaction. The majority of reflexive vignettes in this book will follow a three-part pattern: starting with a context statement; followed by a transcribed interview extract; ending with a reflexive comment from the researcher.

#### **Nathan’s context**

Extract 1.5 comes from an interview which took place in Japan, in spring 2012. The setting is a training centre where Japanese volunteers study languages, including English, intensively for 10 weeks before being dispatched as overseas volunteers, to live and work in a recipient host country. The interviewee, (M), is an experienced male teacher of English who is originally from Ghana but has lived and worked in Japan for approximately 20 years. The other speaker, (N), is myself, conducting fieldwork for my postgraduate research studies. I was already acquainted with M, as I had previously been a language teacher at the training centre, although I had not seen him for around two years prior to the interview. M has not only worked in the context for an extended period of time, he is also head of English at the training centre. The interview took place in M’s classroom in the early evening, after lessons had finished. As indicated by line 1, this extract comes from the very end of the interview; at this point we had been talking for around 40 minutes. We had discussed topics such as the language learning needs of the Japanese volunteers, aspects of their language training and the significance of ‘diversity in English’ for this pedagogical context.

#### **Extract 1.5 Nathan’s Interview extract**

- 1 N: so just as a very final [point
- 2 M: [yeah
- 3 N: I’m interested in sort of going back to something you
- 4 mentioned earlier (.) it’s really interesting when you
- 5 said that (.) you think they should be:: allow::ed or
- 6 not discouraged to speak in a Japanese way
- 7 M: yeah

- 8 N: what are your (.) can you give me any more insight into  
9 like (.) for example coming from Ghana
- 10 M: yeah
- 11 N: do you consider yourself um (.) as a like (.) speaking  
12 Ghanaian English (.) has that got any meaning to you  
13 (.) or do you consider yourself (.) how do you actually  
14 unpack that
- 15 M: yeah okay I:: (.) read something recently that [amused  
16 me
- 17 N: [uh-huh
- 18 M: but which I thought was [true
- 19 N: [uh-huh
- 20 M: which (.) somebody was trying to define Ghanaian  
21 English
- 22 N: right
- 23 M: and he ended up saying that Ghanaians would  
24 ve::hemently say there is no Ghanaian English (.) we  
25 speak English we don't speak Ghanaian English  
26 (*laughter*)
- 27 N: right
- 28 M: now that is what (.) that's what the that was a comment  
29 that somebody made (.) about Ghanaians
- 30 N: and what [what's your opinion on that
- 31 M: [and I think  
32 (.)  
33 when I was in school
- 34 N: yeah
- 35 M: it was true that we considered ourselves English  
36 speakers
- 37 N: right
- 38 M: but now it's become fashionable
- 39 N: right
- 40 M: to be unable to speak English
- 41 N: oh is it
- 42 M: yes
- 43 N: right (*laughter*)
- 44 M: (*laughter*) it's become fashionable in Ghana
- 45 N: right [how interesting
- 46 M: [and I haven't been there for quite a while
- 47 N: right
- 48 (.)



49 M: so (.) I don't know for myself  
50 N: yeah  
51 M: I was brought up to feel that I speak English  
52 N: right  
53 M: and so  
54 N: yeah  
55 M: for the people who I went to school with my  
56 contemporaries  
57 N: yeah  
58 M: who communicate with me in English  
59 N: mm  
60 M: we don't think that we are speaking Ghanaian English  
61 N: right  
62 M: of course we are aware that [our  
63 N: [yeah  
64 M: accents are different (.) but the vocabulary [is  
65 British  
66 N: [so do you  
67 think in that context  
68 M: yeah  
69 N: people equate (.) the word Ghanaian English do they  
70 equate that with meaning in somehow deficient or  
71 M: y::eah  
72 N: wouldn't it be possible to think of it as a different  
73 style but no less correct  
74 M: only if there's a large enough group  
75 N: right  
76 M: to make it a standardized dialect  
77 N: right  
78 M: of standard English  
79 N: right  
80 M: yeah

*Interviewer reflection on extract*

Reflecting on this extract now, I am pleased with my interaction with M, particularly the way I frame a complex, multi-layered question across lines 1–13 and the rich responses which M makes to this. My question could be roughly paraphrased as 'do you consider yourself to be a speaker of Ghanaian English, or just English?' This more direct version, however, would have provided fewer interactional resources for M to respond to (e.g. less thinking time, fewer features of my talk to

'hook a response onto') and may have been potentially face threatening, as I was aware that terms such as Ghanaian English are not always well received. Breaking down the extract, it roughly divides in half as follows:

Lines 1–6: By linking my new question to an earlier part of the discourse, I create cohesion and avoid asking the question 'out of the blue'. I was interested in returning to the idea of speakers using English in their own way and with legitimacy, and I emphasise this by taking more time over the words 'be allowed or not discouraged' (5–6). M seems to be following my attempts to link back to an earlier topic in the interview, indicated by the receipt token or backchannel 'yeah' (7).

Lines 7–13: This is where I actually frame my question about his take on Ghanaian English, and my move is characterised by pauses, false starts and the absence of an actual 'question' in a formal linguistic sense. This may be construed as questionable practice for an interviewer, and obviously wouldn't do in other interview contexts (e.g. a reluctant interviewee). In this case though, and perhaps for many interviews in qualitative research, I feel that the complex way I frame the question is suitable and fit for purpose. Before the fieldtrip to Japan, I had read that asking questions in less direct ways can imply a significant message to the interviewee; that the interviewer is aware that the question they are asking is not an easy one, and probably hasn't got a simple answer. This may cause interviewees to feel less pressure to provide a quick response, and encourage them to take time over their answer. M's response (14 onwards) is interesting in that he uses an anecdote (14–25), incorporates a mitigation (41), and provides further comments about his school life and the opinions of other Ghanaian people before providing his main answer (46 and 54).

Along with the initial 'question', I would say that I am fairly satisfied with other aspects of my interactional style in the extract, such as the use of regular backchannels for encouragement and allowing pauses (e.g. 28, 43) for time to think. I feel that the timeliness and wording of my prompt (26) and probe (59–66) are suitable and encourage M to give further insights into the topic. Engaging with the literature on interactive, discursive approaches to interviewing was helpful preparation for my fieldwork, particularly as it encouraged me to engage in an intentional period of reflexive development as an interviewer before 'going into the field'. As with teaching there is always space to improve on interviewing practice, but I am pleased that this approach gave me a platform to build on, in terms of establishing a baseline level of confidence and proficiency as an interviewer prior to the fieldwork.

### **My comment on Nathan's reflexive vignette**

The vignette is interesting because it reveals Nathan's sensitivity to the language he is using. This will have undoubtedly helped both in piloting and connecting his developing approach to his wider reading. Of course this is only a short account and its inclusion here is largely illustrative but it does show examples of the choices and decisions an interviewer makes in the language used. The account shows a self-awareness about interview practice and possible interactional resources. For example, the vignette features an awareness of different ways of framing questions in order to encourage fuller responses. There is attention to and care for the interviewee (linking to previous discourse, avoiding face-threatening possibilities, and supportive use of backchannelling). If you are interested in finding out more about Nathan Page's research, you can e-mail him at [n.page@aston.ac.uk](mailto:n.page@aston.ac.uk)

### **Summary**

This chapter has attempted to both introduce and differentiate the terms reflection, reflective practice and reflexivity. This is not always possible and there is a great deal of overlap. Reflective practice can be treated as umbrella term under which we might find reflection and reflexivity. Reflection is more wide-ranging in scope and can mean simply thinking about something. Reflexivity is more explicitly tied to the self and the researcher's influence on the research and its outcomes, as well as the research's influence on the researcher. Finlay and Gough see these concepts forming a continuum where 'at one end stands reflection, defined simply as 'thinking about' something after the event' and at the 'other end stands reflexivity' which is 'a more immediate and dynamic process which involves continuing self-awareness' (2003: ix).

Reflexivity is much more concerned with the mutual shaping of one thing and another and we often use the term 'reflexive relationship' to signify this bi-directionality. Table 1.2 summarises a short but workable distinction.

Reflexivity involves examining yourself as researcher and also your research relationships. You can reflect on your assumptions, beliefs, 'conceptual baggage' and preconceptions and how these affect the interaction and dynamics in the interview. This will develop a stronger sense of both the interviewer 'self' and the interviewee's 'self'. Reflexive awareness can be fostered through collaborative talk, journal-writing, reflexive bracketing, and the production of subjectivity statements.

*Table 1.2* Reflection, reflective practice, and reflexivity

Reflection	General in nature and wide-ranging. Thinking about something.
Reflective practice	Foregrounds notions of professional practice and ongoing investigation into how things are best done (whether it is teaching languages, looking after the aged, encouraging sustainable tourism, or conducting qualitative research).
Reflexivity	Focused on the self and ongoing intersubjectivities. It recognises mutual shaping, reciprocity and bi-directionality, and that interaction is context-dependent and context renewing.

The overall aim of the book is to raise awareness and sensitivity to a range of issues inherent in the use of qualitative interviews. In terms of more specific goals, the book aims to:

- reveal examples of reflection and reflexivity in action, particularly through reflexive vignettes;
- provide tools and focus for reflexivity in qualitative interviews;
- exemplify how reflexivity can be represented in writing;
- open up aspects of reflexivity, especially for novice researchers.

The position taken here is similar to that adopted by Finlay (2008: 15) ‘that reflective practice should be applied selectively, taught sensitively and generally used with care. Practitioners need to be critical and reflexive about the tool they are being given and not use it blindly’. Developing a reflective approach to qualitative interviews is likely to be helpful but you need to be critical and reflexive about this process too. Above all, the qualitative interviewer needs to develop their own sense of the appropriacy of his or her methodology. The development of our sense of plausibility (Prabhu 1990) as qualitative interviewers is a complex and challenging process but an interesting and important one:

To recognise and elaborate on the multifaceted shape of the interview should not mean that we pay less attention to its utility for learning about the world around us. Rather, it is just the opposite; we must think carefully about both technical and epistemological matters because they inventively construct our knowledge of the world we live in, as much as they serve to gather information about it. (Gubrium et al. 2012: 5)

## Suggested further reading

- Breuer, F., Mruck, K., and Roth, W. M. (2002). Subjectivity and reflexivity: An introduction. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (Vol. 3, No. 3). Also in 2002 and 2003 there were two full special issues of *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (FQS) focused on subjectivity and reflexivity in qualitative research.
- Edge, J. (2011). *The Reflexive Teacher Educator in TESOL: Roots and Wings*. London: Routledge. (Chapter 2 'in praise of reflective practice' is a good overview of the importance of reflective practice.)
- Farrell, T. S. C. (2015). *Promoting Reflective Practice in Language Education: A Framework for TESOL Professionals*. New York: Routledge.
- Roulston, K. (2010). *The Reflective Researcher: Learning to Interview in the Social Sciences*. London: Sage. (Chapter 6 is particularly useful in considering dimensions of reflexivity).

# 2

## Qualitative Interviews Overview

### Pre-reading Tasks for Chapter 2

1. Make a list of all the different kinds of interviews you can think of? How would you classify them into different sorts of interview?
2. It is sometimes claimed that interviews have a 'taken-for-granted nature'. What do you think this means and what particular dangers does this pose for the qualitative researcher?

### Introduction

This chapter takes a wide-angle view of the interview, recognising that interviews take place in many forms and are very much part of our everyday experience. Through providing an overview of different perspectives of interview and research interviews, we can contemplate the ways in which we experience interviews in everyday life. Even if we have not conducted a research interview, we are likely to have been interviewed and certainly to have watched/listened to a range of interviews on television/radio. Interviews are both mundane and memorable, both ubiquitous and unique, and it is worth considering their range in terms of genre. This chapter assembles a collection of texts and perspectives on interviews that I hope will stimulate thinking about the nature and purpose of research interviews.

Another important aim of the chapter is to provide a starting point for novice researchers in establishing and understanding the roles, expectations and interactional routines in interviews. Getting a sense of

both the ubiquity and range of interviews in society is helpful in raising this awareness. The first part of the chapter works towards an appreciation of the genre of interviews and tries to provide a fix on what counts as ‘an interview’. To do this, it starts with a task and comment from a qualitative researcher who has shifted career into therapy and counselling. After considering the nature of interviews in our more everyday lives (e.g. political interviews), Chapter 2 provides a short summary of the history of the research interview and then narrows the focus to introduce some key concepts, ideas, and concerns related to qualitative research interviews.

### Task

Make a list of the three most famous interviews of all time? Why have you chosen them? Why were they important at the time?

### Iconic interviews

I am wondering what you have chosen. Most of us will choose either a political interview or a celebrity interview (because that is what we get exposed to most on television). Certainly there are a range of iconic interviews and my experience of the task above is that it produces really interesting discussion but also very different responses depending on age and background.

In a module called *Spoken English*, I show my postgraduate students a range of television interviews; they always find the Jeremy Paxman and Michael Howard interview one of the most jaw-dropping. Paxman interviewed Michael Howard in 1987 after his resignation as Home Secretary. The interview, available on YouTube, centres on the report of a meeting Howard had had with Derek Lewis (Head of Her Majesty’s Prison Service) about the position of John Marriott (the governor of Parkhurst Prison). Paxman essentially asked Howard the same question (‘Did you threaten to overrule him [Lewis]?’) 12 times with some variation (including displays of exasperation and explicit comments that Howard is not answering the question). Howard’s evasive answers are typical of the media-trained modern politician as he manages to keep giving his answer (I did not over-rule him) and evading the key aspect (threatening to overrule). It is the sheer persistence of the grilling that students find stunning.

Politicians have, of course, become adept at evasion and not quite answering the question, or at least answering the part of the question

they want to answer. Perhaps the most well-known example of this is Clinton's tense shift (from the past tense 'had' to the present tense 'is not' and 'is accurate'):

Lehrer: You had no sexual relationship with this young woman?

Clinton: There is not a sexual relationship. That is accurate.

As well as politicians, we see and hear a lot of celebrity interviews on television and radio. These range from chatty, entertaining vehicles for actors to promote their latest film to more in-depth interviews with artists and authors and celebrity confessions (e.g. Lance Armstrong finally admitting his guilt to Oprah Winfrey). My personal favourite is Melvyn Bragg interviewing Dennis Potter. There's nothing particularly eye-catching about the interview questions but Bragg leaves the space for Potter to articulate how cancer has made life more immediate and 'present-tense':

Below my window in Ross, when I'm working in Ross, for example, there at this season, the blossom is out in full now, there in the west early. It's a plum tree, it looks like apple blossom but it's white, and looking at it, instead of saying 'Oh that's nice blossom' ... last week looking at it through the window when I'm writing, I see it is the whitest, frothiest, blossomest blossom that there ever could be, and I can see it. Things are both more trivial than they ever were, and more important than they ever were, and the difference between the trivial and the important doesn't seem to matter. But the nowness of everything is absolutely wondrous, and if people could see that, you know. There's no way of telling you; you have to experience it, but the glory of it, if you like, the comfort of it, the reassurance ... not that I'm interested in reassuring people – buggar that. The fact is, if you see the present tense, boy do you see it! And boy can you celebrate it.

You can find this transcript and others on a really excellent *Guardian* online resource, which ranks the great interviews of the 20th century: (<http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/series/greatinterviews>).

This is an admittedly UK-centric view of iconic interviews but the point of including it here is to make the point that such interviews are part of the fabric of our history and understanding of what constitutes an interview. The Academy of Achievement site which is more USA focused is <http://www.achievement.org/> (where you can find video



interviews and transcripts from Rosa Parks and Maya Angelou, amongst many others).

At the top of the online list above and at the top of others too is David Frost's interview of Richard Nixon. It is worth spending some time on both this interview and also Frost as an interviewer. Frost built a strong reputation as a political interviewer but he actually had a much more varied career. However, he is best known for this series of interviews in 1976 with Nixon in which he managed to get him to engage in detailing his involvement in 'Watergate'. He also elicited an apology ('I let down my friend, I let down the country'). This is probably the most famous interview of all and Frost's supreme achievement. Frost's ability in guiding the interview and managing to get the former US President to apologise for the Watergate affair (an attempted cover-up that had forced his resignation) is worth watching. This historic interview was dramatised by Peter Morgan in *Frost/Nixon* (a play and later a film that had long runs in both the West End and on Broadway). The interviews are of course famous for their high stakes (Frost had mortgaged his house to make the programme) but also for Frost's tenacity and mental resolve. According to Bob Zelnick (Producer):

The fact that it drew almost universal praise was a tribute to David's hard work and his very, very tough attitude once the bell rang and the fight started.

Political interviews are notoriously combative and the boxing metaphor invoked in this tribute is typical of the way they are viewed. Interestingly, and congruent with the metaphors of 'fight' and 'battle', one adjective ('disarming') crops up a lot in describing Frost's strength, when colleagues and fellow journalists talk about his interviewing skills:

David Frost's strength lay in his range. He could segue effortlessly from writing a comedy script to interviewing a Prime Minister and switch from radio to TV. Nowadays the media seems to be more about silos – presenters are political/news/entertainment specialists rather than generalists. He didn't ever seem to be aggressive in his questioning but was completely disarming – as was illustrated when he used the word 'bonkers' in an interview with Margaret Thatcher after the sinking of the *Belgrano*. He was also always evolving – even if he didn't actually talk about it. Ned Sherrin who worked with him came up with a wonderful line: 'David always learns from his mistakes without ever actually admitting that he's made any.' (BBC 2013)

We might note in passing this everyday sense of ongoing reflective practice in this extract (evolving/learning from mistakes). Other noteworthy elements of this endorsement are Frost's 'range' and his language. As an interviewer he knew when to probe and when to hold back and encourage more from the interviewee. Michael Sheen, the actor who played him in *Frost/Nixon*, was struck by his ability to build rapport when he reviewed videos of his interviews: 'He was able to put people at their ease and bring things out'. One of Frost's own key recommendations was to maintain a curious expression and use words like 'Really? Aha. Go on.' Clayman and Heritage (2002) is worth reading to get an interactional sociolinguistic view of the political interview and they devote a lot of space to Frost and his interview style.

My purpose in devoting room to considering the characteristics of iconic interviewers is to highlight aspects of their style, in particular their language choices. These kind of interviews are, of course, very different from qualitative research interviews and yet they help us to focus on some of the fundamental features of a good interviewer. Another iconic interviewer that I grew up with on television was Alan Whicker. He once said that he was the only person who was really interested in other people's holiday snaps and that maintaining such an attitude of curiosity meant that interviewees opened up and felt comfortable sharing the detail of their lives. One of his interview techniques was to not say anything at the end of an answer and then people would usually continue, often saying something even more interesting. Another technique that he was conscious of using was to simply repeat the last few words of what the other person had said (Brunt 2007). Both these techniques are important alternatives to simply going on to the next question. I will end this section with an obituary for an well-known interviewer from the USA who endorses the view that interviewing is essentially simple and mostly a case of establishing that you are listening:

The elfin, amiable Mr. Terkel was a gifted and seemingly tireless interviewer who elicited provocative insights and colorful, detailed personal histories from a broad mix of people. 'The thing I'm able to do, I guess, is break down walls,' he once told an interviewer. 'If they think you're listening, they'll talk. It's more of a conversation than an interview.'

Mr. Terkel succeeded as an interviewer in part because he believed most people had something to say worth hearing. 'The average American has an indigenous intelligence, a native wit,' he said. 'It's

only a question of piquing that intelligence.' In 'American Dreams: Lost and Found' (1980), he interviewed police officers and convicts, nurses and loggers, former slaves and former Klu Klux Klansmen – a typical crowd for Mr. Terkel.

Readers of his books could only guess at Mr. Terkel's interview style. Listeners to his daily radio show, which was first broadcast on WFMT in 1958, got the full Terkel flavor as the host, with breathy eagerness and a tough-guy Chicago accent, went after the straight dope from guests like Sir George Solti, Toni Morrison and Gloria Steinem.

'It isn't an inquisition; it's an exploration, usually an exploration into the past,' he once said, explaining his approach. 'So I think the gentlest question is the best one, and the gentlest is, "And what happened then?"'

From 'Studs Terkel, Listener to Americans, Dies at 96', William Grimes, *The New York Times*, 31 October 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/01/books/01terkel.html?hp>

## Ubiquitous and familiar

The interview has a ubiquitous presence and status on television and radio and in our lives. Watching and listening to interviews is commonplace and, for example, it is not unusual for school children to interview a relative or family friend for a project. Roulston (2012: 61) says that:

Projects such as the American Folklife Center's StoryCorps project, which has archived 16,000 interviews conducted by people of all ages exploring the experiences and lives of friends, colleagues, and family members from across the United States, support the idea that interviewing is a mundane skill – anyone might conduct interviews anytime, anywhere.

This familiarity has implications for the qualitative research interview. Borer and Fontana (2012) make the point that 'both elites and common folk have "interview repertoires" filled with sound bites that often pass for legitimate opinions and aquired knowledge'. They go on to say that 'because interview repertoires are stocked with bits of informal knowledge that people can rely on and recall when asked questions about themselves, interview answers become problematic as truth claims'.

At the same time as living in an ‘interview society’ (Atkinson and Silverman 1997: 304), Denzin and Lincoln (1998: 36) report that qualitative researchers have established the research interview as their ‘favorite methodological tool’. Briggs (1986) estimates that 90% of social science research includes interviews. Gudmundsdottir (1996: 293), talking about educational research, claims that ‘the interview is gradually being recognized as the most important method that researchers use to collect data’. Across a range of fields, as an hour of Google Scholar will quickly demonstrate, qualitative research almost always uses some form of interview. Such fields include health care, environment studies, geography, education, marketing, information systems, ethnography, business administration, and management.

Gubrium and Holstein (2012: 28) see this shift to the ‘familiar’ as having happened by the late 1950s:

When they encountered an interview situation, people weren’t immediately defensive about being asked for information about their lives, their associates, and even their heartfelt sentiments. They readily recognized and accepted two new roles associated with talking about oneself and one’s life to strangers, (1) the role of interviewer and (2) the role of respondent, the centerpieces of the now familiar interview encounter.

It may be difficult to realise just how familiar, ordinary, and perhaps mundane interviews have become. Occasionally there’s an interview on television that goes horribly wrong (e.g. the Meg Ryan/Michael Parkinson interview) and this brings into sharp focus the norms and expectations that have built up over time. Certainly Extract 2.1 gives us a glimpse of a world where these norms and expectations are simply not there. This extract is from an interview conducted by Evans-Pritchard (1940: 12–13 in Seale 2004). This historical extract demonstrates an anthropologist’s difficulties in establishing information through an interview but also undoubtedly shows us how the interview for most of us has become so much part of the fabric of our lives.

**Extract 2.1**

Evans-Pritchard: Who are you?  
 Cuol: A man.  
 Evans-Pritchard: What is your name?  
 Cuol: You want to know my name?  
 Evans-Pritchard: Yes.

- Cuol: You want to know my name?  
Evans-Pritchard: Yes, you have come to visit me in my tent and I would like to know who you are.  
Cuol: All right. I am Cuol. What is your name?  
Evans-Pritchard: My name is Pritchard.  
Cuol: What is your father's name?  
Evans-Pritchard: My father's name is also Pritchard.  
Cuol: No, that cannot be true. You cannot have the same name as your father.  
Evans-Pritchard: It is the name of my lineage. What is the name of your lineage?  
Cuol: Do you want to know the name of my lineage?  
Evans-Pritchard: Yes.  
Cuol: What will you do with it if I tell you? Will you take it to your country?  
Evans-Pritchard: I don't want to do anything with it. I just want to know it since I am living at your camp.  
Cuol: Oh well, we are Lou.

This extract brings into focus our current familiarity with the roles and expectations of the interview and brings home what is meant by those that say we live in an 'interview society'. Our lived experience is certainly one where interviews have become increasingly common. As Wooffitt and Widdicombe (2006) make clear, interaction in research interviews depends on the usually tacit understanding that each participant has of the expectation that the interview is a site for the asking and answering of questions. Seale (2004: 105) summarises the impact of such an interview society and lists three conditions that have led to the interview being central to the ways in which we make sense of our lives:

1. Individual selves (rather than religious or collectivist ideologies) are seen as the appropriate sources of subjectivity. Psychology is thus used to 'explain' experience.
2. A 'technology of the confessional' has arisen, whereby techniques for gathering personal narratives have become very widespread (e.g. the 'confession' to a policeman, a priest, a psychotherapist, a journalist, a research interviewer).
3. Everyone has become familiar with the aims and methods of the interview, so that they know the behaviour appropriate to both interviewer and interviewee.

### **Task**

1. Think about the following speech events.
  2. Would you call them interviews? If not what term would you use?
  3. What would you predict about the talk in each case?
- A priest sits behind a screen and a man sits in cubicle on the other side of the screen. The priest occasionally asks questions but the man does most of the talking.
  - A chat show host sits on a sofa opposite a famous film actress. It is being filmed for television. The actress mostly talks about her latest film.
  - A counsellor sits in small room at 45 degrees to young man who talks about his depression and inability to sleep.
  - A doctor sits in front a computer looking at patient notes. A woman sits to the side and answers questions about her stomach pains.
  - A BBC Political TV programme presenter sits opposite the Prime Minister and quizzes him about his manifesto for the next election.
  - A policewoman sits with a colleague to her left on the other side of a table from a man who is detailing his alibi for the previous evening. There is a solicitor to his side.

### **Interview types**

In the section above it has been claimed that we live in an interview society. This section considers the range of speech events that might be called interviews and draws out some important distinctions amongst them.

Some of the cases in the list in the task above might be called interviews by those involved. Some might not. It is conceivable that the doctor example might be called a medical interview but it is much more likely that it would be called a consultation. The interview with the Prime Minister would probably be called a 'political interview', the policewoman is probably engaged in an interrogation. What did you think for the counsellor?

#### **A starting point**

We can draw on the experience of a researcher (Julian Edge) who has worked for many years with qualitative interviews in the area of applied

linguistics and in teacher education. However, he has now changed profession and so his reflective practice is now focused on his experience in counselling and therapy. We will draw on his experience in later chapters but in this initial extract we consider whether there is any overlap between forms of research interview and counselling.

### Task

- How would you differentiate between a counselling session (between Client and Counsellor) and a qualitative research interview (between Interviewer and Interviewee)?
- What are the main differences in purpose and focus?

### Interviewing, counselling and cooperative development (Julian Edge)

To begin simply, the counselling session is not an interview. In order to make sure that this bald statement is not only idiosyncratically my own, I contacted six fully qualified and well-experienced counsellors who have all conducted research insights ranging from the level of MA dissertation, to PhD thesis, and who have extensive research supervision. I asked them:

When you meet with a client in your role as counsellor, might you use these words to refer to that time together?

Meeting/Session/Interview/Hour/Appointment.

These were the instances of interview in some of their responses:

I wouldn't ever use the word interview about therapy.

I would use the word sessions, would not use interview or hours.

I wouldn't say appointments or interviews.

Interview NO

More analytically, the distinction lies in the fundamental purpose of the meeting. At its simplest, again, the interview sets out to benefit the interviewer. The counselling session sets out to benefit the client. Interviewers seek to elicit information that will further their research. Counsellors seek to elicit information that will support the self-actualisation of the client.

This latter statement reveals a further distinction. While they both operate in the context of now, the interview seeks to establish how things have been. The counselling session seeks to open up how things might be. While the goal of the interview is expository, the goal of the counselling session is developmental.

### **Comment on Julian's text**

We will return to Julian Edge later in the book for further attempts to see the differences (but also possible common concerns) between research interviews and therapy/counselling. For now, the starting point is that a counselling session is not an interview. There are clear differences in purpose, differences in who the speech event is actually for, and differences in the main focus (e.g. whether it is on the past or the future). This is not to say that analysis of transcripts of each kind of speech event might not reveal some common features. For example, both a therapist and an interviewer might want to build up rapport or to check and reflect back an understanding ('so what you seem to be saying is that ...'). However, the differences are far more important than any similarities and there is a fuller reflexive vignette from Julian at the end of this chapter (see page 53) for you to further consider these kinds of difference.

The research interview does not exist in some watertight way separate from all the other interviews. So it is worth reflecting on different kinds of interview or 'interview-like' speech events, as this can help develop a greater sensitivity of the kind of dynamics we want to achieve in a research interview. For example, it does not take much for a research interview to take on the characteristics of an interrogation (calling to mind the aggressive and often confrontational nature of an interrogation or a political interview). There may be elements of the confessional, with the interviewee searching for absolution. Similarly, the interview might open up areas that are troubling or upsetting for the interviewee. In those cases, the research interview may start to resemble a mild form of psychotherapy.

Living in an interview society is therefore neither an advantage or disadvantage. While familiarity with the interview format might help put interviewees at ease and generally provide a schema for the question and answer flow of interviews, it can just as easily fall into familiar hierarchical discourses (more typical of, for example, a job interview). Particularly if an evaluative tone slips into the interview, it may start to feel like such a speech event.

The interviewee might also revel in the limelight of concentration attention. The kind of slippage or crossover being opened up here is



recognised in postmodern accounts of interview practices. Borer and Fontana (2012: 45) begin their overview by saying that ‘the everyday world and the world of media have merged (Baudrillard and Foss 1983)’, as the boundaries between the two have collapsed, experiences is mediated by the ‘hyperreality’ of the likes of Disneyland, Real TV, and the Jerry Springer Show, where the imaginary becomes real and the real, imaginary (see Denzin 2003). We will come back to talk about this kind of generic slippage in later chapters (especially Chapter 6) with attention to specific linguistic manifestations. At this point, we will focus on the history and origins of the research interview.

## History of research interviews

Charles Booth is widely credited with being the first to develop a social survey method with interviewing at its heart (see Bales 1991). In 1886, Booth began a detailed survey of the economic and social conditions in London. Fieldnotes and quotes from informants are included in *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1902–1903). This innovative work in the 19th century documented working-class life in London, influenced government policy in tackling poverty, and led to the founding of Old Age pensions in 1908. As well as interviewing those afflicted by poverty, he also interviewed a broad cross-section of society, especially focusing on the health and well-being of Londoners.

### Task

Look at Booth’s written report of an interview with Charles Umney. What does the report tell you about the actual interview that has taken place?

Mr Charles Umney of Wright, Layman, Umney 50 Southwark Street, S.E. Manufacturing Druggists. Employs 68 hands, Wages PW: 27/- to 32/- employment perfectly regular – the busiest months being Jan. Feb. and March, when there is most illness about. Everything turned out by a manufacturing druggist has to be supervised with the greatest care, as the retail chemist is never generally blamed for mistakes in prescriptions. The original sin may lie at the door of the manufacturer – for this reason over every department is placed an expert, a man who has passed examinations in chemistry, under the Pharmaceutical Society, &

who is absolutely responsible for the smallest product of his shop. During the 18 years of Mr Umney's experience two mistakes only had occurred. It is to the interest of this manufacturer to take all pains possible to avoid such accidents, as he may at any time be called upon to pay heavy damages should an accident occur. The raw drugs are exposed for sale once a week at some place near the docks. London used formerly to be the drug market of the world, but of late years other cities have attracted a part of this business, especially Antwerp, Amsterdam & New York. It is practically necessary to examine every bale before buying, & not be content with samples, as the greatest deceptions are sometimes practised. The chemicals are obtained from various parts of the country from chemical manufacturers – and are made up into drugs on the premises. Mr Umney was very *bouttoné* – I was not taken over his factory.

This extract copied from the original record in the archives of the British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics Library but other extracts are available in scanned form through their online site:

The Charles Booth Archive (<http://www.connectedhistories.org/>)

Although this isn't a verbatim transcript, you can get a sense from the notes of the status and importance that is being given to the company's responsibility (in comparison with retail chemists) by the interviewee. There is also strong sense of the care and attention to detail (absolutely responsible, examining every bale). Interestingly, you also get an insight into Mr Umney's reticence from the notes. Mr Umney is '*bouttoné*' (tight lipped) and Booth '*was not taken over his factory*'.

Platt (2012) provides an insightful overview of the history of the interview and I am not going to attempt something similar here. However, there are two aspects of the history of the interview that are especially noteworthy. Firstly, in reference to Adorno et al.'s *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) she points out how the model initially adopted was that of the psychotherapeutic encounter where the instructions distinguished '*underlying*' from '*manifest*' questions (2012: 16):

'methods were needed to differentiate the more genuine, basic feelings, attitudes, and strivings from those of a more compensatory

character behind which are hidden tendencies, frequently unknown to the subject himself, which are contrary to those manifested or verbalized on a surface level. (1950: 293)

Platt (2012: 17) then provides an example of a study where it is evident that interviewee responses are not necessarily accepted at face-value:

Everything conspired to lead to an emphasis not on the interview itself but on its interpretation..... [S]uch a method . . . requires repeated reading of the interview record ... in search of those small verbal nuances and occasional Freudian slips that might be clues to character. (Riesman and Glazer 1952, pp. 14–15).

Platt points out that the extent of ‘interpretation’ goes well beyond the literal data. Indeed the interpretive book (Riesman, Glazer, and Denney, *The Lonely Crowd*, 1950) contains almost no direct interview data at all.

### Debates about interview claims

Some famous sociological debates revolve around attacks on the original study. Perhaps the most well-known is Freeman’s (1983) attack on Mead’s (1928) research in Samoa (although Mead herself produced a reflexive and somewhat self-critical account herself before Freeman’s critique). Mead, based on observation and in-depth interviews, had claimed that Samoans had a placid transition to adulthood, and that teenagers had a relatively relaxed and free sexuality (compared with the USA). Freeman’s study refuted both Mead’s findings and methodology. Freeman’s findings suggested that Samoans were very different from the picture Mead represents. Instead of being sexually liberated, Samoans put a high value on virginity. They also had less ‘rosy’ characteristics than Mead suggested (Freeman claimed that they were vindictive and punitive). The claimed inaccuracies were factors that arose out of number of flaws in the research: Mead’s field work was limited in terms of actual engagement in the field; her knowledge of Samoa, both in terms of culture and language, was also limited; she lived with expatriates rather than Samoans and over-relied on reporting from teenage girls (who later said that they had been teasing Mead).

There is also Boelen’s (1992) critical take on Whyte’s (1955) ‘Cornerville’ research. Whyte’s study of an Italian American neighbourhood (the North End in Boston) is one of the most famous in all ethnographic literature. Social workers introduced him to a man called Doc who apparently was willing to show him gambling joints, street corners

and pretend that Whyte was his friend (so that no one would bother him). Boelen (1992) revisited Boston and reinterviewed nearly all of the original Whyte interviewees. The key informant in Whyte's study was a man called 'Doc' who had helped Whyte and apparently even stood up for him on occasions. However, years later Boelen interviewed his sons and they reported that their father 'considered the book untrue from the very beginning to the end, a total fantasy' (Boelen 1992: 29).

## Methods and interviews

The claims that are made on the basis of interviews are tied up with the inherent ontological and epistemological perspectives of various research methods. Ritchie et al. (2013) say that interviews are influenced by the following philosophical considerations:

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| Ontology     | To what extent does the researcher believe that an objective reality exists beyond that constructed by individuals involved? Concerns about interview methods are directed by premises about whether what is being collected equates with reality or is in some sense a construction of reality   |
| Epistemology | To what extent does the researcher believe that reality can be captured through a data-gathering exercise such as interviewing? For example, is interview data representative of respondents' beliefs and values or is it a construct of what the respondent believes the researcher should hear? |

There is overlap in the ways these terms get used and they tend to get used interchangeably. Mauthner and Daucet (2003: 415), for example, do not conflate them but neither do they distinguish between them:

our understanding of how our data analysis methods were infused with epistemological and ontological assumptions that we were not fully aware of at the time has deepened as a result of progress in our thinking about epistemology and ontology.

There a wide range of assumptions and positions adopted (consciously or unconsciously) in various forms of interview. As nearly all research qualitative 'methods' in guides to qualitative research include interviews, there is a lot of ground to cover. Richards and Morse (2013)

for example cover ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, discourse analysis, case study. All of them use interviews. However, the nature and form of the interviews and types of analysis vary:

Ethnographers use description to seek patterns and categories; grounded theorists use narratives and aim to create theory from them; phenomenologists initiate conversations and develop themes and seek meaning; discourse analysts dissect interviews in detail, and case study researchers compare them with those from other cases. (Richards and Morse 2013: 32)

Sometimes the interview is subsumed within some other general category (e.g. case study or life-story). Indeed, as Potter and Hepburn point out, 'in some cases the term interview is not even mentioned as this method of eliciting material from participants has become so wired into the commonplaces of social science' (2012: 555).

Table 2.1 is meant to be very introductory in nature and there are undoubtedly methods that could be added and other possible summaries. However, my main aim here is to map the ground and suggest reading which might contribute to a fuller understanding. The table draws on the summaries in Roulston (2010: 52–72 and 2012: 63–65):

## **The nature and purpose of the research interview**

Perhaps because of the wide range of different methods, and the variety of inherent ontological and epistemological positions, achieving any precision about the nature of a qualitative research interview is problematic. Perhaps the first point to make is that the range makes it almost impossible to predict an overall generic pattern or structure. Warren (2012: 14) tells us that the contemporary western interview can be analysed as five stages:

1. Introductions and setting up
2. The beginning of the interview
3. The middle part of the interview
4. The end of the interview
5. Any interactions that occur after the interview's formalities (usually the turning off of the tape-recorder).

This may be a reasonable starting point, and it is certainly helpful to draw attention to the set-up and orientation to the interview, as well

Table 2.1 Interview categories

Ethnography	Interviews are usually part of an immersive observation process and usually take the form of directed one-on-one interviews. Oriented towards studying shared meanings and practices (i.e., work practice, institutional culture). Interview questions are generally related to social and cultural processes and aim to elicit shared meanings within a given group of people. Emphasising the emic perspective, interviews are usually embedded in long-term fieldwork. (See also linguistic ethnography)	Atkinson et al (2001); Heyl (2001); Copland and Creese (2015)
Inductive thematic analysis	One of the most common analytic approaches used in qualitative inquiry. In-depth interviews and focus groups are the most common data collection techniques associated with ITA. Draws on inductive analytic methods (similar to grounded theory below). Mainly involves identifying and coding emergent themes within data (including interview data).	Braun and Clarke (2006)
Grounded theory	Also uses inductive data collection and analytic methods. In-depth interviews and focus groups are the most common data collection procedures associated with GT. GT builds theory from text through a process of systematic and exhaustive comparison. This analytic process is time consuming and intensive.	Charmaz (2012)
Case study	Analysis focuses on anything from one to several cases that are typical or representative of the chosen research topic. Cases are recruited on a specific basis and interviews concentrate on eliciting observations and perspectives on the unique feature of interest. The interviews aim to learn about the person or persons that are part of the case. The types of interviews conducted by researchers vary in the degree of formality (informal interview to structured interviews).	Merriam (1998); Stake (1995).
Feminist epistemologies	This analytic perspective has not only problematised the gendered dimensions of established interviewing practice but also explored alternatives. (see Smith 1987).	DeVault (1990); DeVault and Gross (2007)
Discourse analysis	This tends to focus on the study of 'naturally occurring' discourse, where texts, and form and structures within discourse are the objects of analysis. The research focus varies from written texts to broadcast talk and public events. These methods often focus on the language used in the texts. Interviews may be used to provide further perspectives on texts.	Schiffrin et al (2008)

Narrative analysis	In this form of analysis, narratives are used as sources of data. Narratives may be elicited through qualitative interviews but may also come from other sources (e.g. diaries, letters, and literature). Narrative approaches tend to generate narratives through in-depth interviews, where questions and tasks are aimed at eliciting stories. They also elicit participants' views on the significance of these stories.	De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2015)
Action research	Action research is interventionist in nature and so interviews are often conducted as part of an introductory and exploratory cycle to determine needs from stakeholders. However, interviews are also used to evaluate the success and impact of the actual intervention.	Stringer (2013)
Postmodernism	The interview is 'a way of writing the world'. It is a 'simulacrum, a perfectly miniature and coherent world in its own right'. As such it is not 'a mirror of the so-called external world' nor 'a window into the inner life of the person' (see Denzin 2001: 25).	Denzin (2001)
Mixed methods	Collection of qualitative data in a mixed methods study can be informed from a wide range of theoretical perspectives and analytic approaches. The important thing is to specify how interviews are used and how qualitative and quantitative datasets will be integrated.	Creswell (2013)
CA/ Ethno-methodology	Generally speaking, observation and recording of talk in natural settings takes precedence over interviews. However, interviews may be used to provide further perspectives on spoken data. CA has provided important insights into the co-construction of interview data.	Baker (1997); Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995)
Discursive psychology	Has drawn on CA in order to problematise interviews in comparison with naturally occurring data.	Antaki et al. (2003); Potter and Hepburn (2005)

as the talk that happens after the actual interview. However, talking about the stages of beginnings, middles and ends does not take us much further. If we cannot be precise about the general structure, what about the kind of speech acts that are common? Again this will vary depending on whether the interview is designed as a tightly controlled question and answer session, a 'conversation with a purpose' (Burgess 1984: 102) or as means of eliciting narratives. Most qualitative interviews can be regarded as a 'professional conversation' (Kvale 1996: 5) but, again, they will vary widely in adopted roles, structure, and mix of speech acts. This is taken up further in Chapter 4.

In the following sections we open out some key purposes, concerns, metaphors, challenges, and considerations in order to get a better fix on the nature of qualitative research interviews. This chapter is introductory in nature and later chapters will return to some of these issues in more detail. The next section begins with examining the purpose of a qualitative research interview.

### **Why do we interview? What do we want to find out?**

How we regard the interview is important. Is the informant providing evidence, data or information? What is the status of this data? Kvale (1996) defines qualitative research interviews as attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view. This process unfolds the meaning of peoples' experiences and uncovers their lived world. Weiss (1994: 1) talks about the importance of interviewing for being able to access interviewee's 'interior experiences'. Through this process 'we can learn what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions'. We can also 'learn how events affect their thoughts and feelings' and access 'the meanings to them of their relationships, their families, their work, and their selves'. This focus on revelation of self is essentially a romantic view of the interview purpose. Gubrium and Holstein (2012: 31) say that:

Ultimately, there is a fundamentally romantic impulse undergirding the interview enterprise. If we desire to really know the individual subject, then we must provide a means of hearing his or her authentic voice.

Particularly open-ended or in-depth interviewing are designed to give more space where interviewers are encouraged to explore deeper aspects of 'self'. The central purpose of the interview is to create a space for the interviewee to articulate aspects of self and it is worth remembering that this is an inherent reflexive enterprise:



The central feature of the self in modern society is its reflexivity, a constant questioning and reconstruction of the self in a lifetime project. We are constantly constructing and revising our personal stories. (Craib 1998: 2 in Richards 2006: 1)

As Giddens says 'the self today is for everyone a reflexive project' (Giddens 1992: 30) where the individual makes choices about 'how to live' and what to say about that life. Any kind of social interaction is a site for the construction, reconstruction, and perhaps challenge of identities and interviews are no different. One of the risks is that it is intrinsically 'unsettling' and can produce 'an insecurity regarding the basic assumptions, discourse and practices used in describing reality' (Pollner 1991: 370).

### **Metaphors for interviews**

There have been a number of attempts, particularly in postmodern and critical accounts of the qualitative interview, to use metaphors to provide an insight into fundamental issues with the epistemology of the interview. Metaphors are thought to be a useful way of understanding the research process (Alvesson 2011). Kvale (1996: 5) contrasts a 'mining' metaphor with that of 'travelling', where the traveler evokes a postmodern constructivist position (in contrast to the positivist miner 'prospecting' for the truth). In another metaphor, Holstein and Gubrium (2004: 151) warn that the interviewee is not a 'vessel waiting to be tapped'. In a later article they produce this extended representation of the production of knowledge in a 'vessel-of-answers approach':

the image of the subject behind the respondent is passive, even while the subject's respondent may be actively reluctant or otherwise difficult to deal with (see Adler & Adler 2002). The subjects themselves are not engaged in the production of knowledge. If the interviewing process goes 'by the book' and is non-directive and unbiased, respondents will validly and reliably speak the unadulterated facts of experience. Contamination creeps in from the interview setting, its participants, and their interaction; the imagined subject, in contrast, is pristinely communicative, and under ideal conditions, his or her respondent serves up authentic reports when beckoned. (Gubrium and Holstein 2012: 32–33)

One of the objections to using interviews is that they are not naturally occurring data and cannot be 'authentic' or 'real'. There are a number

of strong arguments for trying to access naturally occurring data where possible, instead of relying on interviews. Potter (1996) was one of the first to express concerns that interviews, focus groups, and survey questionnaires are all by nature 'got up' by the researcher'. He proposes 'The Dead Social Scientist Test' and it goes like this:

The test is whether the interaction would have taken place in the form that it did had the researcher not been born or if the researcher had got run over on the way to the university that morning (1996: 135).

This 'test', although somewhat tongue in cheek, is widely quoted. Although many would disagree with a black and white contrast between 'natural' and 'unnatural data' (see Speer 2002, and De Fina and Perrino 2011), the metaphor does prompt qualitative researchers to seek out naturally occurring data if possible but at least to be aware of the role of the interviewer in the co-construction of interview data.

### **Importance of co-construction**

One of the main outcomes of the literature that has problematised the qualitative interview (of particular note are Cicourel 1964; Silverman 1973; Briggs 1986; Mishler 1986a) is that it is now well established that interview talk is inevitably a co-construction between the interviewer and interviewee. Interview interaction happens because the interviewer doesn't get 'run over' on her way to the interview. Any reality is jointly constructed. Brinkmann (2013: viii) provides a useful comparison between competing perspectives on how interviews have been used for knowledge-producing purposes. He pays particular attention to what he calls the 'the positions of experience-focused interviewing (phenomenological positions) and language-focused interviewing (discourse-oriented positions)' where phenomenological accounts treat interview talk as 'reports' (concentrating on the experiences of interviewees) while language-focused interviews treat them as 'accounts' (paying more attention to the context of interviewing).

Rapley makes a distinction between interview data as 'resource' and data as 'topic' (2001: 304) and this brings into focus the two contrary positions:

- The interview-data-as-resource approach regards data collected '(more or less) reflecting the interviewees' reality outside the interview'.
- The interview-data-as-topic approach views data collected as '(more or less) reflecting a reality jointly constructed by the interviewee and interviewer'.

Applied Linguistics has contributed to a greater appreciation of the co-constructed nature of qualitative interviews and greater appreciation of critical perspectives on their use (e.g. Block 2000; Pavlenko 2007; Roulston 2010; Talmy and Richards 2011). Discursive psychologists have for some time also been interested in the interactional and co-constructed nature of interviews. Initially this work concerned the discursive construction of ‘self’ and identity in interview settings, focusing on the linguistic features of positioning, footing and identity work (e.g. Antaki et al. 2003). However it also provided a strong argument that interviews should be studied as an ‘interactional object’ (Potter and Hepburn 2005: 281). Potter and Hepburn (2005) also draw attention to avoidable ‘contingent’ problems with interviewing (the deletion of the interviewer, problems with the representation of interaction, the unavailability of the interview set-up, the failure to consider interviews as interaction). We will return to these problems in detail in Chapter 6.

### Narrative and postmodern perspectives

Gubrium and Holstein (2012: 32) summarise the ‘narrative turn’ within the social sciences in particular reference to qualitative interviews. This ‘turn’ is essentially a postmodernist driven ‘turn’ resulting from the recognition that experience and everyday reality is actively and narratively formulated within the interview. Interviewing is a social encounter and occasions the construction of accounts (as opposed being a ‘neutral conduit’ or ‘source of distortion’). It is not simply an elicitation of the interviewee’s pre-existing thoughts and experiences. For postmodern researchers this means explicitly framing research as narrative both in terms of collection, analysis, and representation, or treating accounts as performances:

I want to re-read the interview, not as method of gathering information but as vehicle for producing performance texts and performance ethnographies about self and society (Denzin 2009: 216).

Even if you do not adopt a postmodern perspective on the research interview, it is valuable to reflect on the challenge to our taken-for-granted ways of collecting and representing interview data. In particular, I would recommend Denzin’s (2001) extended discussion of the film *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam*. Trinh T. Minh-ha uses a variety of forms (dance, printed texts, folk poetry, and interviews) featuring the voice and experiences of Vietnamese women in Vietnam and the

United States. Trinh's film explores the difficulty of translation, and themes of dislocation and exile. It deliberately upsets our assumptions about interviewing by juxtaposing the apparently real English-language interviews of Vietnamese women with Vietnamese language interviews with English subtitles. The film shifts our perceptions during an apparent documentary and brings into question the ways in which data is represented by and through interviews.

I recently saw an exhibition in the Mead Gallery that helped me to reflect more on Trinh's film. In the exhibition called 'Unreliable Evidence' there was video installation by Omer Fast ('The Casting' 2007). It featured two narratives from a soldier returned recently from Iraq. One narrative featured a carbomb and shooting in Iraq. The other featured an incident within a relationship with a woman in Germany. Each narrative had two film screens (four in total). Two screens showed a documentary style interview in a studio with the soldier (one for each narrative). The other two provided a more cinematic construction of each event. The overall effect revealed the partial nature of the interview account, and it was disconcerting trying to decide which screen (and which image/account/construction) to focus on.

## Summary

Gubrium and Holstein state that the 'interview can no longer be viewed as a unilaterally guided means of excavating information. It is being re-evaluated in terms of its structure, interactional dynamics, situated responsiveness, and discursive dimensions' (2012: 27). This book aims to contribute to exactly this kind of re-evaluation and argues that reflective practice is well suited to enabling such an evaluative process.

The working position being adopted in this book is that research interviews are an integral part of our methodological options. However, across a wide range of fields there is recognition that they are taken-for-granted and that more attention needs to focus on the interview process and dynamics. This view is from the field of Information Systems (IS):

It is an excellent means of gathering data, and has been used extensively in IS research. Until now, however, the qualitative interview has been a largely unexamined craft. In our review of current practices in IS research, we found a general lack of reporting about the interview process and considerable variety in those that did report. (Myers and Newman 2007: 24)

## Suggested further reading

- Clayman, S., and Heritage, J. (2002). *The News Interview: Journalists and Public Figures on the Air*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Platt, J. (2012). The history of the interview. In Gubrium, J. F., Holstein, J. A., Marvasti, A. B., and McKinney, K. D. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*. (2nd ed., pp. 9–27). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Roulston, K. (2010). *The Reflective Researcher: Learning to Interview in the Social Sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (Chapters 4–6 provide an overview of different methods and perspective on the qualitative interview).

## Julian Edge's vignette

My client, Dee, has two sons, Mike (21) and Joey (5). She is concerned about the deterioration of her relationship with Mike. She acknowledges that some aspects of Mike's character that *'infuriate'* her are just the same as his father's, but that is not the issue. It seems to her that Mike has increasingly taken to *'winding up'* his little brother to an extent that borders on bullying. She worries about the extent to which she is to blame for Mike's behaviour, because of the parenting he received when young. As we join the session (about ten minutes in), I am reflecting my understanding back to Dee:

### Extract 2.2

Line	Speaker	
001	D	There's a guilt there, as well . . .
002	J	So, in the moment, there's an annoyance with him, Yeah and a frustration with him and an anger with him . . .
003		
004	D	Yeah . . .
005	J	And then this guilt comes to you
006	D	Mmm mmm
007	J	because you take part of the responsibility for him being like that
008		
009	D	Yeah, yeah ... Yeah ... and if I really, deeply
010		look into it, I, you know, my, the easy
011		response for me would be to say, "Oh well,
012		that's his dad's bit!" (laughs) You know, and
013		obviously that would be easy, to do that but, you know, there is part of that, but obviously, I'm part of it ...

014	J	Mmm
015 016 017	D	And I have to admit, I suppose, sometimes it's difficult ... erm... really ... I don't know what I mean behind that - 'it's difficult' -
018	J	Mmmm
019 020 021 022 023 024	D	Yes, so, there is a whole load of a mix of stuff and it's gone on and on for years, in lots of guises, . . . And my partner gets infuriated by him and actually, he tells me - he doesn't tend to do it so much now, but over the years, he has said to me - I am just far too tolerant, far too, I, you know, I should - far too nice to him, almost, if that makes sense ... erm ...
025	J	So, Mike's behaviour also annoys your partner?
026	D	Oh yeah, yeah
027 028	J	And earlier you said that a part of this annoying behaviour you also, you also notice <i>in</i> your partner . . . Is that right?
029	D	(Two seconds) My partner is not Mike's dad.
030	J	Oh, sorry!
031	D	Sorry, yeah, I left that confusion
032	J	I'm sorry. I misunderstood.
033 034 035	D	No, no, no, that's OK. You weren't to know. I should have explained. That makes it easier. I separated from Mike's dad when he was about.. er .. ten, probably
036	J	Right.
037	D	Nine? Ten? About that kind of age.
038	J	OK.
039	D	So, yeah, so ... he's not the same person. Luckily! (laughs)
040	J	Yes! (laughs)
041 042	D	God! That would be an even more trying household (both laugh.) if I had to deal with him as well!
043 044 045	J	So, when your current partner sees the way you are with Mike, he thinks you are too soft with him . . . too understanding ...

046	D	Too understanding, yes . . . . he has always
047		over the years always said to me that I will
048		find, I always try to understand everything he
049		does and, when he is just being a pain in the
050		arse, I will try to explain it and understand
		it, if that makes sense. . .

From Extract 2.2, line 029 on, I had been struggling with a physical/emotional response that I still find very difficult to categorise. There was a relatively ‘normal’ embarrassment at having blundered mistakenly into someone’s personal relationships, and/but this feeling was negatively supercharged by an angry disappointment with myself in professional terms for having failed so crassly to understand the client’s situation before challenging her with what might be seen as an inconsistency in her account. I had been so keen to offer her this chance of a new insight into her situation that I had been insensitive to the lack of necessary identity between the father of my client’s 21 year-old son and the partner to which she referred. I felt that I had failed to be who I wanted to be and that I had put the counsellor/client relationship at risk. I could feel the discomfort sweating into my shirt.

While my client did not seem too put out, and our laughter together was genuine, I notice in retrospect how quickly I tried to ‘get back on track’ (line 043) and how potentially insensitive my use of the expression ‘*your current partner*’ might seem in the context of a long-term relationship.

Furthermore, my mistake here had a further effect a couple of minutes later when, instead of inviting my client to say more about the emotions she was exploring, I felt obliged to carry out a factual check on the situation (Extract 2.3, line 009):

### Extract 2.3

Line	Speaker	
001	D	There is something about Mike’s interaction with
002		Joey that I just don’t like and I don’t want to
003		happen. I feel incredibly protective over Joey
004		and I think all those, that history of that
005		relationship I’ve had with Mike is probably a
006		part of what I’m feeling, but I also think, ‘ <i>Just</i>
		<i>don’t behave like that with a little five year-</i>
		<i>old boy!</i> ’

007	J	Right.
008	D	Does that make sense?
009 010	J	Yes! Yes, and ... and ... and ...Joey ... is your child with your current partner ... ?
011	D	Yes (smiles) Yes.
012	J	So ...
013 014	D	Yes, so there are dynamics there in that relationship as well and I completely understand that and . . .

On this occasion, I felt clumsy, but also believed that I had to clarify the situation rather than risk blundering into another misconception. I established clarity, but felt another clunk in my attempts to be *with* my client.

### On reflexivity

With regard to prospective reflexivity, what difference did it make to the counselling that I was the counsellor? A part of my input into the misunderstanding was doubtless some kind of underlying presupposition regarding the referents of '*my son*', '*his dad*', '*my partner*', as my client used the terms. My client saw my misunderstanding as understandable. Nevertheless, I was lucky that she was not put out, nor put off from further exploration.

With regard to retrospective reflexivity, what difference did this counselling experience make to me as a counsellor? I learned that I need to monitor the use of relational terms more closely and to be sure as possible that I am not importing presuppositions of my own. I learned how much more I have to learn regarding careful listening, because I discovered when reviewing the recording that my client had in fact said how much Mike sometimes reminded her of his dad – a clue to a memory past that I might have picked up. Most importantly, perhaps, I learned to be a little more accepting of my own fallibility. What got us through the discomfort of those moments, in addition to the reasonableness and generosity of my client, was the fact that I was managing to communicate to her what Rogers calls the '*core conditions*' of person-centred therapy: unconditional positive regard, empathy, and my own congruence with regard to being just who I seemed to be.



I will always make mistakes. If I can sincerely acknowledge that fact in principle and take those mistakes more lightly in practice, I may hope to be more useful to my clients and better able to continue to learn from my experience through reflexive reflection.

### Postscript

After the one-hour session of which we have looked at a few minutes here, my client decided to 'book time' with Mike for a serious talk in a mood that would not be one arising from conflict. She later reported that not only had the relationship between the two brothers improved, but that the '*whole atmosphere in the house*' had been transformed, something that her partner had also commented on.

Ah, that's what one works for.

# 3

## Interview Context

### Introduction

Context is notoriously elastic and a difficult concept to pin down. However, a reflexive interviewer will need to engage with context before, during and after the interview, as Davies advises:

the data produced by an interview should include not just a record of what is said ... but the full notes as to the contexts and how these various contexts are likely to affect the interactions that formally constitute the interview (2008: 122)

In simple terms the interview context includes why, where, who, how, and what:

- 'why' includes the researcher's purposes in setting up the interview in the first place, most obviously in the 'topic' or 'focus' on the interview;
- 'where' includes the physical, the social, and the institutional context;
- 'who' includes both the interviewee(s) and the interviewer(s);
- 'how' includes the genre of interview, whether the interview is being recorded (recording equipment), and the kind of questions, conversation, and interaction that arises;
- 'what' can include any texts, documents, artefacts, photos, or videos that are made interactionally relevant.

Of course, this basic distinction only gets us so far. For example, recording equipment is both a 'how' and 'what' issue. If we conduct a Skype

interview, this is partly a 'where' and partly a 'how' issue; the interviewee and interviewer are in different places and the medium of the computer interface has a number of potential implications. These issues will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7 (Beyond the Individual).

Although the list above gives us a starting point to discuss context, from this point the discussion gets more challenging. Abbas (2013: 487) embraces this challenge and talk about routes to a 'messy' reflexivity in getting to grips with context. These routes involve not only examining the researcher's narrative and his or her culture, status, and gender position in relation to those studied, but also looking at all the different aspects of context at work in a specific interview. This means asking 'what are the contexts affecting the production of knowledge? How are these contexts filtering and shading meaning, colouring the way questions are posed and responses are offered, what is said, how it is said, and what is not said?'

So if we think about the different contexts affecting the qualitative interview, we need to think about at least the physical and temporal context, the institutional and social context, and the language being used as each interview creates its own interactional context, where each turn is shaped by the previous turns, and roles and membership categories are invoked and evoked.

This chapter offers some different perspectives on context. Practically, it discusses the importance of planning and preparation (including set-up and anticipated problems). It also includes advice on sampling and ethical considerations. However, the main theme is more theoretical. It argues that all knowledge, viewpoints, and ideas generated in interviews are situated:

There is growing awareness of the importance of the interrelationship between the content of what is said and the context in which it is said. Some researchers contend that if we ignore the situated nature of cognition, we defeat our own goal of providing robust, useful knowledge. (Clarke and Robertson 2001: 773)

Consequently Chapter 3 encourages a reflexive perspective on varied aspects of context. In particular, it makes the case that an interview necessarily involves co-construction and that this leads to a greater emphasis on the interviewer and how he or she shapes and influences cognition and knowledge. This shaping and influence comes from aspects of an interviewer's identity and background, familiarity with the topic of the interview, and prior relationships with the interviewee.

A reflexive treatment of context needs to take into account the range of questions that are posed and the responses that are offered. Abbas (2013: 487) suggests thinking about ‘what is said’, ‘how it is said’, and ‘what is not said?’ They also suggest the following questions as constructive in pinning these issues down:

- What place is this? Who chose it? What are its characteristics? What meaning/s does it have to the participant and/or the interviewer?
- What is the cultural relation between the interviewer and the participant?
- What cultural norms or rules are at work that may affect what is said and not said?
- What issues of status, gender, or age may affect what is said and not said?
- How can we know what is not being said?
- How does the researcher decide what to leave out, what seems important, and how to summarise it in an analytic profile?
- If there is more than one researcher, what cultural, status, gender, age, or other factors may affect negotiations between the researchers?

Chapter 3 considers the value of asking such questions in reflecting on the interview context.

## **The importance of planning and preparation**

When discussing research we can distinguish between planning research, doing the research and then doing something with the research (analysis/writing up). It is probably true that, in comparison with the huge amount of time that necessarily goes into the last stage, little time is spent on planning. However, history is full of tales which demonstrate the problems that arise because of lack of foresight. Presumably the Chief Naval Architect has to find alternative employment after the following episode:

In 1625, Gustav II, the king of Sweden, commissioned the construction of four warships to further his imperialistic goals. The most ambitious of these ships, named the *Vasa*, was one of the largest warships of its time, with 64 cannons arrayed in two gundecks. On August 10, 1628, the *Vasa*, resplendent in its brightly painted and gilded woodwork, was launched in Stockholm Harbor with cheering crowds and considerable ceremony. The cheering was shortlived,

however; caught by a gust of wind while still in the harbor, the ship suddenly heeled over, foundered, and sank. (Maxwell 2012: 1)

Preparation is important. Your interview is not likely to sink but it won't be seaworthy unless you cast your reflexive compass more widely than the wording of the questions you are going to ask. Planning will help the interview-time to be well focused.

Before the interview starts, try to find out about the interviewee's lived world. This might involve reviewing key documents and websites, talking to other informants or visiting their place of work. Advanced preparation will demonstrate to the interviewee(s) that you are both interested and well-briefed. Just as importantly, knowledge about the interviewee's background will give you options when conducting the interview (e.g. helping with follow-up questions). In Chapter 5 (Managing Interview Interaction) we consider the value of an interview guide, where such background information comes into its own.

There are some basic but important practical considerations that all interviewers should be aware of in order to reduce problems arising. These aspects mainly relate to the choice of location and equipment for the interview. These practical considerations are well handled in many handbooks and guides to qualitative research (e.g. King and Horrocks 2010; Gubrium et al. 2012). Table 3.1 provides a summary of these issues:

These are very basic rules of thumb but 'being prepared' goes beyond arranging the time and place and making sure you have two working recording devices. The following sections discuss key features of preparation and offer further advice.

## **Perspective on context**

### **Set-up**

Each interview needs to be 'set up' and there will be requests, explanations, and rapport building before the research interview begins in earnest. There will also be permissions to be established, as well as other ethical considerations. Warren (2012) describes the contextual build up:

Prior to the actual interview – and shaping its interaction to some degree – there are the multiple and changing contexts within which the interview takes place. The interview encounter is framed by the circumstances that got the interviewer and respondent to the moment of it. For the interviewer, these circumstances include prior interest

*Table 3.1* Practical considerations concerning place and equipment

Issues with recording devices	It is almost always worth having two different recording devices. Many researchers have a main recorder and then use a second recorder as a back-up (sometimes a mobile phone).
Problems with batteries/power	This is a common problem. Put fresh batteries in recorders before each interview. If your recording device is powered by connecting to a power source or computer, make sure the battery level is 100%.
Wrong time or place	48–72 hours before an interview, it is a good idea to confirm time and place with interviewee(s).
Issues with place	If possible visit the interview site at least once before arriving for the interview. This will iron issues with access, locks, opening times etc.
Noise	Avoid interview sites with a lot of background noise.
Problems with interruption	Make sure you have enough time for the interview and that you are not conducting an interview in a space that might be double-booked or where there are likely to interruptions. Prepare a sign for the door ('Interview in Progress') and think about telephones (e.g. put on silent mode).

in the topic, training in the method, and negotiations such as those between graduate students and mentors, granting agencies and principal investigators, and researchers and human subjects committees. For the respondents, they include the biographical and current features of their lives. (p. 131)

To the list of circumstances that shape the interview from the interviewer's perspective we might also add all the data that has been collected on the topic so far. The main point is that everything that leads up to the actual speech event of the interview is relevant to what the participants believe they are doing in that interactional space and therefore how the interaction unfolds.

Part of setting up might be explaining what the research (and interview) is designed to accomplish. In particular, those adopting a 'feminist' style of interviewing will want to foreground the collaborative and explorative nature of this potential accomplishment. As Davies says (2008: 120), such an introduction should 'attempt to present the interview as joint exploration of the topic of the research, rather than a mining of the interviewee for information'.

## **The physical context**

One of the first decisions to make is where the interview will be held. It is important to make sure that it is a comfortable physical environment with minimal background noise and distractions. Moriarty argues that interview location is crucial but not often reported (2011). Different choices bring their own set of expectations. Leaving aside telephone and online interviews for the moment, there are four possible locations for face-to-face interviews:

- Interviewee's home – can be more relaxing but is it too relaxed?
- Neutral spaces (e.g. cafes, reception areas) – can be a good option but there may be distractions and noise so that the recording might not be as good.
- Institution (e.g. where the interviewee works) – often the easiest option but will aspects of professional identity dominate?
- The interviewer's space, be this home or institution – but does this affect the power relations in the interview?

If you have more than one interview with an informant, consider varying the time and place of interviews to get a stronger sense of the impact of these different choices. Interviewing in an interviewee's home might give access to different perspectives than interviewing in the workplace. However, often it is more convenient to interview within the interviewee's institutional setting (e.g. office, school, or hospital).

Where the interview takes place has consequences. These are not always easy to predict. In the following comment from Warren (2012: 133), we see how her interaction with elderly assisted living patients was influenced by competing factors, which both limited and encouraged their contribution:

The institutional context of fear promoted vague answers or non-answers from elderly residents – at the same time loneliness moved them in the opposite direction, towards elaborating and extending communication with the interviewer.

## **Language context**

One issue that does not get as much attention as it ought to is the language in which the interview is conducted (Temple and Young 2004; Xu and Liu 2009). Much of the time the language of the interview

will be shared by the interviewer and interviewee. However, this is not always the case. Often, the interviewee will be using a second language when giving his/her responses. This reality may well effect how much detail the interviewee can give or if he/she is able to express ideas effectively. Certainly, interviewing in L2 is often limiting for the interviewee. Roberts (2006: 12) talking about ethnographic interviews says there is:

relatively little written about the importance of interviewing learners in their dominant/expert language. It is often taken for granted that if informants can communicate in English, then their voices can be sufficiently 'heard' but ethnographic interviews in a still developing new language muffle the insights, stories and metaphorical world that such interviews aim to draw out.

Androulakis explains how in one research project, 'the use of many languages was not only tolerated but it was to be encouraged, as a means of succeeding in letting the immigrants express themselves' (2013: 377), an approach which allows the interviewee the linguistic choice. Cortazzi et al. (2011) also argue that researchers need to reflect on the implications of interviewing in different languages. Their work provides a comparative analysis of data generated with Chinese participants, where they compare Chinese-medium and English-medium interviews.

If the interviewer does not speak the interviewee's language but feels that on balance it is better to give the interviewee the chance to use it, then it will be necessary to use an interpreter. Temple and Edwards (2002) argue for a reflexive approach when they evaluate the role of interpreters in multilingual interview situations. In particular they consider the contribution interpreters make to the research process. Andrews et al. (2013) also details the complexities of managing interaction before and during the interview when an interpreter is being used in multilingual research. In particular she argues that where interpreters are used then account needs to be taken of their contribution to the responses elicited from interviewees. The importance of developing a shared understanding of the purposes of the research (between researcher(s) and interpreter) is also stressed.

Mariam Attia was part of the research team for *Researching Multilingually* (an AHRC-funded network project which explored processes and practices of researching in contexts where more than one language is involved). She suggests the following reflexive questions that developed out of her interviewing experience (working between Arabic and



English) although she stresses that reflexive responses to questions will differ from one researcher (or research team) to another because they are highly context-specific:

- Which language shall I use with which participants, and what implications does this language choice have on the research process?
- With multilingual researchers and participants, why use one language over the other?
- Who should I involve in the interviewing process and why? What is their exact role in this process?
- Do you transcribe then translate or translate right away? Or do you transcribe, analyse and then translate? What language should I code in and why?
- What is lost in the transcription and then in the translation?
- What are some of the ethical dilemmas involved?

We will return to these issues in Chapters 6 and 9; however, you can reflect on the importance of language choice in multilingual research contexts further by accessing the accounts and views at two multilingual research projects. *Researching Multilingually* (<http://researchingmultilingually.com/>) was the earlier project and *Researching Multilingually at the Borders of Language, the Body, Law and the State* (<http://researching-multilingually-at-borders.com/>) is the current one. See also Andrews et al. (2013) and Holmes et al. (2013) for useful insights too.

Researching multilingually, especially in a large team raises further methodological, procedural and ethical issues with regard to interviewing. A number of recent accounts have begun to engage with and articulate the range of issues (Giampapa and Lamoureux 2011; Androulakis 2013; Holmes et al. 2013; Stelma et al. 2013; Fournier et al. 2014; Copland and Creese 2015). This literature reveals that teams vary in their approach to accessing multilingual worlds and experiences, employing, for example, translators, interpreters, research assistants, and even teaching assistants.

Beyond language choices, it is important to recognise that communication is inherently cultural and this brings with it different priorities when it comes to content and context. One of the well-known distinctions that can be made is between 'high context' and 'low context' cultures. High-context cultures pay less attention to content (what is said) and are more attuned to the 'how' it is said, 'who' said it and the 'where it was said'. Low-context cultures pay less attention to the context and more attention to the content (see Ryan 2012 for more detail).

### Interactional context

The interview ‘produces situated understandings grounded in specific interactional episodes’ (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: 353). Although the interviewer may be interested in getting a perspective on the lived experience and context the interviewee inhabits, the interview enacts its own context and this unfolds through the interaction. In this book (particularly in Chapter 5 ‘Managing Interview Interaction’ and Chapter 8 ‘Analysis’), we will draw on two linguistic concepts to make explicit how individual contributions are shaped. The first is ‘genre’, where both parties’ views of and previous experience of the norms and expectations of this kind of speech event will probably come into play (see Swales 1990; Egging and Slade 2005). The second is ‘lexical cohesion’, which we can use to point to links in the unfolding interaction (see Carter and McCarthy 1988). The cohesive ties between one part of the interaction and another enable us to be more precise accounting for ‘the importance of the conversation as an ongoing context, where the earlier parts of the discussion have a continuing influence on what is said later’ (Morgan 2012: 174). The extent of such lexical cohesion will depend a great deal on the type of interview being conducted. Sometimes the interviewer is very consciously trying to draw on previous interviewee turns in order to frame the next question. Interviewers also vary considerably in the extent to which they might probe using elements of the interviewee’s previous turns.

In Extract 3.1 from van Enk (2009: 1265) we see the importance of both perspectives (i.e. genre and cohesion).

- 1 I: At one point you said something about the ADHD theory
- 2 N: Yeah. (laughs)
- 3 I: Which I thought was really interesting [unclear] [both laugh].
- 4 As an interviewer I’m not supposed to say that. Very neutral,
- 5 right.
- 6 N: Oh oh, you’re caught on tape. [both laugh]
- 7 I: Good thing the tape is only for me. But you said [reading], I
- 8 think it’s pretty naive if we think that everyone is the same and
- 9 that we need to sit in a classroom.

The cohesive tie comes in the first line (‘at one point you said something about ADHD theory’). The explicit expectations related to genre are interactionally relevant in lines 4–7 (an expression of what the interviewer is supposed to do in line 4 and N’s alignment through humorous exaggeration of this ‘transgression’ in line 6). This sort of shared joke, where the interviewer is ‘caught’ on tape violating a key

generic expectation (interviewer neutrality), often helps mitigate the awkwardness of a formal series of questions and answers (for a detailed discussion, see Garton and Copland 2010).

An obvious feature of the extract above is the way that the fact that the interview is being recorded becomes explicit. In fact, this is one key element of the physical and interactional context that tends to get airbrushed. Speer and Hutchby (2003) argue that, rather than ignore this issue as confirmation that there is something inherently problematic about recording, the presence of the recording device can become an analytic focus in itself. In other words, noticing how the participants orient to the recording equipment and being recorded is important. It is occasionally the case that interviewees can feel discomfort being recorded, although this feeling usually passes very quickly. Speer and Hutchby (2003: 334) argue that recording devices are not 'automatically significant and imposing, nor do they inevitably encourage only certain kinds of talk'. However, interviewers can profit from considering whether such a presence was significant and imposing and in doing so note 'the precise "effects" they are deemed to have'.

Another aspect of interview context to contemplate is whether you are bringing artefacts (such as documents and photographs) or data (such as video or transcriptions) into the interview as prompts for discussion and how they will be handled. This is a fairly common procedure in ethnographic interviews where the data or artefact is used to elicit a further or fuller perspective from the interviewee (see, for example, Creese 2005; Copland 2012; Copland and Creese 2015). The interactional context will certainly be shaped and affected by bringing in other texts and artefacts and interviewees should be warned that this is going to happen to avoid awkwardness or discomfort.

## **The interviewer**

This section draws attention to issues of identity and argues for more consideration of the ways in which aspects of identity and relationship impact on the unfolding interaction. Roulston (2013) explains:

Interviewers must understand the social locations that they occupy as researchers – such as race, ethnicity, status, age, nationality, education, gender, language proficiency, and so forth – and how these both limit and benefit the generation of interview data with research participants. (p. 71)

The social science literature has tended to focus primarily on distinctive features of the interviewee (e.g. attention to age, race, gender, and issues of power) rather than the interviewer. Roulston, in contrast, believes that these features are also a consideration for the interviewer and can affect data generation. If we acknowledge that the interview generates its own interactional context, what the interviewer brings to the process inevitably requires more attention. Briggs in particular, talks about paying close attention to the different orientations of interviewer and interviewee (1986: 47).

An emphasis on co-construction and context should lead to a greater emphasis on the interviewer. Rapley (2001) emphasises this reality:

Whatever ideal the interviewer practices, their talk is central to the trajectory of the interviewee's talk. As such, the data gained in the specific interview begin to emerge as just one possible version, a version that is contingent on the specific local interactional context. (p. 318)

In other words, the interview, conducted by a different interviewer, would generate different data. As Roulston argues above, sometimes even the way the interviewer 'looks' will have implications on the possible version that emerges (see too Rapley 2015) and this is the focus of the next task.

### **Task**

1. Think about what difference the way you dress for an interview might make to how the interview unfolds. What is the ideal dress code in your opinion?
2. Can you think of any interviewing situations where dress might be especially important?
3. Read the following and consider the issues it raises with respect to dress. (A colleague of mine told me this anecdote and I asked if he could write a version of it for this book.)

A student once visited me from another department wishing to discuss some aspects of the interviewing that formed part of her research project. When the discussion turned to the subject of researcher identity, she recounted an interesting experience that arose from her choice of dress code.

Both she and her father were long-term residents in the UK and were what might be described as Muslims liberal in their observance, so when her father arranged an interview for her in the UK with a leading Muslim cleric noted for his conservative outlook, the issue of clothing arose. Her father pointed out that the imam disapproved strongly of women who did not wear the veil and suggested that she might at least put on a headscarf. Reflecting on this, she realised that her choice of clothing would inevitably influence the imam's perception of her and thereby affect at least to some extent his responses. If she dressed conservatively, it was likely that he would regard her as in some sense an 'insider' and might as a result express views that he might withhold from an outsider. Dressing and making up as she normally did would almost inevitably position her, in his eyes, as an outsider and though it would not necessarily compromise the data she might get from the interview, the outcomes might nevertheless be impoverished.

She thought long and hard about the decision but in the end opted to dress as she normally did, her only compromise being that she was careful to choose one of her longer skirts. The consideration that had finally persuaded her not to wear at least a headscarf was that representing herself, in terms of appearance at least, as a devout Muslim would be a form of deception and she felt that this would not be entirely ethical. Depending on how the interview developed, it might also lead to tensions between visual and verbal aspects of her presentation of self in the interview.

Her assessment of the interview that followed was that it had gone reasonably well and that the imam had been polite, welcoming and relatively forthcoming, but at the end of the interview he asked her why she had insulted him by appearing before him inappropriately dressed. She defended herself and her father – who had privately criticised her vehemently for her decision – pitched in to defend her right to dress in a way that was appropriately conservative in the context of the local culture. The meeting ended in what might be described as serious but non-acrimonious disagreement.

Having recounted this story, she said that she had since thought about it many times and was still not entirely convinced that her decision was correct. The balance between representing oneself honestly ('being oneself') and showing consideration for the feelings of the interviewee was, she felt, a fine one.

The vignette above offers an example of where choice of clothing is an integral part of identity within the interview context and that it might have a tangible impact on the way the interaction unfolds. Clothing choice needs to be managed. This does not mean that it is always easy to get clothes choice right, especially in fieldwork:

I spent most mornings deciding to wear a salwaar kamiz only to end up being in the company of those wearing Western dress and feeling like an anthropological poser or, other days, showing up in a blouse and skirt and feeling very conspicuous amongst the saris. (Henry 2003: 233–234)

While it may not always be possible to anticipate how clothing and the identity positions these are likely to play out in interview contexts, it is at least possible to reflect on how the interview went afterwards. Bucholtz and Hall (2005, 2012) have considered how choices in clothing have an impact on identity in interaction and corresponding relational facework (see Spencer-Oatey 2007) and they have illustrated ‘how identity does not precede interaction but emerges within it, as speakers jointly construct temporary identity positions to meet the socially contextualized demands of ongoing talk’ (2013: 125).

Rock (2015: 124–125) provides an interesting account of negotiating positionality with both police officers and detainees within her research project. Interestingly, her clothing choices turned out to be significant too. Her linguistic ethnographic work involved the delicate balance of not aligning with the police (so that enough trust was built up with detainees) but not aligning too much with detainees (where the worry was that they might unburden themselves of confidential but compromising information). She was aware that, with detainees, her clothes became increasingly casual over time (in an attempt to avoid indexing formality associated with officialdom). Of course, clothes are not the only aspect of the challenge of negotiating positionality. Rock also talks about interviews with police officers, where she was conscious of both avoiding being positioned as a ‘know it all’ who seemed to have ‘swallowed the custody rule book’ or being positioned as someone ‘completely naïve about procedures who needed things explained from the ground up’. Bott (2010) also provides a reflexive account, through the integration of diary entries, about her attempts to position herself conducting fieldwork in a lap-dancing club. She reveals similar kinds of concerns about dress in relation to context and interviewees:

I felt increasingly self-conscious and interfering ... as if I was wearing too many clothes and had too many qualifications and questions ... need to rethink what to wear ... felt very overdressed, in more ways than one ... felt like formal clothes represented, in contrast to the women, professionalism and superiority – or even worse, chaste. (2010: 164)

### Status as a researcher

Another aspect for examination for any researcher is their status as a researcher/interviewer within the research context. Briggs (1986: 46–48) found that his relatively junior status in Mexico caused mismatches in what the participants thought was happening in the ‘interview’. His questions were ‘swatted away pretty abruptly’ and he only later found out that his unmarried status meant that he was ‘not seen as a fully-fledged adult’. While Briggs’s frame for the speech event was a research interview, this was not matched by the interviewee’s frame which was more like ‘advice and pedagogic instruction’.

Johnson and Rowlands consider the question of whether it is better to be a novice researcher or a more experienced one. Each status has its pitfalls and dangers that researchers should recognise when planning their projects. Table 3.2 summarises the main points from Johnson and Rowlands (2012: 103), Kvale and Brinkman (2005: 170), and Corbin and Morse (2003: 347) with respect to advantages and disadvantages of researcher experience.

Table 3.2 Experienced and novice researchers

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Novice researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less inclined to hardened assumptions</li> <li>• More difficulty seeing nuances and layered meanings</li> <li>• A greater learning curve</li> <li>• More difficulty negotiating ethical issues</li> <li>• Can get overwhelmed with data</li> <li>• At least in the first interviews, often awkward, with the interviewer interjecting too many comments and questions (often because of discomfort with pauses and silences)</li> </ul>
Experienced researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May possess member knowledge but take that knowledge for granted</li> <li>• Lack of information-gap might make asking genuine questions difficult</li> <li>• Member status may form a barrier when interviewing</li> </ul>

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**Task**

Before we discuss issues of insider-status, acquaintance and prior relationship, have a look at the following piece of interaction. What does it tell you about Fiona and May's familiarity with each other?

- 1 Fiona yes if you could change, oh sorry, *((phone starts ringing))* anything about
- 2 your feedback style what would you change
- 3 May well I think you know the answer to that *((laughs))*
4. Fiona okay *((laughs))*
- 5 May I'm sorry I think that's my phone and nobody ever rings me I do apologise
- 6 Fiona no no that's fine that's fine I'll have another cake I like this interview I
- 7 get cakes cakes and cats.
- 8 *((May answers phone))*
- 9 May sorry *((May sits down))* what was the (.) oh yes, what would I change about
- 10 my, erm, feedback style erm (.) well, as I said I'd like to be able to be a little
- 11 bit more circumspect about some issues I think.erm

**Familiarity**

In this section, the topic of familiarity is considered from two angles. The first perspective is whether the interviewer has insider or member status. The second related perspective is whether the interviewer has an existing professional, familial, or social relationship with the interviewee.

*Insider or outsider status* – One common deliberation is whether there are advantages and disadvantages of having 'insider'/'outsider' member status when interviewing a particular group. It is often necessary to interview across boundaries. As Rubin and Rubin explain:

our approach to qualitative interviewing emphasises the ability to go across social boundaries. You don't have to be a woman to interview women, or a sumo wrestler to interview sumo wrestlers. But if you are going to cross social gaps and go where you are ignorant, you have to recognise and deal with cultural barriers to communication. (1995: 39)

The advantages and disadvantages of being perceived as an 'insider' by the interviewee is a perennial topic for comment, especially in terms of whether the interviewee is constructed as the 'same' or 'other'. However, neither is an insider identity necessarily fixed. De Fina and Perrino (2011: 36) suggest that 'the status of the researcher is negotiable and



negotiated within research situations' and this 'leads to very different development depending on the way participants align to each other'.

There are some advantages in having at least a degree of insider status or knowledge. It often brings with it a high degree of knowledge of the research topic or context under investigation. Lofland and Lofland (1995) argue that if the researcher has low levels of understanding of the issues in focus during the interviews, their 'understandings' are likely to prove very limited in terms of empirical data and it will take a long period to 'hear' what an interviewee is saying. However, there are also possible disadvantages to inside status. The main one is shared assumptions. Vincent and Warren (2001) warn that misunderstandings can arise if there is too much researcher and respondent symmetry. Kanuha (2000: 439) also recognises some of the blind-spots for those who 'are native' rather than those who 'go native' and discusses 'the roles and challenges of the insider/indigenous/native researcher'. Kanuha argues that even if the 'native' might have some advantage in terms of insight and understanding, there are always issues of objectivity that need to be addressed.

Often, as researchers, we inhabit a space where we recognise that we are insiders in one sense and outsiders in another sense (Foley 2012). Adopting binary viewpoints (either-or) can actually narrow possibilities for understanding. Corbin-Dwyer and Buckle (2009) explore the space between being an insider and being an outsider through a dialectical approach that allows the preservation of the complexity of similarities and differences and which recognises that holding membership of a group does mean absolute sameness (and not holding membership does not denote complete difference).

Roulston et al. (2001) use the term 'cocategorical incumbency' to consider interviews where the interviewer and interviewee belong to the same professional group (e.g. geography teachers or learners of French) and where a particular kind of familiarity is therefore invoked. Co-categorical incumbency can lead the interviewee to produce a certain type of talk (for example exchanges centered on 'complaints' with teachers). Another kind of insider status is related to race. Henry (2003: 233–234), talking about a research trip to India, reports feelings of frustration and anger 'when people challenged my representations, always probing and asking additional questions and then resigning themselves to some first impression'. She provides examples of their responses to her representations of her identity:

When asked where I was from, I told many of my participants that I was from Canada. When I did this, they almost certainly paused

and looked quizzically at my features, ... 'but where are your parents from?' they would ask and, when I would say, 'India' or 'Pakistan', they would sigh knowingly and say, 'I knew you looked Indian'. When I introduced myself as a child of Indian parents and stressed my parents' (and thus my own) 'Indianness' as an alternative way of representing myself, I was told that I was not really Indian as I had not grown up in India, nor did I really look Indian.

In other words, choosing to represent you status in one way or another does not guarantee it will be received as such. Henry (2003: 234) refers to Visweswaran (1994: 115) and says that 'for someone who is neither fully Indian nor wholly American', the question 'where are you from?' can 'provoke a sudden failure of confidence, the fear of never replying adequately'. (See Javier 2015 too for an interesting account of negotiating similar issues).

*Acquaintance interviews/prior relationships* There are many possibilities in terms of familiarity between interviewer and interviewee, and this certainly influences the nature of the co-construction. They range from:

- No prior existing relationship (outside of arranging the interview);
- A relationship that has developed during fieldwork;
- A professional relationship;
- Friends;
- Colleagues;
- Family.

Each of these can have important implications on what transpires in and is generated by an interview. As Warren (2012: 132) says 'the prior relationship, or lack of it, between interviewer and respondent is one of the myriad contexts that precede and shape the interview encounter'. The data on page 72 (from Garton and Copland 2010: 545) shapes the encounter in at least two ways. The interviewee (May) is making relevant (in the interaction) Fiona's knowledge of the topic under consideration (e.g. in Line 3). There is also evidence of their existing relationship (e.g. in Lines 6–7). In this case Fiona has insider status (they are both teacher-trainers); they have a prior professional and social relationship. Garton and Copland (2010) call research interviews where the interlocutors have a prior relationship 'acquaintance interviews' foregrounding the importance of relationship to what gets generated in interview talk. They argue that interviewers in acquaintance interviews need to be aware of and make explicit the part that prior relationships play in the process of data generation.

Again, familiarity is neither an advantage nor a disadvantage but it can be helpful to think about the ways this shapes the interaction. For example, Berger (2013: 13) talks about the ‘double sword’ inherent in these situations. On the one hand, the researcher’s familiarity may enable better in-depth understanding of participants’ perceptions and interpretations of their lived experience. On the other hand, the researcher must remain ‘constantly alert to avoid projecting his/her own experience and using it as the lens to view and understand participants’ experience’.

### Task

Read *Anne’s vignette* on page 80 at the end of this chapter.

1. As you read the transcript consider which elements suggest it is also an acquaintance interview.
2. Are there signals of shared understanding? How do you know?

## Ethical considerations

There are a number of dangers posed by the relationship between interviewer and interviewee and considering the ethical dimensions of these issues is crucial. There is not space here for a full treatment of ethical issues in qualitative research and there are certainly more comprehensive commentaries and guides elsewhere (see Orb et al. 2001; Berg and Lune 2004; Kubanyiova 2008; King and Horrocks 2010; Guillemin and Heggen 2012). However, what follows is a summary of key considerations for ensuring that participants are informed, have provided consent, have privacy guaranteed (if that is what they want), and are not harmed. It is important to seek advice on standards governing your research methodology and to seek appropriate ethical approval from review boards/committees. Having said that, Table 3.3 is a summary of various key points of reflection with regard to the relationship with the interviewee based on Lichtman (2012), King and Horrocks (2010), and Guillemin and Heggen (2012).

All researchers have to think about the ethics involved in their studies. Ethics should not only be a consideration in the planning stages of the research (when ethics approval forms are generally submitted) but throughout the research project. For example, it is not always possible to predict what impact the interviews will have on the interviewees.

Table 3.3 Ethical considerations in dealing with interviews

Issues	Questions and comments
Avoid harm	This is the 'cornerstone of ethical conduct' (Lichtman 2012: 54). Have you thought about and made explicit any possible adverse effects of your research? If you begin a study and you find that some of your participants seem to have adverse reactions, is it best to discontinue the study (or at least their involvement)? Kubanyiova (2008) talks about what happens when a participant wants to leave the study but doesn't want to tell the researchers.
Informed consent	Interviewees can only make a reasonable assessment of whether they want to be involved in your research if they have a detailed explanation of the research topic and outcomes. Also, has there been any pressure or persuasion on your interviewees to take part?
Ensure privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality	Seek permission from the participants, if you wish to make public any information that might reveal their identity or their organisation. Is your data going to be available on the Internet and therefore increase the possibility of it being traced back to the speaker or author? Make sure you remove identifying information from your interview records (avoiding the danger of deductive revelation). What will you do if they prefer not to be anonymous? (It is always advisable to give them the choice but participants might not be aware of the possible dangers of allowing their identities to be made public.) It is your responsibility to keep the information you have confidential and securely stored and you need to be much more sensitive to information that you obtain from minors and others who might be in a vulnerable position.
Avoiding intrusiveness	Are you intruding on participants' time, their space, and their personal lives? What is the value for participants in taking part in your research?
Trust, rapport, and friendship	Researchers should make sure that they provide an environment that is trustworthy. At the same time, they need to be sensitive to the power that they hold over participants. Establishing rapport is both natural and necessary but researchers need to avoid setting up a situation where the interviewee thinks it is 'just a chat' rather than research interview. Hunter (2005) and Huisman (2008) are both useful in highlighting the ethics of positioning in relation to the interviewee (when negotiating appropriate professional and social voices).
Data analysis and representation	You have a responsibility to interpret your data and present evidence so that others can decide to what extent your interpretation is believable.
Data ownership	Will you make the data available to the interviewee? In what form (full access/summaries/final report)? Ideally this needs to be made clear before the interview process and is part of informed consent (see Hagens et al. 2009).

DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) report on a study where the simple act of listening and reflecting had unforeseen outcomes and in some cases resulted in harm. They describe research involving in-depth interviews with nurses from India about their life histories. The nurses had been working in the USA for between 10 and 25 years and the researchers went through a process of carefully informing participants about the nature of the research. Participants had also signed consent forms. However, despite these precautions:

Several unexpectedly expressed grief and intense feelings when talking about their lives. In a few cases the nurses shared that they had never discussed their grief previously. It became evident that many participants had not fully processed their separation from their homeland and families of origin. (2006: 314)

The participants had not fully understood either the nature of the research interview or how it might affect them emotionally. In these contexts, it is the responsibility of the researchers to consider this kind of response. A pilot study could have alerted them to the potential for the interviews to cause distress.

Rubin and Rubin (1995: 98) provide a particularly poignant insight into the kind of retrospective reflection that none of us wants to face. They had conducted an in-depth interview with an administrator in Thailand. Within two months of them completing their fieldwork, he had committed suicide. The researchers were left to wonder ‘if our encouraging him to talk about his problems may have made them more salient to him’ and hence contributed to his death.

Two open access online resources have regular contributions that include comment on ethical dimensions of qualitative interviewing:

- *FQS* is interested in empirical studies conducted using qualitative methods, and in contributions that deal with the theory, methodology, and application of qualitative research (<http://www.qualitative-research.net/>).
- *Qualitative Report* is free peer-reviewed, weekly open access journal (<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/>).

## Interviewees

Chapter 3 concludes with some more practical considerations related to interviewing. It thinks about how interviewees are selected, how many of them to select, and how many questions to ask them.

*Sampling* – In large scale studies, or where the study relies exclusively on interviews, it is usually important to select interviewees who represent a wide range of the case being investigated. Seidman (2006) makes the case that it is also important to ‘select some participants who are outside that range and may in some sense be considered negative cases (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Weiss 1994: 29–32; Locke et al. 2004: 222–223)’. He then discusses a story focusing on what it is like for an ethnic minority teacher to be a member of a local teachers’ union, and says that it would also be useful to include some non-ethnic minority teachers who are also members of the local union and ‘if the researcher discovers through interviews that non-minority and minority teachers are having similar experiences, then the researcher will know that some issues may not be a matter of ethnicity or majority-minority status’. Robinson (2014) presents a useful guide to sampling issues and his four-point approach to sampling in qualitative interview-based research may be worth bearing in mind when working towards coherence, transparency, impact, and trustworthiness, though the extent to which these procedures are followed will depend on the research tradition in which you are working. The four aspects are:

1. Defining a sample (a process of specifying inclusion and exclusion criteria);
2. Deciding upon a sample size (through the conjoint consideration of epistemological and practical concerns);
3. Selecting a sampling strategy (choosing between random sampling, convenience sampling, stratified sampling, cell sampling, quota sampling, or a single-case selection strategy);
4. Sample sourcing (includes matters of advertising, incentivising, avoidance of bias, and ethical concerns pertaining to informed consent).

*How many interviews is enough?* This is the title of Baker and Edwards’s (2012) helpful resource. It features a set of succinct researcher voices from 14 prominent qualitative methodologists and five from more novice researchers. These voices are talking from a range of epistemological and disciplinary positions, and varying conversational and academic styles. The recurring answer to the question ‘how many’ is ‘it depends’. However, the usefulness of Baker’s resource for students and researchers rests on the guidance offered by the various contributors as to what it depends upon in their particular research.

The question of how many interviews is enough is also related to whether one or more interview are being conducted with each

informant. We should not assume that there will only be one interview per informant, especially if the number of informants is restricted. Sometimes one interview might be conducted over several sessions (e.g. in life history research). Spradley (1979), for example, conducted one in-depth interview over six or seven sessions with each participant. Sometimes it might be appropriate to conduct follow-up interviews. This will be all discussed further in Chapter 7 but, for now, it is fair to say that most qualitative studies tend to have between six and 12 interviews. Having said that, a lot depends on whether your research is basically an interview study or whether it is research within which there are interviews. In other words, whether interviews are your main data collection instrument or whether they are supporting other kinds of data. In my own PhD for example (Mann 2002), I had six key informants but I conducted two interviews with each one. This might seem like a relatively small number of interviews but my analysis was primarily based on recordings of meeting talk, so interaction was the main focus of the analysis and the interviews provided an additional perspective.

## **Summary**

This chapter has attempted to shift the focus away from content (the research topic) towards various dimensions of context (where the interview takes place and who conducts it). It is important to consider where you are going to conduct the interview but it is also important to examine your own identity and status and how this might influence the interview. It is not so much a question of whether being an experienced researcher is better or whether insider status is better; after all we often don't have much choice about these aspects of our status and identity. The argument being developed here is that it is important to develop a reflexive position and consider how these different elements impact on the interview interaction.

Pavlenko (2007) offers a critical review of sociolinguistics in relationship to interview analysis and argues that there is too much emphasis on content and too little attention to form and contexts of construction. She is concerned that it is not uncommon to see researchers compiling interview answers into narratives and ignoring their co-constructed nature and 'interactional influences on the presentation of self' (2007: 178). The worry is that there is little recognition that what the interviewee says in the interview is always contextually shaped and is always produced in negotiation with the interviewer (Rapley 2001;

Rapley 2015). It is also influenced by factors such as interview mode and type, which form the focus of Chapter 4.

## **Suggested further reading**

- Berg, B. L. and Lune, H. (2004). *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (Vol. 5). Boston: Pearson. (Chapter 3)
- Edwards E. and Holland J. (2013) *What Is Qualitative Interviewing?* London: Bloomsbury.
- Lichtman, M. (2012). *Qualitative Research in Education: A User's Guide*. London: Sage. (Chapter 4)
- Rapley T. (2015). Questions of context: Qualitative interviews as a source of knowledge. In Tileaga, C., and Stokoe, E. (Eds), *Discursive Psychology: Classic and Contemporary Issues*. London: Routledge.
- Richards, K. (2003). *Qualitative Inquiry in TESOL*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. (Chapter 2)
- Talmy, S. (2010). Qualitative interviews in applied linguistics: From research instrument to social practice. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 30(1), 128–148.

## **Anne Wiseman's vignette**

### **Context**

This interview takes place between myself and a previous participant on a Bulgarian trainer-training project set up in the early 1990s. I was the project manager and developed the project over a period of five years. During this time I recruited and trained cohorts of teacher-trainers and trainer-trainers across the country to help with the new educational reforms in-country, most of which concentrated on transforming Russian teachers into teachers of English. I had a previous relationship with the all interviewees, in that I was the project manager but also in most cases a friend. In fact, since the project, I have met many of them again on a social basis, even staying with some of them in their houses.

I am currently writing a thesis looking at the long-term impact on outside agencies' intervention during a period of fundamental change that took place in Eastern and Central Europe in the 1990s. This focuses on the team of trainers who were part of this project in Bulgaria, using qualitative interviewing, in a life history approach, as a means of investigating the impact of this project upon their professional development. I am using an open-ended approach to interviewing, primarily asking each interviewee what impact they feel the project has had upon their lives and professional development (often the two are intertwined).

The interview below took place in Varna, Bulgaria during a teachers' association conference. It was very hot and we were both eating ice cream.



**Extract 3.1**

- 1 A OK OK and in terms (.) do you want sort of talk about (.) sorry  
 2 you're trying to eat your ice cream (.) I've just eaten mine
- 3 G No (.) it's all right for me because I'm listening and you're  
 4 talking
- 4 A At least you've done it all – I've got mine to do yet (.) I've got  
 5 a clean *salfetka* (serviette) if you need it (.) yeah I mean if you  
 6 want to sort of summarise (.) to what extent your professional  
 7 development has progressed because you're running a private  
 8 language school as well now, aren't you?  
 9 (Pause while ice cream is sorted out)
- 10 G The School was established six years ago.
- 11 A (surprised tone) Is that all it was? So when  
 12 I last came you were running CELTA courses?
- 13 G Yes, CELTA and DELTA courses (.) this is the other avenue  
 14 which I have been following but erm, Avo language centre is as  
 15 a small school established by my daughter and myself.
- 16 A Ah OK
- 17 G We are in partnership relations with Avodale (?). for  
 18 quite some time Avo is the recognised Cambridge centre  
 19 and I am the Course Director there and tutor,  
 20 and we run course every year.
- 21 A Ok , Do keep eating. I'll ask another question!  
 22 , So again it's because of the teacher or trainer training course?
- 23 G Yes or trainer training because I've already trained maybe  
 24 more than 10 CELTA trainers.
- 25 A Ah Ok.
- 26 G And I am in training as a DELTA trainer at the moment.
- 27 A Oh gosh. So you've really got to the highest point of trainer  
 28 training that you can? And you put that all down to seeing  
 29 that notice in the ... ha ah ha
- 30 G Yes exactly.

**Reflexive comment on the extract**

My relationship with Galya is that of an old colleague and as trainer-trainee, so we have many shared memories and, as a result, the interview is more of a conversation than perhaps a typical interviewer-interviewee situation. In a more typical context, the interviewer may initially take some time to find out more about background and context. There might also be a greater level of formality. Here, we shared information about

ex-colleagues names and situations; some parts of the interview felt like a ‘catching up’ conversation. However, it is obvious that I am trying to encourage her to talk about the topic-at-hand too. As I reviewed this transcript (including the extract above) I realised that there were a lot of aligning instances of ‘yes’ and ‘uh hmm’ to corroborate what Galya was saying and perhaps encourage her.

This interview falls into the realm of an acquaintance interviews (e.g. Garton and Copland) and this, of course, affects the interview. There is a vast amount of shared knowledge and understanding. Most of the interviews are in English but there is shared knowledge of Bulgarian too. In this extract this isn’t really featured so much and my use of *salfetka* (line 5) here is perhaps an attempt to display solidarity. On other occasions, where sometimes the interviewees struggle with a translation from the Bulgarian, I am conscious of drawing on my shared understanding of the meaning of that particular word in Bulgarian to push the talk along. Another aspect of the shared understanding is the ellipsis (line 29) which also shows how we have a shared or common understanding of what was going on at the time.

The references to the ice cream (which we were both eating at the time) helped to make the ‘interview’ more of a conversation and kept the talk informal. I feel this was useful as it put us again on a more equal footing (sharing something in the moment). Perhaps the sharing of the ice cream puts the focus on the awkwardness of tissues and eating with your mouth full (rather than any potentially awkward feelings around being interviewed). Perhaps also the small gift of the ice cream is in some small way a recognition of the potential imposition of an interview?

## **Ros Appleby’s vignette**

### **Context**

Extract 3.2 below comes from an interview which took place in my university office in Australia in 2009. The interview was one of the first that I conducted as part of a project inquiring into the gendered experiences of white Western men who were working, or had worked, as English language teachers in Japan. The project involved several field trips to Japan and interviews with men in both Japan and Australia. In this project I was specifically interested in a stereotype I had been told about whereby Western men who were unsuccessful ‘losers’, and unable to attract a woman in their home country, could become ‘heroes’ and the object of romantic desire in Japan. This stereotype was widely

recognised amongst Western English language teachers in Japan, and had been lampooned in popular culture (see [www.charismaman.com](http://www.charismaman.com)).

The interviewee (B) and I (R) are both white, middle-aged Australians, and we were acquainted through a professional network. At the time of the interview, B had returned to Australia after working for several years in Japan. While in Japan, he had met and married a Japanese woman (his student) who had returned with him to Australia.

Extract 32 starts at about 20 minutes into the interview. About five minutes prior to this, I had asked B whether he had been aware, during his time in Japan, of the purported desire of Japanese women for Western men. In response, he had offered some enthusiastic accounts to illustrate his experience of being on the receiving end of that desire. In Extract 3.2, B then compares the attention he received from Japanese women to that which he had experienced with Australian women in his home country.

### Extract 3.2

- 1 B: um (.2) it was pleasant to be (.) to be (.) yeah to be well seen of  
 2 and and and be attractive and so on and (.) whatever but hhh  
 3 (.2) it wasn't hhm (.2) °(I'm gonna) say this the wrong way.° (3.0)  
 4 hh I don't wanna say it's new to me huh I mean I wasn't suddenly (.)  
 5 Mr Fantastic Mr Wonderful >I still had girlfriends here of course<  
 6 and I had lots of .hh I had a number of female friendships and  
 7 relationships here of course it wasn't a question of suddenly  
 8 [it's all different]  
 9 R: [ mm mm ]  
 10 B: it's all new=  
 11 R: =mm  
 12 B it was easier, and it was a lot more (.) um (1.0) there  
 13 was just a vast (.2) greater number of women available (.)  
 14 there are just >so many people in that country< [ *(laughter)* ]  
 15 R [mm mm mm]  
 16 B um, (.) so, (.) it wasn't different in that way but I just guess  
 17 (.) um, (3.0) it was, (0.2) easier just to relax and be yourself  
 18 I think (.) here (0.4) you would often try harder and harder  
 19 and >sometimes be unsuccessful and< .hh (.6) and you  
 20 (.2) °I don't know you,° (3.0) mm.  
 21 (3.0) yeah.  
 22 (2.0)  
 23 R mm. .hh=  
 24 B =>I grew up in that time in the 70s and 80s when

- 25 women's lib was getting stronger and stronger< and  
 26 some women were aggressive and some women were (.)  
 27 and you'd try and make friends with a girl politely and  
 28 you had to be careful who you chose because it just didn't  
 29 work. (*laughter*) it just didn't work. [*laughter*]  
 30 R [*laughter*]  
 31 B >so but< I certainly I had numerous girlfriends here  
 32 and so on and whatever and I don't want to paint  
 33 a picture that (.) you know that things were suddenly  
 34 : fantastic in Japan and had been terrible here (.) but  
 35 for some people that was the case (.) yeah  
 36 because you were a foreigner therefore you were  
 37 attractive. you were white male (.) end of story.  
 38 R mm.  
 39 B it didn't matter anything else about you (.) you were  
 40 the only one in town or the only one who (inaudible)  
 41 females there so (.) yeah.

## Interviewer reflection on Extract 3.2

### The use and meaning of pauses and silences

This was my first set of interviews since completing my doctoral study in 2005. When transcribing my doctoral interviews, I had become aware of my habit of 'joining in' with the 'conversation', as I might in everyday life. I felt this had the effect of interrupting the interviewee's flow of thoughts and speech. In these interviews, I was consciously allowing for longer periods of silence, in the expectation that the interviewee was thinking about what to say next. The first of these longish silences is at the end of line 3, where B was indicating, in a rapid, quiet 'self talk', that he was thinking about how to say something that might be difficult to express. The next long silence comes in line 17, where B is again trying to express a thought, and using fillers such as 'um', 'so', 'I just guess', but clearly hadn't finished his turn.

The silences in lines 20–22 are slightly different. In line 20, it seemed like B had more to say, indicated by the continuing intonation after 'you'. But then after a sequence of longish silences, interspersed with 'mm' and 'yeah', each with a falling intonation, it seemed that B had finished what he had to say on this point.

In line 23, I mark the finish of that point with 'mm', and then take a breath in readiness to ask another question. But just as I draw breath,

B rushes in (line 24) with his next stretch of speech about Australian women in the 1970s and 1980s.

On reflection, the hesitations, pauses, and silences in B's account seem to indicate that he was struggling to position himself as a successful heterosexual male in two different cultural contexts (Australia and Japan), and in the context of the interview where he is giving an account of himself to a white Australian female. First, he explains that his success in Japan was pleasant, but not greatly out of the ordinary (lines 4–5), because he had previously enjoyed successful heterosexual relationships in his home country (lines 5–7). Perhaps these explanations were offered in order to avoid being cast in the position of an unsuccessful 'loser' who could only find a girlfriend in Japan, or to indicate that he had no particular preference for Japanese women over Australian women. But then, the longer pauses (lines 17–22) precede an explanation about his difficulties as a man trying to approach women in 'women's lib' Australia. Perhaps the hesitations and pauses here indicate his uncertainty about representing Australian women – perhaps women just like me – as aggressive in their rejection of men's 'polite' advances. The laughter that we share is, I think, an indication of the delicacy of this exchange between a white Australian man and woman on the topic of 'women's lib'.

# 4

## Research Interviews: Modes and Types

### Introduction

Chapter 4 considers different interview modes and types. It is a wide-ranging chapter, as it aims to introduce important choices that face the qualitative interviewer. The chapter begins with a discussion of ‘mode’ (Halliday 1978: 138). For example, we think about whether an interview is face-to-face or conducted on the telephone or through Skype. This deliberation furthers some of the discussion around the importance of context that was developed in Chapter 3, as whether you are interviewing face-to-face or using some form of CMC (computer mediated communication) can be seen as an important dimension of interview context.

Chapter 4 also examines the nature of ‘conversation’ and the extent to which an interview can be regarded as a conversation. From there, we focus on various ways of understanding and classifying research interviews, detailing the range of characteristics and orientations. There is a discussion of what is meant by structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviewing and the last part of the chapter comments on the use of a range of tools in interviews. This includes video (e.g. for stimulated recall) and the use of photographs and texts.

### Interview mode

This chapter primarily focuses on the face-to-face research interview involving one interviewer and one interviewee. The treatment of group interviews and focus groups will be covered in detail in Chapter 7, as well as a fuller range of the synchronous, asynchronous, text based, video, and audio platforms possible. However, the first part of this

chapter considers other kinds of interview 'modes' (Halliday 1978); it briefly thinks about what difference it makes whether the interview is conducted face-to-face, on the telephone, through Google Hangouts, Skype, or through a chat room interface.

Hammond and Wellington (2012: 91–93) cover the main arguments why we should not assume that qualitative interviews necessarily need to be 'face-to-face encounters'. They believe that it is an open question 'as to how much difference face-to-face interviewing makes in practice' and see online interviewing as a growing opportunity for researchers to 'access interviewees across distance and time barriers' where interviewees might have 'better opportunities for reflective responses'. Interviews (including focus group interviews) are increasingly conducted online (Mann and Stewart 2000). This is often a matter of convenience for both parties and does make it possible to interview informants that would otherwise be difficult to interview:

We would be able to interview geographically dispersed populations with a recorded interaction that at least mimics face-to-face interactions. Although there are some drawbacks, the benefits strongly outweigh them. (Sullivan 2012: 60)

In my own research I have increasingly used telephone and Skype interviews (both because of practicality and restricted research budgets). Obviously Skype 'mimics' face-to-face interactions, at least to some extent, whereas telephone and e-mail can't have this element. For a recent British Council project our research team used Skype. This is currently free and it is possible to capture the computer screen (e.g. using Snagit or Camtasia), so that you can record, transcribe and review the interview later. As well as the Skype video, it will also capture any texts or photographs shared on your screen during the interview. The use of Skype enabled the team to interview 30 informants relatively quickly, although you are always at the mercy of two Internet connections (theirs and yours). Consequently, a few of the interviews had a short hiatus while we reconnected. Extract 4.1 is typical of such a glitch where part of the turn cannot be heard (in this case because the connection seemed to drop out for a few seconds).

**Extract 4.1**

- 1 P: Well I can give you my example. I was on the
- 2 water village, it's a called Kampong Ayer
- 3 I don't know if you've heard of it?

4 I: No, I haven't.  
5 P: It's the largest water village, I think, in the  
6 world, there's many, many thousands of people  
7 living there, it's not a rich area,  
8 And the classroom management situations ( xxxx  
9 ( xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx xxxxxxx xxx  
10 xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx xxxxxxx xxxxxxx x )  
11 I: Sorry, I missed that last thing, you were talking  
12 about water village and it not being rich and  
13 then I think you were going on to talk about some  
14 aspect of the methodological challenges?  
15 P: Yes, it was more classroom management really  
16 than anything else.

I suspect the detail of the original turn (lines 8–10) has been partly lost in the re-telling (lines 15–16).

As well as problems with bandwidth and connection, there are sometimes more 'natural' interruptions. In Extract 4.2, the interviewee is using Skype (audio only) but is in a car on a windy day. There are both problems with the connection and a background wind noise.

**Extract 4.2**

1 I: And have you had any feedback on whether that's  
2 working better?  
3 S: I don't know to be honest, I'm not sure.  
4 I: OK. So what exactly are you doing now?  
5 S: I'm now an education advisor for the Department  
6 for International Development.  
7 (( a few second of interference ))  
8 **Sorry, I'm going past a windy bit**  
9 **again.** So I work, I'm a ((xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx and and  
10 I sit xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxx for xxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxx))  
11 in the Education Policy Team in this department  
12 and think about how the UK should spend lots of  
13 money on education in other countries, which is  
14 very interesting.

Before conducting your first Skype interview, it is worth having a trial conversation to get used to the interface and recording possibilities. The following is a comment from Valeria Lo Iacono who is sharing this experience of using Skype for his interviews:



When you first start doing video interviews with Skype, the first thing that can strike you is seeing yourself on video. You become 'the other' i.e. the viewed and also the viewer. Seeing yourself onscreen can be daunting or exciting (depending on your outlook) and offers advantages and disadvantages. First, it means that you can see what the other person sees and this can help you to maintain your professionalism. When you begin to slouch in the chair or look as though you are disinterested, you can re-compose yourself. On a negative side, one's focus should be on the interview, dialogue and questions, although in the holistic embodied experience of an interview, one might argue that being aware of the presentation of self is an important part of the interview. Noticing oneself in the video is perhaps no different from the moments when we try to avoid appearing to stare at the interviewee and need moments to look elsewhere in a face-to-face interview. It is worth considering the interviewee and how the ability to also view themselves can impact on their experience and on the interview. Will the awareness of their self, have any impact on the data collection for example.

In one of the pilot studies I noticed myself slouching and I immediately changed my sitting position. Seeing yourself and the interviewed live on screen also has the benefit that you can ensure that you are both correctly in picture and visible to each other for when you come to analyse and transcribe the interviews. Another issue was note-taking. On the video, I could see that I appeared to be looking down at something which for the other person is not viewable. I was in fact looking down at a notebook, as I took notes, my hand out of camera shot. I decided to verbally explain that I was taking notes to pre-empt any concerns of focus on my part, to the volunteer. [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Valeria\\_Lo\\_Iacono](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Valeria_Lo_Iacono)

This kind of reflexivity is important, especially with regard to not maintaining eye contact. Recently, I had a researcher come to see me and he was very upset. After several weeks of trying to set up a Skype meeting with a well-known and very well-published American academic (in the field of online communities of practice), he had finally managed to pin down this 'guru' of the Internet, only for the guru to be clearly pre-occupied with some other task. Apparently this pre-occupation with another task was so engaging that the academic apparently did not establish any eye contact at all during the talk. The young researcher was left deflated and disappointed.

So far in this section I have concentrated on Skype because this is what I am currently using (if I cannot set up a face-to-face interview). However there are other possibilities that can be considered. Of course, in the past 20 years there has been a global spread of the Internet and this gives us many more possibilities with CMC. In 2007, there were 1.24 billion Internet users (Burkeman 2008) and this has had a significant impact, providing opportunities for individuals to construct the reality of their everyday lives online (and off-line) and for these two to interact. The Internet has reconfigured the way in which individuals communicate and connect with each other (Jowett et al. 2011). Not only has the Internet had a far-reaching impact on the nature of social interaction in workplaces and our social lives, it offers new possibilities for research too. As we have already said, research interviews might be conducted through e-mail, online chat, and through telephone/video tools like Skype. Table 4.1 provides a few basic distinctions to consider in reflecting on your choices.

*Table 4.1* Interview mode – basic distinctions

<b>Distinction</b>	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Further reading</b>
Synchronous or asynchronous	If you are working synchronously (in real time) you will be able to probe, check, and clarify more easily. If you are working asynchronously informants may have more time to construct their responses.	Gatson and Zweerink (2004)
Written or spoken	The advantage of written interviews is that there is no need for transcription as it is possible to copy and paste chatroom exchanges or e-mail interviews. However, it is hard for written exchanges of any form to have the richness and engagement that conventional spoken interviews usually establish.	See Meho (2006) and James (2007) for in-depth treatments of e-mail interviewing
Telephone or face-to-face	It can be hard to establish rapport on the telephone and responses are less in-depth (Thomas and Purdon 1994). There is a lack of non-verbal possibilities on the telephone (e.g. Miller 1995). Irvine et al. (2011) found interactional differences (e.g. telephone interviews are shorter; interviewees speak proportionately for less time on the phone; there are proportionately more instances of interviewee requests for the interviewer to clarify questions in telephone interviews).	Holt (2010) Irvine et al. (2011)

## Degrees of structure

Most novice researchers start the methodology section of their dissertation or thesis with an overview of structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviewing. Usually, referring to sources such as Fontana and Frey (2000), they remind us that there are various types of qualitative interview. They then provide a summary that goes something like this:

(a) Structured interview. This type of interview relies on a detailed script that is prepared and usually piloted before the interview. It can resemble a spoken questionnaire. Part of the reason for this piloting and revision process is that the script is usable by more than one researcher.

(b) Semi-structured interview. This type of interview often relies on a guide (rather than a script) and, although there is room for deviation from the guide, it is important to cover most of guide, for comparative purposes.

(c) Unstructured interview. This type of interview relies on a few open-ended questions where interviewees are encouraged to talk at length about what seems significant or prominent for them. In such open-ended interactions, there might be one or two themes that the interviewer wants to focus on but generally follows the lead of the interviewee (Weiss 1994).

About 90% of students then say that, after careful reflection, they have decided to opt for semi-structured interviews. I suppose this is not necessarily surprising. Semi-structured interviews provide a reassuring structure and at the same time there is no pressure to stick to a pre-determined script. Also, there is more chance to develop an 'equilibrium between the interviewer and the interviewee' (Hitchcock and Hughes 1989: 83). In addition, the semi-structured format provides room for negotiation, discussion and expansion of the interviewee's responses. However, while it may not be surprising, there are two main objections to such an unreflexive rush to opt for semi-structured formats. The first is that it may be worth trying more unstructured or open formats before making this decision (at least in a piloting phase). The second is that there is too rarely an account of the challenges and learning points in preparing for, undertaking, and writing up such semi-structured interviews.

Of course, types of interviews are not always divided according to structure. As well as degrees of structure (where we have structured at one end of a continuum and unstructured at the other), we can talk about degrees of formality. When interviews are planned/scheduled and consent forms are signed beforehand, it is of the more formal variety. When it happens on a more ad hoc basis, perhaps as part of ongoing fieldwork, it can be more informal (see Gobo 2008). These more ad hoc interviews might not even be framed as interviews. More informal interviews tend to be controlled to a greater extent by the interviewee (see Agar and Hobbs 1982). It is also possible to divide interviews according to degrees of directiveness, and degrees of conversation. In simple terms though interviews can be grouped as follows:

Structured	Unstructured
Formal	Informal
Directive	Non-directive
Less conversational	Conversational

Structured and more formal interviews will be much more directed by the interviewer and will follow question and answer patterns rather than resemble conversation. A completely structured interview is often regarded as a spoken questionnaire. In fact, neither of the two extremes (structured/unstructured) exist because, at the other end, a completely unstructured interview (i.e. unstructured not only in terms of planning but also execution) would just be a chat. Every interview finds its place somewhere *between* these two extremes and is therefore in some sense semi-structured.

## Degrees of conversation

One of the important questions to ask, in an effort to pin down the generic parameters of the qualitative interview, is can an interview be a conversation?

Unfortunately there is not an easy answer to this question. A commonsense answer would suggest that an interview cannot really ever be a conversation, as the turn-taking and topic-changing patterns look very different in almost all interviews.

### Task

Look at the three extracts below. They all come from the same interview.

1. What stage of the interview do you think that they come from? (One is near the beginning, one is in the middle, and one is at the end).
2. Would you call any of these extracts conversational? In what ways are they like conversation or different from conversation?

#### Extract 4.3a

- 1 K: I think that's one of the most important things  
2 in having a successful co-teaching relationship,  
3 is having both teachers feel valued they feel  
4 that the other person values them and that the  
5 work they are doing is important. So I think  
6 having parity helps to create those feelings.
- 7 I: Is that something that you've experienced as  
8 a teacher yourself, that kind of parity  
9 relationship?
- 10 K: Yeah, it is. One thing that I did actually  
11 last year, because I do a lot of research  
12 on co-teaching, and like I said my own  
13 co-teaching experiences are rather limited  
14 and happened 10 or 15 years ago, so I wanted  
15 to do it again. So last semester I asked one  
16 of my co-teachers, who was teaching a class  
17 on critical pedagogies, so I asked him ...

#### Extract 4.3b

- 1 K: I must have sent invites to the wrong person(.)  
2 I thought I invited you.
- 3 I: Well(.) the funny thing is (.) that when I've  
4 just tried to phone you (.) normally it doesn't  
5 let you just go straight through (.) normally  
6 you have to invite (.) so I can't remember having  
7 a contact request. So anyway (.) we're online  
8 we're cool.
- 9 K: It worked.

- 10 I: What are you doing in the States at the moment?  
11 I came home for the vacation, with the kids,  
12 we're spending some time with Grandpa and Grandma  
13 here.  
14 I: So where's home for Grandpa and Grandma?  
15 K: Minnesota.  
16 I: OK, great. So did you grow up in the States?  
17 K: I did, yes, grew up in the same area,  
18 in Minnesota.

**Extract 4.3c**

- 1 K: So I think that is very problematic, yes, relying  
2 on those six countries, privileging Caucasians  
3 as native speakers.  
4 I: I was talking to a Korean researcher here at  
5 Warwick and I think she had a friend in America  
6 who was Korean Heritage (.) so obviously she  
7 looked Korean (.) I think she had been all  
8 through secondary school in America anyway she  
9 got rejected by the EPIK scheme because they  
10 said, 'Well, you didn't have primary education in  
11 the US' (.) which seems bizarre to me (.) Is your  
12 perception that it's breaking down a little bit  
13 in terms of- (.) it sounds to me like you said  
14 there are various people who get jobs but if  
15 you're black or of colour then you're pushed  
16 out to the countryside.  
17 K: Yeah, I think that is happening. I think there is  
18 a lot of discrimination...

These extracts are from one interview with a teacher trainer and researcher who has been a team-teacher in the past and who is currently researching aspects of team-teaching/co-teaching in Korea. The talk certainly looks different at different points in the interview and the extracts above vary in the degree to which you could say that they look like conversation.

Extract 4.3a is from the middle of the interview and looks the least like conversation. All the attention is directed on the views of the interviewee ('K'). Extract 4.3b is from the beginning of the interview. Typically the beginnings and endings of interviews are sites for more conversation-like exchange. Extract 4.3b certainly looks more like

conversation than the Q and A routines in Extract 4.3a. For example, the turns are shorter, and it is more symmetrical. However, the Q and A routine do start to get established on line 10.

Extract 4.3c is from later in the interview. Once the main questions have been asked, the interviewer is more likely to disclose information and have a wider interactional repertoire than asking simple questions. There is an interviewer question here (starting on line 11) but it is pre-sequenced by the disclosure of a short anecdote, including some 'voicing' (line 10–11) and an opinion on the problematic aspects of recruitment and employment practices in Korea.

Clearly, as the extracts above demonstrate, the talk at different parts of the interview might be more or less conversation like. However, the turn-taking rights and instrumental and goal-orientated nature of the speech event means that it cannot be simply like conversation.

Probably 'conversation-like' is a reasonable interactional goal for most interviewers and, if you are a reasonably good conversationalist in your everyday life, you will probably be fairly natural as a qualitative interviewer. In other words, if you can sustain a conversation that is 'unthreatening, self-controlled, supportive, polite, and cordial' then interviewing should not be a problem for you (Lofland 1976: 90).

Some definitions of a qualitative interview embrace the notion of conversation. For example, Webb and Webb described an interview as 'a conversation with a purpose' (1932 in Burgess 1989: 164) and Kvale calls it 'a professional conversation' (1996: 5). Richards (2003: 50) says an interview is 'a very special kind of conversation' and to be contrasted with 'ordinary conversation'. Richards also make the point that in normal conversation our aim is to participate and to try and find the right thing to say (bringing our own points into the talk). He contrasts that with interviews where we are not trying to put our own point across (we are encouraging the interviewee and 'trying to draw out the richest possible account').

Many definitions avoid the mention of conversation at all (e.g. Clayman and Heritage (2002: 2) who prefer 'interactional encounter'). All that we can say, with regard to definitions, is that conversation is an integral part of some definitions but not all of them. However, achieving more precision about conversational elements in interview interaction would be helpful in developing sensitivity.

It might be helpful at this point to look at classroom interaction as a form of generic comparison. In doing so, we briefly consider to what extent conversation has been seen as either desirable or possible in that environment. Perhaps not surprisingly, similar questions have

been asked with regard to classroom interaction about the status and nature of conversation. Certainly conversation is often at the forefront of descriptions of language learning. However, whether or not conversation, in its everyday sense, can ever be part of a foreign language lesson is a moot point (see Seedhouse 1999; 2004). Seedhouse argues that the kind of talk that occurs in a language classroom is a form of institutional discourse and not 'naturally-occurring' and, as such, does not conform to Warren's (1993: 8) definition of conversation:

A speech event outside of an institutionalized setting involving at least two participants who share responsibility for the progress and outcome of an impromptu and unmarked verbal encounter consisting of more than a ritualized exchange.

Seedhouse's position is that asking language learners to have a conversation does not make it a conversation. Consciously encouraging conversation in a language classroom always comes with an instructional purpose and so resulting talk is still inherently institutional, even though it may look very different from normal asymmetrical 'talk and chalk', with its predominant IRF pattern (Initiation/Response/Follow-up). Richards has questioned Warren's overly restrictive definition of conversation, and therefore Seedhouse's definition of a lesson:

It is, of course, possible to define a lesson solely in terms of the teacher's 'pedagogical purpose' but this would exclude the many unanticipated, incidental and spontaneous interpolations – including those directly flouting the teacher's purpose – that provide educationally valuable diversions and sometimes important learning opportunities. While nobody would wish to deny that teaching is and should be a goal-directed activity, this does not mean that interactional legitimacy is determined solely by pedagogic purpose. (Richards 2006: 57)

It is tempting to follow the same argument for a research interview in that participants do not necessarily have the same priorities in partaking in the interaction. A qualitative interview too is certainly goal-directed but not everything that happens in an interview is determined by research purpose either. Equally usefully, Richards (2006: 57), in making the case that conversation happens in classrooms, refers to Zimmerman's (1998) three aspects of identity:



- Discourse identity, e.g. as speaker, listener, questioner, 'challenger', 'repair initiator' etc. 'integral to the moment-by-moment organization of the interaction' (Zimmerman 1998: 90);
- Situated identity, participants 'engaging in activities and respecting agendas that display an orientation to, and an alignment of, particular identity sets' (Zimmerman 1998: 90) namely teacher and learner in the classroom context
- Transportable identity, or 'identities that are usually visible, that is, assignable or claimable on the basis of physical or culturally based insignia which furnish the intersubjective basis for categorization' (Zimmerman 1998: 91), that is to say making relevant in talk your identity, perhaps, as art lover, mother, or tennis player.

Richards (2006) argues that conversation (with its equal participation rights and openness of topic) is possible in the language classroom when transportable identities are engaged by participants in that context, and that actually interaction of this kind may offer a useful antidote for lock-step I-R-F sequences. As we progress through this book, we will find that actual interview transcripts reveal plenty of instances of conversational-like interaction. So, bringing the focus back to interviews, perhaps a fairer question is 'can an interview include conversation?' We can then say with some confidence that interviews can aim for and adopt a conversation-like interactional style and, even if they do not, most semi-structured interviews will include conversational elements or exchanges.

Going back to Warren's definition of conversation for a moment, it would be hard to claim that interviews are 'naturally occurring'. Indeed there have been several important arguments that interview talk is not naturally occurring and is contrived (see Speer 2002). In Chapter 2 also we outlined Potter's 'dead scientist test' which problematises the 'natural' status of the interview and also contrasts interview data with data which is naturally occurring. Potter's argument is that we would be much better off finding data in the field (where people are pursuing goals, living their lives, or managing work-based tasks) at least as a starting point, as this kind of naturally occurring data does not 'flood the research setting' (2002: 550) with the researcher's own categories (embedded in questions, probes, vignettes etc.). In short, Potter's challenge is that the 'justificatory boot might be better placed on the other foot' with the question being 'not why should we study natural materials, but why should we not?'

Our challenge, in collecting interview data, is to try to be more precise about the interaction. Are there any elements which resemble conversation or are more-conversation-like? How do the participants orient to some of the less than natural and contrived elements of research interviews? How are participation rights managed? How are different aspects of identity brought into play? These kinds of questions are important as we examine our methodological choices and the interactional nature and orientations of different varieties of interview.

### **Interview variety**

The next section of the chapter introduces and summarises the most common forms of research interview. Although there is not enough space here to go into a detailed account of the strengths and limitations of each type of interview, Table 4.2 is at least an introduction to the range of possible choices. Interviews have evolved in all sorts of ways to meet different needs and it's valuable to have a sense of just how much variety there is in terms of approach, type, etc. It is offered here as a starting point for further reading and reflection:

There are also possible additions to this list but many of these possible additions are actually conceptualised around either a topic or a technique. For example 'language experience interviews' (Polat 2013: 70) provide insights into language experiences and the situated, dynamic nature of learner differences (see also Dewaele 2009; Dörnyei and Ushioda 2009) but 'language experience' is treated as topic rather than an interview type. Similarly photo-elicitation interviews (PEIs) are best treated as a technique which can be adapted to a range of different interview types.

### **Critical voices**

In adopting any of the choices in Table 4.2, it is important to be aware of critical voices. Needless to say, there are plenty of these to be taken into consideration. For example in reference to life history interviews, Hobsbawm (1997) has pointed out that these types of interview rely heavily on memory, which can be flawed and prone to exaggeration. Another major problem are assumptions that narrative accounts produced in life history interviews can give access to social reality:

Historians who claim that accounts of lived experience give access to social reality, falsely separate discourse and experience: experience cannot exist outside discourse, agency cannot exist independently of language. (Summerfield 2004: 67)

Table 4.2 Interview variety

Common types of interview	Key features
Cognitive interviewing	Cognitive interviewing has the goal of eliciting data on how interviewees respond to and interpret specific stimuli or situations and has been used to pre-test questionnaire design (Beatty and Willis 2007). However they are also used in education to gauge cognitive processes, including reaction to particular materials, and in ICT to evaluate participant use of particular technologies (e.g. Snow and Katz 2009). Paraphrasing, verbal probing, and think-aloud techniques are the main techniques in cognitive interviewing.
Convergent interviewing	Convergent interviewing has features of both structured and unstructured interviewing. It aims to collect, analyse, and interpret participants' experiences, attitudes, viewpoints, knowledge, and beliefs that converge over a set of interviews. It is most often used in under-researched areas or where there is some doubt about an issue. Early interviews try to get long and detailed responses to one main question with subsequent questions clarifying features of these. Subsequent interviews try to probe features of the converging themes (see Dick 2007).
Conversational interviewing	Conversational interviewing is an approach to interviewing that puts the priority on social aspects of talk and tries to avoid a formal question and answer approach. It consciously adopts an informal and conversational way of conducting interviews and, as much as possible, strives to maintain a relaxed and extended discussion. It puts emphasis on informality, reciprocity, interviewer disclosure, and more equal roles in terms of turn taking. This kind of interviewing responds to some of the criticisms of standardisation (in that interviewers can be prevented from resolving misunderstandings). Conversation is suited to revealing that the same question may be interpreted differently by different respondents (Suchman and Jordan 1997).
E-mail interviewing	Despite some disadvantages, the e-mail interview allows the interviewee more time to control both when they want to respond as well as the quantity of the response. In particular, the asynchronous e-mail interview can provide more thinking time for the respondent (not having to reply on the spot). E-mail interviewing can be a viable alternative to face-to-face, telephone and CMC interviewing (e.g. Skype) and Meho (2006) provides an overview of this emerging interview methodology. E-mail interviews can offer opportunities to reach greater numbers of potential research participants (especially where they are at a geographical distance). It is inexpensive and the resulting data does not need to be transcribed.

*(continued)*

Table 4.2 (Continued)

Ethnographic interviewing	Ethnographic interviews often take place alongside fieldwork and there is usually a commitment to observe and interview in the natural setting (Heyl 2005). As the emphasis is on observing and experiencing a way of life, the interview process is likely to involve reference to documents, practices, and artefacts within that setting. Davies (2008: 105) sees ethnographic interviews as 'often virtually unstructured, that is, very close to a "naturally occurring" conversation'. However, many ethnographers have in mind topics they wish to explore and questions they would like to ask. Linguistic ethnography is also focused on gaining an emic perspective and participants are invited to give opinions and recount experiences in interviews which provide 'alternative perspectives' to field notes and recordings of naturally occurring interactions (see Copland and Creese 2015: 29–37).
Feminist interviewing	Rather than the interviewer directing a question and answer process, the interviewer is encouraged to recount her experiences in her own words. The interviewer supports and allows space for this account. Oakley's (1981) classic article argues for breaking down the hierarchical power relationship between the interviewer and the researched. Key features of feminist interviews include the establishment of intimacy, rapport, and openness. This openness is at least partly achieved through the interviewer's self-disclosure (Devault and Gross 2007). Feminist interviews have a strong tradition of reflexivity; focusing on the interviewer's thoughts and behaviour (e.g. Harding 1991).
Free association narrative interviewing	Free association narrative interviews are guided by psychoanalytic principles. Free association interviews elicit narratives through open questions; the main aim is to get the interviewer to recall and detail specific events. Part of the focus is often on the emotional dimensions of these events. Hollway and Jefferson argue that this style of interviewing is especially valuable in picking up detail in the intersubjective context of the interview. This is partly because this form of interviewing values the interviewees' own formulations and expressions and 'unconscious connections will be revealed through the links that people make if they are free to structure their own narratives' (2008: 314).
In-depth interviewing	In-depth interviews aim to elicit a full picture of the participant's perspective on the research focus. The role of the interviewer is to engage with participants by asking questions in a neutral manner. It is important to listen closely to the interviewees' responses, in order to formulate appropriate, probes, clarifications, and follow-up questions (see Johnson and Rowlands 2012). It is often claimed that interviews find the experience of the in-depth interview cathartic and even therapeutic, as it is unusual to have the opportunity in ordinary life to experience such a sustained focus and understanding (see Legard et al. 2003).

### Informal interviewing

These are interviews which are not planned and often go hand-in-hand with participant observation or fieldwork. They are often undertaken 'on the fly' and often feel like a conversation. Without the feel of a more formal interview, informants may be more open and forthcoming (Kemp and Ellen 1984). Informal interviews also play an important role in building trust and rapport and can be used before more structured interviews. The interviewer talks with people in the field informally, without use of a structured interview guide of any kind. The interviewer does not usually record interviews but tries to recall details of his or her exchanges with informants.

### In-person interviewing

The term 'in-person interviews' or 'face-to-face interviews' are contrasted with telephone, e-mail or Skype interviews. The key criteria is that the interviewer and interviewees share the same physical location. The term 'in-person' is usually used in contrast with telephone surveys but they are often used in combination with larger surveys (see Shuy 2002). They are often used in advertising or market research to get feedback on products. For example a respondent might be shown copy of a flyer or advert and be asked questions about their reaction to it.

### Interactive interviewing

Interactive interviews aim at getting in-depth and detailed understanding of people's experiences, including those of the researcher (e.g. Ellis 1998). These interviews create space for the articulation of emotions, insights, beliefs and attitudes. They are unstructured and usually involve 'reciprocity', where the interviewer also shares their experiences (see Corbin and Morse 2003). The conversation itself, as speech event, is also a focus of analysis, where the co-construction of meaning can be investigated. The researcher often has experience of the topic at hand and turn-taking is fluid and lacks a hierarchical nature (see Warren 2012).

### Life-story interviewing

These interviews are focused on documenting the respondent's life and understanding how personal narratives reveal how a life is constructed (Atkinson 2012). They have been widely used in social history, anthropology, sociology, and psychology. Life-story interviews established a prominent position in the sociological research associated with the Chicago school in the early 1920s. They have also had an important role in feminist research (Devault 1990). Life-history interviews are very similar, although some practitioners argue strongly for a key difference. Goodson for example argues that 'the distinction between the life story and the life history is therefore absolutely basic. The life story is the 'story we tell about our life' ... The life history is the life story located within its historical context (1992: 6). In either case, interviews are usually time-consuming and can stretch over several all-day interviews. They elicit descriptions of everyday life, motives, and practices, and their relationship with the social historical contexts in which they occur. Life-history narratives are seen as socially constructed (e.g. Goodson and Choi 2008).

(continued)

Table 4.2 (Continued)

Narrative interviewing	The narrative interview has been widely used to encourage informants to tell a story about some significant event in their life (see Schütze 1992). The interview is designed to both encourage and stimulate the informant and the interviewer's role is to facilitate the reconstruction of social events from the perspective of informants in as much detail as possible (see Riessman 2004). The narrative interview puts emphasis on creating a setting which encourages the generation of detailed 'stories' of experience. These stories should be significant events in the informants' life. Narrative interviewing also often puts emphasis on researchers' own stories and experiences and so reflexivity is important. Researchers are advised to consider their experiences before, during, and after each interview.
Oral history interviewing	Oral history interviews elicit biographical accounts of people's lives. In many ways they are similar to a life-history interview but may only cover one period of the interviewer's life. Oral histories typically aim to record and preserve memories of an older generation. See Perks and Thompson (2006) for further detail.
Semi-structured interviewing	This form of data collection involves the researcher having a series of predetermined but usually open-ended questions, usually written up as an interview guide. The topic or topics that the interviewer wants to explore should be reflected on before the interview, in order to form the interview guide. This provides some format but does not constrain the interview interaction (see Wengraf 2001). The greater freedom (cf structured interviews) allows for probing and clarification. The researcher also has more control of the sequence of questions than in unstructured interviews.
Structured interviewing	Structured interviews involve asking all participants standardised interview questions. Here, it is usually important to ask the same questions in the same order. Interviewees should not show reaction or provide responses to interviewee contributions (although in practice, of course, they often do; see Drew et al. 2006). Often associated with large-scale quantitative research projects with several interviewees, there is an emphasis on keeping to the protocol and reducing 'researcher bias'. Usually used where researchers need to make comparisons between responses from different interviewees (see Arthur and Nazroo 2003).

- Telephone interviewing  
Telephone interviews are often described as a less attractive alternative to in-person interviewing. They were initially associated with large-scale quantitative surveys but there is evidence that qualitative interviewees are now using them more (Carr and Worth 2001). It is also possible to have relatively unstructured interviews over the phone but the general agreement is that interviewees tend to be more reticent and less detailed and that it can be difficult to build trust and rapport. The main problems are felt to be the lack of visual cues and body language. On the other hand, telephone interviews usually offer more anonymity to interviewees (see Musselwhite et al. 2007).
- Unstructured interviewing  
Unstructured interviews are not determined by a pre-existing protocol, although there may be a checklist of topics. As there is no set order of questions, they tend to be open-ended and conversational in style and are designed to get a detailed picture of the topic of interest. Instead of aiming for reliability and comparison across different cases, unstructured interviews prioritise validity arising from the detail and depth of the interviewees' responses. These interviews can be effective in eliciting beliefs, practices, and rationale for decision making and can uncover insider perspectives that might not have been revealed using other data-collection methods (Corbin and Morse 2003).
- Virtual interviewing  
A virtual interview refers to any form of interview that uses an ICT medium. Another associated term is CMC (computer mediated communication). Virtual interviews take place through Internet-based communication tools such as Google Hangouts, e-mail, and chat (i.e. instant messaging – see Hinchcliffe and Gavin 2009). Synchronous technologies such as these can gather qualitative data. As many people routinely conduct their communication anyway through such media, virtual interviewing is often both convenient (for both parties) and helpful in getting perspective on ideas, beliefs and experiences (especially regarding ICT use). Also it enables the researcher to interview large or geographically dispersed samples (see Crichton and Kinash 2003).
-

The anthropologist Weiner (1999) is particularly critical of life-histories, seeing them as a poor substitute for the richness of social life. Life history interviewing forces interviewees into 'artificial subject positions which are then taken as the positions they occupy in real life' (1999: 77). Whatever form of interview you choose, it is important to follow up and reflect on critical voices as well as more evangelical ones.

One of the perspectives that is always worth reflecting on is whether the cultural constructs inherent in your interview style are problematic. For example anthropologists such as Weiner (1999) have expressed the concern that, in terms of engagement with interviewees, forcing a Western form of narrative upon people who may not view their lives in these terms is potentially misleading. Indeed, different cultural contexts place varying values on the interest and value of biographical information itself.

### **Longitudinal studies and multiple interviews**

The next two sections concentrate on time and place. Most peoples' image of a qualitative interview is a one-off, one-to-one, in-person speech event. However it can be very useful to interview an informant more than once. Such multiple interviews are often part of longitudinal studies. Shirani and Weller's publication 'Conducting qualitative longitudinal research: Fieldwork experiences' is a useful starting point if you are using interviews within a longitudinal study. This reports on a four year ESRC project (*Timescapes*). It includes several longitudinal projects that employ a range of methods to explore subjective understandings of life course processes (<http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk/>). The research is particularly focused on 'the intersection between different dimensions of time and the ways in which temporality shapes and is shaped by the changing relationships and identities of different individuals and collectives' (2010: 4). The longitudinal research investigates 'how individuals perceive past, present and future, and the relationship between their biographies and wider historical processes' (ibid.). One of the useful features of this project is that it makes its material available for use and analysis by other researchers. They also exemplify a range of methodological issues, including ethical challenges in this kind of qualitative longitudinal life (QLL) research.

Ruspini (2002) provides an introductory overview of key issues in researching longitudinally. Grinyer and Thomas (2012) also provide a guide to interviewing on multiple occasions, usually within longitudinal studies. They cite Earthy and Cronin (2008: 431) in listing the following advantages of interviewing a research participant on more than one occasion:



- It may assist the development of trust and rapport between the researcher and interviewee.
- It may be less exhausting for both parties, particularly in comparison with a single attempt to capture a person's life story.
- For interviewees who are unwell or who find aspects of the conversation distressing, the possibility of ending the interview knowing that the conversation can continue on another day may be particularly valuable.
- The gap between interviews provides an opportunity for both the interviewee and researcher to reflect.
- Aspects discussed in one interview can be clarified and explored in greater depth in a subsequent conversation.

Repeat interviews are possible even if the research time-frame is relatively short and Vincent (2013) provides an insightful account of the value of such repeat interviews.

### **Walking interviews**

Investigating the connection between place and people has meant increased use of mobile methods, such as 'walking interviews' (see Wiles et al. 2009). Although ethnographic traditions of interviewing have always prized shadowing and walking with an informant in their social setting, there has also been a recent sustained focus on 'mobile interviewing' (see Sheller and Urry 2006). Ingold and Lee (2008) provide a readable introduction to different 'ways of walking' and include contributions from sociologists, ethnographers, geographers, and specialists in education and architecture. *'Timescapes'* mentioned above (see Shirani and Weller 2010) prioritises 'walking alongside' project participants, capturing their lives as they unfold. The overall purpose is building a picture of life in 21st-century Britain by gathering, archiving, and analysing interviews from over 400 people living in a variety of circumstances across the UK. Generally this 'walk alongside' methodology seems to help with trust and rapport as this reported comment from one participant suggests:

'L' says that she thinks we are privileged and she admires our approach and commitment to walking alongside people for a while and listening to them through thick and thin. We are not being extractive and simply pulling out their knowledge and leaving. This is a heartening comment on the value of longitudinal research and sustained relationships. Margaret speaks at length about how much

she and Geoff do trust me and how much they enjoy speaking and having me listen to them. (Shirani and Weller 2010: 18)

In health provision studies too (e.g. Carpiano 2009) there has been increasing use of 'go-alongs' to explore the dynamics of health in social context. This method typically combines interviewing with participant observation (observing behaviours and routines and asking questions on the way). The go-along is essentially a hybrid of interviewing and participant observation, with the researcher accompanying informants as they go about their daily routines and asking them questions along the way (Kusenbach 2003). Walking interviews can be combined with GPS tracking to provide more accuracy and this technique has been used in studies of mobility in aging populations (e.g. Mitchell and Burton 2006) and in studies of urban planning (e.g. Proppen 2006). Jones et al. (2008) provide interesting data related to perceptions of public places (mostly in Birmingham, UK) where matching a GPS record to a location can also give insights into what prompts interviewees to make particular comments in particular places. Pink (2007) provides a methodological commentary on videoing while walking.

## **Interview tools**

This next section provides an overview of a number of different tools that can be used in qualitative interviews. Again, this is meant to be introductory in nature and the suggested reading will provide more detail from these various points of departure.

*Photographs* – Photo-elicitation interviews (PEIs) have been used in ethnographic, social studies, and health-care research (Collier 1987; Hazel 1996; Oliffe and Bottorff 2007). Hurworth (2004) is a good starting point for considering the value of photos in eliciting interviewer viewpoints. Photographs are especially important in work with children (e.g. Einarsdóttir 2007) where they can be profitably used as an 'ice-breaker': helping to open up space for discussion; mitigating the differences in power and status between adult interviewers and young interviewees. Clark-Ibáñez (2004) discusses the PEI detailing possible benefits and potential challenges. This article is useful because it shows how researchers introduce photographs into the interview context in various ways. The main distinction to make is between photos that originate with the researcher and those that are brought along by the interviewee (see also Frith and Harcourt 2007). Sometimes social scientists work collaboratively with photographers. David Stark works

collaboratively with Nancy Warner (a professional photographer), using photographs in combination with interviews to elicit viewpoints in his book *This Place, These People: Life and Shadow on the Great Plains* (Stark 2013).

*Diagrams and illustrations* – Diagrams and illustrations can also be used to elicit data from the interviewee(s). These can also be useful with interviewing children to reduce any tension between the interviewer and children. This might involve existing drawings and illustrations or perhaps pictures that children have produced from a drawing task or prompt (e.g. Wall and Higgins 2006). Starting points for consideration of graphic elicitation are Crilly et al. (2006) and Bagnoli (2009).

*Video* – Video can be used in research interviews as a tool to help recall experience or as prompt. Particularly in stimulated recall interviews, video plays an important role in providing reference to the detail of a recorded event (Nguyen et al. 2013). This method is widely used in social science research to help recall the way participants experience a specific interactional event (e.g. Dempsey 2010; Haw and Hadfield 2011). In medical settings too video has been used successfully to elicit viewpoints on physician-patient interactions (e.g. Henry and Fetters 2012; Asan and Montague 2014). One of the important features of video is that it can help get beyond assumptions and reveal tacit knowledge and understandings. Iedema (2014: 1) sees the use of video as especially useful in allowing practitioners to question ingrained routines, and, referring to Dewey, argues that video can bring into focus ‘the human tendency to confront the world through habit rather than reason or emotion’. This kind of habit needs ‘unsettling, and video does this admirably well’.

*Repertory grid* – This is also referred to as a ‘*Rep-grid*’ and has been used in a wide range of educational and workplace settings. Originally proposed by Kelly in the 1950s as a methodological component of his ‘Personal Construct Theory’, it can be used as tool for seeing how the interviewee construes and interprets his or her experience of a chosen focus (topic). The grid usually has four parts and once completed, looks like a matrix/table with rows, columns and ‘boxes’ for ratings. This includes the topic, elements (instances, examples or pieces of data related to the topic), constructs (terms interviewee uses to make sense of the elements), and a set of ratings of Elements on Constructs. Ceren’s vignette on p. 110 provides an example of reflexive commentary on the use of a repertory grid.

*Vignettes* – This book makes extensive use of vignettes. Hazel (1996: 2) calls vignettes ‘concrete examples of people and their behaviours on

which participants can offer comment or opinion' and I see such concrete examples of context, interaction and comment as important in understanding reflexivity in qualitative interviews. However, vignettes can also be used as prompts or tasks for qualitative interviewing, often featuring a short scenario or story (e.g. Spalding and Phillips 2007; Jenkins et al. 2010). However responses to such vignettes are not necessarily straightforward in analytic terms. O'Dell et al. (2012) show how a vignette of Mary (a fictitious young carer) produces overlapping responses and identity positions in an interview, as in Extract 4.4 (2012: 709).

#### **Extract 4.4**

- 1 I: How do you think Mary's dad might feel about  
 2 the situation?  
 3 M I think Mary's dad may feel a little guilty because  
 4 at one point he loves his daughter but at the  
 5 next point he may feel that he is taking her away  
 6 from being a normal child. Or he could be like my mother  
 7 and be totally consumed in the fact that he's disabled.  
 8 Cos I'm there for my mother, I love her, but at the  
 9 same time the second my mum became disabled something  
 10 just flipped in her head and she changed.

In this extract we can see that Mary's initial positioning is with one of characters (lines 3–6). However her identification with the father in the story gives way to an expression of her own experiences with her own mother (lines 6–10). The dialogue 'illustrates how shifts between identifications with the character and the self are also evidenced in multiple constructions of reality that can run simultaneously' (O'Dell et al. 2012: 709). The use of such vignettes is not without its analytic challenges (see also MacIntyre et al. 2011).

*Use of texts or transcripts* – Using texts and documents in interviews can help focus on specific details and elements (e.g. 'You told me this teacher's guide was useful. Can you tell me which parts were useful to you and why?'). In terms of transcripts, Mann (2002) uses follow-up interviews in a longitudinal study where transcripts from a previous open-ended interview played a key role in the follow-up semi-structured interview. This study interviewed six participants in June 1999 and undertook a second interview in March 2001. In the follow-up interview, transcribed extracts from naturally occurring data and transcripts from their original interview comments (from Interview 1) were used.

The follow-up allowed some critical distance to have developed from the original interview and encouraged an overall retrospective view of aspects of development. It also provided an opportunity to comment on particular critical incidents and checked if the original perspectives from the 1999 interviews still obtained. This process is explained in more detail in Mann (2002: 94–99).

## Summary

This chapter has provided a brief introduction to the many types of interviews and tools that are used in qualitative research. If you are a novice researcher, it is worth undertaking a period of reading and reflection on what you are hoping to find out and the type of interview that is likely to most appropriately achieve your purpose before making your methodological choices. Apart from the many references in this chapter, the following journals regularly have contributions that focus on methodological issues of various types of qualitative interview:

- *British Educational Research Journal*
- *Forum Qualitative Social Research* (open access online journal)
- *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*
- *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*
- *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*
- *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*
- *Qualitative Health Research*
- *Qualitative Inquiry*
- *Qualitative Research*
- *Qualitative Research in Psychology*
- *Qualitative Research Journal*
- *The Qualitative Report*

## Suggested further reading

- Atkinson, R. (2012). The life story interview as a mutually equitable relationship. In Gubrium, J. F. et al. (Eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*. (pp. 115–129). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Grinyer, A. and Thomas, C. (2012). The value of interviewing on multiple occasions or longitudinally. In Gubrium, J. F. et al. (Eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*. (219–231). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Roulston, K. (2010). *The Reflective Researcher: Learning to Interview in the Social Sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (Chapter 4 covers various features of interview design).

UK DataService has a useful overview of most interview types (including an example transcripts) <http://ukdataservice.ac.uk/teaching-resources/interview/qualitative.aspx>.

## Ceren Oztabay's Vignette

### Context of extract

Extract 4.5 below comes from a repertory-grid interview I conducted in the autumn of 2013 for my PhD research study about student-teachers' perceptions of research and learning to do research (*research education*). These student-teachers were taking a BA in English Language Teaching studies in North Cyprus. In my rep-grid interviews, I elicited elements from my participants by utilising the following topic/focus: 'the research activities that I have done/am doing as part of my BA studies'. Extract 4.5 below comes from an interview with Lara, a 23-year-old, female, Turkish-speaking student-teacher studying BA in ELT. At the time of the following interaction, we were talking about an essay-writing experience which Lara had identified and presented as 'research-inclusive'. The essay topic was Turkey's historical Village Institutions of the 1920s which were well known and celebrated for their 'creative' and 'democratic' approach towards teaching and education. In terms of background then, the following interview extract captures Lara articulating her essay-writing experience about these Turkish Village Institutions. As can be seen, Lara was very enthusiastic about the subject and wanted to dwell on it a bit more once she 'introduced' me to her experience. Even though I appreciated her keenness, I was extremely worried about time. My focus was primarily on completing the grid, without straying too far away from our focus (research).

Extract 4.5 and its commentary will hopefully shed light on two important tensions related to utilising a structured interview tool that requires a particular form. The first is my resistance (as the interviewer) to allow for what appeared to me, at the time, as a needless and irrelevant deviation from our focus (*research*). The second is the unexpected yet welcome consequence (in terms of the goals of the rep-grid method). Changing my mind, in the moment, allowed the deviation to unfold. To further explain my 'resistance', I was very aware that my previous rep-grid interviews which, even with slight deviations from the focus, lasted well over 90 minutes. They were mentally exhausting for both my participants and myself because we simply had to finish the grid. Therefore, at this moment, I was regretting the fact that I had willingly allowed a drift away from the topic. However, as Extract 4.5 will indicate, the 'unwanted' deviation turned into an opportunity for me to formulate a 'new construct' together with Lara.

**Extract 4.5**

- 1 L: In my second year, hmm ((trying to remind herself  
2 of the 'research activities')), what did we do?  
3 (1.0)  
4 Aha yes! For example in the [X] module, tutor [X]  
5 asked from us - the village institutions, do you  
6 know about them?  
7 C: Hmm, not quite.  
8 L: Shall I tell you about them a bit? I mean, can I?  
9 C: Sure, let's go over it briefly though, shall we?  
10 L: Yeah.  
11 L: So these schools were opened in the 20s and shut  
12 down in the 40s. They were founded as boarding  
13 schools for those children who did not have  
14 access to education in their villages. They were  
15 such lovely schools, you know! This is what we  
16 were assigned to research.  
17 C: Mm-HMM.  
18 L: The reason is that everyone was engaging in  
19 experiential learning (.) for example imagine  
20 that it was the music hour. The teacher would not  
21 just go and write on the board the musical  
22 notes. They would hand the pupils with whatever  
23 instrument they wished to play - a violin or  
24 saxophone or whatever - and they would,  
25 interacting with one another and getting help  
26 from the teacher - I mean this is something that  
27 does not exist now in Turkey! Maybe in 2050s or  
28 something. And there was a practice called 'the  
29 reading hour' and it was like, say, in Friday  
30 afternoons everyone would get together, sit  
31 together outdoors and read books or whatever.  
32 Like a day of hobbies, everyone did whatever they  
33 wanted to. It was called the reading hour for  
34 some reason. So this is what we researched and I  
35 liked it so much because I have heard about these  
36 schools before because my grandfather went to one  
37 but I did not know about the details. So I  
38 out of 5 actually  
39 (both laugh)  
40 C: So you liked the style of teaching, the ideas-

- 41 L: Ideas yes, everyone being equal, teachers'  
42 attitude, that intimacy and closeness - I loved  
43 it. And it makes me so sad that they were shut in  
44 the 40s for political reasons. To me it's the  
45 worst mistake ever made in the history of our  
46 education!
- 47 C: Oh, okay. You used the word 'sad'. It sounds  
48 as if you personally related to this topic
- 49 L: (laughs) Yes! Exactly that!

My two turns early in this extract (lines 7 and 9) reveal my lack of enthusiasm for this potential detour. The next turn in line 17 (having heard of the word 'research' from Lara) is a loud 'Mm-hmm'. I think this was aimed at intervening and directing the talk back towards the essay itself as a research activity. However, Lara continued until line 38. The first part of this extended turn is a passionate, detailed and uninterrupted explanation of how 'experiential learning' and then there are details of how the particular practice of the 'reading hour' was implemented in these Village Institutions.

In line 40, seizing the opportunity of Lara having started to share her experiences of the research aspect of reading and writing about the Village Institutions, I interrupted. This was undoubtedly because I was feeling an even stronger urge to resist any further deviation and get the interview back on track. My intention was to sum the topic up in a sentence and perhaps follow-up with a possible 'why' or 'what about' question. However, it was Lara who this time seized back the turn, eagerly building on my use of 'ideas'.

As it turned out, this was a crucial moment in my interview with Lara in terms of 'generating new constructs' and this is an essential aim of the rep-grid technique. Because of my impatience and sense of losing control at the time, I let myself think out loud and passed what then sounded to me as a 'judgement' or a forced 'conclusion' of Lara's foregoing self-expression (line 47). I picked out the word 'sad' and concluded hastily that she had related to the research topic at a personal level. In the corner of mind, I knew that I should have changed the subject in a less leading manner (i.e. frame a follow-up question such as 'You used the word "sad", can you explain that a little?'). However, the end of the extract (line 49) shows that to my surprise, Lara took my comment well, approved it, adopted it, and later, wanted to put 'my phrase' of *personal relation to experience* versus *no personal relation established* as a construct pair by which all other elements should be evaluated.



No other construct pair in Lara's final rep-grid was as strongly influenced by *my* words in terms of labelling as this one.

On reflection, I felt that I had done something 'wrong' as a repertory-grid interviewer because of my previous readings which framed *supplying* constructs (like I did) as undesirable. Soon after, however, I came to the realisation that it is perhaps inevitable that in this kind of construct work, a few of the labels arise out of the co-construction. It did not set out provide the constructs but, in this case it arose out of the interview interaction. I additionally alleviated my initial 'guilt' by thinking that Lara would have perhaps rejected – or at least modified – my conclusive phrase had she felt that it was not representative of her opinion; but instead, she owned it as hers. Additionally, I realised that despite the time pressures, in Lara's case at least, it proved useful to give up some control as the interviewer and allow the interaction to unfold more naturally. I thought that, in my future rep-grid interviews, letting go off my resistance to detour might again prove itself very handy in a moment when my participant was 'stuck for words' to formulate a new construct.

Indeed, having developed this awareness, I later more intentionally 'offered' a potential construct (but in a way that I felt was congruent with my current understanding of the interviewee). Most times my participants did take up my attempt to provide a construct. Instead, they used them in a dialogic way to generate a 'better' or more representative construct version. Moments like these helped develop a more nuanced sense of what was allowable in terms of the use and timing of my potential 'word/phrase offerings' during the interviews. As a researcher, I believe that improving such self-screening skills is essential as a means to bring me closer to my target of achieving discretion in the use such 'offers' in my future interviews.

At heart, repertory-grid interviews support a constructivist view of meaning-making between the two parties involved. I believe that this extract may somewhat be a good example of Lara and me, the interviewee and the interviewer, co-constructing an interesting piece of meaning bounded by a particular place, time, and interaction.

# 5

## Managing Interview Interaction

### Introduction

Chapters 5 and 6 form a pair. Chapter 5 provides a practical guide to managing the interview while Chapter 6 provides a deeper reflexive treatment of important areas of sensitivity. This chapter concentrates on an introduction to the nuts and bolts of interviewing; the importance of recording the interview, listening, eliciting information through questions, using probes, and developing and maintaining rapport. While it is possible to consider interviewing from each of these perspectives (on one-at-a-time basis), it is also important to remember that all these elements have a reflexive relationship. For example, Spradley, talking about eliciting information and rapport says:

Ethnographic interviewing involves two distinct, but complementary processes developing rapport and eliciting information. Rapport encourages informants to talk about their culture. Eliciting information fosters the development of rapport. (1979: 78)

This chapter helps the reader examine the interrelationship of these various elements: the mechanics of eliciting information (asking questions, probing etc.) and the interpersonal dynamics. In very simple terms, it considers how to get the most out of the interview and the interviewee, while maintaining rapport and keeping the interviewee feeling comfortable.

Understanding the relationship between rapport and eliciting information is helped by a better understanding of interaction and genre. Chapter 4 provided some groundwork in detailing different genres of qualitative research interview and this chapter furthers our

understanding of how interviewer priorities, adoption of generic elements like 'conversation', or, for example, an imperative to encourage 'narratives' shape the nature of the interaction. How we manage the interview depends on our generic expectations and what we think is 'going on'. Whatever choices we make, it is important to think about what we think is happening in the interview interaction. As Scheurich in his postmodern critique of the interview suggests:

Consequently, whether we call the interview interaction 'interviewing,' 'conversation,' 'storytelling,' or simply 'an interaction' is of much less importance than what we think occurs in this interaction. (1995: 73)

This chapter has the overall aim of encouraging sensitivity to and reflection on what occurs in interview interaction. It encourages you to pilot your interviews, think about your procedures, consider the possibility of producing an interview guide, and think about the interactional choices you have in your repertoire.

## **Fundamentals of managing interview interaction**

### **Recording**

Recording the interview properly is absolutely essential. Most researchers are not able to recall the important detail of an interview after the event without a recording. It also ensures that the research process is transparent. It is a good idea to use two recording devices for face-to-face or telephone interviews. I usually use a digital recorder (I currently have a Sony IC Recorder which has a USB port). As a back-up I use my mobile phone. As well as checking battery levels before the interview, I make sure there is available memory on both devices. Recording synchronous CMC spoken interactions (e.g. Skype) is more complicated, especially if you want to capture the video as well as the audio. Here I use the mobile phone as a back-up with the computer speakers turned up and the device near the computer speakers. In terms of the primary recording, things have changed very fast in the last few years. I have experimented with various 'free' recorders but the free version usually lasts for 14 days or a month (e.g. Pamela). Others have a restriction on the free version (usually 10 to 15 minutes) which is not at all practical for recording qualitative interviews. Initially I had used Vodburner to record my Skype videos but in 2014 Microsoft/Skype withdrew support for SkypeKit, the technology used to provide Vodburner for Mac.

I then used Jing for a while but quickly ran out of space on their free-service (provided by TechSmith) – and so I switched to Camtasia for Mac which is not free but is easy to use and very reliable. Appendix 1 (p. 282) lists a few other reliable options, including Google Hangouts and UberConference. The following site also has an up-to-date comprehensive list of your online recording options:

<http://www.answers.com/topic/comparison-of-skype-recorders>

Janghorban et al. (2014) and Weller (2015) are good starting points for evaluating the relative merits of audio and video recording. It is important to remember that, in terms of the camera impacting on the interaction, that Skype/F2F issues are different because in the latter the camera has a physical presence while in the latter it's hidden (embedded within the technology of engagement).

### **The importance of listening**

Listening is the most important aspect of an interview (even more important than recording). Getting listening right is absolutely fundamental and all other considerations and pieces of advice are contingent on this. If you have not interviewed someone before, do not underestimate the importance of maintaining focus. I was talking to an experienced interviewer and he told me about the following incident in Extract 5.1.

#### **Extract 5.1**

1 R: Another thing that did happen it was last  
 2 year actually (.) I was in the middle of an interview  
 3 and it wasn't that I got carried away with the  
 4 interview (.) I started thinking about something  
 5 else in a long answer and I just drifted off (.)  
 6 and the interviewee kind of said hu hhaa haaa  
 7 'Are you listening to this?' (.) he didn't say  
 8 it in those terms but I realised my eyes had  
 9 drifted off (.) my attention had drifted off (.)  
 10 I was very upfront and said 'Look, I'm sorry  
 11 I completely screwed up' ...

This kind of admission is rare and so is an interviewee being honest enough to just check whether the interviewer is still on board. The point is that interviewees will notice even momentary lapses in concentration and there are various indications of this:

Where someone is perceived as directing their attention may depend, not just on the direction of eye gaze, but on the orientation of their head, the posture of the body and perhaps where they are pointing their finger. It has been suggested that these cues are all processed automatically by observers and all make contributions to decisions about another individual's social attention. (Langton et al. 2000: 55)

In short, they will know whether you are really listening to them. They won't always make this explicit (as in the example above) but it will certainly affect the subsequent depth and detail of their turns. It is not easy to maintain focus and keep listening – but this is your first priority.

As we saw in the last chapter, interviewing is very different from conversation, even if we are adopting a conversation-like style of interviewing. We are simply not used to the intensity of listening and we are too used to looking for possible points to share our own views. In Extract 5.2, Susan Eliot is interviewing Richard Krueger about qualitative listening in focus group interviews (the full transcript is available at [qualitative-researcher.com](http://qualitative-researcher.com)) and he says the following:

**Extract 5.2**

1 K: This is one of the major challenges of people  
2 starting to do qualitative research. They  
3 underestimate the time, the discipline, the amount  
4 of effort and the skills needed to be a good  
5 listener. I know of nothing else in life, well  
6 except spouses listening carefully to each other  
7 or children listening to their parents, which  
8 requires the same level of listening acuity.  
9 But many times in qualitative interviews, as in  
10 relationships we become casual listeners, tuning in,  
11 tuning out and not paying a lot of attention  
12 because we're waiting to speak our views  
13 on the topic...

Preparation will help. This is mostly because you will be more relaxed and able to focus on listening if you know your recorder is working and you checked the batteries beforehand. If you have a well-prepared, well-sequenced, and rehearsed list of possible initial questions and follow-up questions, it will also help you to maintain focus and listen. If you have thought about and prepared the interview context (see Chapter 3), you

will be sure that you have established an appropriate environment for the interview. It also helps to consciously put to one side your own views and attitudes.

Listening is more important than your next interview question. Try not to break in too fast with the next question. This is a common temptation for novice interviewers and something we will talk about later in the chapter. Consciously allowing for some pause or wait-time communicates your commitment to being in a listening mode and giving the interviewee space. As well as concentrating on what you say, you need to control your body so that you do not betray your reactions to what is being said. Maintaining eye contact and an open, encouraging stance and attitude helps to avoid unwittingly communicating your evaluations and position. In some ways it is easier to listen if you are an outsider and know little about the topic. Insiders (those who know a great deal about the topic or lived world of the interviewee) have the most problem hearing the interviewee's response and resisting the urge to share their perspective.

Tuning into and being aware of your listening skill is, at the risk of repeating myself, absolutely key to successful qualitative interviewing. If you find this skill difficult, it may be a good idea to practise listening techniques and reflect on this aspect of your development. Cooperative development (see Edge 2002) provides excellent practice in isolating and practising valuable listening moves. It is not designed specifically for qualitative interviewing but Edge provides examples and procedures for being able to 'attend' (provide concentrated attention to the speaker) and 'reflect' (giving back versions of the speaker's previous turn). Other moves are clarified too and his framework provides the discipline to really develop the ability to listen and understand. McCarthy (2003) also provides useful insights into what he calls 'listenership' – the ways in which we acknowledge and provide backchannels. These kinds of move 'oil the wheels' of spoken interaction.

### **Planning and piloting**

Successful interviewing boils down to three main elements: developing rapport, eliciting and listening. Isolating strategies for each of these elements will build up your confidence as an interviewer and enable you to become more conscious of different features of your interview interaction. Piloting is an important phase of developing your interview approach where you can both develop your ability to maintain listening focus and practise some of the moves mentioned above. Seidman (1991: 29) points out that piloting studies are essential in building reflexivity both of 'the unanticipated twists and turns of the interviewing process'

and the ‘complexities of the interviewing relationship’. He feels strongly that these ‘deserve exploration before the researchers plunge headlong into the thick of their projects’.

Piloting the interview with different respondents prior to actual data collection will certainly help you clarify your interview guide. Table 5.1 provides some basic issues to bear in mind and practise and will give you a starting point in this regard. It is based on Edge (2002), Richards (2003), Roulston (2010), and Eliot (2012).

Much of the advice above will depend on the kind of interview you want to adopt (see Chapter 4 pp. 99–103). In any case, it is probably helpful to consider a possible outline procedure for your interview. For example, a suggested procedure for the in-depth interview is provided by Johnson and Rowland. They suggest having an actual protocol of questions in the following sequence (2012: 106):

- Two or three icebreakers to get the ball rolling;
- Several transition questions (perhaps explaining the purpose of the interview, consent and permissions);
- Five to eight key questions (addressing the heart of the research focus);
- Interviewer summarises main points and perhaps gives information about what others have said.

At the same time they also point out that ‘such a nice, neat rational plan’ does not always work out in the trajectory of the actual interview. A sensible position to adopt is:

- Having some kind of provisional plan;
- Not being a slave to it;
- Not expecting the interview to work out exactly as planned.

As well as thinking about the content of the questions you will ask, build up your repertoire of different kinds of questions. For example, Heerwagen (2013) has some useful suggestions for different icebreakers. The following sections provide detail of different kinds of questions.

### **Task**

At this point you might review Nathan’s vignette (p. 23).

1. Look at the questions that he asks (particularly in lines 9–16).
2. All the other moves that Nathan makes are not questions. How would you classify them?

*Table 5.1* Basic considerations for managing interviews

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<i>Put the interviewee at ease</i>	To begin with, concentrate on social exchange and building a relationship. Adopt a friendly and welcoming tone. Thank them for giving up their time. Above all, don't dive straight into the interview. As much as possible keep it feeling like a conversation.
<i>Deal with ethics and communicate your purpose</i>	How are you going to deal with the ethics and explain the purpose of the research? Can you do this in such a way that does not get in the way of a friendly and welcoming manner.
<i>Give the interviewee a chance to warm up</i>	When you plan your questions, start out with questions that you feel will be relatively easy to answer. As the interview progresses, you can start to ask questions which are more cognitively demanding, or that require recall or reflection.
<i>Try to avoid leading questions</i>	Phrase your questions in an open and encouraging way. Reflect on your assumptions. Leading questions can communicate a great deal about <u>your</u> stance and viewpoints.
<i>Avoid ambiguity</i>	Consider the appropriacy and relevance of each of your possible questions. Are they as clear and as simple as possible? If you think a question may be difficult or ambiguous try to clarify its key element and simplify it.
<i>Group the various questions</i>	If you develop stages in your interview guide, this will help with timing.
<i>Demonstrate to the interviewee that you are following</i>	Try to show the interviewee that you understand the detail of what they are saying. At least occasionally try to reflect back what they are saying. If you do not understand, signal this. Say something like 'I'm not sure I understand what you mean when you say ...'
<i>Be sensitive to the interviewee's vocabulary</i>	When you reflect back a version of what the interviewee is saying, be sensitive to the vocabulary they are using. Try to catch their phrasing to make clear you are on the same wavelength. Sometimes it is a good idea to note down key phrases so that you can bring them back later in setting up later questions. Such recycling accomplishes two things. First, it confirms that you have been listening and understanding what they have said. Second, the interviewee does not have to provide further context and background. This can encourage richer subsequent responses. Wengraf (2001: 64) puts it like this; 'you will need to rapidly learn the specific way this unique informant speaks to you on this unique occasion: you will need to learn their "idiolect" (discursive practices)'

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(continued)



Table 5.1 Continued

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<i>Check on mutual understanding of terminology</i>	Check you are on the same wavelength with the terms both of you are using. If the interviewee uses an unfamiliar term to you, ask them to explain it. Also, as interviewer, you should be sensitive to your use of terms. Especially where there are multiple meanings, clarify which one you want to focus on.
<i>Avoid specialised or abstract terminology</i>	Potter and Hepburn (2005: 291) talk about the problem of specialised terminology 'flooding the interview' (often deriving from the theoretical concerns of the interview). It can be problematic if researchers refer to topics in abstract terms that are outside the frame of reference of the interviewee.
<i>Recap</i>	Do not be afraid to ask the interviewee to go back over something which you don't fully understand. This not only enables you to understand better but gives the interviewee the chance to recap and articulate an idea with different emphasis.
<i>Give the interviewee thinking time and space</i>	This may mean pausing and allowing 'wait-time' in order to provide space for interviewee's thinking so that they can voice their beliefs, perspectives, and experiences.
<i>Focus on the detail</i>	Look for the concrete (rather than the general) and probe for detail and examples. Asking for concrete detail and exemplification will provide richer data. Small differences in wording can make a difference. Interestingly, Charmaz and Belgrave (2012: 352) report that conversation analysts have learned that making the change from 'anything' to 'something' can be significant in encouraging more detail in a question 'is there something you'd like to add?'
<i>Vary your questions</i>	Use a range of wh- questions but ask for additional information ('could you tell me more about'). Ask for examples ('you've just said ... could you give me an example of that').
<i>Avoid evaluation of the interviewee's contributions</i>	The usual advice is to 'keep it neutral'.
<i>Allow the interviewee to ask questions</i>	It is usually a good idea to make it clear to the interviewee that they are allowed to ask questions. At least at the end of the interview, offer them the chance to ask any questions and provide a final comment (perhaps something that they have not had the opportunity to say).
<i>Concentrate on listening at all times</i>	Your questions are important but, as much as possible, try to put your agenda and questions aside in the actual interview and concentrate on listening to and trying to understand the interviewee.

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## Interview questions

A lot of the advice above deals with questions. Part of a reflective process on interviewing is shifting the focus from 'obtaining answers' to more 'attention to learning what questions to ask and how to ask them' (Taylor and Bogdan 1998: 93). Like with interviews themselves, there can be 'taken-for-grantedness' about questions and answers:

As long as we have had parental authority, parents have questioned their children regarding their whereabouts and activities. Similarly, suspects and prisoners have been interrogated since suspicion and incarceration have been a part of human affairs. Healers, priests, employers, writers, and many others seeking knowledge about daily life for practical purposes have all engaged in interview-like inquiry. (Gubrium and Holstein 2012: 28)

The choice, sequence, and clarity of the questions to be posed needs careful attention. The next section considers different kinds of questions and then widens the discussion to include other kinds of move (it makes sense to see questions as one, albeit a very important, kind of move).

One of the first distinctions to make is between open and closed questions. Asking closed questions is not necessarily a problem as long as the interviewee is forthcoming. Here Newton (2010: 3) provides an honest account, after reviewing an interview transcript:

Reading the transcription I was struck at how dependent I was on the willingness of the interviewee to talk. During the interview I had the impression of eliciting information through naturally occurring questions. However on examination many of my questions were closed and the interviewee could have responded with one word or phrase. Thankfully the interviewee generally opened further and seemed to use the questions as prompts to share her thoughts.

There is usually a preference for open questions rather than closed questions but Roulston (2010) also questions the unthinking assumption that closed questions are necessarily a problem. However, at least at the beginning of the interview it is a good idea to choose open questions. Once the interview flow has been established, it matters much less.

Table 5.2 provides an overview of distinctions related to questions that are worth reflecting on and the following is based on Kvale (1996: 133–135) and Richards (2003: 53–58).

Table 5.2 Types of questions

Type of question	Examples
Opening questions (starting interviews)	Could you talk me through ...? Can you explain what you understand by ...?
Introducing questions (starting new topics)	Can you tell me about ...? Do you remember an occasion when ...? What happened in the episode mentioned?
Follow-up questions (encouraging more to be said)	This can include nodding, 'mm', repeating significant words You say .... can you tell me more ...?
Check-reflect questions (you are not sure you understand)	You don't get much advice or support in the staffroom?
Probing questions (looking for detail and examples)	Can you give a more detailed description of what happened? Do you have further examples of this?
Specifying questions (looking for more detail)	What did you actually do when you felt ...? How did your ...?
Direct questions (centred on the interviewer)	Have you ever received money for good grades? When you mention competition, do you then think of sporting or a destructive competition?'
Indirect questions (centred on others' views)	Projecting questions such as 'How do you believe other pupils regard the competition of grades?'
Structuring questions (signalling shifts and stages)	Indicating when a new topic is being started: Can we move onto to ...?'
Interpreting questions (verbalising the interviewee's point of view)	You then mean that ....? Is it correct that you feel that ...? Does the expression ... cover what you have just expressed?'

This list is a useful start but does not have enough precision in some areas. It is difficult, for example, to tell the difference in Kvale (1996) between introductory and opening questions. It is also hard to distinguish follow-up and probing questions. In fact, Kvale's description of a follow-up question is actually a mix of backchannelling ('hmm'), receipt token ('right'), and more fully fledged follow-up questions ('you just said you ... could you tell me a bit more about ...'). It may also be helpful to have more precision around who 'understander' moves are 'for' so I have also included Richard's 'check-reflect' (2003: 56) in the

list above, as this brings into play the interviewer's need sometimes to check, perhaps because she is unsure or in doubt about something. Actually, it may be more helpful to think of this as an interview move than a question and this is the position I adopt later in the chapter. For now, we can say that the motivation for a 'check-reflect' is for the interviewer (in order to do a good job of continuing to try to understand).

Focusing on questions only gets us so far. Questions are only one possible interviewer move. Of course there are a whole range of smiles, nods, eye movements, and minimal responses such as 'okay', 'uh huh', 'I see', 'right', 'really' (see Schegloff 1982) that communicate to the interviewee that you are listening and engaged and help the interaction go smoothly. As I have said above, this range of interview moves are not straightforward questions and include receipt tokens (I've understood that information) and backchanneling (often functioning as continuers), signalling different levels of attention, engagement, and understanding. They vary from fairly straightforward receipt of information ('okay'), to expressing surprise ('really') and can express levels of evaluation ('nice', 'good'). Richards (2011) provides an analysis of the subtle features of such minimal responses showing that they can be more interactionally significant than just inviting the interviewee to continue. In fact, certain discourse markers ('right', 'good', 'ok') can actually 'close down' the interaction rather than encourage an interviewee to continue or expand a particular point.

### **Things to get right in managing questions**

In addition to the comments above, the following advice will help you formulate questions that are fruitful:

- Try to ask specific and focused questions. Vague responses are often an outcome of vague questions that are too broad in scope. Focusing on specific details of events and experiences will achieve much richer data.
- If your questions are clear and specific, you will also avoid being unclear or ambiguous.
- Keep to one question at a time. You may have lots of questions you want to ask, but it can be confusing for the interviewee if you ask several questions at the same time. It is generally not a good idea to ask long and complicated questions.
- Try to avoid technical language and academic jargon. Use language that is familiar to your interviewee(s).

- Avoid closed or ‘yes-no’ questions, especially at the beginning of the interview, if you think interviewees may be reticent.
- Start with questions that focus on the present. You can work back to past experiences and speculations on the future later in the interview.

Charmaz and Belgrave (2012: 352) have a useful list of example interview questions that are typical of a grounded theory approach. These are divided into ‘initial open-ended questions’, ‘intermediate questions’, and ‘ending questions’. The following are some examples (Table 5.3):

*Table 5.3* Examples of grounded theory interview questions

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**Initial open-ended questions**

Tell me about what happened/how you came to ...?

If you recall, could you tell me about/how did you happen to ...?

How would you describe the person you were then?

**Intermediate questions**

Could you tell me about your thoughts and feelings when you learned about ...?

Tell me how you learned to handle ...

Now tell me about a typical day when you are ...

**Ending questions**

Could you describe the most important lessons you learned about ...?

Could you tell me about how your views have changed since ...?

After reflecting on your experiences, is there something else you would like to add ...?

---

Although such lists are potentially a useful guide there does not seem to me anything inherently initial or intermediate about some of these questions. The ‘typical day’ question (classed as ‘intermediate’) could be a good starting point. It is very much the kind of question that Spradley has in mind when he talks of the ‘grand-tour’ question:

I arrived at the alcoholism treatment centre and the director asked, ‘Would you like a grand tour of the place?’ As we walked from building to building, he named the places and objects we saw, introduced me to people, and explained the activities in progress. I could not ask tramps to give me a grand tour of the Seattle City Jail, so I simply I asked a grand tour question: ‘Could you describe the inside of the jail for me?’ In both situations I easily collected a large sample of native terms about these cultural scenes (Spradley 1979: 86)

In other words, the ‘ending’ questions in Charmaz and Belgrave’s list might well serve as ‘intermediate questions’. However, it is undoubtedly a good idea to leave space for the ‘is there something you’d like to add’ type question. It is certainly helpful to offer the interviewee the chance to ask their own questions or make a final comment. In Extract 5.3, providing this opportunity reveals that the interviewee is unsure about the purpose of the overall project. This is one of the hazards of Skype interviewing (in this case the interviewee has been travelling in a car and it is a windy day and missed the explanation of the research project).

### Extract 5.3

- 1 I: Oh how interesting (.) great. Thank you ever much  
 2 so for your time (.) it was really interesting  
 3 talking to you (.) do you have any questions?  
 4 E: No (.) just remind me ‘cause I think I was  
 5 going past the wind as you were explaining (.)  
 6 so what’s your overall project looking at?  
 7 I: The ↑project it’s funded by the British Council  
 8 and we’re looking at schemes that employ  
 9 native teacher speakers around the world  
 10 whether they’re government schemes like in Japan  
 11 or international schemes like VSO ...

### Interviewer moves

#### Task

Revisit Ros’s vignette (p. 82)

1. Look in particular at the mix of backchannelling (‘mm mm’ e.g. line 23) and the use of silence (e.g. line 17).
2. What effect does the backchannelling and silence have on ‘B’ (the interviewee)?

Ros told us in Chapter 3 that she was consciously trying not to ‘join in’ so much in this interview, as she felt that this interrupted the interviewee’s thoughts. Perhaps because there are potential face issues for the interviewer, it is very noticeable that Ros does not ask any follow-up questions (or actually any questions at all in this extract). Instead Ros uses the pauses and silence to create space for ‘B’ to have ample time to

reflect and break the silence himself. Nathan's extract (p. 23) is different. There is quite a long multi-layered question which has elements of structuring ('going back to something earlier') and reflecting/paraphrasing (you said ... you think ...'). However, after that question, there are a series of receipt tokens (e.g. 'right') and backchannelling moves ('mm'). In Ros's case she withholds 'joining in' for the whole extract, whereas Nathan steps back once the complex question has been established.

It is important to recognise then that withholding 'joining in' or restricting interview moves to receipt tokens and backchannelling can be useful and deliberate. This next section moves further away from a preoccupation with questions and answers and considers in more detail probing, reflecting, and silence. These are all important interviewer moves and interactional tools which can be used in combination with or as alternatives to questions.

One kind of move which may take the form of a question or a simple reflection is 'for the interviewer'. In other words, sometimes it is necessary to check something (in order to continue to understand). This is often achieved though repetition with rising intonation. In Extract 5.4, Shannon is talking about her teaching training experience in South Korea. The interviewer needs to check something in line 8.

#### Extract 5.4

- 1 S: in the dyads I observed both were very  
 2 confident teachers (.) both were very competent  
 3 English speakers but the experience is  
 4 they had set it up where 'I am half  
 5 and you are half, so together we make one' (.)  
 6 whereas it could be < based on what they have >  
 7 one plus one could definitely be more than one.  
 8 I: So you looked at two ↑pairs  
 9 S: Three pairs.  
 10 I: Three pairs. OK. and would you say that  
 11 they were fairly similar in their demarcation  
 12 of who did what and what the roles were?  
 13 S: Overall there were a lot of similarities  
 14 between them ...

Here the check on line 8 reveals a misunderstanding (perhaps because of the complication of 'dyads' and 'one plus one'). Shannon makes clear that she is talking about three pairs she has observed and not two. This new information is acknowledged by the simple repetition (three pairs)

and receipt token (OK) in line 10. This clarification allows the interviewer to continue with a follow-up question in lines 10–12.

Sometimes interview moves use reflection for more than clarification purposes. Repetition/reflection can function as a probe as in the piece of data in Extract 5.5 which follows a few moments later in the same interview with Shannon.

### Extract 5.5

- 1 S: so I think I had a nice glimpse into  
 2 potential and possibilities with co-teaching  
 3 (.) but yeah (.) so there were a lot of  
 4 similarities in these dyads.  
 5 I: So (.) in really simply terms (.) all three were  
 6 reasonably similar and were relatively  
 7 successful in comparison perhaps with some  
 8 other stories you've heard about in your  
 9 collaborative co-teaching course?  
 10 S: Yes. One other interesting thing was the  
 11 length of time spent together. It had  
 12 a strong correlation in that one of the dyads  
 13 had been together co-teaching for five  
 14 years and they had fantastic dynamics,  
 15 but the first year was terrible

Here the interview move in line 5 is not a repetition as such; it paraphrases an 'understood' version of Shannon's overall experience. These kind of summarising or paraphrasing moves often begin with 'so' ('so what you are saying is ...' 'so if I understand you'). Shannon accepts this version on line 10 and then elaborates on another feature. The first extract features a check and the second has a probing function. The next section provides more detail about various kinds of probe.

### Probes

The main questions for an interview are often prepared as part of an interview guide and are seen as proactive. Probes are more reactive and emergent. They depend on careful attentive listening and require judgement, timing, and sensitivity to the ongoing interviewee articulation. In simple terms, a probe is designed to elicit further information, clarification or explanation. It is usually achieved through a question of some kind but can be achieved through non-verbal means (e.g. eye contact, gestures, pauses). Some probes pick up something that is vague or ambiguous. For example 'it's better now' might be probed with 'when



you say better, what makes it better?’ or if the interviewer says ‘it’s innovative’ you might probe with ‘it’s innovative, what is innovative?’ In both these examples, the interviewer is orienting to the interviewer’s words (‘better’ and ‘innovative’) and the probe is built on that element of lexical reflection. This kind of minimal reflection helps keep these moves neutral and less likely to include your assumptions or leading the interviewer. Other probes focus on emotions or feelings ‘you sound frustrated about that, why do you think that is?’

Table 5.4 Types of probe

Type of probe	Description
Active silence	This keeps the concentration and emphasis on the interviewee to continue (in whichever way she think is meaningful or relevant). This wait-time is a deliberate move (to refrain from commenting) but should not be over-used, especially if the informant is reticent.
Non-verbal noises	hm-hm or mh-mh are a little more directive than active silence and communicate attention and encouragement to continue.
Non-verbal gestures	These can function in tandem or as alternatives to non-verbal noises and can include head gestures, eye movement/gaze, facial expressions.
Echoing	The repetition of a small portion, usually with falling intonation but can be rising intonation if functioning as a check.
Receipt token/comment	Interviewer contributions like ‘really?’ or ‘no!’ show both attention but also can indicate alignment or reaction to the content.
Paraphrasing/reflection	This can function like echoing but is fuller in form than a simple repetition of a word and phrase. Such a move may be prefaced by such phrases as ‘can I just see if I’ve got that’ or ‘so, what you’re saying is’ or ‘so if I understand you, you’re saying that ...’.
Question reformulation	A previous question is giving a different emphasis in being rephrased.
Elaboration request	This might involve a request for further information, exemplification, more detail, or attitudinal aspects. ‘Can you tell me more about ...’ or ‘how do you feel about that’. It might well start with an element of reflection.
Relational questions	These might seek to pick out features of preceding contribution – either to pick up comparisons, contrasts, or inconsistencies.
Clarification	Clarification probes often signal that the researcher has not fully understood something or feels the need to achieve a better understanding. Clarification probes focus on a narrower area than elaboration probes (i.e. are more specific in scope).

There have been a number of contributions aiming to categorise probes and distinguish them from follow-up questions. Table 5.4 draws on some of these contributions (Rubin and Rubin 1995; Kvale 1996; Roulston et al. 2008; Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).

The first of the probing moves in this list is 'silence'. We have already seen in Ros's vignette that silence can be used in deliberate ways to keep the focus on the emerging interviewee articulation. If the interviewee is comfortable and forthcoming, withholding from further questions can be a useful strategy. However, there will be some kind of backchannelling or receipt token that functions to communicate interviewer's listening and understanding.

As you can see from Table 5.4 probes, like questions, vary in their degree of directiveness. Whyte's (1984: 99–110) six-level scale helps evaluate different degrees of directiveness in an interviewer's questions or statements. These start with responses which are less directive (1) to those moves which are more directive (6) and this scale can be helpful for novice researchers in considering their interviewing choices. It is not so much that non-directiveness is either good or bad but that the balance of being directive and being non-directive should be appropriate. This will depend on the emerging interactional context of each interview (e.g. how forthcoming an individual interviewee seems to be). Table 5.5 provides examples of this scale.

The minimal reflection in type 2 in Table 5.5 is sometimes called an 'echo probe'; it simply repeats, perhaps with rising intonation. However, you will have noticed that probes 3–5 above also have an element of reflection (usually at the beginning of the interviewer's turn). In fact, 5 is more likely to include reflection than 3 because it is more 'marked' and needs more work to establish the interactional context. As previously stated, reflection is a key element of a probe because by reflecting key terms or lexis the interviewee hears that you are orientating your moves to their words ('what does authentic materials mean to you?'). This often prompts them to say more.

The interviewer might use minimal reflection but can also use more substantial paraphrasing or reflection which tries to put back on the table what we think we have heard the interviewee say. More substantial reflection/paraphrasing will help make the interviewee feel well listened to and it gives a chance for both parties to see whether the current understanding is on track. The interviewer can tell a lot from the interviewee's response to this paraphrase/reflection. Sometimes it will be matter of fact ('yes – that's right'), sometimes there will be

Table 5.5 Directiveness scale

1. 'Uh-huh,' nod of head etc.	Usually this kind of move is encouraging and allows space for the interview to expand on the current topic, clarify, or even change topic.
2. Reflection.	In some ways this is one of the most important moves. Although it does not seem very directive, it does foreground some element of the previous interviewer's contribution and often has the effect of pushing the interviewee to expand on or clarify a preceding statement.
3. Probe the informant's last remark.	This move usually reflects the last turn but also often contains a corresponding and explicit request/comment/question. (e.g. 'When you say you're not confident with correcting pronunciation, is that because you don't think it is worthwhile or because you don't feel you have the skill-set to do it?').
4. Probe an idea in preceding turn.	This probe suggests a more purposeful move because it doesn't pick up the most recent element of the preceding turn. 'You said ... can you say a little more about that?
5. Probe an idea introduced earlier.	This kind of probing move goes back further in the preceding interaction (i.e. further than the preceding turn) and is often preceded by an adverbial related to time ('a few minutes ago', 'just now', 'just before you spoke about your routines ...'). An example would be: 'A few minutes ago you said that you were frustrated with your line-manager. Why do you think you feel frustrated?').
6. Introduction of a new topic.	Here the interviewer introduces a topic that has not been referred to before.

enthusiasm ('yes – that's exactly right'), and sometimes it promotes clarification ('yeah most of the time but...').

Although it is sometimes helpful to develop such a list of possible interviewer probes, any move might have an element of reflection. Extract 5.6 reflects ('earlier you were talking about your role changing') but this sets up an elaboration probe ('can you tell me how you think it has changed').

**Extract 5.6**

- 1 K: I think I'll work with her again (.) yeah
- 2 it's been interesting.

3 I: thanks (.) earlier you were talking about your  
 4 role changing since the summer(.) can you tell me  
 5 how you think it has changed?

A reflection will have some element of lexis which is 'recovered' from previous interviewee turns ('since the summer'). It is explicitly located in the previous interviewee turns ('earlier you were talking'). Here these elements orient the interviewee to earlier talk and therefore pre-sequencethe request for further information ('can you tell me...').

It is relatively easy to come up with a series of focused questions but using probes effectively takes a bit more practice and sensitivity. Inexperienced interviewers report that it is difficult to maintain rapport, listen attentively, and consider whether the responses have enough detail and cover in qualitative interviews. They worry that too many probes will spoil the rapport and make the interviewee uncomfortable.

### **Flexibility and 'going with the flow'**

The more unstructured your adopted interview approach, the more you will want to keep the interview flexible and to go with the flow. The questions you have prepared in advance are much less important than what emerges from the interview. Rubin and Rubin (1995) talk about the importance of keeping the scope of the interview open and flexible with few interrupting questions at beginning of the interview and being sensitive to interesting leads that are worth following up. This kind of openness or 'going with the flow' is particularly important in grounded theory and ethnographic work, where interviews are often conducted as part of fieldwork and observation:

In this sense, grounded theory has much in common with ethnographic methods, in which researchers adapt their data collection techniques to the nuances of the emerging observation. (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012: 354)

Charmaz and Belgrave (2012: 354) provide Extract 5.7 from Thornberg (2010: 593), who investigates the moral frames that schoolchildren invoke. Thornberg has been a bystander in a situation where a student 'was lying on the classroom floor with a flushed face expressing pain and crying very quietly'. Thornberg then talks to some of his classmates who had been present.

**Extract 5.7**

- 1 RT: How come everyone just passed him by and  
2 went to their places?  
3 S: Because that's what we usually do.  
4 we go to our places and it's Margot  
5 (the teacher) who goes over to him and ...

Making the most of this kind of opportunity helps build up a richer account of the routines and practices being observed.

Johnson and Rowlands (2012: 107), talking about the likely trajectory of an actual in-depth interview, also talk about going 'with the flow' and even being 'playful' and adopting an 'experimental attitude'. In the course of the interview this sometimes means going where the informant wants to lead and, although it is essential for the interviewer to be assertive enough to return to the anticipated interview, the interviewer should avoid being too rigid. Going with the flow can help obtain some unexpected information. This is something to develop an ongoing sensitivity to and it is a good idea to keep a log of how you deviate from a planned interview guide.

**Task**

At this point in the chapter, have a look at Priti's vignette on p. 139

1. Pay attention to the variety of moves in the first part of the interview extract (e.g. thanking, asking, checking).
2. Consider how the interview moves allow space for Beena (the interviewee) to articulate aspects of her identity.

Going with the flow can be particularly useful in allowing space for expressions of identity. We can see in Priti's vignette how, even at the beginning of an interview, the interviewee (Beena) is allowed space to negotiate aspects of her identity in a fluid and negotiated way. Priti's vignette uses conversation analysis to help focus on aspects of identity and culture construction in her interview interaction.

An interviewee may be happy to enlarge on a highlighted aspect of their lived world or they may resist opening up this area. It is therefore not just a question of which aspects of identity the interviewer chooses to foreground. Razon and Ross (2012) talk about negotiating fluid

identities in the interview process. They make the point that literature dealing with qualitative interviews contains 'very little discussion regarding how a researcher's presentation of self can influence the narrative produced'. They claim that where 'such a discussion does occur, it focuses more on how the researcher frames his or her research questions and specific questions, rather than how he or she presents his or her own identity during the interview process' (2012: 495).

Ross (in Razon and Ross) talks about an interview she has conducted with Iyas (a Palestinian Activist). Later on in the interview, Iyas asks her 'Do you live in Yaffo?'. Although this might be treated as an offhand question, it comes after a soliloquy in which Iyas has just told her how infuriated he is by the Jews who come to live in this neighbourhood (forcing up apartment prices in the process). Clearly this is a difficult matter of positioning for Ross and it is worth quoting an extract from this reflexive account, as it gives a graphic insight into the kind of delicate and sensitive work that an interviewer sometimes has to engage with:

With this question, therefore, I am faced with the dilemma of sorting through identity commitments and facing the consequences of the choices I make. How do I respond? I think to myself. I do not live in Yaffo – I live in a southern Tel Aviv neighborhood close by. In an effort to seem not-too-far-removed from their reality, my automatic tendency when asked by research participants where I live is to say, 'on the border with Yaffo,' out of solidarity with the Palestinian community with whom I am interacting. And yet, in this case, such a response might provoke exactly the opposite of the response I might hope for. 'In Florentin,' I finally say, naming the neighborhood in me to them, to the topic of my research. (Razon and Ross 2012: 495)

As the conversation continues, Iyas further invites further contributions from Ross ('So tell me a little bit about you.') After an hour talking about his background, the focus shifts to the interviewer. Ross is aware of thinking what to say and choosing her words carefully in. She then talks about her 'half-Israeli and half-American family' and growing up in both Israel and the USA and in particular the contrast between spending time in Israel in high school (segregated within the Jewish community in Jerusalem) and living in the USA (in an economically, racially, and nationally diverse community in New York State). In providing these disclosures she is establishing her warrant (someone who is familiar with nuances of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict/to some extent an 'activist' like Iyas). As well as giving us an insight into the sensitivity

of the negotiation of such identities, this example also provides another instance of the importance of allowing the interviewee to ask questions.

## **Interview problems**

### **Problems with the interviewee**

This last section considers various potential difficulties with interviewing. Not all interviewees take naturally to articulating their views and experiences and patience is required in these cases. It can be helpful to try to see things from their point of view. Why might they be uncomfortable? Can you demonstrate empathy for their situation? Generally speaking, if interviewees experience and feel your patience and empathy, it can make them feel more appreciated and, in turn, better able to articulate their thoughts.

If you feel that you are getting into sensitive areas and the interviewee is becoming uncomfortable, it is usually not a good idea to carry on pretending this is not the case. One of the obvious strategies for dealing with any discomfort is to ask the question in a way that does not put pressure on them to answer it. Sinding and Aronson (2003: 109) use the following Extract 5.8 to show how it can be important to give the interviewee a way out. It is from a study about home care for elderly women.

#### **Extract 5.8**

- 1 J: I don't complain (about my situation, the  
2 discomfort) I don't tell people how  
3 I'm feeling, they don't want to hear.  
4 Be cheerful (.) you know (.)  
5 I: So if I said to you that for me  
6 to understand what it's like for you  
7 day to day (.) the things that concern  
8 you (.)if I said I'm inviting you to  
9 complain (.) what would you say?  
10 J: Where to start (laugh). I don't know that's  
11 an exercise I haven't (.)  
12 I: Maybe it's a road you don't want to go up?

There are two elements of the interviewer's contribution here that check that the interviewee is giving consent to the process. The first is the hypothetical construction ('if I said to you') and the second is the offer of an opt-out in line 12 ('maybe ...'). Sometimes it is necessary

to be sensitive about probing. If you feel the interviewee is reticent or guarded then vague responses will need more sensitive probing. van Enk (2009) shares another example where the interviewer's care in protecting the face of the interviewee is clear (see Extract 5.9). In this interview, the interviewee (Natalie) hasn't volunteered much about the 'bad experiences' she has alluded to. The interviewer wants to probe this area (lines 1–4) but also mitigates the force of this request for disclosure (lines 4–5).

### **Extract 5.9**

1 I: You said in your answer that you have learned  
 2 a lot through experience and that that would  
 3 account for a lot of maturity. Can you say  
 4 more about that? You know—and again you don't  
 5 have to answer this—

There is some hesitation here around what is appropriate. The interviewer is clearly trying to keep from seeming to be overly prying or aggressive and, here too, offers an 'out' in lines 4–5.

In the process of conducting qualitative interviews, there may be other unforeseen problems and you need to respond to them. A number of these problems will be with the interviewee. Marsiglio (2013) summarising Kvale (1996) identifies eight different possibilities. He takes the view that that consideration of these issues will help an interviewer identify them quickly and so be able to respond in a calm and clear manner and he suggests possible strategies for this. His main points are summarised in Table 5.6 with some possible responses.

### **Bad or failed interviews**

Table 5.6 below presents a range of potential problems. Sometimes the interviewer will be reticent or shy and it is difficult to elicit anything (see Scott 2004). Sometimes you might get the opposite experience:

Mr Oren first was critical about my interviewing technique, he started to question me about my life, and so on. (Warren 1987: 62)

This kind of reversal of roles is unusual, however it is helpful to learn from all interviewing experiences. Despite planning, piloting and your best efforts, interviews will not always go well but you can still learn from them.



Table 5.6 Interviewee problems and responses

Interviewee type	Possible response
Non-talker	Get them to explore their thoughts: 'could you talk a bit more about ...'; 'can you tell me more about why you feel that way'.
Rambler	Politely and gently take control: 'ok do you mind if we talk about'; 'I was wondering whether we could go back to the point you mentioned about'.
Uncomfortable	Either switch topic or give other options: 'which part is uncomfortable for you, do you want to talk about the part you feel more comfortable about'.
Contradicting statements	Pick up the contradiction: 'a little while back you said ... but now you seem to be saying ... how do those statements go together?'
Confused	If you feel the interviewee is confused, deal with the trouble: 'ok, sorry, let me try and rephrase that for you'.
Personal questions to you	If you feel the question is not too personal, it is usually better to answer it and shift to asking them a related question. If you are uncomfortable be honest about that: 'well that's something I don't really feel comfortable talking about ... but I was wondering what you feel about ...'
Flirt	This is rare but needs dealing with. If the flirting makes you feel uncomfortable, deal with it: 'I'm not really comfortable with that kind of comment, could we get back to ...'
Inquisitive	Most of the time it is better to put off sharing your views until after the interview; 'I'd be glad to talk about that after the interview but right now I'm really interested in what you think about ...'

Roulston (2012: 63) claims that contemporary thinking about the interview is still struggling with the dilemma expressed in two opposing viewpoints. The first viewpoint, typified by Merton and Kendall (1946), is that poorly conducted interviews jeopardise the quality of data generated. The second viewpoint (e.g. Riesman 1951) is 'that there are no "bad" interviews'.

Mistakes can certainly be learned from but this does not take away the requirement for careful preparation, planning, and thought. However, failed interviews can be valuable if they help raise awareness of the parameters and choices at issue. For example, a 'failed interview' can lead to new awareness (for an excellent example of this see Prior 2014). Johnson and Rowlands (2012: 103) also regard interviews as learning

material through which researchers can develop self-awareness as a researcher:

The research process is a learning process. Interviewees make mistakes, they make gaffes and alienate informants. They learn that their race, age, gender, social class, appearance, and even achieved statuses make one kind of difference with some of informants and another kind of difference with other informants.

Roulston (2011) provides a useful contribution on treating interview 'problems' as topics for analysis.

## Summary

This chapter has looked at some key elements of planning for and managing interview interaction. It has been suggested that piloting and planning will help establish an interview guide. Thinking about the sequence and type of questions that you are going to ask will help develop your interviewer repertoire too. However, good interviewers are able to react to the ongoing interaction and ask follow-up questions and probe for detail. To do that, we need to appreciate the range of interview moves that we have at our disposal. Sometimes we need to ask questions, sometimes we need to leave space for the interview to continue to articulate their lived world, sometimes we have to probe for more detail and elaboration.

Obviously the questions asked, the pauses allowed, and the probes used help the interviewee to share an articulation of a range of past experiences, current understandings and emerging viewpoints. As well as these more obvious elements of interviewer contribution that you might reflect on, try not to ignore the 'small things'. Richards (2011) has shown that minimal responses (e.g. 'yeah') play an important role in the construction of interview talk. Also, do not ignore more problematic aspects of your interviewing. In other words, try not to shy away from opening up and talking about problematic aspects of managing interviews if you feel that this may be helpful. Fontana and Frey (1994:374) quote Oakley (1981: 41) in the view that 'interviewing is rather like a marriage: everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets'. Being reflexive means opening up the secret interactional world of interviewing. The next chapter digs a little deeper into these secrets and dilemmas.

## Suggested further reading

- Kvale, S. (2008). *Doing Interviews*. London: Sage.
- Richards K. (2003). *Qualitative Inquiry in TESOL*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. (Chapter 2)

## Priti Sandhu's vignette

### Context

In this short discussion I showcase how a detailed transcription of the initial minutes of an interview combined with a Conversation Analysis of these lines revealed significant insights related to identity and culture construction. My intention is to highlight the necessity of treating interview data as a speech event (Talmy 2010) rather than as a direct access to the 'true' feelings, attitudes, beliefs, etc. of respondents (Roulston 2010; Talmy 2010, 2011; Mann 2011; Talmy and Richards 2011). These and other scholars have called for a re-theorisation of interviews, especially within applied linguistics, which would entail treating interviews as 'active' (Holstein and Gubrium 1995) with attention being paid to both the content of interview data and the processes by which such data is constructed. Such re-specifications of interviews have significant impact on the analysis of interview data, with much greater attention being paid to how interactants construct situated meanings while engaged in the act of 'doing' the interview (Mishler 1986; Talmy and Richards 2011) While summarised accounts of interviews are critiqued (Talmy 2010; Richards 2011), especially where the interviewer is missing in representations of interview data (Potter and Hepburn 2005), researchers are encouraged to be cognisant of the co-constructed nature of interviews, the role of the interviewer, and the specific interactional context of each interview, where every utterance is linked to something within the local environment of that interview (Briggs 1986; Mann 2011).

The interview segment that I analyse here is taken from the opening minutes of the first of three interviews with Beena (a pseudonym) in the summer of 2011. This interview was part of the second phase of data collection for a project in which I examined how Indian women narrated the impact of their medium of education on their lives. I had focused on Hindi medium education, English medium education, and a combination of both types of education (Sandhu 2010, 2014a, 2014b, 2015). The earlier data had been collected between 2005 and

2008 during which time I had interviewed 19 women, three times each. These qualitative research interviews had been conducted in the north Indian city of Dehradun. Almost all the interviews took place at my home. All but three participants had been located through a call for volunteers advertised in local newspapers. In 2011, I conducted a fresh series of similar interviews at the same site in which I interviewed an additional 15 women. Beena was one of these respondents. As with the previous participants, Beena was chosen to be part of the project when she answered an advertisement I had placed in a local weekly newspaper. Following an initial telephone discussion about the project, I conducted the first interview with Beena at my home. Extract 5.10 analysed here is taken from this first interview. During the interview, Beena revealed that she was in her mid-50s, single, and had been earning a living as a teacher for most of her professional career.

#### Extract 5.10

- 1 P: uhhm: first of all let me thank you  
 2 for participating in my research, [(.) a:nd  
 3 B: [my pleasure  
 4 ma'am.  
 5 P: thank you a:nd can I ask you if you would  
 6 like to speak uhh in Hinglis- in English  
 7 or Hindi or a combination of ↑both  
 8 B: combination of both.  
 9 P: okay. so is it okay if I ask you my questions in  
 10 ↑English  
 11 B: yeah sure  
 12 P: .hhh so the first segment of questions is related  
 13 to your education  
 14 B: right  
 15 P: .hhh so can you let me **know** uhh: uhh: about  
 16 your K through 12 education [uhh  
 17 B: [okay  
 18 P: kindergarten to uhh through standard 12 was it  
 19 in ↑Hindi medium or ↑English medium  
 20 B: throughout English medium  
 21 P: uhh: which: (.) here in ↑Dehradun  
 22 B: St. Johns  
 23 P: St. Johns ↑here okay. .hhh uhh:: a:nd what  
 24 er:: about you:r (.) higher education  
 25 qualifi[cations=

- 26 B: [uhh: s-
- 27 P: =can you tell me about them and [and the medium
- 28 B: [yes yes actually
- 29 I belong to a family which .hhh always faced
- 30 faced financial constraints my father was the
- 31 only person to earn for the family
- 32 P: umhmm
- 33 B: and we were six brothers and sisters .hhh
- 34 so somehow I managed with the help of
- 35 uh .hhh uhh: very good people I managed to do
- 36 my uhh schooling from St. Johns
- 37 P: umhmm
- 38 B: and (.) uhh after that I had to .hhh uh
- 39 unwillingly and (.) faux willingly I had to
- 40 continue my education .hhh o:n: you can say
- 41 that:: .hhh as a (.) a private candidate
- 42 P: okay
- 43 B: ↑right so I the rest of my studies I am a
- 44 commerce graduate and a (.) uhh: B.Ed.
- 45 from uhh Rohtak University so
- 46 P: your commerce graduation is also from ↑Rohtak
- 47 University
- 50 B: no no from DAV College Dehradun (.) [but
- 51 P: [and B.Ed.
- 52 from ↑Rohtak
- 53 B: yes but it was all:: I had to appear as a
- 54 private candidate because I could not
- 55 afford and: uhh (.) uhh the regular education
- 56 P: okay

## **Comment**

It was only after I transcribed this excerpt in some detail that I realised the identity-implicative work Beena had carried out while talking about her educational background.

What this close transcription revealed is a complex speech event being performed which has pre-established role-related hierarchies, in the sense that I as the interviewer wield absolute power to ask questions and decide the trajectory of the interview which Beena as the interviewee follows in lines 1–21; although this changes somewhat thereafter. In these initial lines, I unhesitatingly use my role as the interviewer

to thank her for her participation in the project (line 1), elicit the language/s she would prefer to use for the interview (lines 4–5), check if my own use of English to ask my questions would be fine (line 7), signal that the first ‘segment’ (clearly indicative that others would follow) of questions are connected to her education (line 9), and then proceed to ask her about her education (line 11). The last is repeated in a reformulation which now includes the precise nature of her K-12 education that I was interested in finding about, i.e. her medium of education (lines 13–14). My pursuit of specific demographic details vis-à-vis her educational background is unmistakable. Beena follows my lead unhesitatingly and proceeds to answer all these questions in a straightforward and unproblematic manner. Using Conversation Analysis to analyse the interview opening indicates that my questions in these lines are constructed as first pair parts of several question and answer *adjacency pairs* (Liddicoat 2007; Schegloff 2007; ten Have 2007) to which Beena provides the second pair part answers as *preferred responses*. This latter is indexed through the absence of any delay or hesitations in their formulations and by their short constructions (lines 2–3, 6, 8, 10, 12, 15, and 17) as well as by the use of occasional affiliative overlaps (lines 2 and 12). Extrapolating from her constructions, I am able to say that this far, Beena has not indicated verbally that anything in my questions and her answers might need further explanation or any kind of justification.

However, the nature of her responses changes when I ask my next question about her post-secondary education (lines 18–19 and 21) in answer to which she conducts extensive accounting work interspersed with multiple articulated perturbation indicators. Immediately in an overlap, she articulates an elongated hesitation marker (line 20) and the beginning of a word which she abandons to let me complete my utterance (line 21). Then in another overlap with my turn, she starts an extended answer. However, instead of directly replying to my question about her higher education and its medium of instruction, she begins to tell me about her family (lines 22–24). I respond by a back channel murmur (line 25) which she treats as an invitation to continue and provides more information about her family background (lines 26–28). In these two turns she provides a detailed picture of her socio-economically challenged background, with her father doing his best to raise her and her five siblings. She attributes her K-12 education in St. Johns as owing to the help of ‘very good people.’ At the end of her turn, I contribute another murmur, to which she responds by providing information related to her higher education. This turn is significant as within it she twice states her pursuit of her higher education ‘unwillingly’ or ‘faux willingly’ as a ‘private candidate.’ The declaration of the

private nature of her education is preceded by yet more perturbations and accounting work comprising indrawn breaths (.hhh), elongated words ('o:n'; 'tha:t'), and micro pauses (.), and a diffidence in naming the type of education directly ('you can say that') – '.hhh o:n: you can say that: .hhh as a (.) as a private candidate' (lines 31–2). I respond with an 'okay,' only after which she names the degrees she studied for – a BA in commerce and a B.Ed (teaching certification). There is a short clarifying exchange about the universities for these degrees (lines 36–38) followed by a summing-up statement by Beena in which she once again explicitly mentions her financial constraints which prevented her from studying as a regular student at university (lines 39–40). This is accepted by me in my next turn. After this considerable interactional accounting work, the conversation turns to Beena's professional experience in which she again utilises the description of her family's financial constraints to explain why she started working while still in school.

It is clear that in the absence of a close transcription and a CA-based analysis, I might have missed the extensive accounting work Beena conducts for the private nature of her higher education and how, in the process of doing this, she constructs it as highly problematic and in consequent need of validation. It needs to be remembered here that my research interest had nothing to do with the private or regular nature of my respondents' education or even the extent of the education itself. I merely wished to know how their linguistic educational backgrounds had impacted their lives – a point that I had made clear to Beena prior to this interview and also through my questions in the first few minutes transcribed here when I repeatedly inquired about the medium of education. However, she did not say anything about her linguistic educational background in connection with her university education; instead she concentrated on its private nature. In the process, she constructed herself as someone who is aware that such a private education might be found wanting in this particular interaction with me. Beena here treated me as an inside member of her culture who, while not needing to be told what a 'private candidate' is, would nevertheless need to be provided with some excuse for such an education. Thus, through her own explanations and manner of articulation, Beena provides cultural insights into her local community where a private university education is seemingly deemed somewhat 'lesser' than a regular one, a general opinion she seems sentient to. I hope that through this brief discussion I have demonstrated that a micro-analysis of a closely-transcribed interview segment enables researchers to showcase how respondents construct specific identity and culture implicative stances and representations, allowing for an emic analysis of interview data.

# 6

## Dilemmas and Parameters

### Task

Read through Eljee's vignette.

1. Read through the 'context' for the interview first. Before reading the transcript and Eljee's reflexive comment, try to predict how her shared identity (as a visible ethnic minority native English speaking teacher) might affect the interview interaction.
2. After reading the transcript, consider whether it is possible to tell (from the interview interaction) that Eljee's interview takes place within a narrative-based methodological framework.

### Eljee Javier's vignette

#### Eljee's context

In the English language teaching industry, professionals are categorised as native speakers (NS) or non-native speakers (NNS). This study critically explores the identity of a sub-category of English language teachers: visible ethnic minority native English speaking teachers (VEM-NEST). I am an English language teacher who is also a visible ethnic minority and so this topic is one that affects me on a personal and professional level. The aims of this study were to explore the experiences of VEM-NESTs and whether this specific category further problematises the native speaker model in English language teaching.

A narrative-based methodology was used which occurred in two stages. During the first stage I sent participants a written story of my own



experiences of being a VEM-NEST with an invitation to respond by writing their own stories. The second stage was a one-to-one interview in which the interview questions were based on their original written narrative. Ten participants took part in this study (five male, five female). To be selected for this study, participants had to have had at least two years' teaching experience, be employed as English teachers at the time, and be from an ethnic minority but consider themselves native speakers of English.

### **Eljee's transcript**

#### **Extract 6.1**

- 1 I: You grew up in- (.) with a large extended family  
2 (.) can you tell me a little more about how your  
3 cultural heritage was instilled in you (.) what  
4 what did that actually involve?  
5 P: Well (.) I might of "mis-written" the situation.  
6 I mean I grew up with my nuclear family but I had  
7 a lot of contact with extended family so with  
8 visits rather than living in the same area <so to  
9 speak> I mean, it really involved getting  
10 together for birthdays, celebrations and eating  
11 certain foods listening to certain music I  
12 suppose and I dunno, having a shared  
13 consciousness as being different but open  
14 conversations of overcoming those differences  
15 or I don't know, acclimatising.  
16 When I say open conversation I mean nothing  
17 explicit but it was just, it wasn't a case  
18 of "We're different and we're going to actively  
19 try to stay different" it was kind of we want  
20 to try to acclimatise as much as possible and  
21 make the most of the opportunities of being  
22 here whilst still keeping an identity in terms  
23 of say food or music or language - this pidgin  
24 English that was spoken in the house.  
25 So yeah, it was sort of having a balancing act,  
26 certainly not trying to blend in too too much  
27 and lose a sense of identity.  
28 I: What do mean by "blending in too much", like  
29 what was too much?  
30 P: That's a really interesting question.  
31 I: The reason why I ask that is because I wonder

32 that myself in a Canadian sort of culture so  
33 I wondered what your take is on that?

34 P: Yeah, it's interesting generally that your story  
35 and then me reflecting on my story sort made me  
36 think, "Oh I haven't really tackled these  
37 questions very much growing up" (.) but I'm  
38 trying even to think why that would be. (.) I'm  
39 I'm sorry I'm not sure-

40 I: Don't worry, I mean it make me think (.) like  
41 yeah finding that balance between being- growing  
42 up in a Filipino household. It was interesting  
43 when you mentioned Patois in your house, where  
44 with my parents they spoke English to me and my  
45 brother. That was quite specific. My mother can  
46 speak German, English, both dialects in the  
47 Philippines and Spanish and my dad speaks  
48 English, Tagalog - the main dialect in the  
49 Philippines - and Japanese and my brother and I,  
50 we just speak English! I mean this linguistic  
51 heritage here! And part of that was that they  
52 wanted us to be Canadian and be really part of  
53 so Canadian society English was the best way  
54 forward and that was a choice growing up so I  
55 guess I didn't notice it until I got older that  
56 they still insisted, even up to high school, that  
57 the values - for example the emphasis on family,  
58 and the whole taking care of your elders, the  
59 honorific system of how you address people - in  
60 my family but certainly different things like  
61 using English and getting an education in Canada.  
62 That was kind of a path to try to negotiate  
63 so I don't know if it's something similar  
64 with you?

65 P: It was very similar, I mean things like the  
66 language thing for a start, I mean it was  
67 expected, up there they'd speak Patois to us  
68 all the time y'know to varying degrees. I think  
69 my dad is much more a user of the dialect  
70 whereas my mum you could probably say she's  
71 got an accent until she swings into it full on  
72 but it was never expected that we'd speak like  
73 that and between either that or even having

74 a very strong black country accent as I mentioned  
75 in my story it just wasn't expected. Again I  
75 think that was a sense of they thought, they  
76 really wanted us to be very well educated -  
77 - my sister and I - they wanted us to get  
78 a good education, it was always expected that we  
79 would go to university and maybe me more so  
80 than my sister as I was always more academic than  
81 my sister. Anyway so it was definitely an  
82 expectation that I would go. I think then  
83 attached to that was a sense of well people  
84 that do that, that speak a certain way, y'know  
85 what I mean in order to get ahead in this society  
86 that you're in (.) you need to speak a certain  
87 way and y'know my parents ... they were aware that  
88 they were both working class, my mom dad worked  
89 in a supermarket and a factory and I think they  
90 felt that their background limited them really in  
91 terms of achieving that...

### **Eljee's reflexive comment**

Extract 6.1 above demonstrates the interactive nature of narratives and how the audience influences the interview event. The stories that people tell themselves, and others, about who they are and who they are not, in addition to who and how they would like to/should be (Martin 1995: 10) are choices made in the construction of identities. In this sense the story is one's identity, in both content and form (Lieblich et al. 1998).

As a VEM-NEST researcher I occupy a particular position with regards to how this study was conducted and have, to the best of my ability, attempted to be transparent about what I brought into this study. Using my written story as an opening gambit was a method I used to disclose who I am as a researcher and to establish a rapport in preparation for interacting with my research participants in real time.

This interview extract is an example of how I chose to share my experiences with my participant to exemplify my point of view, and present an identity that I wanted to be known by. I related some information about my family and invited her to respond. Given that we are both VEM-NESTs, her response was framed accordingly. If she were to have shared the same story with a different person, it would be tailored to suit the audience in order to construct an identity that she wanted to make known in that context.

## Introduction

Eljee's vignette provides a snapshot of a qualitative interviewer at work. This transcript is very different from a standard series of semi-structured questions and answers. Some differences are immediately obvious. The turns are long. Also, Eljee starts out with a fairly standard question and follow-up question but, for a number of reasons, increasingly shares her own experiences. The interviewer and interviewee's shared identity as 'visible ethnic minority native speakers of English' (VEM-NESTs) shapes the interaction in noticeable ways. As she says, she wants to be transparent about this. We return to this vignette later in the chapter as we open out some of the following interview discussions and dilemmas:

- How empathetic should I be?
- How is my own identity shaping the interviews?
- Am I allowed to disclose my own experiences?
- How should I establish and handle rapport?

There are no easy answers to these questions but attempting to answer them is a revealing and sensitising process in itself.

The last chapter (Chapter 5) dealt with some of the building blocks of the interactional architecture of qualitative interviews; the kinds of questions asked and different ways of probing for detail. These interview features will obviously affect what the interviewee says but in this chapter (Chapter 6) we move beyond some of these more obvious building blocks to consider a range of interview orientations, interviewer stances, and characteristics that are admittedly more fuzzy but undoubtedly equally important in developing a reflexive account of qualitative interviewing. In opening up some of these reflexive issues, the chapter summarises and develops initial arguments in Mann (2011), where I outlined several 'discourse dilemmas' (2011: 18). In the same article the notion of 'parameters of sensitivity' (2011: *ibid.*) was also floated. The chapter begins with a discussion of 'discourse dilemmas' and then develops ideas related to parameters of sensitivity. It looks particularly at reflexive treatments of empathy, rapport, and disclosure, including ethical perspectives.

## Discursive perspectives

Chapter 2 provided an overview of important contributions from various social sciences in helping to theorise the qualitative interview and

outline what a reflexive approach looks like. Sociology provided the first attempts to theorise the interview (e.g. Cicourel 1964), but contributions in other fields have been important. Briggs (1986), in the field of anthropology, was particularly influential in providing insights from his fieldwork in Mexico; he highlighted the illusion of researcher objectivity and neutrality when trying to standardise the distinctively social event of a qualitative interview. In ethnomethodology, conversation analysis (CA), and membership categorisation analysis (MCA), important analysis has been undertaken on the interactive construction of interviews (e.g. Sacks 1992; Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995; Baker 1997). Social psychology too has for some time been interested in paying close attention to interview 'interaction' (e.g. Edwards and Potter 1992; Antaki et al. 2003). In particular, a 'discursive turn' in social psychology quickly established a growing literature and a distinct approach called 'discursive psychology'. Discursive psychology tends to draw on traditions of CA. Potter and Hepburn (2005: 281), for example, provide a strong argument that interviews should be studied as an 'interactional object'. In this chapter, I draw on and represent the concerns of discursive psychology in reference to qualitative interviewing in order to highlight important perspectives and dilemmas. The first section summarises four key issues in establishing the nature of the reflexive challenge for the qualitative researcher, before moving on to highlight particular concerns and dilemmas.

### **Co-construction**

One main outcome of the literature summarised above is that it has problematised the qualitative interview (of particularly note are Cicourel 1964; Silverman 1973; Briggs 1986; Mishler 1986a). It is now well established that interview talk is inevitably a co-construction between the interviewer and interviewee. In this regard, it does not matter whether you conceive your interviews as 'active', 'conversational', 'narrative', or 'structured', the interaction is still co-constructed (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). What needs further reflexive deliberation is how the interviewer and their conception of the interview affect this co-construction. We need to consider this because all interviews involve at least two contributing participants and the interaction that happens in a qualitative interview is more than a straightforward revelation of truths about the informant's life. There have been numerous arguments that we cannot treat interviews as an unproblematic technology that somehow reveals what is real, authentic, and objective (e.g. Drew and Heritage 1992; Talmay 2010). Atkinson and Silverman (1997: 322)

were early advocates that we need to be suspicious of the 'self-revealing speaking subject' where the interviewer's job is to elicit 'confessional revelations' of the interviewee's life, beliefs and experience. Discursive psychologists (e.g. Antaki et al. 2003) suggest that in order to understand how interview features are co-constructed, interview data needs to be subject to the same standards of discourse analysis as any piece of spoken interaction. Although conversation analysis is not the only way of analysing interview data, it has proved a useful approach (see Richards 2011; Roulston 2011; Talmy 2011) and we will come back to the range of options for analysis in Chapter 8.

### **More focus on the interviewer**

The growing realisation that interviews are inevitably a co-construction has meant not focusing entirely on the interviewee. Of course, the social science literature has continued to focus primarily on distinctive features of the interviewee (e.g. attention to gender, age, race, and other aspects of identity). However, recognising the importance of co-construction brings a requirement that we pay more attention to what the interviewer is also bringing to the process and the way that identities are constructed and managed at various stages. Foley (2012) details how researchers work to 'construct the respondent' at various stages: through the selection process; through the interview interaction; in the analytic process; and finally in the production of manuscripts. An important aspect of a greater focus on the interviewer is paying attention to issues of identity. Identity has been the subject of interest and debate in social sciences for many years (identity is usually seen as complex, hybrid, emergent, changeable, and performative). Recognising that identity is constructed, co-constructed, and re-constructed in qualitative interviews (and that this process is shaped by the interviewer) is an important starting point. If we see identity as something that is shaped through interaction (including interview interaction) then we can start to pick up the detail of a dynamic process where membership of particular categories is made relevant (e.g. in Eljee's vignette: 'native speaker of English', 'daughter', 'university graduate'). Focusing on the interviewer as well as the interviewee allows us to see how identity is negotiable and negotiated within research contexts. An interviewer may be more or less an insider (or an expert on the research topic) or belonging to a membership category depending on the way participants align to each other. De Fina and Perrino (2011) highlight debates and issues related to this topic (see also De Andrade 2000) and they make clear how being an insider or an outsider in a community can be a negotiable

issue. The nature of interviewer/interviewee relationships can also change over time. Vincent (2013: 344) draws on Reinharz (1992) in discussing examples of such changing relationships. For example, being a stranger may enable interviewees to feel more able to talk freely. On the other hand, being a stranger may also result in more guarded responses on occasions. Vincent describes her shift from stranger to 'less of a stranger'. As other researchers have found (e.g. Schultz 2001), her outsider status meant that participants felt they could direct questions and tap into her experience and knowledge. By her second and third interviews, the questions were not just one way. This is an interesting discussion of her status as both an outsider and, increasingly, an insider (making her status difficult to specify).

### **Context and set-up**

We have devoted a whole chapter (Chapter 3) to various perspectives on context. In particular we established that the interview 'produces situated understandings grounded in specific interactional episodes' (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: 353). We also focused on the problem of a lack of information about the way the interview is set up. This problem can be summarised as what task understandings are presented to participants. This understanding is usually established at the beginning of the interview (just before the recording device is switched on). Issues such as how the interview task was explained need to be addressed; although the interviewer may be interested in eliciting detail of the interviewee's lived experience and context, the interview enacts its own context. Part of this context is the basis on which interviewees have been 'recruited' (whether they are, for example, 'visible ethnic minority native speakers' of English or 'working mothers'). We have also established in Chapter 2 that each research interview draws on and recreates generic expectations and this reflexive generic relationship is captured in Briggs' statement that 'the communicative structure of the entire interview' shapes 'each utterance' (1986: 102–103). Each sequence is linked to the next. An utterance, point of view, opinion, belief, anecdote, argument, or complaint does not exist in isolation.

Each interview is set up in particular ways. There will probably be requests, explanations, and rapport building before the research interview begins in earnest. Potter and Hepburn (2012) suggest that two features of set up are often missing from the actual accounts that are produced after the interview. The reader is usually not given information about the basis on which the interviewee has been 'recruited', neither is there detail of the 'task understanding' – what the interviewee

has been told about the nature and format of the interview or research study purposes.

### **Moving from the 'what' to the 'how'**

The last of these four issues is a response to the recognition of the importance of co-construction, context, and influence of the interviewer. The view that it is important to consider interviews as social practice rather than just research instrument means an analytic shift from focusing solely on the 'whats' (the product of the interview) to at least some focus on the 'hows' (see Talmy 2010). Donnelly (2003) captures the challenge for qualitative researchers to shift from a 'what' perspective to a 'how' perspective and 'to articulate as fully as possible the processes associated with the data analysis of interviews' (2003: 318). An approach that recognises the social construction of interview data (where interview data are best treated as versions or accounts of experiences, truths, beliefs, feelings, facts etc.) puts more emphasis on the 'assembly process' (Holstein and Gubrium 1995: 78) rather than just what is assembled. This is usually a question of rebalancing (rather than throwing the baby out with the bathwater). It is not necessary to perform an extensive analysis of the 'hows' in order to view the research interview as social practice. However, 'a reflexive recognition of the situated accomplishment of the interview' (Talmy 2011: 34) does mean more consideration of the 'how'. Another way of saying this is that we need move from a reliance on the 'interview-as-technique' perspective towards the 'interview-as-local-accomplishment' perspective (Silverman 1993: 104).

Trying to articulate the processes associated with analysis of interviews involves 'epistemological reflexivity' (Willig 2001: 32) and a critical examination of methodology, assumptions, choices, and theories that influence the research. Willig's work is primarily in psychology but reflexivity has become an important touchstone in sociology and anthropology too (see Clifford and Marcus 1986). In social science the production of reflexive accounts means that sociologists, anthropologists, and ethnographers have become more visible in their writing. This increased visibility shifts the balance from representations of the researched towards at least some representations of the researcher. Nightingale and Cromby explain this as requiring an examination of 'the ways in which a researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research' (1999: 28). It encourages a more critical engagement with interview practice and processes where difficulties, confusion, and complexities are not simply 'swept



under the carpet' (Clarke and Robertson 2001: 773) but become at least part of the account.

### **Task**

1. What do you think Clarke and Robertson are talking about? What kinds of difficulties, confusions, and complexities might get 'swept under the carpet'?
2. Read Jessica's reflexive comment below. What difficulties are troubling Jessica as researcher?

### **Jessica's reflexive comment**

I conducted an interview with a 19 year old student. I'd been teaching the group for 7 weeks when the interview took place and knew that she was a bright, funny and confident young woman who was not shy about expressing her opinions in class. But I'd also become increasingly aware of and annoyed by her refusal to speak English to anybody but me in class. This undermined my attempts to establish a 'target-language-only' classroom. It is fair to say that I was quite exasperated with her before this interview took place and I think aspects of this relationship certainly impacted on the way the interview played out. During the interview I asked a question aimed at eliciting her attitude to L1 use in class but I think I was already anticipating her answers, having heard them previously in class (you could summarise this as 'using English to speak to another Catalan native-speaker is somehow fake and false'). At one point in the interview, she used an analogy of myself and my husband (an English speaker) speaking Catalan at home (saying this would be similarly strange). This annoyed me when she said it, probably unreasonably, because of her excessive confidence. It was an assumption about my personal life that was actually wrong as we speak Catalan to each other in the presence of Catalan speakers, as a courtesy. So, I corrected her in the interview. In retrospect it wasn't necessary. Her comment was perfectly reasonable. This whole experience made me realize that, even though I'm collecting data for my PhD, I've still got my teacher's hat on. It is noticeable in the interview that I pick the student up on an incorrect vocabulary choice! On one hand, if I'm justifying this, many students volunteered for the interviews to take part in

order to get a little extra practice, so am I just fulfilling their wishes? However, on the other hand, am I exerting my authority over her by reminding her of our roles? Reading over the transcript again, I can see that I gave her an unnecessarily hard time on a couple of occasions. I can see that I'm frustrated, and sometimes resort to a kind of emotional blackmail ('that would make me really happy'). Actually I was appalled when I listened to the recording because it sounded unprofessional and inappropriate. Where was my professional detachment? I was obviously incapable of divorcing my teacher self (in the interview, tired and impatient) from my researcher self (wanting to see the learner's perspective). Not only did I tell her off, but I effectively prevented her from opening up more about her reasons because I didn't agree with her.

Jessica's detailed and revealing journal entry opens up a number of difficulties but they are not clear-cut. For example, Jessica's 'teacher's hat' comes into play in a number of ways, most noticeably in correcting language errors but also feeling the need to correct or contest the student's use of Jessica's life as analogy. However, this 'problem' needs to be seen in relation to the fact that the students have chosen to have the interviews conducted in their L2 (English). We can see from Jessica's account that their interactional history (from the classroom) and Jessica's impatience and annoyance with the student undoubtedly impacts on the quality of the interview.

### Discourse dilemmas

In order to be both reflexive and transparent, we need to account for the ways in which the interview context and our researcher identity and positioning affect the interview interaction and be willing to confront some of the more problematic issues that arise from our interview practice. Usually previous interactional relationships or an acquaintance status are not as problematic as in Jessica's example but they are nonetheless often interactionally relevant. In Anne's vignette (p. 80) we can see obvious ways in which the relationship is being invoked, remembered and reconstituted. Extract 6.2 shows Anne checking whether her knowledge of 'G' is correct and up-to-date.

#### Extract 6.2

7 I: ... because you're running  
8 a private language school as well now, aren't



of representation of interview interaction) will be treated separately in Chapter 10 ('Representation').

It is one thing to recognise these contingent problems and another thing to properly address them:

Sociologists are famous for pointing things out that they then ignore; the interactionally contingent aspects of the interview are among those things. We write methodological articles about these contingent aspects and then we go on to analyse the data as though it was not so. (Warren 2012: 140)

Potter and Hepburn are concerned that claims about cognitive phenomena (such as beliefs) are based on discourse data but without a corresponding specification of exactly where and how in the data such an assertion can be justified.

Another issue is related to the identity category under which the participants have been recruited. They provide examples of people being recruited for research being categorised in roles such as 'recreational drug user' or 'adolescent male' (p. 290). Recruiting someone for an interview as a 'recreational drug user' is likely to have significant consequences for how interview interaction plays out. A lot depends on what the interviewee has been told about the purpose of the interview. If a language teacher is recruited for an interview about personalisation in the classroom, they are unlikely to represent themselves as pretty much treating all students equally. An overriding professional identity will push them to represent themselves as a caring, responsive practitioner who regularly takes account of individual's needs and wants.

### **Eljee's vignette**

If we return for a moment to Eljee's vignette, we can see how taking into account co-construction, context, the interviewer and the 'assembling process' is essential. Eljee has already shared her own view that 'transparency' and being explicit about what she 'brought into the study' are an integral part of reporting her research. Her full narrative study (Javier 2015) also includes a critical examination of her epistemology (Willig 2001), in addition to a critical account of her assumptions. She addresses how her involvement shapes the interviewee's contributions. In some ways it is easier for her because she is not aiming to be objective or neutral. She could of course still have stripped out the interviewee turns and produced a thematic analysis based solely on the

interviewee's turns (telling us about 'P's parents expectation that she should go to university and her working-class background). However, this sort of account would miss out on the richness of the dialogic effects that play out both between the researcher and the 'researched', and between their written narrative texts.

Reviewing Eljee's transcript (p. 145), there is a real sense of dialogic engagement. Not only are there obvious ways in which the previously written narrative text creates a dialogic effect (line 5 'I might have mis-written'; line 35 'my story'; line 74 'as I mentioned in my story'), there is also a construction of shared experience and identity, which is expressed by both the interviewee (line 34 'your story and then me reflecting on my story') and by the interviewer (line 40 - 'it made me think'). It is also important to note the use of vague language (Channell 1994) in articulating these liminal spaces related to identity and language (see Grossen 2010). The hesitant and provisional nature of some of the language ('I dunno ... I mean ... I suppose ... just ... like ...') is typical of emergent real-time articulation (Mann 2002). The dialogic effect of both the narratives and the interview talk create interactional spaces where perturbation and uncertainty are characteristic elements of the talk (lines 34-39: 'making me think' 'but I'm trying even to think').

To summarise, the way Eljee has set up the research means it is much more likely that her own experiences are going to be explicitly orientated to in the interviewee's contributions (e.g. line 34-36 where 'P' comments on Eljee's 'story'). Eljee is consciously and deliberately using her own experience as prompt in two ways. The first way is through her written story of her own experiences as a VEM-NEST. The second way is through disclosure, for instance in her extended spoken disclosure (lines 42-62). Overall, she shifts from a fairly straightforward series of questions (the open question on line 1 and the reflect/probe on line 28) to increasing use of disclosure and rapport work (lines 31-33 and lines 40-64).

## **Parameters of sensitivity**

Mann (2011) puts forward the proposition that, for the qualitative interviewer, there are a number of questions, dilemmas, and choices that need more reflexive consideration and treatment and that these dilemmas are responded to by finding an appropriate point between two parameters. So, as an example, one standard piece of interview advice is that you keep questions neutral and don't disclose your point of view (be neutral, objective, and avoid influencing the interviewee). However, in terms of developing rapport and maintaining a

conversation-like interview, it may be sometimes useful to allow some element of disclosure. This 'don't disclose ⇔ disclose' is one parameter of sensitivity. If you adopt the position that some element of disclosure can be helpful, then you need to be reflexive about monitoring this. When might disclosure help with rapport and establishing conversational and comfortable interaction? When does disclosure get in the way and start to cut down the space for the interviewee to articulate their views and beliefs?

Table 6.1 is based closely on Mann (2011: 18) and suggests some possible areas for developing reflexive sensitivity.

If we take the first of these parameters of sensitivity, our interview might be more or less agenda-led. Sticking quite closely to a set, fixed, and planned series of questions might allow greater comparison among cases but you may miss out on rich detail. The following account is a good example of an interviewing experience at the opposite end of the scale from being agenda-led (especially being led by the interviewer). This is a fascinating example of an ethnographer at work, where allowing an informant to take the lead can provide fascinating insights (Bernard 2012: 186):

At one point on that second night, Savas told me (almost offhandedly) that he had spent more than a year of his life walking the bottom of the Mediterranean. I asked him how he knew this, and he challenged me to document it. Savas had decided that there was something important that I needed to know and he manoeuvred the interview around to make sure I learned it. This led to about 3 hours of painstaking work. We counted the number of seasons he'd been to sea over a 46-year career (he remembered that he hadn't worked at all during 1943 because of 'something to do with the war'). We figured conservatively the number of days he'd spent at sea, the average number of dives per trip, and the average depth and time per dive. We joked about the tendency of divers to exaggerate their exploits and about how fragile human memory is when it comes to this kind of detail. It was difficult to stay on the subject, because Savas was such a good raconteur and a perceptive analyst of Kalymnian life. The interview meandered off on interesting tangents, but after a while, either Savas or I would steer it back to the issue at hand. In the end, discounting heavily for both exaggeration and faulty recall, we reckoned that he'd spent at least 10,000 hours – about a year and a fourth, counting each day as a full 24 hours – under water and had walked the distance between Alexandria and Tunis at least three times.

Table 6.1 Parameters of sensitivity

Parameters of sensitivity	Comments
Agenda-led ⇔ Conversational	This is an important balance in semi-structured interviews. There is usually a set of questions but some flexibility to have more conversational sequences. Open interviews tend to be more conversational (see Chapter 3).
Direct ⇔ Indirect	Sensitivity around the issue of directness covers a number of issues (e.g. hypothetical questions, indirect probes (e.g. asking about other peoples' views, offering anecdotes, texts). Richards (2011) shows how standard advice on directiveness tends to ignore 'minimal responses'. For more detail see Chapter 4.
Conventional ⇔ Active	Considerations of the balance between rapport and empathy and more 'active' or confronting stances (Holstein and Gubrium 2004). This might be compared with interview moves associated with 'active listening' (see Edge 2002). This is covered in this chapter.
Empathy ⇔ Disclosure	The balance between trying to view things from the interviewee's perspective and 'contribution' or 'disclosure' (see Rapley 2004; Kvale and Brinkmann 2009 on 'inter-view'). This is covered in this chapter.
Reports ⇔ Accounts	Recognising the co-production and situated nature of what is presented. It also covers a monologic/dialogic parameter. This is covered in Chapter 10.
Rapport ⇔ Overrapport	Warren and Karner (2009: 141) spell out the difficulties of both 'underrapport' and 'overrapport'. This is covered in this chapter.
Context-free ⇔ Context-shaped	A representation issue – the balance between the use of context-free quotes and longer sections which show some interactional context. This is covered in Chapter 3.
How ⇔ What	Might also be called process and product. This is a useful overall parameter – to make sure there is at least some reflexive element. See Ellis and Berger (2002); Davies (2008). This is at the heart of the reflexive endeavour.

The enterprise (of arriving at a better understanding of Savas's underwater walking distances) provides a focus from which there are meanderings and tangents. One of the interesting features of this experience is the organising imperative of the interview's generic expectation (the interviewee 'manoeuvred', the interviewer or the interviewee would 'steer it back' to the issue). It is still very much an interview, however, and there is an important sense here of going with the flow and trusting the informant to lead into interesting places. In Savas's interview, the exact numbers are not the point. Rather, it is the process of establishing the number of hours that produces the rich account. This kind of account is only possible when an interviewer, having defined the focus of the interview, is prepared to allow the respondent (Savas) to determine the content:

What did matter was that Savas Ergas had a really good sense of what he thought I needed to know about the life of a sponge diver. It was I, the interviewer, who defined the focus of the interview; but it was Savas, the respondent, who determined the content. And was I ever glad he did.

Returning to Table 6.1, it was meant as a starting point (in Mann 2011). However, it now seems to me (sitting here re-reading it) to be something of a mixed bag. Some parameters are more straightforward than others and are at opposite ends of cline in an everyday sense, for example 'direct' and 'indirect'. Others are certainly opposites, for example 'rapport' and 'over-rapport' but 'over-rapport' is an inherently negative term. Others, e.g. empathy and disclosure, are not really opposites at all and are probably best treated separately. This last point can be illustrated by returning to Eljee's vignette. In Eljee's move below (line 40 in Extract 6.4), her decision to disclose at that point in the interview is clearly motivated out of her empathetic understanding and her appreciation that 'P' is perhaps struggling and potentially feeling uncomfortable.

#### **Extract 6.4**

38 P: ... I'm trying even to think why that would be. (.)  
 39 I'm sorry I'm not sure-  
 40 I: Don't worry, I mean it make me think (.) like  
 41 yeah finding that balance between being- growing  
 42 up in a Filipino household..

So an empathetic appreciation of the difficulty that an interviewer is experiencing might well prompt disclosure. I think in the original



formulation (in ‘parameters of sensitivity’), I had been focused on something like the contrast between focus on the interviewee (empathy and understanding) and focus on the interviewer (disclosure of experiences and beliefs) but I do not think it necessarily helpful to see them as straightforward ends of a cline. As Eljee’s example shows, their relationship is more subtle and nuanced than that. In what follows, I focus on three of these areas of sensitivity – rapport, empathy, and disclosure – and attempt to draw out considerations and possible dilemmas. Although they are treated separately there is a great deal of overlap and relationship between these three areas.

### **Rapport**

Most guides to qualitative interviewing stress the importance of building rapport. Sensitivity to relationships with research participants needs to include thinking about levels of rapport (Harrison et al. 2001) and negotiating boundaries of trust and rapport is part of this fine balance (Russell 2005). For ethnographers ‘hanging out’, chatting, and letting the informants get to know you is important in building levels of trust and rapport (e.g. Bernard 2012). Other researchers need to build rapport on a more short-term basis (through introductory e-mails, phone calls, and pre-interview explanations and orientations). It is important to be honest and open in all dealings and avoid ‘faking’ rapport or any other manipulative behaviour (see Bernard 2012). The important thing is to remember that it needs to be established and we need to keep it in mind. This means not letting our pre-occupation with our research focus make us forget to be welcoming, cordial, friendly, and interested in them as people rather than simply informants. Most of this is common sense but it is worth thinking about the level and nature of the rapport we manage to establish.

We also need to consider over-rapport. A standard view would suggest that over-rapport is something to guard against; too much rapport and familiarity leads to a lack of perspective, which may impact on the ability of the researcher to see the ‘wood from the trees’. This is sometimes seen as ‘going native’ (getting too close) and is more likely in acquaintance interviews or prolonged fieldwork. Ethnographers are particularly at risk of losing this sense of distance and sometimes trust and rapport can take you into private or dangerous territory. Herzog (2012: 222) provides an interesting discussion of such dilemmas and she quotes Warren (1987: 41) in giving examples of where extended relationships in the field reach complicating levels of intimacy:

We are told for example that Carolyn Fleuhr-Lobban, as a married woman, was treated to oil massages, and we are told that for Dona

Davis rapport was enhanced by taking a lover. The implication – sometimes the explicit indication – was that the events described in these anecdotes resulted in greater rapport, which in turn resulted in access to more (and presumably more truthful) information.

In other research studies, rapport might be difficult to maintain. Bott (2010) details an ethnographic study into British migration to Tenerife where rapport proved to be problematic. Most of her interviewees were employed as lap dancers and timeshare salespersons and her interviews sometimes became heated, especially around the subject of immigration to the UK, which emerged as a dominant theme. Interviewees often used racist and sexist language and Bott found it difficult to persevere with any kind of ‘rapport building’ and objectivity under these conditions. As she says, ‘the richer the data became, the harder it was to stomach’ (2010: 159). Although the interviewee disclosures were providing invaluable data and an intellectual fascination, they also ‘jarred with the personal and political, anti-racist me was almost unbearable’ (2010: 167).

### **Empathy**

Empathy has been the subject of some lively debate in social science, particularly in relation to critiques of ‘emotionalist’ interviewing (see Silverman 2001). In this style of interviewing empathy is built through the generation of rapport, trust, and intimacy. Empathy can be seen as a contrast with more active forms of interviewing where there are more possibilities for contesting or questioning interviewer accounts. Brinkmann and Kvale (2005: 157) have argued that ‘prevailing forms of warm, empathic interviews are ethically questionable’ and in contrast they propose ‘various forms of actively confronting interviews’. Kvale, in another paper, evokes the cautionary tale of Little Red Riding Hood:

There are many kinds of wolves. Today, we could perhaps include some interviewers who, through their gentle, warm, and caring approaches, may efficiently circumvent the interviewee’s defences to strangers and invade their private worlds (2006: 498).

Again, like rapport, if empathy is manipulative and the researcher is not genuinely interested in the interviewee’s life and perspective, it is problematic. Watson (2009: 114) warns that the ‘easy assumption of empathy potentially stifles research’ and can give rise to ‘unethical practices’ as well as ‘complacency’. If an empathetic stance is too

readily adopted, it leads us to project 'our own understandings onto the unsuspecting other and in the process prematurely closing down research'. Empathy can also serve to mask asymmetrical elements of the interviewer/interviewee relationship.

Empathy is something that needs maintaining in interview interaction. A lot of this work is subtle and helps to keep the interview on track. When you look at your own interview practice, it is worth looking at how subtle features of interaction, ranging from questions to forms of alignment, relate to empathy. In Extract 6.5 'R' is being interviewed about her teaching experience on a native-teacher teaching scheme in Hong Kong.

### **Extract 6.5**

- 1 I: What are the challenges of working in these  
2 schools?  
3 R: I think probably you don't have the same sort of  
4 banter, but you do, after some time you get-  
5 I think it's just that you're expected to  
6 work with lots of different people all the time  
7 and that's a great thing, but inevitably some  
8 people you'll find harder to work with than  
9 others but you just have to deal with it.  
10 I: Well, that's like anywhere, that's life, isn't  
11 it?  
12 R: Yeah, but I probably work with about 18 different  
13 teachers in a week.  
14 I: Yes, it's a lot, isn't it?  
15 R: Yeah. So we might be teaching the exact same  
16 lesson but be completely different with a  
17 different teacher

This is an interesting example of real-time subtle shifts in positioning. The interviewer move in line 10 is probably meant to be empathetic and understanding. However, the use of 'well' seems to be taken up as an argument marker, or at least as underplaying the significance of R's difficulties of working with so many different teachers. In either case, the argument marker 'but' in the next line (line 12) intensifies R's argument that this is not just run of the mill (not 'just life'). The interviewer in turn shifts to a much stronger form of alignment, understanding, and empathy in line 14. These kind of moment-by-moment shifts in alignment help keep the interviewee feel understood.

Examples like the one above show that interviewers are often working a balance between being empathetic but, at the same time, not creating a warm bath effect that shifts towards the kind of understanding and empathy that is characteristic of therapy or counselling. It is possible to establish rapport and empathy but then later to realise that there have been missed opportunities to probe and data is therefore limited.

### **Disclosure**

A standard position on interviewer disclosure would regard it as something to be avoided. Richards (2003: 50) says the following:

In interviews we are concerned only with encouraging the speaker, not with putting our own point across, so the skills we need are still collaborative but they are focused on drawing from the speaker the richest and fullest account possible.

This is certainly the orthodox position but are there occasions when getting the richest and fullest account might be helped with some element of disclosure? This might be different from a desire to put our 'own point across'. First of all it makes a great deal of difference whether the disclosure is purposeful. In other words, is the desire to share a story or express your point of view or belief a loss of interviewer concentration, or are you deliberately using disclosure to produce a dialogic effect? If we look at a short extract of Eljee's interview above we can see that, although it is certainly disclosure, she summarises her position in line 62 and then explicitly hands over the turn (lines 63–64). This transfers the attention back to the interview (inviting the interviewee to comment on similarity; Extract 6.6).

#### **Extract 6.6**

62 I: ... that was kind of a path to try to negotiate  
 63     so I don't know if it's something similar  
 64     with you?  
 65 P: It was very similar,...

Rather than simply take the position that disclosure needs to be avoided, it is perhaps better to see it as an area in which to develop sensitivity. Reflecting on this, I think a distinction needs to be drawn between personal disclosure (in terms of sharing information about one's life, current situation, experiences, etc.) and personal positioning

(in terms of advancing an argument, presenting an opinion or point of view, etc.). This is important because while I think the latter is rarely, if ever, advisable the former might be essential.

We have noted (in Chapter 4) that different styles of interview involve very different attitudes to disclosure or 'sharing' and, perhaps not surprisingly, there are a range of views on this issue. Sometimes 'sharing' can simply get in the way, especially when interviewees have fairly traditional expectations of the research interview:

I can remember sharing stories of mine that I thought connected to what the participant was saying and sensing that the participant was impatient for me to stop talking. (Seidman 2006: 89)

This is clearly different from the feminist position adopted by Oakley, who argues that interviews will be less manipulative if 'the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship' (1981: 41). Again, we need to find an appropriate balance:

I try to strike a balance, saying enough about myself to be alive and responsive but little enough to preserve the autonomy of the participant's words and to keep the focus of attention on his or her experience rather than mine. (Siedman 2006: 89)

In truth, there is probably a lot more disclosure that you might imagine from reading published versions of researchers' studies that include interviews. This is one of the kinds of interactive work that can get air-brushed out of accounts and we come back to this issue in Chapter 10 (Representation). Researchers feel the pressure to keep to expected norms and maintain neutrality. Extract 6.7 features a reminder of an example from Chapter 3 where van Enk (2009: 1265) talks about being 'caught' on tape and 'violating the convention of interviewer neutrality'.

### **Extract 6.7**

- 1 I: At one point you said something about the ADHD theory
- 2 N: Yeah. (laughs)
- 3 I: which I thought was really interesting [unclear] [both laugh].
- 4 As an interviewer I'm not supposed to say that. Very neutral,
- 5 right.
- 6 N: Oh oh, you're caught on tape. [both laugh]

Usually this kind of evaluation ('really interesting') is a vehicle for returning to a previous point for probing and further elicitation. However, at the same time, it does not fit our image of the 'classic' neutral interview where such an evaluative comment from the interview should be avoided. However, as van Enk goes on to say:

Interviews are interactive, and whether I 'do' a distantly neutral interviewer or a chummy, self-disclosing one (and in commenting ironically that I'm supposed to be the former, I'm clearly performing the latter), I cannot avoid influencing the words of the interviewee. (2009)

There is evidence from at least some accounts that disclosure can help to build levels of trust and empathy but needs to be handled with care. Foley (2012: 311) uses two quotes from Carpenter (2005: 211), repeated here, that show how self-disclosure can both help a respondent to feel more comfortable sharing their experience (in this case of losing their virginity) but sometimes might be counterproductive.

Although (the respondent) answered me when I asked how old she'd been when she lost her virginity, she really opened up after I answered her question about how old I was – and it turned out we'd been the same age.

However, in this second quote we see the interviewer's realisation that disclosure needs to be restricted:

When it came to sharing my opinions with women and men whose beliefs appeared to differ substantially from mine, I confess that I was less forthcoming – without lying outright – for fear that being entirely open would 'poison' the interview and destroy my rapport with the respondents.

### **Ethical dimensions**

Whether we are in danger of using rapport in manipulative way or running the risk of being a wolf in disguise in our use of empathy (see Kvale above), there are always ethical dimensions in seeking to achieve appropriate levels of rapport, empathy, and disclosure (amongst other reflexive issues). For example, one of the balances that needs consideration is how far empathy takes us into the kind of talk you would expect in a therapy or counselling session. Weiss sees the research interviewer

as resembling 'a therapist by encouraging the respondent to develop thoughts and memories' and 'by eliciting the respondent's underlying emotions, and by listening closely to the respondent's utterances' (1994: 134). However, others (e.g. Kvale 2006) warn against the emotional therapeutising of the academic interview.

Particular care obviously has to be taken when interviewees are taken into sensitive or problematic areas of their lives. DeMarras and Tisdale (2002), for example, found that, in most of their interviews, troubling emotions of anger, frustration, and anxiety were 'relieved' by the participants during the process of describing anger incidents. This relieving was experienced and then explained by interviewees in a variety of ways, including direct references to 'feeling or experiencing the anger again'. They also reported physical symptoms in the form of 'flushed face and neck, shortness of breath, sweaty palms, and facial expressions indicating discomfort, frustration or anger' (2002: 118). If you want to take your interviews into areas the interviewee might find sensitive or distressing, then your approach needs to consider whether people who have already suffered or previously been distressed will be caused furthering suffering within the interview (Corbin and Morse 2003). However, neither should you assume that it is better to avoid sensitive areas. McIntosh (2009) produced a major study that established the perceived risk for participants in unstructured qualitative interviews and evaluated levels of harm when the interview causes distress. The backdrop for her research is the current crisis in research ethics governance, where research ethics boards routinely assume that unstructured interviews present levels of risk to participants. What is interesting about her study are the participants' paradoxical responses to interview participation. Taken as a whole, the participants experience distress but report benefit, not harm. Not only do participants believe that unstructured interviews provide a unique and profound opportunity to tell their stories, they experience interviews as revelatory and transformative. Consequently, McIntosh makes the argument that:

The real harm inherent in sensitive research is the failure to protect it. Human dignity is preserved, protected, and celebrated by these stories of suffering (2009: 158).

## **Summary**

This chapter has reviewed the importance of including a reflexive 'how' account as well as a 'what' account. This involves a greater appreciation

of context and the co-construction of the interview. The chapters in the book so far have provided insight into how context is important, both in terms of needing to provide relevant information about context (i.e. the conditions under which interviews were undertaken) as well as an understanding of the interactional context (i.e. how the talk is produced turn-by-turn in sequences). This chapter has detailed a range of discursive dilemmas and parameters of sensitivity in working towards a reflexive understanding of qualitative interviews.

Reflexivity is not meant to be an all-encompassing pursuit. If it brings insights and ways of moving forward with your qualitative interviewing then it will be helpful. However, it is possible to become unnecessarily self-critical and mired in self-doubt too. This is an extract from Simon's (a PhD student) research diary:

I found reviewing the transcripts difficult this week. I'm confronted by what seems to be countless missed opportunities. What would have happened if I'd elicited more here? Am I reacting fast enough? Then there's my awkward questions, frequent pauses and false-starts. Am I that inarticulate? What am I aiming for? Am I supposed to stay neutral and objective? Sometimes my interviewees seem to want me to share my views and experiences. If I do, will I reveal my vulnerability? If I don't, am I hiding and therefore putting more pressure on the interviewee's narrative?

This is a common response to spoken performance in a variety of speech event (e.g. teachers reviewing classroom extracts). Transcripts seem to show up our various failures. However, it is unlikely that any interviewee in real-time will feel that Simon has too many false-starts and hesitations. They will be focused primarily on their own contributions to the interview. In fact such disfluencies are just as likely to be interpreted as commitment to trying to phrase a question carefully. The important thing is not to worry about every detail of your interview performance but to arrive at one or two concrete strategies for future interviews (perhaps checking and probing more, disclosing/sharing some experiences for particular purposes). So, just to reiterate, this reflexive 'how' enterprise is not meant to become an all-encompassing affair but is probably best seen as an occasional lens or perspective that we bring to what are trying to achieve in our research. This lens will usually focus on transcripts and corresponding analyses that show how the interview talk is jointly accomplished by both the interviewer and the interviewee.



In our post-paradigmatic age, when dealing with the qualitative interview, it is important that we seek to ‘understand the relationship between the nature of its construction and the data which it yields’ (Talmy and Richards 2011: 4). In the remaining chapters, we will provide more examples of reflexive comment on discourse dilemmas and parameters of sensitivity in order to better understand this ‘relationship’. Developing our understanding of these areas of sensitivity will help improve the quality of our interviews through a greater congruence between our aims and outcomes. Potter and Hepburn (2005: 282) hope that there will ‘be much less interview research, but much better interview research’. This is because they see naturally occurring data as preferable (see also Silverman 2007). The view taken in this book is that qualitative interviews are not likely to reduce in the frequency of their use. However, the challenge remains to produce ‘better interview research’. Developing a reflexive approach to interviews, especially through close attention to interview interaction, will help achieve better understandings of the interview process and interaction and, at least in most cases, ‘better interview research’.

### Further reading

- Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (2004). The active interview. *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*, 2, 140–161.
- Mann, S. (2011). A critical review of qualitative interviews in applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*, 32(1), 25–42.
- Potter, J., & Hepburn, A. (2005). Qualitative interviews in psychology: Problems and possibilities. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 2(4), 281–307.
- Talmy, S. (2011). The interview as collaborative achievement: Interaction, identity, and ideology in a speech vent. *Applied Linguistics*, 32(1), 6–24.

# 7

## Beyond the Individual

### Task

Before you read Samaneh's vignette below, think for a moment about these two questions:

What difference does it make interviewing children in a group (rather than individually)?

Do you think it would be easier or more difficult to interview, if you have a lot of experience as a teacher?

After you have read the vignette, consider these questions:

- If you think this intervention was justified here, do you also think it would be justified in a one-to-one interview with (a) a child and (b) an adult. And if your answers differ, why? What are the implications of this?

### Samaneh Zandian's vignette

#### Samaneh's context

Extract 7.1 below is from a participatory group interview with children of ten to 12 years of age. This interview was part of my PhD research project, which explored how students educated at primary level in Iran make sense of intercultural relationships. Through understanding their current levels of awareness I am also investigating the potential for creating opportunities for intercultural learning. The interview participants in this school were mainly Iranians with dual nationalities who

spent parts of their lives in another country. The interview took place in a private international school where the medium of education was English (for most students in this school, English was their strong second language). Most of my other interviews were conducted in Persian but this one was conducted in English.

The project involved child-friendly questionnaires, followed by group interviews in five primary schools in Tehran. Approximately six participants from three different grades (grades 4, 5, and 6) took part in each interview and completed three collaborative tasks. During these participatory interviews children were paired based on their grades. The transcribed extract below is part of a general discussion at the end of the interview. It relates to a visual prompt card with pictures and short descriptions of four fictional classmates (from which they had to choose one 'friend'):

- Sabina is originally from Africa, but her parents moved to Abalooboo after she was born.
- Adeleh and her sister are from Afghanistan, They have recently moved to Abalooboo. Their mother tongue is Farsi.
- Sarah was born in Abalooboo. She can only speak the language spoken in Abalooboo.
- Jin is from China. She moved to Abalooboo with her parents one year before you did.

This item aimed to explore children's views about friendship as a source of environmental support in a new sociocultural context. Despite the similarities in the language and religion between Iranians and Afghans, the second multiple-choice option was only selected by very few respondents. In Extract 7.1 below, the children are responding to the following interview prompt:

I: Very few students picked Adeleh and her sister (.) why? (0.5) Do you have any idea?

### Samaneh's transcript

#### Extract 7.1

(I = interviewer)

- 1 H: I don't like Afghanistan. Because it's a dirty
- 2 and bad place.
- 3 L: me too
- 4 D: Yeah!
- 5 I: Why do you think it's a dirty and bad place?

- 6 L: Because of it's so (0.5) ((*gestures being*  
7 *disgusted*))
- 8 J: OK, em (0.5) the Afghan people who live in Iran  
9 are different, they are like (.) they moved to  
10 here to get money and stuff like that and  
11 they are really poor (.) so they are different  
12 from Afghans who are in Afghanistan and who  
13 are really rich and stuff like that (.) these  
14 people, they are working in building and  
15 they are sellers and stuff like that, so  
16 it's true that they smell and their feet are  
17 ouf ouf ((*gestures disgust due to bad smell*))  
18 ((*laughter*))(.) but it doesn't mean that they  
19 are bad people.
- 20 L: Even I saw (0.5) em the lady and the kid was  
21 just (1.0) she has one leg (.) ((*with a marked*  
22 *shocked tone*)) the the other leg was gone,  
23 she was sitting in the 'foroodgah' (=airport)
- 24 I: Yeah they are victims of the war (.) it's not  
25 their fault.
- 26 P: They um had (1.0) a war in Afghanistan a very  
27 bad war and a lot of people died in  
28 Kandahar (0.5) so it's not very nice to say that  
29 (1.0) 'they are like Yucky' or like stuff, it's  
30 not good.
- 31 D: um because the people there are actually  
32 really dirty like 'H' said (1.0) like no  
33 one want to be like them
- 34 S: Actually, I have for those two ((*gestures to L*  
35 *and H*) because (1.0) they think they are 'Yucky'  
36 or they are bad, actually Afghanistan is a  
37 country as well and they are (0.5) like us as  
38 well, but they have as 'P' said, it's (.) it's  
39 not good to say 'they are-they are so bad, they  
40 don't have a- they have a bad country, they  
41 are not good.'
- 42 J: I had a (0.5) Af-Afghan friend [in Venezuela],  
43 actually she was really nice (0.5) like she was  
44 like (0.5) mmm. She didn't study much, she got  
45 out of 20 in a test and stuff like that, she  
46 didn't talk much but she was really nice.

47 D: I grew up with an Afghani in my cottage  
48 ((referring to holiday home)), so right now he  
49 moved, but (0.5) when he wanted to leave he was  
50 so: nice to me, he was like (1.0) I said can I  
51 have this? ((referring to a gift)) he was like  
52 OK. He was like really nice to me, so when  
53 he wanted to leave, I was like cried for  
54 him.

### **Samaneh's reflexive comment**

In general, one of the positive aspects of group interviews is that participants can challenge each other's ideas and provide a wide range of responses (Lewis 1992). This can result in the formulation of the new ideas, and sometimes an individual's personal development. I think this extract shows a good example of such challenge and exchange. However, I have chosen this extract because it includes a troubling moment for me (line 24–25). It raises two questions for me: Am I justified in intervening at this stage and to what extent did my turn shape the following interaction?

In terms of what happens before my intervention, first 'H' expresses her negative feelings about Afghans (lines 1–2) and immediately receives confirmation and support from both 'L' (line 3) and 'D' (line 4). In lines 8–19, 'J' tries to point out that their comments are generalisations about Afghans; however, her own statement is also negatively biased against Afghan refugees in Iran and I found it uncomfortable to listen to this jokey characterisation of Afghans as 'smelly'. Perhaps this and 'L's naivety in lines 19–22 that makes me unable to resist some sort of contribution. I could sense that 'L' was unaccustomed to disabled people and, consequently was facing difficulty accepting them as part of her society. My response is probably a response to 'L's statement (as it clarifies why many of the Afghan refugees in Iran are physically disabled) but it is undoubtedly prompted also by the previous biased comments about Afghans. At the time though, I also remember a strong and immediate feeling of regret in interfering in the discussion.

On reflection, I am clearly making my position and stance fairly evident but it is not explicitly evaluative of the previous children's contributions (even though I was fairly shocked at their insensitive comments on Afghans). During the interviews, I was generally very careful not to interfere with the discussions, and only act as the facilitator, but I evidently found it very difficult to stay out of this particular discussion. I think it was partly because I could clearly see that children

lacked awareness of the fact that they were being very biased towards a particular ethnic group.

What effect does my intervention have? It is always difficult to tell exactly but following my statement, in lines 26–30, ‘P’ also expresses her disagreement with the rest of the group too and she is explicitly evaluative of their previous comments. It is likely that my comment might have encouraged ‘P’ to show her disagreement with the majority of the group, but I assume that she expressed her genuine opinion, rather than saying what she might have assumed it was ‘expected’ of her to say. Her turn shows awareness about the situation in Afghanistan, and actually, from the beginning of the discussion, I picked up signs of disapproval in her face. Perhaps she was initially reluctant to speak out though. What happens next is also interesting. In lines 31–33, ‘D’ disagrees with ‘P’, and confirms ‘H’s statement in line 1. This shows at least that my comment did not have a terminal effect on the flow of the discussion, even if it may well have influenced it. Perhaps my intervention also provides the warrant for ‘S’ to say ‘Actually, I have for those two’. ‘S’ directly addresses ‘D’ and ‘H’ here (who are the main participants with the opposing view). The phrase, ‘I have for those two’ is a literary translation of a phrase in spoken Persian, which means: I have something to say to those two people. After S’s comment, both ‘J’ and ‘D’ reflect and talk about their personal experiences of being in contact with Afghans, and this gave a more human angle to this discussion.

Another point to make is that I also think the transcript makes some contributions harsher than they felt in real-time. For example in lines 16–17, I think that ‘J’ is trying to say something funny to impress the other members of the group. The laughter in line 17 is a response to her own (assumed) ‘funny’ statement (in lines 16–17). Although ‘J’s comment does look very harsh in the transcript, children usually make such comments amongst themselves and find it silly and funny without intending to be offensive.

In this particular discussion it seems that my comment did not drastically change the nature of the discussion. However, I still believe that it is important for the researcher to stay in the background as far as possible, particularly when working with children, due to the existing power imbalance between the adult researcher and the child participants. I acknowledge that this can be very difficult in certain circumstances, especially for novice researchers. It is also especially difficult for teachers (like me) as classrooms are characterised by evaluative language (see Walsh 2011). When conducting research, especially when the participants are children, distinguishing between the role of a teacher and

a researcher is an essential skill, and at the same time a challenging task.

## **Introduction**

The great majority of qualitative interviews involve one interviewer and one interviewee. However, this is not always the case and it is sometimes helpful, as in Samaneh's example above, to interview more than one interviewee at a time. This may be a matter of practicality but it is also acknowledged that the dynamic of such an interview is very different and preparation is arguably even more important than for individual interviews (Barbour 2008). In this chapter we examine factors related to the range of such multiple person interviews. In particular we concentrate on interviews with children when it is usually preferable to interview a pair or group. We also review and discuss key contributions on the design and management of 'focus group interviews', summarising current thinking and advice.

The title of this chapter is deliberately ambiguous. There are three possible ways in which an interview can be 'beyond the individual'. There can be:

- more than one interviewee;
- more than one interviewer;
- more than one interview.

In short, this chapter questions the assumption that the qualitative interview is a one-off, one-to-one event. The majority of this chapter deals with the first of these perspectives and outlines key considerations in interviewing pairs or groups (including focus groups). There is then a brief focus on team aspects of interviewing, either because the interviewers are working as a team on the same research project or because there needs to be more than one interviewer present, often for language reasons (where one is working as a translator). The last part of the chapter comments on the value of conducting more than one interview, in particular focusing on the value of a 'follow up' interview.

## **More than one interviewee**

As we said in the introduction, most qualitative interviews involve one interviewer and one interviewee. However, this is not always the case and the following table provides a useful summary and starting point

for considering the nature and possibilities of individual, paired, group, or focus-group interviews. Table 7.1 is based on Ritchie and Lewis (2003: 35–36):

*Table 7.1* Interviewees: individuals, pairs, and groups

Individual interviews	They provide a concentrated focus on one individual and allow the individual to share details of his or her unique perspective and lived world. The individual interview allows concentration on personal viewpoints, beliefs, and relationships. There are inevitably more opportunities for probing for detail about the individual's understanding and relationship to the phenomenon or context being investigated.
Paired (or triad) interviews	Where you are interviewing a pair or perhaps three people, there are opportunities for interviewees to both articulate their own experience but also react to and comment on the ideas and viewpoints of the other interviewees. There might also be opportunities for interactive joint reflection. In this interaction, contrasts and comparisons and complex relations can be explored. This form of interview can be especially useful where the interviewees form a naturally occurring unit (e.g. a family, team-teachers, a management team, materials writers).
Focus groups or group discussions	Focus groups usually consist of six to ten informants who are chosen to discuss a particular topic or phenomenon. The interaction itself (how informants talk to each other) can be just as important as what they say. The focus group creates its own dynamic and social context allowing the group's ideas to be developed and refined. Focus groups may be facilitated by texts (e.g. quotations) or tasks (e.g. ranking priorities).

### Task

Read Anne's transcript below. She is interviewing a pair of boys ('A' and 'M') about learning French at school.

1. What do you think is noteworthy about this interaction?

### Anne's transcript

#### Extract 7.2

- 1 I: What kind of activities did you do today?
- 2 A: past tense
- 3 M: done a test on the past tense



- 4 I: Any others?  
5 M: we did a diary about what we've done in  
6 the past week  
7 A: yeah and we did what we've done in  
8 the morning, the afternoon and the night.  
9 I: which out of those activities did you like the  
10 most?  
11 M: doing the diaries  
12 I: why did you like doing the diaries?  
13 (0.5)  
14 did you both like the doing the diaries the  
15 best?  
16 A/M yeah  
17 A: because when you forget about things and then  
18 you think oh I did that last week and if  
19 it was funny your laugh in your head  
20 I: ah so because you had to write it down so like  
21 it reminded you of stuff and that's what you  
22 were thinking about..how about you ('M').  
23 M: I thought it was quite funny because I was just  
24 making it all up  
25 I: so you enjoyed because you got to make  
26 things up?  
27 M: yeah  
28 I: and do you think that activity was sort of  
29 helpful to you?  
30 M: yeah because it was making us learn what  
31 to do with the past tense.  
32 A: yeah because we were enjoying it we were also  
33 learning as well.  
34 I: ok

Extract 7.2 above reveals some of the difficulties of interviewing a pair and also specific issues associated with interviewing children. One of the difficulties of working with children is that their turns are often short and there is consequently little time to think for the interviewer. At the same time the interview needs to steer clear of producing an interactional dynamic that feels like an interrogation.

In the extract above, although it is obviously hard work, it is probably the case that these children are more comfortable than they would have been being interviewed on their own. They are collaboratively building

on each other's turns (e.g. line 32) and also able to be honest (about making up diary entries). However, when reviewing the transcript a few days after the interview, the interviewer felt there were missed opportunities. At line 25 she wrote 'needed to respond better here' and at line 34 'needed to respond better here!!! I could have pushed for more but what could I have said????'. Of course, it is much easier with hindsight but perhaps on line 25 a probe like 'What sort of things do you make up? Can you remember any?' might have worked better. Interviewing children is difficult and is certainly easier in pairs or groups but in either case it is important to avoid an interrogatory style of interaction. Later in this chapter we will come back to this challenge.

### **Focus groups and group interviews**

A number of writers have argued that group interviews and focus groups are different in nature (Morgan 1997; Greenbaum 1998; Barbour 2008). Barbour and Kitinger (1998) claim that focus groups are set up to explore a specific set of issues and encourage group interaction in order to generate data. Focus groups provide an opportunity to gather information from a clearly defined target group. They are particularly widely used in market research, product testing, and in information and computer technology (ICT). One of the key reasons why researchers increasingly use focus groups is where there is a significant gap in the social status (e.g. sociological inquiry) or where there are gaps in age (e.g. in educational inquiry). As Charmaz and Belgrave tell us 'focus groups are valuable collecting data from minority group members or other groups, especially when a significant gap in social status exists between researchers and participants. For some, it is easier to open up in a group interview with peers than one-on-one with a person of higher status, which can be intimidating' (2012: 354).

The invited focus group (usually six to ten people) share a particular identity, interest, profession, or are similar another way (Krueger and Casey 2009). Although group interviews tend to be smaller in size (usually four to eight people), they also tend to be recruited on the basis of a particular identity, interest or profession. It is true that group interviews can be more open-ended and that the topic can be less focused but this is not always the case. In fact, most group interviews focus on an issue (or at least related issues) and most will also allow space for interviewee-interviewee interaction. Setting up group interviews is often a matter of either convenience (it is less time-consuming to interview five people in a group rather than five different interviews) or comfort (with individuals who are not used to or who may be

uncomfortable with being interviewed one-to-one). In what follows, the two terms (group interview and focus group) will be used interchangeably as the issues raised (e.g. about set up, types of questions etc.) are relevant to both.

Focus group researchers tend to use the term 'moderator' rather than interviewer. Morgan et al. (2008: 37) define focus groups as group interviews that involve 'individuals who discuss a particular topic under the direction of a moderator who promotes interaction and ensures that the discussion remains on the topic of interest.' Greenbaum (1998: 1–2) distinguishes between three types of focus groups: a full group, mini-group, and a telephone group. He defines the method as 'a discussion ... led by a trained moderator, involving ... persons who are recruited for the session based on their common demographics, attitudes, or buying patterns germane to the topic.' The focus group moderator guides the group through a discussion on a clearly defined topic. Along the way, opinions are expressed, information is gathered, participants collaboratively build on each others' turns and sometimes contest statements or argue against each other. This rich discussion can look very different from a one-to-one interview. In addition, when interviewing a group, it is more likely that the kind of talk can become informal with everyday forms of communication between interviewees (e.g. joking and teasing) and so it is more likely to mirror interaction in the interviewees' everyday social context (Barbour 2008).

If there are ten or 12 people in the focus group, it is obviously a good idea to keep the research focus as narrow as possible (Krueger 2009). The large numbers mean that access to any one individual's subjective experiences, attitudes, and feelings is by definition limited. However, it is possible to combine focus groups with individual interviews (see Lambert and Loisel 2008; Liamputtong 2011). Lambert and Loisel provide three justifications for such a combination of methods:

- pragmatic reasons (sometimes individuals have not been able to attend the focus group);
- comparative data (to compare and contrast participants' perspectives expressed in both formats);
- data completeness and confirmation of particular findings.

Wilkinson (1998: 334) presents useful detail about the mechanisms through which focus groups elicit participants' meanings. The collective nature of focus group discussion is seen as providing 'more than the sum of its parts' in that there can be enhanced disclosure, more

elaborate accounts, better understanding of participants' individual agendas, and the opportunity to observe the co-construction of meaning in action. Krueger (2009) provides a useful introduction to focus groups in an insightful online interview with him conducted by Susan Elliot about developing listening skills with focus groups ([www.qualitative-researcher.com](http://www.qualitative-researcher.com)). Hennink (2007) also provides a good discussion of the 'non-directive interview' in relation to focus groups, emphasising spontaneous features and showing how participants may take on the role of interviewer allowing for a greater range of views and responses to the ideas and comments of others.

### Managing groups

When interviewing a focus group or large group, it can be helpful to bring a colleague with you. This assistant can operate recording equipment, take notes, and provide an extra pair of eyes and ears. At the end of the session you might also invite a comment from your assistant. At this point, the assistant can also remind you if you have missed something crucial.

In terms of managing the speech event, Heerwagen (2013) has helpful advice on icebreakers. Table 7.2 provides an examples such icebreakers, in this case related to technology use:

*Table 7.2* Managing groups: icebreakers

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1. Tech effects:	Choose one of the following questions: What technology innovation made the most impact on your life and why? What innovation do you like the least and why? What aspect of the World Wide Web has made the most positive impact on your life?
2. Best or worst:	What's your favorite or least favorite ___? Everyone identifies their favorite [something related to the research focus] and says a few things about it. (e.g. If you are doing a focus group about mobile phone usability testing, have each person identify their favorite/least favourite app. Everyone must list a different one.)
3. One-words:	First, divide the participants into smaller groups. This allows participants to get acclimatised to the others in the group. Mention to the smaller groups that their task is to think of one word that describes X; give the groups a minute to generate a word. After, the group shares the one word that describes X with the entire group of participants. For example, with a session about mobile phone use, you could request that the group think about their smart phone and come up with one word to encapsulate it.

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After some kind of warm up or icebreaking task, a moderator should ask some starter questions. These should be easy for the participants to answer. This is an important early stage because the group as a whole will be interested in hearing what others in the group say. They need to feel relaxed and comfortable as a group. For the moderator it provides an opportunity to hear and assess the expression of a diverse range of views (Morgan 2012). Beyond icebreakers and starter questions, the moderator/interviewer concentrates on listening and 'enabling talk' in shaping the talk in focus groups (Myers 2007). Much of the ground covered in Chapter 5 is relevant here, especially in terms of the need for pauses and the range of questions employed. For the moderator, being comfortable with pauses is an important element, as a pause might provide an opening for another group participant to add his or her perspective. The overall aim for the interviewers/moderators is to 'balance both their own need for information from the discussion and the participants' need for comfortable interaction' (Morgan 2012: 163).

In relation to the range of questions, Puchta and Potter (1999, 2004) show how elaborate questions in focus groups are organised by moderators to suit particular goals. They have a guiding function (enabling particular participant responses), and can 'head off trouble' (1999: 318), especially when a question is likely to be unfamiliar. In addition, they help to secure participation 'by providing participants with a range of alternative items to respond to' (*ibid.*). Lastly, they provide guidance in producing relevant kinds of responses. Such elaborate questions 'help manage a dilemma between the requirement that the talk should be both highly focused on predefined topics and issues, and at the same time spontaneous and conversational' (*ibid.*). Puchta and Potter also offer advice about some of the 'mundane' skills of handling focus groups. For example, they provide hints regarding encouraging participation (asking participants to 'chip in'), gambits for softening face-threat and conflict, using 'repeat receipts' and providing candidate answers.

Some researchers recommend putting the group in a circle because this encourages interaction and more general involvement (e.g. Gillham 2005). One of the unique features of multi-party talk in group interviews and an outcome of such involvement is what might be called sharing and comparing talk. These are the 'basic interactive processes that establish ongoing connection in focus group talk' (Morgan 2012: 163). Morgan provides a section (2012: 164–176) that highlights the ways in which focus group participants share and compare ideas. He also focuses on the language of agreement, disagreement, and offering

alternatives (e.g. 'and', 'but' and 'or'). His work reveals how, in the later stages of the interview, the interviewer begins to use previous comments, distinctions and descriptions to further this process of relationship building. Morgan argues that there is a need for further research that makes explicit the procedures for sharing and comparing in group interviews. These procedures have been largely implicit and more attention to and description of them has the potential to make a substantial contribution to our understanding of group interview talk.

In group interviews, there are two tendencies that are worth watching out for. One tendency is centrifugal (where the group tend to orient towards consensus) and the other is centripetal (where the group may adopt polar positions). The latter is more likely where a discourse of debate is adopted. Usually the tendency is the former, though, and interviewees are likely conform to a 'group norm'. This can be seen as a problem but other researchers (e.g. Puchta and Potter 2004) see the ways in which such group norms and identities are constructed as central to their analysis.

As a caveat to the comments above, the presence of the moderator is not necessarily as crucial as you might imagine and it can be possible to set up focus groups without having a moderator (or interviewer) as long as the group is well briefed. Interestingly, Laws (1990) found little difference between one group with a moderator and one without a moderator. In Kitchen's (2013) study she hands over responsibility for the running of the focus groups to the Korean parent research participants. Kitchen details the outcomes of this decision and examines the resultant situated interactive discourse patterns. Part of the reason for this approach is that Kitchen acknowledges her status as an outsider and monolingual English speaker but someone who is interested in cross-cultural participatory research and so sees her 'handing over' as both artful and culturally sensitive interviewing.

It's a good idea at the end of the session to review what's emerged from it. Gillham (2005: 68) provides a useful list of what needs to be summarised: key issues, areas of agreement/disagreement, topics needing clarification, areas that need further investigation, and advice to the researcher

### **Group interviews (with children)**

This next section considers group interviews with children. In doing so, we also return to Samaneh's reflexive vignette to think about issues of interview procedures and interviewer power and identity. There is also further comment on the use of photographs and tasks in working with children.

One of the main challenges that researchers have in working with children is the need to try and reduce the power differential. Whether the interviewer is a teacher or not, any adult is likely to be seen as an authority figure and children are therefore often daunted and guarded in what they say (at least initially). For that reason it is usually easier for children to open up in a group interview alongside their peers, rather than in a one-on-one interview with a person of perceived higher status (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012). Nevertheless, as we have seen from Samaneh's contribution in lines 24–25 above, adult status cannot be easily left at the door and is easily brought back into the mix. Samaneh's attitude and position is implicit in her statement about disabled Afghans when she says that it 'isn't their fault' and some of the subsequent children's turns (though not all) are orientating to this position.

One of the obvious ways of reducing adult power status is by maintaining a friendly and encouraging demeanour and, as far as possible allowing the children to respond to each other and lead the talk as far as possible. In Extract 7.3, Adrian is talking about a successful interview with a family group of children. One of the reasons that this is successful is that he had previously built up a friendly and comfortable relationship with them.

### **Extract 7.3**

I: Did you interview them with their parents or †separately

P: Separately on the whole (.) except where they preferred to be together (.) I think that only happened in one instance (.) but the children sometimes we interviewed together.

I: †Yeah (0.5) and that was a †conscious choice (.) because you thought it might be more comfortable for them,

P: Yeah (.) I don't think there was a great deal of theorising of it (.) it was just sometimes I think it's just on the hoof (.) you think(.) 'What feels more comfortable here, what's going to be a better †conversation' (.) and so one of the things I remember was that I interviewed < I don't think Shahela was involved in the interview> (.) but I interviewed three children (.) they were children (.) they were 11, 10 and 9 or something like that (.) a boy and two girls (.) you know (.) with children of that age sometimes the

interview can be (.) 'Yeah, dunno, yeah, no,' but they were just chatting for an hour-and-a-half (.) I mean I had to kick them out (.) because I thought their parents would be worried <laughs> and they just talked (.) and you will have seen some of the excerpts probably in the papers and so on (.) but they just really talked about-not just about their language (.) which is one of the things we were interested in (.) but the kind of music they liked and whether they were allowed to watch certain films on TV and all that (.) just chatty stuff that kids do (.) but it was (.) I think (1.0) so I regard that as a very successful interview (.) because they talked a lot about themselves and their view of the world and so on (.) a lot about wanting to go to grammar school and what they had to do to achieve that and a whole load of stuff (.) and I suppose (.) what I believe is that one of the reasons that was a successful interview is because we did the interview right at the end of the 10 weeks (.) not at the beginning (.) and so they'd got used to (1.0) I mean I hadn't been (.) I think my kind of style as researcher isn't being particularly gregarious or to befriend people (.) but I think they got used to me being around and so they were happy to chat.

Adrian's experience is similar to a range of researchers who have found that an encouraging and non-threatening atmosphere is helped by mixing with children informally before the interview or by changing the interview context. This mixing or 'hanging around' might be in other classes, the canteen or the playground. Davies (2008: 121) shares the following insight, talking about trying to minimise deference:

I found in interviewing some young people with mental handicaps that the combination of an interview format in a college setting produced a very strong attitude of deference marked by extreme politeness in their responses. Being unable to alter the setting, I had to attempt to undermine my association with college staff by hanging around with students in less formal contexts, primarily the canteen. This, along with making the interview interaction itself as informal as possible, helped to mitigate, but did not entirely eliminate, this deferential response.



In a similar way, Pollard (1985: 57) explains that his approach to accessing children's perspectives meant that he had to find a way of collecting data which 'minimised the possible distorting effect of being seen as a teacher'. This is something that Samaneh was very conscious of too. To distinguish herself from the school staff, she spent ten breaks in each school eating snacks and sometimes having lunch with the students. They gradually got to know her and they called her 'Miss University Student'. As she emphasised that the students were helping her with a project, they sometimes called it 'her homework'.

Pollard's adopted response involved working with a team of child interviewers and starting 'a dinner-time club' for fourth-year children concerned with 'finding out what children think about school'. The children who came to the club regularly called it MID, the Moorside Investigation Department, and it seemed to capture their imagination. Club members invited other children to be interviewed. As confidence and trust developed he became more involved and worked alongside the child interviewers.

Despite our best efforts to make children comfortable enough to elicit their views and experience, we can never be entirely sure whose voices are being represented in interviews with children. In any social encounter (children or not) comments are influenced by other voices appropriated from previous interaction and social practice (Bakhtin 1986); children's utterances may well be partially their own; some of their statements and viewpoints might echo adults' voices. Children also sometimes produce the response they assume the adult researcher is expecting to hear (Kuchah and Pinter 2012; Pinter and Zandian 2014; 2015). However, Samaneh's transcript is typical of the kind of 'unsolicited, raw and emotional comments' that children are able to produce and are examples 'which indicate that children are able to go beyond what the adult was asking' (Kuchah and Pinter 2012: 295) or what the adult expects. In Samaneh's data she was certainly not prepared for or expecting these kind of comments. They were therefore challenging in a number of ways, as she has made clear.

Another aspect of Samaneh's methodology that is noteworthy is her use of a question task with visual and fictional elements. There is a growing recognition that visual tasks and use of photographs help focus children's attention. Fournier et al. (2014) provide a reflexive account of methodological and pragmatic considerations that arose when conducting participatory action research utilising Photovoice with children. The children were 12 to 18 years old, were orphaned and living with HIV in a group home setting in Western Uganda. The study

is interesting because it provides an example of participatory approach to exploring the children's experiences using *Photovoice* to share their stories, define their issues, and propose their own solutions. The use of photography involves collecting and selecting photos/pictures and can elicit more detail and a change of focus in interviews. Usually it will be the interviewer who collects appropriate photo prompts and develops these into an organised and categorised 'interview kit'. However, it can also be useful to hand this responsibility over to the children themselves. Jorgensen and Sullivan (2010) make use of such a technique in their child-centred research. In their case, they use participatory photo interviewing to understand children's experiences with household technology; giving children cameras and asking them to take their own photographs focusing on various aspects of their lives. The photos are jointly explored later in the interviews.

### **More than one interviewer**

The vast majority of group interviews are conducted by one interviewer. However, this is not always the case. This chapter now examines the use of team interviews. In such interviews having more than one interviewer can be the most desirable way of conducting an interview. If more than one researcher can be present at the interview, it may be a possibility worth considering. This is still a comparatively rare option and certainly needs careful deliberation. It is more common when there are also more than one interviewee. It is not usually a good option when there is only one interviewee (as it inevitably puts more pressure on the interviewee and has the potential to assume the dynamics of a more formal interview – like a job interview).

It can be helpful when setting up group interviews to have an assistant so that responsibilities can be divided. In such cases, it probably makes sense for one team member to have primary responsibility for facilitating discussion, even if both interviewers are involved to some degree in raising points, clarifying responses, and eliciting detail. If one interviewer takes primary responsibility for leading the interview and discussion, this leaves the other to concentrate on taking notes (and other organisational and administration tasks). This second role can include observing interviewee reactions, contributions, and attitudes. After the interview, the two interviewers can share perspectives and discuss the detail of the interview.

On other occasions an assistant will be helping with issues of access and translation/interpreting. In Extract 7.4, I am interviewing Adrian

about his experience of team interviewing and he is detailing some of the challenges of working in such a way with an assistant who has both helped with access to her acquaintances and is translating between Sylheti and English.

#### Extract 7.4

I: For that project did you tend to interview individually or did you sometimes interview †together

P: It depended who we were interviewing and in which language the interview was to be conducted (.) clearly if it was going to be in Sylheti or Bengali, Shahela was involved (.) and so I think there are pros and cons of having somebody interpreting in an interview situation (.) clearly if the interviewee is more comfortable conducting the interview in a language that I don't understand (.) then I need to work with somebody else (.) but it feels a little bit at one remove (.) one of the things that I was going to say about the work I did for my PhD was that I was interviewing (.) again Bangladeshi women (.) all of whom were immigrants to this country and their children had been born here (.) and I was interviewing them in their own homes and doing that with somebody I recruited as a kind of research assistant (.) and I paid her a bit (.) and so she was able to interpret or translate the questions and answers (0.5) but one of the things that happened was <so firstly> I was quite interested in the geography of the interview (.) because always the research assistant Mina (.) would go and sit right next to the research participant on the sofa in the living room and I'd sit on the other side (.) and so I was interviewing both of them (.) so it wasn't two people interviewing one person, it was me (.) one person interviewing two people I think.

I: Yeah (.) interesting (0.5)

P: Which is quite interesting (0.5) and one of the things <laughs> that happened quite a lot was because she knew them (.) she was part of their social network (.) I'd ask the question < she'd interpret it > and the interviewee would say 'Why are you asking me that, you know that! It's the same for your kids as it is for my kids, you've known my kids all their lives, why are you asking me how I teach them

to read? You come and help me twice a week.' (.) and so that was quite difficult to negotiate (0.5)

I: That artificiality is-

P: And so I had to kind of (1.0) so Mina would say 'She's saying that she doesn't need to answer that, because I already know.' And I had to say things like, 'Would you mind asking her just to say it anyway?' and that creates a real, kind of, as you say, artificiality and distance, I think (0.5) and so the fact that they felt so aligned with each other I saw as a very positive thing (.) but it also presented a barrier (.) because it meant that the interviewee wasn't go to say the stuff that I wanted on the audio recording and in my transcript (.)

Adrian's experience gives us an insight into the process of interviewing multilingually. His experience brings into focus a number of issues. Firstly, interviewing where there is a need for a translator can be challenging. Also, in this interview it is the translator (Mina) who is the 'insider' and her acquaintance is both an advantage (in helping to negotiate access and make the interviewee comfortable) but it also produces an awkward dynamic that produces difficulties for Adrian in getting the interviewee to provide full accounts.

We have already touched on 'the language context' and issues of multilingual research in Chapter 3. Researching multilingually, especially in a large team necessarily means that there are a range of roles (translators, interpreters, teaching assistants) to be taken into account (in particular see Giampapa and Lamoureux 2011; Holmes et al. 2013; Stelma et al. 2013; Fournier et al. 2014). Reviewing this literature reveals the variety of roles and experiences within teams aiming to access the multilingual worlds (see Andrews et al. 2013).

Large research projects, whether they are multilingual or not, necessarily means working as part of a team. In such projects, having more than one team-member in the interview can help ensure consistency across interviews and the sharing and development of appropriate interview practice. There are lots of aspects of working in a team and sharing the interview space is certainly not the only issue. Creese and Blackledge (2012) are insightful about the process of negotiation in teams. In particular, they discuss agreements and disagreements in the process of making 'meaning' out of their linguistic ethnographic data. Despite a broadly positive experience of team processes in their

linguistic ethnographic research, they acknowledge some difficulties. As they say, their discussion ‘raises more issues than it resolves’. As Johnson and Rowlands (2012: 109) make clear the ‘interpersonal dynamics among research team members can be a source of problems’. These dynamics are usually kept well out of public view. These include issues related to division of labour, where some members of the team end up feeling ‘ripped off’ – they provide an example where:

In one of the extensive team research projects on which Johnson worked, proprietary rights to the interviewing records were specified in a divorce agreement. (2012: 109)

For qualitative research as a whole, there is a need for more accounts of ways in which team processes (including problems and challenges) are negotiated and articulated in research teams.

### **More than one interview**

This last short section points to several reasons why more than one interview with an interviewee(s) might be helpful. Vincent makes the point that in research handbooks (e.g. Cohen et al. 2000; Hardy and Bryman 2004) ‘the single interview is the implied default’ (2013: 341) and it is still comparatively rare to consider the advantages, disadvantages, or appropriateness of repeat, follow-up, multiple, or longitudinal interviews.

Life history research is one form of research where multiple interviews are frequently used. Earthy and Cronin (2008: 431–432) see multiple interviews as helping to build trust and rapport for life-history interviewing. This way of proceeding is less exhausting for the interviewee and saves both parties from trying to fit everything into one attempt. The gap between the interviews offers a chance for both parties to reflect and it also offers the chance for the outcomes of previous interviews to be revisited in more depth. This opportunity for greater reflection is something that is raised by a number of researchers (e.g. McLeod 2003; Herzog 2012). Herzog (2012: 221) summarises the work of Cornwell (1994) in making the point that ‘public accounts’ are often offered in first interviews and more ‘private accounts’ are offered in follow-up interviews, when rapport, trust, and intimacy have been established.

McLeod argues that longitudinal interviews allow eliciting ‘prospective and retrospective reflections over time’ and that such a

focus 'promotes reflexive and comparative analysis, and recognizes that understandings, for both the researcher and the researched, are incremental and recursive' (2003: 209). In my own longitudinal study of university cooperative development research talk (see Mann 2002) an open-ended first interview was followed up with a semi-structured second interview. The second interview was conducted a year later and used transcribed extracts from both research meetings and first interviews. These transcribed extracts were distributed as a pre-interview reading task for interviewees (see 'Robert 1st interview notes' Mann 2002 Vol. 2: p. 190 as an example). The second interview aimed to:

- allow some critical distance to have developed from the original process;
- encourage an overall retrospective view of aspects of development (since the first interview) as well as comments on particular critical incidents;
- check if the original perspectives from the first interviews still obtained;
- use some of the incidents identified in the data to check understanding with particular participants;
- focus on some of their key lexical choices and metaphors.

The second interview was less open ended than the first and provided an opportunity for checking, confirming, and asking for elaboration (rather than necessarily opening up new issues). The follow-up interview was therefore more goal orientated. Generally speaking the use of their previous transcribed statements, views, and experiences encouraged a dialogic process where the original statements were revisited, elaborated on, and clarified. The follow-up interviews also enabled me to check on some of my interpretations. Distributing selected transcribed extracts and critical incidents in advance of the second interview was seen as helpful by participants and was certainly valuable for me to get each individual's comments on these selected extracts from the first interview. Most of the interviewees remarked that they found it interesting to read their first interview comments in transcribed form too.

A second interview has the potential to bring out shifts in beliefs and positions. In Extract 7.5, in lines 9–11, the interviewer (Nicolás) is able to quote Tom (the interviewee) from his first interview. It is interesting how different Tom's position is now and also how shocked Tom is about his previous comments.

**Extract 7.5**

- 1 I: ↑What made you change your mind? Because you  
2 told me in the first interview that you  
3 didn't intend to study.  
4 T: I like it now, I think it's helped  
5 me on (unintelligible).  
6 I: Okay, so that's-  
7 T: Well have you still got that?  
8 I: Yes, basically I've got here that  
9 you told me, "No I would like  
10 to do something that would help you  
11 more than Spanish, in the future."  
12 T: Bloody hell. Was that at the start  
13 of the year?  
14 I: That was the first interview.  
15 T: Oh God.  
16 I: So that's why I'm asking you what  
17 changed your mind?  
18 T: I don't know, I think I realised how  
19 much it can help you.  
20 I: That's great, thank you Tom

For more examples of how a second interview can reveal such shifts, see Pino-James (2015).

**Summary**

This chapter has considered various aspects that arise when we move beyond the assumption that an interview is a one-off, one-to-one event. Most of this chapter has dealt with the nature of focus groups and group interviews. I have argued that, for reasons of convenience and putting interviewees at ease, group interviews are worthy of serious consideration as a research option. In particular, research suggests that children respond much better to paired or group interviews where they are alongside peers and can build from each other's contributions.

We have briefly considered team aspects of interviewing, either when the research project is large in scale and interviewers are working as a team or when the research is multilingual in nature and an interpreter is necessary. The last part of the chapter briefly considered the value of conducting more than one interview, in particular focusing on the value of a 'follow-up' interview. This can be a reflective and dialogic

process, where transcribed extracts of other speech events (including previous interviews) can form the basis for discussion and comment.

This chapter finishes with a reflexive account from Claire. The vignette highlights some of the challenges of group interviewing in a longitudinal study (this is her second interview with the group). As you read through the transcript concentrate on the tension between trying to maintain solidarity, good humour, and rapport on the one hand (their relationship) and probing for more detail on the other (the research focus).

### **Suggested further reading**

- Barbour, R. (Ed.). (2007). *Doing Focus Groups*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Greenbaum T. (Ed.). (1998). *The Handbook for Focus Group Research*. (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Krueger, R. A. (2009). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. London: Sage.
- Morgan, D. L. (Ed.). (1997). *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications.

### **Claire Cunningham's vignette**

#### **Claire's context**

Extract 7.6 below comes from a group interview which took place in summer 2012 at a primary school in the North-West of England. It forms part of the second stage of data collection for a longitudinal study concerning primary school teaching staff and their experiences and opinions of working with children with English as an Additional Language. The interviewees (H, L, and A) are all bilingual members of staff at a fairly large primary school and are part of a close-knit team of four Bilingual Learning Assistants (BLA) specifically employed by the head teacher to work across the school, provide bilingual support for children, translate for teachers, and liaise with the local community.

I had met the interviewees during a previous visit to the school so this was my second group interview with them, although in the previous visit, the 'conversation' was a little dominated by a more vocal member of the team who was unable to be present this time. For me, this meant that although I had built some rapport with this group of individuals, I still had work to do here as the dynamic felt rather different with just three (perhaps slightly less self-confident) members of the team present. Being very much the outsider in a group interview with a team that work so closely together also suggested that I should be focused on rapport-building and maintenance throughout. I was an outsider in that



I don't work in the school or in any school, I come from a different part of the country, I have a different ethnicity and linguistic background, and a different educational and professional background. I feel that all of this plays out in the way I conducted various points of the interview, but I will focus on how particular interjections from me may have helped the interviewees realise that what they were contributing was valuable, both to their professional practice and to the interview.

Extract 7.6 starts at about five minutes into the interview. I had begun the interview asking how things had been going for the team in the year since I'd seen them and had initially been told that nothing much had changed until 'L' realised that since my last visit, the BLA team had taken on more responsibility, running an assembly based around exploring the heritage they share with the majority of the children in the school. I noted that the team seemed reluctant to celebrate or truly acknowledge their achievements and Extract 7.6 shows how I reacted to that.

### Extract 7.6

- 1 A: an then we had a (0.1) the visit to the: (0.2)  
 2 H: [mosque]  
 3 A: [Tooting Hill school(0.2) a school more or less  
 4 like ours (0.2) but uhm we just wanted to see  
 5 how they (0.2) work as BLAs an (0.1) what their  
 6 EAL strategies an other things  
 7 H: we got some positive feedback we did get some  
 8 positive feedback I mean as in uhm (0.2)they were  
 9 sort of (0.1) they liked the all the displays an  
 10 the way the new arrivals were (0.1) duh an things  
 11 like that but I think (0.2) teaching wise I think  
 12 we thoughts ours was[(0.1)  
 13 L: [rubbish  
 14 H: [better because  
 15 I: cool  
 16 H: we we do a lot of sort of (0.1) a one to one  
 17 0.3) u:h first language support an' we do like  
 18 0.1) group first language support whereas I don't  
 19 think we [saw a lot of that  
 20 L: [as visually the school  
 21 [itself looked fabulous  
 22 C: [well that's really interesting isn't it  
 23 L: yeah (0.1) you know uh en (0.2) it was a lot  
 24 even though it was a church of England school  
 25 (0.1) it had become uh (0.1) an academy

- 26 I: right
- 27 L: but apparently the previous head teacher was a  
28 revert to Islam (0.2) so when- he had a lot  
29 Islamic [calligraphy
- 30 A: [yeh yeh
- 31 L: [on walls an things like that which  
32 (0.2) u:h which was nice to see
- 33 C: yeah
- 34 L: because the majority of the children there were  
35 Muslim (0.1) you know and the parents loved it as  
36 well (0.1) the teacher was telling us as well  
37 a:nd uh there was a lot of (0.1) uhm Asian errm  
38 (0.1) teachers there an uhm support staff as well
- 39 I: great
- 40 L: jus- just meet the needs really I suppose
- 41 I: so you thought it was maybe more visually  
42 appealing than pedagogically fascinating
- 43 A: yeah because like some- most of the teachers  
44 were sort of (0.2) err (0.1) they could speak  
45 (0.1) they had a first language as well but (0.1)  
46 we didn't see that in (0.1) any of it
- 47 I: wow really
- 48 H: which is- which is quite interesting cos  
49 we keep saying you know it'll help if you  
50 know teachers (0.1) knew
- 51 A: you know little prompts here an there you know  
52 you can't obviously do the whole thing battling  
53 we understanding because it takes time doesn't it  
54 an everything's so (0.1) planned (0.1) but  
55 even like little prompts an things like that
- 56 I: an they weren't doing it (0.3) that's interesting  
57 (0.1) did you ask them why
- 58 A: no we didn't actually we just [thought it was
- 59 L: [we just thought
- 60 I: [you just noticed
- 61 [and ran away
- 62 L: [we were doing a lot of group work as well so
- 63 A: we (.) I think because we (0.1) I mean I've  
64 been doing this for about eleven years now so  
65 I (0.1) I just thought you jus you just do it
- 66 I: yea yea yea

### **Claire's reflexive comment**

Initially, this extract might highlight some of the challenges of working with groups in an interview situation. The very first contribution to this section of the talk is A introducing the visit, which H assumes is the one they made to the mosque, interjecting incorrectly to finish A's utterance. With three or more people in a fairly informal interview setting, this kind of thing can be challenging. We see a similar thing happen only a few lines later, with L claiming the visit made the BLAs feel their own practice was 'rubbish', whilst H was actually saying that he felt it was better than seen elsewhere. As the interviewer, I think I picked up on 'rubbish' here, and felt that I wanted to do some confidence-building here as well as data-gathering, whether that was outside my remit or not. However, the other key aspect in the group interview is the fact that the interviewer's voice is often heard less, which is no bad thing, of course. We can see in this extract that for the most part, I am engaged in minimal encouraging contributions, mostly of a very positive kind, with 'cool' and 'great', but when a longer contribution is made, it seems to highlight that I am surprised by the description of the other school and asking them to comment further and give more detailed information through the use of tag questions and the 'wow, really?'

Another observation is about my later use of one of the interviewee's particular lexical choices, which I think is something I try to do as a tool to build rapport and solidarity. Here, we can see me picking up on 'visually' in order to use it within a short summary of my understanding of O's description.

Finally, I can make a comment about the use of humour in my interviewing. I am aware that I use humour as a tool for creating rapport in an interview setting. It can be a useful thing but it is important also to reflect on when it doesn't work so effectively. In analysing this section, I do wonder how effective my use of humour towards the end of this extract was. I think it perhaps highlighted that I'd noticed the BLA's lack of confidence in believing in their own good practice and I think I wanted to get into a discussion about that. However, I'm not sure how successful this was, with L seeming to almost make an excuse for not having brought the issue up with the other school, although A did imply that perhaps it was almost too obvious to bring up, with 'you just do it'. Overall, I think that particular moment of humour might have been better replaced with another interviewer contribution.

# 8

## Transcripts and Analysis

### Introduction

Riach maintains that the challenge for the qualitative researcher is 'conducting analysis or presenting findings in a way that sensitively captures the multiple levels of a research encounter' (2009: 356). The next two chapters outline the nature of this challenge, both in terms of transcription and analysis (Chapter 8) and representing data and findings (Chapter 9). Working with interviews creates a number of different challenges: making contact with interviewees and arranging interviews can be demanding; organising and securing permissions with ethical approval can be frustrating; however, it is often grappling with data analysis that causes the most angst. Generally speaking there is more advice available on how to conduct interviews than on how to analyse the interview interaction (Wilkinson 2004). This is partly because analysis varies so much across different paradigms and research traditions.

This chapter focuses on producing a transcript and the analysis of qualitative interviews. It first considers the key decisions for transcription and then considers some of the options and challenges in analysing qualitative interviews. This will involve exploring options in working towards a systematic process for examining, describing, summarising, analysing/reconstructing the data so as to respond to your research focus and questions (Miles and Huberman 1994).

### Metaphors for analysis

It can be helpful to think about the challenge of collecting and analysing interview data in metaphorical terms. When talking about interviews in Chapter 2 we explored several metaphors including Kvale's

(1996: 5) contrast between ‘mining’ and ‘travelling’, where the traveller evokes a postmodern constructivist position (in contrast to the positivist miner ‘prospecting’ for the truth). Metaphors are used when the object of our focus is indeterminate or where we are trying to articulate our position and understanding of the enterprise (Mann 2002) and so it is no surprise that metaphors are also often used in trying to pin down the nature and challenge of qualitative analysis. Patton says that qualitative analysis is not straightforward and is something of a journey:

Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. No formula exists for that transformation. Guidance, yes. But no recipe. Direction can and will be offered, but the final destination remains unique for each inquirer, known only when – and if – arrived at. (Patton 2002: 432).

### **Task**

- Consider the metaphors of jigsaw puzzle, kaleidoscope, and symphony? What are the merits of each one?
- Thinking about qualitative data analysis, what metaphor can you think of that works better for you?

Dye et al. (2000) use the metaphor of the kaleidoscope. Working in a grounded theory tradition (involving the ‘Constant Comparison Method’), the kaleidoscope for them allows the parts (the mirror and small pieces of coloured glass) to form new patterns. The process is an iterative one, aiming to arrive at an overarching theoretical concept. Seidel also suggests several different metaphors in his work. First of all, he sees data analysis as working on a jigsaw puzzle (1998: 3), reassembling puzzle pieces into groups. One strategy is to group all the pieces that look similar:

You start by sorting the pieces of the puzzle. For example, assume you have a puzzle picture with a tree, a house, and sky. A common strategy for solving the puzzle is to identify and sort puzzle pieces into groups (e.g., frame pieces, tree pieces, house pieces, and sky pieces). (1998: 3)

The main idea here is iterative because the puzzle pieces might have to be rearranged many times before the pieces emerge into a coherent

pattern. However, many researchers would object to this metaphor on the grounds that jigsaw puzzles have pre-existing fixed patterns and this does not leave room for the discovery of emergent pieces.

Seidel also uses metaphor to introduce different aspects of qualitative data analysis (QDA). He sees QDA as a symphony based on three notes: 'noticing', 'collecting', and 'thinking' about interesting things. While there is great diversity in the practice of QDA he argues that all forms of it are based on these three 'notes'. It can be helpful to think about the process of data analysis through metaphors, at least as a starting point. This heuristic process of contemplating metaphors is dialogic in nature; as you progress into your analysis, it enables you to reflect on what aspects of the metaphor 'fit' and perhaps which aspects cause dissonance for you.

This chapter presents various dimensions of analysis. After considering the analytic processes related to transcription and interview interaction, later sections of the chapter examine other aspects of analysis, such as approaches to analysis and analytic tools.

## **Analysing interview interaction**

Before we turn our attention to the mechanics and processes of transcription, it is worth reminding ourselves of a line of argument developed in Chapter 3, as this provides a strong justification for the close attention to transcripts suggested in the next section. In Chapter 3 we argued that it is necessary to take into account the context in which interview data is produced: an interview is an interactional event and creates its own context and this needs to be at least part of our analytic focus. Talmy and Richards (2011) argue that 'analytic concern with both interview product (the whats) and process (the hows) grounds the interview as an interactional event' where we can open up 'for analysis how the interview is achieved' (2011: 2).

Talmy (2010: 14) worries that the qualitative applied linguistics research he reviews tends to conceptualise interview data as participant 'reports' (focusing on 'content', or the 'what' of the interview). Chapter 3 made the argument that more research needs to recognise that the interviewer and interviewee jointly construct the interview talk (Sarangi 2004). There are certainly some important contributions in the literature that do focus on the analysis and joint construction of interviews (e.g. Nijhof 1997; Rapley 2001; Baker 2002; Cassell 2005; Wooffitt and Widdicombe 2006; Garton and Copland 2010). However, these articles tend to have a main focus on the issue of co-construction

(the 'how') rather than having their primary focus on a 'topic', 'content' or 'what' area (e.g. mobile phone use, bilingual identity). There is still a shortage of qualitative research that focuses on a 'what' or on 'content' focus AND has a complementary, parallel or even subsidiary focus on the 'how' (see Chapter 5 pp. 152–3 for more on this point). One of the central arguments of this book is that it can be illuminating for researchers drawing on interview data to devote more space and attention to recognition of this co-construction. This recognition, in terms of analysis and representation of interview data, does not necessarily mean transcript-based, micro-analysis of co-construction (as in for example Richards 2003; ten Have 2004; Roulston 2006; Rapley 2007). Instead, it might mean re-balancing to include some sustained attention to this kind of analytic focus.

Donnelly (2003) maintains that being able 'to articulate as fully as possible the processes associated with the data analysis of interviews' (2003: 318) means a shift from a 'what' perspective to a 'how' perspective. Moving from an 'interview-as-technique' perspective towards the 'interview-as-local-accomplishment' perspective (Silverman 1993: 104) requires attention to and analysis of interview interaction and the kind of processes we have outlined in earlier chapters, where we examined, context, set-up, methodology, interview types, assumptions, identities, choices, and theories (all of which influence the research).

This challenge is just as relevant for focus group interviews as one-to-one interviews. Wilkinson makes the point that most analysis does not take into account the interactive nature of focus group data (see also Kitzinger 1994; Wilkinson 1999). Indeed he says that a limitation of focus group research is 'the rarity with which group interactions are analyzed or reported' (2004: 182) where extracts from focus group data are typically presented just like one-to-one interview data. There is rarely acknowledgement that more than research participant was present, never mind the interaction itself constituting part of the analytic focus. Wilkinson makes the further point that 'compared with the extensive advice on how to *conduct* focus groups', there is 'relatively little in the focus group literature on how to *analyze* the resulting data' (2004: 182).

## Producing and using a transcript

The production of a transcript is an important analytic stage for a number of reasons. First of all, going back to Seidel's earlier metaphor, transcription can be a useful process for 'noticing' and then 'thinking'

about a range of issues. Working with a transcript is also a chance to see just how the interview 'produces situated understandings grounded in specific interactional episodes' (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: 353). The transcript provides an opportunity to reflect on aspects of the interviewer and interviewee stance, positioning, and identities. In addition, the transcript also forms the basis of 'epistemological reflexivity' (Willig 2001: 32); giving the researcher the chance to consider the ways in which their ontological and epistemological positions have a reflexive relationship with the production of a transcription. It is easy to fall into the trap of seeing transcription as a technical or mechanical matter and it helps to read Ochs's seminal paper to fully appreciate these dangers. She reminds us that 'transcription is a selective process reflecting theoretical goals and definitions' (1979: 44).

The question of whether producing a transcript is necessary for either analysis or representation is not always agreed on (e.g. Hollway et al.'s 2005 response to Potter and Hepburn 2005). Potter and Hepburn argue that a Jeffersonian type CA transcript is essential. However, others are dubious about the value of transcription (e.g. Coates and Thornborrow 1999). Smith (2005) too questions the importance of transcription, arguing that the use of a transcript cues and privileges a particular type of reading (i.e. CA). In addition, he states that it is 'extremely difficult to parse an interview for interactional features and substantive topic at the same time' (2005: 313). Hollway in her 'commentary' (in Hollway et al. 2005: 312–214) argues that, anyway, an audio record will be a 'far richer record than a Jeffersonian transcript' (2005: 313). Further reservations are raised by Markle et al. (2011), who argue that the opportunities to embed actual multimedia data into digitally available research reports actually avoids 'the loss of meaning and unavoidable interpretation bias inherent in transcription' (2011: 1). Their argument is that working from and making available the original multimedia (either audio or video) allows for 'greater trustworthiness and accuracy, as well as thicker descriptions and more informative reporting' (ibid.). These are all reservations that we need to bear in mind in guarding against a pre-occupation with transcripts. However, there are three points to bear in mind when weighing up this challenge:

1. The transcription does not have to be full-scale Jeffersonian transcription. It is possible to draw on CA to help capture particular feature of the interaction without agonising over ever detail.
2. It is possible to look at data in a number of different ways (through a different analytic lens) and we explore these options later in the



chapter. Transcription certainly provides one ‘lens’ that can be used selectively (as one of a number of options).

3. It’s not necessary to choose between transcription or working with the original data. These processes can be (and probably should be) complementary.

To sum up the points made above, it may be true that making the original audio or video available to readers/other researchers may well help with transparency (providing permissions have been given), however this does not mean that the transcription process is without value. Neither is it the case that we need to choose one form or the other (and later in the chapter we’ll consider some options for working with and displaying both the original media and the transcript).

Whether you are a novice qualitative researcher or a more experienced one, you are likely to grapple with these issues in your work: whether to transcribe interviews; how much to transcribe; what levels of delicacy to use to transcribe them. Even if you decide that transcription is worthwhile, transcribing is not a straightforward task. There are a number of decisions and judgements about what format to choose:

- which level of detail to choose (e.g. including non-verbal communication);
- whether to use standard orthography or more ‘speech-like’ versions (e.g. contractions ‘I won’t’ rather than tidied up fuller forms ‘I will not’; lexical chunks ‘whadjulike’, rather than ‘what do you like’);
- whether to use punctuation to make the transcript more ‘readable’.

As Bucholtz says ‘although reflection about the transcription process cannot overcome the difficulties inherent in this methodology, it can allow scholars to be more attentive to their own transcription choices and their limitations and to make these explicit in their writing’ (2007: 784).

The position adopted in the rest of this chapter is that it is important to see the transcription process as an integral part of the analysis (Temple et al. 2006; Merriam 2014). There are also a number of sources that can help you reflect on the level of detail you want to capture in your transcriptions (Richards 2003; Nikander 2008; King and Horrocks 2010). These sources cover a number of choices in terms of the level of delicacy that you want to achieve, and much will depend on the goals of your study. The choices range from trying to capture as many interactional details as possible (including timed pauses, stress/intonation,

precise renderings of laughter, backchannelling, body language) to more basic forms of transcription where you just capture only the words spoken (Riessman 2008).

Keith Richards is an experienced interviewer and transcriber and he talks below about the pressure to be transparent and transcribe in full (note his reference to Rapley in Extract 8.1) but he also knows that this is often simply too time-consuming. He also tries to remember that the transcript is always a version of the original recording. Keith is talking to me about some of the dilemmas raised above in Extract 8.1.

### Extract 8.1

I: You've talked about the transcript in terms of showing the transcript and getting it validated and giving them the right to withdraw something. Do you have any general advice about producing a transcript from an interview about how you go about doing that? You've clearly got a lot of experience with conversation analysis (.) so it's probably second nature to you now (.) but if you were giving advice to someone who hasn't done that before (.) how do you go about producing a transcript?

K: That's a really interesting question. It's actually a really tough one (.) because I've never resolved it. It's a question that I come back to every single time I do a transcript of an interview. I have (.) yes (.) you're right (.) I have my standard notation that I use (.) which captures some essential features in speech (.) for example (.) obviously emphasis (.) pauses (.) because a long pause might be significant. I also do- personally I like a bit of sound stretching (.) because I that can capture some aspects (.) very simple -

I: Sorry?

K: Sound stretching (.) you know (.) a colon can stretch it (.) because that can actually be quite revealing (.) I think. But that's my personal thing (.) so that's how I transcribe it and I always transcribe it as standard. Now (.) the fact is that (.) as you well know (.) if you just transcribe it like that for both interviewer and interviewee (.) you don't capture all the features of the talk (.) you don't capture all aspects of co-construction (.) some of which might be important. On the other hand (.) if you attempt to full CA transcription (.) that transcription's going to take you so long (.) it is just practically nonsensical to do it. So what do you do? You've got Rapley saying that (.) 'You ought

to do this (.) because if you don't (.) it's not transparent' and yet you've got the practical demands of doing- So what I actually do (.) and I've never resolved- to be honest I don't have a simple formula for this (.) but (1.2) for me (.) it's a bit like conversation analysis. The thing that's sometimes forgotten in conversation analysis is that (.) because we work with transcripts so much (.) that conversation analysis (.) you are *not* analysing based on the transcript (.) you're analysing based on the recording. The transcript is merely your best effort to represent it. That's how I approach the interview (.) so as I'm transcribing (.) if I think there are any areas that strike me as- areas for whatever reason that might need closer attention (.) i.e. I might have led someone (.) there might have been some perturbation in the talk (.) something like that (.) I just note it. And then I carry on with the transcript and then go back and think of them again and maybe transcribe them in more detail.

This interview exchange captures the rock and the hard place between aiming for a complete CA-like transcription of an interview and a more practical and pragmatic version (either in dropping the need for delicacy or not transcribing everything). It also reminds us that the analyst needs to remember the primacy of the actual recording. Richards (2003: 172–205) provides a solid introduction to many of these choices and dilemmas and Appendix 2 (p. 283) provides a basic set of transcription conventions.

### **Transcription as a process of slowing down**

Despite the kinds of reservations raised above by Hollway et al. (2005), many researchers have found the transcription process of their qualitative interviews invaluable. Briggs for example argues strongly for close attention to interview transcripts (1986: 4). Perhaps the main justification is that transcription slows things down:

What is involved in transcription, and in the whole activity of research, is a slowing down and reflexive re-routing of a process that operates much more rapidly in ordinary social interaction. (Hammersley 2010: 564)

Perhaps the main worry for researchers is that such a re-routing and slowing down is by definition, painstaking and time-consuming.

Deborah Swinglehurst (2014) in a post to the Linguistic Ethnography Forum articulates the same kind of tension evident in Keith Richards' transcript above. She raises a prevailing tension that many of us feel; being pressured to provide a 'quick and dirty' transcription but also seeing the value in a more painstaking approach:

Rick (Idema) points to the 'ponderous' analysis required in more traditional approaches to DA, the implication being that this is too time consuming to be of real value in our fast paced contemporary society, where what is needed and valued is (relatively) quick answers to the current concerns of practitioners. And yet others, such as Ben Rampton point to the 'aesthetic of slowness' that approaches such as CA involve.

The recognition of an 'aesthetic of slowness' goes back to Heritage and others (e.g. Heritage 1984: 122–3) and this is something that Silverman (1999: 414) has also previously articulated where he refers to the work of Sacks (e.g. 1992) in providing an argument for slowness, smallness, and non-romantic clarity. He also reminds us that there is probably a cut-off point where we cannot afford to follow such an aesthetic 'working away' at 'tiny' objects before we are diverted to 'broader' questions (1999: 417). This is another parameter of sensitivity that a reflexive interview analyst will need to consider.

### **Reasons for producing a transcript**

There are several other reasons for producing a transcript that we have not yet considered and Table 8.1 makes these clear.

### **Working with transcribers**

Researchers who are pressed for time or working with a large data set may decide to get another person to transcribe the interviews. While this may be a pragmatic choice, one of the problems of getting someone else to transcribe your interview data is that it might well save time but it creates distance from the original data. Tilley and Powick (2002) critically examine the use of paid transcribers, drawing attention to issues of the trustworthiness of transcripts and their analysis. They found that there was both an absence of direction given by researchers to the hired transcribers and researchers tended to use of resulting transcripts for analysis (rather than returning to the recorded data). They found that, often, ethical issues were not being taken into account (e.g. not having confidentiality agreements in place for transcribers).

Table 8.1 Reasons for producing a transcript

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<i>Prompting initial analysis</i>	The transcription process induces a particular and detailed kind of listening to the original interview data. Roulston (2010: 105) sees transcription as beginning 'the process of interpreting interview data and generating preliminary analysis'. She adds that 'just as asking a follow-up question within an interview demonstrates the interviewer's analysis of what has been said, how one chooses to transcribe talk involves analytic decisions'.
<i>Encouraging close attention</i>	Lapadat and Lindsay (1999: 82) think that transcription 'facilitates the close attention and the interpretative thinking that is needed to make sense of the data'. These are insights that can be missed if someone else is transcribing the data.
<i>Noticing the 'small things'</i>	Richards (2011) looks at the role minimal responses play in the shaping of as they 'influence the development of subsequent talk and they are a classic illustration of the way in which such talk is constructed by the participants involved' (2011: 98).
<i>Considering what is said and what is not said</i>	Feminist accounts of qualitative interviewing have been 'interested in listening for gaps and absences in women's talk, and in considering what meanings might lie beyond explicit speech' (DeVault and Gross 2007: 217). DeVault's work (e.g. 1990, 2004) provides examples of this kind of analysis through close attention to transcripts, particularly in moments where speech seems to falter ('you know/I don't know') and where there is 'hesitant, tentative talk' (2004: 235).
<i>Ensuring reliability and transparency</i>	Rapley (2004) makes a strong argument that allowing the reader access to the transcript, never mind which analytic stance is adopted, is an essential factor in allowing the reader to evaluate reliability.
<i>Offering to the interviewee for validation purposes</i>	A process of member checking (Mero-Jaffe 2011) helps to check the developing interpretation and analysis and also guards against misrepresentation (Sikes 2000).
<i>Inducing further comment</i>	Beyond validation, the transcript also provides the chance for further comment in follow-up interviews. Gardner (2004) shows how the examination of an earlier transcript (in a follow-up interview) establishes an important shift in the interviewee's thinking. In Chapter 6 we also talked about dialogic effect of using transcripts in a follow up interview (see Mann 2002; Menard-Warwick 2008).
<i>Revisiting the data at a later date</i>	Block (2008) re-revisits narrative-interview data and shows how the process of micro-analysis reveals new features of the interaction. Skukauskaitė (2012) demonstrates how re-transcribing the same piece of data at different times reveals how 'unexamined personal theories' guided the first transcript. Prior (2014) re-considers alignment in a 'failed' autobiographic research interview through revisiting a transcript.

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In addition, they found that transcribers omitted or altered words in the transcription process. Similar issues of transcription quality were investigated by Poland (2002) who found that paid transcribers unconsciously tidied up transcriptions but also consciously made changes in an 'editing' process. All this considered, if you do decide to use transcribers, it is advisable to be reflective about this process.

There are some obvious things to think about that could help ensure consistency and quality working with transcribers. For example, checking the resulting transcripts against the original recording is crucial. MacLean et al. (2004) provide other useful advice when working with transcribers, including ways to spot-check transcripts as they develop. Oliver et al. (2005) argue for a 'reflective step' where researchers incorporate reflection into their research design by interrogating their decisions about how to proceed with transcription, in particular thinking about the 'possible impact these decisions may have on participants and research outcomes.'

### **Transcription and qualitative data analysis packages**

If working with transcripts is going to be an important part of your research project, it is important to do some initial investigation into how transcripts can be created and used within QDA packages. There are a various QDA packages (e.g. ATLAS.ti, DRS, Interact, MAXQDA, NVivo and Transana) and this is a fast changing and sometimes bewildering set of choices to make. Nevertheless considering options carefully will bear dividends later. There are a number of useful contributions which can help you get to grips with these options and challenges (see Hindmarsh 2008; Evers 2011; Silver and Patashnick 2011; Skukauskaite 2012).

One of the main decisions is whether you want to transcribe within one of these QDA packages (e.g. NVivo 10). In other words, you can usually choose whether to create transcripts within the package or import them later. One choice is to use another programme for transcription and import the files into the QDA later. For example, f4 (Win) and f5 (Mac) help in undertaking transcription as long as your computer has the necessary requirements (at time of writing 'f4' needs at least XP SP2 and Windows Media Player 9; 'f5' needs Mac OS X 10.6+ and QuickTime). You can download these f4 and f5 transcription tools from <http://www.audiotranskription.de/>.

I currently use SoundScriber for playing and transcribing of recorded interviews. It was originally developed for use in the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) project and released for use by academics performing similar work. It offers some helpful features for

transcription. It has the normal play, fast-forward, rewind and pause but you can vary the recording speed and it has a versatile 'walking' feature. This allows you to replay a section of the interview transcript several times and it then automatically goes to the next section with an overlap. Both the time and number of replays and the length of the overlap can be modified so that you can transcribe without your fingers having to continually press the normal keys (i.e. Play, Rewind, and Pause). Once you get these features tweaked to your preferences, you will find transcription speed is much faster. The downside of SoundScriber is that it is not possible to synchronise the resulting files with the original audio or video file.

You might be forgiven for hoping that VRS (voice recognition software) might do this painstaking job for you. Unfortunately, it currently simply is not up to the job of transcribing one-to-one interviews, never mind focus groups. Although accuracy is improving quickly, VRS is not able to recognise more than one voice and is confused by background noise of any kind. You can edit some of this out background noise out, with Audacity for example, but this is time-consuming. I have experimented with both Dragon Dictate and Dragon Naturally Speaking Premium Version 11.5. If your typing is slow and you have a lot of interviews to transcribe, it may still be a helpful alternative. You will need to play the recording with headphones and repeat the interview turns into a microphone. You can then do the formatting and add pause-timings for each turn.

There is no substitute for trying out these various tools and packages (many of them have demo versions). There are plenty of good screen-capture tutorials (e.g. QSR tutorials on NVivo) but online support groups are a good source of information too (e.g. researchgate.net). A quick search on YouTube will reveal a number of 'how-to' video tutorials but I would particular recommend the University of Essex's 10 tutorials on using NVivo 10 and those produced by QSR International. Both demonstrate handling transcription and analysis within QDA packages:

- University of Essex:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaqYC4UGKq8>
- QSR International:  
<http://explore.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-how-to-videos>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeIXFnJ-7Ms>

### **Transcribing and multimedia data**

One aspect of QDA packages in relation to audio and video capture and viewing is whether they handle multimedia and synchronise transcripts and original recordings. Again, it is worth exploring options before

making final decisions. For instance, if you are handling multimedia data in ATLAS.ti 6, you can import a time-coded transcription using *F4* (via the 'A-Docs' menu). The transcription is then synchronised on viewing with the relevant section of the original audio or video file.

The more interested you are in multimodal analysis or non-verbal communication, the more you will want to analyse interview transcripts in relation to the video recording. The ability to synchronise transcription with corresponding audiovisual files is increasingly available in QDA packages. One option that works well is Transana. It has been designed to handle both video and audio recordings and synchronise these to transcriptions. Also there seems to be currently no problem moving between Windows operating systems and Mac computers. Transana is open source software and recommended for interpretative analysis of recordings but I am not aware of anyone who has used it yet for analysing qualitative interviews (for more information: <http://www.transana.org/>). It certainly could be as it can manage large collections of video, audio, resulting transcripts, still image files, as well as coded analytic clips and notes. For more insights into multimodal transcription see Bezemer and Mavers (2011).

One factor that determines which software package to choose is whether or not it supports the scripts that researchers might use in their research. For example, Attia (2014) used MAXQDA because it supported Arabic. At that time users could not code in Arabic so she had to insert the codes in English.

### Other tools

Before we turn our attention to coding and thematic analysis, a few ideas for analytic tools that can be used as heuristics with qualitative interviews are offered here.

**Tag clouds:** I have found it useful to input an interview into a visualisation software such as Wordle, TagCrowd and Tagxedo.

- TagCrowd ([www.tagcrowd.com](http://www.tagcrowd.com))
- Wordle ([www.wordle.net](http://www.wordle.net))
- Tagxedo ([www.tagxedo.com](http://www.tagxedo.com))

This picks out the frequent lexical words in a text (it ignores grammar items like 'to' or 'are'). For example, Figure 8.1 is a 'wordle'.

These 'word clouds' can help you quickly see reoccurring lexical items (and possibly themes) in your interview(s). You can tweak your clouds with different layouts, colours, and fonts if you like. Those suggested





different approaches to the analysis of qualitative interview data and she introduces readers to ‘various families of approaches, including thematic analysis, grounded theory analysis, ethnographic analysis, phenomenological analysis, narrative analysis, and ethnomethodological analysis’ (2010: 149).

In general terms, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggest five steps for analysing interviews. Their work is essentially within a phenomenological tradition but it provides a basic starting point:

- Read through the whole interview to get a sense of the whole
- Determine the natural meaning units
- Restate the natural meaning unit as simply as possible
- Interrogate the meaning units in terms of the specific purpose of the study
- Tie together essential non-redundant themes of the entire interview into a descriptive statement

### **Content, codes and themes**

It can be confusing for the novice researcher to see a clear sense of a way forward with coding, content, and thematic analysis but analysis is what Erickson (1986: 149) believes transforms collected documentary materials into ‘data’:

Fieldnotes, videotapes, and site documents are not data. Even interview transcripts are not data. All these are documentary materials from which data must be constructed through some formal means of analysis.

In the following sections we concentrate on inductive approaches to analysis and differentiate between different forms of qualitative analysis. Many researchers use content analysis and thematic analysis synonymously. For me a shorthand working distinction between codes, content, and themes is that coding best describes the process of working with documentary materials and transcripts to generate codes and then themes. Initial codes are not themes. Themes work at an organisational level; they organise and sort the various codes. Content is more an umbrella term to describe the whole enterprise but with the caveat that ‘content’ should not forget about the ‘how’ (see Chapter 5 pages 152–3).

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) provide a useful overview of ‘content analysis’. They do not see this as a single method but demonstrate three distinct naturalistic approaches: conventional, directed, or summative.

They reveal differences among these three approaches in terms of coding schemes, origins of codes, and 'threats to trustworthiness'. In summary, conventional content analysis derives codes directly from the documents. With a more directed approach, analysis starts with relevant reading, theory, and previous research findings. These guide the formulation of initial codes. A summative content analysis involves counting and comparisons 'usually of keywords or content, followed by the interpretation of the underlying context' (2005: 1277).

### **Task**

At this point it would be helpful to read Maggie's vignette (p. 223) at the end of this chapter. This vignette reveals a number of issues that you can focus on as you consider her context, transcript, and reflexive comment.

In summary, it reveals how an iterative process of analysis, coupled with an understanding that an interview is an 'interactional event', allows the analyst to develop a nuanced interpretation of the interviewee's (Tamara's) articulation.

### **Thematic analysis**

Many researchers embarking on qualitative interview analysis adopt a data-driven inductive approach. This will often involve a combination of several data analysis approaches and processes including thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 101), steps and modes of interview analysis (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009), categorisation and coding (Richards 2003), and cross-case analysis (Merriam 1988; Creswell 2007; Duff 2008).

If you are engaged in a coding process that is working towards a thematic representation of your research you may find the following six-phase model helpful in getting a sense of possible phases. It is unlikely that you will step neatly in a linear manner through these six phases. Instead there will undoubtedly be a 'back-and-forth' process. I have found this model helpful in my own research and I have adapted it by adding in detail of transcription processes. Table 8.2 is based on Braun and Clarke (2006) and Clarke and Braun (2013).

Braun and Clarke also provide a '15-point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis' (2006: 96) that some of my research students have found a useful guide.

*Table 8.2* Phases of thematic analysis

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Familiarisation with the data	This stage is common to all forms of qualitative analysis. It will involve listening closely to interviews and transcribing in an open but a selective and concentrated way. An immersive process of reading other collected documents (e.g. field-notes) and listening to interview recordings (as well as other recordings), allows the researcher to become more familiar with data. This usually involves ‘noticing’ and perhaps noting key points from initial analytic observations.
Coding	This usually involves generating labels (lexical descriptors) in a back-and-forth process. There are a number of options (see Clarke and Braun 2013, for full comparison). Coding is not simply a method of data reduction, it is process of capturing both a semantic and conceptual ‘reading’ of the data. It is possible for the researcher to code each document (including interview transcripts and summaries) on paper, collating all codes by hand, but it is advisable to use a QDA package (see earlier in this chapter).
Searching for themes	The term ‘theme’ is best reserved for the coherent and meaningful construction of patterns in the interview data that arises out of active searching and assembling, connecting, and relating. This is like ‘coding the codes’ (2006: 78) and themes are determined in relation to the research question and the codes identified. ‘If codes are the bricks and tiles in a brick and tile house, then themes are the walls and roof panels’ (2006: 78).
Reviewing themes	This involves checking the coded extracts and seeing if themes ‘work’ in relation to particular extracts and then the full data-set. This is an iterative and reflective process and involves asking questions about whether the ‘themes tell a convincing and compelling story about the data’. New themes are arrived at by merging different themes; some themes are discarded; sometimes it is necessary to split a theme into two or more new themes.
Defining and naming themes	This requires the researcher to review and reanalyse each theme. Looking at each theme, you should ask what ‘overall story the analysis tells’ (2006: 88). This is a case of capturing the ‘essence’ of each theme, partly by establishing its main element and giving it a ‘concise, punchy and informative name’.
Writing up	Writing is an integral element of the analytic process in thematic analysis ‘not something that takes place at the end’ and ‘should begin in phase one, with the jotting down of ideas and potential coding schemes, and continue right through the entire coding/analysis process’ (2006: 86). The ‘writing up’ stage, however, involves weaving together the analytic narrative and relevant data extracts, providing a coherent version of the data and in dialogue with existing literature.

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## Grounded theory and other approaches to analysis and coding

Charmaz and Belgrave (2012) provide a useful account of the main analytic issues, including suggestions for initial coding and memo writing. After using theoretical sampling to select interviewees, based on pilot interviews and initial findings, early analysis stages alternate with further interviews and coding of transcripts and production of written memos. There is a process of ‘constant comparison’ between existing and new findings (Miles and Huberman 1994). The really important aspects of all this is that key codes are outcomes of the data collection process and not ‘a priori’ categories. In other words the codes are initiated from the interviewee, although they are linked and developed (through axial coding) by the interviewer/researcher. This process continues until the point of ‘theoretical saturation’ (where further data analysis does new codes or categories). The following elements are iterative and recursive with the actual interviews (interviews, coding (open/axial), developing theory, transcribing, memo writing). See Basit (2003) for further detail about coding decisions and Lu and Shulman provide a ‘coding analysis toolkit’ (2008).

### Other analytic lenses

The next few sections of this chapter concentrate on proposing a number of ‘analytic lenses’ which can provide insights into qualitative interview data (rather than belonging to any one paradigm or tradition). There is a great deal of overlap between these suggested lenses.

*From how to what:* The first of these has already been covered in Chapter 3 and Chapter 6 but is important to review with regard to analysis. This analytic lens involves an active focus on the ‘how’ (rather than just the ‘what’). Talmy (2011: 28) puts it like this:

Analyzing not only the whats, or the product of the interview, but also the hows, or the process involved in the co-construction of meaning, has significant implications for the analysis of interview data. In conventional approaches, analysis often takes form in decontextualized content or thematic analyses, in which respondents’ utterances are treated as independent of, and unaffected by, their interactional context, and are then systematically grouped, coded, and summarized such that their ‘interpretive activity is subordinated to the substance of what they report’ (Holstein and Gubrium 2003: 78). In an active interview analysis, by contrast, ‘[t]he focus is as much on the assembly process as on what is assembled’. (ibid.)

Talmy is making clear here the range of analytic approaches can be adopted for this purpose (including thematic analysis). Referring to Boyatzis (1998) and Braun and Clarke (2006), he is stressing the ‘fundamental sociality’ of the research interview.

*Stance, alignment and positioning:* This analytic lens draws attention to the dynamics and co-constructed nature of qualitative interviews by focusing on how interviews create a space for various performances, stances, and shifts in positioning. Baynham (2011) is a good starting point here and in Extract 8.2, for example, he uses bold to highlight those parts where the teacher is dramatising the thought processes of students who rejoined a class with other students who are absent on the first day.

### Extract 8.2

- 1 L: um it was nice having this- How many did we  
 2 have today? Ten?  
 3 I: Yeah  
 4 L: Yeah it was nice because it really felt like the  
 5 first lesson back this year because last week  
 6 two students on Tuesday four on Thursday and  
 7 it's (.) it's not a nice feeling for the teacher  
 8 it's not a nice feeling for the students.  
 9 **They're like well why me?** They sit there and  
 10 they're first **and think is nobody coming?** And I  
 11 don't want them to then **think well I won't**  
 12 **come for the next lesson.** So everybody got  
 13 called. Anyone I could get through to I spoke to.  
 14 Anyone else I left messages. So we got nearly  
 15 everyone back.

The bold helps highlight the performative elements of narratives in the interviews. Note too the use of ‘well’ in voicing these positions (lines 9 and 11). In the transcript above, Baynham uses the bold font to draw our attention to those parts of narrative telling that are ‘voiced’. In other words, using bold font here draws attention to the dynamic relationship between stance taking and discursive positioning. Baynham’s work shows how shifts into performance depend on the display of different participant roles and various alignments that are adopted in the narrative interviews.

In a similar vein, Myers and Lampropoulou (2012) analyse transcripts from the ‘Qualidata Archive’ and focus on issues of stance taking, arguing that ‘social science researchers in any discipline’ should attend to

'these categorization and inference-making processes as part of their analysis of interview transcripts' (2012: 334). One of their purposes in the study is to 'provide tools so that social science researchers can attend to aspects of interaction in interviews that are usually unnoticed' (2012: 348). In particular they are interested in the devices interviewees use for showing that they are 'taking up the question', in particular the moves the interviewee makes in aligning or disaligning with the projected stance inherent in the question. Lampropoulou and Myers provide a reflexive vignette that comes later in Chapter 10 p. 278.

*Identity:* Rapley (2001, 2004) reminds us that interviews are sites for both interviewers and interviewees to present themselves in specific ways (in relation to the topic):

Whatever analytic stance is adopted in relation to interviews, the interviewers' identity work should be viewed as central to the interaction. As such, it should be central in the analysis and the related presentation of the data. Interview-talk is produced in a specific context and an awareness of that context is vital in understanding the talk, and therefore the 'data', itself. (2001: 317)

Chapters 3 and 6 have provided evidence that aspects of identity are absolutely central to understanding the interview (e.g. acquaintance, gender, power). Talmy (2010) provides a useful list of research studies that use interviews but omit analysis of the interviewer role in the production of data. These studies include Canagarajah (2008), who provides important contextual information (religion, caste and class) but provides 'no analysis of the impact this may have had on his interviews'. However, Richards reports a 'growing literature on the importance of treating interviews as interactionally co-constructed events in which participant identity and positioning have significant analytical implications' (2009: 159). A good starting point in considering key issues is Bucholtz and Hall (2005). Miller is also a good example, where she brings into focus the fact that ignoring her white American identity would seriously limit any subsequent analysis of her data. In Extract 8.3, she is interviewing Peng about his experience of prejudice (2011: 51).

**Extract 8.3**

1 I: Have you seen any examples of prejudice. Maybe  
 2 against- I mean it doesn't have to be just  
 3 against Black people, maybe other groups of  
 4 people.

- 5 P: Uh if for me, I never.  
 6 I: Really.  
 7 P: Yeah.  
 8 I: Oh that's so good to know.  
 9 P: I think the American (.) very nice,  
 10 I: [Yeah]  
 11 P: [The people. U::h=]  
 12 I: =That's good.

Miller's analysis shows how engaging with the contingencies of interview accounts, in her case as a 'majority white, US-American' helps establish richer data. This helps us to foreground:

the situated meanings and identity work that are inevitably part of such 'data sets', but also how the research process leads to 'an inter-subjectively produced final account'. (Gardner 2001: 197)

*Membership categorisation analysis (MCA)*: Any kind of social interaction is a site for the construction, reconstruction, and perhaps challenge of identities. Interviews are no different, in fact it could be argued that they allow a particular discourse space in which such identities do get (re)constructed and Eljee's reflexive vignette gives us an insight into such a process (see p. 144). Richards (2006: 3) says that the 'pervasive presence and significance of such construction is reflected in the increased popularity of Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA)'. A growing number of MCA papers explore how membership categorisation is made relevant in talk. Many of these papers work within an ethnomethodological tradition. For example, Baker (2002: 778) proposes five linked ways to interrogate interview data from an ethnomethodological perspective. She argues that it is important to treat data as 'accounts' where members of specific groups speak as they do because they have been assigned membership by the researcher. It is also becoming more common for qualitative interview analysis to consider how interviewer identities and agendas have a reflexive relationship with the construction interview exchange. For example, Mori (2012), working within a constructionist tradition, provides a comparative study of two different interviewers interviewing the same multilingual speaker of Korean, English, and Japanese. She uses membership categorisation analysis to show how each interview constructs the Korean student in different ways (especially in terms of membership categories such as American, Korean, or Korean-American).



## Analytic problems

The next section of this chapter considers problems or pitfalls in interview analysis. The first part highlights a problem to avoid (anecdotalism). The second part argues that we should make problems more 'visible' and part of our analysis. This leads to the final perspective in this chapter which argues that many studies require a more reflexive treatment of the language of the interview.

*The problem of anecdotalism:* Bryman (1988: 77) argues that we should avoid anecdotalism, where a few instances of a phenomenon are picked out and presented as typical, without evaluating the representativeness or generality of the chosen fragments. He argues that we need to guard against a tendency 'towards an anecdotal approach to the use of data' where 'brief conversations, snippets from unstructured interviews' are used 'to provide evidence of a particular contention'.

*Seeing problems and nuisances in a different light:* Scheurich (1995: 241) was one of the first to argue that we need to take more account of 'complexity, uniqueness, and the indeterminateness' of interaction as well as 'problematic' elements of analysis. Edwards (2003: 33) goes further and argues that rather than seeing problems, inconsistencies, and ambiguities as an 'analytic nuisance', we should view them as one of the 'most interesting' areas of interest. These contributions are part of a shift from the 'what' to the 'how'; involving the analyst opening out difficulties, contradictions, deviant examples, and ambiguity through their transcription work. Roulston has been particularly important in showing how tackling interview problems (Roulston 2011) and trouble sources (Roulston 2014) can be revealing. Her CA-led exploration of the way that speakers orient to interactional problems in interviews considers what it is that participants may be telling researchers about research topics via problematic interactions. She shows how, by confronting the management of interactional problems, researchers can identify trouble sources and important issues for further exploration. Roulston (2011: 363) suggests focusing on two questions in particular:

1. Did interviewees answer questions posed? If not, what happened?
2. How might the methods used and questions posed be modified in order to attend to interactional difficulties that occur in field work?

Roulston argues that 'this form of analysis is one way to gain insight with respect to the identities employed by speakers in doing research interviews'. It also enables consideration of 'moral assumptions

concerning research topics implicit in both questions and answers provided by interviewers and research participants' (2014: 14).

### **Language issues in analysis**

This next section opens out issues related to the language(s) in which an interview is conducted, including some translation issues. In Chapter 3 we talked about two particular issues concerned with an interview's language medium:

- when interviews are conducted in a language which is not the interviewee's mother tongue (L1);
- when the interview is conducted in the interviewee's L1 and then translated to another language.

It is not being suggested here that there is a 'right way' to interview (when the interviewer and interviewee do not share the same L1). However, both the decision itself (which language to interview in) or any difficulties or challenges arising in the process often get ignored in research accounts (see Nikander 2008). The suggestion here is that, in simple terms, your interviews will fall into one of four language scenarios and that the particular way in which language choices impact on interview outcomes need to be considered (at least in scenarios 2, 3, and 4):

1. The interviewer and interviewee(s) share the same L1 so the interview is conducted in the interviewer's L1.
2. The interviewer and interviewee(s) do not share the same L1 but the interviewee is competent in what is their L2 (and the interviewer's L1) and so the interview is conducted in the interviewer's L1. A variation of this is that the interviewer may be competent in what is their L2 (and the interviewee's L1) and so the interview is conducted in the interviewee's L1.
3. The interviewer and interviewee(s) do not share the same L1 so the interview is conducted with the help of a translator who has access to both the interviewer's L1 and interviewee's L1 (e.g. Adrian's example on p. 187 where the interviewee's L1 is Sylheti).
4. The interviewer and interviewee(s) do not share the same L1 but they are both reasonably comfortable in communicating in each other's L1. In this scenario, they might codeswitch during the interview.

Of course, the scenarios are fairly crude ones. It is not necessarily the case that 'sharing the same L1' means that there won't be

misunderstandings. There are always going to be differences in dialect, experience, and perspective that might hinder communication and understanding when both interviewer and interviewee share an L1. Also, there are doubtless countless multilingual permutations possible across many interview contexts. The main point being made here is that each choice will inevitably impact on the analysis process and outcomes and needs to be part of a reflexive account.

At this point, it might be instructive to get an insider view of a particular context to get a grasp of the range of issues involved in collecting data in one language and trying to analyse and code in another. Mariam Attia is talking about her interview with Heba Salem (her real name) but many of her comments concern the research process more generally.

## Mariam Attia's vignette

### Mariam's context

I conducted this interview as part of my doctoral research in which I explored teacher cognition and technology use in the context of teaching Arabic to speakers of other languages. Fieldwork took place in an international institution of higher education in Cairo and lasted for nine months. I used several methods of data collection, mainly a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, video-recorded stimulated recall, classroom observation, and teacher reflective writing.

Heba Salem was one of three in-service teachers who took part in this study. The segment below is extracted from an interview with her about her transition into using technology in language teaching (Extract 8.4). It is presented here as an example of interview data that triggered questions about the processes of researching multilingually.

### Extract 8.4

- 1 الباحثة: هل ممكن تصنفي نفسك على إنك بقيت معتمدة جداً على التكنولوجيا؟
- 2 هبة: آه (.) في الفصول آه (.) بقيت معتمدة عليها جامد.
- 3 الباحثة: هل فيه سمات معينة للمدرس الناجح تكنولوجياً في رأيك؟ محتاج صفات شخصية أو محتاج مهارات معينة؟
- 4 هبة: معرفش إذا محتاج مهارات معينة (.) هي محتاجة بس حد يبقى عنده الاستعداد يغامر شوية
- 6 (.) حد يبقى متواجد قدام الجهاز مثلاً (.) جهاز الكمبيوتر لفترة طويلة ويدور كدة ويجرب ده
- 7 ويجرب ده ويجرب ده (.) مش عارفة إذا كات دي مرتبطة بسمات شخصية وللا لا (.) ميكونش عنده خوف (.) ميكونش عنده خوف (...)
- 8 هي عايزة نوع من المغامرة بس شوية.

## English translation

- 1 I: Would you classify yourself as becoming very  
 2 dependent on technology?  
 3 H: Yes (.) in classrooms (.) Yes (.) I have become  
 4 very dependent on it.  
 5 I: In your opinion (.) are there certain  
 6 features that characterise teachers who are  
 7 technologically adept? Does it require  
 8 personality traits or certain skills?  
 9 H: I am not sure if it requires certain skills  
 10 (.) It just requires somebody who is prepared to be  
 a bit adventurous (.) somebody who is present in  
 11 front of a machine (.) a computer for  
 12 example (.) for a long time (.) experimenting  
 13 with it (.) trying this and trying that  
 14 (.) I don't know whether or not this is related to  
 15 personality traits (.) S/he shouldn't have fears  
 16 (.) S/he shouldn't have fears (...) It just requires  
 19 a bit of adventure.

**Reflexive comment**

As a multilingual doctoral researcher, one of the methodological puzzles that I encountered was how to engage with data in one language (Arabic) when a substantial part of my researcher thinking was taking place in another (English). As with most doctoral studies conducted in the UK, my academic context was English-medium. This included the research methods training, the literature, the theoretical framework, the progression panel, the supervisory meetings, the online doctoral community, the thesis, and the viva. Fieldwork, however, was carried out in Arabic, and included negotiating access, identifying the cases, communicating with the participants and, among other forms of data collection, administering interviews.

While my return to the UK marked the end of fieldwork, it was the beginning of a series of questions about handling interview data in multilingual research design. Some of these questions were: Do I transcribe in Arabic then translate into English, or do I listen to the interview and translate right away? Do I need to translate all the interviews? For whom and why? Will I have time for that? Do I translate then code or code then translate? Do I code in Arabic so my codes are closer to what the teachers actually said, or code in English so the interpretation chimes

in with the literature and the conceptual framework? What qualitative analysis software supports Arabic and what doesn't? When I translate, it is important to translate word for word, or is there room for representational adjustments? Does the interpretation reflect what I really want to say, or is it confined by the limits of my English vocabulary?

The extract above is an example of interview data that sparked such questions. I wanted to include the extract in Heba's account and could not find the appropriate English translation for the (underlined on line 6) Arabic colloquial verb يدوحر which the teacher mentioned on different occasions. I used the (underlined) word 'experimenting' knowing that it was not the most accurate.

Over the course of my study, I came to realise that answers to such questions often emerged from ongoing engagement with the data, reflection on multilingual practice, and articulation of research(er) experiences.

### **Language issues (continued)**

There are a growing number of studies that address these kind of language issues in a reflexive way, as Mariam has done above. These accounts are important, not least in challenging the assumption that research interviews need to be conducted in English. Temple and Young (2004) provide a useful discussion of the epistemological and ontological consequences of decisions involving translation, while Xu and Liu (2009) offer useful insights into decisions about translation and representation arising from their decision to interview in L1. Miller (2011) provides a perspective on the possible differences that interviewing in L1 (rather than L2 English) might have on identity construction. There are a number of other useful studies which have begun to open up the topic of interviewing in multilingual settings (see Giampapa and Lamoureux 2011; Androulakis 2013; Holmes et al. 2013; Stelma et al. 2013; Fournier et al. 2014).

Jane Andrews has contributed to a number of the papers listed above and has been part of a drive to account for the way research teams work to access multilingual experiences. Her work details the complexities of managing interaction before and during the interview when an interpreter is being used (in support of interview research practices involving multilingual research). In particular she argues that where interpreters are used then account needs to be taken of their contribution to the responses elicited from interviewees. The importance of developing a shared understanding of the purposes of the research (between

researcher(s) and interpreter) is also stressed. I invited the following viewpoint from Jane in response to the question ‘what advice would you offer to someone interviewing multilingually?’:

My experience of interviewing multilingually involved me interacting with parents with whom I did not have a shared language. The context for the research was an exploration of parents’ perspectives on their children’s learning both in and out of school. My collaboration with an interpreter to facilitate the interaction with parents in the project has led me to appreciate many issues connected with the complexities of working multilingually. These issues are linked, firstly, to my realisation of the benefits of *spending time establishing roles and responsibilities* when researching in collaboration with an interpreter – while a solo researcher may have knowledge, expectations and insights regarding the research in their head, all of this needs to be openly shared between researcher and interpreter so that common approaches and understandings can be shared. A second area of awareness I developed concerned the importance of *respecting the linguistic preferences of research participants*; I had made assumptions about *parents’ linguistic preferences* when in fact by working with an interpreter I appreciated that additional languages felt more comfortable for parents and the interpreter. A final area of awareness for me was for a researcher who interviews multilingually to reflect on the opportunities provided by generating a multilingual data set as regards issues such as *how to present the data* in papers and presentations resulting from the research – is it appropriate to present research data monolingually only? Each of these areas, and no doubt many others, need to be reflected upon by researchers who engage in interviewing multilingually so that they can develop their own approach to ensuring their multilingual research is carried out in an ethical, valid and reliable way.

## Summary

Chapter 8 has covered a great deal of ground. It focused first on producing a transcript and then various aspects of analysis in working with qualitative interviews. The chapter started by considering the value of transcription and developing a set of conventions that might match your research aims. Whether you are a novice researcher or a more experienced one, there are perennial issues to face such as how much to transcribe and what level of delicacy to try to capture.

The middle section of the chapter considered issues of analysis, including working with QDA packages (e.g. NVivo 10). In detailing various analytic decisions we contemplated various analytic lenses and problems to avoid. The interview is best treated as an interactional event that creates its own context and this perspective needs to be part of our analytic focus.

The last part of the chapter considered various aspects of language. This important emerging area of interview analysis is especially important in providing a full and reflexive account of both the nature of the interactional event and claimed outcomes of the research when the interviewer and interviewee(s) do not share the same L1.

### Suggested reading

- Bird, C. M. (2005). How I stopped dreading and learned to love transcription. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11(2), 226–248.
- Charmaz, K., and Belgrave, L. (2012). Qualitative interviewing and grounded theory analysis. In Gubrium, J. F., Holstein, J. A., Marvasti, A. B., and McKinney, K. D. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*. (2nd ed., pp. 347–367). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Davidson, C. (2009). Transcription: Imperatives for qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(2), 35–52.
- Nikander, P. (2012). Interviews as discourse data. In Gubrium, J. F., Holstein, J. A., Marvasti, A. B., and McKinney, K. D. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*. (2nd ed., pp. 397–415). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Roulston, K. (2010). *Reflective Interviewing: A Guide to Theory and Practice*. London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications (Chapters 5 and 8).

### Maggie Kubanyiova's vignette

#### Context

This excerpt (analysed more fully in Kubanyiova, in press) comes from the first in the series of four ethnographic interviews conducted over the period of one school year with an EFL teacher, Tamara. She was one of eight teachers who volunteered to participate in a teacher development (TD) course whose aim was to create an informal space for EFL teachers to reflect on the principles and practices for engaging students in L2 learning. There was no assessment and no expectation of any form of implementation of the course content on the part of the teachers. I had a dual role in this research project, which included that of the course leader (I organised the meetings and designed course materials) and of the researcher (I collected ethnographic data from the teacher development course, school visits, course feedback, interviews,

classroom observations, student questionnaires and focus group interviews, sample teaching materials, and lesson plans). The study was concerned with a broader question of how the eight teacher participants made sense of the course, which later led to theory building with regard to language teachers' conceptual change (Kubanyiova 2012).

Data collection took place in four phases over the course of one school year and each comprised a five-hour TD course session, followed or preceded by visits to each teacher's school. These would include several lesson observations, pre- and post-observation informal conversations, informal interactions with the teacher's colleagues, students, and other members of staff, and an in-depth ethnographic interview covering a range of areas, including the teacher's personal and professional history, their current experiences and the observed lessons. The interview extract presented below comes from the first phase of the data collection (Extract 8.5). Tamara had already attended the first session of the TD course and the interview was conducted immediately after one of the classroom observations I participated in on the day of the visit to Tamara's school. The lesson referred to in the interview excerpt was based on a coursebook theme of friendship which the class had been working on prior to the observation and which Tamara had previously taught outside the research setting (in previous years as well as to a different student group in the same year). The students had been asked to write an 'opinion piece' concerning three questions about friendship set by the coursebook and the bulk of the observed lesson was devoted to building on their answers in a group task and then in a whole-class interaction. As we were walking down the corridor after the lesson, Tamara offered the following unsolicited comment (recorded in my fieldnotes):

I changed my plan in the second part of the lesson. There were some grammatical exercises that followed, but based on the nice discussion, I didn't want to interrupt it, so I chose another task from the coursebook, not the one I'd planned on phrasal verbs.

The interview begins with an informal chat (not audiorecorded), followed by a prompt inspired by Tamara's earlier comments asking her to elaborate on the lesson in question.

### **Maggie's transcript**

#### **Extract 8.5**

- 1 I: Can we return to your lesson? Let's talk about
- 2 your general objectives?
- 3 T: I always plan my lessons in such a way, well, my



4 aim is always to start communication among  
5 students themselves, not myself, not that I  
6 should be the communication channel between me  
7 and them, but rather [they should communicate]  
8 with each other, rather like, sharing  
9 information, sharing opinions, more concretely,  
10 question-answer-based discussion. However, we'd  
11 already had a preparation for this class, the  
12 three questions for homework to enable them to  
13 reflect on their own and try to write without  
14 any concrete outline a sort of opinion paper,  
15 They were asked to simply use their experience  
16 to express their opinion. And we will then  
17 analyse what's an essay, what's a reflection,  
18 what's an opinion paper. Anyway, that's not what  
19 I wanted to say. When we did this friendship?  
20 The basis for our class was the topic as such  
21 and I always start with a few general questions,  
22 in terms of what they know about the topic, what  
23 it reminds them of, what they think we could  
24 discuss in our class in relation to it. And I  
25 always plan the lesson in this way. Either I  
26 only have an article plus a discussion and then  
27 grammar related to the article and then possibly  
28 some post-reading activities and grammar  
29 practice. Or, when possible, through that  
30 discussion, if I can pick up from the discussion  
31 something like, 'now you have used this  
32 particular sentence structure', and I can return  
33 to it. Well, this, the phrasal verbs, is  
34 something I didn't get to do in this particular  
35 lesson. It was just a homework check, to be  
36 honest, the only positive thing was that they  
37 exchanged information, they had to write, they  
38 know already how to share opinions within the  
39 group, they have to write notes and they can use  
40 this information in reproduction or their  
41 maturita [school leaving exam] question, because  
42 they do have one on friendship. They have the  
43 complete vocabulary, opinions, yes? So in this  
44 way they don't have to develop the topic any  
45 further [for the maturita exam]. Educational

46 attitudes. It's more educational what you have  
47 seen.

48 I: Is it a positive thing for you or do you feel  
49 that it was not a good class?

50 (2.0)

51 T: Well, as such, it was not really my  
52 idea. This should have been the beginning. In  
53 this class, it was an end, the discussion. So it  
54 didn't have any particular rationale. And this  
55 is what would bother me in my classes. I always  
56 want to make sure that each class works as a  
57 unit, it's got to have head and tail... What we  
58 did was a sort of post-activity. I don't know.

### **Reflexive comment**

In this reflexive comment, I would like to focus on conceptual and emotional tensions evidenced in this interview excerpt, as well as across Tamara's dataset, which eventually led to a critical analytical insight into this teacher's sense making and, more generally, to conceptualising emotional dissonance as an essential but insufficient catalyst for language teachers' conceptual change (Kubanyiova 2012). Although I am using a particular interview excerpt to illustrate the analytical points I am making in this reflexive comment, it is worth noting here that it was not this interview alone that led to such complex theoretical insights. Rather, what goes on here as well as my interpretation of it are a result of a highly iterative process of analytical sense making situated in the context Tamara's full ethnographic dataset as well as in the broader social context of this research project. The purpose of this reflexive comment is to make some of these analytical processes visible, but for a more comprehensive theoretical consolidation, readers are referred to Kubanyiova (2012, in press).

Tamara's reflection on her observed lesson reveals intriguing conceptual tensions in her interpretation of the meaning of 'discussion', by which she refers to the whole-class teacher-student interaction of 'the second part of the lesson' (Tamara's post-observation comment). Initially, her conceptualisation appears to correspond with the notion of teacher-student interaction in what Walsh (2006) has termed 'classroom context mode.' This refers to an interactional microcontext whose pedagogical aims are to encourage meaning-focused communication and which has been seen by some SLA researchers as beneficial for students' L2 learning in its own right (e.g. Mackey 2007). Tamara's

interpretation along these lines is signalled by her reference to her pedagogical goals as 'sharing information, sharing opinions' (line 9) and her general reflection in lines 4–9 also bears resemblance to the broader themes of the TD course, which included principles for engaging students in meaningful communication, introducing personally relevant topics and tasks, and promoting group responsibility for classroom interaction. This suggests a degree of Tamara's cognitive engagement with the TD course content and is verbally hinted at, particularly in her emphasis on interaction 'among students themselves, not myself' (lines 4–8) as well as in her remark to the students during the observed class which is the focus of this interview: 'You need to express yourself and now you have the opportunity' (for a full transcript of this lesson segment, see Kubanyiova, in press)

The hints of incoherence and vagueness in lines 4–10, however, suggest that these may be somewhat abstract notions for Tamara. As soon as she begins to elaborate 'more concretely' (lines 7–10) and to draw on what she clearly views as her successful past experience of incorporating this type of interactional strategy into her lessons (lines 9–33), two crucial clues emerge: first, the 'communication among students themselves, not myself' (lines 4–5) attains a more specific definition of whole class 'question-answer-based discussion' (line 10). Although its pedagogic purposes may still include some of the goals of classroom context mode (Walsh 2006), such as introducing a new topic or activating students' mental schemata (lines 21–23), for Tamara this type of discussion does not have 'any particular rationale' (line 54), unless it can serve other, more substantial pedagogical purposes, such as presenting a new material on 'phrasal verbs'. Instead of orienting to teacher-student discussion as 'genuine communication' (Walsh 2006: 79), then, Tamara appears to primarily employ it as a classroom organisation tool which allows her to pace the lesson and link the core teaching activities within it, but not as a 'vehicle' for second language learning (Mackey 2007: 2). And although there may be certain 'educational' (lines 37–39) benefits to teacher-student interaction if it is employed in its own right, 'pure speaking' (Tamara's term from a later interview) is, in her mind, not where real teaching and, by extension, learning takes place.

The second insight concerns Tamara's explicit acknowledgement that what she ended up doing in the observed class was a kind of 'discussion' which did not really meet her requirements for effective teaching and therefore failed to produce outcomes that she would typically expect to achieve in her lessons (lines 35; 51–58). In other words, despite Tamara's initial positive appraisal of the 'nice discussion' that she 'didn't want

to interrupt' and therefore 'changed' her original lesson 'plan' (post-observation comment), quite a contrasting emotional evaluation emerges as her reflection unfolds in this interview: Tamara's frustration with this pedagogical practice in the context of the observed lesson (line 33 onwards). Although 'the only positive thing' (line 36) grows into a fairly long list of benefits (lines 36–45) that she appears to have generated in the effort to give a certain 'educational' (lines 45–47) meaning to a strategy which would otherwise be a little more than 'a homework check, to be honest' (line 35), in her mind the benefits do not override the fact that this was 'not really my idea' (lines 51–52) of a good class and to have to do this would in fact 'bother me in my classes' (lines 54–55). It is important to note that as the interviewer in this research interview, I was clearly becoming aware of these conceptual and emotional tensions and my question (lines 48–49) is a clear outcome of this analysis in action rather than a pre-determined interview question. In this instance, the question appears to have created a space in which Tamara could make explicit the emotional tensions that were previously left largely implicit.

The key analytical question that I needed to engage with in order to make sense of the data, however, concerns the significance of the conceptual contradictions in Tamara's messages and of the accompanying emotional tensions in her appraisal of her own teaching. In other words, if 'not really [her] idea', whose 'idea' (lines 51–52) was Tamara attempting to pursue in her observed lesson as well as, it would appear, in the initial stages of her post-observation reflection, and to what end? And what, if anything, could this tell me about Tamara's sense making in relation of the TD course? The answer to these questions becomes clearer when the research context in which Tamara was participating is conceptualised as an 'interactional event' (Talmy and Richards 2011: 2) and is examined not only in relation to what Tamara was saying, but, more crucially, with regards to what she was doing, that is, which aspect of the context and her professional identity (in this case, a committed research participant versus an experienced and competent English language teacher) she was making relevant in the moment-by-moment unfolding of the research interview.

Viewed from this perspective, Tamara's initial conceptualisation of 'discussion' now appears to be associated with the former context in which she primarily drew on her role in the research project. As a highly responsible research participant who had known the researcher prior to the project (cf. Kubanyiova 2012), she seems to have taken it upon herself, as some sort of unspoken obligation (despite the absence of any

formal requirements), to engage with the TD course ideas by ‘show[ing] you’ something ‘non-standard’ (Tamara’s comment in another interview). As a result, Tamara appears to have planned, delivered, and talked about her observed lessons in ways which, although going well beyond her comfort zone, allowed the researcher to ‘see’ (line 47) examples of what she imagined as desirable behaviours and/or attitudes even though she clearly did not identify with such images of good language teaching. In short, the ‘hidden engine’ of what Tamara was doing in her immediate unsolicited post-observation comment and in the initial parts of the interview seem to be partly fuelled by her desire to please the researcher. Interestingly, as soon as Tamara’s professional identity as a highly experienced language teacher is invoked by the interactional context later in the interview (e.g. when she is able to draw on her past successful experience in 20–33, or when she is invited to make a professional judgment in 48), a very different but far more concrete, detailed, and, arguably, more internalised image of a good teacher that Tamara was striving to become surfaces in her account.

It seems, therefore, that what may appear as conceptual contradictions in Tamara’s account merely reflect a dynamic nature of this interactional event in which Tamara’s different identities associated with distinctive images of good practice, become relevant as the interaction unfolds. Tamara’s concluding statement ‘I don’t know’ (line 58) following an articulate and confident assessment of her practice leaves open the possibility of returning to her pursuit of the less internalised images of a good language teacher, enabling me to view this interactional event as a dynamic and contingent space in which a range of participants’ identity projects become relevant at different times. The prominent evidence of emotional tensions in Tamara’s data alerted me to the often internally conflicting nature of these identity pursuits and highlighted different emotional and identity consequences of the participants’ engagement with the TD course ideas with significantly different implications for their conceptual change.

# 9

## Representation

### Introduction

Chapter 9 concentrates on the representation of data and analysis. In simple terms, the chapter asks who gets to see the research and what do they get to see? We consider how the analytic process, research findings, and outcomes are communicated to and shared with participants and the research community. The chapter examines three groups for whom the representation of the research is important in different ways:

- the research participants
- the research community
- novice researchers.

Actually, there is also the researcher. Through interviewing, but also through the process of representation, we discover things about ourselves as researchers, about our responsibilities to the participants and to the research community, and about the nature of research itself. However, in this chapter, we will focus primarily here on the three audiences above. Thinking about the first of these groups (the participants) is both a question of analysis and representation. Research participants' perspective on the data itself (and your interpretation of the data) might feed back into the analysis process, thus supporting validity. The second group is much more squarely a matter of representation and will depend on whether you are publishing a journal article, a book, or a PhD thesis. A consideration of the third group (novice researchers) gives us a chance to focus on ways in which making data and analytic procedures available can help provide insights and training opportunities.

A focus on this last group provides a bridge to the final chapter (Chapter 10 'Training and Development').

A full examination of these potential audiences for our research inevitably means that we need to take into account such issues as ethics, transparency, validity, as well as research training. However, there are two issues in particular that this chapter aims to focus on in detail:

- the way in which any transcripts of interview interaction are shared and made available in research reports;
- the representation of reflexivity.

Skukauskaite (2012) summarises the nature of the challenge in communicating reflexivity and sharing transcripts with various parties:

Reflexivity in research and making transparent the decisions in transcribing provides the basis for warranting research claims in ways that are accountable both to the research participants and to the research community.

This quote neatly summarises the challenge for the qualitative researcher in relation to two of our potential audiences.

### **Sharing data with research participants**

The chapter begins by thinking about the value of showing data and transcripts to the research participants and maintaining a dialogue with 'the researched'. This is partly a question of ethics and transparency, in that it is good practice to both check data and transcripts with participants and make available any report or writing up of the research (even if they do not take up the opportunity). Adler and Adler (2002) recommend taking research accounts back to the field. If this is done, there is also the possibility of validating the findings and opening up further dialogue if research is shared. We have already seen examples of such dialogic effects in Chapter 6 (pp. 157).

Mero-Jaffe (2011) provides a useful introduction to issues of both transcription and the sharing of interview transcripts with participants and makes the case that it is still comparatively rare for either transcripts of interviews or claims based on interviews to be checked with participants. She outlines a number of ethical and reflexive issues that face the researcher in offering the transcript to interviewees. In her case

and in others (e.g. Forbat and Henderson 2005) not all interviewees responded to the offer of checking the transcript. However, the general position taken is that handing over the transcript to the researched can be empowering for the interviewee and can show respect. It is be a conscious attempt to readjust the 'balance of power between the interviewer and interviewee' (Mero-Jaffe 2011: 244) where such a balance of power usually lies with the interviewer (see Davidson 2009). It also encourages further comment and perhaps additional and further involvement in the research.

This process is not always straightforward, however. Dilemmas can arise out of the decision to further involve the interviewee. A particular transcript extract might be playing an important role in supporting or illustrating an analytic point the researcher wants to make. However, on sharing the transcript, the interviewee might say that they do not want the data to be publicly available. In such cases, it is necessary, even though you may be reluctant, to respect the participant's wishes and remove the extract. In my experience this is rare and the objection usually is only then related to a short extract. In response, I have simply erased the problematic part but have kept the outline of the interaction in the interview transcript to give a sense of what has been removed (see Appendix 3 on page p. 285 lines 389–410 for an example). A further issue that sometimes arises is that the interviewee wants to rephrase or rewrite the transcript – either to make it clearer or refine or extend a point. This kind of editorial request is less straightforward, as then the nature of the text would be fundamentally changed (if you accepted their requested changes). Probably the best solution here is to keep the original but register the subsequent feedback in a footnote or in the discussion of the original text.

Grinyer and Thomas (2012) cite Emerson and Pollner (2002), in making the point that such a check is also a gesture of goodwill, as without without the respondents there would be no data at all. However they also make the point that the process needs handling with care and that it would be wrong to assume that the 'take the data back' practice is always welcomed by the participant (2012: 223).

Mero-Jaffe (2011) details how transcripts can cause embarrassment and anxiety for interviewees because of the exposure to the content but also because of the nature of the actual transcript. Mero-Jaffe uses Kvale's (1996) story of a teacher who read a chapter draft that included his interview and subsequently demanded that corrections be made to the transcript (as the teacher felt that the transcript offended him and his professionalism). This kind of issue is partly to do with most people's



lack of familiarity with transcripts. The sharing of transcripts does not always produce an easy or straightforward validation and it is not always easy to predict how participants might react. In Extract 9.1 below, the researcher (Samaneh Zandian) is sharing her experience of showing transcripts to previously interviewed children. She was primarily motivated by the ethical concern that children should also be informed about the results of the research they are involved in and see how their contributions have been included in the research (see also Matthews and Tucker 2000). Four months after the completion of the data collection, she revisited the interview participants and shared the initial findings with them. Although in general, it was difficult for children to recognise their own extracts, after they realised that Samaneh would put their exact wordings in her thesis, they reacted in different ways.

### Extract 9.1

- 1 I: I wanted to show how I would use your.. ideas,  
 2 your opinions, the way you explained yourself in  
 3 the interview. What do you think about it?  
 4 D: I think it's good.  
 5 I: So how do you feel that this ((pointing to  
 6 children's interview extract)) will be (.)  
 7 in a book?  
 8 D: I feel cool. no not cool (.) I feel like I am  
 9 famous  
 10 J: Me too  
 11 H: Yeah  
 12 S: Now that it's in the book I think it would be  
 13 better if you- (.) we like just say our own name  
 14 I: Okay ((*smiling*)) why?  
 15 S: Because then we are famous ((*smiling*))  
 16 L: and everyone=  
 17 S: =everyone would know us ((*with laughter*  
 18 *and excitement*))  
 19 D: Everyone would know our name and they come to  
 20 our school, and they'll be like 'wow! It's  
 21 you, you are in a book!'  
 22 I: What about you Lucy? I see you are shaking  
 23 your head  
 24 L: OK! I am going to be in a book, so seriously  
 25 I need to improve my (.) like I am reading  
 26 these things that I've said and it doesn't

27       make any sense, so I have to improve my..  
 28       talking.  
 29 I: OK! D-does any of you feel like that?  
 30 S: Nooo  
 31 D: Yeah!  
 32 L: I'm embarrassed  
 33 I: OK you said you are embarrassed?  
 34 L: Yeah! yeah!  
 35 D: I don't like to say like 'um ummm umm'  
 36 I: Do you think that anyone talks like books?  
 37 L: No but this is really weird (.) it doesn't  
 38       make any sense  
 39 I: Actually that's very important to mention (.)  
 40       because it does make sense. I understand  
 41       what you say. It is totally normal (.)  
 42       to talk like this.

There are a number of interesting aspects of this exchange between the interviewer (Samaneh: 'I') and the children. At first, it seems that the issue is that the children would like their real names to be used and that pseudonyms limit their fame potential! However, later in the extract, Samaneh senses Lucy's ('L') unease with the look of the transcript (line 22) and then both 'L' and 'D' express their discomfort with the fractured and disfluent look of the transcript. This kind of reaction is undoubtedly one of the reasons why interviews often get 'laundered' into fluent, punctuated, and grammatically correct written texts before checking back with interviewees. The extract above is discussed in more detail in Pinter and Zandian (2015).

In Chapter 8 we said that there is usually a trade-off between the accuracy and the readability of a transcript and we have looked carefully the level of detail that can be captured in transcriptions (Richards 2003; Nikander 2008; King and Horrocks 2010). Generally, those working in a constructionist paradigm tend to try and represent more detail. Roulston (2010: 60) contrasts transcriptions produced by those working in a constructionist paradigm with those working in other paradigms. She says that 'for researchers who are more familiar with carefully edited and punctuated versions of talk commonly included in the representations emanating from other conceptions of interviews, this kind of transcription is likely to be off-putting'. In Samaneh's data above, her decisions to include hesitations and other disfluencies make

the transcript difficult for some of the children to accept. In the next example, the reaction from the interviewee on seeing the transcript is very different and it makes an interesting contrast with Samaneh's case.

In the following interview, I am talking to Mikio Iguchi about his research. At the time of the interview, Mikio had completed the analysis of his research. In the following exchanges we are talking about a presentation at a conference where one of the interviewees has been in the audience. After the talk, the interviewee made the point that he resented the tidying up of the transcript and this news was both unwelcome and unexpected for Mikio. The following is Mikio's account of his experience as interviewer. In Extract 9.2a he is providing some background to his study.

### Extract 9.2a

- 1 M: I'm doing a narrative case study (.) a  
 2 qualitative research on Japanese people  
 3 living and studying in England (.) and I-  
 4 I'm doing a longitudinal er study of how  
 5 their identity changes and how their  
 6 motivation fluctuates during their stay in  
 7 England. (.) and I presented my data in an  
 8 internal data presentation (.) and my participant  
 9 came.  
 10 I: mmm (.) so you had already interviewed him  
 11 befo::re,=  
 12 M: =yes  
 13 I: and how long was that interview?  
 14 M: well I did three interviews spanning a year  
 15 I: [mmm  
 16 M: each interview (.) erm exceeded sixty minutes,  
 17 I: mmm  
 18 M: so quite a long interview

In Extract 9.2b Mikio continues to talk about how the interviewee reacted to seeing a transcribed extract that was included as part of Mikio's talk.

### Extract 9.2b

- 25 M: well I was surprised that he objected to my data  
 26 presentation (.) because I just followed the

27 norms, the standards that I saw in research  
 28 articles and whatever I saw in conference  
 29 presentations (.) because normally an  
 30 individual's voice is summarised as monologue  
 31 (.) so I just thought I'll just follow the  
 32 convention.

33 I: mmm (.) an- and what exactly did do you think he  
 34 objected to?

35 M: well one of the things he told me was that I  
 36 was dramatising events. and::, for him the  
 37 biggest problems seemed to be (.) f- the way  
 38 I presented his voice (.) it was too clear

39 I: mmm

40 M: without his hedges or his erm:: corrections  
 41 or his hesitations (.) so it made the voice  
 42 rather sounding as if he clearly stated something  
 43 (.) and that I am using it to support my argument

This feedback from the interviewee is interesting and it brings into focus the central dilemma in the representation of spoken data through transcripts. On the one hand, if you keep in all the hesitations, 'ums' and 'arhs', readers find the text harder to process and you run the risk of that an interviewee might feel embarrassed seeing their fractured talk (as in Samaneh's case). On the other hand, if you clean it up and take out the hesitations etc., it might cause the kind of reaction that Mikio experiences here. In fact, this incident caused Mikio to re-evaluate the way he represented the data and not only was he subsequently more likely to try to capture the way the participant's had actually spoken but also to represent the data in way that was more consistent with his growing realisation that interviews are 'co-authored'.

Another related point that is often part of the ethics and permissions process is finding out whether the research participants want to be anonymous. Most researchers in social science use pseudonyms when sharing data and this is not always what participants would choose. Wodak (2007: 573) talking about interviews she had conducted in crisis-intervention centre in Vienna says:

I also interviewed the patients and the therapists several times and got to know them well. They told me a lot about their lives and their perceptions of the centre. Long after the study had been published, I met a former interviewee on the street, and he asked me why I had

not used his name when quoting from his interview. I explained that this was because of ethical conventions, but he was hurt and angry: he wanted people to know that he had been able to cope with his crisis, and he was proud that his voice was being heard and read.

The ethics of anonymity is an area that does not receive the attention it should. Clarke and Fujimura (1992: 10) say that anonymity is taken for granted and 'no longer questioned, examined, or viewed as problematic'. The default position is simply to use pseudonyms but, despite this, there is often enough detail about both context and participants to allow deductive revelation anyway (also sometimes called deductive disclosure). As Deyle et al. (1992: 633) make clear 'names can be changed, but that does not always disguise the individuals. In fact, a determined investigator could almost always discover who had worked with the resident field workers'. See Saunders et al. (2014) for a recent overview of the main issues.

Johnson and Rowlands (2012) discuss a well-known example of such guesswork. They comment on the work of Carolyn Ellis who produced an award-winning book (1986) resulting from an ethnographic study of two fishing villages near the Chesapeake Bay in the USA. This was a small, remote community and it did not take much working out, among the research participants, to identify themselves and their neighbours, even though pseudonyms had been used. Ellis's account apparently caused relationships in the community to be strained and some members of the community felt humiliated by Ellis. Discovering that her published accounts had upset a number of villagers, caused her to reassess her ethical position, particularly in the comparison between university-based ethical permissions and procedures and the village-based standards and views on privacy (see Ellis 2007, 2009). In these retrospective accounts, Ellis presents both an honest and reflexive perspective on the ethics involved:

In my mind, the dissertation and book that followed were separate from my relationship with the Fisher Folk. Thus, I failed to consider sufficiently how my blunt disclosures in print might affect the lives of the people about whom I wrote. Instead I cared about how committee members reacted to my dissertation and whether my manuscript would be published as a book. Although I didn't appear often in the text as a character, I considered the story I wrote to be my realist, sociological story about them, not their story. It didn't occur to me to take my work back to the communities and get their

interpretations and responses because I was not writing for the community. (Ellis 2007: 11)

If interviewees want to be anonymous, a careful researcher can also try to alter details of research context, as well as change personal details. This will reduce the possibility of deductive revelation. For example, one of my PhD students wrote the following in a thesis draft (in this case she preferred for me not to include her name):

Pseudonyms have been used throughout this thesis to protect the anonymity of the participants. I have also left some information about schools intentionally vague. So, I have deliberately left out some features of the actual school, aspects of the location of the school and details of other teachers where these have been judged a threat to the teacher's anonymity.

This section has examined the value of sharing data with research participants. It has also considered the importance of protecting anonymity and has also made the point that sometimes anonymity is not what an interviewee wants. It is certainly an option to use their real names, after consulting with them. The next section considers issues of representation in sharing data with the wider research community.

### **Sharing data with the wider research community**

We have already looked carefully at the choices you have in the transcription process in Chapter 8 ('Producing and using a transcript'). What follows in this focuses on transcription and how you share them with the wider research community. Oliver et al. (2005: 1273) argue that transcription should be less of a 'behind-the-scenes' task and transcription should be seen 'as a powerful act of representation'. In reporting our research we need to consider the most appropriate way to represent the interview data.

One of the problems if we are publishing a journal article is that we do not have space for lots of transcripts. If we take an example, Borg (2009) reports a study of teachers' attitudes to research. The findings are based on qualitative interviews which are used to add further detail to questionnaire data. In the article we find out that 'interviews were transcribed in full' (2009: 363). However, the transcripts remain a 'behind-the-scenes' aspect of the research. Space is clearly the main issue.

Indeed, Borg tells that there is not enough 'space to provide an exhaustive qualitative analysis' (2009: 366). As another example, Spence and Liu (2013) provide examples of interview questions but claim that 'the exact question wording and the order of the questions were not rigidly fixed, allowing the interview to flow in a more natural, conversational way, and encouraging additional information to emerge' (2013). However, in an article of this length it is difficult to get any sense of that emergent interaction, especially as we do not have access to the transcripts. The kind of statement that Spence and Liu make here is not unusual, and it is certainly common to allow for flexibility in questioning. However it is difficult to get a sense of what Spence and Liu mean by 'natural' and 'conversational' without access to any transcripts.

As in Borg (2009) above, lack of space is usually the main reason why we do not see any transcripts in the article or the appendices. Mann (2011: 12–14) provides a detailed account of the way in which interviews and interview transcripts are represented in research. In the majority of case where interview data is a core data-set, interview interaction is not visible in transcripts. However, there are a growing number of articles in the social sciences that do include transcripts and features of 'set up' and context. Barkhuizen (2010) pays attention to both content and form, and looks at 'how linguistic resources were used to construct interactively both the story and the local understandings' (2010: 295). Talmy (2011) shows how identity categorisation is co-produced interactionally through the interview setting, and Blackledge and Creese (2008) is an example of an ethnographic study that provides interactional context through extracts. All these examples integrate transcripts into the analysis.

In simple terms, there are three sets of choices:

- how much transcription to do (this ranges from no transcription to complete transcription of all interview data);
- how to transcribe (level of detail/delicacy);
- how to represent the transcriptions (this ranges from using selected quotes from the interviewee(s) voice, to using extracts which show a fuller interactional context, to the sharing of extended or full transcripts in appendices).

These choices are independent of each other: It is possible to undertake a great deal of transcription, but to make none of it available to readers; It is equally possible that limited transcription is undertaken, but that this is shared with the research community.

Chapter 8 has considered various choices in the production of transcriptions. You might have produced very detailed transcriptions for the analysis but may decide to simplify them for the reader. Clearly there are lots of positions to adopt between having a ‘fully laundered’ and cleaned up transcript to keeping a ‘warts and all’ version for the reader. There is always a balance between transparency (staying close to the original recording) and readability. It is often a matter of deciding which signals (verbal and non-verbal) are relevant in allowing the reader to access a clear understanding of the ongoing interaction.

Back (2012: 13) discusses these representational issues and refers to Barthes’ (1985) book *The Grain of the Voice* which reminds us that speech is not necessary innocent, spontaneous, or natural but there is always a process through which speaking becomes written text. His words precisely capture what’s at stake in turning interview talk into a transcript:

We talk, a tape recording is made, diligent secretaries listen to our words to refine, transcribe, and punctuate them, producing a first draft that we can tidy up afresh before it goes on to publication, the book, eternity. Haven’t we just gone through the ‘toilette of the dead’? We have embalmed our speech like a mummy, to preserve it forever. (Barthes 1985: 3)

A transcription can never be the same as speech. However, Mero-Jaffe (2011) and Oliver et al. (2005) are good starting points for evaluating the constraints and opportunities that different transcription styles can have on research outcomes and research participants. The following provides an example of how a detail in a transcription can be open to interpretation:

how does the transcriber represent the non-verbal or non-intelligible? For example, in our work with HIV-positive men, the research team read a transcript where the participant’s statement was continually interrupted by his sniffing, indicated in the transcript by ((*sniff*)). When the team met to discuss this transcript, the sniffing became confusing and the subject of some debate. Some thought the participant was crying during the interview, whereas others made assumptions about drug use. The confusion was settled when the interviewer explained that the participant was sick and his nose was running. (Oliver et al. 2005: 1276)

Considering possible confusions such as this, bring the researcher into areas of appropriate representation and data validity. There will always



be a cut-off point in trying to capture non-verbal elements. Not every detail of context, manner, or attitude can be included.

In this chapter we are primarily concentrating on the last of the choices in the list on p. 239 (how to represent the transcriptions) because we have considered the other two issues previously in Chapter 8. In representing the transcriptions, there are a number of options. These range from transcription as hidden work (perhaps summarising main points) to full sharing of transcriptions. It is obvious that, for research presented in journals, space is certainly very limited. Lack of space is arguably less of an issue with monographs (rather than edited collections) and doctoral theses. Transcripts can be integrated into the main body of the work, the appendices, or additional online resources. It has become more common for PhD submissions to include a CD or memory-stick featuring all the transcripts undertaken. Where the submission is in the form of a 'doc' or 'pdf', it is also possible to provide links to websites where transcriptions/recordings are available. Even with journal articles, publishers are increasingly providing the option for online supplementary resources which are available with the article. These do provide the opportunity for making fuller transcripts of interview interaction more visible.

### Task

What approach do you take to representing your interviews? How much transcribed interview data do you include in writing up your research for other readers?

Read the response from Keith Richards below (Extract 9.3) and think about how far you agree with the position he adopts.

### Extract 9.3

1 I: Thanks. We talked about transcription analysis(.)  
 2 I guess the next thing to talk about is  
 3 representation (.) in that do you have any  
 4 ↑advice (.) for:: (.) particularly with people  
 5 that are presenting their Master's or a PhD (.) in  
 6 the way they present their transcripts in the  
 7 body of the text (.) in appendices, (.) on a CD-  
 8 ROM <whatever> (.) do you think there are any=  
 9 K: =No (.) not general (.) The only thing I would  
 10 say very very much <and you know this yourself>  
 11 is:: don't just chop out the bit that you  
 12 actually need for this (.) treat it as an

13 interview that you're representing (.) so unless  
 14 there's a good reason not to (.) put in the  
 15 interviewer's question as well as the response.  
 16 And although I know that words are always at a  
 17 premium in a thesis or a dissertation (.) give  
 18 respect to the interview and put in a longer  
 19 extract rather than a shorter extract. (.) there  
 20 is a natural inclination to chop out little bits  
 21 and just to refer back to the big interview (.)  
 22 but even if you put the whole interview  
 23 transcribed in an appendix (.) realistically the  
 24 reader is less likely (.) if they've got the  
 25 little chunk (.) to go back and see it in  
 26 context. I do do that (.) when I'm reading  
 27 (.) particularly a thesis I will (.) if I get too  
 28 many little chunks (.) I want to go back and look  
 29 at the interview (.) but I think it just feels  
 30 better (.) it feels better to the reader (.) you  
 31 get a sense of the interview if you do get longer  
 32 stretches (.) not hugely long stretches (.) it's  
 33 part of conveying to the reader the sense that  
 34 this was an interview (.) not simply a data  
 35 source (.) there's a slight difference there (.)  
 36 so that would be my advice.

It is worth considering your options when giving the reader an insight into your interview process and making the most of the interactional context available. As Keith says, these do not have to be 'hugely long stretches' of transcript. There is a variety of ways of drawing on and integrating transcripts (see Table 9.1).

It is important to consider what is lost if the interviewer's turn is not included. Sometimes when the interviewer's contribution is missing, the result is distinctly odd. For example, we get the following extract from an interview in a paper in Hyland (2002: 229) about argument and engagement in academic writing. The interviewee is talking about directing the reading using 'must':

Yes, telling readers they must do something is rather presumptuous and it is not a word I use very often. It has a striking effect, though. It definitely lets them know how you want them to look at something.'

What is the interviewee responding to here? Is the word ‘presumptuous’ theirs or did the interviewer introduce it?

Table 9.1 Integrating transcripts

Option	Comments
Summary	The contributions of the interviewee are summarised. This needs to be a fair attempt to report the content of the interviewee’s opinion, belief or perspective.
Summary with ‘threads’ of interviewee voice	Here the interviewee(s)’ account is primarily a summary, but words, phrases and sentences are woven into the summary.
Full interviewee turn	When quoting the interviewee, the whole turn is provided for the reader.
Fuller interactional context	This might at least include the question or prompt the interviewer employs. The response can then be seen in relation to that prompt. You might include a number of turns, especially in semi-structured or more conversational interviews (e.g. Vicsek 2010).
Extended extract	This involves the use of a series of turns and can be useful for seeing how an interviewer manages the interview and how perspectives on views arising are co-constructed.
Full interview	Sometimes the reader is able to access a transcript of the whole interview. This will not be in the body of the article, book or thesis but might be available in an appendix, CD, USB stick, or www page.

As well as reflecting on how much transcription to integrate into the representation of our research, we need to make decisions about the typicality or representativeness of the data extracts we share. In Chapter 8, we argued that we should avoid anecdotalism in our approach to analysis. In the way that our data is reported, we should also avoid presenting a few extracts as ‘typical’ without a full consideration of their representativeness. Ema Ushioda, following Morse (2010), has previously referred to this practice as ‘cherry picking’ and I invited the following written summary of this problem from her:

We need to guard against ‘cherry picking’ in reporting practices when writing up qualitative research (Ushioda 2014). Cherry picking is a form of ‘anecdotalism’ (Silverman 2005: 211) that applies to how we represent qualitative data such as interview data, where a few choice snippets are used to support a particular claim.

Janice Morse (2010: 3) describes this approach to analysis and reporting as the ‘documentary-style’:

In a documentary, the commentator says something such as, ‘His death was devastating news for his daughter,’ and the daughter then appears on screen, and says sorrowfully, ‘I was simply devastated.’ So it is with cherry picking. Data that support the commentary are deliberately selected to endorse that same commentary.

However, while Morse takes the view that researchers who resort to cherry picking do so ‘deliberately’, it seems conceivable that some may engage in cherry picking practices largely unwittingly through lack of skill or experience in handling qualitative datasets, or through lack of critical reflection. As Silverman (2005: 211) notes, qualitative researchers need to be able ‘to convince themselves’ (as well as their readership) that their findings derive from a critical and systematic analysis of all their data. In this respect, cherry picking is a potential pitfall to guard against through taking a critical reflexive approach to data analysis and reporting. Thus when focusing on particular pieces of data, we should always be asking ourselves how typical, unique or representative these are in relation to our dataset as a whole, and what justification we have for selecting these examples. Only when we have satisfied ourselves can we hope to satisfy our reader.

Choosing extracts is clearly both an issue of analysis and representation of data. In Mikio’s anecdote above it is obvious that the interviewee felt an element of cherry picking had happened:

40 M: without his hedges or his erm:: corrections  
 41 or his hesitations (.) so it made the voice  
 42 rather sounding as if he clearly stated something  
 43 (.) and that I am using it to support my argument

One of the main differences between science and journalism is that the reporting of science should not be a case of picking out the juiciest examples or indeed finding examples in the data that confirm working assumptions. We are familiar with tales of Pharmaceutical companies omitting publication of clinical trials which have negative data on drugs under trial (see Ben Goldacre’s book *Bad Pharma* (2014)) . While social science research is less likely to come under sustained scrutiny, it is still important that we try to represent our data in ways which are not selective, and which do not distort or simplify their nature (Ryen 2012).

## Sharing with novice researchers

It has been established in Mann (2011) that many research journal articles that use transcriptions in the research process do not make them available. There may be good reasons for this. Earlier in this chapter, we considered some of these reasons. For example, perhaps there are ethical concerns or perhaps permissions do not extend to the release of extended or full transcriptions. We have already noted the serious concerns about space that confronts most writers. In some cases, the writer may want to include longer extracts but the journal cannot accommodate them. This happened to me in an article I wrote with a fellow researcher (Mann and Tang 2012). Here, one of the reviewers objected to the extended transcripts and felt that they should 'all be shorter' and that 'we should simply tell the reader the key points made by the interviewee'. Perhaps the reviewer was right but the task wasn't made any easier because the reviewer did not specify which parts were felt to be 'key' (or indeed which parts did not seem relevant). In any case, we did shorten some of them but left others unchanged.

In terms of novice researchers, if there are no extended transcripts, it will limit any chance that they have of vicariously developing their sensitivity to the management of interviews and their understanding of potential pitfalls. It might be argued that there is no substitute for students doing their own interviews and learning on the job. However, I would maintain that published work that both provides transcripts and some reflexive comment on issues, difficulties, dilemmas, and concerns helps establish a better understanding of the interactional nature of the task. Certainly, if experienced researchers present qualitative interviews as straightforward and unproblematic, they are doing novice researchers no favours. Patton (2002: 415), quoting Punch (1986), makes a similar point:

Perhaps we should be more open and honest about the actual pains and perils of conducting research in order to forewarn aspiring researchers. (Punch 1986: 13–14)

In other words, if difficulties, confusion, and complexities are 'swept under the carpet' (Clarke and Robertson 2001: 773) in the account, then such dilemmas and difficulties are simply not made visible to novice researchers. Sharing transcriptions can certainly make such problematic interview moments more visible (see Chapter 6). The premise of this book has been that opening out the process allows the possibility for

more reflection before, during and after interviews. To use something of a cliché, 'forewarned is forearmed'.

Sharing transcriptions inevitably makes the researcher more visible in their writing and this will probably correlate with a greater propensity to engage in a reflexive consideration of the researcher's interview practice. Shifting the balance from representations of the researched towards the representations of the researcher requires an examination of 'the ways in which a researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research' (Nightingale and Cromby 1999: 28). The next section investigates how reflexivity can be represented.

## Representing reflexivity

This book features a number of reflexive vignettes. These open up moments and decisions concerned with the management and analysis of qualitative interviews. In Chapter 1, we talked about the possibility of inserting reflexive texts (thus making reflexivity more visible in our writing). Chapter 1 included reflexive memos from Linda Finlay and Julian Edge. In what follows, we will differentiate between the reflexivity of the interviewer/researcher and the reflexivity of the writer. In some ways this is an artificial distinction and there is clearly a lot of overlap but there is also an important sense that when the data collection is complete then the writer (the 'representer of the research') becomes more prominent.

### Task

Read the reflexive vignette provided by Krisia Canvin at the end of the chapter (p. 251). What is she revealing about the research process through sharing this difficult moment?

What value for the researcher do you think there might be in revisiting a transcript at a later date?

So far in this book we have concentrated on the reflexivity of the researcher where the researcher might typically use a research diary to record insights into the management of interviews and consideration of the ways in which involvement with your 'particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research' (Nightingale and Cromby 1999: 28). The following example makes explicit the nature of their acquaintance. It provides details of set up and physical context and introduces

the key element of the interviewee's identity (the 'trainer') from Hesse-Biber (2007: 111):

It is around 3 p.m. at my gym and I am waiting to interview Annette, a trainer. She has been in the fitness industry for over 20 years and works as a personal trainer to mostly a well-to-do white female clientele. She herself is a picture of perfection, with not one ounce of fat on her body. Her 5-foot, 3-inch frame and well-defined arms, flat abdomen, and muscular all-over tone make her clients want to replicate her physique. I often hear her clients jokingly say 'I want your body!' Annette has agreed to speak to me about her experiences as a trainer. I have known Annette for several years, and we have taken many gym classes together, mainly yoga. I have what I would call a casual gym friendship with her and consider her more of an acquaintance than a friend. I have explained to her that I am interested in understanding women's body image concerns and issues. We move to a quiet room upstairs, away from the hustle and bustle of the gym floor. Annette allows me to tape record the interview.

The extract above is more about the interviewee than the interviewer. It is also concentrated on issues of access and providing detail the interview context (representing the 'doing of the research'). Krisia Canvin's reflexive vignette concentrates attention on a difficult moment between the interviewer and interviewee. It is about both parties and is a good example of how, even much later, it is difficult to be sure about exactly what happened in a particular interview. It is important to examine and make available such troubling moments as they can be valuable both for us and for novice researchers.

In contrast to the examples above, it is possible to represent and engage the reader in the act of writing about the research or topic. As an example, Linda Finlay, engaged in a historical account of the development of reflexivity, shares the following extract. I have kept the format the same as in the article so that you can see how the reflexive text is embedded. The reflexive text is in italics:

Critical self-reflexive methodologies have evolved across different qualitative research fields in a story of turns and shifts.

*I need to give an account of this story of how the use of reflexivity has evolved. Yet I am all too aware of offering a partial, simplistic account – my understanding, my construction. How can it be anything else?*

*Where to start? But a context is still needed – one that pays due homage to key names and the historical shifts while remaining sufficiently fluid to acknowledge how early genres are still in use even as contemporary critiques of critiques proliferate ... . And, in making this rhetorical move, have I inoculated myself enough against likely protests that I am distorting history and offering too incomplete an account ... ?*

Early anthropological ‘realist tales’, where researchers conscientiously recorded observations in an effort to prove their scientific credentials, have gradually given way to more personal ‘confessional tales’ where researchers describe decisions and dilemmas of their fieldwork experience. (Finlay 2002: 2010)

In the above text, Finlay is involving us in a ‘writerly’ moment. It is a mix of making clear the challenge (‘but a context is needed’) and sharing self-questioning (‘have I inoculated myself’). Here is another example from Julian Edge (2011). His reflexive memos are marked as such in the text:

***Reflexive memo 4.1:*** *I always struggle at moments such as this with the idea that I may simply be presenting the typical symptoms of grumpy old man syndrome. I invite a thought experiment: imagine yourself reading an article about some aspect of TESOL methodology. You encounter a sentence beginning, ‘The traditional way of doing this is X.’ What comes next? Is X about to be praised as a way of upholding good practice? I suspect not. ‘Traditional’, in this environment, signals that-which-must-be-changed. This may not, however, be how tradition is viewed by all readers. Nor was it the way in which I used the word, tradition, in the previous paragraph. This issue deserves further thought. I return to it in Chapters 5 and 8.*

Again the writerly dilemma is foregrounded (‘I always struggle ...’) and the sharing of the memo enables a personal concentration of the use of the word ‘traditional’. There is a strong sense of revealing a thinking process.

In autoethnography, reflexive memos and vignettes are inevitably used a great deal. Representing reflexivity can include both foregrounding the researcher or the writer (see Humphreys 2005). They are also used in other forms of qualitative research (e.g. Hunter’s use as a form of self-reflexivity in narrative research, 2005). Lewis and Johnson (2011) provide examples and a good discussion of issues involved in representing the ‘researcher self’ in parallel to the research participants.



Sharing reflexivity in reporting PhD research can provide useful insights for others and the representation of reflexivity in qualitative research has a fairly long history. For example, Chapter 6 of Hammersley's PhD thesis, written in 1980, is headed, 'The researcher exposed: a natural history'. In it, he notes that reflexivity has now become expected in ethnographic theses. A PhD obviously has much more scope for sharing reflexivity than 8,000 word articles or chapters. In a more recent example, Fowler provides four reflexive commentaries on her interview data (2013: 414–422) and these help the reader engage with the issues and dilemmas she faced. Fowler (2013) is a good example of a PhD thesis that provides both longer extracts of interview data and also some interesting reflexive commentary. The approach she takes is to include longer extracts and commentaries in the appendices, as, like many other PhD students, she does not feel that she has room in the main text to show how each one of the many interview extracts and summaries in the main body of the thesis are interactionally occasioned. She takes a 'cautious constructionist' position and documents her journey from inexperienced research interviewer with many positivist assumptions about interview data, to a cautious constructionist position.

## Summary

This chapter has considered the representation of qualitative interview data, primarily focused on choices related to how transcripts are used in writing up research. It has also featured examples of vignettes and memos. The use of these, especially in relation to transcripts, has been evaluated from the perspective of research participants and the wider research community. In addition, the importance of sharing an insider view with novice researchers has been raised. Making available insights into a researcher's concerns, choices, and dilemmas can be done through the sharing of memos or vignettes. It can also be achieved through the use of and commentary on extended extracts of transcribed interview data. We have also highlighted more 'writerly' moments of reflexivity, where the reader is able to share an insight into a decision or choice a writer is faced with, or where the writer wants to make visible a struggle, thought process or representational choice.

Representations of reflexivity can take you into some interesting areas. In general terms, reflexivists have tried to find ways of writing that try to disrupt 'the smoothed-over narratives of objectivism and empiricism' (Henwood et al. 1998: 35). Reflexive memos and vignettes are certainly a starting point in seeking to not unnecessarily smooth things over. However, there are more options, including plays, fables,

transcripts, letters, and poems (see appendix 6). Ashmore (1989) was one of the first to embrace a more radical form of representation and he provides a long list of new literary forms for the purpose. Jacobs (2009) covers a great deal of similar ground and is certainly worth reading if you are planning or writing up a PhD.

Whatever kind of research project you are engaged in, it is certainly important to step back from the research process occasionally and critically examine the nature of your research process and the forms of representation through which you make your research claims. If you get the chance, watch a film by Trinh T. Minh-ha. Both Denzin (2001) and Roulston (2010) refer to this in their discussion of the representation of reflexivity. The film shows women in various situations and from various historical moments from childhood to old age in different contexts (e.g. funerals, the market) and engaged in household tasks (e.g. cooking). What Denzin and Roulston are interested in is the mix of voice-overs, translations, subtitles where ‘the true and the false (the actresses are not the women interviewed by Mai Thu Van) and the real and the staged intermingle’ (Denzin 2001: 31). The viewer does not know that these women are actresses based in the USA re-enacting the interviews until the end of the film. The film therefore questions the authentic nature of the documentary and, in doing so, raises important issues about representation.

## Suggested reading

- Jacobs, D. T. (2009). *The Authentic Dissertation: Alternative Ways of Knowing, Research and Representation*. London: Routledge.
- Mero-Jaffe, I. (2011). ‘Is that what I said?’ interview transcript approval by participants: an aspect of ethics in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 10(3), 231–247.
- Pinter, A. and S. Zandian. (2015). ‘*I thought it would be tiny little one phrase that we said, in a huge big pile of papers*’: Children’s reflections on their involvement in participatory research’. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 235–250.

### Task

Read through the reflexive vignette written provided by Krysia Canvin below. This is a good example of an interviewer opening up a difficulty encountered in an interview. It is both interesting for the insights into the hidden work that both interviewers and interviewees engage in. However, it also shows the value of revisiting a piece of interview data and reflecting on it. As she says, good interviewers never stop learning about the interviewing process.

Roulston (2011) also provides an examination of interview interactions that have been identified as ‘problematic’. The vignette below supports Richards’ (2003) claim that the opening out of problems, tensions, and difficulties is only possible when we see a fuller interactional context.

## Kryisia Canvin’s vignette

### Context

The following extract is taken from an interview conducted as part of a module on experiences of mental health problems in black and minority ethnic communities for the Healthtalkonline.org collection. In this interview, I was talking to Imani, a 48-year old African-Caribbean woman with depression. Imani was a very pleasant, articulate woman who had experienced violence at the hands of her ex-husband, causing her (amongst other things) conflict with her religious beliefs and practices. Imani spoke of her terror, despair, and mental and physical injuries. The first part of the extract (Extract 9.4a) gives an insight into an instance of how interviewees perceive interviewers and interpret their visual cues:

### Extract 9.4a

- 1 I: And is it important to you then that um  
 2 that your counsellor has a Christian faith?  
 3 P: Yes.  
 4 I: Why is that?  
 5 P: Because as I was saying earlier I don’t  
 6 want to have to (.) if I (.) if I explain about  
 7 um (2.0) um (2.0) God speaking to me (.) I don’t  
 8 want a counsellor (.) you see what you did  
 9 just then when you went like that? ((Frowns))  
 10 I: [hmm  
 11 P: I don’t want my counsellor to do that.  
 12 I don’t want my counsellor to say,  
 13 ‘Oh what’s that? Or can you explain that to me?  
 14 What do you mean by that?’ um (.) I  
 15 don’t want my counsellor to be um examining  
 16 me and my language and my belief (.)  
 17 it’s something that I want my counsellor to be

18       able to accept (.) but not just accept but  
 19       to have an appreciation and a knowledge of,  
 20       [um] based on her own experiences.

### *Commentary 1*

In the 14 years that I had been conducting qualitative interviews, I have never experienced anything like this. When Imani referred to my facial expression, it was if the whole interview, if not every interview I have ever done, flashed before my eyes. I was truly horrified to think that I had given her the impression that I doubted her experience or belittled her beliefs. The thought was particularly disturbing given that I believe I am a good interviewer who does everything possible to minimise the power imbalance, to refrain from judgement, to listen to people from the margins of society who are so often ignored. I cannot pretend that this remark did not distract me from the remainder of the interview. On top of the usual interview work that goes on beneath the surface, I had numerous questions running through my mind: Why did I frown? What shall I do about this? Should I say something now or wait? How is this affecting our (previously good) rapport? Was our rapport good or had I misread the signals? How am I going to explain this? In my mind, I rehearsed the answers to my questions. And waited.

Much later, at the end of the interview, I set out to repair the damage that I believed I had done with what I considered my careless facial expressions (Extract 9.4b). At the very least, I hoped that I could offer some reassurance to Imani that I was not judging her. What happened next demonstrated that I had indeed got it wrong, but not in the way that I had imagined:

### **Extract 9.4b**

1 I: One of the things that I wanted to say  
 2 about in terms of you feeling concerned about  
 3 what I might be thinking (.) um and especially  
 4 when I made that face that was something that  
 5 was (.) I was quite concerned about (.) because I  
 6 wouldn't want you to think (.) I mean (.) I  
 7 wasn't pulling a face at what you actually said  
 8 (.)in terms of thinking (.) oh 'is that is what  
 9 you think? Is that what you do?' What  
 10 I was thinking was (.) 'Oh that is really  
 11 interesting (.) must remember to ask some more  
 12 about that.' Because when you are talking (.)

13 of course I am doing lots of other things (.)  
 14 I'm thinking, I'm listening to you, making sure  
 15 I take that on board, thinking about what  
 16 else I have to ask, what else I have asked  
 17 other people, what other people have said (1.0)  
 18 so there's lots of things going on (.) and so  
 19 I think sometimes my reaction is about something  
 20 else and the reason I am saying that to you  
 21 is I wouldn't want you to go away feeling  
 22 like I had judged you  
 23 R: Because I didn't feel that you judged me.  
 24 I: Good okay  
 25 R: [I felt, I felt what was happening was (.) um  
 26 (.) that you were reacting to what you had  
 27 heard me say. and so my concern was (.) um  
 28 (3.0) I need not- (.) I need to look away. I  
 29 need look away (.) so that I don't take  
 30 that on (.) so that (.) um (.) because what (.)  
 31 what happened was I started processing how  
 32 your expression and by process your  
 33 expression I was like 'oh no, I don't  
 34 think she will be judging me, I think she is  
 35 reacting to' and then I started thinking  
 36 about the contents of some of the things (.)  
 37 and you know some of the places that you  
 38 may have gone with me today (.) and I  
 39 just thought (.) 'oh gosh no, I can't take  
 40 that on' (.) I just (.) let me just (.) and I keep  
 41 on talking (.) but I (.) because I remember at  
 42 the beginning to speak to you <and not the  
 43 camera> (.) but I just couldn't.

### *Commentary 2*

Imani's response to my explanation about the hidden work of interviewing was unexpected. Imani did not feel judged, and I was hugely relieved to hear it. Instead, Imani described to me the hidden work that interviewees undertake. Imani was concerned about the effect listening to her story and the distressing events she retold would have on me, the interviewer. Despite – or perhaps because of – this concern, Imani was processing her own discomfort with this and trying to find ways to minimise it.

The experience taught me several things. Interviewers can and should continue to learn: there is no such thing as the perfect interview (or the perfect interviewer). It is a disservice to interviewees to overlook the hidden work that they might undertake during an interview. The literature talks about interviewees having their own agenda and seeking to preserve their moral character, but little is said about how they perceive and manage the interviewer and how this might cause them distress or lead them to moderate their narratives. My confidence in my interviewing skills was temporarily shaken by this experience.

Although I was relieved when Imani told me that she did not think that I had judged her, returning to this extract six years later, I wonder if I was too hasty in letting myself off the hook. Imani's explanation for her remark about my frowning did not fit with the context in which she made it. I do not doubt that Imani was genuinely concerned for my welfare or that she was processing these concerns during the interview. I do wonder, though, if Imani was just as concerned about offending me by appearing to criticise me as I was about offending her.

Kryisia Canvin ([kryisiacanvin.org](http://kryisiacanvin.org))

# 10

## Training and Development

### Introduction

Potter and Hepburn claim (2005: 300) that students ‘often perform open-ended interviews with almost no training’. Richards (2011) has pointed out the lack of attention given to interviewer training generally. Uhrenfeldt et al. (2007: 47) also express the concern that ‘strategies to assist novice researchers in developing their interviewing skills have been limited to date’. Novice researchers are sometimes given general guidelines and checklists but rarely engage in training which focuses on interview interaction, strategies, and dilemmas. This chapter offers ideas for working with transcripts, either researchers’ own data or second-hand data. It also features tasks designed to raise awareness of interview choices and interaction. The last part of the chapter offers guidance on suitable reading for novice researchers.

The chapter can be used as self-study materials or by a trainer who is leading qualitative research methodology sessions. It integrates training tasks used by experienced trainers (including Keith Richards and Kathy Roulston) and these tasks and activities will help novice researchers develop their sensitivity to qualitative interview interaction by focusing on interview examples, discussing choices and issues, and practising ‘doing’ interviews.

Taken as a whole, Chapter 10 makes the argument that encouraging reflective practice in the setting up and management of qualitative interviews is a better way forward for novices than offering ‘best practice’ in the form of a set of rules. Such a reflective approach is more context-sensitive:

Certainly, when learning a new task, some novices tend to gravitate towards applying rules in context-free ways. Yet newcomers

to interviewing may also become overwhelmed and struggle when attempting to remember and apply too many rules. (Roulston 2013: 71)

Offering some training is important because, as Kvale and Brinkmann tell us, it 'seems so simple to interview, but it is hard to do well' (2009: 1). Perhaps one of the reasons why novice researchers tend to underestimate the task is that many treatments of interviews in social science handbooks are general in nature and rely on checklists and 'do and don't' lists. For example, Robson's section on interviewing (2002: 269–291), in his widely used handbook, is dominated by checklists. Although, right at the end of the book, in an 'afterword', Robson quotes Schön in a brief mention of 'the reflective practitioner' (2002: 524), there is no real sense of reflective practice in the section on interviews. Neither is any interview data included and so students are not pointed to issues of co-construction or interactional context. If students rely too much on research handbooks (e.g. Robson), they are likely to see interviews as more of technical matter than as situated social practice. Having said the above, there is a lot of useful reading that is an important part of any research-training process and the last part of this chapter provides a range of suitable resources.

In order to open up issues of interview management and raise sensitivity to some of the challenges and options available, this chapter:

- Suggests ways of working with students on qualitative interviews. It presents important elements of any training process;
- Shows how a focus on transcripts can draw attention to the relationship between interaction and context;
- Reminds the reader that the kind of reflexive vignettes offered in this book can be helpful in focusing novice researchers on details of context, interaction, and analysis;
- Considers the use of 'second-hand data' in providing materials for discussion and analysis;
- Provides training tasks that focus on practicing interviews, opening up elements of interview practice, including dilemmas, and sticky moments;
- Points students and novice researchers to resource books that investigate qualitative interviewing in relation to interactional context (e.g. Richards 2003; Roulston 2010).



## **Ways of working with students**

Roulston (2010) is one of the best starting points in contemplating training options. She highlights three main ways of working with students:

1. examining epistemological and theoretical assumptions concerning the use of interviews for research purposes;
2. encouraging researchers to be reflective and consider reflexivity in the use of qualitative interviews;
3. providing opportunities for researchers to critically observe their practice and analyse interaction methodologically. (2010: 61)

One of the reasons why Roulston (2010) is such a rich resource is that the book has built on her previous work, where she provided accounts of specific attempts to introduce training and reflective activities for qualitative researchers. For example, Roulston and Lewis (2003) summarise graduate students' experiences on a 15-day intensive interviewing class based on their transcriptions and reflective notes. They offer detail of particular problems that students encountered: dealing with sensitive subjects; listening closely and actively; unanticipated behaviours of interviewees; and distractions in interview settings.

Roulston shows examples of the kinds of realisations that are possible when students have opportunities to reflect (e.g. on poor phrasing and delivery of questions). Roulston (2010: 67) argues that there is not much literature that describes researchers 'engaged in practicing their skills as interviewers – either in class, in class interview assignments, or – less commonly – in authentic projects'. Part of her approach is to draw on students' interview experience of authentic projects external to the course. These projects provide 'intense experiential learning opportunities' (Roulston et al. 2008: 239).

An important element of developing a reflective approach to the practice of interviews is encouraging students to keep a journal during the training process. For the trainer, the use of such journals in a qualitative research course can provide sources of data that offer insight into the perceptions and experiences of novice researchers but also provide feedback on the course, enabling adjustments (see Onwuegbuzie et al. 2012). The use of reflective journals also embeds writing as an integral part of the qualitative research process; helping students to consider how to conduct various types of interviews and how to choose appropriate questions for each type of interview, as well as decide on the right number of questions to ask (Onwuegbuzie et al. 2012).

Reflective journals work together with mock interviews, which help focus attention on the way in which the interviewer and interviewee co-construct knowledge. 'Mock' or 'trial' interviews enable students to have an opportunity to familiarise themselves with interview management. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2012) also explain how, after trying mock interviews, they can be discussed and critiqued by both peers and the instructors. Students can also go through a transcription and member-checking process with their peers. In Onwuegbuzie et al. (2012) students are encouraged to incorporate discussion of non-verbal aspects of interviews (e.g. proxemics and paralinguistics) into their reports. Onwuegbuzie et al. are concerned that discussion of non-verbal communication occupies either a minimal role or even a non-existent role (e.g. Creswell 2007) in most standard qualitative research texts. They provide a template for collecting non-verbal data. Further, students are introduced to the concept of debriefing the interviewer, and this, together with transcripts and member checking, helps to provide an audit trail. The debriefing process is a reflexive one because it taps into perceptions of the interviewer's background/experience, non-verbal communication, interview findings, unexpected issues or dilemmas that emerged during the interview(s). It also evaluates how the study might have impacted on the researcher and the participant(s).

Wanat (2008) covers similar ground to Roulston (2010) and Onwuegbuzie et al. (2012) but is particularly useful in considering problems of access for research students. She stresses the difference between negotiating formal access and actually making progress when in the field. Often, an organisation may give permission but this does not mean that employees will be cooperative. Her training approach involves introductory reading from handbooks (e.g. Bogdan and Biklen 2003) followed by discussion of basic interviewing techniques (establishing rapport, questioning, listening, and probing). The next stage uses demonstration interviews with official gatekeepers to focus on handling access issues. The students are encouraged to plan and revise interviews based on these demonstration interviews. Wanat's approach makes space for discussion of the difficulties that the student might experience with uncooperative respondents when in the field; issues related to gaining entry and cooperation involve dealing with 'resistance tactics' (2008: 203). Such 'resistance tactics' are 'passing responsibility', 'controlling communication', 'requesting information' and 'forgetting'.

Perhaps the most important aspects of the approach that Roulston, Onwuegbuzie et al., and Wanat take is that students are involved in 'doing' interviews, as well as actively engaged in talking about data.

In other words, their approaches are engaging and experiential and students generally appreciate this:

This was one of the few classes I've taken where I felt like I was actually 'doing' something. What I mean by that is our class gathered the data, did the interviews and all the other steps involved in the research process. We were actively learning as opposed to passively learning. (Keen 1996: 175)

Conducting an interview, either in mock interviews, authentic projects, or with gatekeepers can be a powerful learning experience. Another option is to start closer to home and interview friends or family. Atkinson (2012: 123) shares an insight into the experience of a 'woman in her late thirties' who, being trained in life-story interviewing techniques, interviewed her father as part of a class project for the *Life Story Centre* at the University of Southern Maine and shared the following:

Sitting for my father for three hours listening to his life story was a wonderful experience for both of us. Our relationship has not been one of sharing feelings and innermost thoughts. I've also felt that he loves me, although he has seldom showed his love through words or behavior. What started out to be a slightly uncomfortable experience for both of us ended up being a very special time. It was like we had both been lifted out of our worlds and placed in this room together ... He shared more with me that day than he had in my entire lifetime.

One of the advantages of conducting a life-story interview with an acquaintance or family member is that there are less tricky access issues (c.f. gatekeepers) and the experience is a good chance to explore a longer more 'storied' kind of interview.

This section has made the point that it is essential to get students doing interviews as part of a training process. Reflective journals and class discussion can help engage novice researchers in the process. Work with transcripts is also essential in developing sensitivity to qualitative interview features and the next brief section points to sections of the book which are helpful with this in mind.

## **Working with transcripts and vignettes**

There are three ways of ensuring that transcripts and transcription are kept at the heart of the training process. First of all, students can be

guided to look closely at features of their own interview transcripts: This section will focus on options for this. Secondly, they can work with transcripts that are available in research databases and archives: The next section discusses possibilities for this option. Lastly, students need to be directed to reading that features close analysis and reflection on transcripts: The last part of this chapter offers advice on choices here.

We have already covered a great deal of ground in terms of how transcripts can help focus novice researchers on 'artful ways to conduct interviews' (Wolcott 1994: 102). Chapter 5 covered a range of types of questions, prompts and other interview features that can be highlighted through transcription. Chapter 8 too (particularly the section 'producing and using a transcript (p. 199) has argued that the production of a transcript is an important process for 'noticing' and then 'thinking' about a range of issues. As well as understanding how interviews produce situated understandings grounded in specific interactional episodes' (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: 353), a transcript encourages reflection on an interviewer and interviewee stance, positioning, and identities.

Hsiung (2008) identifies and then works with the challenges of teaching reflexivity and part of the approach involves students examining their transcripts. This process prompts students to realise aspects of their practice. For example, students better understood that they were too reliant on interview guides and prepared themes after examining transcripts. In sticking too closely to the schedule and not concentrating fully on listening and understanding, they also realised that they missed opportunities, particularly in not managing appropriate follow-up questions. Generally, students found it difficult to 'simultaneously engage in active listening, while at the same time develop questions that encourage thick narratives' (2008: 224). Roulston (2010: 174) also includes suitable exercises for 'analysing interview interaction', which could be used with trainees.

Working with transcripts also encourages noticing of small-scale but potentially significant elements of the interaction. Richards (2011) draws on Mishler's (1986) work in showing how interviewees construct their accounts in response to the interviewer's often subtle response tokens. Responses by the interviewer, such as 'Hmmm ... hmmm,' can serve as a confirmatory marker; communicating to the interviewee that they are on the right track or telling a pertinent story. Such features can be more interactionally significant than just inviting the interviewee to continue. Indeed, we saw in Chapter 5 that certain discourse markers ('right', 'good', 'ok') can actually limit the interaction rather than encourage an interviewee to continue or expand a particular point.

One of the key features of this book is the integration of reflexive vignettes and suggestions for activities and tasks to make use of them. These vignettes provide data for discussion in training sessions but also a possible template for reflexive exercises for novice researchers. This would involve them in choosing and transcribing a short piece of interview data that focuses on an interesting moment, breakthrough, dilemma, or choice. The interviewer may or may not have been conscious of its significance at the time. So, for example, you could contrast Krysia Canvin's vignette (p. 251), where she was very conscious of the awkward moment at the time, and Priti Sandhu's vignette (p. 139) where it is only after close transcription and analysis, that she appreciates Beena's 'extensive accounting work'.

The cumulative effect of qualitative researchers presenting their work in a neat and linear way means that novice researchers are not made aware the common features of 'muddle, confusion, mistakes, obstacles, and errors' that make up most research processes (Boden et al. 2005: 70). This is unfortunate, if understandable. After all, 'To place a 'failed', interview at the centre of an academic article is risky and exposing. In the end, the academic arena is a competitive one where 'success', rather than 'failure', is rewarded.' (Nairn et al. 2005: 222). Despite this, one of the main goals of this book has been to open out the reflective process and reveal some sensitivities, difficulties, and dilemmas. As in Krysia Canvin's example, vignettes can be especially helpful in bringing into focus the context and interaction around what Riach calls 'sticky moments'. Riach features two of these sticky moments, which emerged during one research project, where 'the situated-ness and assumptions of interview protocol and research context were actively questioned or broken down' (2009: 357).

The joint consideration of interview transcripts and personal biographies can 'be a source of participant-focussed reflexivity' (2009: 358). Pillow is a useful resource for showing examples of self-revealing and reflexive accounts. She talks about the 'uncomfortable reflexivities' (2003) of this process; in revealing the research process and the positionality of the researcher. She advocates 'the necessity of an ongoing critique of all of our research attempts' and argues that qualitative research would 'benefit from more "messy" examples, examples that may not always be successful, examples that do not seek a comfortable, transcendent end-point but leave us in the uncomfortable realities of doing engaged qualitative research' (2003: 193).

Although transcripts are undoubtedly valuable, the use of video-recorded interviews is certainly another option. Video helps get into the

non-verbal aspects of interviews mentioned earlier (see Creswell 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al. 2012). Uhrenfeldt et al. (2007) use video recording to enhance the development of novice researchers' interviewing skills. They offer a framework in order to 'guide the reflexive review of a video recorded qualitative research interview' (2007: 42), based both on their own experience and also the ideas of Whiteley et al. (1998), who works on paralinguistics, proxemics, and timing. These are elements that cannot easily be captured in a typed transcript of the interview.

### Using second-hand data for training purposes

Ideally novice researchers will collect and transcribe their own data but this is not always possible and it can be a good idea to use 'second-hand data' for both sensitising students to the interview process but also opening out issues of analysis. Again, the reflexive vignettes in this book are suitable materials for this purpose. Trainers might hand out one of the three parts (1. Context, 2. Transcribed extract, 3. Reflexive comment). It is certainly an option to begin with the transcript and see what emerges from pair or group discussion (before handing out the context and comment parts). Some of the reflexive vignettes featured in the book are from more experienced researchers. Others are more novice contributors and they reported that the exercise itself was very helpful in articulating dilemmas, concerns, and sensitivities.

#### Task

Greg Myers and Sofia Lampropoulou have successfully used archived interview data for a number of published articles in order to conduct discourse analysis of interviews. Their reflexive vignette can be found on p. 278. Before you read the vignette think about the following questions:

1. Make a list of advantages and disadvantages of using archived data.
2. If you had access to hundreds of interviews on a similar theme (e.g. experiences of health care) what kind of discourse features might you focus on?

In this reflexive vignette and in a subsequent article (Myers and Lampropoulou 2015), the researchers have focused on laughter in relation to transitions in qualitative interview transcripts (2015). Their work

has also focused on discourse features of archived qualitative interviews. For example, they have analysed stance-taking in social research interviews (2012). They have also analysed the process of drawing inferences from place categories and place names, in archived transcripts of oral history interviews. This work uses membership categorisation analysis (MCA) to show how places, house types, and houses can be presented as being shared and recognisable, in categorising themselves and others while giving accounts of behaviour (Myers and Lampropoulou 2013).

I have focused primarily on conversational analysis in this book but it is possible to use archived interviews for other forms of discourse analysis. For example, Sealey (2012) uses corpus analysis focusing on instances of 'I couldn't' in a corpus of 144 transcribed oral history interviews in order to explore the issue of constraint on the speakers' goals and experiences.

Table 10.1 provides some examples of useful archives that contain qualitative interviews.

*Table 10.1* Archives that contain qualitative interviews

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QualiBank	<a href="http://ukdataservice.ac.uk/">http://ukdataservice.ac.uk/</a> The UK Data Service enables you to search and browse a wide range of qualitative interviews. It offers a wide range of resources and support.
Timescapes	<a href="http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk/">http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk/</a> It is part of the rationale of this project that it is an accessible and re-useable resource, available to other qualitative researchers. Therefore, secondary analysis is central to Timescapes' work and is a core part of each project.
UKDA	<a href="http://ukdataservice.ac.uk/">http://ukdataservice.ac.uk/</a> The UKDA wants to make data easily useable for research and training purposes. The site provides access to data, additional resources, and user-support for those interested in using archived data.
Life Story Centre	Available from <a href="http://usm.maine.edu/">http://usm.maine.edu/</a> Has example questions and resources. The archive of interviews is being rebuilt and the server address may change in 2016.
CESSDA	<a href="http://www.nsd.uib.no/cessda/home.html">http:// www.nsd.uib.no/cessda/home.html</a> The Council of European Social Science Data Archives takes the view that social science data produced within publicly funded projects should in principle be available for re-use outside of the original research team.
ICPSR	<a href="http://www.icpsr.umich.edu">http://www.icpsr.umich.edu</a> The Inter-University consortium for political and social research has archived interviews and teaching materials.

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The archives listed above can certainly be used for training purposes. However, if you are thinking of using archived data for secondary analysis, it is important to think about permissions if it is to be published. There are a number of contributions that are helpful in considering these issues. Corti and Thompson (2004), Heaton (2004), Parry and Mauthner (2004), and Crow and Edwards (2012) are helpful resources. They present perspectives on working with archived textual and visual material in social research.

## **Training tasks**

The following tasks could be used by pairs of students for self-study or as training materials for a training session. They are provided here in addition to the various tasks included in Chapters 1–9.

### **Task 1**

#### **The value of listening**

The following exercise is based on an exercise suggested by Edge (2002: 44–45) and is a good way to start to focus on the importance of listening closely and being attentive.

It works well and often provides a graphic and experiential demonstration of the power of listening.

- Split the group into pairs (A and B).
- Give them a few minutes (individually) to think of an experience that really matters to them. (It might help to give some direction about the topic and perhaps relate it to a recent research topic. Edge suggests a teacher they remember well but it could be anything ('Remembering a good cook and a particular meal they made').
- At this stage, also tell them that they will need to prepare to talk about this experience for a few minutes.
- A describes this while B shows complete indifference, making no response at all.



- They change roles, but this time when B tells the story A will show full attention, responding as though it's one of the most interesting things they've ever heard.
- Finally, the participants compare what emerged in the two experiences and how the speakers felt.

## Task 2

### Typical day: Interview contrast

The following task is based closely on Richards (2003: 52). It is very similar to Task 1 but in this case the trainer does the interview. It can work well as a demonstration before moving on to Task 1. This task can be very amusing and also provoke a detailed discussion and comparison of the talk features in each of the interviews (especially in terms of what sort of interactional pattern is being established at the outset):

- Ask for two volunteers from the group to be interviewed and decide who is A and who is B.
- Tell them that the topic of the both the interviews is 'a typical day'.
- First the trainer interviews A. In this interview, the questions come thick and fast ('what time do you arrive at x?; 'what transport do you usually use?'; 'how long do you usually spend at x?' 'Do you have any breaks in the morning?; 'where do you spend most of your time?'). It helps if the interviewer simply nods and then asks the next question.
- Second the trainer interviews B. This interview should start with a little pre-ambule and then an open 'grand-tour' question. Something like 'I'm interested in how you spend your time at x, what sorts of things do you regularly do, okay then (.) could you tell me about a typical day at x for you? The trainer should be attentive, interested in the details and occasionally check on a detail (could you tell me a little more about, you say you ( ) is there any reason why you ... ?
- After completing the two interviews, the trainer invites A and then B to make comments on how they felt.
- The trainer then throws it open to the whole group to make comparisons between the two interviews. Encourage them to focus on small features of the interaction.

**Task 3****Morning routine  
(Keith Richards)**

This is a good task for getting students to look closely at a transcript. This task gets the group to focus on different moves available to the interviewer. The following example is from Richards (2003: 55) and is useful for noticing the use of 'opening questions', 'check-reflect moves', 'follow-up moves', and 'probes'.

**The following example is Extract 2.2. from Richards (2003: 55):**

**What's your morning routine?**

- 01 IR: I wonder if you could just talk me through what you  
 02 do when you go into the office in the morning, your routine.  
 03 IE: Er my usual routine is that I check the answerphone  
 04 first of all  
 05 IR: Uhuh  
 06 IE: to see if any messages have been left on that ... open the  
 07 filing cabinets and  
 08 IR: You unlock the filing cabinets  
 09 IE: I unlock the filing cabinets  
 10 IR: Right  
 11 IE: Yeah. Then I open up the post that's arrived at our end  
 12 IR: You say 'your end'. Was that- How many ends, how many  
 13 destinations  
 14 IE: By that I mean that ... (Moves on to interactions while  
 15 taking the post round) ... Might have a little chat or I  
 16 might, if they look as though they're really kind of stuck  
 17 into something straight away then I'll just kind of  
 18 IR: When you say you'll have a little chat, I mean, you'll  
 19 institute that will you, or  
 20 IE: Er, er, it depends really. Sometimes (Exchanges on nature  
 21 of talk continue) ... if there's maybe something particular  
 22 that I want to talk about I will- I will let them know that  
 23 IR: Uhuh  
 24 IE: and ask when it will be convenient for me to see them.  
 25 IR: Right. So effectively you're signalling that things are  
 26 important but they're picking the time for the talk.  
 27 IE: Yeah, that's it exactly. Yeah and if ...  
 28 (Exchanges on subject of talk continue.)  
 29 IR: If we could go back a bit and talk a bit more about the  
 30 relationship between where you are and the other section.

### Task 4

#### Matching interviewer stereotypes

I have used this list of stereotypes as a matching exercise (where the stereotype is matched to the description). Students can think of other potential stereotypes. I got the idea for this from Bennett et al. (1994: 280). It allows interviewers to think about their attitude to the interview process. It works better if you cut up on cards.

The Squirrel	Collects recordings of interviews as if they are nuts, only does not know what to do with them other than play them back.
The Ego-Tripper	Knows in his heart that his hunch is right, but needs a few pieces of interview fodder to justify it. Carefully selected quotes will do just that, and one has no idea how much lies on the cutting-room floor.
The Optimist	Plans 200 interviews with a randomly selected group of secondary school Heads by Christmas. Is shortly to discover 200 synonyms for 'get lost'.
The Amateur Therapist	Although ostensibly enquiring into parents' attitudes to lacrosse, gets so carried away during interview he tries to resolve every social/emotional problem he encounters. Should stick to lacrosse.
The Guillotine	Is so intent on getting through his schedule he pays no attention to the answers and chops his respondents short in mid-sentence. (He actually does manage to do 200 interviews by Christmas.)

### Task 5

#### Difficult interviewee role plays (Kathy Roulston)

Task 5 can be used following Task 4 and concentrates on the features of unpredictability in qualitative interviews. The purpose of Task 5 is for interviewers to develop skills in dealing with the unexpected. It encourages interviewers to be flexible and open to what happens in interview settings, and comfortable in reorienting the direction of an interview in order to help others tell their stories in ways that meet the goals of the research project.

Directions:

Decide who will be an interviewer and who will be an interviewee. Review the directions below prior to conducting the interview.

- The interviewer should develop interview questions for a professional life-history interview. The interviewer should aim to generate a 45–60 minute interview related to the research topic.
- The interviewee should select any one of the roles listed below, using the description to inform how to answer the interviewer's questions.

Interviewee's role: 'The busy person'

You are a very busy person. You accepted the researcher's request for an interview because you are prominent in the community and have political aspirations. You are willing to have your real name published in the report from the study. The interview is scheduled between meetings – and you're already late. You don't have much time to talk.

Interviewee's role: 'The talker'

You are an invalid and don't get many visitors to your home. You are excited that a researcher has asked you to be involved in a study and you'd like to tell them about your family, your pets, and show them your photo album. You've set aside the whole afternoon for this interview.

Interviewee's role: 'The short answerer'

You've never participated in a research interview before, and have a shy, retiring personality. You aren't given to lengthy descriptions or elaborations and aren't really clear on why the interviewer would even want to speak with you. You ask a lot of clarification questions of the interviewer, so you can be sure that you know what the researcher wants from you.

Interviewee's role: 'The wanderer'

You've had a long and interesting career and love talking to other people about your experiences. You often interrupt yourself to diverge to other interesting topics, giving lots of descriptive detail as you go. Yes, this researcher may want to find out about your professional life history, but you'd really rather talk to them about the short recreational courses you've taken – and there's so much to talk about: your wine-tasting weekend; the golf course you've recently enrolled in. Then there's the hiking vacation you've planned for the Summer!

Interviewee's role: 'The teacher'

You are an experienced researcher and you took on this interview because you like to help beginning researchers. In fact, you are an experienced interviewer yourself, and are generous in giving suggestions to other researchers about how they should do things. In fact, the interview guide that the researcher has with them could do with some work. This researcher needs some help ...

Interviewee's role: 'The player'

You enjoy being a research participant, and particularly like to choose projects in which there is some benefit to you (cash payments are your preferred option). You see it as your duty to provide data that won't 'fit' – you've taken research courses yourself, and think it's fun to see what kind of reaction you can arouse in your interviewer. You've had some pretty enjoyable moments that make great stories at parties.

Interviewee's role: 'The liar'

You forged documents to enter your profession, and no one knows. Your current boss thought it would be a great idea to participate in this research study, and everyone in your work place is participating. You've told so many lies to get to your current position, that you're not sure what you've said to whom. You're not sure that you'll be able to tell the story of your life without contradicting yourself. You're scared – maybe this is the moment you'll be found out ....

Interviewee's role: 'Distracted'

You are due to be in a wedding party next weekend, and unfortunately said you'd help out a friend to be in this study. You've got a lot of responsibility in helping out the happy couple and can't really afford the time to do this interview. You've also not ever been this involved in a wedding, and need some help with etiquette. Maybe the researcher could help you?

Interviewee's role: 'Advice seeker'

You are quite unhappy in your current career path, and have so many regrets about the choices you've made. You're thinking about changing career paths and use every opportunity in talking with friends, families, acquaintances, and even people you meet casually to ask them what they think about you should do. Surely there's someone who'll be able to tell you what the right decision would be ....

Interviewee's role: 'Questioner'

You've agreed to be part of this interview because you want to go to graduate school. You know that the interviewer is doing a graduate degree. You are really curious to know how the researcher got into graduate school, and what they're doing. It could help you decide what school to apply to.

**Task 6**

**Practicing asking ethnographic interview questions  
(Kathy Roulston)**

This task gets the interviewer to think about the difference between research purpose/aims and the actual interview questions that can be asked.

**Research purpose:**

- To examine the culture of graduate student education in the \_\_\_\_\_ programme at the University of \_\_\_\_\_.

**Research focus:**

- Acts, activities and events that graduate students engage in as part of graduate education provided by the \_\_\_\_\_ programme.
- Students' goals in taking coursework in \_\_\_\_\_ programme?

**Definitions of terms:**

- People (actors) organise their activities through a series of acts. For example, the activity of 'taking a course' involves acts of completing reading for class, participating in discussions, and writing papers.
- Some activities are organised into larger events, for example a 'graduation ceremony' involves a range of activities include a procession, speeches, awarding of degrees, and so forth.

**Possible interview questions**

- What courses have you taken over the past year?
- Thinking about a typical class, how do you usually prepare for the class?

- Do the courses have a typical organisation? If so, tell me what typically happens in a course? If not, tell me about one of the courses you've taken.
- Walk me through a typical class for one of the courses. What happens?
- Tell me about the assessment used in a typical course.
- Tell me how you typically approach course assignments for a qualitative class.
- Let's take the example of the \_\_\_\_\_ assignment that you mentioned. How did you go about doing that assignment? What happened next? What were the main things that you took from that assignment?
- Thinking back on the course work that you've taken, is there an experience that stands out? Tell me about that.
- Thinking back on some of the language that you've learned in the programme, what are some of the terms that stand out? How would you explain those to a newcomer to the \_\_\_\_\_ programme?
- What do you hope to gain from taking coursework in the \_\_\_\_\_ programme?
- Is there anything else that you would like to share about taking course work in the \_\_\_\_\_ programme?

## Task 7

### Getting started (Keith Richards)

This task is designed to explore the advantages of the 'grand tour' opening question and to link this to the idea of using the interviewee's responses as a basis for further exploration, shifting attention away from the interviewer's own agenda.

1. Examine the following interview openings and comment on what sort of interactional relationship they set up. What are the implications of this for the interview that follows?

#### Opening A:

*Can you just talk me through a typical day in your life as a student here at the university, from the time you get up to the time you go to bed?*

Opening B:

*What subject are you studying?*

*How many years does your course last?*

*What year are you in?*

*How many days a week do you come into the university?*

2. Jot down a list of topics you would expect to cover if you were interviewing a student in order to learn about their experience of studying at university. Try opening A with different students and examine their responses to see how many of the topics on your list can be linked to aspects of their response. For example, if they say, 'I usually head to the library in the afternoon and spend an hour or two working there', this would link to a topic on use of the library (and provide you with an opportunity later on to begin an exploration of this with something like, 'You mentioned earlier that you spend time in the afternoon working in the library. I wonder why you choose to work there rather than anywhere else' etc.).

(It would be useful to record the interviewee's response, but if you do, ensure that you wipe the recording once you have completed the task.)

**Task 8**

**Developing a sense of your own style  
(Keith Richards)**

The aim of this task is first of all to allow participants to appreciate that even minimal responses cannot be ignored and that a 'Mmm' from one interviewer (in this case Jill) might be interpreted by an interviewee as more significant (e.g. in terms of indicating importance or agreement) than its use by another interviewer. Once this point has been grasped, participants can try to identify distinctive features of their own interviewing style.

The following extracts follow immediately after the interviewer's first question and each lasts for 23 seconds.

- What do we learn about the difference in style between Jill and Jo?
- Are there any implications of this in terms of how their later responses might be interpreted?



**Jill**

01 IE: Yeh (.) sure. I actually started in:  
 02 EFL teaching, em (.) after (0.3)  
 03 university I did my TEFL course (0.4)  
 04 and then I worked abroad teaching  
 05 English: (.) in Mexico and in Spain,  
 06 IR: °·hh°=  
 07 IE: =and when I came back to En:gland, I  
 08 was loo- obviously looking for wo:rk,  
 09 and (0.3) I:: (.) applied for >some  
 10 ESOL< jobs, (0.6) as well as some EFL  
 11 jobs, and I got (.) e:m (0.8) this  
 12 job. Yhhheh!he<sub>h</sub>heh  
 13 IR: <sub>h</sub>heheheh

**Jo**

01 IE: A:::h=Idid, <sub>I</sub> fo<sub>u</sub>:nd that teachers=  
 02 IR: <sub>h</sub>mm <sub>h</sub>  
 03 IE: =gave children a particular ti:me.  
 04 IR: Mm <sub>h</sub>hm  
 05 IE: <sub>h</sub>e:m:: (0.8) was it after the  
 06 break?=or  
 07 (0.2)  
 08 IR: Mm hm  
 09 IE: there is a special half an hour  
 10 reading time so there are<sub>h</sub> some=  
 11 IR: <sub>h</sub>mm hm <sub>h</sub>  
 12 IE: =boo:ks (.) e::m available.  
 13 IR: Mm hm=  
 14 IE: =e:m in the classroom so children  
 15 c-could go and keep (.) their own  
 16 books, <sub>h</sub>and the<sub>h</sub> teacher says=  
 17 IR: <sub>h</sub>mm hm <sub>h</sub>  
 18 IE: =reading time °is°=  
 19 IR: =Mm hm=  
 20 IE: =I think it's (.) probably after lunch.  
 21 IR: Mm <sub>h</sub>hm.

2. Examine a recording of one of your own interviews and identify distinctive features of your own interviewer style. For example, what sort of minimal responses do you use (and how often) to show listenership? Are there any expressions that recur in your questioning?

**Task 9****Recall elicitation**

This is a way of working with trainee interviewers that draws on work in cognitive interviewing. It practises eliciting interview recall and encourages an emphasis on accuracy.

- Divide the group in half.
- One half (Group A) watches a video of an event of some kind. It could be an incident in film or part of a documentary. It is ideal if quite a lot happens in the episode.
- The other half (Group B) are invited to go outside the training room or to another space for 10 minutes.
- On their return members of Group B take the role of the interviewer. In pairs, a Group-B participant interviews a Group-A participant. Through questioning, elicitation, and probing the interviewer should try to get as detailed an account as possible. This stage should take 20–30 minutes depending on the length of the video.
- In the next stage, you can either compare what Group-B participants have elicited or watch the video again. In either case there can be a discussion of what the interview managed to establish in terms of recall.

**Reading to recommend**

Many of the previous chapters have provided guidance on areas of specific reading. What follows is a short summary of recommended reading for training novice researchers. It is based on Mann (2011) but has been extended. It first of all considers social science handbooks and then handbooks with a sole focus on interviewing. After that, there is a table of suggested other reading that might be helpful in clarifying a range of reflexive dimensions on qualitative interviewing.

**Social science handbooks**

There are a great number of books which provide an introduction to the subject of qualitative interviewing. In general introductions to social science research there is usually at least one chapter that covers the nature of qualitative interviews (e.g. Silverman 1999, 2001; Flick 2002;

Marks 2002; May 2002; Seale et al. 2003, 2007; Yates 2004; Denzin and Lincoln 2005). It is not possible to provide a comprehensive guide here but I would pick out the following as offering a good mix of perspectives on the subject:

- Patton (2002) is engaging, amusing, and detailed;
- Richards (2003) is a great read, devoting Chapter 2 to the topic of interviews, and includes a range of graded tasks and transcripts;
- Rossman and Rallis (2003) is a very readable resource that includes interview transcripts and encourages a more reflective approach than most;
- Bogdan and Biklen (2003) have a good section on reflective field-notes (pp. 110–120) and is useful if you are considering interviews. The illustration of the difference between descriptive and reflective fieldnotes is helpful for novice researchers;
- Denscombe (2007) is useful and provides useful insight into interviews in Part 2 of the book. He covers the emergence of mixed methods approaches, focus groups, and increasing use of the Internet in interviews;
- Hurworth (2008) is concerned principally with the teaching of qualitative research and has good ideas for training tasks;
- Berg and Lune (2012) is now in its eighth edition and has several sections that deal usefully with interview issues. There are useful ‘trying it out’ sections, presenting ideas for practical exercises.

### **Handbooks with a sole focus on interviewing**

Apart from Roulston (2010) mentioned above, one resource that is also worth the investment is Gubrium et al. (2012). This takes up a considerable space on your bookshelf (it is over 600 pages) but is certainly the most comprehensive, authoritative, and up-to-date guide currently available. It is a rewritten version of the widely cited 2002 version and covers the history and forms of interviewing, distinctive respondents (e.g. children, older persons, etc.), the context and circumstances of interviewing, technical issues (e.g. Internet interviewing to the ‘reluctant respondent’). It offers strategies for interview analysis, reflection, and representation. Gillham (2005) is a good introductory read. It is basic but I would recommend it as a solid overview of what is involved in interviewing and may be a better starting point for many. Edwards and Holland (2013) feature their own and colleagues’ experiences. The examples selected in the book are informative and engaging illustrations of qualitative interviewing

in practice. They are particularly good on interview tools and the use of new interviewing technologies.

Among other resources with a sole focus on interviewing, Rubin and Rubin's (1995) personal recollections make entertaining reading and many students find that this book is a quick way into a wealth of insight. Mishler (1991) uses several transcripts to illustrate the construction of meaning, as well as providing an influential narrative analysis approach (contributing to the 'narrative turn' in the social sciences). The chapter on the joint construction of meaning is excellent, contrasting a 'behavioural' view of interviewing with one that recognises the importance of interview 'discourse'. Wengraf (2001), focusing on life-history interviewing, sets out to be comprehensive and the case studies are very helpful but many researchers find it a challenging read. Seidman (1998) provides an accessible phenomenological perspective and a thorough treatment of both life-history and focused, in-depth interviews. Kvale (2008) and Arksey and Knight (1999) also provide depth in their analysis and discussion. Schostak (2006) is a very useful perspective on framing and positioning.

### Further reading

Table 10.2 offers other reading that might be helpful in clarifying reflexive dimensions on qualitative interviewing.

In addition to the reading suggested above, I maintain two sites with information and up-to-date resources for qualitative interviewers:

- <http://qualitativeinterviewing.com/>
- <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/staff/teaching/mann/interviews>

If you have any suggestions for resources of links that might be useful for researchers using qualitative interviews, please send them to [steve.mann@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:steve.mann@warwick.ac.uk)

### Summary

Richards (2011: 95) makes a case for 'more interactionally sensitive approaches to interviewer training' and his article is a data-led reminder that 'progress depends on the development of craft skills through the sensitive interrogation of one's own work' (2011: 107). This chapter has offered ways of working with novice researchers which prioritise an experiential way of working so that they can begin to consider their choices and decisions. By encouraging them to learn through

Table 10.2 Further reading on reflexive dimensions of interviewing

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Bradbury-Jones (2007) and Bradbury-Jones et al. (2009)	Good introductions to a focus on locating and considering aspects of the researcher's subjectivity and evaluating the impact these subjectivities could potentially have on the study. Bradbury-Jones draws on the work of Peshkin (1988) in articulating different aspects of 'I' within a particular research study explored through a reflexive diary.
Cole and Knowles (2001)	Provide reflexive comment on the research process of life-history interviewing (from developing the project to analysing and presenting the life). They use extended excerpts from their own data and provide descriptions of example interview settings, and interactions both before, during and after the actual interviews.
Krieger (1991)	Provides an example of an 'exercise that helped me to re-engage with my data at the same time 'as 'separating out' a sense of myself'. The section of her book (pp. 165–185) provides a candid insight into multiple perspectives of the various interviewees and her responses, to interviewees and problems encountered.
Partington (2001)	Provides an overview of the problems he experienced working with a team of interviewers. He found a great deal of variety in their technique (including inappropriate questioning, inadequate listening and lack of interpersonal skills). Although it is difficult to be sure why certain interviews seem to be more successful, the transcripts included in the article makes clear different skills in establishing rapport, following-up leads and demonstrating attention and interest.

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completing tasks and doing interviews, it is possible to enable novice researchers to become more sensitive, reflexive, and reflective with regard to their own interview management. Their progress depends on working with transcripts and being pointed to reading which deals with qualitative interviews in a similarly data-led manner.

In Chapter 1 we talked about the importance of keeping reflexivity at an appropriate scale. We said that qualitative research needs to avoid becoming a form of qualitative 'navel gazing' (Sparkes 2000: 21): There will always need for a balance between a focus on the researcher self and getting on with the job of collecting data, analysing

it and writing it up. This is the balance between Narcissus and Icarus (see p. 1). One of the advantages of developing an experiential approach to the development of qualitative interview skills and strategies is that the novice researcher is less likely to get constipated with the application of rules and advice.

Barbour (2004), in reviewing Puchta and Potter's book 'Focus Group Practice' (2004) worries about the use to which their book is likely to be put. She reminds us of the story about the legendary Garfinkel who, it was alleged, experienced great difficulty in carrying out the everyday task of ordering a loaf of bread, so attuned was he to the nuances of conversational gambits. In other words, she worries that 'over-zealous attention to the techniques outlined might well result in just this sort of crippling self-consciousness'. Reflection needs to be kept in check, of course. I would not recommend that any student worries over every aspect of their interview. You cannot follow every 'rule' and take on board every piece of advice. There are dangers in getting bogged down in the detail of the craft. After all, there is nothing intrinsically difficult about conducting a qualitative interview. If you are relaxed and you listen, the interviewee will almost always be relaxed and forthcoming. However, there is a great deal to reflect on along the way. Interviewing is something that you can get better at.

## **Reflexive vignette (Greg Myers and Sofia Lampropoulou)**

### **Studying interview transcripts/Using other peoples' data**

Social research interviews are a genre in which utterances of interviewees are elicited, transcribed, coded, and used as evidence about social groups for, among others, academic arguments and social policy. Our data are from ESDS Qualidata (<http://ukdataservice.ac.uk>), an archive of interview and focus group transcripts, diaries, and other materials produced by funded qualitative research in the UK. Such a source of data provides a large sample of the interview genre and shows a wide range of variation within that genre. The disadvantage of using this data for the linguist is that transcripts are already in place and there is little or no access to sound files that would allow for re-transcription. They vary in the level of detail they include; for example, none have indications of non-verbal responses, and none have the details of timing and overlaps that can be found in transcripts for conversation analysis. They also vary in the amount of paralinguistic information they record. Clearly, there is room for a much richer and detailed analysis of sound files.

But we argue that linguists need to be able to use the data produced for other purposes, as we would use court records, the *Congressional Record* or the *Hansard* report of the United Kingdom parliament, while acknowledging their limitations: the very fact that the data is *mediated*.

In fact, their limitations might prove useful to the linguist as mediated data might tell us something about specific linguistic or paralinguistic features as these were understood and represented by the transcriber. We believe that laughter is one of these features. The following example is extracted from the project 'Families and Social Mobility' (Extract 10.1). The interviewee reports her parents' expectations from her in relation to job prospects. Instances around laughter are marked in bold.

**Extract 10.1**

1 I: Were you expected to achieve certain things in  
 2 life?  
 3 S: No, I think they knew really. As I say,  
 4 I went to a secretarial college for a short  
 5 space of time. I was pretty hopeless at that.  
 6 I did manage to type, but shorthand was beyond  
 7 me. It was just - I was - I think as a teenager,  
 8 I was too mad and I didn't want to settle to  
 9 anything really, you know. If anything  
 10 came easy to me, I did it, but shorthand  
 11 was too involved. I could type and that  
 12 was enough, so I went into an office  
 13 and I was just a typist and went from there,  
 14 you know. I don't think my mother and  
 15 father - I think my mother and father knew  
 16 I wasn't very clever, so that was it,  
 17 you know. **Put her in an office and she's**  
 18 **all right! {Laughs} So, that's where I stayed.**  
 19 I: The next section here is about family life.  
 20 In fact, there's a whole heap of pages  
 21 which.....

(SN 4938 *Families and Social Mobility*, int. 108)

The interviewee first offers her parents' view on her abilities and skills, and makes a point that the work of a typist was all she was suited for. She further elaborates by representing their speech, in the form of hypothetical reported speech and just after this, it is transcribed that she is laughing. The laughter seems to work as an acknowledgement

of this view but at the same time disassociates the interviewee from it. Following the laughter, as in other examples in our data, there is a transition to the serious, summing up the point of this narrative. Then, the interviewer introduces the next topic. We cannot know if the interviewee only laughed at the point that is transcribed and/or if the interviewer shared the laughter with the interviewee. What we do know is that the transcriber decided to transcribe laughter in this particular position that marks the transition from non-serious to serious.

Extract 10.2 is from the project investigating the social consequences of the foot-and-mouth disease epidemic in North Cumbria. The interviewee works at a secondary school and reports on the familiarity of children from the area with animals.

### Extract 10.2

- 1 I: Animals are used as part of the curriculum were  
 2 they?  
 3 B: Yes.  
 4 I: They were used in lots of different ways  
 5 probably.  
 6 B: Well there is a lot of children as I  
 7 say from farming community and some of them  
 8 go to the agricultural college at Newton  
 9 Rigg after here, **so they're brought up**  
 10 **to know how to bring up animals and butcher**  
 11 **them and things [LAUGHTER]. Well it's part**  
 12 **of their lives isn't it.**  
 13 I: Well it's a natural cycle isn't it  
 14 B: Yes

(The Health and Social Consequences of the 2001 FMD Epidemic in North Cumbria 5407, int. 18)

The interviewee discusses an unpleasant and unexpected situation: children being familiar with butchering animals. Laughter marks this incongruity between the conventional association of children and pets, and the experience of the particular children in an agricultural community. Immediately after the laugh, the interviewee shifts back to a serious statement, a conclusive comment on her perception of the situation which is echoed by the interviewer. (One source to our framework on laughter is Chafe 2007).

The above two examples show the clear separation between laughable reported speech and/or unexpected material from other statements



presented as serious. This suggests that the interviewees are attending to the role of the laughter in qualifying or distancing their stance-taking. We therefore argue that transcribers generally represent a laugh when it is necessary to indicate a stance on an utterance. So an analysis of transcripts gives us insights on transcribers' interpretations of stances. Since they do not have to transcribe laughter, they do it only where they judge it is needed to convey the utterance meaning. We argue that it is useful using existing transcripts as these contain traces of the interaction of interviewer and interviewee. A researcher taking this perspective would attend to the transcriber, as well as the interviewer, as mediating the interaction with the research subjects (Myers and Lampropoulou 2015).

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Google Hangouts and UberConference

*Google Hangouts on Air* (<http://www.google.com/+/learnmore/hangouts/onair.html>)

There is no doubt that Hangouts is one of the most successful applications of Google+ (Google's attempt at social networks). This video-conferencing app allows you to share and connect with at least ten participants through video or voice. Another feature of this app is 'Hangouts on Air' which allows your Hangout to be shared live with the public via YouTube, your Google+ page or any other website that supports the embedded YouTube code. You can set your 'on air' streaming as public or private, and, after pressing the Start Broadcast button, everything is automatically recorded to your YouTube channel, where you can then edit it. If you do not have a YouTube channel linked to your Google+ account, the app will ask you to create one. In this way you do not have to worry about using any other software or plug-in in your browser.

*UberConference* (<https://www.uberconference.com/>)

This conference call application is a free service for up to ten callers. It aims to replace the pain of phone call conferences. It can be used in a computer or as a smartphone app (iOS and Android). Both options let you manage the conference with visual controls – you can also share your screen and documents (via Dropbox or Google Drive). Once you login you are given a unique phone number. The use of this number is limited, in the free version, for the US only. Paid versions – Pro and Business – allow international calls. But the web version is free at time of writing from everywhere. It is quite simple to set up, you can invite people on the go and you can even record the conference by just pressing the record button. Everything is stored online and you do not have to worry about using any other software or plug-in. There is also an add-on so that you can use UberConference within your Google Hangouts.



<i>ha ha</i> or <i>hee hee</i> etc.	Renditions of laughing
CAPS	Used for loudness (in comparison with surrounding talk). Segment of speech noticeably louder than surrounding delivery.
—	Underlining is used to vocal emphasis or where there is a prominent tonic syllable (e.g. I had <u>thirty</u> at one point).
...	Intervening utterances which have been taken out.
[yeah]	Back-channelling (square brackets are used when these are fully transcribed in detailed transcription e.g. yup, yes, uhuh etc ). Sometimes used in long articulations where there are numerous back-channel cues.
> <	Segment of speech noticeably quicker than surrounding delivery.
< >	Segment of speech noticeably slower than surrounding talk.
° °	Segment of speech noticeably quieter than surrounding delivery.
?	Questioning intonation. Sometimes ? is used more than once if there is more than one element of questioning intonation in any one syntactic question, as in the following:
	1 N: is there <u>any</u> sense in <u>whi</u> ch?
	2 it's- (.) the whole person
	3 decision is to some extent still
	4 more of an <u>abstrac</u> tion?
,	Continuing intonation (often used where there is a continuation key at the end of a move or turn) – can be fall-rising or weak rising intonation.
.	Falling or stopping intonation.
!	Used where there is extra feeling or emotion in the voice.
↑↓	Vertical arrows precede marked pitch movements (in contrast with normal rhythms of surrounding talk).
:	Elongated sound (e.g. that's ni:::ce).
-	Hyphens mark a cut-off or halt in delivery. This is often due to a change in direction of syntax (e.g. that- it's not the point).

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### Appendix 3: Elizabeth's interview

Elizabeth is talking about her experience of using 'Cooperative Development' (Edge 2002) and how she has found it useful as technique but not helpful when carried over to other types of talk.

There is one section removed (lines 389–410) because Elizabeth thought it might be upsetting for a third person.

- 365 E and frustrated because I wasn't sure how the pair felt about  
 366 it (.) and in some cases we ended up in giggles (.) I mean  
 367 a lot of people ended up just in giggles (.) and some  
 368 of the things we had to think about weren't things- (.)  
 369 we didn't know what to talk about. (.)
- 370 I yeah  
 371 E there was this problem of what to talk about [Interviewer: yeah]  
 372 and it [Interviewer: yeah] was really really difficult and he said  
 373 'well' if you don't know what to talk about look at this  
 374 shape and say what you think (.) you know (.) [Interviewer: yeah]  
 375 an- and we didn't want to look at this shape  
 376 I that was the Medulla?  
 377 E that was the Medulla yeah (.) that's right  
 378 but (.) I was really keen on it and I wanted it to work  
 379 (.) [Interviewer: yeah] and so I thought 'oh okay' well I'll  
 380 practise *Reflecting* in my conversations with teachers around  
 381 the course (.) [Interviewer: yeah] and it had disastrous effects (.)  
 382 because:: it gave the wrong message to people (.)  
 383 I yeah (.) what sort of message do you think it gave?  
 384 [ ]  
 385 E and so  
 386 [this extract from 386 has been removed because Elizabeth  
 387 I was not happy about its inclusion. It contained potentially  
 388 E embarrassing comments about a third person...  
 389  
 390  
 391A155  
 392  
 393  
 394 I  
 395 E  
 396 I  
 397  
 398  
 399 E  
 400  
 401  
 402 I  
 403 E  
 404

405 I  
406 E  
407  
408  
409  
410  
411 I     okay  
412 E     you don't carry it over into your normal lives  
413 I     yeah (.) yeah as a technique  
414 E it- it's a technique (.) and I talked to Nicholas about it  
415       afterwards (.) not on the course  
416       because er- w::- there were too many things  
417       happening (.) but I did talk about it to Nicholas  
418       afterwards (.) when I joined Norton  
419       and .hhhh (0.4) you know it needs to be::  
420       when you're teaching it you should definitely  
421       put a health warning on it (.)

## Appendix 4: Dasha Zhurauskaya's Vignette

### Context

The extract below comes from a collection of semi-structured interviews conducted by two community workers with multilingual immigrants to the UK. In the section of the interview from which this extract was taken, 'I' (the Interviewer) is a native speaker from the UK. She is questioning B (the Interviewee) about her values in life and if there are things that she misses about home and also what she values about living in York. (For the interviewee, English is an additional language.)

The data was collected for a project called 'York's Hidden Stories'. This is a community-based project, which aims to capture and share the experiences and values of the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community in York. The project was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Comic Relief with the stated aim of strengthening York's commitment to racial equality and diversity (see Craig et al., 2010).

### Interview extract

1 I: is there anything (.) in particular (.) that y:ou  
 2 (.)really do treasure about [country] °then°  
 3 B: (0.4) anything particular  
 4 I: anything (.) you know it could be foo:d music  
 5 (.) [people  
 6 B: [y:es (.) yes I love the music  
 7 I: mm  
 8 B: (0.2) and er (.) is here I miss that music (.)  
 9 I do (.) when I play in the car my children don't  
 10 like it [(laughter))  
 11 I: [right  
 12 B: oh mammy put English one on ((laughter))  
 13 I: right yeah  
 14 B: so I miss (.) but I do I miss it but (.)°yeah°  
 15 A: (.) so what do you treasure about living in York  
 16 then

### Commentary

Following Roulston (her 2001 paper), I 're-analysed' some of the data. Initially I had concentrated on thematic analysis but later I used a more CA-informed methodology. Having two different analysis of the same data set was helpful for me. The thematic analysis was conducted at the request of a client, in this case a York-based charity called the Centre for Global Education York (CGEY). My subsequent use of a CA-informed methodology made it much clearer to me that the interview is a co-construction and brought out more subtle elements of the interaction.

Sometimes the theoretical views of a client and an applied linguist can be different. My client approached qualitative interviews from a 'romantic'

perspective, whereas my own views are much more in line with constructivist views of the interview (e.g. Roulston, 2010).

On one level, a reader might wonder why the interviewee is suggesting possible answers (perhaps putting words in the interviewer's mouth on line 4). However, it is also possible to see this as helpful language support (as the interview is being conducted in the interviewee's L2). Actually the phenomenon of the interviewer suggesting possible answers is common in the data set.

There is also evidence of language accommodation between the two speakers (as English is the interviewee's L2). 'B' is confused by the interviewer's emphasis on 'in particular' and therefore asks for clarification (or perhaps is just checking). Perhaps saying 'in particular' (line 3) provides the interviewee with more processing time. Certainly this gives the interviewer extra time in phrasing the question (lines 4–5). On line 4 'anything' is followed by a pause and this is a potential transition relevance place. 'B' could proceed with a reply but remains silent and so the interviewer carries on with a list (making clear what might be an appropriate topic). On line 6 'B' begins her turn with an overlap '[y:es (.) yes I love the music', selecting music from the list offered by A in the previous turn. In line 7, B accepts A's answer with a noise 'mm' and a long silence in line 8 is interpreted by A as an invitation to continue. Line 8 continues with a hesitation 'and er (.) is here I miss that music (.) I do when I play in the car my children don't like it [(laughter)]'. In line 13 B concludes the answer with 'so I miss (.) but I do I miss it but (.) °yeah°. The extract ends with A's next question.

The above extract is characteristic of much of the data used for my study. It illustrates well the interactional nature of the interview. Here we observe how the individuals actively produce meaning in their talk in collaboration with each other to active particular interactional goals.

This experience made me more confident in the idea of engaging in open dialogue with clients. This needs to be done with caution but it is important not to abandon your own epistemological position. The applied linguist's job is to focus on recognising real-world problems in which there are language-related issues and/or to respond to the identification of a problem by a potential client. In my experience, based on this research project, the nature and scope of the 'problem' turned out to be somewhat different than that initially identified by the client. Some of the solutions I offered to the client were to the problem that they had identified and others were solutions to a problem that they hadn't realised existed. This is a sensitive issue and careful communication with the client, rather than compromise, was needed.

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## Appendix 5: Christina Gkonou's Vignette

### Christina's context

The students who took part in the qualitative interviews were adult learners of EFL, studying in two private language schools in Thessaloniki, Greece. The participants were purposefully selected from a larger pool of students who had already been administered a quantitative survey. A number of completed questionnaires were chosen through criterion sampling (Miles and Huberman, 1994), my conceptual criterion being to ensure high levels of language learning anxiety that would lead to insightful and thick descriptions (Denzin, 2001) of the construct by different informants. The students with the highest rankings were invited to attend the follow-up interview.

The student whose interview extract has been included for analysis here was a 27-year-old employee of a logistics company, studying for a Master's degree in Logistics Management at the Department of Economics, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. Her total language anxiety score, as summed up through the questionnaire, was 173 (minimum score = 46, maximum score = 230). After a gap of nine years of studying English in a formal learning context, the participant decided to continue her English studies in order to obtain an advanced-level certificate of proficiency in the language. This would considerably increase her chances of promotion in her current job, and help her converse comfortably with colleagues abroad.

My research concentrated on how Greek EFL learners experienced language learning anxiety. The participants were asked to identify the causes of their anxiety and discuss any strategies they used to alleviate it. Special attention was paid to skill-specific anxiety, in particular anxiety over speaking and writing in EFL. Speaking anxiety was selected as one of the main research foci given the prominence speaking receives in the majority of research into foreign language learning anxiety. Writing was also chosen among the four skills, because in large-scale settings, such as university examinations, English ability is often assessed using written tests.

The interview took place on 28 April 2011, at 21.00pm, in the language school, after the end of the student's class. It was conducted in Greek, as the student said that she was more comfortable conversing in her first language than in the target language. The participant also commented that conducting the interview in English could affect the amount of detail she would want to offer. Code switching was only used with terms of English, such as 'speaking', 'writing', 'IELTS', etc. The interview was audio-recorded, transcribed and translated by myself. Before the interview started, the student was asked if she would mind me using a recording device. After transcribing and translating all interviews, I asked two of my colleagues who are working as EFL teachers in Greece and who have a Master's in translation from the University of Surrey to check two of the translated interviews for their accuracy.

## Christina Gkonou's vignette

- I: In your opinion, which is the most anxiety-provoking aspect of the lesson?
- Z: I am usually anxious about the time I am given by the teacher to work on a writing task, an essay. As for speaking, I always feel I have to think a lot before I say something in English. It's so different from speaking in Greek. And also when I speak in Greek, I don't make mistakes. I mean that native speakers of any language normally don't make mistakes, unless you speak too fast for example. I don't want to make mistakes in English though, but it can often be difficult to express certain ideas in another language. And of course the level of anxiety differs across situations, for example a one-to-one lesson, or in a classroom, with other students, where you also become anxious about what you will say in the presence of others.
- I: How do you think that could affect you?
- Z: When I speak English in class, I have to think if I've used the grammar and vocabulary correctly. It's difficult to clearly say what you want to say in English as you are used to speaking Greek most of the time. And my anxiety doubles because I am in a classroom with other students and I have to speak in front of them. I have to think of what I'll say in front of people who might be stronger students than I am. I wouldn't call it competitiveness, but students should be of an equal level of proficiency and should have similar abilities. Is this possible? I don't know. No, no, I am competitive, because I don't want other students to perform better than me.

## Reflexive comment

I began the interview by asking the participant to define anxiety in an attempt to gradually guide her through more complicated questions, specific to language learning situations. To answer my question about the most anxiety-provoking aspect(s) of the English lesson, the student compared her native language with the target language. Without being asked to distinguish between writing anxiety and speaking anxiety, the student contrasted them, showing that she had understood and could remember the research foci of my study stated on the consent form she was asked to sign and briefly summarised by me prior to the commencement of the interview. There is a possibility that the interviewee could still remember some of the questionnaire items, although she had completed it six weeks before the interview was conducted.

The last line of the first answer presented above was given the code 'competitiveness' by me. In the actual interview, I did not use this term in order to avoid leading the interviewee to give a response that I would like to hear, given the constant reference in the existing literature to the connection between anxiety

and competitiveness. However, in the second answer, the interviewee employed this specific term, and in fact the way she structured her response is indicative of a gradual process of coming to realise and admitting that she is competitive. One of the limitations of interviews – or, diaries – inherent in research on anxiety and emotions is that participants cannot always have access to unconscious learning processes, and are not always aware of the connections among events that take place in class, or the reasons why they exhibit certain behaviours. This may often result in incomplete responses, because events that may be of particular interest to the researcher may be omitted by the participant. Additionally, researchers may feel that they should not push participants to report on negative emotions, or ‘negative’ aspects of their personality. At the same time, an amount of reactivity, or the ‘Hawthorne effect’, is likely to appear, given that certain participants will try to improve or modify aspects of their behaviour in response to the fact that they know they are being studied.

Having said this, the interviewee in this case was forthcoming and mature enough to find out things about her personality and self-beliefs. Her experience as an English language and foreign language learner, along with her awareness of the nature of her anxiety which she often encountered in class – she made this point later on –, helped towards identifying a number of different dimensions of anxiety about language learning, such as competitiveness.

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## Appendix 6: A Teacher's Experiences Highlighted by a Stimulus Poem

### Daniel Xerri's vignette

#### Daniel's context

The extract below is from a semi-structured interview I held with a teacher of English, F, at a post-16 college in Malta. It formed part of a pilot study and was the first time I was trialling the interview guide. The interview was conducted in a one-to-one manner and lasted about 45 minutes. It took place after I had observed the teacher delivering a 55-minute poetry lesson to a class of 14 students studying English at Advanced Level and who were about to sit for their examination in less than six months' time. The teacher had 12 years' teaching experience and held a Master's degree in English Literature. I conducted classroom observation by means of an events checklist using interval recording. The purpose of the interview was to explore the teacher's beliefs and practices in relation to poetry teaching.

Towards the end of the interview, stimulus material was used to allow the teacher to elaborate further on her experiences as a teacher of poetry. The stimulus consisted of the poem 'Introduction to Poetry' by Billy Collins (1988). When poetry is used in qualitative research it has the potential 'to communicate findings in multidimensional, penetrating, and more accessible ways' (Cahnmann, 2003, p. 35). I realised that by incorporating a question on a poem in the interview guide I could better understand 'the richness and complexity of the observed world' (Cahnmann, 2003, p. 34). I chose this poem partly because of what Collins (2003) says about poetry and school: 'all too often it is the place where poetry goes to die' (p. xvii). By means of Collins's (1988) poem I wanted the interviewee to provide me with more than her reading of the poem; I was mostly interested in what she thought it said about her teaching experience.

#### Daniel's interview extract

- D: the last thing that I'd like you to do is (.) could you read this poem and keeping in mind what we've been discussing tell me whether it describes your experience during a poetry lesson?
- F: ((reads poem)) oh well (.) I love the first part (.) the final two stanzas I don't know whether you'd agree with me but they seem to be referring to secondary school students rather than sixth formers (.) to be honest when I taught in secondary school I found that attitude (.) you know? miss what does it mean? A Level second year students don't always give you this response do they? I mean the curious ones don't want the teacher to give her own definition her own interpretation for them to write down (.) this is a feeling I definitely used to get when I taught poetry in secondary schools (.) miss tell us what it means so that we can put

it down (.) they don't look at the poem but they look at you and they want to memorise what you are saying so that they can go and write it in the exam

D: but why does this attitude suddenly change once they enter sixth form?

F: well I'm lucky I must say because my second year A Level students come to class with a certain curiosity and I think that curiosity is essential (.) I think you always have five to six students who are there to memorise what you're saying so that they can go and replicate it in the exam irrespective of whether it fits the question or not (.) I mean you always get them (.) I mean even at the end of the year you occasionally get students who give you back what you would have given them irrespective of whether it fits the context (.) the reason why it changes at sixth form is perhaps because at sixth form they are conscious that they are studying the subject because they want to (.) whereas even when I used to teach in what is perhaps the best girls' junior lyceum in Malta you had about 30% of the class who hated the fact that they had to study literature that (.) they were forced to do so (.) with A Level students if the teacher is sly enough to choose texts which interest the students which aren't very conformist (.) for example you noticed when you observed the lesson (.) I took those texts because you were coming because I wasn't planning on doing those texts but I said let me do them because I want to be a little interactive and I want to give them an opportunity to speak on their own (.) the number of students who objected to the Wordsworth text and said that it's so conformist and it's so mellifluous and silly which it is from a certain point of view (.) you know (.) they were put off (.) they wanted to resist the text (.) when I've chosen texts which have been a little less conformist I think that that tends to involve them a bit more

## Interviewer reflection on extract

I decided to use stimulus material as part of my semi-structured interview with this teacher because I wanted 'to generate less analytical and more imaginative responses' (Morgan, Fellows, & Guevara, 2008, p. 198). The stimulus material was meant to provide me with a form of unstructured response that distilled all that had taken place in the observed lesson and all that we had discussed in the interview. I chose Collins's poem in order to provide the teacher with a final opportunity to reflect on her experiences in relation to the topic of the interview, that is, the teaching of poetry.

The poem served as a means by which the teacher could think about her experiences and decide whether the situation described in Collins's poem was

similar to or different from her own. Thanks to the stimulus material she could contrast her present teaching situation with past contexts and explain to me why she considered them to be different. This allowed me to realise that the stimulus material served as a medium through which the teacher could identify with some experiences while distancing herself from others. The teacher was aware of differences in students' attitudes to poetry depending on the context in which they were being taught. This awareness on her part meant that her own pedagogy might have had to adjust itself to students' expectations of her and their approach to poetry. By piloting the stimulus material with this particular teacher I realised that in future interviews I would need to ask many other probing questions in order to plumb teachers' views about why they identify with or dissociate themselves from the situation described in the poem. This would enable me to use the instrument more effectively and thus develop an understanding of teachers' beliefs about poetry teaching and how these influence their practice.

Given that the interview took place soon after I had observed one of the teacher's lessons, the stimulus material helped her to keep in mind the events in that particular lesson, her behaviour and that of her students. The events checklist indicated that the most frequent event during the observed lesson was that of the teacher explaining something in relation to poetry. The teacher's explanations slackened in frequency only when the students were working in small groups. Group work was present for almost one third of the lesson. While discussing the stimulus material the teacher mentioned that these group work activities were purposefully devised for my visit and this made me aware of the possibility that what I had witnessed was an example of the Hawthorne effect. I realised that in future interviews I had to address this issue by questioning each observed teacher about the reasons for certain teaching decisions. This would enable me to ascertain whether these decisions were typical of their style of teaching or a result of reactivity.

Using stimulus material as part of the interview confirmed that the instrument would allow me to answer my research questions. However, in the process I was also able to reflect on my own shortcomings as an interviewer, especially in light of the fact that a lack of experience may lead one not to ask probing questions (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004, p. 394). Analysing the transcript made me fully embrace the notion that an interview 'allows for greater depth than is the case with other methods of data collection' (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 352). I learnt that this is even more so when stimulus material is built into the interview guide. However, the stimulus material also highlighted the possibility of reactivity during classroom observation and this problem was compounded by the fact that my very choice of stimulus material exemplified my own beliefs as a researcher. I was subsequently reassured by the idea that while 'we cannot eliminate researcher bias or the influence of researchers on participants and settings... we can openly acknowledge that bias in our interpretations and writing' (Casanave, 2010, p. 73). Using stimulus material as part of the interview facilitated the process of gathering rich data but also served to flag a number of areas that required further development in order for me to use this instrument in a more effective manner.

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