

Research, Relationships and Reflexivity: Two Case studies of Language and Identity

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In her book on four Mexican adolescents in Denver, Thorpe (2011, p. 3) writes “I have to say it was often a relief to step into their world. These girls served as an antidote to everything else that was going on in my life [...] being with them kept me in touch with my origins”. Current trends in linguistics and anthropology point towards increased reflexivity with respect to researcher-participant dynamics, foregrounding the idea that the researcher-participant influence is often multidirectional and variable (Bucholtz, 2001; Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Talmy, 2011). In this chapter, we examine how the researcher influences the relationship between themselves and their participants, focusing on the subsequent co-production of data. We present two case studies that focus on language variation and identity. The first is a study of phonetic variation and identity in a British adolescent community. The second is a study of second dialect acquisition and identity among British women in the USA and North American women in the UK. We explore some of the issues surrounding researcher-participant dynamics in this reflexive turn in social science research, discuss two

case studies in terms of researcher-participant relationships, and finally touch on the broader implications of our analyses for research in applied linguistics.

Reflexivity and Researcher-participant Dynamics

It has long been acknowledged that carrying out participant observations involves a fundamental tension in the sense that “participation requires emotional involvement; observation requires detachment” (Paul, 1953, p. 441). While a more positivistic orientation was particularly prevalent in the early anthropological research (e.g. Malinowski, 1922), since the 1960s and 1970s there has been an increasingly reflective approach to participant observation in the social sciences, where the notion of what participant observation means has been problematized (Giddens, 1974; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In many cases, this involves the researcher foregrounding their own involvement in the context under study, which Tedlock (1991) conceptualizes as a transformational shift from a detached “participant observation” to a more reflexive “observation of participation”. This brings with it a heightened sense of *reflexivity*, which Davies (2008, p. 4) defines as “a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference.” To this end, researchers have increasingly sought to provide detailed narrative accounts of their highly personalized interactions with a particular ethnographic context (e.g. Mendoza-Denton, 2008). In turn, this work has problematized the distinction between participation and observation and has highlighted the importance of making the researcher’s biases, experiences and interests an explicitly stated part of the study (Erickson, 1973).

We are interested in the synthesis of qualitative and quantitative methods and how the reflexivity that characterizes much qualitative research can inform quantitative analysis. Generally speaking, quantitative research aims to be cumulative in nature and seeks to produce research findings that ought to be replicable and generalizable. Highly

contextualized and personally situated qualitative accounts often lack ‘generalizability’ in this sense. However, some argue that intrinsic lack of generalizability is an important part of a socially-sensitive approach to language study – shifting the focus towards exploring what *can* happen, rather than what *typically* happens (Coupland, 2007, p. 28). The contemporary social world is regarded to be some to exist in a state of ‘superdiversity’, which has involved the ‘diversification of diversity’ itself (Vertovec, 2007, p. 1025). In such rapidly changing contexts, what ‘typically’ happens is unlikely to remain static. This is not to say that macro-social processes are to be ignored; indeed, researchers have persuasively argued for a comprehensive account of the workings of ideology in the mechanics of daily social and linguistic practices (e.g. Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Rampton, 2006). However, there is also Walford’s (2007) view that in order to fully understand the dynamics and processes that characterize a particular social matrix, we need to attend to what makes a context unique and non-comparable in this sort of research.

While it has long been acknowledged that as researchers, our involvement changes the object of study (Labov 1972), it is also likely that a range of research practices impact the co-production of data. One example is the concept of anonymity for human subjects. Maintaining participant anonymity is a basic requirement of both official and procedural ethics and it usually aims to facilitate a balance between protecting subjects and a commitment to producing accurate knowledge (Kubanyiova, 2008; Mackey & Gass, 2012). However, some have argued that anonymity only really protects researchers, allowing them to be more liberal with their descriptions than if participants were explicitly named (Devereux, 1967; Nespors, 2000). Revisiting her classic ethnographic study of rural life in Ireland, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2000) reflects on how the stories that she did *not* tell impacted upon her representation of the community under study. She suggests that

“[s]acrificing anonymity means we may have to write less poignant, more circumspect ethnographies”, but that “our version of the Hippocratic oath – to do no harm, in so far as possible, to our informants – would seem to demand this” (Hughes 2000, p. 128). To this end, when anonymity is abandoned in ethnographic writing, researchers must have much stronger evidence in making claims about their fieldwork sites (Walford, 2002). Of course, in practice, abandoning anonymity is unlikely to be straightforward and depending on the context, not desirable either. Accordingly, we do not dispense with the usual standards regarding anonymity in the research reported here. However, we raise the issue of anonymity in order to foreground both the extent of the reflexive turn in qualitative research, as well as the perspective that anonymity is an active research decision that also impacts the production of data.

In this chapter, we discuss our own quantitative-qualitative research in relation to some of these issues introduced above. We consider the ways in which our involvement with our research participants affected the co-production of data and how our own personal histories also affected various aspects of the research, including study design, sampling and analysis. As part of the research, we became aware of how our own identities shape what we notice as researchers, and likely also what we don't, as well as shaping how others relate to us, and how we shape what others say and/or do. We also look at how knowledge is constructed in our data, in particular, in relation to the social context, along with what constitutes ‘valued knowledge’ in our settings.

Case Study I: Phonetic Variation and Identity

Background

The first case study we report on is Sam Kirkham's sociophonetic ethnography of a multiethnic secondary school in Sheffield, a city located in the north of England (Kirkham

2011, 2013). As our focus in this chapter is our own narrative experiences as researchers, we use first-person pronouns in these case study sections in order to appropriately situate our individual narratives. Accordingly, the rest of this section is narrated from Sam's perspective.

I originally decided to carry out an ethnographic study in order to better understand the social context in which adolescents use phonetic variation. In particular, I was interested in language and ethnicity in minority and multiethnic communities (Rampton 1995; Schilling-Estes 2004; Eckert 2008) and so decided to carry out a sociolinguistic ethnography in a school, with a focus on social practice and linguistic variation (see Eckert, 2000; Rampton, 2006; Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Lawson, 2011 for similar approaches). In earlier work at the school I examined quantitative differences between ethnic groups in the school via an experimental study (Kirkham, 2011), but doing ethnography represented an attempt to broaden my perspective on these sociolinguistic dynamics and explore new patterns. In this chapter and elsewhere I use the pseudonym 'Ashton Valley School' for the school in my study. Ashton Valley is located in an affluent suburb of Sheffield, but admits students from across the city, resulting in a school with a relatively diverse 'social mix'. Indeed, this social mix is celebrated by the school and often used as a 'selling point' to prospective students and parents (see Hollingworth & Mansaray, 2012). However, it is worth briefly unpacking the extent of this social mix. While ethnic diversity is much higher in the school than in the surrounding neighbourhood (33.6% ethnic minority population in the school vs. 11.1% in the local neighbourhood), the school is notably less diverse in terms of social class. The school is below average for the proportion of students receiving free school meals (a common indicator of socioeconomic deprivation in British education) compared to both city and national averages. It is also the case that the majority of the adolescents from ethnic minority backgrounds disproportionately make up those from socioeconomically deprived

neighbourhoods (based on a UK government static called ‘Index of Multiple Deprivation’, which captures thirty-eight socioeconomic indicators across seven distinct ‘domains’ of deprivation; see Kirkham 2013, pp. 103–104). This creates multiple intersections of potential social differentiation in the school, which interact with social practices in various ways.

In order to track the social dynamics of adolescent peer groups within the school, I focused on a number of *communities of practice* (CofPs). A community of practice is “an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992, p.464). CofPs represent the social grouping that individuals construct for themselves and, as such, can only be identified through ethnography (Moore, 2011). The utility of CofPs is that they capture the point at which social categories intersect with social practice and, as a consequence of this, previous sociolinguistic ethnographies suggests that CofP membership is often a stronger predictor of linguistic variation than demographic categories (Eckert, 2000; Moore, 2004; Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Lawson, 2011; Kirkham & Moore, 2013). I identified four female and two male CofPs in the school. In each case, I group them into ‘pro-school’ and ‘anti-school’ groups. This reflects each group’s orientation towards the school as an institution, such as whether or not they uphold the institutional ethos of the school, respect the authority of teachers, participate in extra-curricular activities, and so on. Previous research suggests that school orientation is a salient social division in urban schools (Willis, 1977; Eckert, 1989) and these categories are also often found to correlate with patterns of linguistic variation amongst adolescents (Eckert, 2000; Moore, 2004). The different CofPs are briefly outlined below.

The Ashton girls are a pro-school group of middle-class girls from a socioeconomically advantaged neighbourhood in Sheffield, who pride themselves on an individualistic ‘nerdy’ yet ‘cool’ style. The Ashton girls are named after the area in which the

girls lived, which is also the area in which the school is located. They never referred to themselves in this way (they felt that they were ‘normal’ and everybody else was ‘weird’), but almost every other student in the school identified this group of girls as such, hence the name. The Twilight girls are a pro-school group of Pakistani and Somali girls who all identify as Muslim and named themselves after their love of the popular teen fiction Twilight novels. They are a much more socially reserved group and generally hang around in the library and inside the school during break times. The Parkdale girls are an anti-school group of White and White & Black Caribbean girls who strongly reject the school’s institutional authority and are often abusive towards teachers and other students. The Rebellious girls are also an anti-school group, but they are more ethnically and socioeconomically mixed than the Parkdale girls. They are also distinguished from the Parkdale girls mainly through their relationship with the institution of the school, as well as in the nature of their transgressive social practices. Instead of rejecting school outright, they instead draw upon discourses of reciprocal ‘respect’, evoking discourses of ‘the street’ (see Anderson, 1990) and argue that they would participate in school culture if only it was reconfigured in a way that better suited them. The Rebellious girls are also much less likely than the Parkdale girls to engage in highly prohibited activities, such as smoking, underage drinking, and socializing with older boys (see Kirkham, 2013, pp. 47–93 for a much more detailed outline).

Amongst the boys, I was only able to identify two CofPs: the Ashton boys are a pro-school, middle-class and exclusively White CofP, and the Rebellious boys are an anti-school, ethnically mixed and urban-oriented CofP. The boys were much less likely to name themselves than the girls, which may be indicative of their much larger friendship groups. The names used here are intended to be broadly reflective of the respective girls’ styles, despite not being completely equivalent due to the ways in which gender intersects with

social practice (see Kirkham, 2013, pp. 47–93). While the girls formed tight-knit and sharply differentiated CofPs, the boys clustered into two large networks that very rarely experienced much contact with each other. In the following sections, I narrate some of my own interactions and experiences with these different groups of adolescents and analyse the ways in which these relationships impacted upon the co-production of data.

Adult-adolescent relationships in ethnographic research

Ethnography with adolescents attempts to ‘get beyond the adult perspective’ and understand adolescents on their own terms (Eckert, 1997, p. 53; see also Kirkham & Moore, 2013). However, in the school context, adolescents only tend to experience very hierarchical relationships with adults, which can impact upon how an adult researcher may be expected to behave in the school. Eckert (1997) explains that

as long as the fieldworker functions as an adult in the school, he or she is expected – by teachers and students alike – to embody adult norms. Functioning as an anomalous character, with the adult privilege of mobility but the adolescent privilege of lack of responsibility for the behavior and safety of others, requires special arrangements with both groups (p. 60).

This was a conflict that I experienced from the start of my fieldwork. Complete alignment with the students would risk completely alienating teachers and potentially cutting short my fieldwork. Do you align fully with the students and risk isolating yourself from the teachers and being barred from their lessons or, worse, the school? Or do you align with the teacher and lose the trust of students with consequent effects for your data? This conflict is arguably intensified when working in a diverse contact situation, such as Ashton Valley School, as the researcher is likely to have very different relationships with different CofPs. I feel as though most of the time I got the balance more or less right (I was only banned from one teacher’s

lessons, for example), but the following examples illustrate some of the boundaries and dynamics that characterize this tension.

An example of an in-between position from the early stages of my fieldwork is presented below, in the form of an extract from my fieldnotes. In this episode, Aqil, one of the Rebellious boys tests my authority during a Religious Education lesson.

Aqil begins to ask me a series of rather uncomfortable questions, including “are you gay?”, “have you ever used a condom?” and one that I can’t remember about my knowledge of particular genital diseases (I didn’t know them). This made me quite uncomfortable; I wasn’t really sure how to respond to these! I interpreted this as some kind of test of my authority and was stuck between how to avoid answering his questions and not coming across like a teacher. In the end I settled with “I’m not telling you” as a response, which had the effect of not giving an answer, but not reprimanding him either.

Had the above conversation occurred in the absence of a teacher, then I may have had more flexibility with my response, but at this point I was already coming under pressure from some teachers not to ‘encourage’ the students’ disruptive behavior, as my presence had allegedly correlated with greater levels of disruption in some lessons. Interestingly, this sort of interaction with Aqil continued over the entire fifteen months at the school and became a sort of ritualized interaction in which we would frequently engage.

The above example is given as a simple demonstration of some of the conflicts in ethnographic practice. However, what I wish to explore further is the idea that a single in-between position is unlikely to suffice in the context of a highly diverse school. Different groups display different orientations towards adults – some students were very respectful and only spoke when spoken to; some expected a relationship based on ‘earned respect’ rather

than pre-determined hierarchies; while others were highly suspicious of adults altogether. Getting some students to fully accept me would have required me to engage in fairly serious transgressions. For example, the Rebellious boys were a community of practice that oriented towards the 'street' and urban 'gangster' masculinity. They rejected the authority and ethos of the school in favor of discourses of street life. Ideologically, schools provide the primary context for adolescents' socialisation with their peers, but these boys had much broader peer networks that extended beyond the school. Thus, it was sometimes more difficult to form meaningful relationships with some of the boys due to their strong distrust of adult figures and, in some cases, gaining their trust would have involved me participating in illegal activities, which I wasn't prepared to do due to the ethical and legal issues involved. This is an example of how there are limits to which you can 'break the rules' – in the end, I decided that I had to make a compromise between carrying out a detailed study of all adolescent groups and not breaking the law, but it meant that I wasn't able to obtain the sorts of rich data on the boys that I was able to with the girls. Ethnography may be about leveling hierarchies, but how far do we – or indeed, can we – go?

A different sort of in-betweenness characterized my interactions with very affluent White British students, such as the Ashton boys and girls. Instead of regarding me as a suspicious figure, I was usually positioned as 'in-between' an adult and a teacher and potentially somebody whom they could use to access unofficial information about higher education. Indeed, some of the Ashton boys were children of academics who had been told that taking part in university research projects was a very good thing to do! On the other hand, the Rebellious boys had experienced almost no contact with anybody from university at this stage and they seemed suspicious that anybody from an official institutional would show an interest in them. I provide a brief example of this below, which is taken from an interview

with a Somali boy called Mohammed who was a member of the Rebellious boys. At this point, I had actually known Mohammed for around a year. However, I had taken a strong methodological decision not to carry out any audio recordings until twelve months into my ethnography and, as such, most of my examples of explicitly negotiating boundaries and relationships were not audio recorded. However, the following example illustrates how Mohammed utilizes the concept of trust and my status as an adult outsider in order to do certain kinds of identity work.

- 1 **Mohammed:** why you want interview so many Muslim boys?
 2 it's like everyone you spoken to today is Muslim innit?
 3 **Sam:** I'm really interested in talking to people from all
 4 different backgrounds across the school.
 5 **Mohammed:** right.
 6 **Sam:** so I don't just want to interview people from Ashton,
 7 we want to find out what everyone thinks.
 8 **Mohammed:** but who's going to listen to this?
 9 are you going to show it to teachers or the police or our
 10 parents?=
 11 **Sam:** =no no no not at all,
 12 just me.
 13 (.)
 14 **Mohammed:** ok ok safe

As noted above, I actually knew Mohammed fairly well by the time of the above conversation and we had already spoken about my project. However, this sort of discourse

often occurred at the outset of my project with many students, so it worth commenting upon this phenomenon more generally. In this instance, and probably in many others too, the Rebellious boys appeared to use the idea that I might be an authority figure as a way to do identity work and strengthen their ‘tough’ and ‘street’ image. In this instance, Mohammed asks “are you going to show it to teachers or the police or our parents?”, which implies that he gets up to things that could get him into trouble, potentially even with the police. I knew firsthand from other conversations that Mohammed had never been in trouble with the police and that he was actually one of the less ‘rebellious’ of the Rebellious boys, but this represents one instance in which the boys used my presence and my project as a form of discursive positioning, representing themselves as engaged in potentially illicit activities.

Implications for the co-production of quantitative data

The tensions described above are by no means unusual in ethnographic research; in fact, they are highly characteristic of work with adolescents. However, they do have implications for the production of quantitative data. One of the analyses in Kirkham (2013) focuses on the realization of what is often called the ‘happyY’ vowel – the vowel that occurs at the end of words such as *happy*, *furry*, *silly*. This vowel varies extensively in Sheffield, ranging on a continuum from the ‘traditional’ [ɛ̃] realisation (similar to the vowel in *dress* in British English) to the contemporary supralocal [i] norm (similar to the vowel in *fleece* in British English). Notably, [ɛ̃] is typically associated with White working-class speakers and [i] with White middle-class speakers in Sheffield (Beal, 2004). The happyY vowel presents a nice case study for examining whether different CoffPs may maintain the working-class ‘local’ variant or use the middle-class ‘supralocal’ variant. Amongst the girls, the pro-school Ashton and Twilight girls both produce this vowel with higher F2-F1 formant values, suggesting something closer to [i], whereas the anti-school Parkdale and Rebellious girls

produce happY with lower F2-F1 values, suggesting something closer to [ɛ̃] (see Kirkham, 2015 for details of the results). While it might be tempting to interpret these results as indexing a middle-/working-class distinction, many of the CofPs are socioeconomically mixed, so there is no straightforward mapping. However, I suggested that this result may actually represent an ideological reinterpretation of the social meanings of happY, with associations such as ‘middle-class’ and ‘working-class’ being mapped onto more local categories that are relevant to the context of the school, such as ‘pro-school’ and ‘anti-school’. This is an example of what Irvine and Gal (2000) call *fractal recursivity* – a process by which oppositions at one level are projected onto oppositions at another level.

The results for the boys showed rather different patterns, with no significant differences between the Ashton and Rebellious boys in the statistical model. This could suggest that this vowel is only socially salient amongst the girls, given the much greater phonetic differences evidenced amongst their peer group. One conclusion that could easily be drawn from these results is that the happY vowel is used as an identity marker and distinguishes communities of practice amongst the girls, but not amongst the boys. However, this result is partly an outcome of how my interaction with the adolescents impacted upon what I could find out about them. My desire to not impose upon groups who didn’t take to me immediately meant that the working-class White boys, who were likely to be the most prolific users of the happY vowel, were not adequately sampled in this study. In addition to this, the fact that I was less able to probe the depth of the Rebellious boys networks means that there were probably more fine-grained divisions within the larger CofP, which might have shown strong links with particular types of variation if only I was able to investigate them. This is a fundamental issue in carrying out variationist ethnographic work, as it becomes strikingly apparent that the relationships we forge with different groups strongly

impacts our ability to understand the community under study and, as a consequence, the ways in which speakers use language for social ends. However, while my account of the boys' sociolinguistic practices is potentially less rich as a consequence of this, my closer relationship with the girls allowed me to uncover a rich tapestry of social differentiation within their peer group. In particular, the difference between the Parkdale girls and Rebellious girls was not obvious until after spending a few months at the school. The close patterning between these two CofPs and phonetic variation (see Kirkham, 2013) suggests that a more reflexive model of social practices may afford insights into systematic patterns of language use that would be inaccessible using a more 'etic' approach.

Case Study II: Second Dialect Acquisition

Background

This section is written from the perspective of Alison Mackey. In Seigel's (2010) field-shaping book, second dialect acquisition was defined as "a special type of second language acquisition – when the relationship between the L1 and L2 is close enough for them to be considered by their speakers to be varieties of the same language" (p.1). I will restrict the ambiguous terms of *language* and *dialect* so that *language* implies mutual intelligibility and *dialect* implies "a set of linguistic features distinguishable both qualitatively and quantitatively from other dialects of the same language" (following Hazen 2001, p. 86). This definition applies to British English and North American English, which are considered by both linguists and the general public to be varieties of the same language, English. Different types of dialects fall under the umbrella term of second dialect acquisition. For example, the term *national dialect* refers to dialects across countries, such as British, Australian and American English. *Regional dialect*, refers to dialects within a country, such as New York (North American) English versus Texas (North American) English. And *sociolect* refers to

dialectal differences which reflect social differences, such as the /r/-stratification discussed by Labov (1996).

As a British immigrant to the US, I have a long standing interest in how British women living in the United States and American women living in the U.K. construct their evolving identities. I arrived in 1994, and for almost fifteen years I was a member of a loosely constructed group of British Women in the greater DC area who met monthly at one another's houses for a cup of tea, and to discuss topics deemed to be of importance to British people in the U.S. These ranged from things like whether British Airways was having a fare sale, so that those of us who tried to go 'home' for the summers might benefit, to topics like where you could buy English treats like trifle sponges or back bacon, and other ingredients for British cooking. Although these practical matters were the topics of the meetings, and depending on how organized the host was they appeared on a formal agenda, the group also functioned as a support group, with those who had arrived recently being mentored by those who had been there for many years. A subset of the group also organized and hosted a formal Christmas party most years, as well as a few other social evenings to which spouses were invited. However, it was primarily a monthly get together of women. Most of the women were married to British men who, reflecting the Washington, D.C. location, had worked or were working for the U.K or U.S. governments in various capacities. A few of the British women were married to American men. Of the younger group members, it was more common for women themselves to have moved to the US for their own jobs and to have met their husbands in the US. For the older women, most had met their husbands while in the UK and had moved to the US "for" their husbands. These younger women tended to be more transient members of the group, often leaving the area or the country after a few years. The

core group had been in existence for at least 25 years, and many of the original founding members were still present. Sub-groups also existed.

My interest in identity began with two sisters who were members of the group. They had moved to the US at the same time. One story that I was told suggested they had arrived in the US on the QE2 although I was never able to confirm whether or not the sisters were pulling my leg with this story. At the time I joined the group, I qualified as one of the younger members. It was not clear to the group how long younger members would stay and there was a certain amount of joking about how “fresh” the recent arrivals were. Of these two sisters, each married their (American) husbands in the same year. They each had two children, of similar ages, and they lived within ten miles of each other, in a suburb of Washington, DC. They were approximately three years apart in age. I say approximately, because on the bio data form I gave them, at the same time as their consent form, they each wrote “not your business” under date of birth so I guessed their ages based on some things they told me about their college years (which partially overlapped). A few of the other women also declined to fill this DOB question out, and one of them told me I should have had age ranges that they could check, to place them in a decade. Working primarily with second language learners, usually college level adults, it had never before occurred to me that my participants would not want to disclose their ages. This was just one of the things I found interesting about this particular group.

Anyway, of the two sisters, one of them had retained every aspect of her cut-glass English accent, which as a linguist I judged was quite close to classic received pronunciation and which showed very little evidence of dialect shift. In order to ascertain this, I recorded and listened to myself chatting with her several times about different topics, and in different settings (a formal tea, an informal chat at the beginning of a drive, a charity auction). I asked

a North American speaking linguistics colleague trained in phonetics to listen and I asked two other British English speaking linguists to listen, and none of us could determine much more than the occasional use of a US lexical item. At the same time, her sister evidenced considerable shift. She consistently used post-vocalic /r/, and flapped realizations of /t/ in words such as *water*. She also used US lexis rather than UK lexis most of the time. Both sisters had clerical jobs, even though they both made it clear that they didn't need to work. One was a secretary, and the other was a bank teller. I found myself wondering how two people with two similar backgrounds, contexts and lives could end up sounding so different. They had been in the US for around 25 years at the beginning of my longitudinal case study. Ten years later, when I concluded that study, there had been little perceptible change.

Being initially experimental and quantitatively-oriented, I looked for differences in the linguistic or contextual environment that could help to explain why one sister's dialect was unmistakably British and the other sister was identified, even by linguists, as a native North American English speaker (one guessed Canadian). Over time, I realized that the salient difference between the two sisters involved their concepts of who they were, and what made them who they were – in other words, identity. There were many markers of this. As just one example of many, one sister had accepted her adopted country as her home and always referred to it as such, saying she was relieved to get back home after an extended trip to England, and to drive on a “regular-sized” road home after she arrived at the airport. The other sister, in the same conversation, bemoaned the fact that the roses in her Washington, DC garden would not bloom as well as the ones in her garden “at home” and that she longed for the weather that produced the blooms at home as opposed to the dreadful humidity of the East Coast. Although these patterns were frequent in my data, I had not designed my initial longitudinal case study to answer questions about identity, and I left the group when I moved

house. So I designed a new study based on the insights I had gained through the first group, with the goal of merging my interests and existing expertise in research into second language acquisition with these new interests in the acquisition of second dialects (or non-acquisition, as the case may be). One of my questions was whether targeted sociophonetic analysis of American vs. British English features would reveal a manifestation of any accent and identity shifting, especially as concerns like post-vocalic /r/ and intervocalic /t/ and /d/ (tapping) are very commonly discussed by Brits and Americans living in each other's countries.

Examination of changes like these might be revelatory of overlapping & shifting identities. I was particularly keen to know whether second dialect speakers intentionally use features of the second dialect and/or place more emphasis on their first dialects, and whether their use of or attention to dialectal features change according to the situation they found themselves in? I wanted to understand if the patterns were the same for British and American women, living in a country where they did not grow up speaking the native dialect.

Second dialects and identity

Second dialect acquisition is different from second language acquisition in that it can happen without the speaker intending it to happen. Speakers may begin to incorporate elements of a second dialect without being aware that they are doing so. It is also important to point out that there is mutual intelligibility between the first dialect and the second dialect, which is unlike the situation when people acquire a second language. Like second language acquisition, second dialect acquisition can also be mediated by social factors (Ellis, 2008), the presence of affective variables (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991) and individual differences (Dornyei & Skehan, 2003). Affective variables includes factors such as motivation and anxiety. Individual differences refers to attributes that make some individuals better language

learners than others. Examples of individual differences include creativity, anxiety, and motivation.

I take identity to broadly refer to ‘the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future’ (Norton, 2013, p. 4). In this study, as noted, I was interested in examining how dialect changes affect identity and vice versa. The women in my first study often talked about not being sure where they belonged any more. One of the saddest stories I heard was from a woman in her sixties who told me that now her husband had retired from his government job, she wanted nothing more than to go home to England and look after her aging parents and live close to her sisters and get to know their children. But she couldn’t, because her own children were in the US, and she was a new grandmother. She said she felt as though she would never be “a full person” in either country, because someone would always be missing. I realized that situation would also apply to me in the future. The recent research on transnationals began to feel very close to home to me. Applying this concept to language, Chambers (1992) mentions the idea of “double foreignness” when discussing second dialect acquisition. “Dialect acquirers...” he writes, “invariably discover when they revisit their old homes that their dialect is now perceived as ‘**foreign**’, yet their neighbors in their new homes also perceive their speech as ‘**nonnative**’” (p. 695). That is to say, they sound foreign and different in both their new and old homes. The question, then, is whether or not they also *feel* foreign. And this brings up important questions about how acceptance or rejection by both their new and old homes impacts the second dialect acquisition of people like this.

American women in the UK and British women in the U.S.

In my next study, then, I focused on semi-structured interview data from British women living in the U.S., in the same vein as the chats I had had with the group I was a member of so long. However, this time I also included in my research pool North American women living in the UK. I was interested in particular in the relationship between accent and prestige (Jones, 2001) in the two countries. As a Brit in America, I am often made aware that many Americans have a special affection for British accents. I had noticed in my previous data pool that this seems to cause some speakers to play up a type of accent with an associated higher degree of prestige. An example from a speaker with this type of awareness is shown below. Elyssa is a Brit who is living in the US and is talking about how people respond to her accent.

Elyssa:	You can talk your way. Yeah absolutely. It's the feeling of being superior. And I think- I know it sounds silly but- but that kind of scares me about going home. That I've got so used to it here- that walking into any situation I feel like I'm- like I'm already five points up.
Researcher:	Right. And you know that you'll like somehow win the situation. You know like, it's like you'll be the person who's right, like-
Elyssa:	I know that most of the time that I could save anything just by- by saying "Oh, I'm terribly sorry" or something...Like really pulling out the British cards.

The privilege situation seems to be reversed though, for the American women living in the U.K as Jane's comment suggests. Jane is from the Midwest, and has been living in the UK for three years:

Jane:	They act like they don't understand you when you say something like you miss mixer taps but they do know, it's their way of being superior. And I think- look, you're the stupid ones, you have these separate taps...
Researcher:	Yeah, that bothers so many Americans, and the Brits tell you, well just mix the water in the sink but the sink is dirty, right-
Jane:	It's so dirty, toothpaste in there or whatever, why, why, why? Even in modern houses.
Researcher:	And don't get me started on the useless heating
Jane:	Expensive and it doesn't even work.

When talking about identity, all of the British women were clear to say they thought of themselves as “not American”, and all the American women made sure to let the interviewer know they were “not British” Concomitantly, though, production data shows all of them use features of the second dialect, sometimes intentionally to gain advantages (as Elyssa makes clear above when she exaggerates how upper class she sounds in pronouncing the word “terribly”) and sometimes inadvertently. In the case of the British women, however, the participants all reported making an explicit effort to strive to maintain their native dialects in the U.S. and their comments indicated this was due to the social rewards of being a British English speaker in the U.S. On the other hand, the American women in the UK talked more about wanting to fit in to avoid perceived prejudice of various kinds. Both sets of women seem to have a sense of a relationship between their national identities and their dialects.

One thing that was very interesting, though, in relation to this dataset was how the interviewer impacted the data. I was the interviewer for the American women in the UK. The data suggest that despite the fact that my accent is comprised of features that would generally

mark me as a speaker of British English, I identified quite strongly in a cultural way with the Americans. When I was collecting those data, I was in the UK for 18 months after having been gone for 25 years, and after living in the US for the last two decades, and being a US-UK dual citizen, having an American husband and two (mostly) American children. The data showed me that I can, and was, playing it both ways with my identity. As many novelists have observed, there is nothing like being somewhere else for providing you with clarity about what you are (not). This shifting and uncertain identity of mine likely impacted the co-production of the data, as the Americans and I sympathized with each other over the inadequate heating of UK houses, and the obsessions with the weather and gardening (as shown in the excerpt above). I was not the interviewer for the British women in North American though; instead, my two collaborators: Kaitlyn Tagarelli (American) and Sheena Shah (British) collected these data. We are at work on a paper discussing this data set in depth. How each of us, and our accents, impacted the data is an interesting object of study. Sheena, as a fellow Brit, behaved like I did, which is to say, she acted like a participant herself, fully involved in the content, telling her own stories, and co-constructing the data. Kaitlyn, who, incidentally, is primarily a neurolinguist who uses fMRIs to measure brain activation, was much more hands-off. Her touch was light, and her influence was less obvious.

Initially, we were concerned about the ways that Sheena and I were present in the data. We felt that our participants went further with their stories of identity change, development and shift because they understood they were talking to someone who was experiencing the same thing. Over time, and with reading however, we realized that this was simply an outcome of the authentic reflexivity of the context, foregrounding the idea that researcher-participant relationships can be highly multidirectional and variable.

Discussion and Conclusions

Taken together, these two case studies combine to illustrate the nuanced and reflexive relationship between researchers, elicitation methods, and participants. We both express overlapping concerns about identity shifts between researcher and participant. Sam's research shows how differential relationships with the adolescents led to rich insights into social practices in some cases (the girls), but limited his interactions with other groups. This highlights the idea that applying the 'same' data collection and analysis method to different groups may be unrealistic because, under the surface, they elicit markedly different data, given the ways in which researchers and participants interact with and experience the fieldwork situation. Rather than seeing this as a barrier to producing an objective account of social and linguistic processes, we view it as an opportunity to reconceptualize the nature of research, framing the differential nature of data collection as qualitative data in itself. This reflects what King and Mackey (in press) have recently called for – a more layered approach to the understanding of data.

Alison's case study illustrates the highly personalized nature of how researcher identities and histories can also influence the trajectory of qualitative data collection. Her own beliefs and experiences surrounding living in the UK and USA motivated her study. However, this influence went far beyond initial motivation: the case study snippets reveal how the women positioned themselves in relation to Alison, but also how Alison's interactions, and Sheena's, foregrounded their own relationships with British and American culture and their own shifting identities. Again, one way to view this is as the collection of non-comparable data, due to the highly personalized interactions with the different participants. Indeed, one interpretation of Alison's choice to use other interviewers for the

British women in North America is that she was aiming to reduce her own influence on the data collection process. However, the analysis and reflections presented in her case study suggest that the dialectic between empiricism and reflexivity exposes a productive tension that highlights the richness of the social matrix in which these women operate.

As a concluding note, our narrative aims to be non-polemical. We take the position, again like King and Mackey (in press) that this perspective is only one way of understanding more about language and the social world, and that empirical studies that do not foreground such a relationship remain essential to developing models of language and society. At the same time, though, we have argued that foregrounding the interaction between researchers and participants can sometimes be important in providing additional insights into social and linguistic phenomena and, in doing so, transforming the researcher-participant relationship into a source of data, rather than as a source of potential bias.

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