Reflexivity and the production of shared meanings in language and sexuality research

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Abstract

This chapter explores and exemplifies reflexivity in the context of research on language and sexuality. The chapter focuses on empirical research which involves investigating discursive constructions of gender and sexuality identities in schools. The research project was conducted over a number of years and involved multiple data-sets – this chapter focuses solely on the element of the research which used interviews with LGBT+-identified young people as part of the broader project. Throughout the chapter, I explain how researcher reflexivity was implemented throughout the interview stage of the research process and offer suggestions as to how others may deploy a similar approach in applied linguistics research which investigates identity. More specifically, I reflect on how reflexivity became a research tool which facilitated relationship-building between researcher and participants with a particular focus on sexual orientation. A key issue which emerged during the research process was that the shared positioning of both the researcher and the participants as LGBT+ helped to produce particular kinds of knowledges about language, sexuality and schooling, many of which had been 'unspoken' prior to the research taking place. I exemplify this issue with examples from the interview data. Thus, as the researcher, it was important for me to reflexively examine my own sexual identity and how this shaped the phenomena under investigation. This chapter provides an analysis and critical discussion of such reflexive process.

1. Introduction

This chapter aims to explore and exemplify reflexivity in the context of research on language and sexuality. The chapter focuses on empirical interview-based research which involves investigating discursive constructions of gender and sexuality identities in schools. Previous work has shown how researchers engaging in work exploring language and sexuality often report it as being risky and feeling vulnerable (e.g. La Pastina, 2006; Nelson, 2006; Pakula, 2018; Sauntson, in press). A key dimension of risk relates to the perceived and experienced vulnerability of research participants who identify as LGBTQ+. However, less attention has been paid to those researching these populations, including those researchers who may also identify themselves as LGBTQ+. As a lesbian-identified woman researching LGBTQ+ populations, this has been the case in much of my own research. Therefore, issues explored throughout this chapter characterise reflexivity as a research tool which facilitates relationship-building between researcher and participants with a particular focus on sexual orientation in qualitative interviews. An issue which emerged during the research process was that the shared positioning of both the researcher and the participants as LGBT+ helped to produce particular kinds of meanings about language, sexuality and schooling, many of which had been 'unspoken' prior to the research taking place. Thus, as the researcher, it was important for me to reflexively examine my own sexual identity (and its disclosure during the research process) and how this shaped the phenomena under investigation. This chapter aims to provide an analysis and critical discussion of such reflexive process.

2. Theoretical background

Reflexivity has largely been accepted as a critical practice for many areas of social research (e.g. Adkins et al, 2011; Pillow, 2003). Definitions of 'reflexivity' in social sciences research abound and there is no singular definition that is shared across academic communities – as Roulston (2010, pp. 119) rightly observes "experienced researchers cannot agree on the nature and practices of reflexivity". However, in very broad terms, reflexivity seems to be understood as a kind of 'turning back' on itself which pays close attention to researcher subjectivity and ongoing self-awareness throughout the research process. As Macbeth explains:

> […] reflexivity is a deconstructive exercise for locating the intersections of author, other, text, and world, and for penetrating the representational exercise itself. (Macbeth, 2001, pp. 35)

In a similar way, Pillow (2003, pp. 176) defines reflexivity as "a focus on how does who I am, who I have been, who I think I am, and how I feel affect data collection and analysis". Bucholtz (2001) argues that these kinds of reflexive practices also need to be made explicit as part of the reflexive process itself. In other words, an element of the reflexive process involves the researcher explicitly articulating each aspect of reflexivity being engaged in as the research progresses.

Fook (2002) makes a useful distinction between reflectivity and reflexivity, arguing that the latter "refers more to a stance of being able to locate oneself in the picture, to appreciate how one's own self influences the research act" (pp. 65) and recognising how "we ourselves, as whole people, influence the situations and contexts in which we interact" (pp. 173), rather than simply reflecting on practice in the case of the former. Fook proposes however that the terms can be used interchangeably based on the assumption that reflective processes are underpinned by reflexive stances. Roulston (2010) describes reflexivity in terms of the researcher being 'mindful' of what they bring to the research project, including the 'identities' which shape and are shaped by the research. This chapter will explore what happens when sexual identities are explicitly and self-consciously emerge and mesh with the researched phenomena.

Within the subject-specific field of applied linguistics, Blommaert (2005) discusses how the researcher's own cultural and interpretive capacities are crucial in making sense of the complex intricacies of situated everyday activity among the people being studied. He asserts that it is important for researchers to be explicit about how they are interpreting the linguistic data, what factors they think may be informing their interpretations, and how their own socio-cultural identities may be influencing their analysis of data. Mann (2011) further observes that being reflexive involves the researcher making themselves more visible in their writing and throughout the research process. Moreover, Mann (2011; 2016) is critical of the fact that researchers often fail to consider the impact of their own identity in the analysis of interviews – this is a particular concern for language and sexuality research and one which I directly address throughout this chapter.

A final theoretical consideration relates to the work of Mauthner and Doucet (2003) and Riach (2009) who observe that reflexivity can be both embedded *in* the research moment but can also occur *after* the research moment has passed. Following Giddens (1991), Riach further argues that *change* is a key element of reflexivity – reflexive processes emerge from some sort of change because those processes involve *questioning*. Sometimes, it is difficult to engage in reflexive processes whilst the research is being conducted and often researchers need time and space to perform reflexivity. This sets a precedent for reflecting on research conducted in the past. In this chapter, I discuss reflexivity after the research moment has passed – by discussing research data that was collected, analysed and

subsequently published over the preceding decade. Details of the research data and context are explained in the next section.

3. The context of the study

In order to explore the dimensions and applications of reflexivity outlined above, I draw on empirical data collected from a study conducted between 2010-2016 (and subsequently published between 2012-2019) which utilised a range of methods of linguistic analysis to investigate aspects of the relationship between language, sexuality and education (Sauntson, 2013; 2016; 2018; 2019). The data for this study was obtained from secondary and high school contexts in the UK and US and comprised: semi-structured interviews with LGBTQ+-identifying young people; semi-structured interviews with educators; classroom observations and recordings; curriculum and teaching guidance documents. The data-sets were analysed using the linguistic methods and frameworks of: tactics of intersubjectivity (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004; 2005); appraisal (Martin, 2000; Martin and White, 2005); corpus linguistics; and critical discourse analysis. In this chapter, I focus on the role of researcher reflexivity in one specific area of the broader study – the interviews conducted with young people. In the original study, these data-sets were analysed using the tactics of intersubjectivity and appraisal frameworks. In this chapter, I shift the focus away from the actual research findings and more towards a methodological discussion of the role which researcher reflexivity played during the qualitative interview process. There is a particular focus on three related reflexive issues: reflexive discourse analysis of researcher contributions to the interview interaction; mutual disclosure and the shared LGBT+ identities of the researcher and participants; and 'real-time reflexivity' concerning the presentation of data. After outlining the reflexive scope for the study in the next section, these three related reflexive issues frame the discussion in section 5.

4. Reflexive scope for this study

The reflexive scope for the study focuses primarily on issues concerning the lesbian-identified researcher managing interactions with LGBT+ research participants who explicitly talk about issues relating to their sexual and/or gender identity. In the interview data, the participants unsurprisingly disclose sensitive personal information, even when it is not explicitly asked for. A key reflexive question that drove all of the interview processes was whether or not I, as the researcher/interviewer, should disclose my own lesbian sexual orientation to participants prior to the interviews taking place. I ultimately made the decision to come out to participants in a group meeting before the interviews took place as it felt more honest, and therefore more ethical, to do so particularly when I was asking the participants to talk openly about their sexual orientation as it related to their school experiences. The decision to disclose my sexual orientation also aligned with my wish to show that I could empathise to some extent with the feelings and experiences of the participants with a view to establishing the 'rapport' that is considered so important in qualitative research interviews (Mann, 2016). However, I remained acutely aware that, although my sexual orientation disclosure created 'sameness' with these students, it was important that this did not occlude the many other lines of difference between myself and the participants (including age, ethnicity, race and social class). The next reflexive decision therefore involved managing the interpersonal relationship between myself as the interviewer and research participants throughout the interview process. At this point, it is helpful to draw on literature relating explicitly to reflexivity in sexuality research, not just in applied linguistics but in the social sciences more broadly.

Rooke (2009) uses the term 'queer reflexivity' in describing how her own lesbian identity influenced her perception of issues emerging from her own research and questioning whether the issues identified as important by the research were relevant to the participants. Relatedly, Nelson (2006) notes that research into language and sexuality is, in itself, a stigmatised area (in some contexts more than others) and therefore may particularly benefit from making use of self-reflexive accounts as part of a range of research methods. Nelson notes the importance of conducting research in this area "without fear of reprisals" (pp. 4), an issue which is not necessarily as salient in other areas of applied linguistics. Similar concerns are explored by Pakula (2018) who goes even further in proposing the idea of a 'taxonomy of risk' relating to the study of language and sexuality in educational settings and encourages researchers to be self-reflexive in asking whether the 'risk' is perceived or real, and in 'locating' the risk. Pakula proposes two stages in applying a reflexive 'taxonomy of risk' to a research project in language, sexuality and education. The first stage involves assessing whether the risk is perceived or real. For example, as researchers (especially those who identify as LGBTQ+), are we mapping our own fears onto the research process or is it a potential risk predicated on real-life social attitudes, political situations or the culture of the issue(s) under research? Linguistic and/or conceptual risks are the second locus of risk identified by Pakula. These risks relate to the use of particular words or concepts within a research project which may be perceived as taboo in the context under scrutiny. Pakula refers to his own work on analysing sexuality in English Language textbooks in Poland as an example of this locus of risk.

As a specific dimension of 'risk' and as a dimension of queer reflexivity, sexuality disclosure by researchers to research participants is, to date, a relatively under-explored issue in applied linguistics research methods literature or even in research methods more broadly. Although not explicitly focused on language, one discussion comes from La Pastina (2006) who adopts a self-reflexive stance to consider disclosure of his own queer identity in ethnographic research. He outlines the benefits of disclosing sexual identities in ethnographic fieldwork – it can help to build up trust and rapport with research participants – "being open about our sexual orientation becomes a tool for research" (La Pastina, 2006, pp. 727). However, in La Pastina's research, fear of repercussions following disclosure of his queer identity emerge as a key reflexive concern, particularly in contexts which are characterised by hostile attitudes towards sexual minority groups.

Even rarer is work that explicitly examines queer reflexivity in relation to language and sexuality research within applied linguistics. One study comes from Moita-Lopes and Falabella Fabricio (2018) who also use the term 'queer reflexivity' and consider reflexivity on the part of research participants who created a blog about sexual diversity as part of the project. Analysis in their research focused predominantly on how the participants themselves used the blog text type to engage in reflexive processes concerning their own and others' sexual identities. Ellwood (2006) considers sexuality and reflexivity in relation to language education research practices. Ellwood (2006) proposes that concept of 'ethical reflexivity' in sexuality and language education research, defined as a process which "values the notion of remaining open and vulnerable, as a researcher, to what is not, or cannot, be fully known or controlled" (pp.68). Ellwood goes on to reflect on a series of research interviews previously conducted, focusing on what she did not, or could not, know at the time. Furthermore, Ellwood draws on Foucault's notion of the 'confessional' to explore what Pillow (2003) had previously termed 'uncomfortable reflexivity'. According to Foucault, the act of coming out as LGBT is considered an act of confession in societies where homosexuality (and other sexual minorities) are constituted as secrecy. Thus, coming out can be an 'uncomfortable' reflexive act in the

context of the research interview, positioning the researcher themselves as vulnerable and in a position of 'confessor' as well as 'confidant'. These issues are discussed and exemplified through the data of this study in more detail in the second part of the next section.

The positioning of the interviewer as vulnerable and uncomfortable creates a mode of interviewing which signals to the participants that they, too, can be open about their vulnerabilities and discomfort regarding sexual identity – they can also 'confess'. This shared confession becomes a means of establishing rapport in the interview encounter (Walby, 2010). This notion of the interview as confessional is supported when participants in my own research report experiencing the interview as a kind of catharsis (Pillow, 2003) or talking therapy. However, Pillow (2003, pp. 177) is careful to note the importance of not simply reducing reflexivity itself to a confessional act on the part of the researcher but instead, "to situate practices of reflexivity as critical to exposing the difficult and often uncomfortable task of leaving what is unfamiliar, familiar". Furthermore, researchers such as Walby (2010) argue that sexual identities themselves are reflexively co-constructed, by both interviewer and participant, in interview encounters as interaction. Drawing on Riach (2009), Walby suggests that, in the context of research interviews about sexuality, the reflexivity of the participant is as important as the reflexivity of the researcher in shaping the meanings and identities which result from the encounter.

Walby (2010) also identifies sexuality as a risky or 'touchy' interview topic. In Walby's research on commercial same-sex relations between men, he reflects on instances when he, as the interviewer, was sexualized by participants. Walby's reflexive account highlights the importance of the researcher's/interviewer's body and speech acts during interviews as part of the reflexive process, as this can shape the collaborative meanings produced within the research encounter. The queer reflexive issues outlined in this section are further explored with reference to interview data from the study in the next section.

5. Reflexivity in this study

As explained earlier, the primary source of reflexivity considered in this chapter is interview interaction between researcher and participants. In this section, I discuss relevant literature on reflexivity specifically relating to research interviews with key issues exemplified and illustrated with examples from the interview data. This enables me to illustrate the reflexive processes I engaged in during and after the interview interactions. The three key reflexive issues introduced earlier which are developed in this section are: reflexive discourse analysis of the interview interaction; mutual disclosure; and real-time reflexivity. These issues are related and overlapping and the division of this section into sub-sections is simply to aid with the organisation of data extracts. I examine each issue in turn with examples from the data – the first sub-section is longer than the other two in order to allow for analysis of a number of interactional features.

Reflexive discourse analysis of researcher contributions to interview interaction

In applied linguistics, researchers such as Talmy (2010) promote a distinction between interview as research instrument and interview as social practice. In the latter, there is explicit recognition that the research interview itself is a form of social action which can be subjected to the same kinds of analyses as any other social encounter/interactional event. Talmy encourages those who deploy research interviews to 'problematise' interview data by being reflexive about their role as a participant in interviews, and how the ensuing interview data is analysed and represented.

It has been documented by numerous research methods scholars that interviews are interactional and are special kinds of conversations within a research context (e.g. Holstein & Gubrium, 2012). Furthermore, because of the interactive nature of research interviews, participants are viewed as collaborative co-creators of knowledge with interviewers – as Holstein and Gubrium (2012, pp. 4) observe "Participation in an interview involves meaning-making work". In this sense, interviews are 'active' processes of collaborative meaning-construction rather than what Holstein and Gubrium term a 'search and discovery mission'. Interviews are seen as products of interpretive practice or what Pillow (2003) terms doing research 'with' rather than doing research 'on'.

In applied linguistics, research interviews conceptualised in this way have been termed 'discursive interviews' (e.g. Garton and Copland, 2010; Mann, 2011; 2016; Richards, 2011; Roulston, 2011; Talmy, 2010; Talmy and Richards, 2011; Wortham et al, 2011) defined as "a socially-situated 'speech event' […] in which interviewer(s) and interviewee(s) make meaning, co-construct knowledge, and participate in social practices" (Talmy and Richards, 2011, pp. 2). In discursive interviewing, the interactional aspects of interviews are seen as valuable data, as much as the propositional content of what is discussed. This is because, as Mann (2011) argues, in order to examine how meanings are co-constructed, it is necessary to pay attention to what the interviewer brings to the process as well as to the participants' contributions. In fact, Wortham et al (2011) argue that the interactional aspects of interviews can carry important information about the positioning and evaluations of the participants (and, I would add, by the interviewer). They maintain that interviews themselves are a part of 'social reality' and are social events in their own right. Talmy and Richards argue that greater reflexivity on the part of the research, particularly reflective engagement with moment-by-moment interview practices, is an integral element of discursive interviewing.

Using elements of conversation analysis, Richards (2011) illustrates how interactional features (such as conversational strategies of alignment and disaffliation) contribute to the collaborative production of meanings. Whilst Richards makes use of conversation analysis, Mann (2011) draws on discourse analysis to explore how discursive features such as positioning, footing and emotion talk can also be subjected to a more reflexive discursive analytical process when interviews are conceptualised as interactive objects/social encounters in their own right. A number of the conversation and discursive interactional features explored by Richards and Mann are also found in my own data. These features were used effectively as a way of establishing and building rapport between myself and the participant/s in each interview. But what differs in my data is that these strategies are used to collaboratively construct a shared sexual identity as part of a set of broader shared meanings. I discuss specific examples from the semi-structured interview data-set (with 20 LGBTQ-identified participants) below.

Whilst my previous analysis of the interview data (Sauntson, 2013; 2016; 2018; 2019) has focused on the propositional and discursive content of the participant contributions, and has taken an 'interview as research instrument' perspective, in this section, I consider the same data from an 'interview as social practice' perspective. In doing so, I reflexively analyse my own role in the interview and how interactions between myself and participants produced particular collaborative meanings relating to sexuality in the context of the social interaction. In the 'interview as social practice' approach, interviews themselves become the topics for investigation instead of merely a data source for 'mining' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) by the interviewer/researcher.

In all of the extracts presented, a first key conversational feature that occurs frequently (and is also typical of the wider data-set) is laughter (engaged in simultaneously by both interviewer and

participant/s). Laughter itself is produced as a shared socio-emotional response to the preceding utterance/s in the interaction. It is well documented that laughter does important social work in interaction and, in the case of the kind of shared laughter collaboratively produced in these interview extracts, indicates affiliation between participants. This, in turn, helps to build the rapport between the interaction participants. In the first example, the laughter occurs when myself and the participant (Abby) collaboratively engage in producing a critique of the English teacher being discussed at this point during the interview. Laughter is a collaborative way of dealing with a shared experience that is actually quite traumatic for the participant – in this case, the experience of having their sexual identity actively silenced by a teacher during a lesson. Additionally, we collaboratively construct the shared knowledge of the teacher in question being under-educated and the lessons subsequently being of poor quality.

Example 1

Abbyii: the teacher would be like, brush it off, oh, you're
reading a bit far into this, no this is what he said it's
about
Helen: he was put on trial for homosexuality of course that's
what it's about
[both laugh]
Abby: I know, and then I said like you know when you're
supposed to look into little bits of the text this could mean
this could show the relationship and then he'd be like Abby
you're just looking a bit too far I do English Literature
[both laugh]
Helen: no no no teachers just need to open their eyes
[both laugh]
Abby: I know it's really bad like you're teaching about this
author you have no idea what they're actually writing about
you need to get some education I learnt it
Helen: I mean because that's very obvious it's a really
obvious text by a really obvious author
Abby: you'd think
Helen: you'd think yes
[both laugh]

The sharing of negative experiences is also seen in Example 2. As in all of the extracts presented in this chapter, I use minimal responses to indicate both engagement and agreement with the propositional content of the participants' utterances. But in Example 2, I go further and offer an explicit judgement ('I think you have every reason to be [bitter]' – line 9) on the reported emotional response of the participant (Amy) to a situation in which the school did not respond appropriately to her reports of homophobic bullying and isolated her as a result of reporting the bullying incidents. My utterance positively endorses the reported feelings of Amy and, in doing so, I align myself with her– my utterance has the meaning of 'I offer my opinion that the negative feelings you experienced were justified and legitimate'.

Example 2

Amy: I just I've wondered since em now I've grown up just a
little bit that er maybe it would have been handled
differently if if it was say racist [Helen: yea] bullying or

4 or sexist bullying or something
5 Helen: yea yea that's interesting
6 Amy: would I have been isolated in the library [Helen: yea]
7 having my lessons there [Helen: yea] [both laugh] not that
8 I'm bitter [both laugh]
9 Helen: I think you have every reason to be [both laugh]

Example 3 contains another typical example where I offer a subjective emotional response to something the participant (Hannah) has said. In this case, rather than aligning with the reported emotions of the participant (as in Example 2), I express negative emotion in an unsolicited way. The discussion in this extract focuses on the silence around sexuality issues in Hannah's English lessons. Hannah reports how the poems of 'a gay poet' were used in an English class – I then ask whether the poet was Carol Ann Duffy and Hannah affirms that it was. This is an example of where shared knowledge (both show familiarity with the poet Carol Ann Duffy and knowledge of her lesbian sexuality) is co-constructed by the participants. My own expression of negative emotion ('really disappointing' – line 15) is produced in response to Hannah reporting that none of Duffy's poems that directly address her lesbian identity were included in the English lessons.

Example 3

1 Helen: right okay em and you didn't sort of come across any em
2 texts either books or poems or plays that that sort of had
3 either gay characters in them or that just raised issues
4 around homosexuality in particular
5 Hannah: I mean no I think the only time was there was a poem
6 written by em a gay poet once and the teacher just sort of
7 mentioned the fact that she was gay [Helen: right] and we were
8 like em we like we didn't have any kind of discussion about it
9 it was just a fact that kind of thing
10 Helen: okay right [both laugh] yea can you remember what was
11 it Carol Ann Duffy
12 Hannah: yea it was
13 Helen: yea [both laugh] yes her poems are on the curriculum
14 but not the ones that deal with [Hannah: yea] you know
15 sexuality which is really disappointing [both laugh]

Another instance of where I verbally produce an unsolicited emotional response occurs in Example 4 ('that used to make me really angry as well' – line 6). The utterance is produced in response to the participant (Jack) reporting that a senior teacher in his school asserted that there was no bullying at the school. I then align with the participant by sharing a similar experience relating to when I used to be a school teacher. There is a shared knowledge and (problematic) experience being co-constructed here – Jack was silenced by a senior teacher (i.e. told that they could not report bullying incidents) and so was I in my former employment as a teacher. My own reported emotional response of anger is offered in relation to my shared experience of being silenced in the school context in a similar way to Jack (line 4).

Example 4

1 Jack: one of the first things I was told when I went to the
2 school that I went to 'we don't have bullying here' that was
3 one of the first things they said to me
4 Helen: yea it was like that in the school I used to teach in

5 maybe it was the same school [both laugh]
6 but yea that used to make me angry as well because from day
7 one you can see that it happens
8 Jack: mmm
9 Helen: and I and I don't see how denying it is gonna help
10 anyone [Jack: mmm] surely it's better to be honest about it
11 Helen: yea yea

The co-construction of shared experiences, identities and meanings is also achieved through the sharing of 'in-jokes' at times during the interviews. Again, collaborative laughter does important social work in these instances in terms of aligning the interviewer's and participants' emotional responses. The in-jokes also function to relieve tension and discomfort at times during the interview when the participant is explicitly disclosing their feelings of vulnerability. In Example 5, Todd is talking about how anxious he felt about attending the LGBT+ youth group for the first time. He specifically mentions his own concerns about the 'stereotypes' he thought he might encounter in the group. At this point in the interview, it seemed to me that Todd was finding it difficult to articulate his thoughts and perhaps did not want to say something that might be considered offensive to LGBT+ individuals. In articulating what I thought Todd wanted to say for him ('camp gay men and butch lesbians'), this signalled to Todd that it was acceptable to express these views in the interview. Furthermore, it signalled to him that I was closely aligned enough to him to know what he wanted to say – and I could align with him because I shared his experience of identifying as a member of the LGBT+ community. This felt somewhat risky to me as I was relying on Todd 'getting the joke' – I could only get away with producing the utterance because it was understood that, as a member of the same LGBT+ community as Todd, I was able to adopt an ironic stance to actually be critical of such stereotyping.

Example 5

1 Todd: well cuz er I've been at [group name] for two years now
2 [Helen: yea] I it's Out Central's given me a lot of help
3 Helen: yea it seems like a really good group
4 Todd: it it is it's really helped me though cuz er I thought
5 it would be full of people I didn't know but I thought it
6 would be full of people who were like stereotypical
7 stereotypes of people
8 Helen: right yea camp gay men and butch lesbians [both laugh]

Another instance of the interviewer and participant sharing an 'in-joke' specific to our LGBT+ identities can be seen in Example 6. Here, John is discussing constructions of 'normality' in relation to sexuality in schools and drawing attention to the fact that 'normality' is a relative and socially constructed concept ('somebody could say that straight's not normal'). There is an implicit assumption of shared knowledge about the social unacceptability of directly saying 'straight isn't normal' and the 'joke' relies on this shared knowledge. But the utterance simultaneously acknowledges that being constructed as 'not normal' in terms of sexual identity is a painful experience – the utterance signals to John that I understand this and therefore am aligned with him in terms of his feelings as well as our shared sexual identity.

Example 6

1 John: it's not seen as normal though is it

2 Helen: no no I mean I don't know how how you do that that's
3 such a massive social issue
4 John: I know then somebody that's gay could say straight's not
5 normal
6 Helen: yea it would be nice to do that sometimes [both laugh]

The examples discussed above go some way to responding to Talmy's (2010) and Mann's (2011) calls for more analysis of interviewer contributions and a closer examination of their role in the production of data in applied linguistics research which utilises qualitative interview methods. Roulston (2011) adds to this that a closer and more reflexive analysis of interview interaction could help interviewers develop insights into how to moderate their interview practice in order to enhance the quality of the data. It is hoped that the interview extracts discussed above provided some illustration of that process.

So far, I have reflexively analysed some of my own discursive contributions to the interview encounter/interaction. However, this has not yet accounted for the role played by my mutual disclosure in the reflexive process – this is the focus of the next section.

Mutual disclosure

Holstein and Gubrium (2012) argue that, in order to facilitate the collaborative co-construction of knowledge, the interviewer must establish a climate for 'mutual disclosure' as a way of developing what is commonly referred to as 'rapport'. By this, they mean that the interviewer (as well as the participant/s) must be willing to share their own thoughts, experiences and feelings in order to assure the participants that they, too, can honestly and openly share their thoughts and feelings. This has particular relevance for interview-based investigations into language and sexuality. In my own research which focuses on the experience of LGBT+ individuals, it is particularly important for me to share my own identity as a lesbian i.e. as a member of the same kind of 'sexual minority' group. In doing so, I position myself as a 'cultural insider' (Woodin, 2016) with the aim of facilitating acceptance of my role on the part of the participants. Reflecting on this kind of personal sharing and disclosure practices on the part of the interviewer are, arguably, an important aspect of reflexive interviewing. As Mauther and Doucet assert, "Situating ourselves socially and emotionally in relation to participants is an important element of reflexivity" (2003, pp. 419). Rooke (2009) goes as far as to define ethnography as an 'affective process'. This is an aspect of the interview process that I also reflected on during the research project.

'Romantic interviewing' features in Roulston's (2010) theoretical conceptualisations of reflexive qualitative interviews. It is this type of reflexive interview which generates 'confessional' or 'self-revelation' data from the interaction between the interviewer and participant. Doing so depends on the establishment of rapport and empathic connection between interviewer and participant and requires the interviewer to play an 'active' role and to foreground the role of reflexivity. Roulston asserts that the data generated from romantic reflexive interviews provides in-depth knowledge and understanding about the beliefs, perceptions, experiences and opinions of the 'authentic self' of the interview subject – issues which are of central concern to those researching the language practices pertaining to sexual identities. Prior to the interviews in my research, I had disclosed my own sexual orientation in a group briefing session moderated by the youth workers. The following set of examples all contain instances of when I, as the interviewer, draw attention to my own sexual identity and, in doing so, attempt to show that I am able to empathise and relate the participants' feelings and experiences. The result is the generation of self-revelation data by the participants.

In Example 7, I use a reference to my 'wife' to re-affirm that I am in a same-sex relationship. I also use this reference to align myself with the experience of the participant at this point in the interview by explaining that I have been subjected to the same kind of 'familial silencing' in relation to my lesbian sexual identity.

Example 7

Amy: definitely yea so so the only em experiences you know
people have of homosexuality especially at a young age is
either they see it on the TV after 9 o'clock at night [Helen:
yea] when they're supposed to be in bed [Helen: yea] [both
laugh] or from their parents [Helen: yea] and er my father
always told me that it was you know it's not a good thing
[Helen: right] it's a mental health problem
Helen: oh dear [both laugh]
Amy: bless him he's he's nearly 70 so [Helen: right] he's from
a different era [both laugh] my partner's still 'my friend'
[both laugh]
Helen: yea that's how my dad refers to my wife [Amy: yea] you
know she's still 'my friend' [both laugh]

In Example 8, Todd is talking about coming out at school. In response to this, I explain that I do not share the experience of coming out at school and evaluate my own actions negatively by characterising them as 'not brave'. However, the same utterance simultaneously affirms my lesbian identity which aligns me with Todd in that we both share the experience of having a minoritized sexual identity. Furthermore, we collaboratively construct a meaning of schools being a problematic place for those who identify as a sexual minority.

Example 8

Todd: but cuz er I only told some of my friends I came out to
some of my friends [Helen: yea] and it was like next day or a
week later the whole school knew I was and I thought 'great'
Helen: right
Todd: I was like 'oh god this school'
Helen: yea [both laugh] it's brave to come out I was never
brave enough to come out in school so I'm always really you
know really impressed [Todd: yea] by anyone who does [Todd:
yea] I was just too scared

Real-time reflexivity

Early on in *Language, Sexuality and Education* (2018), I am explicit about making a decision to foreground the 'voices' of research participants. This involved making choices about what to include and how to present these 'voices' – so, inevitably, they are mediated through my own subjective interpretation and motivations. But below, I move to presenting extracts of data which were characterised as 'sticky moments' (Riach, 2009) – these are moments when participants produce meta-discursive utterances about the interview interaction itself and, in doing so, explicitly engage in reflexive processes (i.e. the utterances enable the participants to evaluate their own positioning in relation to the research topics being discussed during the interview). These utterances constitute what Riach terms 'real-time reflexivity'.

The sticky moments which occurred in my data appeared to mainly take the form of positive evaluations of the interview experience by the participants. This goes some way to addressing the

ethical dimensions of the research – participants themselves were explicit in stating that they found the interview process beneficial rather than harmful. This can be seen in Example 9 in which the participant (Tad) explicitly evaluates the interview in positive terms.

Example 9

Helen: that's really helpful thank you those are all the
questions that we had em but if there's anything else that you
wanna say that you think's relevant or if you've got any
questions that you want to ask us
Tad: no I think I think those are good questions and hopefully
it will be constructive for the future I really hope

Similarly, in Example 10, John evaluates the interview positively ('I'm really getting into this now'). A few utterances later, he produces another reflexive meta-discursive comment ('I forgot what the question is now once I've started talking'). These utterances are examples of John reflexively engaging in the interview process as it is happening. Moreover, the utterances all expressed positive emotion without exception, suggesting that the process of being involved in the interview interaction was a positive experience of value to him. These kinds of reflexive utterances, therefore, go some way to addressing some of the ethical dimensions of research involving interviews with LGBT+ youth in which they discuss experiences that may be painful and traumatic.

Example 10

John: I dunno I don't not really no because at the end of the
day schools at the minute don't really everything that they
say like these policies and crap like that sorry I'm getting
really into this now [Helen: it's okay it's good] [YW[iii]: we're
enjoying listening to you] [all laugh]
John: em I had to go into the class with the teacher I had to
have somebody with me in case somebody said someat to me and I
just gradually just got back into going to school [Helen: mmm]
I forgot what the question is now once I've started talking
Helen: me too it's all right just carry on [all laugh]
John: yea and
Helen: oh it was about the policy
John: oh yea yea

Other examples of real-time reflexivity (or 'sticky moments') occurred when the participants explicitly reflected on their own contributions to and engagement in the interview as it was happening. In Example 11, John questions the value of his contributions to the interview as he is producing them. As the interviewer, this prompted me to respond by explaining how and why his contributions were of value.

Example 11

John: am I just talking about crap that I'm not meant to be
talking about
Helen: no it's okay it's really interesting actually yea and
really important for you know people like yourselves to talk
about these things em as you know and for everybody to talk
about these things actually so it just becomes er more of an
open issue that doesn't have all this silence and and taboos

8 [John: mmm] around it any more really

In example 12, John again explicitly draws attention to the interview situation by questioning what it is permissible to say. Clearly John is reflecting on his contributions as they are happening in order for this questioning around legitimacy to take place.

Example 12

1 John: they'd still like the the one the one would always get
2 like a bit of grief but not not grief to her but I'm I'm just
3 trying to explain the situation and I don't know if I'm
4 allowed to
5 Helen: well yea

The examples of real-time reflexivity (or 'sticky moments') discussed above occurred often throughout the whole data-set and function to reflexively draw attention to the interview interaction itself, and how the interaction is being negotiated between participants as it happens. These examples also provide illustrations of points during the interviews when the participants themselves were explicitly reflexive. Without directly asking the participants, it is difficult to attribute these kinds of sticky moments to the fact that they are talking about a sensitive topic (sexual identity) which they may not be used to talking about openly with adults, or whether these moments are simply a result of the young participants being inexperienced at taking part in interviews. However, the reason for the sticky moments occurring is less important than they very fact that they emerge as part of the negotiation of what gets legitimately discussed in the context of these interviews focusing on sexual identity.

Conclusion

The extent to which it is possible to discuss the full range of my reflexive engagement in the research project is necessarily limited by the space constraints of this chapter. The extracts presented and discussed in this chapter are, in themselves, selective and are a result of a reflexive process by which I had to make decisions about which extracts would be most effective to illustrate the particular aspects of reflexivity I wished to highlight. And the analysis of those extracts is also selective and therefore limited. There are, therefore, a number of limits to reflexivity and this is another issue explored in the literature. Mauthner and Doucet (2003) argue that reflexivity is inevitably limited and, as such, they encourage researchers to be aware of "the limited extent of our reflexive processes and methods at the time of our research" (pp. 418). They invite researchers instead to think about 'degrees of reflexivity' with some dimensions being easier to identify and discuss at a given time than others.

Despite its unavoidable limits, it is arguably important to continue to recognise the value of reflexivity both within applied linguistics and across disciplines. Reflexivity requires time and space and this is an issue that could be addressed within universities through the use of peer mentoring in research and the creation of 'reflexive research spaces'. In my current institution, for example, there are weekly departmental 'research retreats' (sometimes on campus, sometimes in a different space off campus, and, during the pandemic, held virtually) which are marked out as 'undisturbed' time during which staff can legitimately be engaged in writing and other research activities. During the retreats, we often find ourselves talking about how we feel about the projects we are engaged in, the problems we are experiencing, how, we have had to adapt research, and so on. By definition, this means that the

space creates opportunities for reflexivity in relation to research. This could, therefore, be a practice that is more strategically adopted by other institutions.

More specifically in relation to language and sexuality research, I have found the university's LGBT+ staff network to be a supportive space (sometimes physical but more often virtual) in which it is possible to reflect on the experiences of being an LGBT+ researcher researching LGBT+ issues. Therefore, staff networks may play an important role in creating 'reflexive spaces' and for advising researchers engaged in projects involving different kinds of 'minoritized populations', not just sexual minorities. This is another strategy for facilitating reflexive research that could be adopted by institutions more broadly.

Even though this chapter has focused on 'queer reflexivity' in relation to language and sexuality research which uses interview methods, it may be possible for those working in other areas of applied linguistics to adopt similar reflexive approaches. In particular, it may be helpful for use within areas of applied linguistics which explore other dimensions of language and minoritised identities, such as race, ethnicity and gender.

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i Interactional features discussed are underlined in the extracts.

ii Interview participants are referred to with pseudonyms when requested.

iii A youth worker was present during John's interview.