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University of Bristol, UK

Frances  
GIAMPAPA

## The Politics of Researcher Identities: Opportunities and Challenges in Identities Research

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## Introduction

In applied linguistics there is a long tradition of varied routes of methodological inquiry that are grounded within particular epistemological (i.e. ways of knowing) and ontological (i.e. the nature of reality) questions. The paradigm from which a researcher works will impact on the research design, the manner in which data is gathered and analysed. It also affects the way in which a researcher sees his/her role in the field and their relationships in/out of the field.

From traditional quantitative/semi-experimental paradigms to qualitative ones, researchers have addressed issues of trustworthiness and rigour in research design in a variety of ways. What has also been part of these discussions, in varied degrees, is the role of the ‘objective’ researcher. In fact, in many quantitative pieces of research the role of the researcher is traditionally absent in discussions (or rather is limited with regards to impact on the research), whereas in qualitative research there tends to be greater discussion around the role of the researcher as insider/outsider and how the researcher ensures objectivity and neutrality. There is an abundance of research methods books and journals in applied linguistics that provide good introductory chapters to some of the issues relating to collecting and analysing data within the above mentioned research positions (see e.g. Paltridge and Phakiti 2010; Mackey and Gass 2012).

Research on language and identity has fallen within a number of methodological traditions. However, for well over a decade there has been the emergence of what Block (2003) has termed the ‘social turn’ in

applied linguistics. That is, the advancement of theoretical frameworks such as sociocultural theory, second language socialisation and learner identity to name a few. This has opened the door to new methodological forms of inquiry and analyses. What holds these theoretical approaches together is that language learning is seen as a social process and the contexts of learning become important sites of inquiry.

This chapter opens up the debates on the ways in which researchers as socially, politically and historically positioned selves are part of, and inextricably intertwined with the lives and everyday practices of their research participants. As a critical/linguistic/ethnographer, I am challenged to think ‘reflexively’ and to consider the ways in which my identities, positionalities, values, beliefs and biases come to bear on the research that I do. In the following section, I provide an overview of the shifts in language and identity research in relation to both theoretical and methodological issues. In particular, the rise in critical approaches to researching language and identity, which has spotlighted and problematised the role of the researcher and the researcher-researched relationship in language and identity studies. This is followed by an account of researcher identities and a critical reflection on the issues faced by researchers investigating language and identity drawn from my own experience.

### **Overview of the researcher in language and identity studies**

An important example of language and identity study with second language learners is Norton’s (2013, 2000) seminal research on migrant ESL women in Canada, which challenged the conceptualisation of

English language learners, their motivation and participation in ESL communities in their personal and professional lives. This research and others in the same vein have produced ethnographic cases that challenged the methodological traditions and tools within traditional applied linguistics research.

Norton's research re-drew the long trajectory of SLA research that conceptually based its understanding of concepts such as 'identity', 'learning' and 'motivation' within a psycholinguistic frame that up to the mid-nineties did very little to incorporate the 'social' within its analysis (i.e. social factors, and the collective process that impact language learning). As such, it offered a different way of talking about issues of identity at a time when larger social and political processes at play resulted in an unprecedented influx of large-scale migration and mobility in tandem with increased economic and cultural change.

As Norton reminds us, the question of 'Who am I?' is reframed within a politics of identity, and the struggle for recognition and representation within a globalising world. As such, the identity politics of the young immigrant women in Norton's research show not only the struggle for legitimacy and authority to be heard within and across various contexts, but also the ways in which they invested and repositioned themselves in resistance to the dominant discourses reproduced in Canadian society that labelled them as 'immigrants' and English language learners. Instead, their choices and investment in language and culture as well as the resistance to identity positions showed the way in which these participants' language practices and desires to re-imagine themselves would open up possibilities for the future, and access to symbolic capital (e.g. prestige, social networks) and material resources (e.g. employment and monetary gains).

From Norton's research, three important concepts in second language acquisition have been challenged and re-traced - *investment, identity and imagined communities* (Kramsch in Norton 2013). For Norton (2013: 50), the notion of investment 'conceives of the language learner as having a complex social history and multiple desires'. This stood as a direct challenge at that time to the fixed and static notion of motivation in SLA, which dominated SLA research for decades. Investment is strongly embedded within a Bourdieusian approach to the economics of linguistic practice (see Bourdieu 1991; Norton Peirce 1995), brought into frame the language learner's commitment and choice as well as his/her desire to learn. The benefits and return of this investment rests on the learner exercising his/her agency in order to be heard and claim legitimacy and authority as an English language speaker. This shifts the English language learner into the 'driver's seat' in challenging institutional and societal discourses of passiveness, disengagement and inability to speak with authority because s/he does not fit the 'native speaker' mould.

Norton's theorisation of identity moved applied linguistics researchers further along from traditional concepts of identity (singular) as a fixed, immutable characteristic of a language learner. Drawing from Weedon's (1997) theory of subjectivity (identity), Norton's research brought into frame issues of power and the multiple identities that social agents perform discursively to access social networks and in turn material and symbolic resources. As Norton (2010: 350) notes, 'Every time we speak, we are negotiating and renegotiating our sense of self in relation to the larger social world, and reorganizing that relationship across time and space'.

This brings me to the concept of ‘imagined communities’. Coined by Anderson (1983: 49) in his discussion about the construct of ‘the nation’ he states:

I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community... It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.

In Norton’s research and her work with other scholars (e.g. Kanno and Norton 2003), imagined communities take on a powerful conceptual role signalling that as social agents the possible communicative realities and social affiliations are beyond the current conditions of people’s lives. Identities are also linked to the desire and aspiration of language learners to be part of communities in which their linguistic and cultural forms of capital are legitimised.

The influence of Norton’s original work in scoping the conceptual roadmap noted above and the theoretical shifts in the development of critical approaches in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics has also had an impact on the methodological positioning and tools for language and identity research. Researching language, identities and power in the field of critical applied linguistics and critical sociolinguistics has pushed forward in new directions and with it has come new ways of thinking about the methodologies and methods that we use<sup>1</sup>.

We have also seen the advancement of critical approaches in applied linguistics (and sociolinguistics) that has opened up further both theoretical and methodological routes into researching language and identity, such as the use of a range of qualitative and ethnographically oriented methods that include, for example, the use of diaries, interviews and participant observation for data collection and the use of discourse analysis). What is meant by ‘critical’ in the field relates to critical theories underpinned in the traditions of Marx, The Frankfurt School, Gramsci, Freire, Bernstein, Bourdieu and many others. The strength of ‘critical’ approaches also comes from the plurality of synergies that results from linking critical theories together with other areas such as postcolonial and cultural studies, post-modernism and post-structuralist approaches to language research. Talmy (2010: 128) notes a number of key features of critical research stating that it signals:

... a conception of *society* as stratified and marked by inequality, with differential structural access to material and symbolic resources, power, opportunity, mobility and education.

Accordingly society is characterized by asymmetries in *power* arrangements ...there is a reciprocal, mutually constitutive relationship between social structures and human *agency*. That is, social structures shape or mediate social practices, but do not determine them (Giddens 1979; also see Ahearn 2001). This means that *social reproduction* (i.e. the reproduction of unjust social relations) is never ‘guaranteed’ since power is not uni-directional or top/down.

In addition to Talmy’s incisive explanation, it is important to keep in mind that concepts such as society, power, agency, and culture are socially and historically situated across space and time. Furthermore, critical research is action driven, that is, it aims to do more than merely describe conditions but aims to push for change and the dismantling of inequalities through emancipatory measures of critique and direct action by the very participants involved. Further development in the field has led to the critiquing

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of such positions, however, this is part of the ongoing dialogue within the critical applied linguistic field to search for more collaborative, inclusive and reflexive ways of doing research.

As I have noted in previous writings (Giampapa 2011: 134), ‘research should be a process of democratisation ... where attention is focused on issues of power within the research process’. I connect this with Cameron *et al.*’s (1992) call for a move away from research ‘on’ or ‘for’ participants to research that is ‘with’ participants. I would go further in the advancement of research that is co-produced and community driven that sees participants as co-researchers and drivers of the research in tandem with the researchers themselves (e.g. in the field of education and the social sciences more broadly there is a shift towards co-produced research. This has also opened up discussions around voice and ethics of co-production. (See Banks 2012).

In framing critical research in this way, what is also questioned is the statement that research is ‘value-free’ (Lather 1986). As Lather (1986: 64) argues ‘scientific “neutrality” and “objectivity” serve to mystify the inherently ideological nature of research’. She offers alternative forms of validity as part of the development of data credibility checks that are necessary to ‘protect our research and theory construction from our enthusiasms’ as part of ‘our efforts to create a self-reflexive human science’ (1986: 67). Such concerns are not simply for those researchers who are bound to critical methodological approaches or working from critical theories to investigate language, power and identity. SLA researchers such as Ortega (2005: 433) also remind us that ‘an ethical lens on ... research would make us view research as always value-laden’, regardless of which methodological paradigm one

favours. She raises a number of questions that push researchers to think about the social responsibility and the impact of their research (even within quantitative paradigms).

This certainly puts into frame the researcher not as an invisible and ideological neutral being but rather as part of the research narrative in terms of what stories get told and how they are interpreted and told. However, an expanded notion of the researcher as social being with multiple identities that impact on the process and analysis of research is taken up in the work of critical sociolinguistics (see Cameron *et al.* 1992; Copland *et al.* 2014).

The development of critical sociolinguistic approaches has also drawn from similar sets of theoretical frameworks as critical applied linguistics. Martin-Jones and Gardner (2012) highlight that by the end of the 1980s to this day, influences and developments in critical theory, post-structuralism and post modernism have had long-lasting effects on the development of a particular movement in sociolinguistic research. From this, a critical sociolinguistic approach was born laying the foundations for a trajectory of research that brought together ethnographic and discourse analytic frameworks to investigate linguistic ideologies, identities, and linguistic practices through discourse across time and space (Norton Peirce 1995; Giampapa 2004a, 2004b; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004; Block 2007).

This has also led researchers in the pursuit of qualitative methodologies and methods that offer new ways of capturing social and linguistic processes of everyday life, for example, ethnography of communication (Gumperz and Hymes 1972; Hymes 2003; Duff and Uchida 1997; Watson-Gegeo 1997;

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Duff 2002), critical ethnography (Canagarajah 1993; May 1997; Ibrahim 1999; Giampapa 2004a; Talmy 2012), linguistic ethnography (Rampton *et al.* 2004; Creese 2008; Maybin and Tusting 2011) to name a few. Many of these approaches draw from the traditions of linguistic and cultural anthropology, interactional sociolinguistics, language and literacies studies and cultural studies.

Within such methodological approaches the researcher's role and the reflexive<sup>ii</sup> stance of the researcher are a key consideration within the research process. Discussions around the role of the researcher as insider/outsider have often been discussed in relationship to the research participants and the ethics of maintaining the role of the 'objective' researcher who will reflect on the researcher-researched relationship (see Hultgren, Erling and Chowdhury this volume). However, reflection does not generally involve problematising the researcher-researched relationship reflexively. Being critically reflexive is part of a much broader debate around methodological rigour, and knowledge production. In her discussion about quality in critical ethnography, Lather (1986: 65) describes this pursuit of guaranteeing trustworthiness in data as being 'between a rock and a soft place'; on the one hand the unquestioned pursuit of trustworthiness in research by alternative paradigms and the other being the imposition of positivist claims for objectivity and neutrality. Alongside the reconceptualisation and introduction of data checks such as triangulation and reflexivity (i.e. the capacity to become the 'other' and 'turn back on oneself' (Aull Davies, 2010: 4), Lather (1986) proposes *catalytic validity* as a way of understanding the degree to which the research puts in motion conscious-raising and what might be in Freirian terms 'conscientization', that is developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action (Freire 2000). Researchers continue to push forward these agendas as well as the re-definition of the researcher in the research process, as can be seen within critical sociolinguistics and, in particular linguistic ethnography (Creese 2008).

Two decades of social, political, economic and technological change as a result of globalisation has led to shifts in migration flows that have been described as ‘super-diversity’ (Vertovec 2007). That is a description of contemporary migration that is far more transitory and multiple in movement, as well as far more diversified in terms of migrants’ social markers (e.g. nationality, ethnicity, linguistic, religious and so forth) and multiple objectives for migration. This has also led to a shift from seeing language as a structured form of communication to a view of language as sets of linguistic resources that agents carry with them and use creatively and, in combination with other modes, to make meaning as part of everyday life. This has led a number of researchers to investigate these new and complex multilingual realities, social orders and communicative processes across transnational discursive spaces and scales (Blommaert and Rampton 2011; Duchêne and Heller 2012; Creese and Blackledge 2012).

This new linguistic landscape offers both opportunities and challenges to researchers in the documenting, analysing and representation of multiple voices across multiple discursive terrains. These multiple voices are not only those of participants (as co-researchers, collaborators and so forth) but also intertwined are the voices of the researchers themselves walking alongside participants and engaging in complex, multi-layered and mutable relationships of power, positioning (self/other), representation and identities (Creese, Bhatt and Martin 2009; Giampapa 2011; Giampapa and Lamoureux 2011).

The extensive body of research from the Mosaic Centre for Research on Multilingualism at the University of Birmingham (see e.g. Blackledge and Creese 2010; Blackledge *et al.* 2013; Creese 2008;

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Creese *et al.* 2009) have made a considerable contribution to our understanding of multilingualism in contemporary Britain, especially the linguistic and cultural practices of ethnic minority youth in complementary schools. The legacy of Blackledge's and Creese's research as part of the Mosaic Centre (which also includes the work of Marilyn-Martin Jones, Sheena Gardner and Deidre Martin) has contributed to an expanded understanding of the process and product of linguistic ethnography. Creese and Blackledge have shed light on ethnographic team work, raising pertinent questions about the role of multilingual researcher identities within the research, as well as the representation of data, voice and meaning making in doing research. In laying bare the process of conducting ethnographic research in multilingual teams, Creese, Bhatt and Martin (2009: 215) aimed to not only demystify the process of conducting research across multilingual educational settings but also develop 'innovative forms of ethnographic team methodologies'. Thus in order to capture the multiple voices, languages and cultures represented across educational settings, researchers investigating language and identity need to grapple with the same types of issues and seek new ways of researching identities and language practices in contemporary life.

As Eisenhart (2001) reminds us, while ethnographers are responding to the changing conditions and experiences of contemporary life through conceptual adjustments and theoretical expansion, they are not moving forward as quickly with methodological shifts necessary to robustly investigate them.

Eisenhart argues for 'various reflexive practices as one way to respond methodologically to new theorising of social life' (in Creese, Bhatt and Martin 2009: 219).

Reconsidering the tools for research, Creese, Bhatt and Martin (2009) challenge us to think of the ways in which we are representing the diversity and multivocality of the communities we study. They highlight the importance for ‘multiple approaches that explicitly address how diversity shapes data collection, analysis and final written accounts’ (*ibid.*: 281). This also raises questions about how we think, write and teach ethnographic methods that would lead to addressing the new issues and aspects of linguistic and social practices, and events of late modernity. Through a process of researcher vignettes, the multilingual team in Creese, Bhatt and Martin’s research addressed questions about their relationships to participants and also how they negotiated their research identities within the team. What this highlighted was a number of interlocking themes related to the insider/outsider research roles and the importance of language and culture among the team members. In the first instance, what Creese, Bhatt and Martin (2009) show is the fuzziness of the insider/outsider dichotomy and how fluid and mutable these categories are with respect to the research participants and the team itself. That is, they show how researchers will ‘move in and out of insider and outsider’ (*ibid.*: 228) positions in order to perform particular identities in order to maintain distance or gain access into particular settings. The same insider/outsider performances are discussed in terms of the team itself. What this shows are the tensions of ‘ongoing identity work of researcher performance’ (*ibid.*: 229). The positioning of particular team members as linguistic and cultural experts as a constructed identity, also signals the importance of language (i.e. both English and the community languages) in building rapport and trust within the field.

In Creese and Blackledge (2012: 306), we are taken further into the workings of ethnographic teams and the process of ethnography by exploring ‘how teams of researchers negotiate and come to (dis)agreements in the process of making “meaning” out of “data”’. Creese and Blackledge offer a window into this process by audio-recording team discussions of data analyses. As Creese and

Blackledge indicate, this becomes more than simply negotiating, arguing and listening to different team perspectives. Rather it is about representation – a key component in ethnographic research. It is also about voice – the researcher’s voice in the construction of the stories from the research data. It is the multiple voices – researchers’, participants’, research team’s all coming together to make meaning out of data and out of experiences in the field. What is particularly pertinent here is that issues of interpretation and representation of data cut across all types of qualitative research, not just ethnographic research. This is what is important about the methodological work that Creese and Blackledge have explored, as it offers insights into all qualitative research into language and identity.

What has also become more pertinent is an understanding of the ways in which researchers themselves are implicated in the process of research. Part of this process is the reporting of research; the traditional genre of research reporting does very little to bring in researcher identities, values and ‘partial’ knowledge. These are not simply issues pertaining to a particular methodology for language and identity research, the point here is that these are debates that challenge thinking about the very nature of research and its impact.

As I have shown in the discussion so far, critically driven research has sought to deconstruct the researcher in the research. Within qualitative research, there are a number of well written ‘how to’ authored texts (e.g. Coffey 1999; Davies 2003) that have led the call for reflexive practices. This is particularly the case within the traditions of critical and/ or linguistic ethnography, which will be the focus of the following sections. Within critical approaches to researching language, methodologically a number of challenges remain, including:

- 1) What does it mean to be and become a reflexive researcher?
- 2) How do researcher identities and positionalities play into the research process?
- 3) What does it mean 'to be in the field' and how is the 'field' itself mutable?
- 4) How do researchers and participants engage in a tango of positionalities, power plays and representations that are not always brought to bear on the process of doing research?

In many cases, some of these reflexive musings, collective stories and hybrid storylines have been left at the margins of research diaries. Challenging the ongoing beliefs that 'reflexive epistemological and narrative practices ... might [be considered] subjective and unscientific' (Foley 2002: 469), I will bring to the forefront some of the challenges and opportunities that I have grappled and engaged with as a researcher, advocating that these reflexive moments, discussions with participants and the 'self' be taken from the 'margins' and brought centre stage as part the messiness and detailed practices of the research process in applied linguistics research into language and identities.

In the following section, I will begin by considering what has led researchers, like myself, towards a vocalised outward thinking of our own researcher identities, relationships of power and positionalities. This process is ongoing across my research trajectory and begins within my own epistemological and ontological engagement with researching the politics of language, identities and power.

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## Researcher identities - extending the dialogue

As part of becoming a reflexive and critical researcher one must unpack and strip away researcher beliefs, values and experiences that construct the ways in which we define our points of departure – that is, the questions we pose and the analytical lens we take. Working from emancipatory, critical approaches to research, Cameron *et al.* (1992: 5) state:

Researchers cannot help being socially located persons. We inevitably bring our biographies and our subjectivities to every stage of the research process and this influences the questions we ask and the ways in which we try to find answers.

As I have mentioned in Giampapa (2011), casting a reflexive gaze on who we are as socially constructed draws attention to what we research and the way we research it. Being and becoming researchers is shaped by our multiple histories and social and linguistic capital. Our multiple identities position us as researchers in specific ways, crafting particular relationships to participants, communities and the contexts in which we work. These identities continue to be of importance at every level of the research process. At the pre-during-post field stages, the interplay of researcher identities positions the researcher in particular ways in relation to participants.

Rampton *et al.* (2004) suggest that unpacking the complex situatedness of everyday practices of our participants takes time and close engagement. Part of the researcher's own interpretive capacity to understand these practices is also coloured by his/her own experiences. These experiences, positions, and identities can open up and shut down opportunities for enriching the research. These relationships

are also subject to participants' control when in the field. That is, participants' interpretations of researchers' roles, and their positioning of researchers as 'insiders/outside/ both and neither' (Creese, Bhatt and Martin 2009: 221). However, our interpretive capacity and what we can 'know' about whom and what we study is only ever partial.

As discussed in the previous section, issues of methodological rigour, reflexivity and also ethical mindedness have been part of ongoing discussions, in particular, within (critical) ethnographic research (Cameron *et al.* 1992; Rampton *et al.* 2004; Hammersley 2007). Relationships within the field are paramount in enabling a 'close up and personal' view into the lives of participants and the phenomena under investigation. Discussions on what it means to take on an insider/outsider role are key to any 'how-to guide' to designing an ethnographic research.

The role of the researcher, his/her positionality in traditional ethnographic accounts is one of objective observer, taking field notes and producing the types of ethnographic diaries/journals that have also raised questions about 'field relationships ... ethical and political questions' (Foley 2002: 474). These have long been at the heart of an ethnographer's research journey. However, drawing on Tedlock (1991), Foley (2002) points out that while the practice of 'confessional reflexivity' pre-dates postmodernism (e.g. Malinowski's [1967] diary accounts), these reflexive diary accounts were always separate from the business of writing 'formal, scientific realist ethnography' (Tedlock in Foley 2002: 474). Others have agitated against this schism between what is made visible and what is kept at the margins. In particular, Foley (2002) reminds us of the ways in which auto-ethnographers' works (such

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as Ruth Behar's) openly argue against the 'grandiose authorial claims of speaking in a rational, value-free, objective, universalizing voice' (*ibid.*).

Canagarajah (1996) also criticised the lack of researcher identity and voice in research accounts even within critically grounded research. Canagarajah (*ibid.*: 324) argued that:

For all practical purposes, the researcher is absent from the report, looming behind the text as an omniscient, transcendental, all knowing figure. This convention hides the manner in which the subjectivity of the researchers – with their complex values, ideologies, and experiences – shapes the research activity and findings. In turn, how the research activity shapes the researchers' subjectivity is not explored – even though research activity can sometimes profoundly affect the researchers' sense of the world and themselves.

While he singled out Norton's extensive research on identity, because of its significant contribution to the field, it is certainly an aspect of the research process that has given researchers pause and reflection. Norton and Early (2011) responded to the critical questions posed by Canagarajah over a decade earlier by addressing the ways in which researcher narratives and the multiplicities of research identities impact on and are incorporated in their language teaching research. Norton and Early (2011) highlight the importance of 'small stories' (Georgakopoulou 2006) co-constructed by them and the teachers in their research in order to understand how their use of narrative inquiry shed light on the ways in which researcher identities were negotiated. These small stories or 'stories in action' (Norton and Early 2011: 421) offer significant insights into the diverse identity positions that are negotiated and co-constructed in daily interactions.

In my own fieldwork, I have recognised the importance of both field notes and a research journal as a way of looking back over and into the interpretative accounts that I develop in my research. These ‘scribbles’ on the page or within the margins raise questions about my role and the relationships I forge within the field; they also help me to consider issues of power, and positionality as raised by the participants. That is, the positioning of the researcher and the power that participants can hold also has an impact on the beginning-middle-and end of the research process, as will be discussed in the following sections. Furthermore, in the analysis and writing up of research I have also struggled with the idea that my interpretations are in fact only one part of the ‘stories’ I document. Questions of voice and power resonate within my own reflexive pauses.

To illustrate these issues, I draw from a series of experiences across several years of being a researcher: from doctoral and postdoctoral research to more recent experiences of research and teaching. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) highlight (drawing on the work of Barnard) to ‘re-flectere’ is about making the field itself the subject of reflexivity and ‘subjecting the position of the observer to the same critical analysis as that of the constructed object at hand’ (Barnard in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 41).

*Being and becoming a researcher: Tales from an incomplete journey*

Our identities and multiple points of reflexivity as a dynamic process of being and becoming a researcher are negotiated, managed and resisted across time and space within the process of doing research (i.e. pre-in-post field). As England (1994: 81) highlights:

‘[T]he field’ is constantly changing and researchers may find that they have to manoeuvre around unexpected circumstances ... this in turn ignites the need for a broader, less rigid conception of the ‘appropriate’ method that allows the researcher the flexibility to be more open to the challenges of field work.

At the doctoral stage of being/becoming a researcher I was inducted into the academy through a programme of work that was to focus in on the epistemological and ontological questions in my field. The ‘making’ of a researcher was constructed in ways that quickly positioned me as the novice, locating me within the research in relation to institutional ethical expectations about what it means to do research and go into the ‘field’. The research training tied to the doctoral process was built around understanding research in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics and the expansive methodologies and methods (e.g. critical ethnography) that would arm me with the ‘expertise’ to undertake my doctoral investigation into what it meant to be and become Italian Canadian across space and time and the discourses and ideologies attached to speaking the right language and reproducing the right forms of cultural capital to access symbolic and material resources in Toronto.

As such I asked research questions that focused on:

- 1) What are the discourses on identities and what does it mean to be and become Italian Canadian within the Italian Canadian world?
  - a. Who produces these discourses and how do these discourses function to include some and exclude others and in what ways is this accomplished?
- 2) How do Italian Canadian youth define what it means to be and become Italian Canadian?

- a. How do participants self-identify and perform their identities socially and discursively?
  - b. How are identities negotiated across and within worlds?
  - c. Which identities are negotiated in which spaces and which identities are non-negotiable?
- 3) In what ways do Italian Canadian youth manage, resist and challenge the discourses on identities from within the Italian Canadian community as well as from the Canadian and Italian worlds?

Over 18 months, I conducted fieldwork that crossed multiple worlds and spaces (Italian Canadian, Canadian and Italian worlds – as represented by participants’ discourses and the university, home, workplace and social spaces). I used diverse methods<sup>iii</sup> and broadened the participant baseline to include unheard ‘voices’<sup>iv</sup> within the Italian Canadian community in order to situate and engage with discourses of Italianness (e.g. Italian Canadian youth groups, Italian Canadian media representatives, a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered (LGBT) group called FUORI to name a few). I documented, challenged, analysed and engaged with the production of discourses of Italianness and the eight Italian Canadian youths’, who were participants in my study, negotiation, resistance and management of their multiple identities (see Giampapa 2001, 2004a, 2011).

As a critical ethnographer, I recognise how my identities are socially constructed, historically, and politically embedded across time and space. The past, present and future identities are inculcated in my discursive performances as a Canadian-born, Australian-raised straight female of immigrant Italian heritage. My family’s histories and experiences of multiple transnational immigration in Italy, Canada, Australia and back to Canada, spanning the 1950s, 1970s and 1990s, socialised and coloured my identities. The personal trajectory intertwining with the professional (i.e. moving from Australia to Canada to pursue my doctorate and then postdoctoral studies) led to a complex layering of identities that

would create points of tension and also open up dialogue with the participants in my doctoral research (as well as my future research that unfolded in my postdoctoral and mid-career programme as an assistant/associate professor).

The fruitfulness of these possible and multiple dialogues were countered by a less flexible and more rigid understanding of the ‘researcher’ and ‘research conduct’ constructed by institutional structures and reproduced through ethical hoops that all researchers are required to jump through. Instead, a ‘conflictual’ relationship was constructed by ethical processes that require researchers to fill out mandatory forms, submit multiple copies of tools and discuss possible ethical issues in ways that fulfilled the guise that research can be sanitised of subjectivities, one-way power relationships and possible ‘harmful effect’ to participants. The tick-box approach to ethics satisfied the ethics committee at the time, which also recommended the swift destruction of data ‘post-research’. For most researchers, particularly novice ones embarking on doctoral research, I was intimidated by this unknown committee of ethical elites who would have the power to challenge and possibly restrict and halt my progress into the field. However, I do not wish to suggest that ethics committees are not important or productive. From later experiences as a departmental and faculty ethics representative, I have seen how members of ethics committees see their role not only as ‘risk management’ but as supporting and enhancing the reflexive dialogue in research.

As a departmental ethics co-ordinator, the role of ‘dialogue’ in producing and exploring ethical mindedness have become key for all researchers – from the early career to the professoriate. This dialogic process opens up the possibilities for researchers and doctoral supervisors and students to

engage in the consideration of opportunities and possible tensions of doing research. As Guillemin and Gillam (2004) suggest our understanding of ethics should be reframed as an ‘ethics in practice’ moment where research and real life collide offering important pauses for critical reflection. This realigns the process as ongoing and shifting as the research evolves and relationships with participants hopefully develop towards trust and openness. However, as indicated so far, my research training did not lead to the deconstruction of my researcher identities and how these might be experienced once in the field.

Experiences later on in the field were important for reflecting on the importance of researcher identities. One was in my postdoctoral research<sup>v</sup> on the Multiliteracy Project (see [www.multiliteracies.ca](http://www.multiliteracies.ca); Cummins and Early 2011), and another was in a project with an early years teaching school partnership; these highlighted that the construction of the role of the researcher as conceptualised by the participants can create potential tension and conflict. In both contexts, I was challenged as a researcher to unpack and explain the ways in which I work. That is, for me research is both collaborative and co-produced, however, I realised that participants’ experiences of researchers in their settings was more along the line of: ‘enter, take what they need and leave’ and never to be heard from again. In the case of the Multiliteracy Project, one of the project teachers had had experiences where she felt her own intellectual property had been transgressed. Equally, in the early years teaching school context, I was interrogated on my research practices and whether I co-authored with participants and collaborated in ways that were mutually beneficial. In both these instances, the tensions that were created at the outset made it possible for a trusting relationship to evolve and to negotiate a set of principles and embedded practices that set out data ownership. As Guillemin and Gillam (2004: 265) purport:

There can be all sorts of ethically important moments: when participants indicate discomfort with their answer, or reveal a vulnerability; when a research participant states that he or she does not want to be assigned a pseudonym in the writing up of the research but wants to have his or her real name reported.

The representation of the researcher as experienced by participants made entering field sites such as the school settings, as noted above, a negotiated process. Looking back at my doctoral journey, I have written openly about the ways in which my own identity as an ‘Italian’ Canadian was troubled and negotiated (Giampapa 2011). In the case of two participants in my doctoral research, Salvatore and Paolo, both had rather fixed and static views of what it meant to be Italian Canadian and who could legitimately belong. While similar in denying their ‘Canadianness’, even though they were both born in Toronto, each produced identities that were locked into the production of particular varieties of Italian (e.g. Salvatore valuing the institutionalised national language – a standard form of Italian; Paolo demarcating his Calabrese dialect as a more valued form of capital within his social and family networks). Each positioned me as an ‘outsider’ as I did not ‘sound’ Italian (Canadian), indeed my English is marked by an Australian accent. However, at the same time I was legitimised through the fact that I spoke standard Italian and had the cultural markers that both Salvatore and Paolo saw as valuable – someone who they presumed to be engaged with their cultural identity and language, re-enforced by travel to Italy and by periods of living there as well. The unpacking of my cultural and ethnic identities also challenged these participants’ production of discourses of Italianness, which in fact divided rather than contributed to what they saw as the Italian Canadian world.

My relationship with FUORI<sup>vi</sup> (the LGBT group in my research) also created interesting points of engagement. These were both productive and reflective in the ways in which I was positioned: as an Italian Canadian female and lesbian. The assumption was that my interest in investigating the representations and performances of being Italian Canadian and gay equated for FUORI that I had a personal link to the research. While I felt committed to working with an activist group that sought to shift the dominant discourses of Italianness, rooted for them within a heterosexual macho male image, I found myself intertwined within their agenda. Thus the research relationship was coloured by my attempts to open up a different set of discourses that challenged their construction of being Italian Canadian and gay. I needed to go further in my attempts for self-positioning and critical reflexive pauses to unpack the ways in which our relationship would unfold and how this would in turn impact on the analysis and representation of voices within the group. This highlights the point that being critically reflexive is an ongoing process, and that there are moments within the research where leaving my sexual identity outside the research was not enough and that through my actions (e.g. attending specific LGBT events that were open to friends and family) I could re-position in terms of my own researcher identities.

## **Summary**

This chapter has explored the theoretical and methodological trajectories of identity and language research. Norton's (2013) seminal research has led the way in understanding the links between the language learning process and a learner's social identities. In particular, the social turn in applied linguistics and the advancement of critical theoretical approaches in the field have shed further light on understanding contemporary communicative practices across transnational spaces and time. This can be seen through the contribution of key researchers who have pushed our understanding of the impact of

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globalisation on the multilingual practices and discursive performances of identities across urban settings (e.g. Blackledge and Creese 2010).

The methodological challenges and tensions that have come out of researching language and identities cuts across qualitative research – researcher role, field relationships, insider/outsider positioning, reflexivity, ethical mindedness to name a few. Of particular importance in this dialogue has been the work of critical and linguistic ethnographers, who have advanced the work on researcher identities, positioning, voice and representation as part of the demystification of the research process and product.

My research is situated within the multiple methodological conversations that I have sketched and my work continues to engage with issues of identity, language and power. Through narratives and research stories I continue to deconstruct the processes and affordances that come from being and becoming a researcher. The process of challenging researcher's identities and positionalities, in the field as well as outside it, is complex. Participants can exercise their own power through personal and political agendas that can at the same time open up new and interesting spaces for dialogue. My research experiences raise questions about the way researchers are trained and given opportunities to think differently about the methodological tools used to negotiate the spaces in which we observe, interpret and investigate. These all become the 'methodological rich points' (Hornberger 2006: 221) where the potential for co-construction and co-production of knowledge provides greater potential for the critical reflexive work that is necessary within our field.

## Related topics

Language and identity in linguistic ethnography; A linguistic ethnography of identity: adopting a heteroglossic frame; Ethics in language and identity research; Linguistic practices and transnational identities; The future of identity research: impact and new developments in sociolinguistics; Identity in language learning and teaching: research agendas for the future.

## Further Reading

Byrd Clark, J.S. and Dervin, F. (eds.) (2014). *Reflexivity in language and intercultural education: rethinking multilingualism and interculturality*. New York: Routledge. (Offering a historical route into the field of multilingualism and intercultural research, the reader will find the untangling of the concept of ‘reflexivity’ and its theoretical underpinnings very helpful.)

Copland, F., Creese, A., Rock, F. and Shaw, S. (2015). *Linguistic ethnography*. London: Sage. (This is an important read for not only linguistic ethnographers but for all interested and working with language data, qualitative and of course ethnographic approaches to research.)

Giampapa, F. and Lamoureux, S. (guest eds.) (2011). ‘Special issue: Voices from the field: Identity, language and power in multilingual research settings’, *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, 10(3). (This special issue offers a range of important insights into the reconceptualisation of the researcher and the research process.)

Paltridge, B. and Phakiti, A. (eds.) (2010). *Continuum companion to research methods in applied linguistics*. London: Continuum. (This edited volume provides a particularly insightful understanding of key methodological issues in current applied linguistic research.)

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<sup>i</sup> In Norton’s (2013 [2000]) 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *Identity and language learning*, she signals new themes in identity research – one of which is examining researcher identities (see also Norton and Early 2011).

<sup>ii</sup> For me being critically reflexive is a process that engages with an internal dialogue as researcher as ‘self’ (i.e one’s identities, and positionalities which are influx) alongside participants’ positionings of themselves and of the researcher, which are also shifting.

<sup>iii</sup> These methods included: interviews (individual and focus group interviews, and special themed interviews around work, religion, sexuality, and travelling to Italy); 2) the shadowing of core participants across different spaces such as the home, university classrooms, social spaces and workplaces; 3) auto-ethnography where the core participants became the ‘ethnographer’ audio-recording their interactions across diverse settings; 4) questionnaires; 5) participant identity narratives and travel diaries reflecting on the ‘trip to Italy’ as a transnational experience; 6) newspaper documents; and 7) researcher diaries.

<sup>iv</sup> Similarly my use of ‘voice/voices’ relates to Creese (forthcoming) who notes ‘voice’ in her own team ethnographies as both a descriptive and analytical tool. For me this relates strongly to other concepts of authority and legitimacy – the right to speak and be heard in Bourdieusian (1991) terms.

<sup>v</sup> I was a postdoctoral researcher on a Canada-wide research project known as ‘The Multiliteracies Project ([www.multiliteracies.ca](http://www.multiliteracies.ca)). Based as part of the Toronto team, I co-ordinated the collaborative research with the seven project schools as well as being based in one of the primary schools (Coppard Glen) working

collaboratively with Perminder to explore multilingual identities and the production of her students' dual language identity texts.

<sup>vi</sup> Fuori (translated from Italian as *Out*) is the pseudonym used for the Italian Canadian LGBT group.