
**Interviewers’ contributions shape interviewees’ responses across participant and across time**

**What this research was about and why it is important**

Interviewing is a popular way for researchers to generate data. Most studies that use interviews have tended to focus on participants’ perspectives only. In this study, the authors examined their own identities as interviewers while conducting interviews. They were especially interested in how particular aspects of their own identities became visible in the interviews they conducted, and how managing these identities influenced the type of data (e.g., interviewee responses) obtained. The results show that the interviewers’ contributions had a bearing on how the interviewees talked about their identities and experiences. The study also showed that what took place in one interview shaped how the interviewers approached future interviews with the same interviewees across time and with different interviewees across section.

**What the researchers did**

**Combined two studies**

- The authors brought together complementary data collected at two separate sites. Fernández interviewed three US-American college students who spent a semester studying Spanish in Buenos Aires, Argentina. McGregor interviewed one US-American college student who spent six weeks studying German in Leipzig, Germany.

**Highlighted the researcher’s perspective**

- The researchers took extensive notes about their experiences in each of the interviews (called researcher identity **memos**). They then brought together their notes and observations from their respective data collection sites, and reflected on their own and each other’s experiences and perspectives as interviewers while analyzing for common themes. This reflexive approach is known as collaborative autoethnography.
- The researchers conducted a finer analysis of the interview data to examine how the interviewers used language and other meaningful elements (e.g., silence) to create and manage existing identities in their interaction with the interviewees.

**What the researchers found**

**Researcher identity negotiation influences interviews across section**

- Fernández (an Argentine national) progressed from displaying interest and support for one interviewee’s characterization of Argentina and its culture to a stronger emotional investment in subsequent interviewees’ views on Argentine nationals.

**Researcher identity negotiation influences interviews across time**

- McGregor (who is cisgender, heterosexual, and white) progressed from displaying doubt and skepticism toward a narrative told by her interviewee (who is transgender, queer, and black) about a difficult experience with racial and gender discrimination to overt interest and support for a different telling of the same experience in a later interview.

**Overall...**

- The researchers found that interviewers’ identities matter. Both interviewers were clearly juggling many different roles related to e.g., national, professional, and gender identities while conducting interviews with their participants, influencing not just the participants in that specific interview, but also others within the same interview cycle (Fernández) and the same participant in a later interview cycle (McGregor).

**Things to consider**

- This project supports previous research that views interviews as social interactions. The findings show that interviewers’ and interviewees’ juggle their identities together, and that this affects future interview interactions.
- This study shows that the interviewer is always under strain. As applied linguists, the authors are aware that others involved in language education may be dealing with similar identity management issues. For this reason, participating in reflexive practice can make these issues more visible, understandable, and empowering.


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