A Critical Review of Qualitative Interviews in Applied Linguistics

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This article asks what applied linguistics can learn from related disciplines with regard to the collection, analysis and representation of qualitative interviews. It assesses the contributions of qualitative sociology, anthropology, discursive psychology and outlines four 'discourse dilemmas' which might provide the basis for a more critical and reflective dimension to the use of qualitative interviews in applied linguistics. Summarizing important contributions that have already been made in applied linguistics, the article also highlights the contribution of the other articles in this special issue. Furthermore, the article also outlines a number of 'parameters of sensitivity' that might help researchers develop a more reflective approach to the carrying out, analysing, and reporting on qualitative interviews.

INTRODUCTION

The qualitative interview has a growing presence in applied linguistics. This growth has been seen 'particularly in qualitative studies that aim to investigate participant's identities, experiences, beliefs, and orientations' (Talmy 2010: 111). Despite this increase, the qualitative interview has, for the most part, been undertheorized. In addition, problematic aspects of data collection, analysis, and representation are frequently left aside. Instead, selected 'voices' are arranged in what might be termed a journalistic tableau: there is something appealing, varied and often colourful in their deployment but they tend to be presented bereft of context and methodological detail. This article will argue that a critical reflective dimension is also often missing and that these are issues that applied linguistics needs to consider.

This article aims to address the following question: What can applied linguistics learn from related disciplines with regard to the qualitative interview? The article assesses the contributions of qualitative sociology, anthropology, and, in particular, the interactional perspectives of ethomethodology/CA, and discursive psychology. It also aims to consider and critically evaluate the current state of qualitative interview use in applied linguistics. The intention is to provide a focus on important contributions that have already been made in applied linguistics and then look for evidence that those contributions have been having an impact in research. The article ends by suggesting a number of 'parameters of sensitivity' that might provide a more reflective framework for qualitative researchers adopting interview methods. These parameters might

help to move beyond 'how to' prescriptions and general advice and, instead, open out and report on what can be termed 'discursive dilemmas' that arise in the process of carrying out, analysing and reporting on qualitative interviews.

THE QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

This article opens up and maps the ground in which the other articles in the collection are making their contribution. As well as considering common themes and representations in social science handbooks and particular re-source books on interviewing, it considers a selection of key contributions made in the fields of qualitative sociology, anthropology, conversation analysis (CA), and discursive psychology. It is not the intention to provide a detailed topography of the 'disputable lands' running between these disciplines. Neither is the aim to attempt a history or typology of the interview here (see Fontana and Frey 2000, who provide a history and overview of the variety of possible interviews). The intention is, rather, to open up areas of debate and interest related to the use of qualitative interviews in the wider social sciences.

There is no shortage of writing about qualitative interviews in the social sciences and there is inevitably quite a variety. In general introductions to social science research there is usually at least one chapter or section devoted to interviews (e.g. Denzin and Lincoln 2005).[1] Of particular note is Patton (2002), who is engaging, detailed, and also amusing, while Rossman and Rallis (2003) is a resource that includes interview transcripts and encourages a reflective approach. In terms of those books that have a sole focus on inter-viewing, there is also a wide range of possibilities. Rubin and Rubin's (1995) personal recollections make entertaining reading and also provide a wealth of insight. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) and Arksey and Knight (1999) provide depth in their analyses and discussion. Perhaps the most comprehensive resource on interviews is Gubrium and Holstein (2002), which provides a detailed and influential treatment. (Supplementary Data providing more comprehensive suggestions for reading are available online for subscribers at http://applij.oxfordjournals.org.)

In the variety of resources available above there is plenty of advice and also plenty of metaphors used to describe the interview process. These metaphors are revealing from an epistemological perspective. For example, Kvale (1996: 5) contrasts a 'mining' metaphor with one of 'traveling'. The traveler evokes a post-modern constructivist position that stands in contrast to the positivist miner extracting nuggets of raw truth. Warren and Karner (2009: 155) use the metaphor of 'camera' and Holstein and Gubrium (2004: 140) the 'fly on the wall' in critiquing a positivist 'view' of the interview. Holstein and Gubrium (2004: 151) also warn that the interviewee is not a 'vessel waiting to be tapped'. Metaphors are helpful heuristics at best but at least 'traveler' evokes a sense of getting a perspective on both physical and cultural words that

are sometimes elusive, occasionally contradictory, often partly hidden or obscure, emergent or changing. Whatever metaphor we choose for the interview, there is wide recognition in the social sciences that there is something commonplace about the qualitative interview. Benny and Hughes (1956: 137) viewed modern sociology as the 'science of the interview' and Holstein and Gubrium (2004: 140) cite Briggs' (1986) well-travelled claim that 90% of social science articles rely on the interview. The interview is embedded in contemporary culture and it has been said that we live in 'an interview society' (Atkinson and Silverman 1997). Interviews are all around us, and their ubiquity creates conditions that can desensitize the researcher to forms, roles, and expectations (Briggs 2007).

Disciplinary perspectives

Within the social sciences, we can point to important contributions that theorize the interview in the fields of qualitative sociology, anthropology, discursive psychology, and ethnomethodology. To borrow a line from Briggs (2007: 552), 'I wander somewhat promiscuously' in these fields, no doubt ignoring some important fences and checkpoints. This treatment is necessarily selective and the intention is to draw out some important contributions and dilemmas, using them as a series of critical and discursive perspectives with which to review qualitative interviews in applied linguistics.

Much of the literature cited above falls under the umbrella of qualitative sociology. Following Silverman's (1973) and then Cicourel's (1964) view of the interview as 'social encounter', there have been a growing number of influential critiques of how interviews are theorized in social scientific research (e.g. Atkinson and Silverman 1997). It is worth drawing particular attention to Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) contribution to this theorization of the interview, which represented a departure from the common practice of simply adding to the list of 'approaches' available. They see all interviews as unavoidably 'active' and use the term *active interview* to underscore the perspective that all interviews are unavoidably meaning-making ventures. Even the standardized survey interview itself is active, despite the fact that standardization procedures seek to strictly limit the interviewer's input and 'restrict the respondent's range of interpretive actions' (Holstein and Gubrium 2004: 157). When the interview is theorized as 'active,' the interviewer's contribution to the co-construction of interview content, and the local accomplishment of the interview, is explicitly acknowledged and thus becomes a topic for analysis. Fundamentally, 'no matter how formalized, restricted, or standardized' the nature of the interview, there is 'interaction between the interview participants' (1995: 18) and there will inevitably be spontaneous and 'improvized' elements. In this view, *all* interviews are already sites of social interaction, where ideas, facts, views, details, and stories are collaboratively produced by interviewee and interviewer. However, the extent to which that interaction is (i) acknowledged as requiring analysis, and subsequently, (ii) included or

excluded from the research report, depends on whether the researcher has theorized the interview as active or not.

Although it may be true that sociology provided the first attempts to theorize the interview, work in other fields has been important. In the field of anthropology, the work of Briggs (1986) has been influential, although not as influential as he would have hoped: he notes that anthropologists 'seldom focus sustained critical attention' on interviews (2007: 551). Walford (2007) remarks that (for ethnography) interviews are not sufficient as a data source in studying social life, while in ethnomethodology, CA, and membership categorization analysis (MCA), important work has been undertaken on the interactive construction of interviews (e.g. Sacks 1992; Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995; Baker 1997).

Of particular interest to an applied linguistics perspective are ethnomethodological contributions, as they typically pay close attention to interview 'interaction'. Social psychology too has for some time been interested in the interactional character of interviews. A 'discursive turn' in social psychology quickly established a growing literature and a distinct approach called 'discursive psychology' (e.g. Edwards and Potter 1992; see Miller this issue; Prior this issue). Antaki *et al.* (2003) present the concerns of discursive psychology in reference to the interview. Key to this literature is a concern with the linguistic features of positioning, footing, stake management, emotion talk, identity work, and the like. Discursive psychologists, in pursuing these discourse aims, tend to draw on traditions of CA. Potter and Hepburn (2005: 281), for example, provide a strong argument that interviews should be studied as an 'interactional object'. This argument leads this critical review to pay particular attention to discursive psychology and ethnomethodology/CA. Potter and Hepburn (2005) draw attention to avoidable 'contingent' problems with interviewing (the deletion of the interviewer, problems with the representation of interaction, the unavailability of the interview set-up, the failure to consider interviews as interaction). They argue that these 'could be (relatively easily) fixed, or attended to' (2005: 285). The following section draws on and modifies these contingent problems, recasting them as 'discursive dilemmas'. Considering such dilemmas helps avoid a prescriptive orientation and develop greater sensitivity in handling qualitative interviews.

Discursive dilemmas

Co-construction

One main outcome of the literature that has problematized the qualitative interview (of particular note are Cicourel 1964; Silverman1973; Briggs 1986; Mishler 1986; Holstein and Gubrium 1995) is that it is now well established that interview talk is inevitably a co-construction between the interviewer and interviewee. An interview involves at least two contributing participants and Atkinson and Silverman (1997: 322) are suspicious of the 'self-revealing

speaking subject' where the interviewer's job is to elicit 'confessional revela-
tions'. Discursive psychologists suggest that in order to understand how fea-
tures are co-constructed, interview data need to be subject to the same
standards of discourse analysis as any piece of spoken interaction. This
is the primary reason why CA features so prominently in the analysis of
co-construction.

A greater focus on the interviewer

The social science literature has focused primarily on distinctive features of
the interviewee (e.g. attention to age, race, gender, and issues of power).
The importance of co-construction is that it inevitably requires more attention
to be paid to what the interviewer is bringing to the process. Briggs (1986: 47)
in particular talks about paying close attention to the different orientations of
interviewer and interviewee. Focusing more on the interviewer raises issues of
identity that have been the subject of interest and debate in social sciences for
many years. There has also been a lively debate in social science with regard to
empathetic stances adopted by interviewers. In particular, there have been
critiques of 'emotionalist' interviewing (Silverman 2001). Watson (2009:
114) warns that the 'easy assumption of empathy potentially stifles research'
and can give rise to 'unethical practices' as well as 'complacency'.

Interactional context

The interview 'produces situated understandings grounded in specific inter-
actional episodes' (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: 353). Although the interviewer
may be interested in getting a perspective on the lived experience and context
which the interviewee inhabits, the interview enacts its own context. This is
partly because the research interview carries its own generic expectations and
in Briggs' (1986: 102–3) terms 'the communicative structure of the entire
interview' shapes 'each utterance'. Each sequence is linked to the next: an
utterance, point of view, opinion, belief, anecdote, argument or complaint
does not exist in isolation. Each interview is set up and there are often re-
quests, explanations, and rapport building before the research interview begins
in earnest. Potter and Hepburn suggest that two features of set up are often
missing from interview studies. The reader is usually not given information
about the salient identity categories with which interviewees have been 're-
cruited' (e.g. as teacher trainers, internet users, bilingual mothers), neither is
there detail of the 'task understanding'—what the interviewee has been told
about the nature and format of the research study or interview.

There has been a great deal of discussion in qualitative sociology around the
idea of giving 'voice' to interviewees, especially where issues of discrimination,
under-representation and asymmetries of power are concerned. However,
there is also a worry that these voices can become decontexualized, taking

attention away from the interactional context and the role and contribution of the interviewer (see Baker 2004).

The 'what' and the 'how'

Another key issue is that the researcher needs to be more conscious of the interview process rather than simply 'mine' the products. Donnelly (2003) sees the challenge for qualitative researchers as being to shift from a 'what' perspective to a 'how' perspective and 'to articulate as fully as possible the processes associated with the data analysis of interviews' (2003: 318). A consideration of the 'how' means that we need to move from a reliance on the 'interview-as-technique' perspective towards the 'interview-as-local-accomplishment' perspective (Silverman 1993: 104). Articulating the processes associated with analysis of interviews involves 'epistemological reflexivity' (Willig 2001: 32) and a critical examination of methodology, assumptions, choices and theories that influence the research. Willig's work is primarily in psychology but reflexivity has become an important touchstone in sociology and anthropology (see e.g. Clifford and Marcus 1986). In social science, the production of reflexive accounts means that sociologists, anthropologists, and ethnographers have become more visible in their writing. Again, this shifts the balance from representations of the researched towards the representations of the researcher and requires an examination of 'the ways in which a researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research' (Nightingale and Cromby 1999: 28). It also encourages a more reflective and critical engagement with practice and process, where difficulties, confusion, and complexities are not 'swept under the carpet' (Clarke and Robertson 2001: 773).

A CRITICAL AND DISCURSIVE VIEW OF QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW USE IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Richards (2009: 159) sees interviews as one area of applied linguistics that is 'in need of particular attention', where 'methodological interrogation' needs to be more widespread. He sees 'as yet few signs that researchers have taken note of developments in the wider field', although Pavlenko (2007) is cited as a notable exception. There have certainly been developments in the wider field but it would be wrong to jump to a hasty comparative diagnosis with regard to applied linguistics. We have already seen that it is arguable that anthropology has not sufficiently responded to Brigg's (1986) challenge (see Briggs 2007: 551). In discursive psychology, as we have seen, Potter and Hepburn's (2005) view is that there are prevailing problems associated with the use of qualitative interviews that have not been resolved. In qualitative sociology, there have been 'varying degrees of enthusiasm' (Silverman 2007: 572) for the position that interviews are 'accounts' and 'representations' and are 'collaboratively produced'.

The articles in this special issue are part of an emerging and acknowledged response to problems associated with the use of qualitative interviews (see Block 2000; Pavlenko 2007). Taken together, they call for a critical and discursive approach to research interviews and the data produced from them. In order to see such a call is justified, I intend to look at several articles that use interviews published in relevant applied linguistics journals (e.g. *Applied Linguistics*, *TESOL Quarterly*, etc.). I will then return to the four discursive dilemmas modified from Potter and Hepburn (2005) in relation to applied linguistics. In doing so, I will draw attention to common problems and also highlight useful contributions, including articles in this collection.

A selection of papers from applied linguistics

The first three studies highlighted below use interviews as the primary method for generating data and are a representative sample of strong research articles that use one of a variety of qualitative interviews (i.e. semi-structured, life-history, ethnographic). Taken together, they raise important issues about methodology, analysis, and representation.

Varghese and Johnson (2007) use 'semi-structured' interviews to explore evangelical pre-service teachers' Christian beliefs and their views on teaching. The presentation of these views involves the liberal use of quotes interspersed with comment. Yet, despite the fact that the intended Bakhtinian analysis 'looked closely at the discourse of the interviews' (2007: 15), there is only one extract that gives clear indication that the interview discourse consisted of more than interviewees' contributions. Instead, interviewer contributions are summarized, as in 'when asked what her immediate plans are' (2007: 15). In reality, the article focuses only on the discourse of the interviewees (which it does exceedingly well). It represents both the forceful and fairly dogmatic 'voice' of interviewees and also partly manages to show that their views are 'in a state of flux and development'. For the reader though, not having access to the interactional context, it limits any view of interactional development. Transcripts are not available in any appendices or in a supplementary online resource and so the reader is not able to consider how Varghese and Johnson's acknowledged atheist status is played out interactionally with these evangelical teachers. Neither is there any methodological comment on what semi-structured means in relation to the 'interview protocol' provided as Appendix A1 of the article.

Like Varghese and Johnson, Hayes (2005) provides some transcripts but we do not see the interviewer's contributions in those transcripts. This is somewhat surprising because in both this life-history study on Sri Lankan teachers and his later study of Thai teachers (Hayes 2009), he explicitly comments on the interviewer's role as well as methodological issues such as trustworthiness. He also provides theoretical discussion about the role of the researcher in co-constructing the interview. However, these remain background methodological discussions and the reader cannot access this co-construction in either

transcripts or analysis. In the 2009 paper, Hayes (2009: 4) sees the overall purpose of the article to 'give voice' to the participating teachers and in both studies he is certainly successful in this aim. However, by not following through on the methodological issues raised early in the articles, he denies us the opportunity to see how the recognition of 'power imbalance' and 'shared contextual knowledge' shapes the interviews. We have no access to the voice of the interviewer (although there is one probe included in the 2009 article). In short, although Hayes says that 'the interviews which provided data for this paper must be *seen* as co-constructions' (my emphasis), the reader does not end up being able to 'see' co-construction.

Palfreyman (2005) presents interview data to illustrate the processes of '*Othering*' (a group's construction of a shared Us–Them representation of another group). The study provides detail about the interview schedule [there is 'loosely-structured' talk (2005: 218) around a schedule, that is provided as an Appendix A]. Richards (2009: 160) discusses this article as 'a valuable interview-based study' but one that 'explicitly refers to issues of representation and recognizes the relevance of personal relationships' without following up to examine these aspects in the interviews themselves. We do know that all 12 interviews were transcribed but there is no access to any extracts. In an important study of the nature of construction or representations through talk, it is not shown how the researcher managed to 'elicit and explore issues that seemed significant to the informants' (217).

The selected articles above use interviews as the primary method for generating data. However, there are a growing number of articles that draw on interviews to support other data collection instruments (e.g. questionnaires). It could be argued that such mixed-methods research should not reasonably be expected to live up to the same level of expectations with regard to the issues raised above (focusing on the role of the interviewer, transparency with regard to transcriptions, balancing the 'what' with the 'how', accounting for interactional context). I consider this argument in relation to two excellent papers in our area.

Borg (2009: 363), in a study of teachers' attitudes to research, uses qualitative interviews as follow up data to questionnaires. Here, we are told that 'interviews were transcribed in full' but there are no transcripts included, either in the article, the appendices, or in any on-line supplementary resource. Methodologically, we are told that the interviews were 'structured' but 'there was also scope for more flexible interaction' and the interviewer 'was able to probe further relevant emergent issues as required' (Borg 2009: 363). However, without any extracts or representation of interactional context, this aspect of the research was not available. Representation aside, the analysis concentrates on coding and classification and there is not enough 'space to provide an exhaustive qualitative analysis' (366).

Borg's study does not set out to consider the interview as a collaborative and constructed event. Neither is the idea of co-construction explicitly mentioned. So, it might be argued that it is unfair to demand that his paper should

find space for consideration of these issues. Shi (2010) is a good example of an article where there seems to be an appreciation of the interview as a co-constructed event, but the presentation of the data does not allow the reader any view of this co-construction. This is a very interesting study that establishes university students' textual appropriation and citing behaviour but there are no transcripts included (even though we know from the acknowledgements that the interviews were transcribed). Shi does mention the interviewer contribution but, beyond a few phases like 'when prompted to identify' (a glimpse of an interviewer at work), the interviewer presence is largely absent. Interestingly, the article quotes Gubrium and Holstein in recognition that an interview is 'a dynamic meaning-making process done in collaboration with the interviewer' (Shi 2010: 22) but the decision not to include any exchanges between interviewer and interviewee means that such dynamic collaboration is not represented. Perhaps the mixed-methods researcher is in an unenviable position, as there are inevitably more aspects of methodological choice, analysis and representation to account for in limited space.

Discursive dilemmas in applied linguistics

Having considered a selection of papers published in applied linguistics, we return to a consideration of the four dilemmas outlined earlier. These four perspectives offer a focus to further theorize interviewing in the applied linguistics field and draw on recent contributions that have contributed to this process (Roulston 2010; Talmy 2010).

Co-construction

Talmy sees a pattern in the qualitative applied linguistics research he reviews where it conceptualizes 'interview data as participant ''reports'' of objective or subjective reality, with a generally exclusive focus on ''content'', or the ''what'' of the interview' (2010: 14). This may change if there is more research that recognizes that the interviewer and interviewee jointly construct the interview talk (Sarangi 2003). Indeed, Richards (2009: 159) reports a 'growing literature on the importance of treating interviews as interactionally co-constructed events in which participant identity and positioning have significant analytical implications'. He cites a number of examples (Baker 1997, 2002; Nijhof 1997; Rapley 2001; Cassell 2005; Roulston 2006; Wooffitt and Widdicombe 2006). However, the articles cited by Richards tend to have a main focus on the issue of co-construction, rather than matters typically considered to be relevant to applied linguistics. It is not at all evident that other studies, which have their main focus on another area (e.g. teacher beliefs, bilingual literacy), pay much attention to this 'growing literature'. Hopefully, work that does feature the microanalysis of co-construction (see e.g. Baker 2004) will prompt more inclusion of this kind of analysis.

The language in which the interview is conducted is integrally related to the nature of the co-construction. This issue does not get as much attention as it ought to in applied linguistics. Consequently, issues such as justifying the use of L2 and considering how much it affects the detail of what interviewers can offer do not get sufficiently addressed. Canagarajah (2008) would be a good example of a paper where large amounts of codeswitching are overlooked. Also, there is no comment at all on why some participants chose English (only) and why some chose Tamil. This is a crucial but neglected data source and somewhat surprising given the stated aim to provide 'emic perspectives on how the [Tamil diasporic] community explains its language choice and attitudes' (2008: 148).

There needs to be more attention given to code switching practices in interviews (when both parties have access to L1 and L2). For example, is it worth encouraging interviewees to code-switch if they feel that an explanation can be fuller in L1? There are also translation complexities that get airbrushed out (e.g. some research students interview in L1 and then analyse and present them in L2). Temple and Young (2008) provide a useful discussion of the epistemological and ontological consequences of decisions involving translation, while Xu and Liu (2009) offer useful insights into decisions about translation and representation arising from their decision to interview in L1. Miller (this issue) provides a perspective on the possible differences that interviewing in L1 (rather than L2 English) might have both on identity construction and more attention needs to be given to this issue in applied linguistics interviews. Miller also provides a translation.

It is likely that any study that seriously grapples with the co-construction dilemma will need to represent the talk with some kind of transcription. The question of whether producing a transcript is a necessary element for either analysis or the transparency of the representation is not always agreed on (see Hollway's 2005 response to Potter and Hepburn). However, Briggs (1986: 4) argues strongly for close attention to interview transcription and there are several ways in which a transcript might strengthen the research by:

- Offering it to the interviewee for validation purposes. Rapley (2004) makes a powerful argument that allowing the reader access to the transcript, never mind which analytic stance is adopted, is an essential factor in allowing the reader to evaluate reliability.
- Inducing further comment. Mann (2002) uses a second interview that incorporates transcripts from the first interview and demonstrates a 'dialogic effect' as interviewees enlarge on, clarify and sometimes cast doubt on earlier articulations. Gardner (2004) provides an example of where examining an earlier transcript in a follow-up interview establishes an important shift (see also Menard-Warwick 2008).

Many papers that use transcripts in the research process do not make them available. This limits the chances that research students in particular have to

access the co-constructed nature of the interaction or vicariously develop their sensitivity of the management of interviews.

A greater focus on the interviewer

An emphasis on co-construction leads to a greater emphasis on the interviewer. In studies where identity work or MCA is prominent, we would expect a focus on the interviewee but we might also expect more attention to be given to the complexities of the interview's categorization processes (see Wooffitt and Widdicombe 2006) that also involve the interviewer. There are a growing number of articles that consider issues of membership categorization. For example, Roulston *et al.* (2001) use the term 'cocategorial incumbency' to consider interviews where the interviewer and interviewee belong to the same group (e.g. geography teachers or learners of French). This can lead the interviewee to produce a certain type of talk, in their case around 'complaints'.

Research studies need to be more open in their accounting for how membership, roles and relationship can affect the way talk develops. Most articles in applied linguistics treat aspects of pre-existing or personal relationship as part of background information or 'setting the scene' (if they get mentioned at all). Palfreyman (2005), for example, talks about personal relationships with participants but the analysis does not make clear whether this becomes interactionally relevant with participants. Prior (this issue) considers how his role and relationship with his interviewee (Trang) is implicated in important differences between his two tellings of the same narrated event. Garton and Copland (2010) is also a good example of an analysis that accounts for the effect of 'prior relationship'. Drawing on Goffman's work, they show how prior relationships are invoked and made relevant by both parties during educational research interviews. Previous relationships might range from: no prior existing relationship (outside of arranging the interview); a relationship that has developed during fieldwork; a relationship of peer professionals; a relationship with friends, colleagues, and family. Each of these can have important implications for what transpires in and is generated in an interview.

Researchers often fail to consider the impact of key aspects of interviewer identity in their analysis. This is a matter that concerns Talmy (2010) and he provides a useful list of research studies that use interviews but omit analysis of the interviewer role in the production of data. These studies include Canagarajah (2008), who provides important contextual information (religion, caste, and class) but does not analyse how this affected his interviews. Talmy (2010) cites numerous studies that all mention some aspect of the interviewer's identity but do not consider in any detail how this might have played out in the interviews. Miller (this issue) confronts the matter with a retrospective account of how her identity as a 'majority white, US-American' might have influenced the interviewee's responses. Talmy (this issue) also considers how identity is performed in the speech event of the interview ('doing' identity as well as 'talking about' identity).

Interactional context

Context is notoriously slippery and elastic. However, there cannot be any doubt that an interview creates its own interactional context, where each turn is shaped by the previous turns, and roles and membership categories are invoked and evoked. Concerns with context might be divided into the research context (including physical and temporal issues) and the interactional context (the talk that arises in the interview). It is rare to get much detail of the former in applied linguistics, where, for example, important matters like the presence of a tape recorder are ignored. Speer and Hutchby (2003: 317) see it as essential that social scientists 'should investigate precisely what it is that participants are doing when they orient to being recorded...'.

It is worrying if there is little or no recognition that what the interviewee says in the interview is contextually shaped. Interviewee contributions are always produced in negotiation with the interviewer (Rapley 2001: 317) and extracts from transcripts 'should always be presented in the context in which they occurred' (319). Pavlenko (2007) provides a critical review of sociolinguistics in relationship to interview analysis and argues that there is too much emphasis on content and little attention to form and contexts of construction. She is concerned that it not uncommon to see researchers compiling interview answers into narratives and ignoring the 'interactional influences on the presentation of self' (2007: 178). There are some exceptions to this complaint. For example, Barkhuizen (2010) pays attention to both content and form and looks at 'how linguistic resources were used to construct interactively both the story and the local understandings' (2009: 14), Talmy (this issue) shows how categorization is co-produced interactionally through the interview setting, and Blackledge and Creese (2008) is an example of an ethnographic study that provides interactional context through its extracts.

Richards (2003) includes a number of longer transcripts and analysis so that the reader can access the account of the tension between legitimate talk in interviews and something more like gossip. The account is valuable because we get a perspective on the interactional context and we get a consideration of how the interviewers' participation is 'significantly implicated in what the respondents end up saying' (Wooffitt and Widdicombe 2006: 56). Roulston (this issue) provides an examination of interview interactions that have been identified as 'problematic'. As in Richards (2003), the opening out of problems, tensions and difficulties is only possible because we see a fuller interactional context.

The 'what' and the 'how'

Where the interview plays only a supportive role and where the intention is to use interview data to support other data, it could be argued that there simply is not space for consideration of the 'discursive perspectives' being advanced here. However, a decision not to engage with such issues as co-construction,

interviewer identity and interactional context underplays the contribution of the interviewer and, at best, leads to the selective placement of interviewee voices. This is particularly worrying when studies rely solely or mostly on the qualitative interview (e.g. Cheung 2005). It is also, arguably, a missed opportunity when aspects of the interview process are evoked but not exemplified in other kinds of study. An example here would be Sealey's (2010) corpus-based study. Although it is claimed that 'the interviewers are skilled in encouraging people to articulate their memories, views, and beliefs' (2010: 217) and that 'the interviewer takes steps to downplay, or mute her individuality and provide maximum space' (220), there is no procedural or linguistic detail about how these skills and steps are employed. Consequently the research process (the 'how') is undervalued in the almost exclusive focus on research findings (the 'what'). Talmy (this issue) addresses this issue and shows how taking into account the 'hows' as well as the 'whats' enables a fuller understanding of how 'themes' (with potential for analysis) are interactionally occasioned.

Part of a shift from the 'what' to the 'how' involves the analyst opening out difficulties, contradictions, deviant examples, and ambiguity. Scheurich (1995: 241) argues that we need to take more account of 'complexity, uniqueness, and the indeterminateness' of interaction as well as 'problematic' elements of analysis. Miller (this issue) provides a focus on 'problem' interview cases and successfully brings out important contradictions, inconsistencies and ambiguities that constitute those 'problems'. Prior (this issue) takes what might ordinarily be seen as a problem (the differences in two tellings of the same event by the same interviewee) and traces them to the differing contextual circumstances.

More reflexive and transparent approaches to the reporting and representation of interview data, such as the above, would be helpful. If 'space' is an issue, we need to find more innovative ways to give the reader access in supplementary materials. As with DVD bonus features, it might be possible for writers to provide more of a back-story here (revealing more of the methodological and interactional 'how', rather than just selecting and presenting the 'what'). Access might be provided through writers' personal websites or through journals' and publishers' on-line resources.

PARAMETERS OF SENSITIVITY

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 1) tell us that it 'seems so simple to interview, but it is hard to do well'. Despite this challenge, Potter and Hepburn claim (2005: 300) that students 'often perform open-ended interviews with almost no training'. Richards (this issue) makes a particular case for the value of micro-analysis in interviewer training in order to encourage more 'interactionally sensitive approaches' to interview positioning (going beyond how questions and probes are constructed). Roulston (this issue) also argues for the close analysis of transcripts in helping to move beyond 'prescriptive' rules to a more nuanced and reflective approach.

Central to such an approach are parameters of sensitivity that might help students develop their awareness in handling the kind of discursive dilemmas outlined above. The 'how to' literature can provide some necessary guidance but can also tend to be general or prescriptive. Students need particular help in becoming sensitive, reflexive and reflective with regard to their own interview management in their differing and local accomplishments (Mann 2008).

If it is true that students underestimate the interview task, it is not surprising given some of the general treatments of interviews in social science hand-books. Our students sometimes rely too much on research handbooks (e.g. Robson 2002: 269–91) where, in terms of Talmy's (2010) distinction, inter-viewing is treated as a technical matter rather than a one of situated social practice. Robson's section on interviewing, for example, is dominated by checklists. Although, right at the end of the book, in an 'afterword', Robson quotes Schön in a brief mention of 'the reflective practitioner' (2002: 524), there is no real sense of reflective practice in the section on interviews. Neither are any interview data included and so students are not pointed to issues of co-construction or interactional context. Students should be pointed to re-source books that cover qualitative interviewing on our own field (e.g. Richards 2003; Holliday 2007; Roulston 2010) as these generally do discuss and take account of the interactional context.

The qualitative interviewer needs to make important decisions and progress in the following areas: recruiting and setting up interviews, managing the interview itself, developing a reflective and sensitive approach, and feeding this sensitivity into the analysis and representation. Researchers can certainly develop their 'technical' skills (e.g. they need to know that there is preference for open questions rather than closed ones) but it also important to develop a theoretically informed and interactionally sensitive way of working with interviews.

As well as being directed to appropriate and specific reading where they receive advice on artful ways to conduct interviews (Wolcott 1994), students need to be directed to reading that features explicit theorization of the inter-view, close analysis and reflection on interview data, interactional context and issues of co-construction. Some guides to interviewing do not give enough attention to this kind of close analysis (e.g. Keates 2001; King and Horrocks 2010). In addition to developing sensitivity to technical issues (e.g. how to follow up and probe answers), students could also be encouraged to consider a more ongoing reflexive approach.

It is common for our students to provide 'a summary of participant's obser-vations, richly interspersed with quotes, presented as analysis' (Pavlenko 2007: 163). This is particularly worrying when a study claims to be constructivist in nature and yet pays no attention to issues of co-construction in the shaping of these quotes. The following table presents an indicative list of the parameters of sensitivity that a researcher needs to build up. Rather different from a checklist system, it would encourage the interviewer to keep a record of and focus on issues that are interactionally relevant in their research and then

account for them. Tensions, balances and choices could be added in a reflective and ongoing exploration of practice.

Parameters of sensitivity	Comments
Agenda led ⇔ Conversational	Important balance in semi-structured interviews.
Naturally occurring ⇔ Manipulated voices	Similar to the degree of structure but also an important analytic perspective on how the data will be treated.
Direct ⇔ Indirect	Sensitivity around the issue of directness covers a number of issues (e.g. hypothetical questions, indirect probes such as asking about other people's views, offering anecdotes, texts). Richards (this issue) shows how standard advice on directiveness tends to ignore 'minimal responses'.
Conventional ⇔ Active	Considerations of the balance between rapport and empathy and more 'active' or confronting stances (Holstein and Gubrium 2003). This might be compared with interview moves associated with 'active listening' (see Edge 2002).
Empathy ⇔ Disclosure	The balance between trying to view things from the interviewee's perspective and 'contribution' or 'disclosure' (see Rapley 2004; Kvale and Brinkmann 2009 on 'interview').
Reports ⇔ Accounts	Recognizing the co-production and situated nature of what is presented. It also covers a monologic/dialogic parameter.
Rapport ⇔ Overapport	Warren and Karner (2009: 141) spell out the difficulties of both 'underrapport' and 'overrapport'.
Context free ⇔ Context shaped	A representation issue—the use of context free quotes and longer sections which show interactional context.
How ⇔ What	Might also be called process and product. This is a useful overall parameter—to make sure there is at least some reflexive element (see Ellis and Berger 2003; Davies 2007).

CONCLUSION

Richards in a review of qualitative research (2009: 158) states that 'analysis of interviews in our field still tends to treat them as reports rather than accounts, relying on unproblematized thematic analysis'. The review presented here would generally support this view. Applied linguistics is not alone in its mistreatment of the qualitative interview. Potter and Hepburn (2005: 321) take the field of psychology to account and say that 'the representation of what goes on in interviews is pervasively inadequate in ways that are both consequential for their analysis and for the transparency of that analysis'. The verdict on applied linguistics would be similar. I am not arguing that transcription and interactional context always needs to be

in the main body of the paper. Neither am I arguing that simply making transcripts available is sufficient to cover issues of co-construction, interviewer contribution and reflexivity. However, if a fuller interactional context is not available in appendices, the writer's website, or in supplementary online data, then researcher and potential researchers are impoverished. Prior (this issue) provides full transcripts (to open up the data for inspection) and also provides a data-led and reflexive account of the interviewee working with an interviewer (where narratives are recipient designed as well as prompted by the 'occasion').

Part of developing a more critical approach to qualitative interviewing is moving beyond the temptation to carve out quotable parts that serve our purposes. This is neither critical nor transparent. Where possible we need to negotiate a wider dissemination for at least some of the data. Obviously this will be where

- data are not sensitive;
- there is no possibility of deductive revelation;
- there are necessary permissions.

If there are good reasons why a fuller interactional context is either sensitive or does not have the requisite permissions, then it should be kept from public view. However, if interviewees give up their time and are willing for a wider pool of researchers to learn about the sensitive and demanding job of interviewing—then we should get permission for that.

Neither am I arguing for a form of qualitative interview navel gazing. Although most would welcome a more reflexive and context sensitive attention to the construction on interview interaction, there may be a danger that we focus too much on the how rather than the content of what the interviewer is saying. We still need to focus on 'what' is said; we just require more attention on 'how' this is constructed and how interaction is managed (see Holstein and Gubrium 2004). If we are to continue to develop the role of qualitative interviews in applied linguistics we need to develop more sensitive, informed and data-led accounts for the ways in which interviews are constructed. The following articles in this special issue suggest some ways that applied linguistics might respond to this challenge.

SUPPLEMENTARY DATA

Supplementary data is available at *Applied Linguistics* online.

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NOTES

1 This paper provides one example rather than a longer list of references due to word count restrictions. However supplementary on-line resources provide a more comprehensive list of reading and resources available for the reader interested in qualitative interviewing.

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