University of Southern Queensland

# Seeking to understand 'experiences of difference' in discussions with Saudi students at an Australian university

A dissertation submitted by

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B.A., M.A., Grad.Cert.T.S.L.

For the award of

Doctor of Philosophy

2010

# ABSTRACT

This dissertation reports on a study seeking to understand the experiences of ten male students from Saudi Arabia enrolled in a nursing degree at an Australian regional university. It draws on data produced in five discussion groups that were designed to elicit stories from the students about their experiences in Australia. By reflecting upon the broader issues relating to research in this cross-cultural context, the dissertation presents new perspectives for research in applied linguistics, education and cross-cultural studies. It also offers a new approach to the concepts of language, culture and identity, conceptualising them as empty signifiers which point to 'experiences of difference' that cannot be neatly categorised as distinct phenomena. This approach also enables an exploration of ethical and methodological issues relating to cross-cultural research.

Three distinct analytical frameworks, developed from the primary and secondary theoretical work associated with M. M. Bakhtin, are employed. The first framework explores key themes in the students' stories – expectations, differences and struggles – and highlights factors that might be important for enhanced understandings about the experiences of international students in an Australian context. It also indicates the weakness of reductionist approaches to researching the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse students. The second analytical framework employs the theoretical concepts of authoritative discourse and the superaddressee to explore what the group discussions revealed about 'experiences of difference'. This approach is presented as an alternative way of exploring the concepts of language, culture and identity. The third analytical framework identifies a number of ethical and methodological issues relating to the research more generally, including the role of serendipity in research, questions of ownership and knowledge rights, and the ethical dilemma of what to do with information that the researcher does not have permission to disclose.

The dissertation explores possible implications of these issues for research in cross-cultural contexts with a view to informing future studies. It concludes that further research using a variety of philosophical and methodological approaches in different contexts is required in order to gain a fuller understanding of the diversity and complexity of international student experiences.

# CERTIFICATION OF DISSERTATION

I certify that the ideas, experimental work, results, analyses, software and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.


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Signature of Candidate                         Date




ENDORSEMENT



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Signature of Supervisor                        Date



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Not simply to adhere to a long-standing academic tradition, but also with heartfelt thanks, I wish to express my appreciation to the many people who have in many and various ways helped me along this journey.

I thank my original supervisors, Dr Aniko Hatoss and Associate Professor Francis Mangubhai, for inspiring and encouraging me to get started on this journey.

I am deeply indebted to my principal supervisor Dr Robyn Henderson, and my associate supervisor Associate Professor Patrick A. Danaher, both of whom have continued to provide wisdom and insight, as well as encouragement and support, throughout my journey as an emerging academic. I count them as both esteemed colleagues and good friends. I also thank Dr Ann Dashwood for her insightful and encouraging comments on the first full draft of this dissertation and Mrs Jodie Gunders for her careful proofreading of the manuscript.

My academic work has been enriched by numerous students and staff at the University of Southern Queensland and especially those involved in two informal collaborative and support groups in the Faculty of Education: PG&ECR and Doc Chat.

I have found the journey of becoming an academic a complex and at times difficult process. I am grateful for the personal support provided to me by literally hundreds of people, including family, fellow church members, neighbours, and friends, but most especially by my wife, Leanne, and our two children, Cassie and Mandy, who have endured much and whom I love dearly.

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Midgley, W. (2007, November 8). *Cross-cultural research design: Balancing researcher identity*. Paper presented at the 2nd annual University of Southern Queensland Faculty of Education Postgraduate and Early Career Researcher Group research symposium, Faculty of Education, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia.


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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Where it all began

Seven days after returning to Australia, the country of my birth, after a 12-year absence living and working in Japan, I found myself in front of a group of 15 international students eager to be taught English. No problem, I thought to myself, I have been doing this for over a decade. Fifteen minutes into the class, I was not so sure.

My experience in teaching English as a second or foreign language was almost exclusively with Japanese students in Japan. In this classroom in Australia, over half of the students were men from Saudi Arabia, most of whom were in their mid- to late-20s. I had never met a Saudi[1] person, I knew nothing of their language and culture, and very little about their religion. I was accustomed to trying to coax words out of shy Japanese students, and was bewildered by the seemingly constant stream of very loud talk issuing forth from the Saudi men, often speaking over the top of one another, occasionally so passionately eager to be heard that they would rise to their feet. At the end of that first day of classes I found myself wondering how I was going to help these students to improve their English.

My anxiety was only heightened by the perplexity that seemed to engulf the entire program. I had joined the teaching team midway through an intensive English course, and what some staff were calling the problem of the Saudi students had already reached crisis level. During the remainder of that course, there were several special staff meetings called to address this problem. A leader from the local Islamic community – although not from Saudi Arabia – was invited to speak to teachers about cultural differences that might affect learning and classroom behaviour. Special policy and procedural guidelines were drawn up to protect the safety of teachers and students, although to the best of my knowledge there had never been a threat of physical violence. There was a taste of fear in the air.

Fairly soon after starting, I began to take time to chat informally with some of the Saudi students outside class. I found them to be warm and friendly, mature and responsible, eager and committed. I began to wonder what all the fuss was about. I came to believe at the time, and continue to believe to this day, that

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[1] I use the word Saudi, rather than Saudi Arabian throughout this dissertation. The single-word term was more commonly used by participants in this study to refer to themselves and their country, and I have appropriated the term from that usage. Although some participants used the words Saudi and Saudis as nouns, I have chosen to use the word only as an adjective, to avoid confusion.

underlying many of the problems was a mutual lack of understanding between the Saudi students and the teaching staff. I wanted to find out more about this, but I was unable to locate any published research on the experiences of Saudi students in Australia.

All of this occurred at the time that I was putting together an application to enrol in a PhD program. At that time, I was planning to study the language learning goals, strategies and perceived outcomes of Japanese working-holiday sojourners in Australia. As I was already fluent in the Japanese language and familiar with the culture, it would have been a logical topic for me to choose. As I already had many contacts in the Japanese community in the region, it would also have been convenient. However, I could not get the Saudi students off my mind. A concern for social justice began to well up within me, and I felt increasingly compelled to take action on their behalf. As I perceived the tensions between students and staff to be birthed in misunderstanding, I felt the answer lay in seeking to achieve greater understanding. Finally I decided to take action by changing the focus of my PhD research. The topic suddenly became much more complex, but it was one about which I have developed a great and enduring passion.

## THE EMERGENCE OF THREE INTER-RELATED LAYERS OF CONCERN

As already explained, the catalyst for the change of focus for my PhD study was my growing concern with what I perceived to be a lack of mutual understanding between Saudi students and their English-language teachers (myself included). In seeking to understand more about this issue, I was confronted with what became for me the first layer of concern: I was unable to locate any published research findings on the experiences of Saudi students studying at Australian universities. In fact, I was unable to locate studies published in the English language on the experiences of Saudi students in any Western country.

One Saudi student, upon hearing about my interest in researching this question, told me that he had been to the university library to try to find out about the experiences of other Saudi students and was also unable to find anything. He encouraged me to pursue that line of research, because it would be really helpful for other Saudi students to be able to read about the experiences of those who had been before them. Whether or not my study – written in English – will be of assistance to Saudi students is still not clear to me. However, I do believe that seeking to achieve a greater understanding of the experiences of Saudi students studying in Australia will be beneficial for informing teaching and support practices in Australian educational institutions.

In seeking to explore this area in greater depth, I began to read extensively on broader issues relating to language, culture and identity with respect to

students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It seemed to me that an exploration at this deeper level may also provide helpful insights into the experiences of Saudi students studying in Australia. However, I found myself personally unwilling to accept the reductionist perspectives of much of the research on language, culture and identity. My readings and reflections led me to develop a new conceptualisation of these phenomena which I call 'experiences of difference'. Developing and then applying a philosophy and method of exploring these 'experiences of difference' became a second layer of concern for me in this study.

As I continued to design my study, another even broader layer of concern impacting upon my research also surfaced. In an increasingly mobile and globalising world, education research increasingly encounters cross-cultural contexts. Culturally and linguistically diverse students, teachers and administrative staff encounter one another on campuses, electronically through email and discussion boards, and in virtual reality spaces. The appropriateness of seeking to explore these issues through a Western academic lens has been questioned by some, particularly from within the post-colonial paradigm (e.g., Appadurai, 2001; Darby, 2006). As the catalyst for this study was birthed in a desire to pursue social justice, I became increasingly concerned with the ethical and methodological issues associated with the research that I (a Western academic) conducted with non-Western participants.

All three layers of concern represent different dimensions of my study, and they are all inter-related. The way I address one of them influences and is influenced by the way I seek to address the others. For example, my concern with social justice in the specific context of Saudi students in Australia both informs and is informed by my concern for social justice in cross-cultural research in general. These three layers of concern are represented in Figure 1.1 as dimensions for exploration. Each of them is discussed fully in separate chapters (Chapter 5, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, respectively).
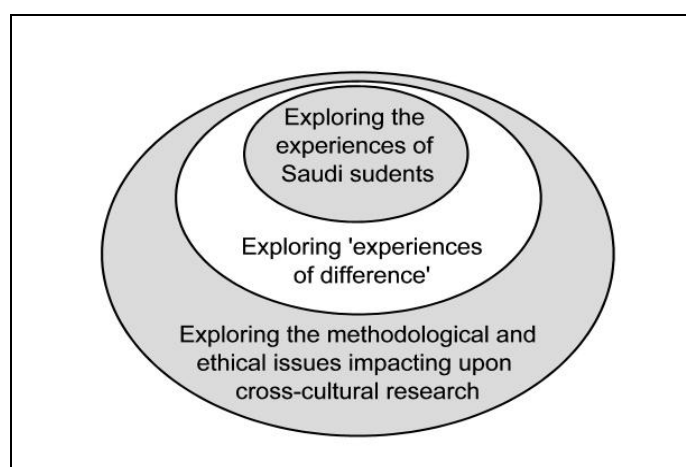


*Figure 1.1: The three dimensions of this study*

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To clarify the focus of my study, I reframed the three layers of concern into three research questions. As already explained, each of the research questions addresses a different dimension of this study, and one full chapter of analysis is devoted to each of them.

1.  What do the Saudi students choose to discuss when talking about their experiences as international students in Australia? (Chapter 5)

2.  What do these discussions reveal about 'experiences of difference'? (Chapter 6)

3.  What ethical and methodological issues relating to the cross-cultural context of this research can be identified? (Chapter 7)

The wording of these research questions is designed to reflect the philosophical framework underlying this study. Hence, Question 1 does not ask "what experiences do Saudi students have …?" but rather focuses on what experiences they choose to discuss in the context of this study. This wording is intended to foreground the ontological, epistemological, axiological and paradigmatic approaches adopted for this study, which are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

In order to examine these different research questions more fully, I have chosen to use three different analytical lenses: one for each question. Therefore, in Chapter 5, I use a content analysis lens to investigate Research Question 1. In Chapter 6, I develop and employ a discourse analysis lens for Research Question 2. I adopt a reflexive analysis lens in Chapter 7 to explore Research Question 3. I have chosen to use different lenses because I do not believe that any one analytical method is suitable to answer all three questions. I support my use of multiple lenses in Chapter 3, and discuss the different analytical approaches at the beginning of each of the three analysis chapters.

## CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

This study was conducted at one Australian university in which there was a large number of Saudi students, with a particular concentration of male students in nursing studies and in preparatory courses leading into that stream. The participants in this study came from among one cohort of male Saudi students enrolled in a Bachelor of Nursing degree program. The process and rationale behind the selection of participants for this study, along with specific demographic details, are discussed in full in Chapters 3 and 4.

## KEY TERMS

Originally, my second layer of concern was to explore the concepts of language, culture and identity. These three terms are employed in academic studies in a broad range of disciplines, covering a wide array of meanings and applications. In this study, I conceptualise these terms as empty signifiers pointing to important experiences of difference. My definition of key terms, therefore, begins with a brief discussion of the concept of empty signifiers.

### EMPTY SIGNIFIERS

In the post-Marxist theoretical framework developed by Ernesto Laclau (1996), an empty signifier is quite simply "a signifier without a signified" (p. 36). This framework of understanding is not referring to purely abstract concepts, but rather to differences that people experience, and therefore need to name in order to discuss. In the case of an empty signifier, the features of the phenomenon are structurally impossible to identify. The basis of their ontological status (being something different) is inextricably linked to the ontological status of the one noticing that difference. As a consequence, that to which the signifier refers does not exist in any ontological sense until it is noted and signified. As Laclau (2006) puts it, "the name is the ground of the thing" (p. 109).

Being empty does not imply that empty signifiers are unimportant. Indeed, the opposite is the case: empty signifiers are created and employed because we encounter differences that cannot be clearly represented, and yet they are so important to us that we need to find a way to represent them in order to think about, discuss and respond to them. Therefore, an empty signifier attempts to capture in a sign or symbol that which cannot be fully captured in a sign or symbol but which nevertheless our experience requires us somehow to capture in a sign or symbol.

The political significance of this, as drawn out in the work of Laclau (2006) and others (e.g., Carlbom, 2006; Szkudlarek, 2007) is that empty signifiers, once created, can then be filled with meaning. Brigg and Muller (2009) have argued that the word culture is one such empty signifier which, in studies of conflict resolution, is filled with Western understanding which runs the risk of simply reinforcing dominant Western ethico-political relations. The term empty signifier, therefore, carries deeper political implications than the related term floating signifier. A floating signifier can be a "more or less meaningless ... ephemera" (Sweetman, 1999, p. 53): the signifier can mean whatever the user wants it to mean. By referring to language, culture and identity as empty signifiers, I am highlighting the possibility that these signifiers can also be filled with meaning by people other than the person who uses the term. In other words, I may be able to use one of these signifiers to mean what I want it to mean (a floating signifier), but it may also be that my meanings are constrained

by forces outside my control or even conscious awareness. I use the term empty signifier to note this broader possibility. Empty signifiers and floating signifiers are both examples of the way in which utterances are appropriated (see Chapter 6).

Conceptualising the terms language, culture and identity as empty signifiers, means that they cannot be essentialised, because their ontological status is determined by the experience of difference, and these 'experiences of difference' are contextual and contingent. In the following, I briefly review some of the literature on each of these three terms. I begin with the term language, as it is most closely related to my own post-graduate studies in applied linguistics. I then look at some of the overlapping ideas that need to be considered when considering culture and identity in the context of discussions relating to language. Finally, I explain the unified framework for understanding 'experiences of difference' that I have developed for this thesis.

## LANGUAGE

The use of language has been a common characteristic of human life across the globe throughout recorded history. It has been described as the one attribute that, more than any other, distinguishes human beings from other animals (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2003). However, despite the pervasiveness of language in our everyday lives, it is a theoretical concept that has proven difficult to conceptualise.

Linguistics is the field of study concerned with languages. There are two dominant streams of thought on the concept of language within the field of linguistics: formalist and functionalist (see, for example, Darnell, 1999). To simplify a very complex theoretical debate, the formalist view conceptualises language as something that human beings possess to varying degrees of perfection, whereas the functionalist view sees language as something that human beings do to various degrees of effectiveness.

For the formalist, language is an innate ability of all human beings, and all human languages abide by the same universal laws or principles. Language can be studied by a kind of theoretical smelting, in which the impurities of human contact can be removed from the pure ore of language. Linguists from this tradition continue to explore the nature and dimensions of this so-called universal grammar (see Chomsky, 1976, 2000; Jackendoff, 2002). The functionalist view argues that language cannot be separated from the context of its use. The focus of functionalist linguistic studies is not on the universal features of pure language, but rather on the way in which certain tasks are performed in certain contexts using language (see Halliday, 1973, 1975).

A similar debate has occupied Second Language Acquisition theorists with respect to how second languages are learnt, and therefore should be taught. The central theme of the Applied Linguistics Associations of NZ and of Australia (ALANZ and ALAA) combined conference at AUT University in Auckland, New Zealand in 2009 was developed around the binary distinctions noted by Sfard (1998) in theorising mathematics education. Sfard discussed the metaphors of acquisition and participation, and these two metaphors for learning can be seen to represent two distinct approaches to understanding how second languages are learnt and used. The acquisition metaphor (as distinct from Krashen's [1981] use of the term acquisition) sees language learning and use from a cognitive processing perspective; the participation model views language learning and use as a social phenomenon (see also Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008; Zuengler & Miller, 2006).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, language is a concept that has implications far beyond the questions of whether it is a form or a function, or whether language learning is cognitive or social. To refer to a codified system of communication as a language is to attribute to that social phenomenon some degree of power and prestige. In Max Weinreich's memorable words, "A language is a dialect with an army and a navy" (1945 [original in Yiddish], as cited in Fromkin et al., 2003, p. 445). The codified system of communication I have used for this chapter is a language called English, or sometimes academic English. However, the equally rich and complex codified system of communication used by some members of the Indigenous community in my town is not honoured as a fully-fledged language. Without recognition as a language in and of itself, what they speak can be perceived to be a wrong, poor or bastardised form of the English language.

In an attempt to disrupt the power and privilege associated with globally dominant forms of the English language, some writers use the term Englishes (e.g., Nero, 2005) to encompass those forms of English that are significantly different from the dominant ones. From within the empty signifier framework, it can be argued that these approaches seek to re-empty the signifier language or English language of its Western politico-ethical meaning, and then refill it with meanings that represent a different politico-ethical position.

On an individual scale, the use of language also has implications relating to power and prestige. Barbara Mellix (1987/1998) demonstrated this dramatically in her paper "From outside, in". She began in standard academic English:

> Two years ago, when I started writing this paper, trying to bring order out of chaos, my ten-year-old daughter was suffering from an acute attack of boredom. She drifted in and out of the room complaining that she had

nothing to do, no one to "be with" because none of her friends were at home. (p. 61)

At the end of that same paragraph she quotes herself speaking in frustration to her daughter:

> I lost my patience. "Looka here, Allie," I said, "you too old for this kinda carryin' on. I done told you this is important. You wronger than dirt to be in here haggin' me like this and you know it. Now git on outta here and leave me off before I put my foot all the way down." (p. 61)

The stark contrast between the two languages used by Mellix in this paragraph, and the images that they may evoke in the mind of the reader, demonstrate the way that language use has implications far beyond the simple exchange of information.

The word language, conceptualised as an empty signifier, can be used to represent an 'experience of difference'. Whilst I understand everything that Mellix (1987/1998) wrote, I experience a sense of difference when reading the second part that I did not experience when reading the first part. If Mellix were to write that way in one of the English as a second language programs in which I have taught, I would mark it as wrong. The attribution of right and wrong reflect the in-filling of the empty signifier language with dominant models of what constitutes correct English.

## *CULTURE*

The term culture is used by cultural anthropologists to refer to a broad range of beliefs, behaviours, artefacts and social systems that serve to maintain cohesion within larger groups of people (such as tribes or ethnic groups), and also distinguish them from other such groups. In a seminal work on culture from this perspective, Clifford Geertz (1973) defined culture as a "strafied hierarchy of meaningful structures" (p. 6), his emphasis being on not only the external structures (e.g., artefacts), but the meanings associated with them. Riley (2007), examining culture in terms of language and identity, referred to three systems of social knowledge that make up culture: know-that, know-of and know-how. For example, as an insider in the dominant culture in Australia, I know that everyone should be given a fair go, I know of the tragic bushfires near Melbourne in 2009 and I know how to apply for a government grant to fund the purchase of sporting equipment for my daughter's basketball team. In this sense, culture can be seen to be what makes us "us" and them "them".

When considered in the context of language, an important question arises: is language a part of culture, or is culture a part of language? For example, in

2007 there was a heated debate in parliament, media and the wider community in Australia over the requirement to pass an English language test in order to gain citizenship. The then Minister for Immigration, Kevin Andrews, supported the decision to continue to test new applicants on their English language ability, stating that, "Surely being able to use English is important for anybody in this country" ("Fed: Andrews pushes on with citizenship test"). In this context, the ability to speak English was conceptualised as an important characteristic of being one of us Australians. Language was conceptualised as a subset of culture.

However, culture can also be conceptualised as a part of language. When I speak English, I refer to myself with the personal subject pronoun "I". When I speak Japanese, I must choose between a number of different terms (not all of them pronouns), depending upon my relationship with the person I am talking to, and the context of the discussion. With my friends, I might use 僕 "boku" unless they were all young men, in which case I might join them in referring to myself as 俺 "ore". However, if I were giving a more formal speech to those same friends, I would use 私 "watashi" or "watakushi" instead, which is the personal pronoun I would normally choose when speaking to people who are of higher status than or are not yet known to me. I might also have occasion to refer to myself as 自分 "jibun" (myself), 先生 "sensei" (teacher), キャシーのパパ "Kyashi no papa" (Cassie's Dad) and so on, all as the subject of the verb which in English could only be translated as "I". Clearly, the cultural norms and beliefs relating to social status and interpersonal relationships influence the way in which I speak Japanese, and in this sense culture can be seen to be a subset of language.

To rephrase these two points in terms from the linguistic field of semantics, language is a hyponym of culture, and culture is equally a hyponym of language. This seems quite counter-intuitive; it is easy to accept that ant is a hyponym of insect (that is to say, the category covered by the word insect includes all ants); however, we would not say that insect is a hyponym of ant (because there are many insects that are not ants). Whilst it would be valid to suggest that one of the semantic properties of ant is being an insect, it would not be valid to suggest that one of the semantic properties of insect is being an ant. How, then, do we conceptualise a relationship between two concepts in which both can be identified as a property of the other?

Part of the difficulty may arise from the ongoing influence of Aristotelian syllogistic logic on Western modes of thinking: if ant is a part of the broader category insect, then insect cannot be a part of the broader category of ant. These systems of logic have proven to be ineffective in explaining some phenomena in physical sciences; hence the emergence of counter-intuitive theoretical models such as quantum wave theory, which proposes that at an atomic level it is possible for one object to be in a superposition of two quantum states. For instance, a radioactive atom can be both decayed and not

decayed at the same time; it is only at the moment of measurement that it collapses into one of those two states (see Rosenblum & Kuttner, 2006). In a similar way, it may be argued that language is a part of culture at the same time as culture is a part of language; however, when a researcher attempts to measure one or the other, there is a kind of quantum collapse. For cultural anthropologists (e.g., Duranti, 2001), language may collapse into a property of culture; for sociolinguists (e.g., Romaine, 2000), culture may collapse into a property of language.

*IDENTITY*

This complex relationship between the concepts signified by the terms language and culture is further complicated when the signifier identity is introduced into the discussion. Identity is a term used to describe a number of different concepts. In philosophy, it can refer to the intrinsic ontological status of some entity (Quine, 1950). In technology and law, it can refer to a legal entity to which a person can have rights of ownership, hence identity theft (Saunders & Zucker, 1999). However, this study focuses on the social nature of identity; that is, who I and others believe I am in relation to other people. In recent years this social concept of identity has been examined from many different disciplinary perspectives, including anthropology, linguistics, psychology, sociology, history, literature, gender studies and social theory (de Fina, Schiffrin, & Bamberg, 2006). One theoretical framework for understanding the social nature of identity is social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982).

Some recent studies that incorporate both language and culture in discussions of identity have noted that identities can be ambivalent and continuously shaped by dominant discourses (Ngo, 2009) and can be negotiated or resisted through language use (Blackledge & Creese, 2008; Talmy, 2008), although it has also been claimed that identity is the product, rather than the determiner, of language practices (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). A sense of cultural or ethnic identity can affect attitudes towards heritage languages for immigrants and their children, ultimately impacting upon the maintenance of these languages (Tse, 2000), and gender identities can also affect language maintenance in these communities (Winter & Pauwels, 2005). Language students can move in and out of different identities in seeking to influence others in the language classroom (Hirst, 2007). Furthermore, second language users can see themselves as having second language identities which may be in conflict with their first language identities (Hartmann, 2002). As this brief overview of some recent literature demonstrates, the concept of identity is coming to be recognised by many as a complex and contingent phenomenon with equally complex and contingent inter-relationships with concepts referred to as language and culture.

From the perspective I have adopted for this study, identity is perhaps the exemplar par excellence of an empty signifier, because it points to a

relationship based entirely upon the recognition of difference: I am who I am, in relation to someone I am not. However, it is difficult to draw the distinction between 'experiences of difference' that ought to fit under the category of identity, and those that would better be labelled as culture or even language. In order to resolve this issue, I have adoped the approach of those following Vygotsky (e.g., Lantolf & Appel, 1994) and sought to examine the three concepts as an integrated whole. For this purpose, I have developed a unified framework for conceptualising all the 'experiences of difference' that might otherwise be referred to as language, culture and identity.

### 'EXPERIENCES OF DIFFERENCE'

As already discussed, I have conceptualised the terms language, culture and identity as empty signifiers which point to inter-related aspects of experiences of difference, but which cannot be reduced to core essences. What some researchers and theorists refer to as culture is intrinsically related to aspects that others might refer to as language and identity. These terms are all different ways of pointing to (potentially different aspects of) 'experiences of difference'.

Rather than continuing to work with these highly complex, contingent and contested empty signifiers, I have chosen to develop and apply a new framework to highlights the inter-relationship among elements of all three, which I call 'experiences of difference'. The framework is embodied in the broader philosophical stances outlined in Chapter 2. One possible advantage of this approach can be seen in the following example.

If I were to speak with you, one aspect of that engagement would be who I believe myself to be in relation to you, and another aspect would be who you believe yourself to be in relation to me. These aspects we might label as identity. The knowledges that frame and facilitate our discussion (how far apart we should stand, what we should talk about, how I will know that you are getting bored) are some of the aspects that we might label as culture. The words that we chose to use to conduct the conversation we might label as language. However, the words that I chose are influenced by aspects that we might otherwise have labelled as culture (how I should politely end the conversation) and identity (whether I should refer to you by your first name or your title). These things all operate in complex, inter-related ways to influence how I engage with you, and my experience of that engagement. This complex inter-relationship I have conceptualised as one phenomenon which I call 'experiences of difference'.

My attempts to illustrate how this framework relates to other conceptualisations of language, culture and identity have proven frustrating. If I were to draw a circle to represent language, I would need to include within it two smaller circles to represent identity and culture, but the original circle

itself would need to be enclosed by a larger circle: would it be identity or culture? My conceptualisation of the mutually inclusive inter-relationship between the experiences to which these signifiers refer would insist it needs to be both. I have not found a satisfactory way to represent this in either two or three-dimensions. The only way I have found to visually demonstrate this conceptualisation is with the use of a four-dimensional model – that is an animated diagram. I have recreated one frame from my animated model in Figure 1.2, in an attempt to represent it in a two-dimensional printed format. Basically, the circle represents dialogic engagement. The three colours in the sphere represent the phenomena that are expressed by the signifiers language, culture and identity. These phenomena are not static; therefore, in the animated version of the model they seem to throb as the different colours grow and shrink in relation to each other; they move about and merge with one another in different locations.
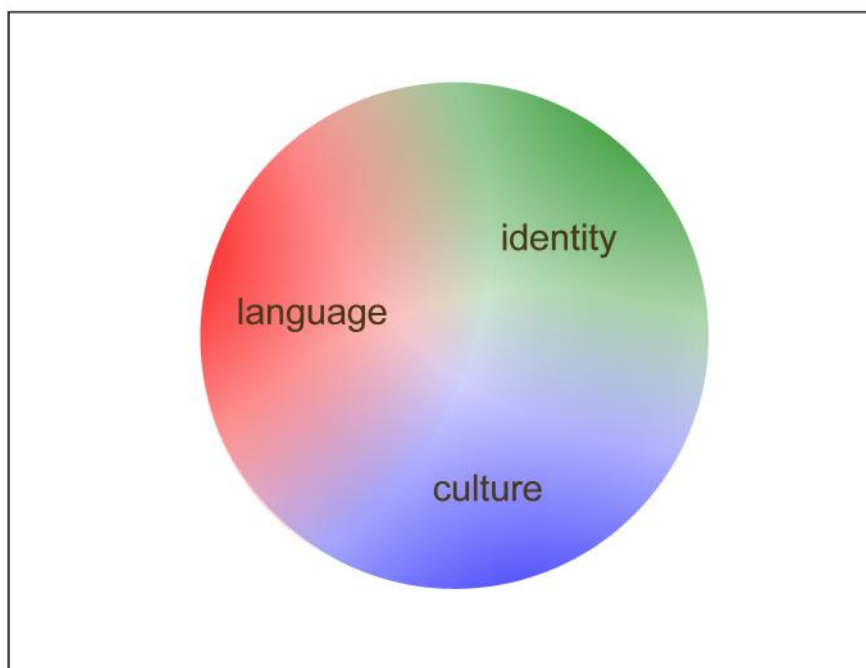


*Figure 1.2: One frame from the unified model: 'Experiences of difference'*

OUTLINE OF DISSERTATION

A review of the table of contents will reveal that this dissertation does not follow the standard five-section outline commonly associated with quantitative studies (see, for example, Creswell, 2005). As an exploratory qualitative study, the research questions and emerging themes for analysis and discussion have informed the structure of the dissertation. There is no literature review chapter; rather, the relevant literature is discussed within the context of each of the chapters from Chapter 2 through to Chapter 7. This decentralisation of the review of literature is intended to both more accurately reflect the research

process I have employed in this exploratory study, and also to facilitate the readability of the final product, with relevant references to the literature situated more closely to the discussions to which they relate.

Because of the significance of the philosophical and methodological frameworks underpinning this study, two full chapters have been dedicated to the discussion of those inter-related domains. In Chapter 2, I focus on the ontological, epistemological and axiological foundations of the study, with an extensive discussion of the bakhtinian[2] approach I have taken, contrasted with other philosophical and paradigmatic approaches. In Chapter 3, I discuss in more depth the philosophy behind the methodological approach I have taken. In Chapter 4, I provide details of how discussion groups for data production were arranged, organised, conducted, recorded and transcribed, with reference to the philosophical and methodological considerations already discussed. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 examine the data through three different lenses, to explore the three different research questions. However, all three analysis chapters are framed by the same philosophical approach. In Chapter 8, I draw together the research findings and discuss the implications and limitations of the study.

## THE RESEARCHER I AM

I have explicitly positioned myself as one of the participants in this study in line with the philosophical and methodological foundations upon which this study is built (see Chapter 3) and have therefore adopted a strong authorial voice throughout. This approach is in line with the postmodern paradigm which challenges researchers to examine their own presence in their research projects, and to acknowledge the influence that presence might have on the outcomes. This presence includes influencing factors such as disciplinary training, epistemological orientation, social positionality, institutional imperatives and funding sources and requirements (Scheurich, 1997).

My academic training includes a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology, a Master of Arts degree in cultural anthropology and a Postgraduate Certificate in applied linguistics. I have worked as both an ESL/EFL teacher, and also as an academic in the fields of applied linguistics (bilingualism, sociolinguistics) and education (pre-service and in-service teacher education, post-graduate research methodology). I see myself as wearing several academic hats, and in a sense, I change hats as I change lenses in the three analytical chapters of this dissertation (Chapters 5-7).

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[2] For an explanation of the lower case 'b' see Chapter 2

In Chapter 5, I am looking with the eyes of a cultural anthropologist in education. I focus on what the Saudi participants say about their experiences, and I try to understand their emic perspective on those experiences. In Chapter 6, I am looking with the eyes of a sociolinguist. I focus on the language data used in our discussions, and try to identify how we use language to accomplish our dialogic purposes, and what this reflects upon my understanding of 'experiences of difference'. In Chapter 7, I am looking with the eyes of an educational researcher. I focus on the processes involved in research and probe into the deeper questions of ethics and methodology in cross-cultural research. These are all aspects of my academic background, and I believe they are all important perspectives to adopt in seeking to explore such complex issues.

My current research is not covered by a specific research grant, and during the time in which the data were collected and analysed, I had no professional involvement in the academic lives of any of the Saudi participants, nor was I in any way involved in the program of study they were enrolled in (which was in a different faculty). Thus, there were no clearly visible external influences on the outcome of my studies. However, my PhD study in general was supported by a scholarship grant, thus I sensed there was a certain degree of expectation about achieving successful research outcomes, particularly from the faculty which supported my application. I see no evidence of this influencing the outcomes of my research. Nevertheless, I acknowledge this as a part of the context in which I conducted my study, in order to maintain transparency.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have outlined the emergence of the focus of this research, noting the three layers of concern which I developed into three specific research questions. I also explained my understanding of the concepts of language, culture and identity as empty signifiers, and presented a unified model to represent the complex and contingent nature of the inter-relationship between the 'experiences of difference' to which these concepts often refer, as a foundation for my discussion of these concepts in the analysis chapters. I now turn in Chapter 2 to explain in more depth the philosophical foundations underlying this study.

# CHAPTER 2: PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

## INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I discussed the research topic and research question, and explained the concept of 'experiences of difference' which is central to this study. In this chapter I outline the philosophical foundations upon which this study is based. Four levels of philosophical perspective inform this study. I examine each one separately and then discuss the use of these different lenses to my study. I expand on the philosophical frameworks I developed for this study, which I have called a four-dimensionalist ontology, a dialogic epistemology, a cosmopolitan axiology and a protoparadigmatic approach to research design. In Chapter 3, I explain in more detail the principles underlying my qualitative design, including the specific ways in which these philosophical foundations are reflected in my research design.

## FOUR-DIMENSIONALIST ONTOLOGY

Four-dimensionalism is a metaphysical theory that seeks to explain the long-standing question of how objects persist and change through time (Koslicki, 2003). Whilst Rea (2003) draws a distinction between four-dimensionalism and perdurantism, the theory of four-dimensionalism which I discuss here follows Sider (2001, 2003), whose four-dimensionalism encompasses perdurantism. Whilst Sider's argument is related to metaphysical questions more broadly, I have adopted his perspective to focus on the four-dimensional (or perduring) ontological status of the dimensions of 'experiences of difference'.

Four-dimensionalism basically posits that objects, which could include events (Rea, 2003), have temporal parts, and therefore can persist and change through time. For example, a steaming hot cup of tea on my desk now can be described as having certain properties. One of those properties is a temporal one (it is now). In one hour's time, the same cup of tea may still be sitting on my desk, un-sipped. In that case, according to the four-dimensionalist stance, it is the same object, with some of the same properties as before, but also with some different properties. Not only will it no longer be steaming hot but it will also have a different temporal property (it is one hour later than the previous time). For four-dimensional theory, the steaming hot cup of tea now and the cooled cup of tea in one hour's time have the same ontological status of existence. As Rea (2003) explains, objects which are not present owing to different temporary properties (e.g., being in the future or past) are like objects that are not present due to different spatial properties (e.g., being in another country or

on another planet). Both objects exist; they just do not exist where/when we are (here and now).

It may seem pedantic to discuss the ontological status of objects that are distant in time; however, four-dimensionalism suggests a radically alternative ontological stance from which to examine the concepts encompassed in the 'experiences of difference' framework, including aspects that are described in other studies with the terms language, culture and identity. Much that has been written about language, culture and identity conceptualises these concepts as static three-dimensional objects; that is, they can be described without reference to time. I would argue that experiences of difference are ontologically four-dimensional, and that their temporal properties are significant; hence my development of a four-dimensional (animated) unified model in Chapter 1 to represent this concept.

An illustration of this may be seen in the use of electronic media as sources of information in research. The American Psychological Association (APA) suggested that when citing electronic media sources that do not have fixed publication dates, edition or version numbers, the date on which the information was retrieved should be cited, because this "offers a snapshot of the content at the time of your research" (American Psychological Association, 2007, p. 2). In establishing this guideline, the APA was essentially acknowledging the four-dimensional nature of web-based information; that is, to identify a source accurately, the reader needs to be told not only from what location it was retrieved (where), but also from what time location it was retrieved (when). Time and space are both essential properties of the information source.

According to this four-dimensional view, language that is completely dissociated from past use, present context and anticipated future response is not language at all but merely a list of words or a book of traditional grammar rules. Likewise culture and identity would be inextricably tied to the past, enacted and experienced in the present, with an eye on the future. To try to remove the past and future, and capture any of the concepts described with these terms as something that exists only in the present, is to capture a caricature of the concept: one that has been artificially reduced for the purposes of recording and analysis. The unified model of 'experiences of difference' that I have developed is based upon the assumption that these experiences (including those factors that others might call language, culture and identity) have intrinsic temporal properties. To seek to essentialise meanings without reference to temporal and other contextual factors would remove these significant properties.

*THE TERM BAKHTINIAN*

It is important to articulate the significance and meaning of the term bakhtinian as used in this study. Bakhtin's academic writing has been described as "standing under the sign of plurality" (Clark & Holquist, 1984, p. 1). This evocative expression may be read in a variety of ways. Bakhtin's writings cover a broad range of topics including literary studies, linguistics, history, philosophy, sociology and psychology (Gardiner, 1992). They span a long career, passing through several phases, including a long period of silence whilst in political exile (Clark & Holquist, 1984). Bakhtin writes in an unusual style. Gardiner (1992) described his texts as "frustratingly vague in their terminology, often deliberately repetitious, and encumbered with multiple and ambiguous levels of meaning" (p. 1). One suggested explanation for this is that some of the papers were never intended to be published (Bell & Gardiner, 1998). Bakhtin writes about many different subjects on many different levels with many different layers of possible meaning.

Another dimension of plurality relates to the eclectic nature of the collection of Bakhtin's writings that are now available in English. Much of the work that Bakhtin wrote was never published, having been either lost or destroyed during the tumultuous years of Soviet history through which Bakhtin lived, perhaps owing in part to Bakhtin's own infamously cavalier attitude to his own work (Holquist, 1984). That which was published in Russian began to be translated into English only after his death, and that work of translation has been piecemeal and non-chronological (Vice, 1997). Thus readers of Bakhtin in English only have access to some of the things that Bakhtin wrote (possibly in collaboration with others in the so-called Bakhtin circle).

Because of the distance in time, language and culture, among other things, between the writings attributed to Bakhtin and my reading of them in English, in this dissertation I do not refer to ideas, theories or concepts as those of Bakhtin. Rather, I use the term bakhtinian, with a lower case b to acknowledge that my reading of the translated works of Bakhtin, and secondary works referring to them, have played an important role in the development and articulation of the theories I discuss. Frank (2005) refers to this rather poetically as "a Bakhtinian impulse" (p. 969).

There has been some discussion over the alleged misapplication of Bakhtin's work by educational researchers (see Matusov, 2007). This may be of great significance for historical research but I do not believe it is of such importance in terms of the objectives of this study. I do not claim that my understanding of the concepts discussed below is in accord with Bakhtin's own thoughts and ideas, nor am I searching for the historical or authentic Bakhtin. The particular application I wish to make of these theories – exploring the experiences of

Saudi students in an Australian university – is a context that Bakhtin himself never discussed and possibly never envisaged. Furthermore, the enigmatic nature of Bakhtin's own personal and professional history, and the eclectic nature of the works that have been published (and then translated into English for publication), challenge the concept of being definitive about what Bakhtin believed about any subject.

However, the theory upon which I have based this work flows in the stream of ideas that trace their origins to the time/space convergence of the discovery in the 1980s of the works of the Bakhtin circle by English speaking academics in the West. For this reason, I prefer the term bakhtinian. My unconventional use of the lower case is intended to highlight this distinction. As has been noted by others working within a similar approach (e.g., Hall, Vitanova, & Marchenkova, 2005b; Lahteenmaki & Dufva, 1998), it seems particularly apt, in the light of the bakhtinian concept of dialogue, to appropriate utterances from translations of Bakhtin's writings into new contexts. In this way, the terms and concepts carry with them the lingering taste of Bakhtin, whilst being adapted for new purposes in new contexts. According to this approach Bakhtin's writings are internally persuasive discourse rather than authoritative discourse (see the discussion in Chapter 6).

Another reason for adopting the lower case b in bakhtinian is that there is not one unified, uncontested school of bakhtinian thought. Makhlin (2000) and Dop (2000), for instance, both challenge the postmodern reading of Bakhtin that they claim dominates Anglo-American scholarship. Bek (1999) challenges parallels drawn between bakhtinian and Hallidayan theories of language, and Pearce (1994) challenges the loose and eclectic use of bakhtinian terms by many scholars. The particular bakhtinian perspective adopted as a theoretical framework for this study is one among several possible views. I present it as unfinalised (see Bakhtin, 1984a), by which I mean that my intention is not to have the last word, but rather to continue in ongoing dialogue.

*DIALOGIC[3] EPISTEMOLOGY*

The term dialogic epistemology is used in a variety of ways when referring to research. In a very general sense, it is used to include the negotiation of meaning between two or more people, which may include the attempt to reconcile conflicting knowledge claims (Skovsmose, 1994). The attempt to invite participants to engage in the full research process (including design and

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[3] I use the words 'dialogic' and 'monologic' in preference to 'dialogical' and 'monological' (versions which also appear in the literature) throughout this dissertation, partly because they are already adjectives (derived from the nouns 'dialogue' and 'monologue') and partly as an intentional appropriation of the term in the title of the English translation of one collection of Bakhtin's writings, *The dialogic imagination* (Bakhtin, 1981).

analysis) in order for both researcher and research participants to discover new understandings or perspectives has also been referred to as dialogic epistemology (Stentoft, 2005).

This idea that meaning is negotiated (often associated with social constructivist or interpretivist research paradigms) is not without its strong opponents. For example, in responding to a paper arguing for a dialogic epistemological approach that champions disagreement in the physical sciences as the basis for the search for new knowledge, Marietti (2001) most emphatically disagrees.

> We must then admit that dialogic discourse is literary; in every case, it is more literature than epistemology, and it is without any interest for the real and scientific bearing to a scientific truth. (n.p.)

These debates, important as they may be, do not directly engage with the concept of dialogic epistemology in the bakhtinian sense of the term. As Wegerif (2008) has argued, the term dialogic is sometimes used for what in bakhtinian terms would be called dialectic. In the writings of Bakhtin, the distinction is quite clear:

> Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness – and that's how you get dialectics. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 147)

In bakhtinian theory, dialogic epistemology is used in contrast with monologic epistemology. Monologic forms of knowledge include what Bakhtin (1986) called "the exact sciences" (p. 161), and arise when a subject contemplates and expounds upon a voiceless object or thing. He goes on to state that "a subject as such cannot be perceived and studied as a thing, for as a subject it cannot, while remaining a subject, become voiceless, and, consequently, cognition of it can only be dialogic" (p. 161).

This distinction between subject and object is central to this conceptualisation of dialogic epistemology. The point of distinction is not one of essence, but of relationship. Simply being human does not necessarily make a person a subject. Thus, it is possible for human researchers to examine other humans in a monologic way. Within this framework, the humans under examination would be objects, whilst the humans conducting the research would be subjects. This is in stark contrast to the terminology often used in monologic research projects (where the objects are referred to as subjects). In this study, I use the

term participants to refer to those (including myself) who participated in the study (see Chapter 4).

The monologic system of knowing is premised upon the belief that the object being examined or contemplated is stable and knowable. As an example, a pathologist may take a sample of my blood in order to examine my cholesterol levels. The examination is based on the assumption that my cholesterol levels at the time of testing will be roughly equivalent to what my cholesterol levels generally are. If each new day I have vastly different cholesterol levels, then the blood test would not be a reliable indicator of my coronary health. Likewise, the blood sample is examined based on the assumption that the pathology tests accurately measure cholesterol levels in the blood. If the tests are not accurate, the findings are not valid. These two concepts of reliability and validity are crucially important for evaluating monologic research.

Research in the social sciences can also be monologic. There are several key indicators of this epistemological foundation. The objects of the study are treated as if they were unchanging and knowable. For example, a research project examining student attitudes towards a particular subject may be based on the presumption that attitudes are fairly stable, and that the researchers are able to discover what those attitudes are. When the objects of the study are human beings, monologic research can silence participants.

Dialogic research, on the other hand, operates on an entirely different premise. When the person being contemplated is a subject, rather than an object, the person is empowered both to change and to remain unknowable. Researchers seek out the voices appropriated by the other participants, and the reporting on that research reflects the different voices that emerged in the dialogic encounter.

I (Midgley, 2008a) have documented an example of the stark contrast between these two approaches in a reflexive analysis of an earlier research paper I had written. In the original paper, I reported on a study in which I sought to understand student attitudes towards forms of addressing the teacher in a conversational English class. This earlier study was a clear example of monologic research. I treated attitudes as things that were unchanging and knowable, and sought to examine and report on them in that way. The original study also silenced the opinions of those I was examining, even when they were enunciated in the data. As an example, one student from the original study replied with, "We are not friends; we are teacher and student" (Midgley, 2008a, p. 20). In the later paper, I reflected on the way I had treated this statement in the original research report:

> Although not noted in the original report, this statement came as something of a shock to me because another (unacknowledged in the original report) reason for inviting students to address me by my first name was to attempt to position myself alongside students as a friend and helper in the process of language learning. The statement quoted here in the report represents one student's refusal to accept that positioning, insisting upon a more hierarchical student-teacher relationship. The implications of this conflict in perspectives on appropriate student-teacher relationships were not examined or addressed by me in the classroom, even after this study was concluded. (p. 20)

In some ways, this reflexive paper is also monologic, in the sense that I was not engaging in dialogue with the author of the original paper (myself, two years previously). The original paper, and the two-year-previous me as author, were examined as objects, rather than given the freedom to participate as subjects. Of course, in this instance it may be somewhat artificial for me (now) to attempt to engage in authentic dialogue with me (then). This is perhaps the nature of reflexive work; although in Chapter 7, I attempt to develop a dialogic framework for reflexive analysis. Nevertheless, the important point to note here is that the earlier research demonstrated a monologic epistemological foundation.

This points to another key finding of that reflexive paper which I have called the "mutability of researcher values" (Midgley, 2008a, p. 14). Over the space of just over two years, the thoughts, beliefs and values that were reflected in my earlier paper had radically changed. One of those significant changes was at an axiological level, which was the focus of the later paper. Another key change was epistemological, as previously discussed. It seems important to note, therefore, that within a dialogic epistemology the researcher is also a subject who has the potential to change.

What I come to know about another person, what that person comes to know about me and what we each come to know about ourselves as a result of dialogic encounter are both contextual and contingent. The chronotopic context of the engagement influences what we choose to reveal to each other, and what we choose to make of what we reveal to each other. The contingency of this knowledge experience relates to the epistemological belief that in a different chronotopic context the same two people know about each other in a way that is different to any previous or future dialogic engagement.

The only way I can come to know about other people, then, is to engage with them dialogically. This includes allowing the Saudi participants to choose what they do and do not reveal about themselves, for reasons which they may or may not choose to reveal to me. This epistemological stance attempts to remove

barriers and boundaries constraining people to preconceived categories and immutability. However, by broadening the possibilities for human freedom within the context of dialogic engagement, the researcher is forced to let go of any attempt to achieve stable and constant knowledge in a positivist sense.

It may be argued that dialogic research in this sense is of little value, because the contextual and contingent nature of the knowledge that is produced in that engagement fails to provide clear and specific answers to any questions. In one sense, I would agree with that; however, when conducting research on matters relating to the way other human beings think, act and believe, I would strongly argue that there are no clear and specific answers. People do change. People do exercise their rights to choose what to disclose, and to keep parts of themselves hidden, and they also exercise their rights to decide whether or not to explain their reasons for doing so, or indeed even to admit to such editorial excising. People's thoughts and beliefs sometimes are very vague, and may be entirely contingent upon the context in which they are discussed.

An example of the contrast between monologic and dialogic epistemological foundations may be drawn from a popular textbook on methods for conducting survey research, recently released in its fourth edition (Fowler, 2009). In discussing the framing of questions for a survey, Fowler (2009) states that,

> When a completely open question is asked, many people give relatively rare answers that are not analytically useful. Providing respondents with a constrained number of answer options increases the likelihood that there will be enough people giving any particular answer to be analytically interesting. (p. 101)

My response to this approach is to argue that the rare answers represent what respondents choose to reveal about themselves and, therefore, from a dialogic perspective, are at least as important as answers that are constrained by closed questions in order to produce data that are more conducive to statistical analysis.

Another example from the same text illustrates why this is important. Fowler (2009) argues that posing the question, "Why did you vote for candidate A?" (p. 97) is not well worded. He gives the following explanation:

> Almost all "why" questions pose problems. The reason is that one's sense of causality or frame of reference can influence answers. In the particular instance above, the respondent may choose to talk about the strengths of candidate A, the weaknesses of candidate B, or the reasons he or she used

certain criteria (My mother was a lifelong Republican). Hence respondents who see things exactly the same way may answer differently. (pp. 97-98)

From a dialogic perspective, the stability implied by the statement "see things exactly the same way" (p. 98) begs contestation. Putting aside objections relating to the extreme positivism implied by this statement – that two people can see anything exactly the same way – the dialogic perspective draws attention to the possibility of there being more than one explanation for any given behaviour, and that the context in which the explanation was sought will inevitably influence the explanation that is offered. Thus, rather than seeking the right answer in a positivist sense, we would examine what the respondents considered to be the right answer in that specific context (e.g., filling in a questionnaire or responding to an interviewer's question).

Fowler continues to suggest what he considers to be a better question: "What characteristics of candidate A led you to vote for (him/her) over candidate B?" (p. 98). Again, a dialogic epistemology would not support this approach. Firstly, the question presupposes that the respondent voted on the basis of evaluating candidates' characteristics, whereas it could have been, as Fowler noted earlier, that the respondent was simply following his or her own mother's party allegiance. Secondly, rewording the question does not provide the researcher with a more reliable (stable) response, because the respondent is in dialogic relationship with the researcher/interviewer, and therefore the very context of that dialogue will influence the respondent's answer. The reason given to the researcher may be quite different to the explanation given to the neighbour over the back fence, which again may be quite different to the explanation given to the Republican-voting mother.

When I first began designing the research for this study, I was faced with the problem of how to conceptualise identity, which I had selected as a key concept for investigation. Previous studies I had read in various academic disciplines (and especially in sociolinguistics) had conceived of identity monologically. Although I was not yet familiar with this term, I was most uncomfortable with that approach. Commenting on the process at the time, I (Midgley, 2008b) wrote,

> Seeking to articulate my own identity at the beginning of this study, I found myself lost in the wilderness of epistemological uncertainty and metaphysical angst ... (R)eflecting upon that angst I discovered that the issue was not with who I am, but with how I have attempted to describe myself. I take offence at being labelled White because of the negative connotations that label has for me. It in no way describes who I see myself to be. The

same is true for the other markers of identity that I examined.
(p. 187)

In trying to discuss my own sense of identity, I found myself resisting a kind of monologic approach, which I felt was restraining me from expressing my own thoughts and attitudes towards who I believed myself to be, in relation to others. My scepticism towards monologic approaches to measuring identity was enunciated in the conclusion to that chapter:

> Because I have found it difficult to articulate my own identity, I am unwilling to accept a simplistic conceptualisation of identity for the purposes of my PhD study ... If I cannot articulate my own sense of identity through ticking boxes on a questionnaire, how can I reasonably expect others to do so? (Midgley, 2008b, pp. 190-191)

One concern that may be raised about adopting a dialogic epistemological foundation for research is what Markova et al. (2007) have called the dilemma of dialogic heterogeneity. Whilst adopting this approach themselves, they acknowledge:

> It remains to be one of the main theoretical and methodological difficulties that dialogical actions, and heterogeneous characteristics of dialogue, interact with one another rather than just co-exist and have an additive impact on communication. Interactive qualities of actions and heterogeneous characteristics cannot be reduced to quantitative and additive effects. Instead, apparently transparent linguistic and cognitive phenomena are no more than the tip of the iceberg hiding an infinite openness of dialogism. (p. 28)

In bakhtinian terms, this infinite openness is referred to as unfinalisability, and rather than viewing it as a dilemma, I see it as an extremely positive and hope-filled framework for research in the social sciences. I believe that monologic epistemological approaches can lead to unhealthy generalisations and stereotyping, including the silencing of participants. When taken to extremes, this can result in what I consider to be socially unjust prejudicial attitudes and actions including racism, gender bias, social elitism and so forth. Monologism seeks to categorise people and their thoughts, feelings and actions, which is inevitably reductionist, never fully appreciating the richness and complexity of any person's thoughts, feelings and actions.

Dialogism, on the other hand, embraces the bakhtinian concept of unfinalisability, both as a belief about the nature of knowing human beings, and as a foundation for research involving people. In terms of research, unfinalisability can be seen negatively: there is too much to know about people, and it is too complex and contingent to draw any firm conclusions. However, the same perspective on knowledge can also be seen positively: social interactions are rich sources of growing understanding. What for some may be a dilemma – I can't find out what people are really like – I would see as an important and exciting dimension of research with human beings in social interaction; namely, I can never find out what people are really like but, as I engage with others in dialogue, we may all be able to continue to learn and grow.

Dialogic epistemology as a foundation for social research, therefore, sees the researcher as a person in dialogue with other people. Knowledge, in this context, is not something that is discovered or collected by the researcher, but rather emerges in dialogic encounters. Dialogic epistemology does not seek to reduce knowledge, at least not social knowledge, into manageable categories, but rather seeks to explore and experience the ongoing, unfinalisable process of discovery in dialogic encounters that is, in the words of Bakhtin (1984a) translated into English, the essence of human life:

> Life is by its very nature dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask a question, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. (p. 293)

This dialogic epistemological foundation is reflected in the way in which I have framed my research questions. Rather than ask, for example, "What experiences do Saudi students have?", my first research question is worded as "What do the Saudi students choose to discuss when talking about their experiences as international students in Australia?" This wording intentionally foregrounds the notion that the knowledge I am accessing as a part of this study is influenced by the choices that the Saudi students make when discussing their experiences with me. I discuss the significance of my own role as a co-participant in the production of data in Chapter 3.

## COSMOPOLITAN AXIOLOGY

The axiological dimension of this study has been highlighted as one of the research questions, and Chapter 7 includes an in-depth analysis of ethical issues, with a particular focus on the cross-cultural nature of the research. Before ethical issues are examined, it is important at this stage to outline a philosophical stance with regard to ethics, which I refer to as cosmopolitan

axiology following Appiah (2006). The reason I have adopted this stance is discussed below.

I find a strong resonance with the writings of Kumar (2005) and Koehne (2005), who argued against reductionism in generalising about international students' experiences. The international students I knew before I began this study were all quite different, and this seemed from the outset to be a common-sense approach to me. Similarly, Dewaele (2005) challenged researchers in sociolinguistics to move beyond viewing language learners as "bunches of variables" (p. 369). This position, aligning strongly with the dialogic epistemology I have outlined, seemed the most appropriate one to adopt. In that sense, my axiological stance was determined by my epistemological stance: I ought not to treat participants in my study as static objects, but rather as dialogic partners.

However, another important ethical issue that is raised in the literature about cross-cultural studies (e.g., McKeever, 2000) is whether or not it is appropriate for me as a Westerner to be conducting research with Saudi students, especially as I have never been to Saudi Arabia, I am not a Muslim and I do not speak Arabic. There are several different aspects of this line of criticism. Firstly, unequal power relations could interfere with data elicitation. This may be of particular concern when researching minority groups who feel disempowered. Secondly, data might not be properly understood by someone who does not have a similar background as the participants, and has not had similar experiences. How can a person who has never left home, for instance, understand an international student's feelings of homesickness? It has also been argued that data analysis may be biased towards a Western worldview, and the outcomes of research conducted in this way could lead to the reinforcement of unequal power relations (McKeever, 2000).

This concern about research methodology is echoed in post-colonial responses to the literature on international students (see Darby, 2006; Johnston, 2003). The vast majority of research into the experiences of students from non-Western backgrounds (see Chapter 5 for review) has been conducted using Western research methods, such as questionnaires, psychometric testing and structured or semi-structured formal interviews. One of the objectives of my study was to respond to Appadurai's (2001) challenge to move beyond this Western-centrism in research by exploring and developing a culturally appropriate and socially just research methodology with the participants. Therefore, on axiological grounds, my research design has been more informed by the desires of my co-participants than by predetermined research frameworks.

This approach is not without its problems. Subedi (2007) encountered a number of obstacles in his attempt to research the experiences of Asian-

American teachers in schools in the United States. He struggled to gain access to a large enough sample of participants, some of his participants did not want to answer questions relating to issues that they considered to be too personal, some participants did not consent to having interviews recorded and there was some anxiety over where and how the research findings would be reported. It seems that at least one of the reasons for these difficulties was that Asian-American teachers in that region were not assured of permanent employment, and many were anxious that their participation in the research project might jeopardise their casual employment contracts. Subedi appears to have maintained the kind of axiological position I have outlined. The result of doing so was that he was unable to answer the research questions upon which his original research project was centred.

Added to all of these considerations were my own personal concerns with ethical and moral issues relating to research in the social sciences generally, and to research in cross-cultural contexts in particular. As a beginning PhD student, I would often hear people talk about my research and I found myself uncomfortable with that terminology. In what senses does the research belong to me, and in what senses am I in control of my research? Another phrase that concerned me was "I am interested in…" used when describing the focus of research. Perhaps it is being semantically pedantic, but such a turn of expression seems to imply that the research enterprise is driven by the interests, tastes and quirks of individual academics. Ethically, I found myself nodding in agreement with other education scholars who have been asking the question "Cui bono?" or who benefits from our research (Ortega, 2005). My concern was not only to avoid the blatant exploitation of participants made infamous in cases such as the Tuskegee Syphilis Study (Shafer, Usilton, & Gleeson, 2006), but also to avoid what I consider to be the equally unethical (although not as tragically harmful) use of research participants for the sole purpose of advancing my own academic career. In other words, I wanted to ensure that my research not only protected participants from harm (the formal ethical requirement), but also sought to help participants (my personal ethical stance).

Another concept that I struggled with for a long period early in my PhD studies was the idea of building on the literature. Although I have adopted a qualitative approach, it is possible to have a very positivist qualitative approach to research. Within this kind of framework, the researcher would read the literature, select a theory, develop a qualitative instrument based on that theory, collect and analyse data in the light of that and then report on the findings.

The ethical concerns I have with this approach are three-fold. Firstly, I find the approach excessively proscriptive for the investigation of complex contextual issues that arise in research involving people. If, for example, language learning attitudes are conceptualised as either integrative or instrumental (e.g., Gardner

& Lambert, 1972), then whatever thoughts and feelings language learners may have towards learning another language will be treated as immutable, and will be reduced to and then compartmentalised into one of those two categories, thereby losing all of the rich complexity that is integral to such affective experiences.

Secondly, whilst I am bilingual, the theories and research I read are almost exclusively written in English and published in Western journals and publishing houses. It seems to me that designing research based on Western literature will inevitably result in a Western bias. The significance of this concern, raised by post-colonial critiques, has been discussed in an earlier section of this chapter.

Thirdly, I suspect that a literature-driven research project will not be able to explore fresh new perspectives, will not allow for creativity and will not be open to radically new discoveries. Whilst this may not necessarily be the objective of all research, part of my own ethical and moral stance as a person conducting research in cross-cultural contexts is to strive to see things from a different perspective. This does not mean that I ever expect to be able truly to gain an emic perspective, or to see things through another's eyes. Rather, it means that when I engage a person from another cultural background, in the space that is created in our dialogic encounter (or surplus of seeing – see Chapter 6) I am able to learn something new. My responsibility is not to attempt to become an insider, but rather to be an ethical and friendly researcher (McGinn, 2005).

All of these ethical concerns form just one side of a balance scale. On the other side of the balance are the demographic details relating to me. I am a Western researcher studying at an Australian university. My dissertation will be written in English (my first language) and is likely to be examined by academics who, if not from Western backgrounds themselves, are likely to have been trained in the Western academic tradition. My future goals include working within Western academia, and for that purpose I hope that my dissertation will be passed by the examiners.

My quandary, therefore, was in trying to maintain a balance between my sense of responsibility towards the Saudi participants (whom I also consider to be my friends) and towards my Western academic audience. On the one hand, I wanted to design research that was culturally appropriate; on the other, I needed it to be academically sound. For the Saudi participants, I wanted the research to be meaningful and valuable; for my Western academic audience, I needed to demonstrate how I was adding to knowledge. I felt compelled to pursue research in a socially just manner; I was obliged to meet certain legal and institutional ethical requirements.

At times I felt caught betwixt and between the two sides of the balance; however, the bakhtinian epistemological stance I have adopted helped to resolve this. From within this perspective, my "self" can be seen as a dialogically constructed image for others (see Lacasa, del Castilla, & Garcia-Varela, 2005; Min, 2001). Who I am is contextual and contingent upon the person with whom I am engaging dialogically. Therefore, in dialogic engagement with my Saudi participants, I sought to construct images of my "self" as friend, fellow student, advocate and so on. For my Western academic audience, I was trying to construct images of my "self" as competent, reliable, trustworthy and so on.

I see no need to try to reduce these images of self into one stable and constant identity position: the real me. I am comfortable occupying a place that encompasses:

- Multiple encounters/perspectives;

- Multiple needs/desires/hopes/ambitions;

- Multiple fears/concerns/complexities;

- Multiple roles/relationship/responsibilities; and

- Multiple opportunities.

This approach will resonate with post-structural paradigmatic approaches to research; however, for me these issues are primarily axiological. I discuss my perspective on research paradigms later in this chapter.

The obvious question that arises from this stance is: how is it possible for one research project to embrace so many multiplicities? To return to the same objection raised in my discussion of epistemology, is not this axiological position too broad and contingent to be of any practical use? The approach I have taken in response to this anticipated objection follows Appiah's (2006) conceptualisation of cosmopolitan ethics; namely, that in order for people with vastly different visions, values and experiences to live harmoniously in our ever-shrinking world, it is necessary to seek out areas of similarity as the starting point for meaningful conversations. In other words, it is not necessary to reduce the complexity of different axiological stances; our objective should be to engage in meaningful dialogue.

These encounters, argues Appiah (2006), may not necessarily lead us to agree on points of difference, but they will at least provide us with the opportunity to "get used to one another" (p. 85). This kind of cosmopolitan ethics does not aim for consensus in opinions. It allows for different beliefs and values to exist side-by-side, which in the modern globalised world appears to me to be an eminently practical approach. However, this approach goes beyond simply allowing those who are different to be different. It proactively seeks to engage with others in such a way that both sides of the dialogic engagement are enriched and have the potential to learn and grow. This proactive engagement with those who are different, with a view to facilitating mutual learning and growth, is the view of cosmopolitan axiology that operates in the current study.

## PROTOPARADIGMATIC APPROACH

I am using a qualitative approach to this study. However, the term qualitative means different things to different people. Before discussing the approach I have taken (see Chapter 3), I will discuss my perspective on the different paradigmatic approaches that inform and direct qualitative research, and then position my study within that framework. By paradigmatic approach, I am not referring to the distinction between quantitative and qualitative approaches, but rather to an overall stance, based on epistemological and axiological foundations, that provides an broad objective which in turn informs the research design.

There are a number of different frameworks for conceptualising paradigmatic approaches in this sense. Creswell (2002) noted four significant knowledge claim positions within educational research: postpositivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory and pragmatism (Creswell, 2002). Discussing qualitative research more broadly, Lincoln and Guba (2003) identified five which they called alternative inquiry paradigms: positivism, postpositivism, critical theory et al., constructivism and participatory (Lincoln & Guba, 2003). Carspecken (2003), saw postmodernism and poststructuralism as having much in common, and therefore he linked them all under the heading of postmodernism. For Carspecken, postmodernism and his own preferred perspective of criticalism represented counter-Enlightenment positions towards research.

My reading of qualitative research has led me to conceptualise research in four broad areas which I call approaches. The distinctions that I focus upon in making this categorisation are the different primary goals of researchers, which in turn call for different approaches to the way in which data are treated. These are illustrated in Figure 2.1. Like Carspecken (2003), the framework locates some research from postmodern perspectives in the same category as research from poststructural perspectives. My intention is not to insist that they are exactly the same, but rather to note the similarity in primary goals. Indeed, the

approach I adopt in this study would both acknowledge and affirm the diversity of perspectives within each of the approaches to research.

One of those broad areas (in no particular order) is what I have called critical approaches. Within this group I would include feminist research, critical discourse analysis, queer theory, critical pedagogy and other advocacy approaches to research. The goal of analysis is to expose power relationships, often for the purposes of emancipation. Textual data such as interview transcripts and print material are analysed with a view to uncovering hidden structures of power and influence. Data in the form of artefacts, objects and images are analysed to identify symbolic and cultural capital, and observations of human activity focus on how power relationships, meta-discourses and grand narratives affect behaviour. I would locate Carspecken's (2003) work in criticalism within this cluster.
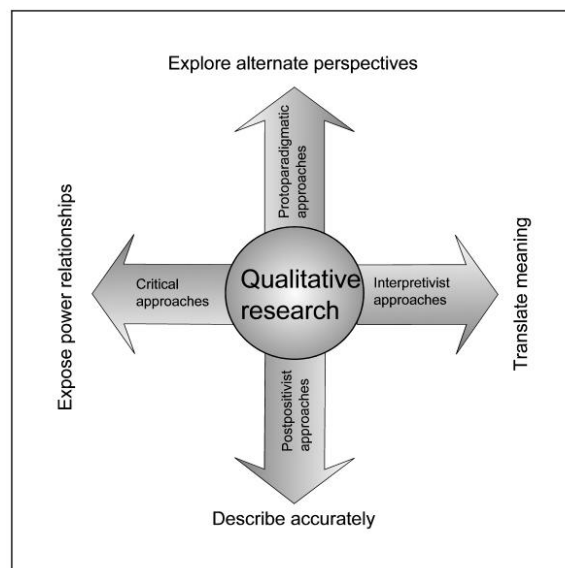


*Figure 2.1: Approaches to qualitative research*

Much current qualitative social science research adopts what I would consider to be a postpositivist approach. By this, I mean that the epistemological stance underlying the research is that whilst absolute knowledge cannot be attained, careful scientific research can bring us closer and closer to the truth. The goal of this kind of research is to describe reality accurately, or paint a picture of truth, as it is variously conceptualised. Analysts therefore note what was said in textual data (and accept it as a true representation of reality), and tend to describe artefacts, objects, images and human activities, again as representations of an external and largely knowable reality. I would locate evidence-based or scientifically-based (see Constas, 2007) research within this cluster.

Interpretivist approaches have as their goal the translation of meaning. Within this cluster I would also include some, but not all, research that is labelled as social constructivism. Based on an epistemology of subjectivity (we each make our own meaning), researchers apply a number of different analytical lenses in the attempt to discern what is meant in a text – implicitly as well as explicitly – and how that meaning was constructed. Similarly, artefacts, objects and images are analysed with a view to understanding the symbolic meaning they have for participants, and observations seek to explore how underlying structures are reflected in behaviour, as opposed to how the underlying structures affect behaviour in critical approaches. An example of this kind of research would be Bleszynska's (2008) *Constructing intercultural education,* which explores the functions and objectives of international education at various levels across society.

The fourth cluster I have called protoparadigmatic approaches. I have adopted the prefix proto from Epstein (2004), who argues that the prevalence of the prefix post in modern systems of thinking (postmodern, poststructural, postcolonial, etc.) fails to adequately represent what many of these stances are seeking to achieve. Post, argues Epstein, implies a constant glance backwards, emphasising what the writer does not believe to be true. The prefix proto implies a transition, a beginning and extension into the future (Epstein, 2004). In this sense, these new approaches are not merely reactionary, but rather they represent a coming together of dialogues from the past in the present, with a view to the future. This approach is in close alignment with the ontological and epistemological frameworks I have discussed.

I would include many poststructural and postmodern approaches to research within this group. I see the objective of this paradigm as being the exploration of alternative perspectives including acknowledging difference within collectives and critically framed alterity (see Nicholls, 2009). Analysts within this cluster look for and within texts for new stories and alternative interpretations. Extending interpretivist analyses of artefacts, objects and images, the protoparadigmatic analyst looks for other perspectives on symbolism. In other words, what other symbolic meaning – beyond the dominant one – might be attributed to data? In terms of observations, it is the differences in behaviour that draw attention and the different interpretations that others may have for actions both within and across attributed and ascribed groupings.

An example of what I would call a protoparadigmatic approach may be found in an article written by a group of scholars from Manchester Metropolitan University in the United Kingdom (Stronach, Garratt, Pearce, & Piper, 2007). Their research focuses on several doctoral students' different interpretations and/or applications of the same pieces of literature relating to the methodology of reflexivity in research. The authors' positioning of their paper is made explicit in an explanatory footnote:

The account here represents the divergence of responses rather than any typicality. It does so because we are interested in how the chosen methodological texts were deployed, in a range of appropriations. (p. 198)

My study also fits within this paradigmatic approach. Like Stronach et al. (2007), I was not seeking to identify typicality, but rather I was focussing on exploring diversity. I was interested in the different ways in which different Saudi students described their experiences to me.

There has been much debate and dispute over the usefulness of some of the approaches that might be located within this group. Wengraf (2004), for instance, claimed that "post-modernism is nothing if not a license to be cavalier" (para. 27), although in the same review article he clarified that his objection was to the ideological manifestation of post-modernism and constructivism which makes "no distinctions between lies and truth" (para. 46). The objection made by Wengraf and others (e.g., Atherton & Bolland, 2002) is that the relativism of a multiple perspectives approach removes any grounds for taking social action: if the exploitation of the poor by wealthy and powerful elites is only one perspective among many equally valid perspectives, then there is no moral or ethical grounds for trying to work towards the emancipation of the oppressed.

I personally agree with the objections raised by those who see relativism as a dead-end for social justice. My own position is not so dogmatically relativist, nor so strictly bound within the one paradigm. The reason I have created the neologism protoparadigmatic approach is to point to my own research objective of not simply responding in a reactionary way to other perspectives, but rather of adding to knowledge gained in other ways, with the final axiological objective of moving forward in dialogue. Therefore, I acknowledge the value of post-positivist research that seeks to create generalisable findings for the purposes of supporting policy decisions and informing best practice. In my opinion, decisions on policy and practice need to be based on something other than just a whim, and it seems to me that rigorously structured and monitored post-positivist research findings are as good as any other method available for that purpose.

However, such research, by focussing on norms, does not give a complete picture of any phenomenon. The multiple perspectives approach I have called protoparadigmatic helps us to see something of the depth and breadth of human experiences and understandings which cannot be explored in post-positivist studies. Discourse-clusters within the critical paradigm can also contribute to a fuller knowledge of phenomena by, for instance, challenging assumptions or pointing to covert relationships of power and influence. Hence in Figure 2.1, I have drawn the four approaches as arrows pointing in a

direction, rather than as bounded fields. I think each of the approaches points to something different, and all are useful. I position myself and this study in the arrow pointing towards seeking to gain a greater and fuller understanding of different perspectives.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have explained the philosophical foundations of this study, including a four-dimensional ontology, a dialogic epistemology, a cosmopolitan axiology and what I have called a protoparadigmatic approach. These philosophical frameworks operate in synergy with the conceptualisation of 'experiences of difference' discussed in Chapter 1, acknowledging the contextual and contingent dimensions of these experiences.

Together, these philosophical stances point towards a research design that differs somewhat from more orthodox approaches, and indeed this is the approach that I have taken for this dissertation. Because of this heterodoxy, I have written extensively in this chapter on the philosophical foundations of this study. In the next chapter I continue this discussion by focussing on the methodological foundations of my research design, in order both to justify and to explain as clearly as possible the approach that I have taken. My position on maintaining standards in qualitative research also requires me to be explicit about these foundations.

# CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

## INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2, I discussed in depth the philosophical foundations underlying this study, including its four-dimensional ontology, dialogic epistemology, cosmopolitan axiology and protoparadigmatic approach. In this chapter I discuss in more detail the theoretical foundations for my research design, including the concept of producing rather than collecting data. I conceptualise my relationship to the data production process as a co-participant, rather than in binary terms as researcher-participant. I then outline the methodological assumptions behind the data production method I developed for this project, including a discussion of narrative research in general, the distinction between big and small stories, narrative interviewing, and group interviewing. I then explain the narrative discussion group data production method. I have not discussed ethics in this chapter, because I analyse that in depth in Chapter 7.

## QUALITATIVE DESIGN

I use the term qualitative design to refer to research that analyses non-numeric data such as texts, images, artefacts and sounds. As a general rule, this kind of research seeks to provide in-depth descriptions in order to help readers understand a situation better, to probe more deeply into complex phenomena or to develop theoretical models. Data are generally collected or produced (see below) with emerging instruments; that is to say, what happened previously in the process of collecting or producing data influences what will happen next. For example, rather than asking respondents to answer a list of pre-arranged questions at an interview, qualitative interviewers will often use open-ended questions and then follow-up with impromptu probing questions on the basis of the responses that have been given.

Often qualitative research is portrayed as an alternative to quantitative research (e.g., Creswell, 2005) or as one of two streams that can be woven together in a mixed methods approach (e.g Creswell, 2002; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Morgan (2007) argued that it was important not simply to choose between qualitative and quantitative paradigms – as he called them – but rather to select an appropriate metaphysical framework for research design. He argued that pragmatism as a philosophical foundation supported the use of mixed methods. Whilst I do not adopt such an approach myself, I agree with Morgan that the qualitative-quantitative binary is limited if it does not address key foundational elements. As I discussed in Chapter 2, I believe it is especially true that research termed qualitative can encompass a broad range of different paradigmatic approaches, with different philosophical foundations, objectives, approaches and outcomes. The qualitative design I have adopted is explained below.

Whilst qualitative methodologies are increasingly employed in a range of social science studies, Gwyther and Possamai-Inesedy (2009) have noted that quantitative empiricism continues to dominate, at least in Australian academic contexts. In this chapter I do not present a fully articulated justification for the use of a qualitative approach. However, in this section I briefly outline some of the key advantages to using a qualitative approach, given the objectives of this study.

The ontological, epistemological and axiological beliefs underlying the design of this study all strongly suggested the appropriateness of a qualitative approach. I sought to elicit multiple constructed identities, and to explore thoughts and feelings about complex issues. Qualitative research provides a better approach for achieving these objectives (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). My study is founded upon a dialogic epistemology, which highlights the importance of social interaction through dialogue. This is also better achieved through qualitative methods (Flick 2002). Another advantage of a qualitative approach is that it provides the opportunity to explore the significance of context in the production and analysis of data (Denzin & Lincoln 2005) which was another important dimension of this study.

I conceive of my protoparadigmatic qualitative approach as complementary to other approaches to research. Decisions about support and funding policy need to be made on some basis, and the results of a responsibly managed quantitative survey would, in my opinion, be suitable grounds for making such decisions. Thus, it may be helpful for policy makers to know that when asked about their experiences, most international students say that they are struggling with homesickness. However, the statistics from such a study do not really help us understand a lot about the experience of homesickness for specific individuals. Do they mean the same thing as I mean when I say homesickness? Do they even have a word for homesickness in their native language? Statistical analyses of these kinds of data also do not take into account the contextual and contingent nature of data collected from or produced with respondents. As these latter aims were the primary focus of my study, I have chosen a qualitative approach.

I agree with Polkinghorne (2005) that the units of analysis in qualitative research are experiences in and of themselves, rather than the individuals or groups that have those experiences, or the ways in which those experiences are distributed in a population. My view of the metaphysical nature of experiences suggests that the dialogic context in which they are shared is an intrinsic part of the experience. In other words, the experiences that were discussed in this study were not purely objective and externally real experiences but rather experiences talked about in the context of the discussion we were having.

I also agree with Holstein and Gubrium (2003) that all participants in an interview, including the interviewer, are involved in making meaning. This postmodern approach aligns well with the protoparadigmatic approach I have adopted in which I am seeking to explore the multiple dimensions and interpretations of the experiences that Saudi participants and I talked about. In this sense, the Saudi participants and I were all co-producers of the data. In a similar sense, the reader of this dissertation and I are also co-producers of meaning in our dialogic engagement through the medium of this text.

It is important to draw these distinctions, because as Bryman (1999) has argued there can be confusion about whether the term qualitative is used to refer to an epistemological stance or a method of data collection/analysis. Not all research that collects qualitative data and uses qualitative analysis techniques is based on the protoparadigmatic assumptions I have outlined in Chapter 2. Post-positivist qualitative research can take the same kind of data that I use, but reach completely different conclusions about what the data mean, and what is important to note about those meanings. I have already noted this distinction in my discussion on the wording of the research questions, and the approach will become more evident in Chapter 5 where I discuss the content analysis of the data, because content analysis is the analytical method most likely to be used within post-positivist qualitative research.

*KEY METHODOLOGICAL TERMS*

Throughout this dissertation, I have intentionally used two methodological terms that are not common in dominant research paradigms in the social sciences, in order to highlight the significant philosophical and methodological foundations I have discussed. I use the term producing data rather than collecting data in order to highlight the contextual and contingent nature of the data. As I have noted, the Saudi students would have produced different data – according to this theoretical model – had they been talking with different people in a different social and temporal context. By using the term producing data, I am not suggesting that the data are not valuable, but rather that an important property of the data – in a four-dimensional sense – is the context in which they were produced. To try to isolate the data from the context would be to attempt to strip them of an integral component, creating an unhelpfully artificial construction. Unlike others who have similar concerns with the artificiality of the concept of objectively collecting data (e.g., Johnstone, 2000), I have maintained the word data.

The other less common terminological approach I have adopted is to use the word participants to refer to both me and the Saudi students in my study. When it is important to make a distinction, I call myself "me" and the Saudi students "Saudi participants", rather than using the more common terms researcher and subjects or participants. My intention in doing this is similar to the explanation

for using the term producing data; namely, that my presence significantly influenced the production of data (see Polkinghorne, 1988). Also, my role as a co-participant provides me with the justification for engaging in the level of interpretation that I employ – as I was a part of the discussion, I am able both to provide extra contextual data and to interpret the meaning and implications of utterances that were produced in that specific context.

This methodological stance also explains why I have used the first person throughout this dissertation. I believe it would be inappropriate for me to use the passive without an agent such as "participants were selected" because that grammatical construction in English is used either to avoid mentioning the agent who did the selecting – which might be deceptive – or to indicate that the agent who did the selecting was not important to the selection process – a positivist stance with which I do not agree. When I did something, I write "I did", and when I make a statement about my own beliefs, I write "I think" or "I believe". This satisfies my sense of duty to maintain academic honesty, and also provides the fullest and most transparent possible description (see Flick, 2002; H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2005) of the research at every stage, including the reporting.

*STANDARDS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH*

I strongly agree with Auerbach (2003) that standards for evaluating qualitative research are required. One approach in this endeavour has been to reconceptualise generalisability to include the demonstration of how the findings from a qualitative study might be transferred to a similar situation. This can be done by providing a detailed description of the context of the original study that would allow the reader to determine whether or not there was sufficient similarity to apply the findings in his or her own context (Schofield, 2002). To distinguish this qualitative approach from quantitative generalisability, other terms have been suggested, such as transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Other models for establishing quality standards in qualitative research seek to develop catalogues of quality criteria including trustworthiness, credibility, dependability and procedural dependability through auditing (see Flick, 2002). A different approach is triangulation, which combines different qualitative methods (e.g., Flick, 2000) or even mixing qualitative and quantitative methods (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) in an attempt to strengthen confidence in the findings. I would argue that these approaches may be of value for qualitative research working within post-positivist paradigm, owing to the close philosophical link with quantitative research. However, a completely different conceptualisation of quality is required for protoparadigmatic qualitative research.

The approach I advocate for establishing and maintaining quality standards in protoparadigmatic qualitative research is what I call transparency. As the English word implies, it involves clearly and fully exposing the inner workings of research. This includes acknowledging my own stance with regards to the research project (Scheurich, 1997), examining the ethics, politics and risks in research (Coombes, Danaher, & Danaher, 2004) and explaining in detail what decisions were made, and why they were made throughout all stages of the research project. This kind of transparency requires a great deal of detail, and therefore may not always be achievable in short publications. However, I have adopted this approach for this dissertation which is why there is such an extensive discussion of philosophical and methodological foundations, and also a chapter of reflexive analysis (Chapter 7).

## NARRATIVES IN RESEARCH

In order to produce data in accordance with all of the philosophical and methodological assumptions already discussed, I decided to ask Saudi participants to tell me stories about their experiences. The use of stories in social studies has developed under various names, including narrative analysis (Cortazzi, 1993, 2001; Riessman, 1993, 2002), narrative inquiry (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), narrative interviewing (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000), narrative positioning (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005) or just narrative (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). It is important to distinguish among the different forms of inquiry that contain the word narrative in their descriptive titles, because they are quite distinct.

One form of research that comes under the umbrella term of narrative includes research in which the results are written in a narrative style. Rather than following the standard scientific protocol for reporting, the researcher writes stories about what he or she has seen, heard, felt and thought whilst observing some phenomenon. Peter Clough's (2002) narrative dramatisations of his research experiences are an example of this approach, taken to a philosophically-challenging extreme with his open admission of elements of fictionalisation in his recounts. Whilst this is not the primary sense in which my study uses narratives, I have used this kind of fictionalisation to write about ethical issues which are important to the discussion in Chapter 7 but, for those very same ethical reasons, cannot be divulged. The introduction to Chapter 7 explains this in more detail.

Patton (2002) described two other forms of narrative research which should be mentioned, although they do not apply directly to my study. The first of these he called interpretative approaches, in which human life is conceptualised as story making (e.g., Sarup, 1996). This narrative approach is metaphysical in nature, assuming that people construct their realities through narrating their stories (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The other form of narrative research Patton (2002) called story reading, in which social phenomena are read for

meaning, just as a story might be read for meaning. In this sense, narrative is an analytical tool.

The primary sense of the term narrative, as employed in my study, is what Patton (2002) called "tales of the field" (p. 118). These include studies that have as their focus stories that are told to or collected by the researcher. Biographic-Narrative Interpretative Method (Wengraf, 2001) in which interviewers ask participants to tell them the story of their lives is one example of this. Inquiry-based storying (see LaBoskey & Cline, 2000) is another. This approach uses written or narrated stories of experiences to better understand the beliefs, values and emotions of the story-teller that may influence behaviour. Narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al., 2006) is a similar approach in which the stories of joint experiences are brought together to increase insight and understanding. This kind of tales from the field research has been utilised broadly, including in studies on early childhood literacy (Woods & Henderson, 2002), people with learning disabilities (Booth, 1999), sociology (Riessman, 1993, 2002) and psychology (Polkinghorne, 1988). Within applied linguistics there has also emerged a burgeoning collection of literature on this kind of narrative analysis (see Hinkel, 2005; Menard-Warwick, 2005, 2007; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Ros i Sole, 2004; Thornborrow & Coates, 2005).

A significant debate has arisen within this tales from the field genre of narrative studies around what have been called big and small stories. Wengraf's (2001) Biographic-Narrative Interpretative Method is an example of a big story approach. Participants are invited to tell the story of their lives, and interviewers listen without interrupting as participants construct their own biographical stories. Then, in a second round of questions, the interviewer asks participants for more details about the different events that were recounted, always strictly adhering to the order in which the events were recounted by the participant. The biographical stories that are collected in this manner are then analysed by examining and comparing how the participants lived their lives, and how they have interpreted them through the stories they chose to tell in the interview.

Small stories, on the other hand, focus on the analysis of smaller anecdotal stories, often told spontaneously in natural settings. Georgakopoulou's (2006) narratives-in-interaction work is one example of this method. She analysed stories that arose in conversations and private email exchanges in terms of their interactional features, with a focus on how identities are formed through the act of telling stories.

Bamberg (2004a) also adopted a small stories approach in his analysis – using what he called positioning analysis – of a very short story about a female's allegedly promiscuous behaviour that was told in a group discussion involving

fifteen-year-old boys and an adult moderator. The paper, and the theory behind it, were criticised by Hall (2004) and Thorne (2004) for, inter alia, making so much from such a small number of data. An argument arose in support of so-called big stories in which participants were given the opportunity to tell their own life stories (Freeman, 2006), as it was suggested that this approach would give a fuller and more meaningful understanding of the participants' sense of identity.

Bamberg's response (see Bamberg, 2004b, 2006) reflects a similar metaphysical stance to the one I have adopted in this study, namely that identities are contextual and contingent. Following this line of thought, I would argue that big story narratives do not provide any more accurate or true picture of a person's identity over time, because the recounting of the story is contingent upon the context of its telling. In other words, whether big or small, stories are four-dimensional, and the time and place of their telling are integral properties. Identity statements that are divorced from the dialogic context from within which they were made are artificially reduced.

The stories that were produced in discussions for this study are small stories. They include anecdotes and recounts of single events in the lives of participants. The stories emerged in the context of discussions about the experiences of the Saudi participants as international students in Australia. The stories they selected to tell, therefore, represent what they considered to be important in the context of helping me – and, by extension, the university – to better understand their experiences. Following the logic behind small story analysis, I would argue that these are the stories that the Saudi participants decided, in the context of our discussions, would best represent what they thought that I should know. This, then, is the methodological basis for the bakhtinian content analysis in Chapter 5.

## Narrative interviewing

Narrative interviewing is mainly used in biographical research (Flick, 2002). It is a data collection method aimed at eliciting stories in artificially constructed interview contexts, designed specifically for the purpose of collecting narrative data for analysis. Before discussing the methodological approach I have adopted based on the model of narrative interviewing developed by German scholars, it is important briefly to address objections to the approach.

One of the strongest critiques of narrative interviewing is that presented by Wolfson (1976), who argued that narratives elicited in interviews lack the performance features common to natural or spontaneous narratives in real-life situations. In other words, it can be argued that people do not normally say to one another, "Tell me a story about …" Rather, narratives are produced in response to contextual prompts, and include important contextual features

themselves such as tellership and tellability (see Georgakopoulou, 2008). Another objection that Cortazzi (1993) noted was the asymmetrical rights to speak in interviews: the interviewer has the right to ask questions, and the interviewees have the obligation to answer those questions, even when telling their own stories.

The approach that I have adopted has sought to overcome these objections by not asking Saudi participants to tell me stories about specific topics, but rather simply to tell me about their experiences as international students in Australia. Encouraging Saudi participants to discuss whatever they chose was an intentional design feature aimed at creating a less artificial context in which to tell stories and also to disempower me as the researcher. Some of the dialogic episodes that I recorded were stories; others were more propositional statements. I have not sought to discriminate between the two, because in a broader sense I am treating everything that was said – small stories, belief statements and even jokes – as part of the narrative discussion.

In constructing my model of data production, which I have called narrative discussion groups, I followed in the footsteps of German scholars who trace their roots to the early work of Schutze (1977 [original in German], as cited in Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). According to Schutze's model, narrative interviewing involves encouraging a person to tell a story about some significant event in his or her life. This approach is methodologically informed by a critique of question-answer schemas of more traditional interview techniques, aimed at minimising the influence of the interviewer. According to Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000), it

> contrasts different perspectives, and takes seriously the idea that language, as the medium of exchange, is not neutral but constitutes a particular worldview. Appreciating difference in perspectives, which can be either between interviewer and informant or between different informants, is central to the technique. (p. 61)

This approach resonates strongly with the philosophical and methodological perspectives I have outlined earlier.

The technique for conducting narrative interviewing requires the researcher to formulate a generative narrative question (Flick, 2002) which is broad enough to allow flexibility in response, and yet specific enough to elicit the kind of narrative that will provide data suitable for the research project. Once the interviewee begins a narrative, the interviewer should not interrupt the telling, but rather should use backchannelling (e.g., "I see", "uhuh") to encourage the

interviewee to continue. The narrative is deemed to be complete when it comes to a coda, which is a statement such as, "Well that's about it, really."

A variation of the narrative interview in the German tradition is the technique of eliciting joint narratives. Hildebrand and Jahn (1988 [original in German], as cited in Flick, 2002) developed this technique to collect the stories that families jointly narrated, based on the assumption that this was an important way that family groups restructure and reconstruct their everyday reality as a family unit. Rather than using explicit narrative stimuli, they gathered family members together in the family home and invited them to recount details and events from their former and current family life. This approach is the closest in terms of technique to the method which I developed for this study: narrative discussion groups.

## NARRATIVE DISCUSSION GROUPS

The following short vignette, based on my field notes, recounts one experience I had which helped to shape the approach and method for producing data.

*In preparation for this study, I accepted the invitation of a Saudi friend to join in the local Islamic Centre Open Day. During one activity on that day, I was invited to go to what my host referred to as a traditional Saudi tent. The tent itself was just one partitioned section of the larger pavilion-style tent in which the day's meetings were held. However, inside the tent there was a woollen rug (brand new, I was told) and several small mats placed in a circle. I asked if I should remove my shoes. My host insisted it was fine to leave them on. After he and I sat down (with our shoes on) on the little mats, about 10 other Saudi men took their shoes off and joined us. Having lived in shoe-removing Japan for 13 years, I personally felt uncomfortable walking on a rug with my shoes on, and found it a little amusing that my host had invited me to leave my shoes on in what I assumed to be an attempt to make me feel comfortable, whereas I would actually have been more comfortable removing them. However, I recognise that my host's invitation was based on his (accurate) understanding of Australian cultural norms, and I was touched by his willingness to be so accommodating. Immediately upon sitting down, I was offered a small cup of spiced coffee and some dried dates. As soon as I had finished one cup, another was offered, this time of sweetened tea. Whilst eating and drinking, I talked with my host and with others in the circle. I was particularly interested in the cultural meanings of this kind of gathering, and so asked about it. The man sitting beside me explained that getting together like that in order to talk over problems and issues regularly was a common and very, very important part of Saudi culture, especially for maintaining a sense of community. I asked about people living in large cities, and he replied that they still gathered together in smaller neighbourhood groups. I noted on leaving the tent that it had a small sign at the entrance "men's tent", and that the entrance of this tent faced away*

*from another completely separate tent that I later discovered was labelled "women's tent".*

As I discussed in Chapter 2, postcolonial readings of the literature on international students (see Darby, 2006; Johnston, 2003) highlight serious concerns about the fact that the vast majority of research into the experiences of students from non-Western backgrounds has been conducted using Western research methods. In seeking to respond to the challenge to move beyond this Western-centrism in research, I spoke to several potential participants about what would be a culturally appropriate way to investigate their experiences in an Australian academic environment. The suggestion made by one of them was that asking questions in a one-on-one interview would not produce a lot of helpful information. A more effective approach, he said, would be to gather a group of participants to share and discuss their experiences together. The idea of having a group as the focus for data collection was reinforced by the experience described in the vignette. The literature seemed to confirm this conclusion. Hill, Loch, Straub and El-Sheshai (1998), for instance, explained the importance of primary group relations in what they called Arab culture thus:

> The dominance of primary group relations characterises intimate, personal, informal, non-contractual, comprehensive, and extensive relations. Once entering into a personal relationship, individuals engage in an unlimited commitment to one another. They are committed members of a group rather than independent individuals who constantly assert their apartness and privacy. Their affiliation to a group and group solidarity are thus primal. (p. 25)

Based on my reading and experiences, I developed the concept of narrative discussion groups as my data production instrument and site. The narrative discussion group has several points of similarity with focus group interviews, as outlined by Krueger (1994). Structurally, they both involve a group of participants and the researcher, and participants can respond to one another's opinions as well as presenting their own. In terms of data production, interactions among participants may enhance data quality, and the degree of similarity or variance in opinions can be noted.

There are also several important points of difference. Unlike focus groups, narrative discussion groups were not highly structured around focus questions. Rather, participants were encouraged to share stories of their experiences in Australia, with other participants free to comment or contribute in what might be described as a narrative discussion. Another difference is that the participants in these narrative discussion groups were not strangers to one another. The complex dynamics of previously established relationships was an important element in the context of this study. Another important area of difference is that a more liberal use of time management was employed.

Participants were encouraged to participate in any way they wished, including not speaking at all. Unlike focus group interviews, the objective of these groups was not to give equal time to hear each participant's opinion, but rather to record narrative discussions as they emerged. Chapter 4 contains details of how the narrative discussion groups were formed and run.

## MULTIPLE ANALYTICAL LENSES

The data for this study were produced on the basis of the methodological foundations explored earlier in this chapter. In order to analyse the data, three different analytical frameworks were adopted. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the reason for using three different lenses on the same data is that I do not believe that any single analytical framework would provide a suitably in-depth analysis of the data for the purposes of answering all three research questions. Therefore, I have changed lenses for each analytical chapter.

The concept of changing lenses fits extremely well with my protoparadigmatic approach, although it is not a new concept in social sciences research. The use of quantitative and qualitative analysis in so-called mixed methods research in education (Creswell, 2002) and the social sciences (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) is one example of what I would call switching lenses. The use of multiple lenses is also well documented in narrative research (see Chase, 2005), and qualitative research more generally (see Kinash, 2006). I explain each of the analytical approaches at the beginning of each chapter, with reference to the literature. In Chapter 8 I draw together the findings from the three different analysis chapters to present a broad and deep, although not necessarily full, description of the complex and inter-related findings of this study with respect to the three different research questions.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have explained the methodological background to the design of this study. I noted the reasons why a qualitative design was appropriate, and highlighted the concepts of producing rather than collecting data, and conceptualising my relationship to the data production process as a co-participant, rather than in binary terms as researcher-participant. I also discussed in depth the methodological assumptions behind the development of narrative discussion groups, including the concepts of narrative research, the distinction between big and small stories, narrative interviewing and group interviewing. I explained the concept of narrative discussion groups and highlighted the differences between these and focus groups. In the following chapter, I give details about how the data production phase of this research was conducted, in line with these philosophical and methodological frameworks.

# CHAPTER 4: DATA PRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I outlined the methodological foundations of the design of this study. In this chapter I outline how the data were produced, including the selection of participants, the way in which narrative discussion groups were conducted and recorded, and how these recordings were transcribed for analysis. I explain what decisions were made along the way, and why they were made.

## NARRATIVE DISCUSSION GROUPS

My intention for the data production phase of this study was to run narrative discussion groups throughout one semester. However, the philosophical and methodological foundations strongly influenced the way in which the narrative discussion groups were organised and facilitated. In this sense, the research design was emergent and co-constructed.

Before commencing this phase of the study, I applied for and received clearance from my university's Human Research Ethics Committee. As the narrative discussion groups were designed to be completely open-ended, no interview protocol was constructed. However I did design a structured interview protocol to collect demographic information before the narrative interview began (Appendix B). I also prepared information forms including a consent form for Saudi participants to sign (Appendix A).

Having made these preparations, I then spoke to two potential Saudi participants I was already acquainted with. I asked them if they would like to participate in my study, and they both agreed to help in any way they could. We negotiated a mutually agreeable time for the following week. I asked them where they would like to do the interview, and one of them suggested a room at the university would be convenient, so I booked a nearby classroom for the appointed time.

At the beginning of the discussion group meeting, I explained the purposes and procedures on the Participant Consent Form and asked both Saudi participants to sign the consent forms if they were happy with the content, which they did. These consent forms, along with those from all other narrative discussion groups, were stored in a locked filing cabinet to which I hold the only set of keys. According to university policy, these documents will be stored in this secure location for seven years, after which they will be destroyed. This is all to ensure that at no time will the private information of any of the participants be accessible to anyone other than me.

Once the two Saudi participants had completed the consent forms, I asked them if they would answer some general background questions before commencing our discussion, explaining that all of the information would be kept confidential, and that their real names would not be used in reporting. They agreed. I asked them the questions listed on the Demographic Data Collection Form, including name, age, hometown, marital and family status. The final two questions on the demographic form were open-ended and, in order to capture their full responses, I used a digital recording device (with their permission) to record the conversations that arose, and then transcribed this onto the demographic form.

When the collection of the demographic information was completed, I then told the Saudi participants that we would begin recording and I turned the digital recording device back on again. I began the first narrative discussion group with the following unscripted question, intended to prompt the Saudi participants to tell me stories about their experiences since coming to Australia as international students:

> Me: *please just tell me any experience that you can think of that was something that was unexpected, something that surprised you, different to what you thought it might be, coming here to Australia, or coming here to [this university] even. What sort of things were there?* **(NDG1)**.[4]

I then encouraged the Saudi participants to discuss whatever they wanted to talk about. Sometimes I asked questions to clarify what they had said. In keeping with the conversational nature of the discussion, I also shared from my own experiences as appropriate. At times the conversation strayed from the original topic of experiences since coming to Australia, but I did not attempt to bring the discussion back to topic. Interestingly, on several occasions in several narrative discussion groups, Saudi participants did attempt to bring the conversation back to what they perceived to be the purpose of the conversation. The possible significance of this is discussed in all three analysis chapters (Chapter 5, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7).

When the discussion seemed to me to have reached a conclusion, I thanked the Saudi participants for their time and stopped the recorder. This same procedure – with different wording for the narrative prompt question – was used for all narrative discussion groups. These first two participants referred others to me who they thought would be willing to participate, in a form of snowball sampling (Creswell, 2005). In each case, I asked one Saudi student to

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[4] NDG1 = Narrative Discussion Group 1.

bring along any of his friends. In this way I attempted to ensure that the Saudi participants in the narrative discussion groups self-selected, again with a view to disempowering myself as the researcher/interviewer.

Throughout the semester in which we were producing data, five of these narrative discussion groups were held. On two occasions, the person I first approached invited me and the other Saudi participants to come to his home. On the other three occasions, the Saudi participants asked me to choose a location, and we used a room at the university. The largest group included three Saudi participants. The smallest group involved just one Saudi participant and me. The specific details are given in Table 4.1.

*Table 4.1: Duration and location of narrative discussion groups*

|  | Number of Saudi participants | Duration (in minutes) | Location |
|---|---|---|---|
| Narrative Discussion Group 1 | 2 | 49 | university classroom |
| Narrative Discussion Group 2 | 2 | 78 + 3 | Saudi participant's home |
| Narrative Discussion Group 3 | 3 | 117 | Saudi participant's home |
| Narrative Discussion Group 4 | 1 | 54 | university classroom |
| Narrative Discussion Group 5 | 2 | 69 | university meeting room |

In Narrative Discussion Group 2, two separate periods of duration are given in Table 4.1 because, after I had turned the recorder off, one of the Saudi participants asked if he could say something else. I turned the recorder back on to allow him to say what he wanted to say, which took a further three minutes as noted.

*NARRATIVE DISCUSSION GROUP SIZE*

As shown in Table 4.1, three of the five narrative discussion groups involved two Saudi participants, whereas Narrative Discussion Group 3 had three Saudi participants, and Narrative Discussion Group 4 had only one. I did not attempt to control the size of the groups, and therefore would suggest that participants

felt that a gathering of 3 to 4 people (including me) was a good sized group for talking about their experiences in Australia.

There were a number of distinctive features about Narrative Discussion Group 4. The Saudi participant in this group was a nursing student who had already graduated, and was currently studying a master's degree in education with a view to returning to complete a post-graduate degree in nursing. Therefore this Saudi participant was a little different to the others, who were all current nursing students. However, the participant, knowing about my study, volunteered to participate, and I agreed to conduct the narrative discussion group with him. I needed to make a decision as to whether or not to include the data produced from this narrative discussion group, given the demographic differences to the others, and the fact that there was only one Saudi participant.

I decided to include the data for a number of reasons. He was at one time a male Saudi nursing student at this university, and potentially would be again, so he was very similar to the other participants, who were all male Saudi nursing students at this university. He was in a position of leadership within the Saudi student community, and therefore was able to talk not only about his own experiences, but also about the experiences of many others, which provided a lot of interesting insights with respect to the first research question. Furthermore, I felt ethically compelled to include the information he offered because I believe he was hoping that the information he gave would be used in my research in a way that would help his fellow Saudi students. However, because of the differences, I have not included the demographic details of this participant in the summary given below.

PARTICIPANTS' DETAILS

The Saudi participants for this study were male Saudi students enrolled in a nursing degree program at an Australian university. The focus on Saudi students (rather than international students in general) was because the Saudi students on campus at this institution formed a large and relatively cohesive community. There were two key reasons why I chose to focus on male students enrolled in a nursing degree program. Firstly, the vast majority (approximately 80%) of Saudi students on campus were current or prospective (in preparatory courses) male nursing students. Secondly, it is culturally appropriate to have male-only gatherings for discussing important matters (see Chapter 3). I believe that female Saudi students may have found it culturally awkward to engage in in-depth discussions with me, a male researcher.

An average score of at least 6.5 in the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) or equivalent is required for entry into the post-registration nursing program at the institution where this study was conducted. Therefore, the Saudi participants' English language ability as measured on the IELTS test

was upper intermediate or above. All Saudi participants had been in Australia for more than six months prior to this study. This gave me confidence that they would have the English language ability to discuss their experiences in some degree of depth.

The average age of the Saudi participants (excluding the Saudi participant in Narrative Discussion Group 4) was 28 (SD=2.3)[5]. Five were from cities in the south of Saudi Arabia, two from the capital city Riyadh, one from a central region and another one from the north. Four of the participants were married, five were single. Of the married men, only one had children, although another one's wife was expecting a baby at the time of the narrative discussion group. All of the married men had their wives living with them in rental accommodation near the university. Saudi participants had an average of 2.5 semesters (SD=1.6) remaining to complete their degrees and had been in Australia for an average of 17 months (SD=4.1). Five of the Saudi participants, including all of those living with wives and children, were living in rental accommodation. Two were staying with Australian homestay families, and two of them were living in student accommodation near the campus. I have not included full demographic details in order to protect the privacy of Saudi participants. Given the large number of Saudi students in this particular cohort, I believe that the demographic data noted below are not unique enough to identify individual participants.

As the narrative discussion groups were self-selecting, it is also interesting to note the similarities and differences between Saudi participants within groups. Details of differences within narrative discussion groups are noted in Table 4.2. Where there was no difference within a narrative discussion group, it is noted as "no difference". Although I asked about type of accommodation, there were no differences within any of the narrative discussion groups, and therefore this is not included in Table 4.2. From this data alone, it might appear that the only determining variable in the self-selection of narrative discussion groups was the type of accommodation. However, with such a small sample, such correlations cannot be made with any confidence. What Table 4.2 does demonstrate is that self-selecting participants were not all exactly alike in demographic background.

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[5] The remaining demographic details in this subsection are given to maintain transparency, and to allow for transferability (see Chapter 3). They are not employed in any of the analysis chapters that follow.

*Table 4.2: Differences within narrative discussion groups (NDGs)*

| NDG | Age | Hometown | Marital status | Semesters until graduation | Months in Australia |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | *No difference* | capital; south | *No difference* | *No difference* | 21; 24 |
| 2 | 26; 24 | central; north | married; single | *No difference* | 14; 17 |
| 3 | 32; 27; 30 | *No difference* | *No difference* | 4; 6; 2 | 18; 11; 18 |
| 5 | *No difference* | south; capital | *No difference* | 3; 2 | 18; 12 |

Another point to note is my previous relationship with the Saudi participants. I had known all four Saudi participants in Narrative Discussion Group 1 and Narrative Discussion Group 2 since shortly after they arrived in Australia, because I was teaching in the preparatory English program they joined when each of them first arrived. I stayed in contact with three of the four throughout the time between our first meeting and the narrative discussion groups (1-2 years). I had visited them in their homes, and spoken with them many times about their experiences in the course of casual conversation. I had a similarly ongoing relationship with one of the Saudi participants in Narrative Discussion Group 3, although I had never met the other two previously. I had met and had several conversations with the Saudi participant in Narrative Discussion Group 4, although I had never taught him English. I had never met the Saudi participants in Narrative Discussion Group 5.

The two narrative discussion groups which were not held on campus were held in the homes of Saudi participants I had known and maintained a casual relationship with for more than 12 months. However, I had known both Saudi participants in Narrative Discussion Group 1 for a similar length of time, and they suggested we meet on campus. This suggests that having a previous relationship with me was not an influencing factor in suggesting where to conduct the narrative discussion groups; however, it may also have been that the two Saudi participants in Narrative Discussion Group 1 were living with homestay families, rather than in privately rented accommodation. I did not follow up on these speculations because it seemed rude to ask my Saudi friends from Narrative Discussion Group 1, "Why didn't you invite me to your home?"

In summary, it can be noted that the formation of the narrative discussion groups included Saudi participants from a number of different backgrounds:

- married with children, married, single
- living with homestay families, living in rental houses, living in student accommodation
- known to me, not known to me
- from different regions of Saudi Arabia (capital, north, central, south).

Whilst I did not actively control the formation of narrative discussion groups, the protoparadigmatic approach I have adopted for this study values alternative perspectives, so I was pleased to have participated with male Saudi nursing students from a range of different backgrounds. Interestingly, the biggest differences in opinions expressed to me in narrative discussion groups occurred within one of the self-selecting narrative discussion groups, rather than between groups (see Chapter 5).

As part of the procedural ethical requirements of this study, I informed all of the Saudi participants that I would not use their real names in the study, and that therefore anything that they told me would remain confidential. However, when it came time to present the findings of my study, I faced the problem of how to refer to the Saudi participants. My study tells very personal stories, and it seemed quite inappropriate to refer to the people involved in these stories as Participant 1 and so on. I did not want to select Western names, because these were Saudi participants. I did not want just to select randomly from a list of Saudi names either, because I did not know what the connotations of those names might have for the individual participants involved. By the time I came to write this dissertation, all of the Saudi participants had already graduated and left Australia; therefore, I could not ask them what names they would like me to use.

What I decided to do was to access a website ("Masculine Arabic names", n.d.) that listed the meanings of men's first names in Arabic. Trusting that these meanings were accurate, I then selected names from the list which reflected the way I perceived each of the Saudi participants. I chose names that I felt were honouring to those participants, and I hope that, should any of them ever recognise themselves in any work published out of this study, they will be pleased with my choice. None of the names I have chosen was the first name of any of the participants in the study. The pseudonyms, with the meanings I believe they have, are:

| NDG1: | Halim (gentle) |
| | Wadi (calm) |
| NDG2: | Latif (friendly) |
| | Rashad (man of integrity) |
| NDG3: | Ubaid (faithful) |
| | Fadil (generous) |
| | Basil (brave) |
| NDG4: | Naim (comfort) |
| NDG5: | Akil (thoughtful) |
| | Ma'mun (trustworthy) |

As noted in Table 4.1, three of the narrative discussion groups were conducted in university rooms, and two were hosted in the home of one of the Saudi participants in that group. Narrative Discussion Group 1 and Narrative Discussion Group 4 were held in a vacant classroom that seats approximately 40 students. This room was selected because it was conveniently close to my office, and on both occasions the Saudi participants had come to my office volunteering to participate immediately. Narrative Discussion Group 5 was pre-arranged with the Saudi participants through the introduction of a previous Saudi participant in the study, and for the purpose of the narrative discussion group I booked a small meeting room with a round table and five chairs. Twice during that narrative discussion group, we were briefly interrupted by other staff – once owing to a double-booking of the room, and once owing to an item that was left behind at a previous meeting. I have sought to capture some of the differences in atmosphere between the two narrative discussion groups hosted in Saudi participants' homes in the brief vignettes below.

### *Narrative Discussion Group 2*

> *Latif had seen me pull up in my car and he met me at the door. Rashad arrived at the same time. Latif invited me to come into his lounge room and Rashad came also. There was a three-piece lounge suite, a low table and a TV on a stand in the room. The TV was on (a local current affairs program) with the volume turned very low, and Latif left it on throughout the discussion group. Latif, Rashad and I sat on different seats around the low table. At the beginning, Latif brought out a packet of Arnott's family assorted biscuits (a popular selection of sweet cookies in Australia) which he opened and left on the table. He also brought out a thermos of hot mint tea, sweetened with honey, and some small cups without handles, into which he served the tea regularly. With the exception of the sweet mint tea, small handle-less cups and constant serving of tea, there was very little that I noticed that struck me as strange or foreign.*

### *Narrative Discussion Group 3*

> *I opened the flyscreen door and knocked on the wooden door of Ubaid's home. He opened the door and looked shocked to see me (he later explained that he was surprised that I was standing with the screen door open, rather than standing more discretely back from the door). He asked me to enter via the garage (he later explained that they were using the front door as the women's entrance). He opened the automatic roller-door of the garage and I entered his house through the hall leading in from the garage. Ubaid invited me to enter the first room along the hall. There was a beautiful rug on the floor, and low moulded-foam cushions placed*

*around the walls, creating a kind of lounge setting at floor level – there were cushions to sit on, cushions for backrests leaning against the wall and cushions for armrests. Although Ubaid didn't ask me to, I removed my shoes before entering the room (I later discovered that the other men took their shoes off before entering the hall, two metres further back from where I had left mine). The room was a little dark due to heavy curtains on the windows, and had the pleasant but unfamiliar aroma of some kind of sweet incense.*

*When the other Saudi participants arrived, Ubaid left the room to open the garage roller-door for each of them (a very noisy operation, taking a minute or two each time), and led them into this room. I asked how I should sit on the cushions, and there was general consensus that I should just make myself comfortable. Throughout the time we spent together, Ubaid would from time to time tap very gently on the wall of the hall. After a little while I would hear another gentle tap (two small knocks in quick succession), after which Ubaid would go out into the hall and come back with drink and food which (I later discovered) his wife had prepared. At first the spiced Saudi coffee I had grown familiar with over the course of my friendship with many Saudi students and dried dates were served. After that came sweet tea with nuts. I never saw Ubaid's wife, nor heard her voice, all evening although I heard Ubaid's voice speaking very softly in the hall several times.*

*At the end of our very long narrative discussion group, I indicated that I had recorded enough material, and it was time for me to go home. Ubaid asked me to wait and, after another series of tapping signals and soft murmurings, returned with a small brazier carrying burning incense. The Saudi participants thought the incense was called sandalwood, and I confirmed that it did smell like sandalwood to me. I asked what it was for and Ubaid explained that I should waft it into my clothes and the nice smell would stay in my clothes for one or two days (I later discovered that the aroma did linger until at least the next morning).*

*Throughout the entire evening, I felt as if I had been immersed in another culture. There were so many tastes, sights, sounds and smells that were quite unfamiliar to me, and I often found myself looking for hints (or asking for help) as to what was culturally appropriate behaviour.*

### RECORDING METHOD

I was originally planning to use video recording equipment in order to better determine who had said what in the narrative discussion groups, and had gained ethics clearance for using this approach. However, as I discussed this approach with some potential participants, I sensed some reluctance, even

though this was not explicitly stated. I decided to try using just an audio recording device for the first narrative discussion group to test whether or not I could obtain a clear enough recording to make a full transcription.

A digital, rather than analogue, recording device was selected for this purpose. I tested the device by recording short conversations in several small groups (up to five people) in several locations, including a very noisy university cafeteria, and the recording was clear enough for transcription in each case. A number of advantages of using a digital recording device over an analogue tape recording device might also be noted:

- The device is smaller, and therefore possibly less intrusive (although see the comment below about the influence of the recording device).

- Files can be stored separately on the same device in folders, thereby improving data management.

- The digital audio files can be easily copied to make backups.

- Digital audio players allow for easy tracking of time.

- Digital audio files can be imported directly into the software I had selected to facilitate transcription (Express Scribe© v. 4.19).

Another advantage of using digital recordings is that some qualitative analytical support software enables analysts to input and code directly from a digital audio file. The NVivo 7© software I had selected to manage my content analysis did not have this function and therefore transcription was necessary. A new version of the software released whilst this dissertation was in preparation (NVivo 8© v. 8.0.264.0 SP3) does have this operation. Therefore, since I still have copies of the audio files, it is possible to use them also as data for analysis, rather than the transcripts. Whilst I have chosen not to do this, the methodological implications and possibilities of this technological development could be significant.

Despite its small size, the presence of the digital audio recording device clearly influenced the discussions to some degree. This is evident in the following portion of one transcript:

Me:     *it's[6] good. Who started that shop?*
Wadi:   *one*
Halim:  *Jordanian*
Wadi:   *Jordanian guy, yeah*
Me:     *good idea. So many Saudis nearby*
Halim:  *yeah (laugh)*
Me:     *is it full every night?*
        *(all laugh)*
Halim:  *there is no other restaurant*
Wadi:   *I think we jumped from the* **__(gesturing to recorder)__**
Me:     *but that's all right* **(NDG1)**.


Wadi, recalling that the discussion group was being recorded, gestured at it (without mentioning it by name) in order to try to bring the conversation back to what he believed the purpose of the discussion to be. In Chapter 7, I discuss the methodological implications of this action, in terms of what participants chose to disclose.


Other evidence of the influence of the recording device can be found in the notes I took immediately following the narrative discussion groups. After the first discussion group, I wrote in my field-notes, "The presence of the recording device seemed to inhibit story telling. As soon as I turned the recorder off, they began to tell me a story." After the second discussion group, I wrote, "Again, immediately after turning off the recorder, interesting stories emerged."


Rather than attempt to overcome this apparent problem with data production, I chose to continue to produce data in the same way. I have noted at the end of Chapter 5 and also in Chapter 8 that the data represent what participants have chosen to tell me, as a Western researcher, about their experiences in Australia. Other data (see below) convince me that there is much more to the story of their experiences. However, as I discuss in Chapter 7, I have endeavoured to give participants the power to decide what they disclose, thereby attempting to allow them the opportunity to create images of themselves (Min, 2001) for a Western academic audience.


TRANSCRIPTION

Transcribing recordings for analysis is inextricably linked to data analysis, especially in a study where conversations, or language-in-use, are the primary source of data (Markee, 2000). Any instance of dialogue encompasses a vast number of data, some of which cannot be captured on an audio recording

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[6] See the subsection "Transcription" in this chapter for an explanation of the use of punctuation in transcripts.

device (such as gestures). Making an audio recording of a dialogue, therefore, loses a certain amount of contextual information.

When a recording is transcribed for the purposes of content analysis, it is common to employ a play-script style of format (Potter, 1999) in which even more contextual information such as pauses, changes in intonation and hesitation is lost. At the other end of the spectrum, some conversational analysts seek to capture as much of these data as possible through intricate and detailed transcription protocols (see Jefferson, 2004). For the purposes of this study, I initially began with a form of transcription that fell somewhere in between these two extremes.

I chose to transcribe some of the paralinguistic and non-linguistic details captured on tape, along with some of the data not captured on tape, but which I noted immediately following the discussions. However, unlike conversation analysts, I did not attempt to capture all of this information in each transcript. The decisions about which data were important enough to be transcribed were based on the methodological assumption that I had a legitimate role as co-participant in producing the data, and were made as a part of the process of analysis. In other words, I transcribed with the research questions and analytical frameworks in mind, selecting what data I considered to be important.

In this initial transcription, I indicated pauses in brackets (including the length of pauses in some instances) where they seemed important. Whenever I could not be certain what a participant had said, I noted it as "(unclear)". When I thought I understood what another participant said, but was still not certain, I transcribed the word using the IPA phonetic transcription guide outlined in Fromkin et al. (2003), and gave the word I thought it was in brackets with a question mark. For example:

Ubaid: *no, they will say [čiz] (cheers?)* **(NDG3)**.

None of these instances proved to be important in the analysis phases, and therefore I did not need to ask the participants to clarify their statements at a later date, although I had mentioned the possibility of this at the end of each narrative discussion group.

When selecting excerpts from the transcripts to include in the analysis chapters, at times I found it necessary to add or delete some words. Added words are indicated by square brackets [thus] and deleted words by ellipsis marks in square brackets: […]. There were three reasons for making these modifications. Firstly, words were added to put statements into context, such as:

> Wadi: *and when you are walking [in Saudi Arabia] you can (pause 1 sec) hold his hand* **(NDG1)**.

Secondly, privacy required me to replace the names of people and places with more generic terms, for example:

> Latif: *sometimes it's difficult with some people in [this town]* **(NDG2)**.

In the university in which the Saudi participants were studying, there was an established pathway for those international students who did not have a high enough IELTS score to enter their programs directly. This pathway involved successful completion of two different preparatory programs, one in general English, and the other in English for academic studies. The two programs operated quite independently of each other. To distinguish between the two in the transcripts, I have labelled the former as *[preparatory English program]* and the latter as *[advanced preparatory program].*

The third reason for adding or deleting words was when the flow of the conversation indicated to me that a participant had used a word or expression that was not clear. An example of this was when Ma'mun was telling the story of his father. He had already said of his father that "he doesn't read or write". At a later point he quoted himself telling his father:

> Ma'mun: *"you don't have to read and write in Arabic"* **(NDG5)**.

I changed this for my analysis in Chapter 5 to:

> Ma'mun: *"you don't [… know how] to read and write in Arabic"* **(NDG5)**.

The narrative impact of Ma'mun's story was focused on the point that his father, who could not even read and write Arabic, let alone English, was criticising his poor English ability. The quotation cited by Ma'mum was part of his response, which was along the lines of: "How could you judge how well I speak English?" This meaning, I believe, is better conveyed by the amended version I have used (see Chapter 5 for this discussion). It is possible that "have to" was an instance of a word-choice error or the effect of interlanguage (see Brown, 1994). It may also be that Ma'mun actually did say (in Arabic) "have to" rather than "know how to" as a sign of respect for his father. In either case, for the Western academic reader, I believe the illocutionary intent of Ma'mun's statement is better communicated by the amended transcript.

It is extremely difficult to decide where sentences begin and end in oral communication, especially when other participants add comments and finish other interlocutors' turns. For this reason, in transcribing I began each new turn with a lower case, rather than an upper case letter. If the participant seemed to finish that sentence and began a new one in the same turn, I used a full-stop at the end of the first sentence and a capital letter for the beginning of the next sentence.

I transcribed each of the narrative discussion groups before arranging the next one. I was able to transcribe at the rate of about one hour for every 10 minutes of recording but, as transcription involves many important decisions, I found the work both physically and mentally tiring. Generally it took between one and two weeks to complete the transcript of one narrative discussion group. Transcribing immediately after the narrative discussion group helped me to distinguish some words that were not clearly recorded, as I could remember some of them as a participant in the conversation. Doing the transcription myself immediately after the narrative discussion groups also helped me to remember who had said what, because in a freely flowing discussion it was at times difficult to discern which participant was speaking, and I did not want to disrupt the flow of the conversation by asking participants to give their names each time they spoke.

One important discovery I made whilst transcribing was the apparent significance of the use of laughter, and therefore I transcribed laughter whenever it occurred. If it was the speaker, I added "(laugh)" at exactly the point in the speaker's turn where the laughter began. When everybody laughed together, I noted it as "(all laugh)" on the next line. An example of each of these can be seen in the following excerpt, along with one of the few occurrences in which I was unable to determine which of the other co-participants was speaking (indicated by double question marks):

> Me:     *but I've learnt five different languages*
> ??:     *oh?*
> Me:     *yeah, I forget them all (laugh)*
>         *(all laugh)* **(NDG3)**.

Trying to transcribe accurately the location of the laughter within a sentence led me to discover a phenomenon that has not been noted by applied linguists in the literature, namely the use of laughter as an infix. In English there are many examples of prefixes (in which a morpheme is added to the beginning of another morpheme) and suffixes (in which a morpheme is added to the end of another). Other languages, such as the Toba Batak language in the Philippines (Crowhurst, 1998), also have infixes in which a morpheme is inserted in the middle of another morpheme. Studies of the English language to date have suggested that the only kind of infixes used in English is the insertion of

expletives, usually inserted in the middle of adjectives or adverbs, a classic example being "abso-bloomin-lutely" as sung by Eliza Doolittle in the musical *My Fair Lady* (Fromkin et al., 2003).

McMillan (1980) provided an extensive glossary of infixes found in English publications throughout the 20th century to demonstrate that, since the infixes are generally expletory intensifiers, they serve the purpose of amplifying emotive stress. Adams (2004) agreed that, whilst it might be technically possible to insert a non-expletive infix, it would lack the appropriate motivation (to relieve emotional stress) and therefore would move, as he graphically described it, "from morphological fecundity into desert" (p. 112). He concluded that theoretically there could be no such thing as a non-expletive infix in English, because it would serve no purpose.

My transcription of our narrative discussion groups revealed a different kind of infix, not of expletives but of laughter. I discovered it by closely listening to the recording and noting that laughter sometimes began in the middle of a word. One example of this was an episode which flowed on from a discussion about how some Australians speak more loudly, rather than more slowly, when international students do not understand:

> Me:    *if you don't understand me, then I'll speak more slowly or I can choose simpler words, easier words*
> Fadil: *yes*
> Basil: *yes*
> Me:    *rather than just lou(laugh)der* **(NDG3)**.

The final word with the (laugh) infix actually sounded more like [la-ha-hau-də-hə-hə], with [ha], [hau] and [hə] operating as allomorphs (variations in pronunciation that do not alter meaning) of the laughing sound [ha].

The decision to transcribe the laughter infix was based on the process of transcription. Firstly, I needed to decide whether or not the laughter was important. For the purposes of my analysis, I decided it was important not only to note who laughed, but also when that laughter began. This led me to notice that laughter sometimes began in the middle of a word. Again I had to decide whether or not that was important. By analysing my own uses of this infixation, I noted that my intention was actually a form of double-voicing (see discussion of this point in Chapter 5) and that therefore it was significant to note the laughter as an infix. There is little doubt in my mind that had I employed a professional transcription service I would not have noticed this phenomenon, and my final analysis would have been the poorer for it.

This more detailed method of transcription was very useful for the bakhtinian discourse analysis in Chapter 6, and therefore I have used it as the data for the analysis and reporting in that chapter. However, in Chapter 5 my analysis focussed on what the Saudi participants said, rather than how they said it. Providing evidence of key themes from the more detailed transcript produced lengthy excerpts which I thought were cumbersome to read, a view which was echoed by several colleagues who also read early drafts of the manuscript. Therefore, whilst I used the original transcription for analysis in Chapter 5, I decided to edit the more detailed transcript into a play-script style for the reporting. I believe that this has enabled me to more effectively communicate the ideas that the Saudi participants wanted to share with me.

To create this edited version of the transcripts, I removed most of the backchannelling (e.g., "hmm", "yeah") and removed any repetition that did not affect meaning. I did not indicate this with square brackets, because the amount of square-bracketing would have been a further obstacle to reading. An example of this editing is given below.

Original detailed transcript for the first excerpt used in Chapter 5:

Halim: *the most important thing that I was expecting*
Me:     *hmm*
Halim: *from coming to Australia or going to anywhere*
Me:     *yeah*
Halim: *to any English*
Me:     *hmm*
Halim: *country, like English speak, speaking language*
Me:     *hmm*
Halim: *is that I was expecting that I go*
Me:     *hmm*
Halim: *I can learn English easily*
Me:     *hmm*
Halim: *I was thinking like that*
Me:     *hmm*
Halim: *if I go to Australia, no problem, I'll learn English within*
Wadi:   *few weeks*
Halim: *one month, two months easily*
Wadi:   *yeah*
Halim: *so*
Wadi:   *and you can speak with, like them*
Halim: *yeah*
Wadi:   *yeah, you can speak like them within a few weeks or a month*
Halim: *yeah*
Me:     *really?*
Wadi:   *yeah* **(NDG1)**.

<u>Edited playscript-style transcript of the same data used in Chapter 5:</u>

Halim: *the most important thing that I was expecting from coming to Australia or going to any English-speaking country is that I could learn English easily. I was thinking like that - if I go to Australia, no problem, I'll learn English within*

Wadi: *a few weeks*

Halim: *one month, two months easily*

Wadi: *yeah and you can speak like them*

Halim: *yeah*

Wadi: *yeah, you can speak like them within a few weeks or a month*

Halim: *yeah*

Me: *really?*

Wadi: *yeah* **(NDG1)**.

I believe that using this edited version of the first transcript in Chapter 5 has the effect of drawing the reader's attention to what the participants were intending to say, rather than how they said it, which was the objective of this layer of analysis. This form of transcription also makes for much easier reading in what would otherwise have been a very lengthy chapter containing long excerpts that would have been difficult to follow.

OTHER DATA

Before, during and after the data production phase, I had many other opportunities to talk with the Saudi participants. As we were all students at a small regional university, I would often run into them on campus, and we would sometimes chat then. On several occasions I met one or more of them in the local community as well, whilst visiting local shops. On other occasions, some of them would come to me to ask for advice or support with some of their academic work. I was not a teacher in any of their courses, but I had taught some of them in their preparatory English program a year or so earlier, so was able to provide advice on their English writing and other academic skills. There were other occasions when I was invited to join them socially, either at cultural functions organised by the local Saudi club or at the homes of participants.

During some of these encounters, I heard or observed things that I thought were of significance for the study I was conducting, and on several occasions I took notes upon returning to my home or office. These notes were not a part of the data production method for which I received clearance from our institutional ethics review board. However, I believe that the experiences that I had in relating with the Saudi participants outside the narrative discussion groups influenced the way in which I participated as a member of those groups, and the way in which I have analysed the data. Questions relating to what data can and cannot be included in this study, and what data should and should not be used, raise extremely difficult and yet very important ethical questions,

which I discuss in Chapter 7. In order to explore these crucial issues honestly, and yet maintain the moral and ethical requirements, I have fictionalised elements of these data. I discuss the rationale and precedents for this in Chapter 7.


## FINALISING THE DATA PRODUCTION PHASE

After producing data from five narrative discussion groups, the Saudi students became busy preparing for final essays and exams, and I stopped arranging groups to enable them to focus on their studies. I spent some time reading and thinking about the data that had already been produced, and felt that I had enough rich data for the multi-layered analysis I had planned. Therefore, in consultation with my supervisors, I ceased the data production phase and commenced the data analysis.


## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have outlined the way in which data were produced for this study, in accordance with the philosophical and methodological foundations discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. In the following three chapters, I seek to answer the three research questions, using the multiple lenses discussed in Chapter 3. In each chapter, I present a brief literature review and an outline of the data analysis framework, along with a presentation and discussion of the findings. The following chapter addresses Research Question 1 by applying a bakhtinian content analysis framework to the narrative discussion group transcripts.

# CHAPTER 5: THE STORIES THE SAUDI PARTICIPANTS TOLD

## INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I explore the data with a view to answering the first research question:

> *What do the Saudi students choose to discuss when talking about their experiences as international students in Australia?*

In Part 1, I discuss the analytical approach of content analysis. Then, I review the literature on studies relating to this research question, followed by a summary of findings based on a bakhtinian content analysis of the data that were produced in narrative discussion groups. In Part 2, I turn from a summary of findings to explore in more depth one episode in which two Saudi participants in the same narrative discussion group had quite different perspectives on the same subject. I note the differences, and also draw out the possible implications of this.

### BAKHTINIAN CONTENT ANALYSIS

Content analysis is the process by which a larger number of qualitative data is reduced to a smaller number of central themes or patterns (Patton, 2002). In some research methodology texts, it is the only qualitative analytical method discussed (e.g., Creswell, 2002) whereas in others it is not explored at all (e.g., Seale, Gobo, Gubrium, & Silverman, 2004). Those who discuss content analysis generally explain it as a process which begins with immersion in the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) in order to get a broad sense of it all (Creswell, 2002). In a second round of analysis, the researcher begins to identify themes and patterns (Patton, 2002), categories (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) or topics (Creswell, 2002) in the data. These are reduced into codes that represent core elements that emerged in the second round of analysis, which are then described and demonstrated with excerpts from the data. Generally, the process is inductive; that is, the analyst does not work with a predetermined set of codes, but rather allows the codes to emerge from the data. This approach is said to have the advantage of allowing for the discovery of the unusual or unexpected; however, the disadvantage of this is that the discovery of the unusual "may require the recasting of the entire research endeavour" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 154). The protoparadigmatic approach I have taken in this study welcomes the unusual or unexpected, and therefore I have taken a fully inductive approach.

I have called my content analysis bakhtinian to highlight two important distinctive features. Firstly, of course, my entire study is founded on a bakhtinian epistemology that locates meaning in dialogic exchanges, and therefore my analysis focuses on data produced in dialogues. According to this model, learning occurs because of the potentiality created by a surplus of seeing and transgredience (Bakhtin, 1981).

The surplus of seeing theory is based on the common-sense notion that when I am speaking to another person the other person can see things about me that I cannot see. In a very simplistic sense, for example, I cannot see my own forehead whilst my interlocutor can (Holquist, 2002). When two people come together in dialogic engagement, surplus of seeing creates the opportunities for both people to learn something new. You can see things in me that I cannot see in myself, and that insight that you bring to the dialogic exchange creates the potentiality for me to learn.

Another bakhtinian way of conceptualising the opportunities created by the surplus of seeing is transgredience. Because two people engaged in dialogue are not the same as each other, they have the potential to transfer to each other some aspects of themselves which brings some kind of "illumination" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 185). Jabri (2004) refers to this as a surplus of meaning. Following Jabri's usage, the outsideness of people in a dialogic encounter is an integral feature of coming to see or know something new.

Surplus of seeing and transgredience operate together in dialogic exchanges. I can see new things about the other, the other can see new things about me and we both have the potential to transfer to the other some of that insight. This may be directly, by telling the other our impression of him or her, or indirectly, by influencing the way in which we engage in dialogue. This process of mutual illumination can create further opportunities for surplus of seeing and transgredience, and in this way dialogic learning can be seen as unfinalised (Bakhtin, 1984a); that is to say, there remain opportunities for change and growth.

The second important distinctive feature of my bakhtinian approach to content analysis is that it highlights the contextual nature of data produced in dialogues; therefore, the data must be analysed in the context of the dialogues in which they were produced. As a result of this approach, I do not present the content analysis as a representation of a positivist or generalisable picture of a reified and immutable truth but rather, what I believe these Saudi students want me (and, by proxy, this university) to know about their experiences here.

This was the context of our dialogic engagement. Regardless of whether what the Saudi participants said was what they believed to be the truth, and

regardless also of whether I have accurately represented the meaning exactly as intended by participants, I maintain that the findings represented in this chapter are meaningful and important constructions of truth. These constructed truths have the potential to improve mutual understanding between Saudi students studying abroad and teaching, support and administrative staff at their host universities. This assertion is based on the belief that the Saudi participants and I both had this common goal as part of the context of the dialogues. With this common goal in mind, I include in this chapter subsections called "Reflections on data" in which I suggest some of the possible implications for providing support to Saudi students at Australian universities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There is an extensive body of literature referring to studies of the adjustment experiences of students who travel to another country to study. In this introductory literature review, I summarise what has been found in previous studies, and also on the methods employed in those studies, in order to highlight the importance of developing a new approach to data collection and analysis. The review is grouped around three key areas: early Australian studies (from the late 1980s), recent trends, and studies of Saudi students studying abroad. Early Australian studies are reviewed in order to provide an historical contextualisation of the present study, which is also focussed on international students in Australia. The sub-section on current trends is not limited to studies conducted in Australia and it positions the present study within the international body of research in this area. The third sub-section documents the paucity of studies on the experiences of Saudi students studying abroad to highlight the timeliness and significance of this study's focus on Saudi students.

### *EARLY AUSTRALIAN STUDIES*

Although there had been some earlier publications on international students in Australia (e.g., Bochner & Wicks, 1972), research increased rapidly in the late 1980s, concurrent with significant changes in Australian government policies. One of the most significant policy change was the March 1985 Policy on Overseas Students which opened the doors to full fee-paying international students (Back, 1989). One stream of publications from this period sought to inform academic institutions of issues that were likely to arise with international students. Ballard and Clanchy (1991), for instance, argued that predictable problems for international students would include lack of language competence, homesickness and culture shock, gaps in background knowledge, housing problems, social relationship problems and difficulties fitting into Australian student life. Two other issues for teaching staff to consider were the different expectations of international students, and mutual stereotyping. The research method for this publication was not explicitly stated: the authors note

that data were drawn from their "daily experience, over many years, of working with students" (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991, p. ix).

A different perspective from that period of increased research activity focussed on student perceptions of issues of quality and ethics. The proceedings from the 9th National Education Seminar (in Australia), for instance, contained a paper highlighting international students' concerns about low standards, poor facilities, low recognition and concerns about ethics in the marketing of Australian programs (Mahmud, 1994). The data in this instance were drawn from a number of letters of complaint received by the author.

More rigorous theory-driven research into the experiences of international students in Australia at that time was outlined in an anthology of essays published in 1989 (Willams, 1989). In that publication, Burke (1989) examined student support issues. He outlined some of the expected roles of international students as those of student, adolescent, foreigner, ambassador and customer. He also summarised difficulties commonly experienced by international students under the headings of cultural adjustment, finances and accommodation, living independently, study-related concerns and being different, including racial intolerance and low levels of contact with Australians. This research drew upon a review of literature current at that time.

In the same anthology, Jones (1989) noted that most research on the experiences of international students in Australia until that time had been conducted using mailed questionnaires. He highlighted a number of problems with early applications of this method, including poorly designed questionnaires and poorly timed use of the instruments (e.g., during exam periods). However, an even more serious concern he raised was that many participants felt uncomfortable writing answers to very personal questions in this format. Jones concludes his survey of research until the late 1980s with a call for "a diversification in research techniques, in favour of more qualitative methods including individual or group interviews and discussions, or studies based on wide experience with overseas students" (p. 36). I have adopted this line of approach in this dissertation.

*RECENT TRENDS IN RESEARCHING THE EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS*

Generalised accounts of international student experiences aimed at providing advice to potential students and teachers continue to be published (e.g., Carroll & Ryan, 2005). Omeri, Malcolm, Ahern and Wellington's (2003) comprehensive review of literature on culturally and linguistically diverse students (which included international students) outlined 18 educational issues, 8 social issues and 5 personal issues that had been identified in a variety of studies, in different contexts, using different methods. These characteristics were collected as a foundation upon which they developed strategies for meeting the

challenges of cultural diversity in the academic setting. This approach may be useful in providing some guidelines for students, teachers and administrative staff, but there such reductionist approaches can also be seen to be problematic.

Koehne (2005) argued that this generalising approach failed to acknowledge that international students were individuals with unique backgrounds, aspirations and identities. Similarly, Kumar (2005) argued against reductionist discussions of international students in university discourses in favour of recognising hybridity and syncretic subjectivity. Dewaele (2005), speaking of second language learners in general, questioned the positivist epistemology that conceptualised language learners as static objects of study, and more specifically challenged the validity of studies that reduced individual human participants to "bunches of variables" (p. 369). He argued for a broader range of approaches that acknowledged difference and diversity in language learners.

One response to these critiques may be found in Byram and Feng's (2006) anthology of research on the experiences of students living and studying abroad in a variety of cross-cultural contexts, using a variety of different research methods. The cross-cultural contexts included Japanese students in Britain, Irish students in Japan, and Danish students in various European Union countries. Data were collected from questionnaires, interviews, journals, drawings, friendly conversations, historical documents and elicited narratives, and were analysed using a variety of methods, including grounded theory, textual analysis, ethnography, narrative analysis and Delphi technique.

In a similar way, Prescott and Hellstén (2005) seek to challenge taken-for-granted notions of how international students adapt to a new learning environment in the Australian context (see also Hellstén & Reid, 2008). These new research approaches in a variety of contexts represent a promising start to answering the call of Jones (1989) two decades earlier for more in-depth qualitative research in a variety of contexts, with a variety of different methods. My study engages with this research agenda by developing and applying a bakhtinian approach in the context of Saudi students at an Australian university, which is a newly emerging context (see below). Hence, my study seeks to explore the experiences of these students in using a non-reductionist framework.

Another important direction in research with international students has been to use the critical framework of neo-racism to explain student experiences. Lee and Rice (2007) found that the majority of research relating to international students' experiences conceptualised key issues as problems of adjustment. Based on their interviews of 24 students from 15 countries studying at one university in the southwest of the United States of America, they concluded that some of the biggest concerns for international students related to neo-racist

attitudes and behaviour in the host community. Whilst my study adopts a bakhtinian dialogic approach, rather than the criticalist approach of Lee and Rice (2007), issues relating to neo-racism did arise in the narrative discussion groups, and these are discussed in the analysis that follows.

*SAUDI STUDENTS*

Until very recently, there had been very little published research on the experiences of Saudi students in Australian tertiary institutions. There are at least two possible explanations for this. Firstly, the influx of significant numbers of Saudi students to Australian universities is a relatively new phenomenon, reflecting a significant change in Saudi foreign policy in 2006. One of the directives under the new Look East Strategy was to increase the number of higher education students sent to countries in Asia, including Australia (Abdul Ghafour, 2006). This policy change is reflected in dramatic increases in higher education commencements of Saudi students in Australia since 2006 (see Figure 5.1).
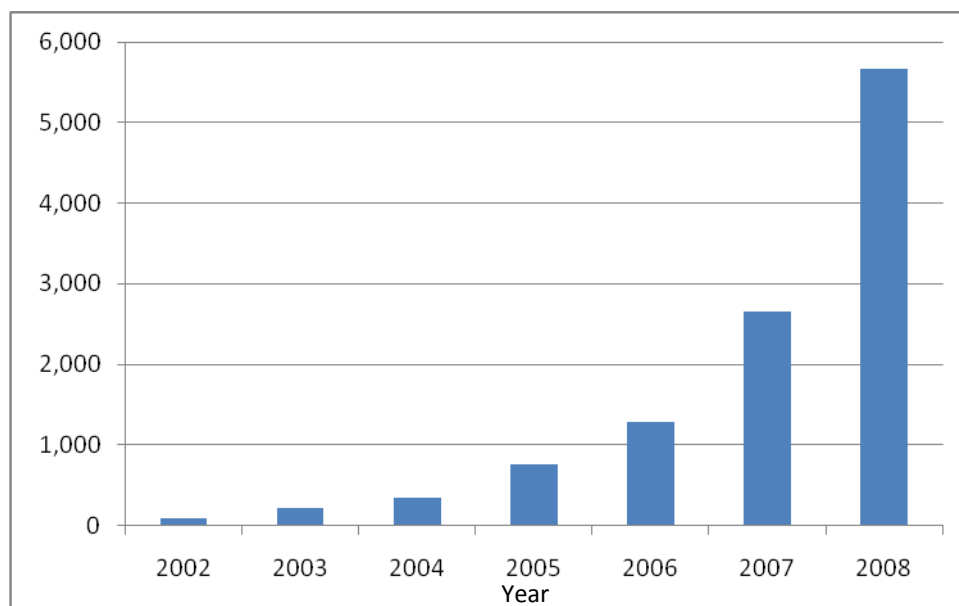


*Figure 5.1: Saudi student commencements at Australian higher education providers* (*AEI international student data*, 2008).

A second possible explanation for the paucity of studies which focus specifically on Saudi students might be the impact of the highly influential research on cross-cultural studies by Hofstede (1980, 1991, 2001) in which Saudi Arabia was grouped with other countries such as Libya and Lebanon in the category he named "the Middle East". This grouping occurred because of lost data (see Hofstede, 2001) and was based on the organisational structure of Hofstede's employer (IBM) at the time his data were collected. Nevertheless, his work continues to be cited as seminal in the field of cross-cultural studies, and this

influence may be seen in studies that describe participants as Middle Eastern rather than from Jordan (e.g., Alazzi & Chiodo, 2006) and Gulf-sponsored rather than Omani (Gauntlett, 2006). Until recently, studies relating to the experiences of Saudi students may also have been incorporated into this broad brush-stroke approach.

At the time of writing, this trend seems to be changing. At the 2009 ISANA International Education Association's 20th International Conference held in Decembe, 2009 in Canberra, Australia, two papers (including one by me based on research from this dissertation) and one workshop focussed specifically on Saudi students in Australian universities. This specific focus was reflected not only in the content of the presentations, but also in the use of the word Saudi in the titles. The data analysed in this chapter, therefore, contribute to a current stream of research in a newly emerging context.

PART 1: THEMES THAT AROSE IN DISCUSSION

The Saudi participants chose to discuss many different things during our narrative discussion groups. Using a content analysis procedure (see Creswell, 2005; Patton, 2002), I have reduced all of the data that were produced into three key themes. Not all of the stories told during the discussion groups fit into one of these themes, and not all of these themes received equal attention in each of the narrative discussion groups. Nevertheless, after multiple readings of the data, and with thoughtful reflection on the goal of trying to facilitate better mutual understandings between the Saudi students and teaching and support staff in the university, I judged the following three themes as most significant: expectations, differences and struggles (Figure 5.2). I discuss each of these separately with data from the narrative discussion groups, and reflect upon what the possible implications of these.
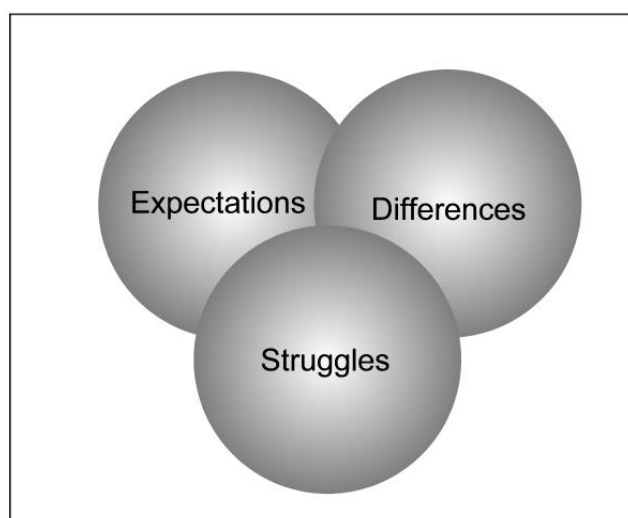


*Figure 5.2: Key themes that emerged*

*Expectations regarding language ability*
There were several different kinds of expectations that seemed to impact significantly upon the learning and adjustment experiences of the Saudi participants. One of these related to expectations about language learning abilities and proficiency. There appeared to be unrealistic expectations on the part of the Saudi participants themselves about how quickly they could master English:

| | |
|---|---|
| Halim: | *the most important thing that I was expecting from coming to Australia or going to any English-speaking country is that I was expecting that I can learn English easily. I was thinking like that - if I go to Australia, no problem, I'll learn English within* |
| Wadi: | *a few weeks* |
| Halim: | *one month, two months easily* |
| Wadi: | *yeah and you can speak like them* |
| Halim: | *yeah* |
| Wadi: | *yeah, you can speak like them within a few weeks or a month* |
| Halim: | *yeah* |
| Me: | *really?* |
| Wadi: | *yeah* **(NDG1)**. |

Ma'mun explained the expectations placed on him by his family to become fluent in English:

| | |
|---|---|
| Ma'mun: | *for example I have three my brothers. They study in the United States. They speak very well. My big brother has a PhD in linguistics from Oxford* |
| Me: | *oh, wow!* |
| Ma'mun: | *yeah and they speak very well: very, very, very well. So my father is expecting me to speak like them* **(NDG5)**. |

Ma'mun's triple repetition of the word very in the last turn of this excerpt suggests the degree of difference he felt existed between his English language ability and that of his three brothers who were also studying abroad. Ma'mun explained his father's expectations, and the pressure he was feeling from them, by telling a story of a time when he took his father to a hospital in Saudi Arabia. At the hospital Ma'mun spoke with one of the English-speaking doctors in the presence of his father. After leaving the hospital, Ma'mun's father challenged him about his English language ability. The excerpt below begins with Ma'mun explaining his father's illiteracy:

| | |
|---|---|
| Ma'mun: | *and by the way my father he doesn't read or write, he didn't go to school* |
| Me: | *okay* |
| Ma'mun: | *and after we finish in the clinic and we get out, he ask me, "Are you really living in Australia?"* |
| | *(all laugh)* |
| Me: | *you're kidding!* |
| Ma'mun: | *I said "I'm in Australia." He told me, "Why do you sometimes stop and stutter when you talk? It seems that you don't understand anything." I asked him, "How do you know? You don't speak English. You don't know how to read and write in Arabic." He said "Your brothers are better than you. They speak very fast"* |
| Me: | *(laugh)* |
| Ma'mun: | *"I can recognise it"* |
| Me: | *oh, no* |
| Ma'mun: | *I'm the black sheep* **(NDG5)**. |

In a different narrative discussion group, Latif expressed his feeling that people in the local community also had very high expectations of international students' English language abilities, suggesting that this could be a barrier to relating to native English speakers in the community:

| | |
|---|---|
| Latif: | *and not many people know international students. You came and they think you already speak English like a native speaker, and they prefer you not to make any mistake with English. You have to understand their accent. Sometimes it's difficult with some people in [this town]* **(NDG2)**. |

Perhaps the most significant expectations in terms of impact, according to the Saudi participants, were those held by their lecturers regarding language abilities. Halim said that this was one of the biggest problems:

| | |
|---|---|
| Halim: | *teachers and lecturers expect your English language level to be the same or a bit less than native speakers, and this is really the biggest problem* **(NDG1)**. |

Wadi joined in the conversation at this point, agreeing with Halim:

| | |
|---|---|
| Wadi: | *they don't know, and the faculty it's not only [our faculty], the other faculties don't know what's going on in [the preparatory English program]. There is big gap and they don't know what's going on. They think that we did very well in [the preparatory English program] and they expect us to be a native speaker* |
| Me: | *hmm. So the faculty expect you to be almost native speakers* |

Wadi:     *yeah most, some of the lecturers*

Me:     *okay*

Wadi:     *they said if you are a uni student we expect you to be a native speaker* **(NDG1)**.

Immediately following this Halim re-entered the discussion and attempted to steer the line of discussion away from blaming the university lecturers for their attitudes, and focussing on the perceived problems in the preparatory English program, which are discussed below. Nevertheless, the Saudi participants' perceptions of the expectations held by some of their lecturers seem to have been a source of pressure and concern.

A similar concern was raised in Narrative Discussion Group 3 in which the discussion turned to the subject of examinations. The discussion flowed from a comment by Ubaid about feeling stressed when Australian students finished their examinations much earlier than he did. One of the other Saudi participants counselled him not to worry by saying,

Basil:     *you have to expect the Australian guys will finish the exam before you. You are not a native speaker* **(NDG3)**.

The conversation continued along the lines of how Ubaid might better cope with this stressful situation. At one point, I commented that if I were his teacher I would allow him more time to complete his examinations.

Me:     *I would give you more time to do the exam, because it just takes longer to read*

Fadil:     *that's good*

Me:     *it's not that you don't know the answers*

Basil:     *that's true*

Me:     *it's slower, and it's slower to write as well*

Basil:     *yes*

Me:     *in your second language* **(NDG3)**.

At this point, Ubaid joined in by expressing some frustration:

Ubaid:     *but why do they not understand this at uni? They are dealing with us as a native speaker* **(NDG3)**.

Shortly after this, Ubaid came back to the same point:

Ubaid:     *so this is difficult, when we enter the major they think, "Okay, they are native"*

Me:     *so they just treat you like a native speaker?*

Ubaid:     *they are doing things as if we were native speakers* **(NDG3)**.


In the context of the original counsel not to expect too much of himself because he is not a native speaker, these comments from Ubaid indicate a degree of pressure he felt, based on his belief that lecturers' expected his English language proficiency to be higher than it actually was.


**Reflection on data**

The expectation that international students will speak with the same fluency as native speakers is unrealistic. Whilst some international students may achieve exceptionally high levels of proficiency, the entry requirement for the degree programs these Saudi participants were enrolled in was a score of 6.5 on the IELTS test. As the highest band in the IELTS testing system is 9, the institutional expectation is clearly much lower than native-speaker proficiency. If the Saudi participants' perceptions of teacher expectations are accurate, then it is understandable that they would feel considerable discomfort. A student with band 6 proficiency in IELTS may be described as having,


> a generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations. ("IELTS band scale", n.d.)


At level 7 a student would have,


> operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning. ("IELTS band scale", n.d.)


At level 6.5, therefore, students would not be expected to have fully mastered the ability to handle complex language well, and it is to be expected that there will remain some inaccuracies, and misunderstandings in their language use.


One theoretical framework which might also help to explain (and possibly relieve) the pressure felt by Saudi students regarding their English language proficiency is the BICS/CALP distinction (see Cummins, 2003). This theory was developed to highlight the different time periods immigrant children typically take to develop conversational fluency on the one hand and age-appropriate academic proficiency on the other. The former, which Cummins labelled Basic

Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), normally takes about two years to acquire, whereas the latter, Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), usually takes between five and seven years.

Whilst the BICS/CALP theory has been criticised on a number of levels (see Edelsky et al., 1983; Martin-Jones & Romaine, 1986), I have found it to be extremely useful as a tool for raising awareness of the complexity of language proficiency. The fact that an international student can have a relatively fluent-sounding friendly conversation does not mean that the same student has the English language skills required for academic report-writing. CALP cannot be picked up in a couple of months, as some participants had thought before coming to Australia. Understanding this may help Saudi participants to have more realistic expectations upon themselves.

The same theory might also be useful in ensuring that lecturers and other university staff have realistic expectations on the language abilities of Saudi students. The fluency with which some international students speak conversational English could be misinterpreted to mean that they have a language competency suitable for academic study, which may not be the case. The BICS/CALP theory may be a useful tool for helping both Saudi students and university staff who interact with them to have more realistic expectations.

*Expectations regarding the university and its programs*
Another important point which emerged many times throughout the narrative discussion groups was the Saudi participants' expectations about the university's programs. The focus of these discussions was primarily on the preparatory English program, which many of the participants were required to complete before entering the degree program. The way in which these expectations emerged was of great interest to me personally, as I am a past teacher in one of these programs. Indeed, the participants in Narrative Discussion Group 1 and Narrative Discussion Group 2 and one of the participants in Narrative Discussion Group 3 had been students in classes I had taught in one program about a year prior to this study.

One of these expectations related to the Saudi participants' conceptualisation that there is a proper way to teach English. From their perspective, the failure to adhere to this method of teaching was one of the reasons for their lack of progress in acquiring the level of English required for their studies, which in turn caused a number of the struggles discussed later in this chapter.

The concept of there being a proper way of teaching English weaves its way through many different episodes in many different narrative discussion groups. For example:

Halim:    *and the teaching way wasn't good enough for overseas students like us* **(NDG1)**.

The comment about not being good enough was explained later by Halim:

Halim:    *the way of teaching (pause 1 sec) it's (pause 1 sec) kind of (pause 1 sec) it can't help. If it's that proper way, like if we came here and we have like a grammar session, a writing session, vocabulary or something, with reading, listening, speaking . . . but we came here and the focus, all the focus was on writing, and how to write and how to write, how to write, and how to do presentations. And something that we're weak on – grammar – we didn't have a strong base in English* **(NDG1)**.

A similar concern was expressed by Ubaid who attempted to be very diplomatic in his comments about the preparatory English program in which I had previously taught. He framed his concern in terms of the poor quality of some of the teachers:

Ubaid:    *I have one issue. In [the preparatory English program], and I will be honest with you Warren about this issue. I'm very sorry but this university is not providing quality of uh good quality of teachers in [the preparatory English program]. Uh, I will not mention their name*
Me:       *okay*
Ubaid:    *a lot of teachers there, they don't know anything about English* **(NDG3)**.

University regulations require all staff who teach in this preparatory English program to be qualified and experienced teachers of English to speakers of other languages. To the best of my knowledge, all of the teachers (including substitutes) involved in the program when Ubaid was a student were all native speakers of English. Therefore, when Ubaid says "they don't know anything about English," it seems to me that he is not referring to their ability to speak English, but rather to their ability to teach English in what he considers to be the proper way. According to Ubaid, this problem exists throughout Australia:

Ubaid:    *and not only here, even in the whole of Australia*
Me:       *yeah?*
Ubaid:    *I have many friends in many cities in Australia. They told me "our teacher, they don't know anything about English"* **(NDG3)**.

Ubaid gave an example to illustrate his point, and he made a point on several occasions of asserting that his story is true:

> Ubaid: *and to be honest with you, one teacher, one time our teacher didn't come, and they got one teacher to take his place. In [the preparatory English program] you know [the director of studies] will make a copy for the students. She made the copy that time about grammar. Then she, this teacher, didn't know how to answer the grammar, to be honest with you. Then she told us to, "Answer by yourselves." But it was really hard, because it was copied from IELTS. I remember that. Then we asked her, "Please could you answer?" She said "Hmm I think this one," and when we finished there were some questions remaining – we didn't finish – and she said, "Discuss this with your teacher. Tomorrow they will come." When our teacher came the next day and we asked him about this question, he said, "I will start from the beginning." Why he will start from the beginning? All the answers which she gave us were wrong. Believe me, this thing happened* **(NDG3)**.

Whilst I would agree with Ubaid that this is not a desirable situation, it demonstrates to me that Ubaid's idea of proper English classes follows a grammar-translation model, rather than the communicative language teaching approaches that are currently favoured in Western ESL pedagogy (see Omaggio Hadley, 2001). Ubaid explained the source of the problem as poor-quality teachers; what I see this pointing to is an expectation about the way in which English should be taught. The fact that Ubaid said "believe me, this happened" suggests that he found the content of his story unbelievable. In other words for Ubaid, the proper way to teach English was self-evident, and for an English teacher not to teach in that way (whether intentionally or otherwise) was unacceptable, and therefore scandalously unbelievable.

This expectation about the proper way to teach English is also evident in Narrative Discussion Group 5. The Saudi participants in this group all did their preparatory English courses at a different language school in Australia. Akil described some of the teaching methods used at that school that he thought were better than those used in the preparatory English program at this university (based on his discussions with Saudi students who had been through that program):

> Akil: *but they have more activities in the class to help us to learn - special grammar or special vocabulary - and they give us maybe around seventy words per week at the beginning of the week. At the end of the week I find I have learnt all this vocabulary and it comes very easy for me. At least you have ten, twenty words is the*

*expectation, to have all those words. And they have sheets with word gaps* **(NDG5)**.


Whilst these kinds of learning activities are not precluded from communicative language learning approaches, they seem to have a much stronger grammar-translation focus. This seems to reflect a similar expectation to the one expressed by Ubaid in the earlier excerpt.


Naim did not attend the preparatory English program at this university; however, he was greatly concerned by some of the problems expressed by several of his Saudi friends about the preparatory English program. His summation was that the program was not meeting the expectations of many Saudi students, although he was not able (or perhaps not willing) to offer any details about the ways in which those expectations were not being met:


| | |
|---|---|
| Naim: | *because many students suffer* |
| Me: | *really?* |
| Naim: | *in the [preparatory English program]* |
| Me: | *yeah?* |
| Naim: | *yeah and also, the other thing which is not that good, when they get out of the [preparatory English program] this is not what they expect* |
| Me: | *[the preparatory English program] is not what they expect or* |
| Naim: | *yeah, [the preparatory English program] yeah* |
| Me: | *oh, okay* |
| Naim: | *yeah they are, usually they are happy in the [advanced preparatory program]. There the program is better than the [preparatory English program]. I don't know why* **(NDG4)**. |


Another expectation that was evident in comments relating to the preparatory English program was that the teaching staff should be permanent (at the time, most of the teaching staff were on casual contracts). Basil stated this explicitly:


| | |
|---|---|
| Basil: | *the problem is, one of the problems, they haven't got permanent teachers in the [preparatory English program]* **(NDG3)**. |


In suggesting improvements for this program, Naim said,


| | |
|---|---|
| Naim: | *I think if they have permanent excellent teachers* **(NDG4)**. |

Naim went on to clarify why he felt this was important, reflecting another expectation that he felt was not being met, namely that teachers (at least in lower level classes) would support their students.

> Naim: *because the language, especially in the primary stages, the language depends on the teacher, especially in the lower levels. So if you are in advanced or in the uni or in the [advanced preparatory program] you can depend on yourself, but in the lower stage you have nothing. The teacher should come down and hold you from the bottom, otherwise, sometimes here, I find the teacher standing and like (gesturing reaching down with hand) and you can't reach. He should lie down a little bit* **(NDG4)**.

This metaphor of the teacher reaching down and pulling a student up is quite different to the metaphor of teacher as a facilitator for learning which predominates in many Western pedagogical models of second language teaching.

**Reflection on data**

With different expectations over how English should be taught, it is not surprising that some Saudi students were frustrated with the English language preparatory programs they were offered. Even with the very best English teaching professionals, conflicting expectations could continue to result in dissatisfaction for some students. One way of relieving some of this tension might be to provide more detail about the teaching methodology used in Australia to potential and incoming students. This could include an explanation of why this methodology has been adopted. Given the complex nature of this material, and the varying levels of English language abilities of some students, it may be advisable for this information to be provided in the students' own languages.

*Expectations regarding the local community*

In Narrative Discussion Group 5, the Saudi participants expressed surprise and disappointment regarding the local community in which the university is situated. Akil admitted that he knew very little about Australia when he arrived:

> Akil: *actually we weren't planning for what we would see or what we could find. We saw, when we came to Australia, we just came and were starting our life here with what we found here in Australia*
> Me: *oh, so just a blank?*
> Akil: *it's a blank, exactly* **(NDG5)**.

Ma'mun joined the conversation here to point out that the reason for their lack of knowledge was a lack of information:

Ma'mun:     *there is no much information about Australia*
Akil:       *yeah*
Me:         *oh okay*
Ma'mun:     *yeah um, maybe we are familiar with the United States more than Australia* **(NDG5)**.

It later became apparent that Ma'mun had expectations of what the local community would be like and he admitted that he was shocked by what he found:

Ma'mun:     *well, I was shocked when I come to [the nearest major city], to be honest with you*
Me:         *really?*
Ma'mun:     *because I expected [that city] would be like, like New York or a big city, and when I went there, it was a good place and very quiet. The city is beautiful, the rest of the suburbs is not too great. So, I expected [this town] to be like [that city]. When I travelled to [this town] I really lost my mind*
Me:         *(laugh) did you?*
Ma'mun:     *I said to myself, "What am I doing here?"*
Me:         *really?*
Ma'mun:     *yeah, there are two streets*
Me:         *two st(laugh)reets?*
Ma'mun:     *not too many people, few overseas visitors, most of the people are, some of them are very old. It's hard to talk with them. And there is no entertainment, especially for the overseas visitors. I went back to [the nearest large city]. I stayed there for three months, thinking a lot about [this town] and trying to change my enrolment* **(NDG5)**.

Later in the same discussion group, Ma'mun's narration became almost melodramatic, although as my laughter indicates, his tone was much more light-hearted than the transcript might seem to indicate:

Ma'mun:     *so it was pretty exciting when I got the scholarship, I said, "okay, the dream has come true." I want to speak this language and, everything changed when I come to [this state]*
Me:         *(laugh)*
Ma'mun:     *and all my dreams disappeared when I come to [this town]* **(NDG5)**.

**Reflection on data**

It is difficult to determine the extent to which these unmet expectations have adversely affected Ma'mun, or whether or not other Saudi students have had similar experiences. One possible solution to avoid this tension might be to provide more specific and detailed information about the host community as a part of the application procedure. However, it should be noted that Ma'mun in Narrative Discussion Group 5 admitted, "It's our fault … we should look for some information about Australia." What is evident in the data is that some of the differences in customs and culture have created some stress for some of the Saudi participants, and these form the basis of the second main theme: differences.

*DIFFERENCES*

Another key theme to emerge in the data I have simply called differences. I have divided them into two groups: those relating to customs and culture generally, and those relating more specifically to learning and teaching methods. In both categories there were some differences that were expected by Saudi participants and others that came as a surprise.

*Different customs/culture*

It came as no surprise to me to find that one theme in all of the narrative discussion groups was the difficulty of acquiring halal food. What was something of a surprise to me was that they did not make as much of it as I had expected. For instance, in Narrative Discussion Group 1, when the discussion turned to restaurants serving halal food, Wadi said "I think we jumped from the …" and then gestured with his eyes to the digital recording device. For him, the topic of where to find halal food was not a significant issue when discussing his experiences as an international student.

I already knew that a butcher supplied halal meat at the Islamic centre on campus on Friday afternoons, and several participants mentioned this. I also knew that there were very few restaurants in town that served halal food, and this too was mentioned in most narrative discussion groups. However, other things that I was not aware of were also discussed.

Naim explained to me the difficulty that Islamic food requirements could place on newly arrived Saudi students.

> Naim:     *and it's very important for you to have a friend to arrange accommodation for you, because staying in a hotel, this is really difficult. Expensive first, and second, you don't have cooking facilities* **(NDG4)**.

With no restaurants serving halal food, and no cooking facilities in hotel rooms, newly arrived Saudi students can find themselves with very little they can eat.

In a different discussion group, Ubaid explained that going to on a trip to a different city could create a similar problem:

> Ubaid: *so sometimes when we go to [another city] we have to take our food with us in the car*
> Me: *with you?*
> Ubaid: *yes. Because it's hard for us to eat at restaurants because they do not provide halal meat so it's difficult for us to purchase from them* **(NDG3)**.

Whilst finding halal food to eat is important to many Saudi participants (although not all – see discussion below), it did not seem to be a big issue for some of them, perhaps because the Saudi community had already made arrangements with a butcher to provide halal meat locally.

Surprisingly, the shopping hours in the local community seemed to be of greater concern to many Saudi participants. In Narrative Discussion Group 4 Naim, again adopting the stance of speaking on behalf of other Saudis, explained:

> Naim: *after eight you can't find something to eat*
> Me: *(laugh)*
> Naim: *at restaurants, yes because back home we have twenty-four hour shops, even restaurants, cafes they're open twenty-four hours*
> Me: *twenty-four hours?*
> Naim: *yeah and the other shops maybe eighteen hours*
> Me: *wow*
> Naim: *yeah, so you can go shopping any time and always there are many people - crowded (laugh). So this is one difference maybe, students who come to study will find - time restriction* **(NDG4)**.

This restriction certainly seemed to be a big issue for Rashad in Narrative Discussion Group 2. It was one of the first differences he mentioned:

> Rashad: *I didn't expect that they were going to close at about five pm*
> Me: *the shops?*
> Rashad: *yes, on the weekend in our country every shop will be open and on the weekend here everything is closed. The weekend I think is the day to*

| Me: | *go shopping?* |
|---|---|
| Rashad: | *go shopping yeah (laugh)* **(NDG2)**. |

Much later in the same narrative discussion group, Latif and Rashad came back to this topic. For Latif, it was not an issue, despite the fact that some of his Saudi friends complained about it.

| Latif: | *that's where  some people they, you know, they are looking for small points they, you know, because they close at five o'clock they get upset, and make it a big deal. It's not really a big deal. I don't know, for me it's acceptable, this situation, because I'm in a different country. I have to follow this thing. I know it's closed at five o'clock. I have to do my shopping* |
|---|---|
| Rashad: | *before five* |
| Latif: | *before five o'clock* |
| Rashad: | *yeah* |
| Me: | *yeah* |
| Latif: | *uh, like Coles, it's open every day until seven or eight o'clock* |
| Me: | *yeah. I don't know when it shuts* |
| Latif: | *yeah, and Friday but on Saturday it closes at five o'clock it's not a big deal. It's like not the end of life* |
| Me: | *yes (laugh). As long as you've got some food* |
| Latif: | *yeah* **(NDG2)**. |

For Rashad, it obviously was an issue, though, because he broke back into the conversation at this point to express his disagreement with Latif:

| Rashad: | *yeah but sometimes in the night, for me, I'm just thinking or surfing the internet and I think "Oh I want to eat that, I want you to cook this one for me." My wife will go in the fridge and say "Oh, we don't have that." This is a big problem here in Australia. I can't wait, after tomorrow maybe I'm "Okay, I don't want this one anymore"* |
|---|---|
| Me: | *(laugh)* |
| Rashad: | *yeah, just to make it now. It's really a problem. No it's a big deal for me, yeah, I want it to be open twenty-four hours like in my country. So I can buy anything any time that I want* **(NDG2)**. |

Two explanations were given for this difference between the two cultures. For Rashad, the shops do not need to be open for 24 hours, because Australians do not care about eating fresh food:

| Rashad: | *yes, but here because also most Australians eating frozen food, they just put it in microwave and they don't, I mean they don't care about food as we do. They just, I don't know, they have a system:* |
|---|---|

> *wake, eat, go to work, come home at five, eat, microwave, sleep* **(NDG2)**.

Latif suggested a different reason, which was more flattering to Australian culture. Rashad seemed to agree with him on that point.

Latif:      *'cause we come from a bad management country*
Me:         *(laugh)*
Latif:      *like*
Rashad:     *no management country*
Me:         *no management? (laugh)*
Latif:      *no really, because, like, maybe for example, in your house... I was sharing a house with an Australian girl. When she planned to cook something she prepared that the day before. Maybe in your house, you are planning what your wife or you are going to cook this weekend*
Me:         *yes*
Latif:      *or some kind of food for lunch*
Me:         *usually at least one day before, yeah*
Latif:      *yeah, but in my home country, I know from my mum*
Rashad:     *always a surprise*
Me:         *(laugh)*
Latif:      *no, they, before they start to cook lunch time they say "okay" like all our family is seated and my mum she says "okay I'm going to cook blah, blah, blah for lunch"*
Me:         *yeah*
Latif:      *"it's good?" "Yeah, it's good." And well one of my brothers or one of my sisters says, "Yeah let's make other dishes." "Okay, okay, Latif," or one of my brothers "please go and buy blah, blah, blah." It's close to the shops, to get some small thing like, like, for example any small stuff*
Me:         *yeah, just a spice?*
Latif:      *yeah* **(NDG2)**.

Another cultural difference mentioned in Narrative Discussion Group 1 was the way in which men in Saudi Arabia touch cheeks in greeting, and hold hands when walking. Wadi explained that they had been taught that these were inappropriate in Australia:

Wadi:       *but it's not a good way in Australian culture*
Me:         *okay, did you know that before you came or did you find out when you got here?*
Wadi:       *no, one of our teacher in [the preparatory English program] said that to us*

| | |
|---|---|
| Me: | *oh, told you?* |
| Wadi: | *mmm* **(NDG1)**. |

Differences in road rules were mentioned by Naim in Narrative Discussion Group 4, and seemed to be a particular concern for Fadil who had firsthand experience of what seem to me to be very severe consequences for not obeying the car registration rules:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Fadil:* | *but I forgot to renew my registration - my car registration and they caught me [at a city] and they just stopped the car and they took off the plates and they just told me not to drive it because it will be an offense* |
| Me: | *they took the plates off?* |
| Fadil: | *yeah, yeah. And they asked me just to tow my car to (laugh) to [local town, 200km away]* |
| Me: | *no!* |
| Fadil: | *really, that's what happened to me* |
| Me: | *did that happen?* |
| Fadil: | *yes with my wife and she was scared and she was almost fainting crying* |
| Ubaid: | *crying* |
| Me: | *did that really . . . they stopped, they took the plates off?* |
| Fadil: | *yeah because it was* |
| Me: | *because it had expired?* |
| Fadil: | *three months it had expired* |
| Basil: | *(laugh) why didn't you renew it?* |
| Fadil: | *I didn't, in my country if I did the registration for my car, it's lifelong* |
| Me: | *oh that's terrible* |
| Fadil: | *yeah, in my country* |
| Ubaid: | *no registration it's 'til you will sell your car, so you can change* |
| Fadil: | *(unclear)* |
| Ubaid: | *but here, no, you buy every six months, and you've lost your money more and mo(laugh)re* |
| Me: | *yeah, it's so expensive, isn't it* |
| Ubaid: | *yes* |
| Fadil: | *so I told, I told him* |
| Me: | *so what happened?* |
| Fadil: | *yeah, they fined me six hundred dollars and* |
| Me: | *oh that's* |
| Fadil: | *yeah really, and er, they er, they, er they took even the screws. They didn't give me the* |
| Me: | *did they?* |
| Fadil: | *yeah* |
| Me: | *I can't believe they did that* |
| Fadil: | *yeah, really they, they were not nice* **(NDG3)**. |

Another key difference expressed by many of the married men was the wearing of the Abaya, the full-covering clothing that their wives wore. I discuss this in depth under Struggles (below) and again in Chapter 6.


**Reflection on data**
I think it is helpful for academic and support staff working with Saudi students to have a better and fuller understanding of the extent of some of the cultural differences faced by these students. Some of these may be obvious (such as the wearing of Abaya) and some of them may be familiar to those with a reasonable level of general knowledge (such as Islamic dietary restrictions). However, as the data demonstrate, the implications of some of these differences and the impact it would have on the lives of Saudi students are not so obvious. It seems prudent to me to suggest that we should never underestimate the impact that cultural differences may have on the everyday lives of international students.


*Different learning/teaching methods*
Another key difference that was mentioned in every narrative discussion group was teaching and learning methods. The fact that every group talked about this suggests to me that the Saudi participants felt it was an important point for teachers and support staff dealing with Saudi students to be aware of. The struggles that arose out of some of these differences are discussed in the next section.


The basic difference was well-summarised by Halim, with support from Wadi, in Narrative Discussion Group 1:


| | |
|---|---|
| Halim: | *but, the hardest, I think it's the studying and the style of teaching here is different from* |
| Wadi: | *totally different* |
| Me: | *is it?* |
| Halim: | *from our home country* |
| Me: | *what's different?* |
| Halim: | *here the teaching is not, it's independent learning whereas in our country it's passive learning* **(NDG1)**. |


They went on to explain one aspect of that difference:


| | |
|---|---|
| Halim: | *and we also don't have like assignments and this thing we don't have that* |
| Me: | *you don't?* |
| Halim: | *no* |
| Wadi: | *all the subjects are exams* **(NDG1)**. |

In Narrative Discussion Group 3, Ubaid elaborated another key difference:

Ubaid:     *at the university we actually use a different style of teaching from my country. The teacher, when he explains, when he teaches you he has to give you everything, all points, and explain each point, but here they are going to give you only the points and you have to search for the other things yourself* **(NDG3)**.

Likewise in Narrative Discussion Group 4, Naim noted his impression that one big difference was the expectation that students would do more work on their own:

Naim:     *yeah, and here the teaching style is different*
Me:       *yeah?*
Naim:     *yeah. It's here more thinking than there. You can think and you can process and it's sort of, you are the student and you are doing everything and you should, I just direct you*
Me:       *yeah*
Naim:     *yeah, as the teacher, I just direct you. Yeah, if you have any problems, just come back to me*
Me:       *come and see me, yeah*
Me:       *so you didn't, you didn't know that that system was different?*
Naim:     *no I didn't know about that* **(NDG4)**.

As Naim stated in the last line of the excerpt above, he was not aware of this difference in learning and teaching methods.

In Narrative Discussion Group 5, another interesting difference was noted. Ma'mun tried to explain that he saw writing in Arabic to be far less structured than writing in English, although he admitted there may be more structured styles of Arabic that he had never learnt:

Ma'mun:   *because in Arabic, we write like one chunk*
Me:       *oh yeah?*
Ma'mun:   *we don't have like English, we don't have thesis and you know writing it's like upside down*
Me:       *very structured yeah*
Ma'mun:   *in Arabic it's like, what do you call this, one chunk*
Akil:     *(unclear)*
Ma'mun:   *you start at introduction and you just*
Me:       *yeah, so you don't have paragraphs?*
Ma'mun:   *we have, but we don't have any structure for writing*
Me:       *oh, okay*
Ma'mun:   *you just write*

| Me: | *so you write like you talk?* |
|---|---|
| Akil: | *yeah* |
| Ma'mun: | *yeah you write like what you* |
| Akil: | *go* |
| Me: | *just let it all go* |
| Ma'mun: | *maybe* |
| Me: | *is that right?* |
| Ma'mun: | *maybe there is some structure for the academic but we don't learn it* **(NDG5)**. |

It is significant to note that this conversation flowed out of Ma'mun's comment that the advanced preparatory program at this university was very good. He highlighted that in this program he had been taught academic English skills. Naim did not go through any preparatory programs, and it seems that he learnt about some of the differences the hard way:

| Naim: | *yeah. The first assignment, er the first assignment, uh I was shocked by that assignment* |
|---|---|
| Me: | *(laugh)* |
| Naim: | *it's because, it's not because it was difficult. It's not difficult for me but, I didn't know that we had the assignment* |
| Me: | *oh* |
| Naim: | *I didn't know because they just give you the introductory book and you have to read everything yourself* |
| Me: | *that's right, no one told you (laugh)* |
| Naim: | *yeah, you have to find out the due date of the assignment and everything about the assignment yourself. Back home we usually have "your assignment will be due at this time" like this, you will follow the teacher's steps* |
| Me: | *so the teacher explains it all* |
| Naim: | *yeah, if you have any question about the assignment your assignment will be due on blah blah and if you have any questions we can discuss those questions, this is the usual way, and they will tell you in advance. But, just I was reading some stuff like this (gesture reading booklet) ah, due date for assignment. What's that assignment? And then I found it, I only have four days* **(NDG4)**. |

**Reflection on data**

These differences in learning and teaching methods are another layer of differences that may impact upon the learning experiences of Saudi students coming to Australia. Not only do they need to develop English language skills to a high enough level to complete their courses, but they must also become accustomed to completely different ways of teaching and learning. These differences may compound to produce a great deal of stress for some students. As Ma'mun noted in the excerpt above (and confirmed by several other participants in different narrative discussion groups), the advanced

preparatory programs at this university appear to be addressing the need for helping students understand the difference in teaching and learning styles. Nevertheless, students would still be novice practitioners in this new style of education, and it seems likely that they might have to work harder students who have learnt this way throughout their secondary schooling.

*STRUGGLES*

The third theme that emerged in the narrative discussion groups was what I have called struggles: instances where it seemed to me that they were not just telling me about difference, but rather they were telling me about their problems. Of course, there is some overlap between the two themes, and some problems (such has Fadil's problem with an unregistered car) have already been noted. In this section I specifically highlight stories that have helped me, and therefore I believe may help others like me, to understand some of the difficulties and stresses that some Saudi students may experience.

*Struggles with Australian English*
One of these struggles related to the difficulty in understanding Australians when they were speaking English. Participants identified three areas of concern: the accent, the rapid speed, and Aussie slang. Latif mentioned the problem of accents:

| Latif: | *you have to understand their accent. Sometimes it's difficult with some people in [this town], especially like old people* |
| Me: | *yeah, the accent is difficult?* |
| Latif: | *yes, very difficult. Sometimes when I go with the taxi driver I can't understand anything. I can understand nothing. I just say, "yes"* |
| Me: | *"yes"?* |
| Latif: | *"yes"* |
| Me: | *(laugh)* **(NDG2)**. |

Halim and Wadi explained how important they felt it was to learn Aussie slang, and their belief that the only way to learn it is to live with Australians and spend time with them.

| Wadi: | *but we notice that you cannot understand slang unless you live with Australians and spend time with them* |
| Me: | *okay because you won't learn it* |
| Wadi: | *you will not learn it* |
| Me: | *in a class* |
| Wadi: | *you will not learn it in a class, and you know that in a class in [the preparatory English class] and [the advanced preparatory class]* |

|        | most of the students are international. Their English is like us. You cannot improve your English from them. But when you spend time with Australians and talk with them and live with them, you understand |
| --- | --- |
| Me: | *uh-huh and do you think learning slang is really important?* |
| Wadi: | *well very important while you are in Australia* |
| Halim: | *to communicate* |
| Wadi: | *to communicate with people* |
| Halim: | *people anywhere like in shopping centre somewhere, in the street or* |
| Wadi: | *yeah we will go back to our country and spot* |
| Me: | *(laugh)* |
| Wadi: | *their Australian slang they will not understand us* |
| Halim: | *(laugh)* |
| Wadi: | *they will say, "this is not English"* |
| Me: | *(laugh)* |
| Halim: | *(laugh)* **(NDG1)**. |

Ma'mun expressed the difficulty he had understanding the English spoken by younger Australians, due to both speed and slang.

| Ma'mun: | *you talk to the young people, they're very fast, use a lot of synonyms, a lot of short-cut words, so I don't understand and say, "yep" or "yeah" or something* |
| --- | --- |
| Me: | *ye(laugh)ah and you can't look it up in a dictionary* |
| Ma'mun: | *yeah you cannot memorise it even if you want to look in the dictionary* **(NDG5)**. |

**Reflection on data**
The implications of these struggles are explained a little in Narrative Discussion Group 4. Naim suggested that lecturers should take care, agreeing with my clarifying question that he was referring back to a previous comment about using slang when there are international students in the class:

| Naim: | *I think the teacher should be taking care there are many non-native speakers around* |
| --- | --- |
| Me: | *so not use so much slang?* |
| Naim: | *yeah* **(NDG4)**. |

Naim also noted that some Saudi students find it difficult to participate in class discussions because they cannot understand the comments and questions that the (often younger) students asked. Without understanding the question, it is difficult to make sense of the lecturer's response. As it is, the lecturer's comments may be lost on international students, due to the difference in

pronunciation of common words. In Narrative Discussion Group 3, Fadil recounted a time in class when he missed a lot of what was said because he did not understand the Australian lecturer's pronunciation of the key word in the discussion (bowel) even though he knew the word with its American pronunciation. This reflection leads on to what was the most frequent topic of conversation in the narrative discussion groups; namely struggles with academic work and university procedures.

*Struggles at university*

The list of problems and suggestions for how to deal with those problems that arose in the narrative discussion groups was quite lengthy. Rather than reference them all extensively here, I have chosen to highlight a few stories that demonstrate some of the range of struggles Saudi participants spoke about, including all of those that I found to be helpful in better understanding their experiences. The remaining problems and suggestions are then summarised in point form at the end of this section.

**Exam anxiety**

The first story is one I have referred to already, in which Ubaid confessed to times of anxiety whilst doing his examinations. The problem for Ubaid was that Australian students would begin to leave the room early, which would cause him to become anxious because he still had so much of the examination left to do:

| Ubaid: | *we are doing the exam in this major, they put us with Australian native speakers in the one classroom. We are doing the exam. After we start answering the questions I find fifteen minutes, thirty minutes, I find Australian people, they finish and they are, they submit their exam paper, and me I still haven't finished, only half. After that I will get, um* |
| Basil: | *nervous* |
| Ubaid: | *nervous and* |
| Me: | *start to panic?* |
| Basil: | *yes* |
| Ubaid: | *yes to panic, "Why are they finished? Is the exam easy or what?"* **(NDG3)**. |

As previously noted, Basil counselled Ubaid in this instance to remember that he is not a native speaker, and therefore not to put too much pressure on himself, which seems to be wise advice to me. I would also stand by the suggestion I made in the context of the narrative discussion group that students from non-English speaking backgrounds could be given extra time to complete examinations without giving them an unfair advantage over native-speaking students.

**Afraid to question grades**

Another story from Narrative Discussion Group 3 also recalls strong feelings, this time of fear. Ubaid told a story that he heard from a Saudi friend who questioned a teacher about a mark and the teacher apparently told the student, "You will fail." According to the student he did, in fact, fail. Whether or not the fail was a result of questioning the mark does not alter the fact that this story has caused Ubaid to be concerned about his own situation:

Ubaid: *I was surprised, really, I never thought it would happen in Australia, it happens, really it happens*

Me: *I'm sure it does*

Ubaid: *even now when I am studying major and I'm trying to be nice with my tutors*

Me: *that is a good plan (laugh)*

Ubaid: *yes, really to keep myself on the safe side*

Me: *absolutely*

Ubaid: *you know, I got my marks in (unclear) I'm not happy with my marks. Actually really I said "no I'm not happy" because actually I know what I have written there, and I will go to my tutor and ask her "Why my mark is not good?" but at the same time I'm afraid maybe she will say "you will not pass." I am coming here to get accepted and to study because I have a limited time here in Australia, I have to finish my study in this time*

Me: *is that for your scholarship?*

Ubaid: *yes, for scholarship and then I will go back, if I don't pass in this time, I will fail, lose everything* **(NDG3)**.

**The shock of receiving a letter**

Another story that surprised me greatly was told by Naim:

Naim: *the uni sent me a letter; this is what really shocked me, "You failed the requirements for the program"*

Me: *really?*

Naim: *if they asked me to do the assignment, that's fine, but to send me this paper (holding sheet of paper to represent a letter) it's very, it's very shocking. I was shocked by this paper (shaking paper). It's okay if you have to do an assignment*

Me: *a make-up?*

Naim: *yeah, a make-up*

Me: *oh, okay*

Naim: *I did the assignment, but the assignment is not a big problem for me to do the assignment, I have the literature, I bring everything, it's not the issue, no. I'll do it, no problem, but to send me a paper (waving paper), "You failed"* **(NDG4)**.

Had I not participated in this discussion myself, I doubt I would ever have realised just how differently a written letter can impact upon a person from a different culture. It seems perfectly appropriate to me to send a formal letter advising a student of his or her failure to meet requirements, and also advising what other steps may be taken. However, for Naim, receiving a letter with the word fail both shocked (he used that word three times) and, I sense by all the waving of the paper, outraged him. I would suggest that part of the shock and anger resulted from Naim's sense of injustice at the incident leading up to it (discussed in the next section). Nevertheless, the use of a written letter was far more upsetting to Naim than I would have expected, and this suggests that there may be different cultural meanings surrounding the use of different forms of communication that may need to be further explored.

### Team-members not cooperating

The incident leading up to the receipt of the fail letter was Naim's own experience, but he told me that other Saudi students had had similar experiences. Just prior to telling me this story, Naim's cell phone had rung and whilst he did not answer it, he did look to see who the call was from. This may have prompted the telling of the story, because Naim referred to the caller as one of those who had had the same experience.

The story that Naim told was an example of the struggles that he claimed many Saudi students had with group-work, which was a compulsory component of the program that these students were enrolled in.

Naim:      *and sometimes if you are in a group you may find yourself in trouble*
Me:         *really?*
Naim:      *yeah, I'm telling you*
Me:         *like what? What*
Naim:      *(clears throat)*
Me:         *for group work, you mean?*
Naim:      *yeah, for group working. Sometimes you did what they asked you to do and then you find yourself at the end that there is a complaint against you*
Me:         *really?*
Naim:      *yeah, this happened with me, and the other one who is calling me right now, he gave me, yesterday he had trouble with his group. And I have many, it's not my case, my case was years ago*
Me:         *yeah ok(laugh)ay*
Naim:      *now more than one they have the same case, sometimes, and sometimes the teacher, they don't, they should understand, they should listen to each side, to the student* **(NDG4)**.

Naim then went on to tell a story about his own experience. His case was complicated by a number of factors including a need to return to Saudi Arabia with his sick wife, and a change in course examiners:

Naim: *because my case, I'll tell you my case. I finished my part of the group presentation and I asked the examiner for permission to leave to go to Saudi Arabia. I told him, I have finished, and my wife was sick, she was pregnant. So she told me, in the group presentation just if you, if you like one speaker in the group that will be fine - if you finish your part, like research this thing, you will arrange what's your part, do your part, then that's okay, you've done your part. I did my part, and I have many emails to document it. I have written it, I have submitted it to the group and everything and one of my friends, Saudi friends, was in the group and he called me overseas to say "You are in trouble with the group." "What's wrong?" "They complained against us that we don't work with them." "What about the papers we gave them in their house?" "They don't, the teacher, the examiner", not the examiner, the examiner was on vacation because of something*

Me: *oh n(laugh)o*

Naim: *another teacher was working now as examiner he left the message, "[Why] he is absent? In the group presentation he is absent, I will give him no mark"*

Me: *really?*

Naim: *yeah, I explained by email that I had permission from the examiner* **(NDG4)**.

Naim then went on to explain the nature of the problem for other Saudi students who had been coming to him for advice. It seems (not surprisingly to me) that many of the young Australian students were delaying their group-work preparation until just before the due date. Some Saudi students, recognising the need to begin their part early in order to complete it on time, tried to arrange meetings with their Australian team-mates, but the Australians would keep declining, saying they were always busy. By the time the Australians began the work, it was too late for the Saudi students who were working in their second language. Therefore Saudi students were receiving poor grades because their native-English speaking team-mates did not start early enough.

There is always the potential for this kind of struggle in group-work. In the case of international students from non-English speaking backgrounds, I think it is important to recognise that it takes some of them much longer to complete a task in English, and therefore they need more time than many of their Australian team-mates might need. Whatever the solution might be to this dilemma, failing to address the issue does seem to be an issue of inequity to me.

## Other struggles at university

There were several other struggles relating to university work that were mentioned in the narrative discussion groups which, due to space restrictions, I have not detailed here. I have summarised them in dot point form:

- Fadil did not feel confident in doing assignments, and therefore it took him 3 or 4 days to talk himself into starting **(NDG3)**.

- Fadil and Ubaid discussed the problem of subjective marking, and particularly frustration at handing in drafts to be checked, receiving good comments, but then receiving low grades for the final submission **(NDG3)**.

- Fadil and Ubaid both talked about the difficulties arising from the amount of time taken to proof-read assignments to check for grammatical and spelling errors **(NDG3)**.

- Ubaid expressed frustration that teachers did not correct mistakes he made in English, "so in future I will still keep, I will continue this mistake" **(NDG3)**.

- Naim explained that younger Australians did not seem to understand different cultures very well, and therefore they did not attempt to relate to Saudi students in their classes, with Saudi students feeling isolated **(NDG4)**.

## Reflection on data

Some of these struggles, such as the time taken to proof-read work, did not surprise me at all. Others, such as the shock of receiving a written letter informing Naim of failure, were perspectives I had not previously considered as issues for some students. Whether or not that perspective is commonly held among other Saudi students, or international students from other cultures, I do not know. Nevertheless, it seems quite reasonable to suggest that different modes of communication would carry different illocutionary intent in different cultures, and therefore it is an important principle to keep in mind when interacting with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Some other struggles, like the stories of group-work struggles, I might have been able to predict myself, had I stopped to think about it. I know that second language users take more time to do assignments, and I know that some Australian university students leave their work to the last minute. The logical outcome of the confluence of these two phenomena is that Saudi students

working in groups with procrastinating Australian students would not have enough time to do their part of the project well. This has been exactly the experience that some Saudis have reported. Although it seems logical to me upon reflection, if Naim had not told me about it, I might never have become aware of it.

*Struggles with family obligations*
Another kind of struggle was discussed by two of the married Saudi participants in two different narrative discussion groups. Of all of the struggles the Saudi participants shared with me, this was the one that impacted upon me the most. Like the group-work problem mentioned above, it is a logical outworking of what I already knew (or at least thought I knew) but I had never processed that line of thinking to its logical conclusion. Hearing the stories of these two husbands also significantly impacted upon my understanding of the relationships between husbands and wives in these Islamic families.

Rashad had only been married for a couple of months at the time of Narrative Discussion Group 2. He noted the struggle he was having with his responsibility to look after his new wife who had recently arrived in Australia with him:

| Rashad: | *it was very difficult ah the first time when we arrived here, I stayed a week and couldn't even go to the university* |
| Me: | *really?* |
| Rashad: | *I was, if she heard a sound, because she doesn't know what's going on in Australia, if she hears anything outside, she calls me, "There is someone near the home" or something like that* **(NDG2)**. |

Rashad's wife, in a new country with completely different customs, was afraid of all the noises that she could hear, but could not identify. Therefore she relied upon Rashad to be there to comfort her, and this kept him away from his university classes.

Fadil and Ubaid noted that their wives were also afraid, and worrying about their wives at home occupied their minds whilst at university. The discussion began with Ubaid explaining that the houses in Australia were less secure than Saudi houses – made of wood, not concrete, and without metal bars on the windows:

| Ubaid: | *it's hard, our wives said they are scared of living in these houses* |
| Me: | *don't feel safe?* |
| Ubaid: | *to be honest with you yes, they are feeling it's not safe* |
| Me: | *oh* |

| Ubaid: | *because we are men and it's fine for us, it's because they are women so they are not happy to live this here. They are scared, because of windows like this, because they don't use the* |
|---|---|
| Basil: | *anytime, maybe somebody he can break the glass* |
| Me: | *ah, break the glass?* |
| Basil: | *(slight laugh) and come in the house* **(NDG3)**. |

At this point, we began a long discussion trying to distinguish between flyscreens, security screens and barred windows. When we had finally settled on the meaning of the different words, Ubaid said that they used bars on their windows, and the lack of bars on Australian homes caused them to feel unsafe:

| Ubaid: | *so we have, we use bars to protect ourselves from any intrusion* |
|---|---|
| Me: | *yeah I can see how that would be concerning, especially like when you are away and your wife's here on her own* |
| Basil: | *yeah* |
| Ubaid: | *yes, yes and then when we are at uni our minds are at home* |
| Me: | *hmm* |
| Ubaid: | *yes, because we know our wives they are scared, like this. So it's also an important point for us* **(NDG3)**. |

From the time when I first met Saudi students on campus, I noticed that they seemed to answer their cell phones as a high priority. Some would walk out in the middle of a class to answer their phones. From my Western perspective, this would be considered to be quite rude. However, upon hearing the students' stories, I began to reconsider some of the cultural implications that may influence the Saudi participants' use of cell phones. At the end of his story about having to comfort his wife, Rashad gestured to his cell phone and said,

| Rashad: | *if I, you see now about two hours (gesturing to mobile phone) together and no call yet* |
|---|---|
| Me: | *and she hasn't called you* |
| Rashad: | *yeah* **(NDG2)**. |

The lack of a call from his wife for almost two hours was used by Rashad as evidence that she was settling well into Australia. This was startling to me. I had always thought that the Islamic laws and customs gave Saudi wives less freedom than Australian wives, but I had never stopped to consider how those same laws and customs also placed far higher expectations on the Saudi husbands to have to look after their wives. If my wife heard a noise outside our home, she would normally investigate it herself. When these Saudi men's wives hear strange noises, their husbands are expected to investigate, even if it means leaving their classes at university.

**Reflection on data**

Upon reflection, it seems perfectly logical that in a cultural environment in which women are less independent, they must therefore be more dependent on someone. Isolated from their families and home communities as partners to international students living abroad, the wives of these Saudi men seem to have only their husbands to depend upon. It seems reasonable to suggest that in such a situation, a conscientious husband would do whatever he could to provide his wife with the support she needed. Therefore it should come as no surprise to hear Ubaid say, "When we are at uni, our minds are at home." Evaluated from within their own religious and cultural context, this would seem to be the attitude of an honourable, responsible and loving husband.

When a Saudi student rushes out of class to answer his phone, therefore, he may be acting as a rude and irresponsible student (from the perspective of some teachers) but possibly also as a responsible and loving husband (from his Saudi perspective). In trying to understand this situation better I tried to imagine how I might feel if I had had to leave my children at home alone when they were still quite young, in order to go to university. In that situation, had I received a call from my daughter saying, "Daddy, there's a noise outside and I'm scared," I would have had no hesitation in leaving the class immediately, to rush to my daughter's aid. It wouldn't have mattered what my teacher thought; my daughter would have been a higher priority. I wonder whether this is similar to the kind of struggle faced by some of the married Saudi men whose wives are alone and scared in a foreign country, without the family and cultural support networks they would ordinarily turn to. Certainly, hearing these stories gave me cause to think.

*Struggles with timing of cultural events*

Another major misconception I had prior to this study was that Islamic students struggled through the period of Ramadan, because it was hard to concentrate on studying whilst fasting. Naim insisted that this was not the big problem for the Saudi community. Muslims, he said, fasted every year at Ramadan and were quite used to it. The big issue for them was not the fasting, but the festival days that followed. Discovering this was quite serendipitous: I had not understood Naim's pronunciation of festival (it sounded like forceful to me) and so I continued to ask about fasting (rather than feasting) which led Naim to clarify. In the transcript below, I have written "forceful [festival]" in the places where I still had not understood that Naim was talking about festivals:

| Naim: | *yeah, sometimes we have forceful [festival] day, a big forceful [festival], it's Islamic forceful [festival] day as well, and you are in the classes, and you like to contact your family overseas and* |
| Me: | *so it's a, it's a special holiday season in Saudi Arabia* |
| Naim: | *yeah* |
| Me: | *when you want to* |
| Naim: | *it's not in Saudi Arabia it's in all Islamic countries* |

| | |
|---|---|
| Me: | *oh, in all Islamic countries* |
| Naim: | *yeah* |
| Me: | *okay, but here in Australia you have classes and you c(laugh)an't* |
| Naim: | *yeah, people in the early morning they are going to uh to prayer and then going to having forceful [festival] day, eating and stuff and you are doing assignment or doing or sitting in class so sometimes it's difficult to concentrate* |
| Me: | *oh, is that because you're fasting?* <br> *(pause)* |
| Me: | *not eating?* |
| Naim: | *no, this is, sometimes we have fasting here we have but, no fasting, it's not difficult for all Saudi students. I think it's not a big issue but the most important thing when you finish your fasting there's a festival day after that* |
| Me: | *oh okay* |
| Naim: | *so you like to enjoy it* |
| Me: | *ah!* |
| Naim: | *and last year not last year, the one before I talked to [the preparatory English program]. They gave me one day off for the Saudi students because I am [a community leader] and we had a festival day here. And they were very, very happy to do so and helped us, and all the students they are very happy about this action* **(NGD4)**. |

**Reflection on data**

Until this conversation, I had thought that Australian universities might need to consider being more sensitive to Islamic students fasting through Ramadan. Naim's comments suggest that an issue of far greater importance to them is time off to be able to celebrate their important festivals together.

*Struggles connecting with the local community*

Several Saudi participants in different discussion groups mentioned struggles with attempts to connect with native-English speakers in the local community. In Narrative Discussion Group 1, Halim talked about the difficulty of talking to people off campus:

| | |
|---|---|
| Halim: | *the people in the at uni you can talk to them and speak to them easily and you can I think, as you are students and you are here, but outside it's (pause 2 secs) different. You can't you can't speak* |
| Wadi: | *you cannot speak to them* |
| Me: | *really?* |
| Halim: | *you can't speak to people outside* |
| Me: | *you can't speak to them?* |
| Halim: | *I don't know but* |
| Me: | *is that something you just feel or?* |
| Halim: | *I feel people don't like to talk to strangers or something* **(NDG1)**. |

Latif noted that there were not a lot of places to go to meet with people from the local community:

| | |
|---|---|
| Latif: | *because we are in [this town]. There is not a lot of activity to go out or to meet people. There's nothing. No. like on Sunday if I don't have like an assignment or something to do I just like watch movies, go to my friend's house meet like, to meet each other - talking, talking about everything* |
| Me: | *that seems to me to be a tricky thing, how do you make friends to start with?* |
| Latif: | *but if you are in [nearby cities], you can meet people in like, like, [nearby city]* |
| Me: | *sure* |
| Latif: | *big place, people, they have coffee and talk, but in [this town] you have to go to the city centre or CBD* |
| Me: | *but a lot of them are shut even on Sunday aren't they* |
| Latif: | *yes, there are some open until midnight, or eleven o'clock, there's a couple of coffee shops open, like coffee er* |
| Me: | *coffee house?* |
| Latif: | *coffee house. And the one front of (unclear?) club, the big coffee shop. They are open I think until eleven o'clock* |
| Me: | *oh all right* |
| Latif: | *but, if you go there, all the people go for dating or for, they already have, like meeting with other people. They are not, you know, prepared for some people to come to like, just for meeting* **(NDG2)**. |

In Narrative Discussion Group 3, Fadil made the interesting observation that Australians seem to him to be less expressive when speaking to him, than when speaking to other Australians:

| | |
|---|---|
| Fadil: | *I noticed when I speak to a . . . no, no when an Australian talks to an Australian, they will, you can see the expressions very clear. If they are happy (happy facial gesture) or if they are sad oh (sad facial expression) but when they talk to me they will (bland facial gesture) you know the face is solid* |
| Me: | *is it really?* |
| Fadil: | *yeah, I notice some of them, not all of them but, uh, I don't know* |
| Me: | *why do you think they do that, I wonder?* |
| Fadil: | *I don't know* |
| Me: | *is it because they don't, they're not sure about you?* |
| Fadil: | *ah, I think because what do you mean, sure about me?* |
| Me: | *well, "Is he safe?" (laugh) "Is he . . .?"* |
| Fadil: | *some of them feel that* **(NDG3)**. |

He added that not all Australians were like this and went on to explain:

> Fadil: *but some of them, no, when I talk to them, I don't know, I feel, you know, they want to make this space (gesturing a space between himself and another person)* **(NDG3)**.

Fadil also found some tension in his relationship with people at university who, he was quick to point out, were not academic staff:

> Fadil: *my friend, my brother, went to the USA, and he was telling me many stories about how they were friendly and they will just, you know, they will greet you if you are on the street and you can make conversation, you can meet someone and, you know you can… er, you can live, you know, a good life there because you won't feel alone, you know, everyone is, you know, you can talk to everyone but when I came here I was shocked really, because some of them like at uni, at, thanks to God, they are not er teachers, they are just working at uni, they will, er, if I ask them something like I don't wanna say where but, like, for example, if I ask them, "Where is that?" or "What should I do?" they will answer me in a way that er I feel that I am stupid. Really, they want to er the answer er telling you "Are you stupid, it's there."  They didn't say that, but you can, "ahah"* **(NDG3)**.

For Fadil, not being able to make friends with Australians was a problem. Ubaid joined him in that discussion, pointing out that one of the big problems for Saudi men was that the best way to make friends in Australia is to go out drinking, and for Ubaid (although not necessarily all Saudis) this is not permitted on religious grounds:

> Fadil: *this is also another issue because I don't have Australian friends, you know a girl I asked her her number to come to sit with us and, you know, do study and she never called*
> Ubaid: *if you want to get Australian, I think, Australian friends, you have to drink*
> Me: *that's a big problem*
> Ubaid: *yes, and you are we can't drink I know of Saudis, some students here study, they make relationships with Australian people and they are friendly because they are drinking with them but, but my religion can't let me to drink and so I think it's impossible to get friends, Australian friends*
> Basil: *not your religion, you (to Ubaid)*
> Ubaid: *yes I can't*

Basil:     *that's okay, but you can't, you cannot, you don't like to drink, but others, they broke the law (laugh)*

Ubaid:     *that's their problem* **(NDG3)**.


**Reflection on data**

As Basil pointed out, not all Saudi students adhere strictly to the Islamic rules forbidding the drinking of alcohol. For those who do, I imagine it would be very difficult to find opportunities to meet people from the local community. My own experience as a newcomer to this community has been that one of the primary ways of breaking in to the otherwise infamously parochial community has been through participation in activities run by the many local Christian churches. I would imagine that this approach is hardly likely to be of appeal to devout Muslims. If Christian churches and clubs serving alcohol are the two best options for getting to know people, it is little wonder that some of the Saudi participants have found it difficult to connect with the local community.


*Struggles with racist attitudes*

In Chapter 7, I discuss in more detail some of the ethical and methodological issues relating to experiences of racism, and specifically what could and could not be told in the context of this study. Here I relay the only story in any of the narrative discussion groups that touched explicitly on attitudes that might be considered racist.


Basil:     *when I came, in the second month my wife and me went to [nearby city]*

Me:        *did you?*

Basil:     *yeah for the first time and um, when we were walking and going around you know our wives, uh, the women in Saudi Arabia in Islamic religion they should cover their bodies and their faces and this is our religion and our tradition and, uh, when we were walking some g(laugh)uy one guy he came to us and he said, "terrorist" (laugh)*

Me:        *(laugh) you're kidding!*

Basil:     *yeah*

Me:        *seriously?*

Basil:     *but we were in the street and there were many people and it was I think Saturday or Sunday and there are some people were dancing and I couldn't hear when he said that my wife, she said to me, "What did that man say?" and I said, "I don't know. I didn't hear it". Then he said it again, "Terrorist. Where is the bomb?" (laugh)*

Ubaid:     *the bomb? (laugh)*

Me:        *really?*

Basil:     *and I said, I got angry, and I said, "What, why are you fighting, why are you talking like this?" He said, "No, why your wife cover her face?" I said to him, "This is not your business. She's my wife and*

> *this is our religion and our, uh, tradition and our custom. What's wrong with you?"* **(NDG3)**.

I can only begin to imagine how distressing it must be on the receiving end of this kind of aggressive behaviour in the middle of the street by a complete stranger. Nevertheless, Basil did not finish his story there. He continued on to indicate that this kind of racist attitude is only one side of the coin.

> Basil:     *when he was talking with me, I noticed that he was drunk*
> Me:       *drunk?*
> Basil:     *yeah. When he went some Australian guy he came to me and he said "no worries" and "sorry"*
> Me:       *yeah*
> Basil:     *you see the two sides of the (laugh) coin*
> Me:       *yeah*
> Basil:     *and he said "no, don't worry, I know Arabic, and I know uh, Islam and Muslims, I know they cover their faces and, don't worry and sorry about him." He said like that. Then, you see, the bad things and the good things* **(NDG3)**.

**Reflections on data**

As an Australian, born and raised in the city in which this incident occurred, I would very much like to believe that there are civic-minded people there with both the decency and the courage to try to reach out and comfort perfect strangers who have been the victims of this kind of unprovoked intimidation based on racial intolerance. However, my experience would suggest that that kind of response would very much be the exception to the rule. I wonder whether I myself would find the courage to approach a total stranger with words of apology for the behaviour of another total stranger. I found this story personally confronting and challenging.

I also found it interesting that Basil continued on to tell the other side of the story. I think that if somebody had been so intimidating to me and my wife when we were in a foreign country, I would find it very difficult to see past the anger and fear to have such a balanced view of the situation. I may have even decided to abandon the country and return home with stories of the shocking treatment I had received. However, Basil not only stayed in Australia, he chose to see the incident as only one side of the coin.

Impressed by Basil's maturity in responding, I began to wonder whether other Saudi participants had also experienced this kind of racially intolerant behaviour and were dealing with it in a similar manner. The way in which I designed my research forced me to restrain from asking a question about a particular topic unless the participants chose to discuss it of their own accord.

As none of the other participants raised the issue, I did not find an answer in the narrative discussion groups. However, other evidence suggests that Basil is not the only Saudi to experience this kind of treatment, and I think it is an important ethical and methodological issue to explore the reasons why racism might not have been discussed in the narrative discussion groups. I have discussed this more in Chapter 7.

*SUMMARY OF PART 1*

I have divided the topics that arose in the discussion group, into 3 themes: expectations, differences and struggles. As can be seen in the discussion and reflections on these themes, there is a considerable degree of overlap between all 3. Some of the things that were discussed did not surprise me at all; others were completely unexpected. I think that coming to understand the latter was the most significant finding of this part of the analysis. I am well-educated and concerned about social justice, and therefore have taken an interest in the affairs of Saudi students at this university. Nevertheless, there was much that I did not know about what was happening in the lives of the students, and how that could impact upon their experiences as international students.

I have summarised the key findings in Table 5.1. The table is not intended to be an exhaustive list of everything that was said; it is intended primarily to raise awareness of the range and complexity of issues that were raised in the narrative discussion groups in the hope that it might prompt thinking and discussion on possible approaches to responding.

*Table 5.1: Summary of key issues that arose in the narrative discussion groups*

| Issues |
|---|
| Unrealistic expectations about English language abilities |
| Different perspectives on proper language teaching methods |
| Expectations of the host community |
| Cultural differences |
| Different learning/teaching styles |
| Australian English: slang, accent, speed |
| Exam anxiety |
| Fear of questioning grades |
| The shock of receiving written advice of failure |
| Problems with team-members |
| Struggles with family obligations |
| Time for important religious and cultural events |
| Struggles making Australian friends |
| Struggles with racism |

There were many new things that I learnt from listening to the stories of the Saudi participants. I was surprised to hear stories of anxiety and fear. I was challenged to reconceptualise the experience of married Muslim men, especially in the light of the weight of responsibility that some of them felt towards their dependent wives. I was disappointed (but sadly not surprised) to hear of racist intolerance and verbal abuse. I was encouraged to hear of courageous civic mindedness, and patient tolerance.

The themes explored in this first part of this chapter do not represent what I consider to be the truth about the experiences of male Saudi nursing students in a positivist or generalisable sense. The themes are drawn from the recounted experiences of some Saudi participants. The important thing this analysis has highlighted is the complexity of the many inter-related facets of experience that can impact upon students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It is not possible to record every experience that every international student has, and it is also not possible to predict what kind of experience any one international student is likely to have, even from such an apparently homogenous cohort as this group of participants. What staff dealing with international students can do is keep in mind that there may be more going on in the lives of international students than they are aware of.

## PART 2 – DIFFERING OPINIONS[7]

### *NARRATIVE DISCUSSION GROUP 2*

In the second part of this chapter, I examine just one of the narrative discussion groups, with a view to demonstrating the extent of the differences between the values, beliefs and opinions expressed by the two Saudi participants in that group. This finding is significant because it challenges reductionist perspectives on understanding international student experiences discussed in the review of the literature at the beginning of this chapter. Narrative Discussion Group 2 was held in the home of Latif, who had invited Rashad, to come over and join us for the conversation. I had known both of the Saudi participants for about 18 months prior to the data production stage, and both of them seemed to me to be good friends, both before and after the narrative discussion group.

If reductionist models were true, then it would be reasonable to suggest that these two Saudi friends, both the same age, both living in rented houses in the same town, both studying the same course (nursing) at the same university, at

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[7] An edited version of this section has been published in Midgley (2009a)*.*

the same time would surely have similar perspectives on life as an international student. As the discussion below emphatically demonstrates, this was not the case. The one significant difference in demographic background between these two participants was that Rashad was married, but he had married only a couple of months prior to the narrative discussion group, and for most of his time in Australia, he was, like Latif, single. To highlight the significance of these differing opinions, it is important to recall that the narrative discussion groups were completely open-ended. The topics for discussion were selected by the two Saudi participants. They chose to talk to me about things that they had very different opinions about. As the data demonstrate, they were well aware of these differences before the discussion began.

One key point of difference that arose was in relation to going to nightclubs and bars in order to meet other young Australians. Latif began to talk about this:

| Latif: | *sometimes I like to go out at night and weekends with my friends to go anywhere, like even if some people they don't like it, especially from my country* |
| Me: | *yeah* |
| Latif: | *they don't like go to this place at night* |
| Me: | *sure* |
| Latif: | *you know what I mean* |

Later in this conversation, Latif clarified that by going out at night he meant visiting nightclubs and bars. Although he did not specifically state during this discussion that he drank alcohol when he went to clubs and bars, his admission in the excerpt quoted above that "some people, they don't like it, especially from my country," and his follow-on comment, "You know what I mean," indicated to me that the point of concern for some Saudi students was the Islamic prohibition on the consumption of alcohol.

I did not ask Latif whether or not he drank alcohol when he went out, and he did not offer that information himself. However, what was clear from his discussion is that he believed that going to clubs and bars had helped him to get to know many Australians:

| Latif: | *now when I go to [a large shopping mall] I meet at least two or three people I know from Australia from clubs* |
| Me: | *oh really?* |
| Latif: | *(laugh)* |
| Me: | *that's been a good way for you to meet* |
| Latif: | *yeah* |
| Me: | *other Australians* |

In these two short excerpts, Latif began to reveal something about his overall approach to life as an international student in Australia, namely to try to fit in by making friends and doing things the Australian way. It seems from these excerpts that for Latif, making and maintaining relationships with (Australian) people in the local community was of a higher priority than strictly adhering to the cultural/religious norms of his home community. This reading of his statements is reinforced later in the narrative discussion group. The excerpts already cited in this section were introduced by this comment from Latif:

> Latif:     *really I love this place. Last time I went to Saudi Arabia I felt like homesick for [this town]*

Towards the end of the 81 minute narrative discussion group, Latif came back to this theme. He said,

> Latif:     *I am really happy in [this town]. I'm very, very happy, because I've got everything I wanted, friends, going out, meeting lots of friends*

Latif's friendships with people in the local community brought him a great sense of personal enjoyment and satisfaction. He continued on to explain that he also believed that interacting with members of the local community is important for language learning. He stated,

> Latif:     *we have to mix with the community to learn English*

Coming back to the subject of going to nightclubs, he said,

> Latif:     *this is where you've got to be, this is the way to meet people*

Putting these segments together, it seems that for Latif it is important emotionally and pedagogically to engage with members of the local community, and one good way to do that is to go to nightclubs and bars. He saw that the need to make Australian friends outweighed any concerns he might have over going to places where alcohol was consumed.

Rashad took quite a different approach to the subject of going to bars and nightclubs. He first raised the subject, long after Latif did, in a joking fashion. Latif had been explaining how sometimes it was very difficult to understand the Australian accent:

| Latif: | *I can't understand anything. I just say, "yes"* |
| Me: | *"yes"?* |
| Latif: | *"yes"* |
| Me | *(laugh)* |
| Rashad: | *you want to go bar? "yes"* |

In the context of a totally different discussion (on the difficulty of understanding the Australian accent), Rashad interrupted with the joking suggestion that Latif always said "yes" when invited to go to a bar. Rashad was making a joke at Latif's expense, implying that he thought that Latif goes too often.

Much later, Rashad made another light-hearted reference to this when discussing another totally unrelated issue: the expense of travelling home.

| Rashad: | *so this is one of the problems we face. But it's a little problem because we are getting a lot of salary, we can just save* |
| Me: | *save up?* |
| Rashad: | *if we are not going to nightclubs* |

At one stage in the discussion, fascinated by the difference I was sensing between the stories they were telling me, I asked Rashad whether he, like Latif, had many Australian friends. He replied,

| Rashad: | *no* |
| Me: | *mostly Saudi friends?* |
| Rashad: | *just Saudis. I don't have Australian friends* |
| Me: | *so you didn't like particularly try to make Australian friends, or you found it difficult?* |
| Rashad: | *uh* |
| Me: | *are you happy without?* |
| Rashad: | *I am. I have Saudis people I like to stay with them all the time* |

Making Australian friends did not seem to be a priority for Rashad. Later in the conversation he indicated that he did not think meeting people at clubs was a good idea either:

| Rashad: | *if I come across the people who I know from clubs, because I met them when they were drunk, anytime I get a problem, if I ring them they will wake up and say, "Who are you?"* |

Although the syntax in the original transcript was very awkward, Rashad was here explaining that he did not go to nightclubs, and even if he did it would be a waste of time because the people he met there would be too drunk to remember him later. Rashad also discussed his thoughts on the impact that not mixing with Australians has had on his English language development.

> Rashad: *however, if I was with an Australian family, I think it would go better, and now I think, for the English language, it's not very important to know everything. Thanks to I.T., I can do assignments, a lot of words, in my assignment. If I read it again, I don't know what it means*

He went on to try to clarify:

> Rashad: *so I think it's not really important for me to achieve 90 percent English. I think 70 percent*

Rashad believed that his English language ability would improve if he spent more time with Australians, but he did not believe that his English needed to improve that much, and therefore he was happy to just spend time with Saudi friends and leave his English language at the level he had already achieved – in his estimation, 70 percent rather than 90 percent. For Rashad, making friends with Australians was not as high a priority as it was for Latif, and as a result he did not make the effort to do so.

This different approach to adjustment was evident in other episodes as well. At one point, Latif explained that he had offered us (Rashad and me) mint tea rather than Arabic coffee, because he knew that most Australians did not like Arabic coffee. Rashad said to Latif,

> Rashad: *if you get married here, you will be in trouble. You should drink coffee any time you talk with your friend*

I tried to clarify the significance of being married to that statement, to which Rashad replied,

> Rashad: *for him, maybe he is busy with assignments but for me I don't have any excuse*

Latif responded by saying,

> Latif:    *that is in Saudi Arabia. We are in Australia, okay*

Rashad insisted on maintaining Saudi customs, such as serving coffee to guests, whereas Latif placed a higher priority on fitting into Australian culture, in this instance by offering tea, which he believed would be more acceptable to his Australian guest than coffee. He did not dispute Rashad's point that coffee was the appropriate drink to serve according to Saudi custom; the point of contention was whether or not Saudi customs should be maintained whilst in Australia. For Latif, the answer seems to have been "no".

Later, when discussing the restricted opening hours of stores in the local community, Latif, who raised the topic, said,

> Latif:    *it's not really a big deal. I don't know. For me it's acceptable for this situation because I'm in a different country. I have to follow this*

Rashad in response said,

> Rashad:    *it's really a problem. No. It's a big deal for me, yeah. I want it to be open twenty-four hours like in my country*

He clarified later,

> Rashad:    *if I am Australian, this is what I am used to but for my country, in my country, I am not used to that*

As the conversation progressed, the difference in their opinions on the subject of adjusting to Australia became more explicit. Rashad was discussing the fact the he felt some of the subject material he was learning, particularly with relation to ethics in nursing, was a waste of time:

> Rashad:    *because we are a religious country. All of Saudis, they are Muslim. No other religion, and all of them they are religious. If one guy is not religious, his family is religious*
> Me:    *okay*
> Rashad:    *and we are relating everything to our religion for nursing, and studying here, in Western [countries] there are a lot of ethical principles when you are a practicing nurse. The patient has the informed consent, the autonomy to decide or not. For us we don't*

*have this, so we find it big problem here. Here the court will decide*
*something like that but there we should to relate everything to*
*religion. So no one can say "I don't want to . . . I want to die."*
*This is not acceptable. In our value, in our culture, in our religion.*
*So, I got a program here for trends and perspectives on nursing,*
*and it's very hard to understand because we never do it in my*
*country. Because we are religious country, we know this is what is*
*right, really it's not right for the other peoples. But we accept it and*
*patients do because it's related to religion but here no, we should*
*do things for autonomy or something like that*

Me:       *yeah*

Rashad:  *so ah, for these things we find some, some subjects here it's very*
*hard because it's different for us but also I think it's useless for me*
*because we are, I'm never*

Me:       *you're never going to use it*

Rashad:  *yes, use this one because we are a religious country*

It seems to me that for Rashad it was not where he was living but where he was
from, that determined how he should live. He sought to build a support
network around him, so that as much as possible, his life in Australia was
similar to his life in Saudi Arabia. This included only mixing with Saudi friends,
and strictly adhering to Saudi customs, such as serving the right beverage to
guests. Whilst he admitted that this approach may limit his language learning
potential, he valued maintaining his Saudi customs and culture over the
possible advantages that might be gained from seeking to integrate more fully
into the local community.

For Latif, on the other hand, the exact reverse seems to have been the case. He
sought to make friends with Australians; he accepted cultural differences and
adjusted accordingly. This, he believed, helped his language learning, and also
seemed to have made him happy. In his opinion, Saudi students should be
aware of the differences that they will face in Australia, and should be willing to
accept them. Towards the end of the conversation, he explained that he saw the
unwillingness to adjust to a different culture to be a characteristic of his home
culture. He explained it this way,

Latif:    *but always, because they are, we are, really difficult people to, you*
*know, to mix with different cultures. We are not easy people to lose*
*our culture, you know. Some different countries when they come to*
*Australia, they like to become Australian, like Australian culture,*
*but most of the Saudi students they don't like to lose their own*
*culture, they want to be*

Me:       *stay Saudi?*

Latif:    *yes and they don't want. They won't use, like, they are expecting to*
*do everything, that's why they find it difficult when they mix with*
*Australian friends they, you know, they hate to lose their own*

*culture even in the meeting  or something. That's, why some of them they find it difficult with the study, um, they find it, I don't know, many things*

Latif was struggling to find words to express his thoughts, but his meaning seems to be quite clear. He said that Saudi students found it difficult to adjust to living in another culture, because they placed such a high priority on maintaining their own customs, habits and beliefs. He believed that this tendency was the cause of many problems faced by Saudi students at this university.

Rashad did not dispute this. Rather, he explained it in terms of religious commitment. The example he drew upon was one that had previously been discussed: halal food. Even in this discussion, the difference between the two Saudi participants was made explicit.

| | |
|---|---|
| Rashad: | *I can eat anything if I am not religious, but people, most of us don't want* |
| Me: | *yeah, sure, yeah* |
| Latif: | *for me, I eat everything* |
| Me: | *you eat everything?* |
| Latif: | *except pork (laugh)* |
| Me: | *except pork? That's going one step too far* |
| Latif: | *(laugh)* |

Rashad positioned himself as a religious Saudi man who therefore would not eat any food that is not halal. Without explicitly saying so, he seemed to be suggesting that Latif was not religious, and that was the basis of their differing opinion. Latif did not attempt to dispute this. Rather he acknowledged that he was not like the "most of us" referred to by Rashad. He ate food that is not halal. Significantly, he drew the line at eating pork. The difference, then, seems to be one of degree. Latif was not prepared to completely abandon the religious/cultural dietary restrictions of his home; however, he was prepared to accommodate to a certain extent.

*SUMMARY OF PART 2*

This small sample from a much larger data set provides support for the arguments of Kumar (2005) and Koehne (2005) that international students should not be conceptualised in reductionist terms. Not only are these two students alike in many demographic ways, but for the purposes of this study they self-selected membership in the same narrative discussion group. Knowing that the general topic of discussion would be their experiences here in Australia, Latif chose to invite Rashad to join us in the discussion. This was not

the first time I had met them together. Once previously, when I was visiting Latif in his home, Rashad had dropped in for a chat. This suggests that the two men relate to one another as friends. Nevertheless, in terms of their priorities, values and approaches to life as international students, these data indicate that they differ greatly.

Based on these data, it would be inappropriate to suggest, for instance, that Saudi students do not try to mix with Australians. Latif did and according to his own account, quite successfully. However, it would also be inaccurate to suggest that all Saudi students mix well with Australians, because Rashad made no attempt to do so. Likewise, whilst it may be true that some Saudi students struggled with differences in the opening hours for shops, it was not an issue for all of them. The same may be said of the availability of halal foods.

These findings have significant implications for the way in which support for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is conceptualised. Firstly, the findings endorse the use of non-reductionist approaches highlighted in the literature in Chapter 5 (e.g. Koehle, 2005; Kumar, 2005) to developing strategies for the support of international students on social justice grounds. These data have shown that students from demographically very similar backgrounds can have very different approaches to living in Australia as international students, based on their unique and highly complex internal networks of attitudes, values, experiences, abilities, beliefs and convictions. To suggest that there is one strategy that should be employed for all international students seems to diminish their personal rights.

For example, it may seem logical and right to suggest that all international students try to mix with Australians in order to improve their English. As the data from Rashad demonstrate, not all international students want to improve their English beyond the level required to pass their courses. There are no moral or ethical grounds upon which educational institutions can insist that international students continue to improve their English beyond the level required for completing the course of study. What is more, there are sometimes other higher priorities – such as the religious convictions that kept Rashad from bars and nightclubs – that may militate against some international students mixing with Australians. To suggest that they must abandon those convictions is to impose another's values and beliefs upon them.

Secondly, the data suggest that reductionist approaches are not always effective. Rashad expressed very strong convictions, and even though his colleague and compatriot suggested that it would be better to mix with Australians, he not only resisted, but he defended his resistance on religious, moral and ethical grounds. I was left with the very strong impression that Rashad had firmly made up his mind. Whilst not all international students may have the personal awareness, confidence, cultural inclination or linguistic

expertise to express strong convictions so emphatically, it does not necessarily mean that they do not hold them. Strategies that come into conflict with such deeply-held convictions are not likely to be effective.

Thirdly, reductionist conceptualisations of international students can lead to discrimination against those who differ from the norm. Rashad did not fit the expected pattern of an international student wanting to improve his English. He did not attempt to mix with Australians. This may give the impression that he was not committed to his study, and/or that he was anti-social or anti-Australian. However, on the basis of 18 months of prolonged engagement with Rashad, I am convinced that neither of these assumptions was true. Rashad was a good student, and to the best of my knowledge, he passed all his courses. He planned to continue on into post-graduate study. The fact that he was neither anti-social nor anti-Australian is evidenced by the fact that he agreed to participate in this study, and this is supported by my encounters with him over the duration of our acquaintance – he always went out of his way to stop and talk to me whenever we ran into each other, both on and off campus.

In resisting the tendency to conceptualise Saudi students in reductionist terms, the problem of how to adequately and appropriately provide support for them in tertiary education remains. Approaching this challenging question lies outside the scope of the present study. However, the data analysed in this chapter suggest that this is an important area for future study.

## Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted some of the key themes that emerged as Saudi participants discussed with me their experiences as international students in Australia. Many of the things that they discussed were surprising to me; not necessarily because they were so radically different to what I expected, but rather because I had not stopped to think through the consequences of some of the cultural differences I was already aware of. In the second part of this chapter, data that support the case for taking a non-reductionist approach to understanding and engaging with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were presented. A number of personal reflections have been made throughout this chapter which I hope will provide a starting point for ongoing discussions on how to provide better support, not only for Saudi students studying in Australia, but also for all students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. In the next chapter, I turn to explore the second research question, developing and applying a bakhtinian discourse analysis framework to the same data.

# CHAPTER 6: EXPERIENCES OF DIFFERENCE

## INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I switch analytical lenses to seek to answer the second of my research questions:

> *What do these discussions (with Saudi students about their experiences in Australia) reveal about 'experiences of difference'?*

As I explained in Chapter 1, language, culture and identity are all important concepts in a number of academic disciplines related to this study. However, my approach in this study has been to treat these terms as empty signifiers which point to 'experiences of difference'. My approach in this chapter is to explore what can be learnt about these 'experiences of difference' from the data produced in this study. I do not attempt to reconstruct reified identities, nor do I attempt to map cultural knowledges. I do not attempt to highlight any particular phenomenon and name it as language, culture or identity, although theories and studies which employ those terms may be closely related.

Rather, using a bakhtinian analytical framework, I seek to explore in greater depth some of the four-dimensional inter-connectedness between the multiple, complex and changing phenomena that other approaches to research might label as language, culture and/or identity. The ensuing discussion focuses primarily on language data, and the way in which bakhtinian concepts can be used to analyse that data in such a way as to highlight the complexity of several different dimensions of the dialogic exchanges that occurred in the narrative discussion groups.

The bakhtinian concepts employed in analysing the data in this framework are dialogue, appropriated utterances, authoritative discourse, internally persuasive discourse, ideological becoming, double-voiced utterances and superaddressee. I begin this chapter by discussing these concepts, and the literature that has built around them. I have focussed my literature review on studies in the field of applied linguistics, as the use of bakhtinian concepts is an emerging approach in this field. I then follow by demonstrating how these bakhtinian concepts can be used to explore 'experiences of difference' without attempting to locate an essential meaning of the empty signifiers of language, culture and identity. This is not to suggest that these empty signifiers point to unimportant phenomena; on the contrary the very existence of such terms and the prevalence of their use within various academic disciplines indicates that there is something important about the 'experiences of difference' which needs to be explored.

Using selected episodes from the data, I attempt a bakhtinian exploration of these phenomena. Some of the episodes examined in this chapter have already been analysed with the bakhtinian content analysis lens in the previous chapter. Applying different lenses to the same data is an excellent way of supporting the underlying premise of this entire study; namely that the issues under investigation are complex, and open to multiple interpretations. As the focus of the analysis is on a different dimension of the discussions, I have used a different style to present the language data. I have not edited the transcripts into play-script style – as I did for the previous chapter – and I have numbered the lines of the transcripts for easy reference. For each new episode, I restart the numbering at 1.

## BAKHTINIAN CONCEPTS

### *BAKHTIN AND RESEARCH IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS*

Most of the work of Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975) became available to the English-speaking public posthumously. The first of his works to be published in English was Helene Iswolsky's translation of *Rabelais and his world* (originally published in 1968); however, it was not until the 1980s that Bakhtin's work gained popularity in the West. Hirschkop (1989) noted that this corresponded to the publication in English of the collection of essays under the title *The dialogic imagination* in 1981. Since that time, a considerable body of Bakhtin's works have continued to be published in English (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984a, 1984b, 1986, 1990, 1993), and a considerable body of secondary literature has also developed.

Concepts and theories developed by Bakhtin have been employed extensively in the West in philosophical, literary, political and cultural studies (e.g., Bell & Gardiner, 1998; Dentith, 1995; Farmer, 1998; Hirschkop & Shepherd, 1989). Since the commencement of the new millennium, Bakhtin's ideas have been receiving renewed attention in the context of applied linguistics, particularly in relation to teaching second or foreign languages. Before examining representative works from that more recent body of literature, I review some earlier uses of bakhtinian theory in sociolinguistics.

One of the earliest papers to explicitly link Bakhtin and applied linguistics was that of Wortham and Locher (1994) who examined the use of voice in a ninth grade class discussion which focused on two television news reports on the 1992 US presidential election. Using transcripts, they attempted to demonstrate how moral messages were expressed through the use of voice and ventriloquation – the attribution of voice to others. They concluded with the suggestion that this kind of analysis "might help us teach non-native speakers to understand English discourse better" (p. 21). Another early use of Bakhtin in applied linguistics research was Schaub (1995), who focussed specifically on

bakhtinian theory in ESL instruction, claiming that until that time, there had been no "thorough articulation . . . of a particularly Bakhtinian understanding of audience issues for cross-cultural or second language writers" (p. 2). His paper discussed the bakhtinian concepts of the socially and culturally embedded nature of language and addressivity, which he referred to as audience.

There were other brief references to Bakhtin in applied linguistics in the period prior to 2000. For instance, Holmes (1997), writing in the second issue of the *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, added a "brief comment" (p. 214) about heteroglossia with reference to Bakhtin. Thesen (1997) writing on the subtheme of English for academic purposes (EAP) made brief mention of Bakhtin in highlighting the importance of focussing on "the individual in context" (p. 494). It is significant to note that this is the only mention of Bakhtin in that 1997 special topic issue of TESOL Quarterly which was on the theme of language and identity. This indicates the limited impact of bakhtinian theory on applied linguistics research at that time.

The Thesen (1997) article also highlights another important point about the introduction of bakhtinian theory to applied linguistics research. Thesen's only mention of Bakhtin is: "I also use the term in Bakhtin's sense" (p. 494), indicating that it was not her primary theoretical model. Interestingly, Bonny Norton, the editor of that special edition, made no mention of Bakhtin in introducing Thesen's article at that time, and yet in 2006 wrote that "Thesen (1997) . . . found the social theory of Bakhtin, particularly the notion of 'voice' relevant" (p. 24). That Norton should choose to foreground bakhtinian theory in an article that originally was far more interested in the theories of Gee and Fairclough seems representative of the significant development in the awareness and appreciation of bakhtinian theory in applied linguistics over the course of that decade.

This pattern of introducing Bakhtin as a secondary source is also evident in the so-called sociocultural paradigm in second language acquisition research which began to gain momentum in the late 1990s. This movement is made up of several different streams, including cognitive development models (e.g., Lantolf & Appel, 1994), language socialisation models (e.g., Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), and situated learning (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1991). Many of these streams draw on concepts from bakhtinian theory to supplement the theoretical perspective of the more influential work of Vygotsky. Curdt-Christiansen (2006), for instance, applied the Vygotskian concept of the zone of proximal development and the bakhtinian concepts of authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse to explain the role of teacher-talk in a heritage language classroom in Canada.

There are many writers in applied linguistics who continued to make reference to the ideas of Bakhtin in this secondary way. Norton (2000) herself did so in

her monograph *Identity and language learning*. The *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (Hinkel, 2006) contains only four references to Bakhtin, and in all cases, Bakhtin is cited as one of several sources. Mills (2001) referred once to Bakhtin in her analysis of bilingual third generation Asian children in Britain, highlighting the notion that people come into being through dialogue.

An early publication drawing together important theoretical foundations relating Bakhtin to applied linguistics more generally is that of Lahteenmaki and Dufva (1998). Chapters in that edited collection developed the case for the application of Bakhtin's theories to language acquisition, language knowledge, and language use in psychotherapy. This approach was also taken by Johnson (2004) who drew on Bakhtin's (1986) concept of utterances to support her critique of positivist and universalist approaches in SLA research. She argued that SLA studies must focus on the local situated context of use, rather than on universals. For her, the key concept drawn from Bakhtin was the examination of individual contexts of language use.

With these important philosophical foundations previously established, Hall, Vitanova and Marchenkova (2005a) introduced the first published book-length treatment in English with a specific focus on bakhtinian research in applied linguistics. In that introduction, they suggested that the catalyst for the recent increased focus on bakhtinian theories in SLA research was the 2002 meeting of the American Association for Applied Linguistics. It is difficult to establish causality so directly. However, there has been a vast increase in the number of published papers drawing primarily, rather than incidentally, on bakhtinian theory and concepts since around that time.

The analysis in this chapter follows in this recent development of the application of bakhtinian concepts for research in applied linguistics, although the findings are relevant to other related fields of sociology, cultural studies and discourse studies more generally. Some of the concepts I discuss in this chapter have been adopted in the literature reviewed earlier, but my study is innovative in applying new understandings of some of these bakhtinian concepts, and in seeking to apply several different but related bakhtinian lenses to the same transcript data.

KEY CONCEPTS FOR ANALYSIS

*DIALOGUE*

The bakhtinian perspective is founded on an epistemological stance that locates meaning in dialogue (see Chapter 2). Dialogue, in this sense, does not mean simply conversation; rather it refers to a relationship that operates on several different levels. In its most basically conceived form, it is a relationship

between a person who is communicating, and the person to whom that communication is directed. It is also the relationship between the person communicating and an (imagined) third party observer, or superaddressee. On another important level, it is the relationship between the present use of a word or expression, and the past use of that word or expression. Similarly, it is the relationship between the present discussion about an idea or object and previous discussions about that idea or object. The temporal relationship also extends into the future, with the anticipation of how the listener will respond, and also in the more general sense that the present instance of communication will influence future discussions, in the same way that past discussions influence the present. Thus dialogue is four-dimensional (see Chapter 2). Each of these relationships plays in important role in dialogic encounters.

The relationship between two people communicating can be envisaged easily, as it forms a part of everyday life. Two people may meet at a coffee shop, converse over the telephone, engage in synchronous or asynchronous discussion over the internet, and so on. The relationship is not always between two specific and embodied persons. A novelist may write with a general readership in mind, and likewise a student may write an essay for an unidentified marker. In these instances, there is still a speaker-listener relationship; however, the "listener" is an imagined or idealised person. The concept of all dialogue being directed towards a listener – whether physically present or not – is referred to as addressivity.

Importantly, for either form of dialogue, the two parties are not conceptualised as person A and person B, but always as self and other. This distinction highlights the important theoretical perspective of distance. I cannot become another person, and another person cannot become me. Likewise, I cannot fully understand another person, and another person cannot fully understand me. It is important to note that the bakhtinian perspective refuses to acknowledge a clear-cut binary relationship between self and other, and Bakhtin (1981) claimed that there were no personal territories as such. When self and other engage in dialogue, a space develops, similar to the third space of enunciation proposed by Bhabha (1994). Bhabha likened this space to a staircase that joins a basement room and an attic. Those in the basement go up, those in the attic go down, and they meet in the middle – the third space. Theorists using a bakhtinian framework might allow for the existence – at least in the imagination – of a basement or attic location. Nevertheless, in bakhtinian theory the staircase is the primary location of meaning.

Bakhtin himself was (perhaps intentionally) vague when discussing locations of self or other, but he was quite clear in enunciating the significance of the staircase, which he called borderline (Bakhtin, 1981). For bakhtinian theory, all dialogue, and therefore meaning, is located on the borderline created when encountering another person.

The operation of the concept of self in bakhtinian theory is closely related to the use of voice (see Chase, 2005; Hamston, 2006; Hirst & Renshaw, 2004; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). As I write this dissertation, I envisage the academic audience who will read it. I have an image of the reader who is not a specific reader, but rather an amalgamation of images and ideas I have about the reader. It is to this constructed image of the reader that I speak, even now as I am writing. I adopt a voice – that is, I appropriate certain utterances and use them in certain ways – that reinforces my claim to be positioned as an expert in this academic field. Through my voice, I present an image of myself (Min, 2001) as I wish to be perceived by this imagined reader.

Voices come together in dialogue following the patterns of speech genres. Whether referring to oral or written language production, a speech genre is a collection of utterances that represents a sphere of language use (Bakhtin, 1986). We would expect to find different words and expressions in a cookbook to those that we would expect in a romantic novel. Each represents a different genre. Likewise, we would expect that an academic discussing research with another academic would use different words and expressions to a person seeking to comfort a distressed friend. Even when I am the academic in the first instance and the comforting friend in the second, I choose different words and expressions in order to present an image of myself that I think is appropriate or useful in the context. I draw on my previous encounters with others whom I consider to be academics and comforting friends, appropriating utterances from those past contexts – adopting voices that I heard in those past contexts – and use them in accordance with the speech genres of academic discussion and comforting a friend.

Thus, even though I am not two different people, I become in the one instance an academic, and in the other a comforting friend, through the utterances I appropriate, and the voices I adopt. By using appropriated utterances and employing voice in this way, I construct an image of myself which is influenced by my thoughts and feelings towards the other in that given context. This constructed image is also influenced by my interpretation of the actual or anticipated responses of the other in dialogue.

The concept of constructing images of self for the other is not unique to bakhtinian theories. Positioning theory (see Harre & Van Langenhove, 1999), for instance, adopts a similar perspective with different terminology, as do other social constructivist theories of identity. The innovative contribution of bakhtinian theory is to draw the focus of attention to dialogue, and more specifically to the space that is formed when self and other come together in dialogue. Holquist (2002) explained,

a dialogue is composed of an utterance, a reply and a relation between the two. It is the relation that is most important of the three, for without it the other two would have no meaning. (p. 38)

*APPROPRIATED UTTERANCES*

The principle unit of analysis in this chapter is the bakhtinian concept of utterance. An utterance is one turn in a dialogue, and may be a single word, a full sentence, a lengthy diatribe, or – in my use of the term – a simple gesture like a nod. The importance of utterance in this perspective is that it is situated in the specific context of a specific dialogue, and the presence of and the contribution by the listener influence what the speaker says. For instance, a teacher may ask his or her class, "Do you understand?" One student may reply, "Yes." That single word is one utterance in the dialogue between that teacher and that student in the context of that classroom at that time. It is influenced by what the teacher has said previously – both the material that was being explained and also the specific question, "Do you understand?" – and the student's answer influences the teacher's next utterance in the dialogue. Had the student said "No," it is quite likely that the teacher would have responded differently.

There are many other contextual factors that might be seen to influence the utterances in this dialogue as well, including the relationship between the teacher and the student, the expectations of both parties, the student's relationship with others in the classroom and so forth. The dialogic epistemology of bakhtinian theory would view contextual influences on dialogue as issues of addressivity. Thus context does not refer to reified non-human factors such as atmosphere, class or culture per se, but rather human interlocutors – actual or imagined; present or distant in time and/or space – who enact or embody atmosphere, class and culture.

An example of an utterance is this present dissertation. Although you (the actual reader) are not physically present at the time or place of writing, an image of a reader is present in my mind as I write, and the way in which I imagine that reader to be responding to this material shapes the way in which I proceed. If I think the reader does not clearly understand my meaning, I will give another example. If I think the reader is questioning the veracity of my claim, I will give further supporting evidence. Thus the reader I am imagining is present as I am writing, even though you (the actual reader) are distant in both time and space. Even if I were to delete this paragraph – and you (the actual reader) never saw it – the reader I am imagining would still have been present as the addressee of my writing. Therefore, in any instance of language use, an interlocutor is always present and influencing what is said or written.

Utterances are constructed by appropriating expressions from previously encountered utterances. For instance, the "Yes" utterance discussed above was not invented by the student; rather, the student had heard or read it used in some other context, and had appropriated it for use in this context. This phenomenon is referred to in the literature on bakhtinian theory as appropriated utterances (see Renshaw, 2004). According to this theoretical perspective, the previous context of the appropriated utterances will influence the meaning intended and derived from the utterance in the new context in which it is used. The past use of a word has an influence on its present usage, although as an utterance is appropriated to a different context, it is liable to be adapted in some way in order to suit the current context. In this way, the meaning of utterances can gradually change over time.

The concept of appropriated utterances is extremely important for bakhtinian analysis within applied linguistics. From a bakhtinian perspective, both formal learning and naturalistic acquiring of a second language – to employ Krashen's (1981) terms – involve the appropriation of utterances in that language: in the initial stages vocabulary; at more advanced stages utterances that are embedded in more complex sociocultural narratives (see Wertsch, 1998). A skilled speaker of a second language is one who has appropriated a large number of utterances – or parts thereof – and is able to use those utterances in similar contexts to the contexts from which they were appropriated. Thus the skilled speaker of English as a second language will use "Hi" as a greeting in informal contexts and "Good morning" in more formal contexts, in imitation of the previous contexts from which those greetings have been appropriated. The context of appropriation may have been natural language use – talking with a shopkeeper, for instance – or it may have been an artificially constructed environment such as reading a scripted conversation in a textbook.

This theory of appropriated utterances is closely aligned with the concept of intertextuality – another common term in applied linguistics, discourse studies and literary studies. This term, sometimes incorrectly attributed to Bakhtin, was first used by Julia Kristeva (1967, reprinted in Kristeva & Moi, 1986) in explaining Bakhtin's term dialogism. Todorov (1984) points out that intertextuality in the bakhtinian sense implies that,

> not only have words always already been used and carry within themselves the traces of preceding usage, but "things" themselves have been touched, at least in one of their previous states, by other discourses that one cannot fail to encounter. (p. 63)

Thus, utterances never operate in isolation. There is always a relationship between the words of the present utterance, and the previous utterances in which those words were used, and there is always a relationship between the present utterance about a certain subject and previous utterances about that

subject. Likewise, the utterances are unfinalised, in the sense that they will live on to influence future dialogues.

*AUTHORITATIVE DISCOURSE AND INTERNALLY PERSUASIVE DISCOURSE*

On a broader dialogic scale, appropriated utterances also operate within larger discourses. A person's acceptance or rejection of these larger discourses into an internal belief system is called, in bakhtinian theory, ideological becoming (Bakhtin, 1981). The use of the present participle (becoming) draws attention to the contextual, contingent, four-dimensional nature of beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours of this perspective. Within this framework of ideological becoming, there are two distinct types of discourse: authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse. Authoritative discourse refers to discourses that, for the purposes of ideological becoming, are received unchallenged. There is no struggle for acceptance and it is not open for contestation; it represents the final and complete word on the subject to which it refers, hence it is monologic and finalised. Internally persuasive discourse refers to discourses that are open to debate; they can be challenged, questioned or amended. They are dialogic, in the sense that they are open to engaging with other perspectives, and unfinalised. Authoritative discourse could include religious dogma, acknowledged scientific truth or currently fashionable trends (Bakhtin, 1981).

One of the important distinctive characteristics of authoritative discourse is that it is constructed in such a way as to demand that it be either accepted or rejected as is. Bakhtin's example of religious dogma provides a useful illustration. Evangelical Christian theology holds as one of its foundational doctrinal creeds that Jesus Christ is the son of God. It is possible, logically and linguistically, to interpret this statement to mean that Jesus Christ was a person (real or imagined) who embodied qualities such as love, compassion and mercy which are characteristics that human beings ascribe to a (real or imagined) supernatural being. However, within the hermeneutic framework of evangelical Christian theology, this interpretation is not acknowledged as a legitimate reading. The creed is interpreted as a statement of the divinity of Christ, essentially that Jesus Christ is God, and it is presented as one that must be either completely accepted or completely rejected; there is no room for amendment, and no possibility of partial acceptance or rejection. In this sense, it is authoritative discourse. Within the framework of other theological interpretative traditions, the same statement may be open to alternative interpretations. In this case, it would be internally persuasive discourse. The meaning, validity and application of the statement are all open to discussion and debate.

Although these two different interpretations refer to the same group of words, they are not referring to the same discourse. The seven words "Jesus Christ is the son of God" operates as authoritative discourse within the evangelical

Christian community, and internally persuasive discourse within other interpretative communities. The former community do not use this expression as one which is open to interpretation: it is a finalised statement of doctrine that is to be accepted or rejected. The latter community do not consider this statement to be referring to a discourse that is finalised or settled: it is a topic for discussion and reflection. In this sense, the illocution or communicative intent of this phrase is entirely different.

This is an important distinction, because it helps to explain some of the problems that can occur not only in inter-faith discussions, but in cross-cultural interactions more broadly. When one party in the dialogue uses a phrase that represents for them authoritative discourse, and the other party sees that phrase as internally persuasive discourse, communication breakdown can occur because the communicative intent that is embedded in the phrase is completely different.

Another important distinction that is not discussed in the literature, but becomes evident in my analysis in this chapter, is the difference between what I have called implicit authoritative discourse and explicit authoritative discourse. Implicit refers to that authoritative discourse which Tsitsipis (2004) noted as operating by erasure, by which he was referring not to the Derridian analytical tool, but rather to what Bourdieu (1984) has called subjective blindness. Implicit authoritative discourse controls the agenda by silencing.

An example of this would be discourses on international students in Australia that do not engage with the issue of racism within the broader Australian community, and also within educational institutions hosting international students. A critical theory perspective would suggest that racism has been kept off the agenda in discourses on international students in Australia through the mechanisms which operate to maintain the power of social elites within Australian society. A bakhtinian perspective would locate this mechanism within the discourses themselves. That is to say, some discourses on international students in Australia are based on authoritative discourse that states (implicitly) that racism is not a part of the research agenda. This authoritative discourse may have been passed on (through silencing) within the academic community in Australia, from mentor to student, from expert to novice, from colleague to colleague and so forth, and as implicit authoritative discourse it is not held up for examination or discussion.

The power of this function of implicit authoritative discourse might be explained through an analogy with modern technology. In order to reach my office on the fourth floor of the faculty building, I sometimes use the elevator. When I use the elevator, I do not seek confirmation that the appropriate maintenance checks have been performed. I just get in, press the button marked with a 4 and wait for the doors to open at the fourth floor. If that

elevator, or a similar one, failed to operate due to faulty maintenance procedures, my attention would be drawn to the issue of elevator maintenance; it would no longer be implicit. Until then the issue remains silenced – indeed, we might say colloquially, "It's not an issue" – and not only do I not evaluate or discuss it, but it never even occurs to me to think about it. Erasure, in this sense, is a very powerful mechanism.

Explicit authoritative discourse, on the other hand, is the kind I believe Matusov (2007) had in mind, when he characterised authoritative discourse as including "intolerance, speaking for others, an unwillingness to listen to and genuinely question others, the failure to test one's own ideas and assumptions, and the desire to impose one's views on others" (p. 231). Although some of these characteristics may apply to both explicit and implicit authoritative discourse, intolerance, unwillingness to listen and the desire to impose one's views on others are features of what I have called explicit authoritative discourse. Explicit authoritative discourse includes the overt attempt to control, whereas implicit authoritative discourse operates covertly.

Explicit authoritative discourse draws its power not from silencing, but rather from the strength of the authority claim behind it. An example of the operation of explicit authoritative discourse can be seen in a newspaper article that was one in a series published in 2008 questioning the appropriateness of an Australian university accepting of a sum of money from the Saudi government. The newspaper report was headed "Hero blasts Saudi blood money deal" (Houghton, 2008, n.p.). The authority claim behind the authoritative discourse in this article claiming that it was wrong for the university to accept the money was the "hero" who is described in the article as a "68-year-old former Vietnam helicopter and jet pilot" who "also headed a UN peacekeeping mission in the Middle East". His qualification as an authority on matters of Saudi politics and policy are cited as "having lived there for nearly six years" during which he found oppression that "shocked him" and persecution that "offended him". An unverified report of one alleged act of atrocity by Saudi police is given as evidence of that oppression and persecution. In this way, the hero is positioned as an expert and this is the authority claim behind the explicit authoritative discourse that states that it was wrong to accept the money.

As the argument is presented as explicit authoritative discourse, the reader of this article must evaluate the strength of the authority claim before deciding whether or not to accept the argument. If being a war hero and having lived in a country for nearly six years is considered to be a strong authority claim (as the author of the article seems to suggest) then the reader is likely to accept this argument as explicit authoritative discourse. However, if the strength of the authority claim is questioned, the argument in this article will be rejected as explicit authoritative discourse. This is not to say that the reader may not accept the same argument on different grounds. For example, an implicit authoritative discourse "you cannot trust foreigners" may operate to lead the

reader to agree with the hero. Similarly, the reader may read news articles presenting both sides of the argument, and then weigh up the evidence and reach the same conclusion as the hero. In this case it would be an internally persuasive discourse. The important distinctions between internally persuasive discourse and the two different kinds of authoritative discourse are summarised in Table 6.1.

When authoritative discourses come into conflict – as may occur in cross-cultural contexts – the process of ideological becoming will be influenced by which kind of authoritative discourse is involved. When implicit authoritative discourse clashes with another authoritative discourse, three possibilities arise. Firstly, the implicit authoritative discourse may remain implicit, and the other authoritative discourse dismissed as absurd, irrelevant or wrong. For example, when the implicit authoritative discourse "men don't kiss each other in greeting" operates in the life of a man who sees two men from a different culture kissing each other in greeting, he may dismiss the behaviour as weird, abnormal or wrong. The implicit authoritative discourse remains implicit.

*Table 6.1: Internally persuasive and authoritative discourse*

| Type of Discourse | Dialogic or monologic? | Overt or covert? | Possible responses |
|---|---|---|---|
| Internally persuasive discourse | Dialogic | Overt | Accepted, rejected, challenged or amended on the basis of merit |
| Implicit authoritative discourse | Monologic (alternatives silenced) | Covert | Accepted unchallenged |
| Explicit authoritative discourse | Monologic (alternatives repressed) | Overt | Accepted or rejected on the strength of the authority claim. |

Secondly, the implicit authoritative discourse may become explicit. In this instance, the authority basis also needs to be made explicit. In the example given above, the man may think to himself, "In our country men don't kiss each other in greeting, but it must be different in their country." "Men don't kiss each other in greeting" has thus become explicit authoritative discourse, and the authority claim for this man is "our country". Theoretically, it is more likely to be cultural group than country; however, for the purposes of analysing authoritative discourse, it is the man's perception that is of importance.

Once the authoritative discourse becomes explicit, the man's evaluation of the authority claims will determine whether or not it is accepted or rejected. If, for instance, the man considers "our country" to be of higher value and esteem

than "their country", then the authoritative discourse is likely to be accepted as explicit authoritative discourse on the basis of the authority "our country". However, if he decides that "their way" is better than "our way", the former discourse may be rejected. He may decide that "men kiss each other in greeting" is the preferred discourse, based on the authority claim that "their way" is better than "our way".

The decision to reject or accept the explicit authoritative discourse "men don't kiss each other in greeting" may vary according to context. Within the man's home country, the authority claim of "our way" may be very strong, and he will not kiss other men in greeting on the basis of that claim. If the same man travels to the country in which men do kiss in greeting, then the authority claim "our way" may not be very strong at all, and he may decide that whilst he is living there, "their way" is a stronger authority claim. It is possible that even when living in another country, "our way" remains more highly valued for the man, and therefore he will not attempt to acculturate to "their way".

The third possibility is that the authoritative discourse becomes internally persuasive discourse. In other words, the person chooses to evaluate the content of the discourse on some merit other than its authority claim. The man in the example above, for instance, may decide that in his culture it is appropriate for men to kiss women in greeting, but not other men. He may then critically analyse this custom, deciding that it is discriminatory. On the basis of his belief that men and women should be treated equally, he may decide that "men kiss each other in greeting" is socially just behaviour, and therefore accept it as internally persuasive discourse.

When one explicit authoritative discourse comes into conflict with another explicit authoritative discourse, the outcome will be determined by the person's evaluation of the respective authority claims. An example of this may be seen in the case of an environmental protestor who trespasses on private property in order to stop some activity. The explicit authoritative discourse "you must not trespass" comes into conflict with the explicit authoritative discourse "we must stop environmental degradation". The authority for the former might be "the law"; that for the latter, "civic duty". The protestor chooses to trespass on the basis of the evaluation of "civic duty" as being a higher authority than "the law".

The different possible outcomes of encountering a new authoritative discourse that conflicts with an existing one are outlined in Table 6.2. It should be noted that the outcomes listed are not necessarily final outcomes – it is possible that future encounters with other authoritative discourses may lead to a different outcome.

*Table 6.2: Possible outcomes for conflicting authoritative discourse*

| Original authoritative discourse | Newly encountered authoritative discourse | Possible outcomes | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Intervening step** | **Final outcome** |
| Implicit | Implicit or explicit | None | Newly encountered authoritative discourse is rejected as absurd, irrelevant or wrong. |
| | | Original authoritative discourse becomes explicit | Original authoritative discourse is accepted or rejected based on an evaluation of the relative strengths of the two different authority claims. |
| | | Original authoritative discourse becomes internally persuasive discourse | Internally persuasive discourse is accepted or rejected based on an evaluation of its merit. |
| Explicit | Explicit | None | Original authoritative discourse is accepted or rejected based on evaluation of the relative strengths of the two authority claims. |

*Identifying authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse*
There are several linguistic markers that may be employed to distinguish between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse in English. The second person singular – you, your, and second person imperatives – can be used to mark authoritative discourses. For example, in the proverb "you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink", the word "you" is not referring to the other party in the conversation, but in the indefinite sense of an unspecified person. "A person can lead a horse to water but he or she can't make it drink" does not sound like a proverb because proverbs are a form of authoritative discourse, and "you" is a clearer marker for authoritative discourse in English than "a person". Freedman and Ball (2004) have noted the use of the third person plural "we" as another marker of authoritative discourse; hence, "we don't eat dog meat in Australia" would be marked as authoritative discourse by "we".

Tappan (2005) argued that the difference between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse is evident in the amount of ownership a person is willing and/or able to accept for what he or she says. In this sense, the statement, "I believe that communicative language teaching approaches are more effective than grammar-translation methods," would be internally persuasive discourse, whereas the statement, "Grammar-translation methods are not as effective as communicative language teaching approaches," would be

authoritative discourse, because the speaker's ownership of the belief in the former statement is made explicit.

However, the concept of ownership is problematic because it could be argued that the speaker of the second statement also owns it, in the sense that the speaker has accepted the validity of the position, and adopted it (consciously or otherwise) as his or her own to the extent that it influences beliefs and behaviour. The important point from a bakhtinian perspective is to identify the way in which a speaker indicates his or her epistemological stance towards the statement. In this instance, the phrase "I believe that" introduces an evaluative personal judgement (Wierzbicka, 2006). The lack of such a marker in the second sentence may be read as a tacit appeal to a higher authority, or as an accepted truth; in other words, the unmarked case here indicates authoritative discourse.

The power of implicit authoritative discourse to influence the ideological becoming of people is particularly potent in mono-cultural contexts, because that authoritative discourse remains unexposed and therefore inaccessible to challenge on the grounds of either authority or other merits. When a person encounters another cultural context, exposure to different authoritative discourses may cause him or her to become aware of, and then examine, the implicit authoritative discourses that have until that point operated covertly. In bakhtinian theory this phenomenon can be explained by the concept of surplus of seeing (see Chapter 5).

As an example, before going to live in Japan, my behaviour was influenced by the implicit authoritative discourse "do not remove your shoes before entering a house". I had never heard this discourse verbalised. Nevertheless, evidence that it was operating in my culture could be found in travel guides that advised that in Japan you must take your shoes off before entering a house. This advice would be superfluous were it not for the implicit authoritative discourse that in Australia you do not take your shoes off before entering a house. Through surplus of seeing – in a dialogic encounter between myself the reader and the authors of the travel guides – this implicit authoritative discourse became visible to me.

In Japan, I always removed my shoes before entering a house, because I accepted the authority behind the discourse: the rules of Japanese etiquette, as passed on to me through travel guides, and reinforced by behaviour I observed. I never sought to challenge this custom; I accepted it as the right thing to do, in that context. Thus it operated as explicit authoritative discourse. However, upon returning to Australia, I continued to remove my shoes before entering my house. I rejected the previously implicit authoritative discourse "do not remove your shoes before entering a house" not on the basis of its authority claims but rather because it seemed a sensible thing to do (to keep the carpet

clean). Therefore, when in Japan "take your shoes off before entering the house" operated for me as an explicit authoritative discourse, whereas in Australia, "take your shoes off before entering the house" operates as an internally persuasive discourse.

## DOUBLE-VOICED UTTERANCES

Another important bakhtinian concept is that of double-voiced utterances. Each utterance has a voice expressing a stance or attitude towards the content of the utterance within the context of that specific dialogue. However, it is possible for a single utterance to have more than one voice. For instance, when quoting what another person has said, the appropriated utterance carries with it the voice adopted by the original speaker; that is, their particular stance with regards to the content of the utterance. However, the person appropriating the utterance could say it with a different tone of voice in order to express his or her own stance towards the stance of the original speaker. For instance, quoting another person's words in a sceptical tone of voice would express both the voice adopted by the original speaker and the voice adopted by the present speaker, commenting upon the voice of the original speaker's utterance. These two voices are expressed in and through the exact same utterance; hence these utterances are double-voiced.

In appropriating utterances, it is not possible to completely eradicate the influence of the original voice. The balance between the influence of the voice of the utterance in its original time-space context, and the voice of the utterance in its new time-space context indicates whether the utterance is operating as authoritative discourse, internally persuasive discourse, or a double-voiced utterance, which theoretically could be either authoritative or internally persuasive. These possibilities are demonstrated in Figure 6.1.
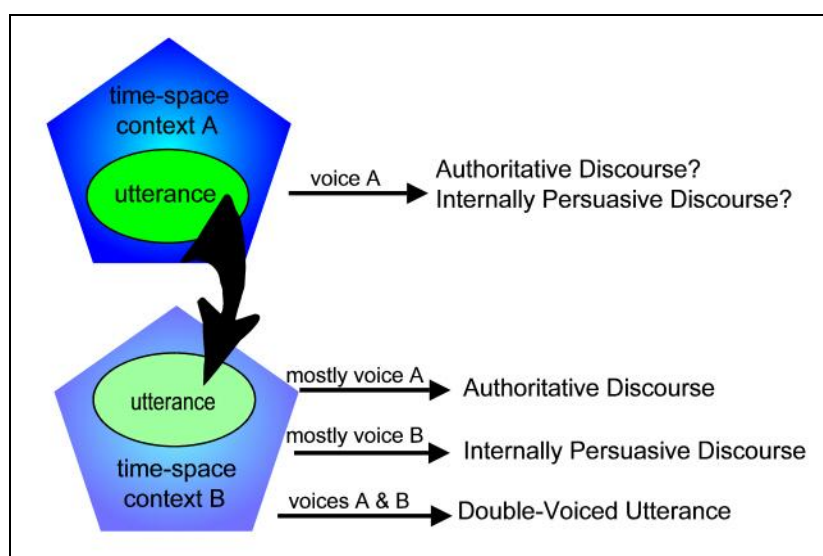


*Figure 6.1: Voice in appropriated utterances*

Another important concept in bakhtinian theory is the existence of a third party, or superaddressee, in dialogue. Bakhtin (1986) described the superaddressee as an ideal listener in the mind of the speaker – one who hears from a position above self and other, and who listens sympathetically and understands justly. Morson and Emerson (1990) suggested the superaddressee was the embodiment of hope, without which all attempts at dialogue would degenerate into terror. They noted that Bakhtin related the need to be heard with the need for God, although from their postmodern perspective they insisted that superaddressee was a metalinguistic fact, rather than an ideological expression. Bryzzheva (2006, 2008) has recently discussed important implications of the role that superaddressee – or third listener as she renamed it – in providing support for those in threatening situations: in the case she discussed, teachers in classrooms.

An example in which the presence of the superaddressee may be observed is in the use of sarcasm. For instance, were an embittered acquaintance to say, "It's about trust, not that you would know what that means," the speaker is appealing to the superaddressee to acknowledge the veracity and validity of the claim to having been betrayed. The fact that the speaker articulates a view that the listener is likely to disagree with can be seen as evidence of the operation of a superaddressee in dialogue. Figure 6.2 illustrates the relationship between addressee and superaddressee in the context of any given utterance.
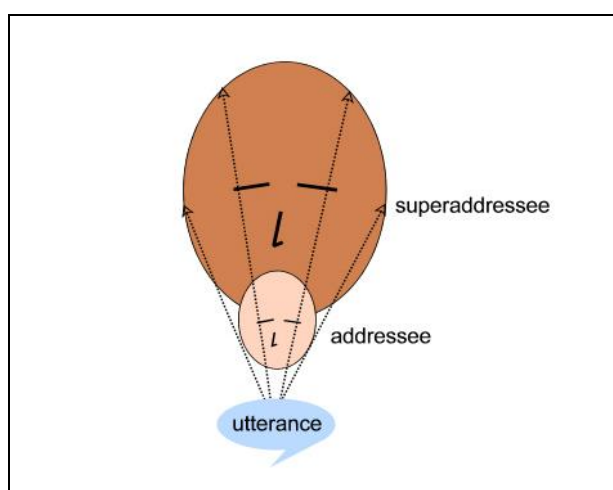


*Figure 6.2: The superaddressee*

## Analysis of the data

In order to explore in more depth 'experiences of difference' using a bakhtinian discourse analysis framework, a number of episodes from the narrative discussion groups have been selected and are discussed in this section. Each of the episodes demonstrates different and inter-related bakhtinian concepts.

Rather than group the analysis under concepts, I have chosen instead to analyse episodes in order to maintain the emphasis on the contextual and inter-relatedness of the concepts.

Given the complexity of the analysis, it has been necessary to limit this analysis to only a selection of episodes from the narrative discussion groups. The analysis is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather exploratory. Episodes which illustrate the application and significance of the bakhtinian concepts discussed in this chapter have been selected. As explained earlier in this chapter, each turn from the transcripts has been numbered, starting at number one for each new episode. These episodes occurred at various points in various different narrative discussion groups, and the line numbering does not reflect the position of the episode in the broader dialogue. At times when sections of an episode have been skipped for the sake of brevity, the line numbering from the beginning of the episode has been maintained.

*MEN HOLDING HANDS: SURPLUS OF SEEING*

1    Wadi:  *and when you are walking [in Saudi Arabia] you can (pause 1 sec) hold his hand*
2    Me:  *you hold hands while walking?*
3    Halim:  *yeah*
4    Wadi:  *while walking*
5    Halim:  *yeah*
6    Wadi:  *but it's not a good way in Australian culture*
7    Me:  *okay, did you know that before you came or did you find out when you got here?*
8    Wadi:  *no, one of our teacher in [preparatory English program] say that us*
9    Me:  *oh, told you?*
10   Wadi:  *hmm* **(NDG1)**.

This episode contains an example of the implicit authoritative discourse that appears to have been made explicit through surplus of seeing in an encounter with another authoritative discourse. Turn 1 contains the explicit statement of what was likely to have been an implicit authoritative discourse prior to encountering a conflicting authoritative discourse; namely that men hold hands whilst walking. The statement in Turn 6, "it's not a good way in Australian culture," is unmarked for epistemological stance, which would seem to indicate that it is explicit authoritative discourse. This is later confirmed in Turn 8: "one of our teacher in [preparatory English program] say that [to] us". The implicit "men don't hold hands" authoritative discourse in Australia has been made explicit to Wadi and his fellow students ("us") by the preparatory English program teacher. Again, we can surmise that it is through surplus of seeing that this Australian implicit authoritative discourse was brought to light.

The truth claim behind the assertion that it is not good in Australian culture for men to hold hands lies in the authority of the teacher as expert on Australian culture (Turn 8). Wadi seems to have received this statement and adopted it as is, without attempting to engage with it dialogically. There is no evidence of evaluating the truth of the claim, negotiating possible meanings, or amending the claim in any way. In the context of this dialogic episode, it functions as explicit authoritative discourse. The fact that Wadi did not reject the authoritative discourse indicates that, for him, the authority claim of "the Australian way" was higher than the authoritative claim of "the Saudi way" in the context of living in Australia, and therefore he chose to not hold hands with other Saudi men whilst in Australia.

*THE RIGHT KIND OF TEACHER: INTERNALLY PERSUASIVE DISCOURSE*

| 1 | Naim: *I think if they have permanent excellent teachers* |
| 2 | Me: *yes* |
| 3 | Naim: *because the language, especially in the primary stages* |
| 4 | Me: *hmm* |
| 5 | Naim: *the language depend on the teacher* |
| 6 | Me: *yes, yep* |
| 7 | Naim: *especially in the lower* |
| 8 | Me: *lower levels?* |
| 9 | Naim: *lower levels* |
| 10 | Me: *hmm* |
| 11 | Naim: *so if you are in advanced or in the uni or in the [advanced preparatory program]* |
| 12 | Me: *hmm* |
| 13 | Naim: *you can depend, the teacher depend on you, yourself* |
| 14 | Me: *hmm, hmm, hmm* |
| 15 | Naim: *but in the lower stage you have nothing* |
| 16 | Me: *yeah* |
| 17 | Naim: *the teacher should come down* |
| 18 | Me: *yeah* |
| 19 | Naim: *and hold you from the bottom* |
| 20 | Me: *yeah* |
| 21 | Naim: *otherwise, sometimes here* |
| 22 | Me: *yeah* |
| 23 | Naim: *I find that the teacher, standing and like (gesturing reaching down with hand) and you can't* |
| 24 | Me: *you can't reach him* |
| 25 | Naim: *reach* |
| 26 | Me: *yeah* |
| 27 | Naim: *he should lie down, little bit* |
| 28 | Me: *yeah* |
| 29 | Naim: *to hold you, yeah, because the many students they suffer* |
| 30 | Me: *really?* **(NDG4)**. |

In this episode Naim was discussing his ideas for how to solve the perceived problems with the preparatory English program that, he said in Turn 29, caused many students to "suffer". He began by making a statement in Turn 1 with the epistemic marker "I think". This seems to be a clear indication of internally persuasive discourse. Therefore, we may presume that Naim had thought about the relative merits of different solutions and, based on those deliberations (perhaps in consultation with other Saudi students), he had arrived at the conclusion that this is one good solution.

The merit grounds themselves on the surface have some signs of authoritative discourse. In Turn 13  Naim appears to have attempted to use the second person subject "you" in an indefinite sense, but then struggled with the syntax of the utterance when he found that the only object that worked in the complement is "you", and therefore he changed the subject to "the teacher". The fact that he began with "you" suggests that he may have been attempting to use this common linguistic device for marking authoritative discourse in English, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

However, a closer reading of the dialogue suggests to me that the entire episode is internally persuasive discourse. Naim made no appeal to any authorities to support his claim that his solution was reasonable and therefore none of his utterances in this episode (even those beginning with the indefinite second person pronoun) operate as explicit authoritative discourse. The most likely utterance to qualify as implicit authoritative discourse comes in Turn 17 when he says "the teacher should come down". However, we find in Turn 23 that the reason Naim offers for the imperative "should" begins with "I find" which would either be a reference to his own experience, or another epistemic device similar to "I think". In either case, it represents internally persuasive, rather than authoritative discourse. If this entire episode is operating as internally persuasive discourse, then it suggests that Naim was attempting to make an appeal on the basis of good sense or sound reasoning, with the hope that I would evaluate the merit of those suggestions on the same basis; in other words, he was trying to convince me on the basis of the merit of the argument itself, rather than on the basis of some authority figure behind the claims.

*THE PROBLEM WITH THE STUDENTS: AUTHORITATIVE DISCOURSE*

    *1*        Ma'mun: *I think the first problem with the student*
    *2*        Me: *hmm*
    *3*        Ma'mun: *themselves*
    *4*        Me: *hmm, hmm*
    *5*        Ma'mun: *he doesn't help to improve himself*
    *6*        Me: *hmm*
    *7*        Ma'mun: *because I saw some student just nagging and talking bad words about [the preparatory English program]*
    *8*        Me: *hmm*

| 9  | Ma'mun: *teachers and when I try to speak with him even in English* |
| 10 | Me: *hmm* |
| 11 | Ma'mun: *he doesn't have nothing* |
| 12 | Me: *hmm* |
| 13 | Ma'mun: *he doesn't know the alphabetic, the word* |
| 14 | Me: *hmm* |
| 15 | Ma'mun: *if you don't know the alphabetic how do you want to speak in English?* |
| 16 | Me: *hmm* |
| 17 | Ma'mun: *that's the basics* |
| 18 | Me: *yeah* |
| 19 | Ma'mun: *you must know it first* |
| 20 | Me: *yeah* |
| 21 | Ma'mun: *you must help yourself before they can help you* |
| 22 | Me: *yeah* **(NDG5)**. |

In this episode, Ma'mun gave his own perspective on the same problem that Naim discussed in the episode examined in Chapter 5; namely that some Saudi students struggled with the preparatory English program. However, Ma'mun's comments were about the students themselves, rather than the teaching staff. The onus, he suggested, was on the students to learn the basics. As he said in Turn 21 "you must help yourself before they can help you". This was his third consecutive use of the second person indefinite pronoun, which may indicate the operation of authoritative discourse. The repetition of the modal "must" in Turns 19 and 21 also suggests the operation of authoritative discourse. Ma'mun did not appeal to any authority figure (such as a teacher or an expert in language learning) and therefore it is not explicit authoritative discourse.

I would suggest that an implicit authoritative discourse about how to learn English properly (i.e. learn the alphabet first – Turn 15) is in operation here. Ma'mun did not appeal to his own experiences, to rational logic, to any empirical evidence or consider any options. He simply took it as read that a person who did not know the alphabet was not able to learn English properly, and that the onus ought to be on the students themselves to achieve these basic skills. His assumption could be challenged – almost all English-speaking children learn to speak before they know the alphabet (Fromkin et al., 2004). However, he did not present his argument in such a way as to invite discussion or negotiation. It was simply a truth. This, then, makes the episode an example of authoritative discourse.

### TEA OR COFFEE? DIFFERENT AUTHORITY CLAIMS FOR AUTHORITATIVE DISCOURSES

| 1 | Me: *Latif this is delicious tea. I've never had mint tea before* |
| 2 | Latif: *because I know most of my friend, they don't like, Australian friend, they don't like Arabic coffee it's different taste* |
| 3 | Me: *it is very different* |

| 4 | Latif: *very different taste, and they not interested with it* |
|---|---|
| 5 | Me: *really?* |
| 6 | Latif: *that's why I don't make any* |
| 7 | Me: *oh okay. That's very kind, thank you* |
| 8 | Latif: *you're welcome* |
| 9 | Rashad: *but if you get married here, you will be in trouble you should drink coffee with you any time you talk with your friend* |
| 10 | Me: *really?* |
| 11 | Rashad: *yes. And he just told me before fifteen minutes that come here* |
| 12 | Me: *yeah* |
| 13 | Rashad: *or I should to bring the coffee or what my wife is doing at home* |
| 14 | Me: *oh. So you … hang on … because you're married, your wife should have made coffee?* |
| 15 | Rashad: *no, because* |
| 16 | Me: *no* |
| 17 | Rashad: *for him maybe there are busy with assignments* |
| 18 | Me: *oh okay* |
| 19 | Rashad: *yes, but for me I don't have any other excuse* |
| 20 | Me: *oh okay* |
| 21 | Latif: *this is in Saudi Arabia, we are in Australia, okay* **(NDG2)**. |

In Turn 1, I commented upon the tea Latif had served me. Interestingly, he responded (in Turns 2, 4 and 6) with an explanation of why he served tea rather than Arabic coffee. This explanation drew to my awareness the authoritative discourse operating in Saudi Arabia that guests should be served with coffee. Latif had privileged a different authoritative discourse – "serve your guests the kind of drink they would like" – out of consideration for me. Having been made aware of this special consideration, I expressed my appreciation (Turn 7), something I would never have done before Latif's explanation, because the Saudi "serve coffee to guests" authoritative discourse was completely unfamiliar to me. It was only through the surplus of seeing that I became aware of the kindness and consideration involved in Latif's decision to serve tea rather than coffee.

However, in Turn 9, Rashad expressed a different perspective on that authoritative discourse: "but if you get married here, you will be in trouble". It seems from this statement that for Rashad "serve your guests the kind of drink they would like" had a less powerful authority claim than "serve coffee to guests". Rashad continued to explain, but I was having difficulty following his point (indicated by my comment in Turn 14). I finally came to understand after Turn 21, when Latif said to Rashad "[that] is in Saudi, we are in Australia, okay". For Latif, "serve coffee to guests" had a stronger authority claim in Saudi Arabia, whereas "serve your guests the kind of drink they would like" had a stronger authority claim in Australia. However, for Rashad "serve coffee to

guests" had a stronger authority claim whichever country he is in, or at least (I presume) when in the presence of another Saudi guest.

In this episode, Latif and Rashad demonstrated two different responses to the Saudi authoritative discourse "serve coffee to guests". Upon reflection, I wonder whether Latif's explanation to me in Turns 2, 4 and 6 might in fact have been a response to Rashad's unasked (but perhaps anticipated) enquiry as to why he had not served coffee according to the Saudi tradition. Rashad's response in Turns 9 to 20 seems to be that not serving coffee is acceptable only because Latif is not yet married. He was still appealing to the Saudi authoritative discourse regarding social manners, privileging the authority of "our (Saudi) way", even when hosting an Australian visitor in an Australian context. However, Latif rejected the authority claim of "our (Saudi) way" in this context, with his statement, "[that] is in Saudi; we are in Australia, okay" (Turn 21).

*THE POINT OF ABAYA: AUTHORITATIVE DISCOURSES OPERATING TOGETHER*

At the time of the narrative discussion group from which the next excerpt is taken, Rashad had only been married for two months. He had been discussing some of the difficulties his wife had experienced upon her arrival in Australia, six weeks earlier. In this short episode, Rashad discussed the wearing of Abaya, the style of dress Saudi women wear in order to fully cover themselves when in public.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| *1* | Rashad: *yeah, so I get here. I was really uncomfortable first week, now I am really comfortable and also, in our culture, our wife should cover theirselves* |
| *2* | Me: *yeah* |
| *3* | Rashad: *yes. That's. In some countries or I mean in some cities* |
| *4* | Me: *hmm* |
| *5* | Rashad: *it's very hard to go out if she's wearing like that* |
| *6* | Me: *hmm* |
| *7* | Rashad: *make difficult, I do that because I don't want anyone to see her but here if I she do that everyone will look at her* |
| *8* | Me: *yes, I know* |
| *9* | Rashad: *it's yeah* |
| *10* | Me: *it's more attention* |
| *11* | Rashad: *the point is that I don't want anyone to see her* |
| *12* | Me: *yeah* |
| *13* | Rashad: *now I make them more concentrate on her* |
| *14* | Me: *yeah* |
| *15* | Rashad: *so I, it's become, I mean problems* |
| *16* | Me: *yeah* **(NDG2)**. |

In line 1, Rashad presented the practice of wearing Abaya as authoritative discourse. He used the word culture as the source of authority and the use of the modal "should" seems to point quite clearly to the explicit authoritative nature of that discourse. In Turn 7, and again in Turn 11, he explained that the reason he wanted his wife to wear Abaya is that he did not want anyone to see her. He revealed a little more about what he meant by that in Turn 13, when he lamented that wearing Abaya in Australia had the opposite effect to that intended, namely it drew people's attention to his wife. As Abaya would be completely covering his wife when people were "concentrating on her" (Turn 13) the "problems" (Turn 15) caused by this cannot be that his wife's features were exposed to public gaze. For Rashad, it appears that the point of wearing Abaya is to avoid drawing attention in public.

This episode demonstrates another complexity when authoritative discourses come into conflict. For Rashad, the "wear Abaya" discourse was explicit and authoritative, but it appears to have been operating in conjunction with another implicit authoritative discourse in Saudi Arabia; namely "do not stare at a woman wearing Abaya". In Australia, the former authoritative discourse continued to operate for Rashad and his wife: she always wore Abaya when in public. However, the latter authoritative discourse did not operate in the lives of the members of the Australian public and this caused problems for Rashad (Turn 15). The "wear Abaya" authoritative discourse did not operate the way it was intended to when the "do not stare" authoritative discourse was not operating. In this sense, the latter authoritative discourse can be said to be an integral part of the former. The complexity that can arise out of the interrelatedness of authoritative discourses may help to explain some of the difficulties experienced in cross-cultural encounters.

*WHOSE PROBLEM? DOUBLE-VOICED UTTERANCES*

> 1    Me: *so the faculty expect you to be almost native speakers*
> 2    Wadi: *yeah most, some of the lecturers*
> 3    Me: *okay*
> 4    Wadi: *they said if you will be a uni student*
> 5    Me: *uh-huh*
> 6    Wadi: *we expect you are native speaker*
> 7    Me: *hmm*
> 8    Wadi: *your English level is low*
> 9    Me: *hmm*
> 10   Halim: *this is your problem*
> 11   Wadi: *yeah*
> 12   Me: *it's your problem? (incredulous tone)* **(NDG1)**.

The utterance "this is your problem" in Turn 10 was a continuation of the recital of what "they said" (Turn 4) indicating that it was an appropriated utterance from a previous dialogic encounter, or possibly a reconstruction of

several such encounters. My interpretation of the constructed meaning of the flow of dialogue to that point in time was that some lecturers had a cold and uncaring attitude towards the struggles of their Saudi students – "this is your problem" meaning, "that is not my problem, so I don't care". Therefore, in Turn 12, I repeated the same utterance, this time with an incredulous tone of voice.

This is an example of a double-voiced utterance. I was using the words of the lecturer, which for me carried with them evidence of a cold and uncaring attitude from that previous dialogic encounter. By repeating the utterance with an incredulous tone of voice, I was also and at the same time expressing my own negative evaluation of that attitude. The utterance "it's your problem?" (Turn 12), therefore, is both the voice of a cold and uncaring lecturer and my own voice criticising that attitude. Analysed in this way, it is clear that the three words of Turn 12 represent an extremely rich and complex communicative event.

Despite this complexity, Halim had no difficulty understanding the meaning of my double-voiced utterance, and in the very next line of this episode, he introduced a different voice to the same utterance:

> *13*  Halim:  *it's your problem and I agree, I totally agree with them* **(NDG1)**.

In this turn, Halim reinterpreted the voice of the original utterance – from cold and uncaring, to factual statement of truth – and then added a new voice, affirming the truth of that statement, in his own but quite different double-voiced utterance of the same three words "it's your problem". He supported this new voice, affirming the truth of the statement, over the next 53 lines of dialogue. He explained that his cohort of Saudi students were placed in the wrong level – in his opinion – for their preparatory English classes, and therefore did not do enough language study before entering their nursing studies.

Throughout this section of the episode, Wadi barely made any contribution, adding only unfinished statements with single words such as "they …", "most …" and "but …" It was therefore unclear whether or not Wadi agreed or disagreed with Halim. Eventually Halim seemed to falter with a series of pauses in one turn, and finally Wadi committed to agree with Halim and accept the validity of Halim's appropriated voice:

> *63*  Halim:  *and level three that we studied*
> *64*  Me:  *yeah*

65    Halim: *wasn't (pause 4 secs) like (pause 1 sec) also wasn't, you know, course to (pause 1 sec)*

66    Wadi: *actually we are not fit to be in level three* **(NDG1)**.

In this episode, two internally persuasive discourses were operating in tension. The discourse that was operating for me in Turns 1 to 12 expressed the opinion that some university lecturers were cold and uncaring, because rather than helping Saudis with their language difficulties and trying to support them with their studies, they abdicated their responsibility by saying, "that's your problem". In this discourse, the attitude of the university lecturers was the problem; the lecturers were the villains and the Saudis were the victims.

The second discourse, introduced by Halim's emphatic, "I agree, I totally agree with them", conflicted with the former by insisting that the university lecturers' comments were accurate and fair. The problem, according to this discourse, was not the lecturers' attitudes, but rather the placement procedure for preparatory English classes. In this discourse the lecturers and the Saudis were both victims, and the villains were depicted only with the indefinite pronouns "they" and "their", as in the following excerpts from Turns 14 to 62:

> _they_ placed us in level three (Turn 19)
> when _they_ offered us the course program (Turn 23)
> _they_ just said...come and start with level three (Turn 25)
> it was _their_ fault (Turn 38)
> _they_ offered students (Turn 38)
> _they_ just put them (Turn 40)
> _they_ got the...students (Turn 40)
> _they_ gave us an exam (Turn 55)

These indefinite pronouns may represent real people whom Halim chooses not to identify, or they may be an anthropomorphic representation of the institution and procedures relating to offers and placement. In either case, when Wadi finally committed to agreement with Halim's view, he selected the word "actually" which seems to mark a change in discourse. From this point, the discussion turned away from the discourse of university lecturers as villains and focused on the perceived inadequacies of the preparatory English program.

*P(LAUGH)ARENTS: LAUGHTER AND DOUBLE-VOICING*

As discussed in Chapter 3, one of the discoveries from the transcription stage of this study was the use of laughter as an infix in English. I have selected several episodes in which laughter was employed this way to demonstrate how laughter, and especially laughter infixes, can be used for double-voicing. In

order to clarify the distinction, I also give some examples of laughter infixes which are not double-voicing, but rather paralinguistic communication strategies, similar to those discussed by Glenn (2003). In all of the examples below, I was the one using double-voiced laughter infixes. The Saudi participants used laughter in other ways throughout all of the narrative discussion groups, but there were no clear examples of Saudi participants using double-voiced laughter infixes. Although this section of analysis disrupts the story of Saudi participants' 'experiences of difference', I have included it because it not only provides an excellent example of this complex dialogic device, but it also represents something of my own 'experience of difference' in these narrative discussion groups.

The clearest example of double-voicing with laughter infixing was in a discussion about the passive learning style common in Saudi Arabia.

| 1  | Basil: *even in the secondary school* |
| 2  | Me: *yeah* |
| 3  | Basil: *they have a special book, there are special book, we call it homework* |
| 4  | Me: *homework book, yeah* |
| 5  | Basil: *yeah, and you know in the primary school* |
| 6  | Me: *yeah* |
| 7  | Basil: *when the teacher will spoke to the students and explain the information and* |
| 8  | Me: *yeah* |
| 9  | Basil: *ah, finish the class* |
| 10 | Me: *mm* |
| 11 | Basil: *they will write in that book* |
| 12 | Me: *mm* |
| 13 | Basil: *message for the parents of the students* |
| 14 | Me: *oh, the parents check it?* |
| 15 | Basil: *yeah, yeah, no the teacher will write it in the class* |
| 16 | Fadil: *for each student* |
| 17 | Basil: *for each student* |
| 18 | (unclear) |
| 19 | Ubaid: *will write on the board and the student have to copy, he will* |
| 20 | Fadil: *primary* |
| 21 | Basil: *primary* |
| 22 | Me: *ah, in primary school the teacher actually writes it* |
| 23 | Basil: *he will say, "page twenty-two" for example, "this is homework"* |
| 24 | Me: *yeah* |
| 25 | Basil: *and he will sign and the parent should, yeah, should see that with their um* |
| 26 | Me: *mm* |
| 27 | Basil: *um, with the students* |

> 28    Me: *mm*
> 29    Basil: *they should help their*
> 30    Fadil: *child*
> 31    Basil: *child gets to, to do that homework. You know, so we've learnt that way, we are not independent*
> 32    Me: *oh*
> 33    Basil: *just a message from the teacher*
> 34    Me: *yeah*
> 35    Basil: *to the parent*
> 36    Me: *to the p(laugh)arents*
> 37    Basil: *we are just carrying these books*
> 38    Fadil: *open my brain*
> 39    Basil: *yeah really*
> 40    Fadil: *pour in*
> 41    *(all laugh)*
> 42    Fadil: *really* **(NDG3)**.

The laughter infix occurred at Turn 36 when I laughed in the middle of saying the word "parents". This word had just been used by Basil in the previous line, and I appropriated it from him at this point in the comment. By appropriating the word immediately after Basil used it, I was maintaining Basil's appropriated voice; by laughing whilst repeating the word, I was adding another voice. I would interpret this particular dialogic exchange as follows:

| **Linguistic data** | **Communicative intent of voice and double-voicing** |
|---|---|
| Basil: *to the parent* | this is an example of the difference between Australian and Saudi education systems (Basil's appropriated voice) |
| Me: *to the p(laugh)arents?* | that is a difference (echoing Basil's appropriated voice). I am amazed at the degree of difference (new voice). |

There are a number of other possible meanings that might be added to my interpretation of the laughter infix, including "I'm not doubting the truth of your statement" and "no wonder it has been so difficult for you to adjust to studying in Australia". In this way, I used both Basil's appropriated voice and the new voice in the same utterance, in order to communicate the complex relationship between what I believed Basil was saying, and my response to that. My understanding of the concept of double-voicing is that it always operates on this level of complexity, and is an excellent example of the complex and contingent nature of 'experiences of difference'.

Another similar example arose in the same narrative discussion group in which we were discussing the problem of trying to communicate in a second language

with people who have never learnt to speak another language. The episode began with Fadil expressing his frustration:

1      Fadil:  *they will insist and they will you know will get angry and*
2      Me: *mm*
3      Fadil:  *get mad and*
4      Me: *mm*
5      Fadil:  *you know they will shout*
6      Me: *yeah, they just don't get it*
7      Fadil:  *even if they repeat it in you know loud voice, I won't understand the same story will occur so* **(NDG3)**.

After some discussion around that topic, I said:

37      Me:  *so it's easy for me to understand, and if you don't understand me, then I'll speak more slowly or I can choose simpler words, easier words*
38      Fadil:  *yes*
39      Basil:  *yes*
40      Me:  *rather than just l(laugh)ouder*
41      *(all laugh)* **(NDG3)**.

In this episode, the laughter infix occurred in a word that was similar to the one used earlier by Fadil ("loud voice" in Turn 7). I think it is reasonable to suggest that I used "louder" with the intent to maintain Fadil's appropriated voice from the words "loud voice", making the slight change either for grammatical purposes, or simply because I had not accurately recalled the exact words he had used. In this instance, the double-voicing might be interpreted as follows.

| Linguistic data | Communicative intent of voice and double-voicing |
| --- | --- |
| Fadil: *even if they repeat it in you know loud voice* | this is an example of how some Australians do not understand second language speakers' needs (Fadil's appropriated voice) |
| Me: *rather than just l(laugh)ouder* | that was an example of a lack of understanding (echoing Fadil's appropriated voice). It's hard to believe, isn't it (new voice). |

Another example of laughter infixing employed by Basil and my response to that demonstrates how the theoretical concept of double-voicing can help to explain an otherwise seemingly inappropriate use of laughter. When Basil began to tell the story relating to possible racist attitudes discussed in Chapter 5, he used infixing in the middle of the word "guy":

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| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Basil: *and, uh, when we were walking* |
| 2 | Me: *hmm* |
| 3 | Basil: *some g(laugh)uy one guy he came to us and he said, "terrorist" (laugh)* |
| 4 | Me: *(laugh) you're kidding!* |
| 5 | Basil: *yeah* |
| 6 | Me: *seriously?* **(NDG3)**. |

This was not a funny story. Basil and his wife had just arrived in Australia. They were walking down the street when a complete stranger came up to him and taunted him with the word "terrorist". In that context, my laughter in Turn 4 seems a totally inappropriate response. However, Basil's use of laughter in the previous line, both as an infix in "g(laugh)uy" and to conclude the turn after the word "terrorist" are important clues to understanding the communicative intent of my laughter. Basil's use of laughter in Turn 3 can be interpreted as "can you believe this actually happened to me?" My use of laughter in Turn 4 can be seen as double-voicing. I appropriated Basil's utterance (laughter, in this case) from the previous line and added a new voice "that's hard to believe" to Basil's appropriated voice. Explained in this way, my laughter was not an inappropriate and insensitive response to Basil's misfortune, but a complex dialogic engagement with the communicative intent of Basil's laughter.

The use of laughter infixing for double-voicing can be contrasted with the more common (in my data at least) use of laughter infixing as a paralinguistic device, without any specific double-voicing. As an example, in introducing his story about the traffic infringement discussed in Chapter 5, Fadil commented on the problem of not knowing all the local laws, to which I responded with a comment, as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Me: *I haven't heard of anybody getting arrested yet* |
| 2 | Fadil: *n(laugh)o* **(NDG3)**. |

Fadil's laughter infix here can be interpreted as "the problem I am talking about is not that serious, thankfully". It is difficult to identify another voice operating within this single word with a laughter infix, although in a broad bakhtinian sense as the utterance is a turn in a dialogic engagement, it is inextricably linked to some previous utterance.

### DIFFERENT (NEGATIVE) OR DIFFERENT (NEUTRAL)? THE ROLE OF SUPERADDRESSEES

In the episode below, Wadi and I wrestle with authoritative discourses regarding cultural differences. Wadi begins by talking about something that he

had recently been taught in a class on communication skills – that cultural differences are not bad, just different.

| 1 | Wadi: *but I'm involved in one course in now* |
| 2 | Me: *yeah* |
| 3 | Wadi: *and uh that's about the communications skills* |
| 4 | Me: *hmm* |
| 5 | Wadi: *and I find that's very good for students* |
| 6 | Me: *hmm* |
| 7 | Wadi: *they teach how about the other cultures* |
| 8 | Me: *yeah* |
| 9 | Wadi: *so they told them that if you will see somebody doing anything* |
| 10 | Me: *hmm* |
| 11 | Wadi: *don't think that's bad* |
| 12 | Me: *hmm* |
| 13 | Wadi: *no, it's their culture* |
| 14 | Me: *okay* |
| 15 | Wadi: *you cannot say that's better than our, you cannot say that's better than our culture* |
| 16 | Me: *yeah* |
| 17 | Wadi: *it's different* |
| 18 | Me: *yeah* |
| 19 | Wadi: *totally different* |
| 20 | Me: *yeah* **(NDG1)**. |

The discourse about cultural differences not being bad, which I refer to here as "different (neutral)", seems to be operating as explicit authoritative discourse. The truth claim is vested in the authority of the teacher(s) as expert(s) with such markers as "they teach" (Turn 7) and "they told them" (Turn 9). Wadi also uses the indefinite second person "you" in his remarks spanning Turns 9 to 15 in the same way that a native speaker would to mark this kind of authoritative discourse.

After 33 lines of dialogue, in which Wadi talked about his impression that Australian people did not like to talk to strangers, he turned to another example of Australians not talking to each other, this time focussing on his homestay family and their neighbours.

| 54 | Wadi: *um, and also the homestay I live with them they have neighbours* |
| 55 | Me: *hmm* |
| 56 | Wadi: *and they said we don't know anything about them they are their neighbours since ten years or more than ten years* |
| 57 | Me: *more than ten years? (incredulous tone)* |

| 58 | Wadi: *yes (emphatic)* |
| 59 | Me: *yeah?* |
| 60 | Wadi: *and they don't know anything about their neighbours* |
| 61 | Me: *hmm and that's very strange?* |
| 62 | Wadi: *yeah. Totally different* |
| 63 | Me: *yeah?* |
| 64 | Wadi: *you know, I'm living in my house I have to know all the neighbours* |
| 65 | Me: *all the neighbours* |
| 66 | Wadi: *I have to communicate with them* |
| 67 | Me: *yeah* |
| 68 | Wadi: *I have to invite them. If somebody sick I have to visit them* |
| 69 | Me: *yeah* |
| 70 | Wadi: *if somebody want anything, I have to help* |
| 71 | Me: *hmm* |
| 72 | Wadi: *that's the difference* |
| 73 | Me: *hmm* |
| 74a | Wadi: *but here no it's different totally different* **(NDG1)**. |

The emphatic "yes" in Turn 58 and the repetition of the assertion that the members of his homestay family did not know anything about their neighbours (Turns 56 and 60) expressed a degree of negative evaluation of the situation. Therefore, the "different" of Turn 62, used by Wadi as a synonym for my "strange" of Turn 61, and repeated twice in Turn 74a, I have called "different (negative)". The degree of negativity in the evaluation expressed by this remark is difficult to assign with certainty. It may simply have been "I don't understand it" or "I find it hard to believe", or it may have been more judgmental (different = bad). Whichever it was, this use of the word "different" was not the same as the earlier usage of the same word in Turns 17 and 19. This is further evidenced by the fact that in the middle of Turn 74 Wadi seems to have become aware of the disjuncture himself. Before anybody else took a turn, he attempted to negotiate a self-repair:

| 74 b | Wadi: *that's their culture I cannot say anything* |
| 75 | Me: *(laugh) it is different you can say that* |
| 76 | Wadi: *it's different* |
| 77 | Halim: *different yeah* |
| 78 | Wadi: *I can't say it's bad or good or no* |
| 79 | Me: *yeah* |
| 80 | Wadi: *it's different* **(NDG1)**. |

Wadi used "their" instead of "your" in Turn 74b when referring to this cultural difference. It is unusual to use the word "culture" when referring to the habits of one single family, but since English was Wadi's second language, it is possible that he intended "their culture" to refer to the lifestyle of his homestay family. Another equally plausible explanation is that "their culture" refers to Australian

culture, especially as he compared this behaviour with what was expected of neighbours in Saudi Arabia. If this were so, then it is significant that Wadi used "their" rather than "your" (as I am an Australian) or even "Australian culture". One explanation of this would be that the utterance "their culture" had been appropriated from the "different (neutral)" authoritative discourse discussed earlier.

Whether the utterance "their culture" was intended to mark a switch back to the "different (neutral)" discourse or not, the end of Turn 74b "I cannot say anything" indicates explicitly that this switch was Wadi's intention. Picking up on these cues for a switch, I laughed. I interpret this laugh as my acknowledgement that we – Wadi and I – had both strayed from the parameters of the "different (neutral)" authoritative discourse. Although it was Wadi's story, as a participant in the dialogue I cooperated in the operation of the other "different (negative)" discourse, with affirming backchannelling and through tone (Turn 57). My laugh was a non-linguistic way of saying "we've been caught out". I then affirmed Wadi's switch by re-introducing the utterance "different" which I appropriated from Wadi's earlier recount of the "different (neutral)" discourse. Both Wadi and Halim joined in this dialogic move, with the almost mantra-like repetition of the appropriated utterance "different". Although the very same word had been used by Wadi in Turn 74a, immediately before the switch, after the switch it was operating as an appropriated utterance from a completely different discourse and therefore it did not carry the same meaning. Before it was "different (negative)"; after the switch it was "different (neutral)".

In this episode, it is clear that Wadi, Halim and I had accepted the teaching about cultural difference as explicit authoritative discourse: it was to be accepted as is, without negotiation. However, this discourse was in conflict with another authoritative discourse; one that allowed for negatively evaluating difference. The fact that this other discourse seemed to operate more covertly (we caught ourselves in the act of speaking that way) indicates that it might have been implicit authoritative discourse. In the process of our ideological becoming, an explicit authoritative discourse seems to have been doing battle with an implicit authoritative discourse.

There are at least two possible reasons why the switch in authoritative discourses occurred at this point in the episode (Turn 74b). It may be that the expression "totally different" in Turn 74a reminded Wadi of the time he used the same expression in Turn 19, with respect to the "different (neutral)" discourse. In this case, it would be an instance of the way that the previous context of an appropriated utterance continues to influence its future use. The very words "totally different" acted as a catalyst to re-instantiate the explicit authoritative discourse in which the term had most recently been employed.

I think that the more likely reason, though, is that Wadi suddenly remembered that our conversation was being recorded for my PhD research, or (in a similar vein) that I was not just a friend having a chat, but a researcher collecting data. In this case, the perceived need to switch may be explained by the influence of a change in superaddressees. In Turns 54 to  74a, Wadi and I were speaking in the presence of a superaddressee who agreed that never speaking with your neighbours was strange, incomprehensible or wrong; that is to say "different (negative)".

It is interesting to reflect upon the character of this particular superaddressee. It seems apparent that the superaddressee agreed with Wadi and me that it was strange for neighbours not to talk to each other. However, it is unlikely that we had exactly the same superaddressee in mind. In the course of this very episode, Wadi explained the importance of maintaining close relationships with neighbours in Saudi Arabia, so it is reasonable to presume that Wadi had in mind a Saudi superaddressee, or at least a superaddressee who was familiar with and sympathetic to Saudi customs. However, at the time of this discussion, I was completely unfamiliar with Saudi customs regarding neighbourly relationships. Therefore, we were not addressing exactly the same superaddressee. However, I had spent twelve of the thirteen years prior to the narrative discussion group living in Japan where maintaining strong relationships with neighbours is also highly valued. My superaddressee (who agreed with us both that it was strange for neighbours to know nothing about each other) was more likely to have been Japanese, or someone familiar with and sympathetic to Japanese customs.

Japanese and Saudi customs are, of course, quite different in many respects, but in terms of neighbourly relations they appear to be quite similar, and therefore Wadi and I were able to speak to different superaddressees and still come to agreement, because our different superaddressees agreed on this point. It is significant to note that it is possible for two people with such different cultural backgrounds and experiences to address different superaddressees who agree on some points, as this perspective resonates so strongly with the cosmopolitan axiological stance I have taken in this study. Whilst Wadi and I may not agree on many issues, as we continue to seek mutually agreeable superaddressees (which are not exactly the same, but do have some points of agreement) we may be better able to achieve the goal of getting used to one another, and therefore create opportunities to learn and grow.

It seems very clear to me that in the middle of Turn 74 (the start of Turn 74b) a change in superaddressees suddenly occurred. A Western academic superaddressee, who upheld the ethical superiority of the "different (neutral)" discourse, took the place of the two different superaddressees who agreed on the appropriate forms of neighbourly relations and therefore accepted the "different (negative)" discourse. As a result of this change in superaddressees,

Wadi and I reverted back to the authoritative discourse that Wadi had learnt in the context of a Western academic environment.

The role of the superaddressee is significant to note in seeking to better understand intercultural communication in general. The concept also provides insight into the inter-relationships between the 'experiences of difference' referred to as language, culture and identity at work in dialogic engagements with second language users. It is possible for two people in the same conversation to maintain two different positions on the same issue. This may not necessarily be because the two interlocutors are confused or noncommittal about their identity positions or cultural beliefs. It may be that different superaddressees come in and out of dialogic encounters, influencing the course of the conversation, as illustrated in this episode. From a protoparadigmatic approach, I would suggest that Wadi and I did not have one real opinion, and one official opinion, but rather that both positions in relation to cultural differences were real in their different contexts.

Looking at the same episode from a slightly different perspective, it is possible to hypothesise several potential outcomes in the process of ideological becoming in relation to the "different (neutral)" explicit authoritative discourse that Wadi was taught in one of his university classes in Australia. Wadi could eventually decide that the teacher-as-expert authority claim is not strong, and he might therefore reject "different (neutral)" as explicit authoritative discourse. It might remain rejected, and therefore have no further influence on Wadi. Alternately, Wadi may decide to engage with it on the basis of its merits, in which case it would operate as internally persuasive discourse.

A third possibility is that Wadi could come to the conclusion that the authority claim for this explicit authoritative discourse only applies in Australia, or only within Western academia, and therefore "different (neutral)" would operate as an authoritative discourse only in those contexts. If this were the case, then when he returned to Saudi Arabia, or when he was talking with friends rather than academic colleagues, it would cease to influence his dialogic behaviour. The potential for the same discourse to operate as authoritative discourse in some contexts, and not so in others, might help to explain the phenomenon of a bilingual/bicultural people seeming to have more than one identity.

The data from this episode suggest that the "different (neutral)" explicit authoritative discourse currently operates in this third way. The chronotopic (time-space) context does not change in this dialogue. However, with a change of superaddressee, Wadi and I switched between the "different (negative)" to "different (neutral)" authoritative discourses in the middle of one Turn (74) in the middle of one dialogic episode.

This analysis highlights the degree of fluidity and contingency between 'experiences of difference' that might otherwise be referred to with the empty signifiers language, culture and identity. Examining broad and relatively stable contextual features such as time, place and the relative status of interlocutors provides insights into these experiences to a certain degree, but it does not adequately represent the complexity nor the contingent nature of many of the factors influencing any given dialogic encounter. The bakhtinian analysis outlined in this chapter might be able to better serve this purpose.

*DISCUSSION*

In this chapter I have sought to demonstrate some of the complexity and contextual contingency of what I have conceptualised as 'experiences of difference' by analysing the data from narrative discussion groups through a framework of bakhtinian concepts. I have come to no reductionist conclusions about the identity positions (e.g., Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999) of the Saudi participants in my study, nor have I sought to map the cultural milieu of a third space (Bhabha, 1994) or third place (Crozet, Liddicoat, & Lo Bianco, 1999) in which they operate. I have not tried to demonstrate causal links between language and culture and identity.

This chapter has had three significant outcomes. Firstly, I have sought to demonstrate the complexity and inextricable inter-relatedness of the phenomena that other theoretical positions refer to as language, culture and identity. The bakhtinian framework I have adopted probes deeply into the contextual nature of dialogic exchanges, and has therefore been useful in identifying something of the complexity of these inter-related phenomena. One example of this can be seen in the discussion about the role of the superaddressee in changing the way in which Wadi and I use the word "different" (and the discourses surrounding that) in the same dialogic episode. This discussion highlighted the contingency of dialogic stances. We were both supporters of the "different (neutral)" discourse, but also and almost at exactly the same time, believers in a "different (negative)" discourse. Looking at the same data in another way, we were both and almost at exactly the same time academics and friends. This kind of contingency is not well expressed in less flexible theoretical models.

Secondly, I have sought to demonstrate how bakhtinian concepts can be used in discourse analysis to focus on some of the deeper currents running through dialogic exchanges. This is also one of the objectives of other forms of discourse analysis, such as Gee's Discourse analysis (1999) and Critical Discourse Analysis (e.g., Fairclough, 2003) and I am not suggesting that my bakhtinian approach can or should replace these other attempts. The protoparadigmatic approach to research design I have employed embraces different perspectives, and I believe that the bakhtinian discourse analysis I have applied here provides another insightful tool to understanding some of the deeper currents

running through dialogic exchanges, including those relating to 'experiences of difference'.

It is important to note that I am not, on the basis of this analysis, advocating for the discontinuation of the terms language, culture and identity within academic discourse more generally, or within specialist fields such as applied linguistics and discourse studies in particular. My argument is that these terms do not fully capture the essence of what they intend to signify (which would be an ontological impossibility) and, therefore, in order to better understand the 'experiences of difference' to which they refer, it is important not to be constrained by essentialist in-fillings of these empty signifiers.

In this chapter, I have explored some similar territory to those who explore language or culture or identity in other studies. The protoparadigmatic approach I have adopted would argue that my way is not better than other ways, but is an important other perspective to consider. I believe the terms language, culture and identity can be extremely useful for reflecting upon and discussing important experiences of difference. However, without the kind of critical reappraisal that I have attempted in this chapter, these discussions can become constrained by dominant discourses that exclude other perspectives and understandings. Thus, I see this study to be a contribution to the ongoing attempt to extend the boundaries of the "limits of Western knowledge disciplines" (Brigg & Muller, 2009, p. 122).

Thirdly, I believe the analysis in this chapter has had the serendipitous outcome of highlighting the way in which the Saudi students in my study effectively understand and contribute to highly complex and contextual dialogic exchanges in their second language. As the excerpts from the data demonstrate, many of the participants still struggle to construct sentences that conform to the rules of grammar for academic English. Nevertheless they are able to engage with complex authoritative and internally persuasive discourses with sensitivity, insight and skill. Just because they have not yet mastered the rules of academic English does not mean that they were not able to use their somewhat limited English to engage with me and each other on a deep level in relation to many important issues.

The Saudi participants' use of the words and syntax are most certainly different to the use of words and syntax that I employ when speaking what I call English. Nevertheless, as a tool for engaging in deep and meaningful dialogic exchanges, the language that the Saudi participants use was perfectly adequate. This finding raises a number of significant questions about the role of academic English as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991), which may be seen to discriminate against or in other ways disempower non-native English speakers from participating in the community of English-language academia. This is an argument that is outside the scope of this study, but I think it is worthy of note.

These data demonstrate that the Saudi participants in my study engaged in rich and deep reflections on a number of important issues, and were able to communicate those to me. The quality of their English is not necessarily a reflection on the quality of their intelligence, wisdom, experience or scholarship.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have used a bakhtinian discourse analysis framework in order to address the second research question which explores 'experiences of difference' as an alternative way of exploring language, culture and identity. The analysis has demonstrated that this framework can point to new insights, particularly with regard to the complexity, contingency and inter-relatedness of these phenomena. The analysis has also demonstrated how these second language users are able to communicate at deep levels with imperfect mastery of the rules of academic English. In the following chapter, I turn to address the third research question, focussing on the ethical and methodological issues that arose in this cross-cultural research project.

# Chapter 7: Research in cross-cultural contexts

## Introduction

In this chapter I switch my analytical lens again; this time to reflect upon the research project with a view to answering the third research question:

> *What ethical and methodological issues relating to the cross-cultural context of this research can be identified?*

As this is a reflexive chapter, I begin by outlining my perspective on reflexive analysis in research. Then I present the key findings of my own reflexive analysis on key elements in the research project. This material is not a running record of everything I did; rather, it is a discussion of those reflexive findings that I believe to be useful in answering the third research question.

In the first part of this chapter, I discuss the development and employment of the research design. In the second part, I explore the complex issue of my own academic identity in relation to this dissertation. In the third part, I attempt to face the challenge of discussing data that could not, for ethical reasons, be disclosed. As I mentioned in Chapter 3 under the discussion on narratives, in order to manage the extremely delicate task, I have employed a form of narrative reconstruction. The stories I tell in the second part of this chapter are not the stories of what happened, but rather are completely fictional stories in which I attempt to convey my thoughts and feelings about some things that happened.

### Bakhtinian reflexive analysis

Reflexive analysis might be seen as the researcher examining him- or herself (in the act of conducting research) as though looking in a mirror (Figure 7.1). Indeed, some papers on reflexivity actually employ the metaphor of a mirror (e.g., Kenny, Styles, & Zariski, 2004). I would agree with Smith (2006) that poorly conceptualised reflexive research can run the risk of becoming unhelpfully solipsistic. A researcher may discover more about him- or herself, but how useful or interesting will that be for other people, and in what ways might that constitute a significant contribution to knowledge?

I have published autoethnographic work (Midgley, 2008b), and I believe that kind of study is useful in understanding the inner world of academia. Framed in this way, I believe it can contribute to knowledge. However, I am not convinced that autoethnography as conceptualised in a purely reflective model can help us learn a lot about the lives of people outside the academy. In order for a non-academic person to conduct a critical autoethnographic study he or she would

first need to be trained as an academic, which would mean that he or she would no longer be a non-academic. In this sense, work that is simply looking at the self as in a mirror can be limited in its application. I prefer to call this work reflective rather than reflexive.
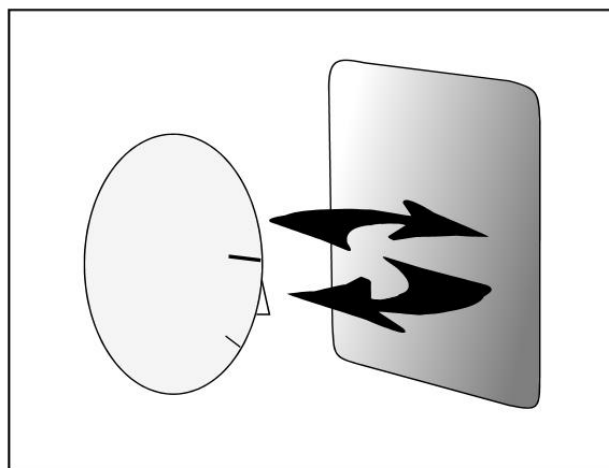


*Figure 7.1: Reflexivity as looking in a mirror*

Another kind of reflective work which is similarly limited is the kind that I believe Walford (1998) had in mind when he complained:

> I find navel-gazing accounts from doctoral students that record every detail of their own learning process very boring to read, and I see them as the worst examples of "vanity ethnography". (p. 5).

In my opinion, recording and reflecting upon all the different steps in the process of conducting research may be very helpful for the researcher's own self-discovery, and it can also be a useful source of knowledge for other research students following along a similar journey. In contrast, my concept of reflexive analysis goes beyond simply reflecting upon me and my actions.

The model of reflexivity I use in this chapter I have developed from the bakhtinian concept of dialogism (see Chapter 6). In this model, when two people engage dialogically, centripetal forces operate to polarise self and other as you and me, whilst at the same time centrifugal forces bring the two together as you-and-me within the time-space context of the particular dialogic engagement. Thus to reflect upon the dialogic engagement in this study, I am looking at "me" as something separate to the "you" of the Saudi participants, but I am also reflecting upon the "me" in "you-and-me". Both of those "me"s are contextually and contingently situated within that dialogic encounter. This

dialogic perspective on reflexivity, therefore, encompasses more than just a mere reflection of what I see when I look at the research.

The important extra dimension of this approach draws on the overlapping bakhtinian theories of transgredience and surplus of seeing (see Chapter 6). According to these theories, I would not be merely reflecting upon an image of myself, but rather I would be learning from looking at you looking at me as illustrated in Figure 7.2. What you see when you look at me, helps me to understand more about myself, and also more about the context in which we engage in dialogue. The opportunity for seeing different perspectives on "me" and "you" and "you-and-me" arises from that distance that is created when self and other (you and me) engage in dialogue. The infinite possibilities of this cyclic process – me looking at you looking at me looking at you looking at me and so on – make this analytical approach a potentially rich source of learning and growth.
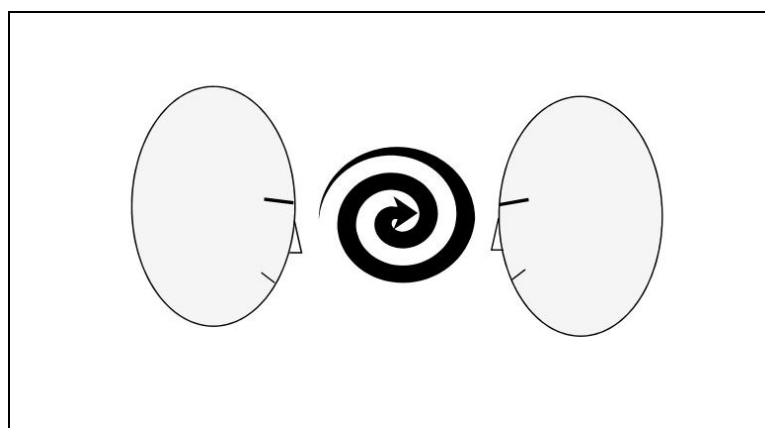


*Figure 7.2: Reflexivity as me looking at you looking at me*

An example of the richness of potentiality within this bakhtinian reflexive analytical method is well captured, I believe, in the beautiful and evocative photograph by Jo Fedora entitled "Looking at me looking at you looking at me" (Figure 7.3). In a reflective model, I would look at what I see – an old man sitting on a bench. I might try to describe what I see such as his clothing and the colour of his hair. I might also think about his circumstances: Is he poor, frail, lost?

In a bakhtinian reflexive model, I look at the old man sitting on the bench, and notice that he appears to be looking at me. I wonder what he is thinking when he looks at me. How does he interpret my appearance and my presence in his world? Is he curious, angry, confused, frustrated? Does he see me as a stranger, a threat, or a potential friend? Does he want to engage with me, or avoid me? This line of thinking helps me to see myself through different eyes (surplus of seeing) and creates the potentiality of learning something new about myself.

*Figure 7.3: Looking at me looking at you looking at me*[8]

As I engage in this process of trying to conceive of what the old man might be thinking about me, I also begin to see him differently. He is no longer just an old man on a bench; I begin to see him as an old man with a history, with thoughts and feelings, perhaps with concerns and worries, perhaps with cherished hopes or shattered dreams. I no longer try to describe him; rather, I try to understand him, and (even though I am only looking at a photographic image) I begin to feel strangely moved. I feel a sense of compassion, a sense of respect, a sense of good-will, and many other things that I struggle to find words for. I want to say "hello". I want to say something that might make him smile.

Where do these feelings come from? I believe this is an example of the mysterious work of transgredience – somehow something has been transmitted from this old man to me, through the reflexive act of looking at the man looking at me looking at him. In this way, I come to know something else about myself, something else about the old man (at the very least, something about the way he has impacted my life), something else about the context in which our eyes met, and, significantly for this dissertation, something else about the power of reflexive analysis.

This is the model of reflexive analysis I have employed in attempting to answer the third research question. I am not merely describing what I did, but rather I am seeking to reflect upon several inter-related layers on dialogic engagement

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[8] Image retrieved May 7th, 2009 from http://www.redbubble.com. Copyright 2009 by Jo Fedora. Used with permission.

including: what I did, in the light of the fact that I did it with Saudi participants; what I saw the Saudi participants do, in the light of the fact that they did it with me; what they might have thought that I might have been thinking, and what I thought that they might have been thinking about what I was thinking, and so on.

This approach may be criticised as being so open-ended that nothing can be known for certain. However, the philosophical foundations of my study, reflected in the wording of Research Question 3, do not seek to validate findings, but instead to explore important issues. My diverse and eclectic comments in this chapter, therefore, represent the things that I think highlight important considerations with regards to the question.

PART 1: REFLECTION UPON THE RESEARCH DESIGN

*THE USE OF LITERATURE*

Like many of my postgraduate student friends I have spoken with, I baulked when my first supervisor asked me to complete a literature review at the beginning of my study. I was reading broadly and extensively, but I did not feel that I was in a position to write a review that would frame my study. Part of this reluctance might be simply explained as being daunted by the size of the task. However, I was wresting with other methodological issues as well. Although my study is not constructed within the same parameters of a Grounded Theory project (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1997), I wanted to refer to the literature in the context of the data analysis rather than in an earlier literature review chapter. During the first year of my candidacy, I explored this issue in a book chapter (Midgley, 2008b) and a symposium presentation (Midgley, 2007).

Two primary concerns emerged for me in terms of methodological decisions. Firstly, as I explored in the book chapter (Midgley, 2008b), the literature on how to investigate identity from within applied linguistics seemed to be unhelpfully limited. If I had followed the literature I was reading at the time without seeking to explore the concept of identity more deeply from the context of my own experience and beliefs, I would most likely have taken a more positivist approach. My autoethnographic conceptual work led me to seek alternative approaches to exploring identity issues for second language users, and this eventually led to the approach I have adopted in this dissertation.

Secondly, as I argued in the symposium presentation (Midgley, 2007), building on the literature follows the axiom of standing on the shoulders of giants. I described it as climbing a mountain using a path that others have previously made, with the aim of going a little higher up the mountain. Whilst this may be a useful approach, I posited that there may be many other mountains to climb.

The literature available to me, a Western academic, cuts a path up the mountain of Western philosophical assumptions, values and perspectives. Building my research upon this literature seems to constrain me to pre-established foundations. My research is in a cross-cultural context, and I wanted to be open to the possibility of exploring other perspectives. Therefore, whilst I read the literature available to me, I tried not to develop my study on the basis of the literature, but rather to draw links between my study and the literature.

Several times in this dissertation I have referred to post-colonial critiques of using Western research methods when conducting research in non-Western contexts (see also Marshall & Batten, 2003). The questions raised by this critique have been an ever-present concern for me throughout this research project. However, I must acknowledge that I am still a Westerner trained in Western academia, and it is likely that much of what I have seen and done has been influenced by this background. As a brief scan of the references list in this dissertation will show, I have drawn on a large number of sources all of which come from within Western academia. I wonder whether it is ever possible to escape from the Western bias whilst working within Western academia. I also note (as I also discussed in my symposium presentation) the pressure I sense to produce a work that will be acceptable to Western academia, because I want to pass this degree and I want to work in a Western academic institution.

To be honest, I am not sure whether I have overcome the problems I foresaw at the beginning of my research. I am not sure whether Western models of research have overly influenced me. I am very interested to hear how others might respond to what I have attempted, and for this reason, I have tried to maintain transparency throughout this dissertation.

*A QUESTION OF ETHICS*

In my university, all postgraduate students conducting research with human participants are required to gain clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee before the data collection begins. The purpose of this committee is to ensure that the requirements outlined in federal policy are maintained. My proposed research was approved by this committee, which suggests that my research activity is therefore ethical. However, ethics review boards operate with principles developed on the assumption that the participants in our research are strangers to us, and therefore whilst giving guidelines for procedural and situation ethics, do not address the important issue of relational ethics (Ellis, 2007).

For example, Medford (2006) expressed her sense of feeling "diminished, silenced, erased" (p. 855) when a person with whom she had previously been in a relationship chose not to acknowledge that relationship in an academic paper. This is perhaps an unusual situation, because in most cases, participants are not

likely to come across a paper written about them in an academic journal (Jones, 2007). Just because they will not read what has been written about them, though, does not resolve the issue. Medford (2006) suggested that the primary ethical standard for academic writing should be to "write as if our subjects are/will be in our audience" (p. 862).

Ellis (2007) took a different approach when dealing with the same complex issues. She wrote an autoethnographic paper on caring for her elderly mother, and chose to omit some of the details when she read the paper aloud to her ailing mother. For Ellis, the deception was justified because she felt it was more important to protect her relationship with her mother than to tell her everything that she had written. This, she admitted, is one of the "grey areas between revealing and concealing" (p. 19).

Many, but not all, of the Saudi participants in my study were friends of mine. I feel concerned about what my Saudi friends would think of my study, but I do not have the same amount of concern about what the other Saudi participants might think. This, I think, is quite natural, but it causes me to wonder whether my research might have been different if all of the other participants had been friends of mine, or if all of the Saudi participants had been strangers to me, or even if all of the Saudi participants were going to read this dissertation. If, as I suspect, these different contexts may have had an influence on the outcome of this study, then it suggests to me that relational ethics is an important consideration in all research involving humans, not just autoethnographic studies.

My reflexive analysis of this study highlighted another dimension of ethics as well. Whilst the procedures and practices I engaged in meet the legal requirements of ethical research, I wonder whether and in what ways my conceptualisation of research is ethical in the sense that Lincoln and Cannella (2009) use the term. I am concerned that the dominant research paradigms of Western academia may "limit the unthought spaces that [particular groups of people] could potentially inhabit as human beings" (Lincoln & Cannella, 2009, p. 280). Am I, in the very act of doing research with these Saudi participants, shoring up the essentialising boxes that I was seeking to challenge? These ethical questions are ones that I continue to grapple with. The process of reflexive analysis – asking these kinds of questions of my research – is the way in which I continue to attempt to grow and learn in these areas.

*Data production design and implementation*

The reasons for selecting narrative discussion groups as a data production method have already been outlined in Chapter 3. As I explained, I felt that this method was the most culturally sensitive and ethically responsible method available to me. By using a completely open-ended narrative format, I tried to

make the narrative discussion groups as naturalistic as possible. Nevertheless, the data we produced seem to have been influenced by the context of their production. The influence might best be described by the theory of the superaddressee (see Chapter 6).

One very obvious manifestation of a superaddressee influencing the data production can be seen in the data from Narrative Discussion Group 1, discussed in Chapter 4:

| | |
|---|---|
| Me: | *it's good. Who started that shop?* |
| Wadi: | *one* |
| Halim: | *Jordanian* |
| Wadi: | *Jordanian guy, yeh* |
| Me: | *good idea. so many Saudis nearby* |
| Halim: | *yeah (laugh)* |
| Me: | *is it full every night?* |
| | *(all laugh)* |
| Halim: | *there is no other restaurant* |
| Wadi: | *I think we jumped from the **(gesturing to recorder)*** |
| Me: | *but that's all right. That's no problem I think we sort of finished anyway **(NDG1)**.* |

Wadi's gesture towards the very small digital recording device on the table suggests that he is thinking about who is listening. Of course, in the most immediate instance it is me who is listening. However it is me the researcher, rather than me the friend, who will be listening to the recording at a later time and then analysing the transcripts of our discussions. Later still, other academics will read the findings of my research. For Wadi, it seems that this Western academic superaddressee does not consider a discussion of local restaurants to be a suitable or significant topic for research purposes, and thus Wadi seeks to shut down the conversation. If this is Wadi's thinking, then it is reasonable to suggest that other Saudi participants may also have engaged with me in the narrative discussion groups under the influence of similar superaddressees. Therefore, what the Saudi participants have told me is, in part at least, influenced by what the Saudi participants think a Western academic will want to hear.

Other experiences also suggest to me that the Saudi participants actively selected what they considered to be appropriate or important to discuss in the narrative discussion groups. One example that I am able to disclose (because it happened in a public place) came to my notice by chance. I was at a local shopping centre one evening, and I happened to park my car beside the car of one of the other Saudi participants. We chatted briefly. During that very short chat, a car drove by. A young man from within that car shouted obscenities at my Saudi friend and then drove off. I was shocked by such abusive behaviour by

a total stranger. However, my Saudi friend seemed to dismiss it by saying, "He's probably drunk." I know from previous conversations with this same Saudi friend that this was not the first time this kind of thing had happened in public.

What startled me about this encounter was that my Saudi friend did not mention any of these experiences during the narrative discussion group in which he participated. In fact, in all the narrative discussion groups, only one person (Basil in Narrative Discussion Group 3 – see Chapter 5) mentioned encounters with racism. Even in that narrative, Basil seemed to be intentionally non-judgmental about the episode, attributing it to drunkenness, and highlighting the actions of another Australian who apologised for the incident.

I find it difficult to believe that these kinds of incidents would not have an impact upon Saudi students. I was shocked by the incident I witnessed myself. I think that if it had been me I would have been angered, hurt and intimidated. The fact that with the notable exception of Basil, none of the Saudi students mentioned racist attitudes at all seems to indicate to me a degree of self-censorship. I can only guess why the Saudi participants might have felt that it was not appropriate or helpful to mention such things which, had they happened to me, I think I would have wanted to talk about it in the context of sharing my experiences.

It may be, for instance, that they did not want to offend me, an Australian, with stories of the bad behaviour of other Australians. This, of course, is only one of many possible explanations. The important point I am raising here is not the reasons why Saudi participants did not talk about racism, but rather to simply note the fact that they chose not to. For whatever reason, it was not considered appropriate or important for our narrative discussion groups. Again, I would account for this with the theory of the superaddressee operating to suppress this kind of discussion.

Noting this phenomenon does not reduce the importance of the findings of my bakhtinian content analysis. I was not trying to present a complete picture of a positivist reality, but rather to communicate what I believe the Saudi students wanted me (and by extension, this university) to know about their experiences in Australia. As I discussed in Chapter 5, I believe that I could accomplish that goal on the basis of the common objective that I and the Saudi participants had of seeking to find ways of better supporting them as international students in Australia.

An important methodological point to be made in raising this issue is that the context of data production (or collection) does influence the data that are produced or collected (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polkinghorne, 2005). Even the most proactive attempts to encourage participants to discuss whatever they

feel is important cannot ensure that participants will discuss everything that is important to them. There remain other influences constraining participants, which I have explained with the bakhtinian theory of superaddressee.

In reflecting upon this process and outcome, I would suggest that in order to provide meaningful outcomes of research, it is vitally important that the goals and objectives of the researcher and the other participants in the research are to some degree in alignment. As Subedi (2007) discovered, when a research project aims to uncover injustices, but participants are focussed on keeping their jobs, research can flounder. In other instances, researchers may accomplish their goals in ways that do not honour, protect, or contribute to the betterment of participants. It seems to me that having common goals and objectives in research is an important application of Appiah's (2006) version of cosmopolitan ethics.

*THE ROLE OF SERENDIPITY*

The inspiration for the design of narrative discussion groups for data production arose from two events that occurred on consecutive days about six months into my PhD study. My notebooks record that on 17 August, 2007, a Saudi student came to my office to ask for help with an essay he was writing. After I helped him with some of his grammar, he asked me how my study was going. I did not record the conversation, and I am not sure at this stage which ideas belong to whom. I wrote down the following points in my notebook after the discussion:

1. *He went to the library to read about the experiences of international students, but there was nothing on Saudis (mostly Chinese, he thought). The Saudi perspective would be good.*

2. *Saudis like to get together to tell stories – old men tell of the old days. Also share experiences.*

3. *It would be good to get groups together to share experiences. Others can add information, or might be reminded of their own stories. This would be enjoyable (telling stories rather than answering questions). It would give more of a Saudi perspective (answering questions has more of a focus on the person who is asking).*

4. *Informal gathering for coffee and chat (in Saudi style) would be natural, enjoyable and helpful.*

The following day, 18 August, 2007, I attended an Open Day at the Islamic Centre on the campus of my university, at the invitation of several of my Saudi friends. The events of that day form the basis for the vignette recorded in Chapter 3. The conversation on 17 August was not planned by me. The Open Day event on 18 August was planned some weeks in advance, but I had no idea what was going to happen there. Both of these events, occurring on consecutive days, gave me ideas that later developed into the concept of narrative discussion groups as a means of data production. I wonder whether I would have taken this approach had I not had these experiences.

This line of thinking leads me to contemplate the role of serendipity more generally on the design, progress and outcomes of my research. For example, I had originally intended to focus on Japanese sojourners. I changed my research proposal after meeting some Saudi students, sensing the tensions relating to how to teach them and noting the lack of literature addressing that situation. Thus, by chance I came upon a need which for me also became an opportunity. I also recall the encounters with books, articles, scholars and ideas which have both informed my study and, I believe, greatly enhanced my work. Whilst I did diligently perform literature searches, some of the most challenging and inspiring concepts came from sources I accessed out of general interest, rather than focussed reviewing. The opportunity to teach a research methodology course part way through my candidature greatly enhanced my conceptualisation of my own methodological approach. These and other experiences that were not planned by me are all instances that might be labelled as serendipitous.

The problem of the role of serendipity in research is that it challenges the notion of research as a professional activity. Marcus (2001), commenting on his reading of doctoral theses in anthropology, notes that many anthropology students struggle with this:

> Yet, aside from the accounts of serendipity, of happenstance opportunity, of circumstantial muddling through response, which indeed constitute the dominant rhetoric by which mostly established scholars explain their interesting and creative divergences from traditional fieldwork practice, there is as yet no alternative modality of method or articulation of a set of regulative ideals governing fieldwork that gives professional legitimacy to what is in fact happening to fieldwork. For students, this is a real problem, because in achieving professional status and credentials through their initial work of ethnography, the rhetoric of serendipity is simply not appropriate for them as it is for the established scholar. (p. 527)

Indeed, had it not been for my third research question, there would have been no place within my dissertation to discuss the role of serendipity.

There are several important reasons why I think serendipity needs to be discussed. Firstly, it is an important element of transparency in reporting on research. I have worked hard on my dissertation, but the findings I am presenting here are not only the result of hard work; I owe some of the most interesting findings to good fortune. In what ways might this observation reflect upon the quality of my scholarship? I find myself in agreement with Stronach, Garret, Pearce and Piper (2007):

> We would rather regard reflexivity as an event in which we somewhat intentionally participate, but nevertheless acknowledge inescapable remainders of the unconscious and the unintended. (Endnote 4, p. 198)

I would extend that sentiment to cover this entire research project: it is something that I intentionally, enthusiastically and laboriously participated in, and yet I acknowledge the benefit I have derived from the unconscious, unintended and unplanned influences that have continued to guide me.

At another level, acknowledging the important role that serendipity has played in my own research provides a critical response to Marshall and Rossman (2006) who suggest that serendipity is a problem that can threaten a research project, and must therefore be kept in check by striking a balance between "efficiency and flexibility" (p. 154). I would argue that if a researcher discovers something that is completely outside the scope of the original research design, then it should not simply be balanced out of the study. If there is not space or time to explore it fully, it should at least be noted for further study. I have demonstrated elsewhere (Midgley, 2008a) how what appears to be a completely unsuccessful research project can still provide useful insights. Subedi (2007) has done likewise.

*WHOSE DATA?*

On another level, I struggle with the ethical connotations of referring to this study as "my research". During the data production phase, I had the opportunity to discuss some of the preliminary findings with a lecturer interested in providing better support to Saudi students. In asking me to share my preliminary findings, she made a point of insisting that she would not use any information I gave her without acknowledging it as my work. This comment, which I acknowledge as both professional and gracious, nevertheless caused me to wonder to what extent this research (and its findings) belonged to me. Upon what grounds could I make a claim of ownership? I might claim the words I am writing here as my own creative labour, but can I legitimately claim discoveries that I came upon by chance? Is there a way of distinguishing that which is the product of a scholar's labour, and that which is pure chance? These are ethical questions that I believe need to be raised, even though I have no answer to them at this time.

Following the same line of reasoning, I am also led to think about the complexity of the role that the Saudi participants played in this research project. Can I claim as "my data" the things that these men told me during narrative discussion groups? Does the signing of a consent form equate to the signing over of rights? Do I now own their words? The commoditisation of intellectual property perspective that predominates in Western academia may suggest that I do, in fact, own the data for my study. However, this is a view I find difficult to accept. My perspective finds resonance with postcolonial writings, including seminal works by Said (1978), Spivak (1988) and Smith (1999). This stream of thought highlights the ways in which Western perspectives on research and reporting on people from non-Western backgrounds can serve to reinforce Western hegemony.

The legal and ethical questions relating to control and ownership of cultural knowledges have been explored in depth by many conducting research with Indigenous, First Nations and Aboriginal people (e.g. Darou, Kurtness & Hum, 1993; Schnarch, 2004; Sommer, 1999). However, my research was not with an Indigenous community. I was not exploring cultural knowledges, but rather trying to understand the everyday experiences of Saudi students at an Australian university. Nevertheless, I have gained a personal benefit from the things that the Saudi students told me. I have published several chapters and articles, and won a bursary to present a paper at an international conference about my research. These are all positive gains in terms of my career as a researcher. Had the Saudi students not told me anything, I would not have achieved these benefits. In this sense, even seemingly mundane data can become a commodity. They may not be of value to the other participants, but they are of value to me as a researcher. Can I claim ownership over the data simply because they is not of any foreseeable use to the other participants?

In pondering this issue, I located a publication by Abdullah and Stringer (1997) in which they draw the distinction between Aboriginal Terms of Reference (ATR) which guide decisions about what kinds of knowledge are valued from Indigenous Australian perspectives, and Academic Terms of Reference (AcTR) which are the criteria that Western academia would use to evaluate research. I wonder whether I have any idea at all about what Saudi Terms of Reference might be.

By applying a bakhtinian reflexive lens to the research project, I am drawn to ask myself these questions about what the Saudi participants might think about what I am doing. The standard response to this line of question would be to ask the participants themselves. In qualitative research, this is sometimes referred to as verifying the data (Creswell, 2005). This may indeed be a fruitful line of investigation. However, the bakhtinian framework of reflexive analysis, operating within a protoparadigmatic understanding of research I have adopted in this study, argues against this as a solution. I can ask the Saudi participants what they think about my research, but ultimately what they say

will be influenced by the context of the question. In other words, their response to my questioning may well be a reflection on their perspective of what is important in Western research, rather than a reflection of a Saudi perspective on research. The superaddressee continues to be powerfully present.

Rather than continue collecting data by referring back to the other participants, I have chosen in this chapter to focus on bakhtinian reflexivity. I think about what I have done then I think about what the Saudi participants might think about what I have done. This causes me to think differently about what I have done. In some way I have better understood myself, my role as a researcher, the way in which my backgrounds and beliefs have influenced my research, and the potential weaknesses of this approach. Therefore I ask, "Whose data are these?" and in asking the question I have learnt something more about myself and research in cross-cultural contexts.

MacDougall (1998) raised another important question in regards to power and control in research. In his discussion of video-documentation in anthropology, he argues that "inevitably, a method that purports to disperse some of its authority to its subjects is also capable of using this to reinforce its own" (p. 154). If I were to take my findings to my Saudi participants and ask them to confirm them (Patton, 2002) through member checking (Creswell, 2002), according to traditional models of qualitative research, I may find that the Saudi participants, responding to the powerful presence of Western academic superaddressees, agree that the findings are a true representation of their thoughts, feelings and beliefs. I could then publish my findings not simply as what I think the Saudi students think, feel and believe, but as the reality or facts about what Saudi students think, feel and believe. Any alternative perspectives, which might be suppressed by the presence of Western academic superaddressees, become silenced. Western academia, through me, would therefore have exerted its authority over the Saudi students, a little like achieving a confession under duress. I have chosen not to attempt to validate my findings; rather, I intentionally own them as my own perspective on what I believe the Saudi participants want me to know in order to help their fellow Saudi students.

*WHAT SHOULD I SAY ABOUT WHAT I CANNOT DISCUSS?*

Besides what Saudi participants decided not to discuss (see above) there was one occasion in which a participant later requested that I not use some of the things that he had said. This discussion was not a part of a narrative discussion group, so I did not need to delete any sections of any of the narrative discussion group transcripts. However, I had recorded what was said and so at the request of the participant, I deleted the recording without transcribing it. Of course, I could not delete the things that he had said from my memory. This raised for me the difficult ethical question of what to do with things I know of but cannot write about.

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Within Australia, there are legal requirements for some professionals to disclose some information, even if the information is given confidentially. For example, the Family Law Act (1975) of Australia mandates that a family counsellor must notify a prescribed child welfare authority if he or she has reasonable grounds for suspecting a child has been or is at risk of being abused (Family Law Act, 1975, 67ZA). In such an instance, the confidentiality of the counsellor-counselee relationship is over-ridden by the legislative requirement for mandatory notification. No such legislative requirements exist for information that might be considered important findings in the context of research but cannot, due to procedural ethical constraints, be disclosed.

The concern that I see in this context is that the things I have experienced, but cannot report on, may have influenced the way I have conducted this research. My strategy for making visible researcher bias was to maintain transparency, but there are some things about which I cannot be transparent. Therefore the reader has no way of knowing whether or not silenced experiences may or may not have influenced the research project. Without this kind of reflexive analysis, I also would not have an opportunity to explore these issues. My attempt to overcome this difficulty is found in the fictionalised accounts that are recorded in Part 3 of this chapter.

## PART 2 – LOST IN THE WILDERNESS?

At the outset of my PhD journey, I wrote a paper entitled *Lost in the wilderness: When the search for identity comes up blank* (Midgley, 2008b). In this autoethnographic study, I explored the issue of my own identity, which led me to make significant decisions about the direction of this study. As I write now towards the end of this same PhD journey, I find myself lost in another wilderness; namely, how should I position my dissertation, and thus myself, in the world of academia.

Shortly before writing this section I applied for a permanent academic position advertised as "Lecturer (TESOL and Applied Linguistics)". I was excited when the position became available because I thought that my PhD study and previous work experience made me an excellent candidate for the position. Naturally, I was rather disappointed when my application was unsuccessful. Beyond the dismay at not getting the job I wanted, though, loomed a larger concern. Given that academic vacancies in applied linguistics are not particularly common, I find myself wondering how I might begin positioning myself to enhance my opportunity to be successful in applying for some other academic appointment, which may not be a specialist applied linguistics position.

Had my application been successful, I would have become a Lecturer (TESOL and Applied Linguistics) and this academic identity would have influenced a

number of important career-related decisions. I would have continued my membership with the Applied Linguistics Association of Australia and also applied for membership with other TESOL and applied linguistics organisations. Decisions about what conferences to attend, and what journals to target for publications, would also have been strongly influenced by this.

It strikes me that a number of important decisions relating to my almost complete dissertation were also affected by my unsuccessful job application. Given that my study explores issues on the boundaries of a number of disciplinary areas, it is possible for me to frame the dissertation in such a way as to position it within a number of different disciplinary specialisations. Had I been successful in my application for the applied linguistics position, I would most likely have tried to highlight sociolinguistic dimensions of my study, with a view to having it examined by experts in that field.

Not knowing what academic positions may become available in the future, it is difficult for me to decide which disciplinary frameworks I should emphasise in my study. I am in a quandary as to how to position my study, and therefore how to position myself as an academic. I am unsure which experts from which fields I should be addressing, because I am unsure which field I am working in, or rather in which field I ought to be working. For the same reasons, I am unsure which parts of my literature review I should expand, and which parts I should reduce.

In the end, I have decided that this also is a serendipitous event. In what might be described as poetic justice, I find that my dissertation has become an object lesson in the very concepts I have explored within it. What is my dissertation about? What is the focus of my study? What is my disciplinary area? The answer depends on who is asking and when they are asking. In my recent job interview, I said that I was an expert in TESOL and Applied Linguistics, and that my dissertation was in the field of sociolinguistics. Now, I am not so sure. This serendipitous realisation does not necessarily mean that my dissertation is of no value or intrinsic worth. Rather it highlights the point that 'experiences of difference' (including academic positioning) are highly contextual and contingent. My academic work does not fit neatly within any single disciplinary box, and my dissertation cannot be so neatly contained either. This may not be a mainstream perspective on academic work, but I am comfortable here.

## PART 3 – WHAT COULD NOT BE SAID

### FICTIONALISING

As already explained, one significant ethical issue I have faced in writing this dissertation is the challenge of what to do with information that I could not disclose. My concern is not that I found some exciting discovery that I wish I

could take credit for, but rather that by maintaining silence, I fear that I am not being fully transparent in my reporting. My solution to the problem has been to employ fictionalisation.

It is important for me to stress at the outset of this section that the following three short stories are completely fictional. I have set all of them in Japan: a country in which my family and I lived for a period of twelve years. Whilst some of the details are drawn from my memories of those years, the characters and places are all creations of my imagination. The stories are not about my time in Japan, nor are they stories about what happened here in Australia. I made them all up.

For research within many paradigms, using fictional stories to communicate research findings would be considered inappropriate. Nevertheless, a number of researchers including Peter Clough (2002), Pranee Liamputtong (2006) and Carolyn Ellis (2007) have developed a theoretical case for the use of stories and other forms of creative expression in order to communicate the findings of sensitive research.

Research on sensitive topics requires special attention to the protection of privacy and maintaining the confidentiality of participants. This can be quite difficult in qualitative research because the textual data used in reporting include a lot of collateral data that, through a process of "deductive disclosure" (Lee, 1993, p. 175), may lead the reader to identify a particular participant as the source. Although not suggested by Lee (1993), I would argue that fictionalisation can be a useful tool for maintaining confidentiality, as it allows the researcher to remove or alter the collateral data, thereby providing fewer data for deductive disclosure. Clough (2002) has argued that "as a means of educational report, stories can provide a means by which those truths, which cannot be otherwise told, are uncovered" (p. 8). By fictionalising, fragments of data from various real events can be drawn together to communicate important truths about important happenings, whilst at the same time protecting the anonymity of the research participants. In this way, the researcher can communicate concepts, ideas and experiences that might otherwise be impossible to report on. This draws on a similar principle to the "mindful slippage between Truth and truthfulness" (Medford, 2006, p. 853), in which the difference between what the researcher knows and what the researcher writes is intentional and based on the assessment of what is appropriate and necessary under the circumstances.

The intention of writing these stories is to express my thoughts and feelings towards some of the other things that happened during the process of conducting this research which, in order to comply with procedural ethics requirements, I could not disclose in this dissertation. I struggled for well over a year in trying to decide whether or not to attempt this part of my dissertation,

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largely because I felt I was taking a large risk without any guarantee of success. My mind was made up late in my candidature by an event which, for the very same reasons relating to privacy and confidentiality, I cannot relate in detail. The way in which this event unfolded challenged me to reflect upon the ways in which my silence on issues I considered to be matters of injustice could make me complicit in such acts.

In response to this event, I set about to do what I was able to do in order to oppose what I considered to be injustices, without crossing any of the legal, ethical or moral boundaries that have been set in place around me and my research project. Certainly, I could have done that without needing to report on it in this dissertation. However, in order for my work to be complete, I felt that I needed to at least attempt to communicate that there was more to this study than I could write in this dissertation.

Fictionalising in this way raises another important ethical consideration. Jones (2007), in discussing performative social science, notes that participants who give their consent to participate in a study are most likely to believe that the information they give in interviews will be published in traditional academic writing destined for academic journals. Transforming what the researcher has learnt through the research process into a performative event – or in the case of my research, into fictionalised accounts – raises the question of whether or not participants should be included in consenting and even producing these representations. Jones avoided the problem by focussing on an autoethnographic study, and in this section of my dissertation I follow the same line. What are represented below are not the things that participants have said to me. Rather, they represent my own thoughts, feelings and reactions to things that occurred during the three years in which I conducted this study.

**Story one**
*I was so excited that morning that I was up long before the sun. At last I would get to meet him. At last, my chance.*

*It must have been ten years since I first started to notice something was wrong. It wasn't that I'd wandered off the path; it was more like the path had begun to wear away beneath me. Now it was getting desperate. Everything was crumbling away beneath me. No way forward. No way back. No way at all.*

*I'd come to Asia looking for answers four years ago. The first country I came to was Japan, and that's where I ran out of money. I got stuck in a job teaching English to high school kids, and my great trek for understanding was over before it even really began. But then I heard about Murayama. Some said he was an old Buddhist priest; some said he was an old mystic healer; others said he was just old. I didn't really care what he was, as long as he could help. I needed some answers, and I needed them now.*

*Murayama grunted in response to my greeting as I sat on the cushion the old lady pointed to. He was staring into the oddly-shaped cup in front of him. For a long time he just sat there staring. I wondered if I should say something, but decided it was better to wait whilst he pondered over the truths he would share. Finally he looked up at me.*

*"Who are you?" he asked.*

*"Warren."*

*"What?"*

*"Warren," I replied, as slowly and clearly as I could.*

*"American?" he asked.*

*"No I'm Australian," I answered.*

*"You're all as bad as each other. Selfish, proud, arrogant and rude. Get lost, will you?"*

**Story two**

*He was such a happy little boy. Every day I walked through the park, and every day he'd be there playing on the swings, digging in the sand pit, chasing dragonflies, blowing bubbles: always doing something, and always having fun doing it. I guess his parents both worked during the day, because I never saw either of them at the park. On a couple of occasions I'd seen his grandmother Ba-chan sitting with him, but usually Ba-chan was at home doing chores. Or so he told me.*

*Not that I asked him, mind you. I was just walking down the path as normal one day and for some reason he suddenly looked up at me with those big brown eyes and said, "Ba-chan's at home cooking."*

*"Oh, is she?" I replied. "That's good."*

*He smiled and went back to playing with an empty milk carton. Most days after that, when he saw me walk by, he gave me his report:*

*"Ba-chan's doing the dishes."*

*"Ba-chan's having a rest."*

*"Ba-chan's cleaning the toilet."*

*"Oh, is she? That's good." I would usually reply. What would I know about how to talk to little kids?*

*He didn't seem to mind what I said, though, because he always smiled back at me. Our little exchanges became a part of my daily routine; one of those little things that you just do, that somehow seem to give stability and grounding to an otherwise frantic life.*

*So of course I missed him that morning. Maybe he's sick, I thought on my way to work. Or maybe Ba-chan was unwell.*

*I didn't find out until I got home. In fact, it was watching the late-night English broadcast of the news. I only remember it in patches:*

> *…four-year old boy…*

> *…intellectual handicap…*

> *…tied to a tree…*

*And then there he was, or a photo of him anyway, smiling out of my TV with those big brown eyes: such a happy little boy. Why would anyone want to hurt him?*

**Story three**

*"I have no choice," he almost whispered. Kenji was only two years younger than me, but as he sat there almost in tears, he suddenly seemed a lot younger, a lot more vulnerable.*

*"You've always got a choice," I said.*

*He just shook his head.*

*"It's just not right," I insisted, trying to urge both courage and action upon my friend with the intensity of my voice. "Just tell him, no."*

*Kenji shook his head again. He scratched his cheek, but it might have been a tear he was wiping away. I wasn't sure.*

*"You have a wife and two little kids," I continued. "He can't ask you to go."*

*"He's the boss."*

*"But it's not right," I repeated.*

*He shrugged.*

*"Your kids won't even recognise you when you get back."*

*He looked down, shook his head, looked up again.*

*"Kenji," I began, but he cut me off.*

*His tears had faded. His years had returned. He stared at me with a look that I couldn't really interpret. Was he angry? Frustrated? Determined? Resigned?*

*"No," he said, with a tone I couldn't read either. "I know you don't understand, but that's just the way it is over here. I have no choice."*

## DISCUSSION

As I noted at the outset of this section, these three stories are not allegories, nor are they written in secret code. I have intentionally constructed them in such a way that the reader will find no keys to interpret the true meaning of the stories, nor be able to reconstruct the events which they represent. As I explained in the introduction to the stories, they are intended to express some of the thoughts and feelings I had in response to things that happened which, for various ethical reasons, I am unable to disclose. I hope that through these stories I have been successful in communicating feelings that I experienced quite strongly at various times throughout the course of this study.

The point of this experimental journey into narrative reconstruction is two-fold. Firstly, I wanted to be as transparent as possible in reporting on my research. To deny that there was more to the process than I am ethically permitted to report on seems to me to be a lack of transparency. Indeed, in a dissertation of this length, not to mention something seems to imply that it did not happen. I have tried to wriggle my way out from between the proverbial rock and hard place of not being able to say something, and yet not being comfortable about not saying it.

Secondly, without this section I fear that this dissertation will leave the reader with the impression that the only issues facing Saudi students in Australia are the ones that Saudi participants chose to discuss in our narrative discussion groups. Some of those things are no doubt important, and I believe the findings in Chapter 5 will help in providing better support to Saudi students in Australia. Nevertheless, some of the other things I have heard and seen over the course of this study, suggest to me that there may be much more to the story than what I have been told. Therefore, this small section in my dissertation is intended to flag the possibility – indeed likelihood in my opinion – that there may be many more things that might be addressed at some stage in the future. I do not believe that I am in the position to be able to force the issue. If some of these other issues become significant problems for Saudi students, I can only trust and hope that they will chose to communicate these to me or somebody else in such a way as to provide insight into how universities can better provide support.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have sought to explore some of the ethical and methodological issues that I have faced in this cross-cultural research project. My findings are not intended to be exhaustive; nor are they conclusive. Rather, I have taken the opportunity to raise some questions that I felt, upon reflection, are important to consider in research that engages in cross-cultural contexts, based on my own experience. In the next chapter, I summarise the key findings of this study, and discuss limitations, implications, contributions to knowledge and areas for future study.

# Chapter 8: Conclusion

## Introduction

In this chapter I draw together the most significant findings of this study. After a brief overview of the three analysis chapters, I briefly discuss limitations, reiterating the exploratory nature of this study and the implications of that approach in terms of transferability. I then outline in more depth what I consider to be the major contributions to knowledge theoretically, methodologically and empirically. I conclude by outlining suggestions for future research to develop the work I have reported on in this dissertation.

## Overview

I used three bakhtinian analytical frameworks to explore the stories that emerged in narrative discussion groups with Saudi participants. The first framework – a bakhtinian content analysis – was used in Chapter 5 to explore what the Saudi students said about their experiences. I grouped the stories told under the headings expectations, differences and struggles. Differing opinions that became evident in the data pointed to the weakness of reductionist approaches to researching the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

The second analytical framework was a bakhtinian discourse analysis. This was employed in Chapter 6 to explore what the group discussions revealed about 'experiences of difference'. This approach was presented as an alternative way of exploring the concepts of language, culture and identity.

In Chapter 7, the third analytical framework – a bakhtinian reflexive analysis – highlighted a number of ethical and methodological issues relating to the research more generally, including the relatively unexplored role of serendipity in research, questions of ownership and knowledge rights, and the ethical dilemma of what to do with information that the researcher does not have permission to disclose.

## Limitations

Exploratory qualitative research does not seek to produce generalisable findings, and therefore issues often discussed under the heading of "limitations" in quantitative explanatory studies, such as questions regarding the sample size or method of sampling, are not germane to this discussion. Below, I address three important questions that might be raised with regards to the way in which this study has been designed and conducted: was it "real"? is

it "true"? and will it be "relevant"?  I then approach the question of limitations from a different angle by reflecting upon what I might have done differently.


**Was it "real"?**
Often exploratory qualitative studies adopt a naturalistic inquiry approach, whereby data are collected from real life situations without any attempt to construct an artificial data collection environment (Patton, 2002). One reason for this is that using a non-naturalistic approach for research in the social sciences could be challenged on the grounds that research conducted in artificial environments cannot be applied to the real world. In other words, data collected in focus groups would not explain how people's attitudes influence their decisions in life; rather they would explain how people respond to questions in focus groups. Following this line of argument, if we wanted to understand how people behaved in real life, we would need to observe them in real life.


From my dialogical epistemological stance, the distinction between naturalistic and non-naturalistic is an artificially constructed one. In other words, there is no such thing as a non-manipulated environment for research in the social sciences. The very presence of the researcher, and the act of noticing, recording, and responding, are all contextual factors that influence the findings. The way in which the researcher comes to know something affects what knowledge the researcher comes to acquire, or – as the proverbial statement goes – looking through rose-coloured glasses will give you a rose-coloured view of the world. The dialogical perspective insists that there are no clear glasses.


Furthermore, the dialogical context of the research reporting – that is to say, the intended audience, and the writer's relationship to it – is also a significant influencing contextual factor. If I am observing a group of teenagers for a sociological research project I am likely to notice very different things than if I am observing the same group of teenagers with a view to telling a humorous story to my family. Even if I notice the same things, I will report on it differently in different contexts. This is the nature of dialogic engagement.


Therefore, whilst I have produced data in the artificially constructed environment of narrative discussion groups, I do not believe this has produced data that are any less real than data collected through, for instance, non-interventionary participant observation. Rather than try to solve the problem of trying to achieve naturalistic objectivity, I have sought to embrace the contextual and contingent dimensions of my study as key elements in the research design.

**Is it "true"?**

The objection may be raised that the analysis in Chapter 5, represents my own interpretation of what the Saudi participants said, rather than their true thoughts and feelings about their experiences. In response, I would argue that it is not possible for me to represent anything other than my own interpretation of data, and that no matter how often I were to check my findings with Saudi participants, what I would end up with is my interpretation of what they had said. The dialogical epistemological stance I have adopted would further argue that each reader of my dissertation would engage with the findings from different contextual backgrounds which would also influence the interpretation of the findings.

This line of thinking raises an important criticism that is often made of postmodern approaches to research; namely, if everything is subject to individual interpretations, what is the point of doing research? Can we ever find any useful information? In response, I would argue that the objective of the analysis in Chapter 5 was to represent what I believe the Saudi students wanted me (and by extension, this university) to know about their experiences as students in Australia. As I stated in Chapter 1, the focus of this study arose out of my desire to help provide better support for Saudi students in their study whilst in Australia. I believe that the Saudi students also hope for better support whilst studying here. Thus we both have at least one goal in common: seeking to communicate to Australian university staff what they need to know in order to better support Saudi students. With this as a common goal, I would argue that the objective noted above can provide meaningful and useful insights, even if it does not represent a static and objective truth.

**Will it be "relevant"?**

In this dissertation, I am not attempting to generalise the findings to a larger target population (such as all Saudi students in Australia). However, the content analysis component of this study (Chapter 5) did explore issues that may be transferable (Creswell, 2005). Thus, for instance, whilst not all married Saudi students may struggle with anxiety over the safety of their wives at home (see Chapter 5), there may be some who do. There may also be husbands from different cultural backgrounds that have similar struggles. In this sense, the findings might be transferable to similar contexts. In this dissertation I have given a thick description (Geertz, 1973) in order to better facilitate the process of thinking about what aspects of these findings might be transferable to other contexts.

This same finding with relation to husbands worrying about their wives also highlights the fact that there may be many different and culturally unique stressors in the lives of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and these may not be obvious to others. This more general implication of the findings may be transferred to broader contexts in which academic, administrative and support staff are working with students from

different backgrounds. I have noted some of these important general implications in the next section under empirical contributions to knowledge.

**What might I have done differently?**

With an exploratory study like this, there are many different decisions that need to be made along the way. Any one of those decisions may significantly impact upon the outcome of the study. In this section, I am not seeking to extrapolate these possibilities, as it seems to me that they are endless. Rather, in reflecting upon this study, I note four options that I did not select along the way, which might have enhanced or enriched the study in some way. These four have been selected not to demonstrate an exclusive list of limitations, but simply to demonstrate the kinds of decisions that are made in this kind of study, and how that may affect the outcome.

The first choice I might have changed was with regard to the naming protocol. As I discussed in Chapter 4, the Saudi participants in this study had already completed their degrees and left Australia before I had reached a decision on how to anonymise. In hindsight, I would have liked to have discussed this with the participants. It may be that they would have been happy with the decision I have made; however, I would be interested to know what they thought of my decision. I would also be interested to know whether they feel honoured and esteemed by the names I have chosen to give them, which has been my intention.

These thoughts were brought to the fore for me when I had a discussion with a colleague who had been a participant in a research project before becoming an academic. This colleague recognised herself as a participant in a research report (a book). She was surprised by the name that the researchers had chosen to represent her, and also expressed a sense of having been disempowered. She said that she would have liked to have been acknowledged as the source of the ideas that were attributed to this anonymous other. I would have been very interested to know what the Saudi participants thought about this. Unfortunately, at the time I was conducting the narrative discussion groups, I simply accepted as given that the names of participants would be anonymised, and it was not until it was too late that I began to consider other options.

Another thing that I might have done differently is to have met with the same groups of Saudi participants on more than one occasion. I did not do this for pragmatic reasons – the Saudi students were busy, and my time was also limited by the terms of my research scholarship and degree. Nevertheless, it might have been interesting to also document how the stories changed (or did not change) as we journeyed together through a series of narrative discussion groups. This is something that might be pursued in future studies.

A third thing that I might have done differently is to try to have the same kinds of discussions with Saudi students who had finished their studies and returned to work in Saudi Arabia. The reasons for not doing this were also pragmatic – not only was there no time, I also did not have the finances to make that kind of extended visit, nor did I have contacts in Saudi Arabia at the time who could have been potential participants. This also is something that might be pursued in future or related studies.

The final thing that I would note here is that I might also have sought to gain an understanding of how others in the university viewed Saudi students. It would have been interesting to see whether teaching, administrative and support staff at the university viewed the Saudi students and their experiences in the same way as the Saudi students described themselves to me. I suspect that they would not be the same. I do not have any data to support that suggestion, though, and this line of inquiry might also be something of interest for future research that might enhance the overall understanding of the experiences of Saudi students studying in Australian universities.

## CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

In the following section, I summarise what I consider to be the key contributions to knowledge under the headings of "theoretical", "methodological" and "empirical". It is important to note that these ideas are closely inter-related, and there is considerable overlap. I have grouped them under the three headings in order demonstrate the different kinds of contribution to knowledge which I have identified.

### *THEORETICAL*

One significant contribution to theoretical knowledge is the conceptualisation of language, culture and identity as empty signifiers that operate within a unified model which I have called 'experiences of difference' (see Chapter 1). This is significant because the terms language, culture and identity permeate studies throughout almost every conceivable area of social science research. Continuing to explore theoretical ways in which to conceptualise these terms may contribute to discussions across a very broad range of disciplines.

There are two key concepts to be drawn from the discussion in Chapter 1. Firstly, as empty signifiers, the terms language, culture and identity are liable to be filled with political meaning. Therefore, any theoretical discussion employing these terms might be enhanced by seeking to deconstruct them in an attempt to identify elements of the political infilling, and the implications of that upon the broader theoretical discussion. Secondly, by recognising that all three terms refer to different dimensions of 'experiences of difference', conceptual links between discussions surrounding each of the three terms

might be teased out more fully. What one theory might label as language, might speak also to an element that another theory has labelled identity.

Another contribution to theory is the conceptualisation of language as four-dimensional (Chapter 2). This ontological stance finds resonance with other views on language which highlight the importance of context (e.g., Halliday, 1973); however, by specifically identifying time as one of the properties of language this theoretical position emphasises the crucial significance of temporal contextuality (or locatedness) in a way that might lead to further fruitful explorations into the nature of language.

A third contribution to theory is the conceptualisation of four different kinds of approach to qualitative research, including the neologism protoparadigmic which I have used to describe one of them (Chapter 2). This perspective draws the focus on analysing research methodology away from rigid schools of thought (about which there is no clear consensus) and emphasises instead the various foci of different research approaches. This helps to identify resonances that might exist between research approaches that do not neatly fit into more rigid frameworks. This is especially important for the growing body of research that is often labelled with a term containing the prefix post. Rather than insist that all of these approaches are post-structural or post-empirical, the framework outlined in Chapter 2 looks to the objectives of each research endeavour as a means of seeking out points of similarity. According to this approach many, but not all, post research paradigms might be identified as protoparadigmatic without diminishing many of their distinctive features.

## METHODOLOGICAL

One of the important contributions to knowledge with regards to research methodology is the development of narrative discussion groups as a data production method (Chapter 3). The method itself – combining the principles of open-ended interviews, group interviews and narrative interviews – might be utilised in other exploratory studies to create opportunities for learning and mutual understanding that may not be available using other more structured data collection methods. I would suggest that this would be particularly useful in research that engages with cross-cultural contexts.

Furthermore, the way in which I designed the method in engaging with the other participants in the research (see Chapter 3) might also be employed in other research contexts. Rather than selecting a method before engaging with participants, researchers seeking to explore experiences in a similar way to what I have done in this study may find it useful to spend time with potential participants before making decisions about research design. This principle of involving the other participants in the design of the research is employed in

participatory action research (McTaggart & Kemmis, 2005). In this study I have shown another way in which this principle can be applied.

Another contribution to methodological knowledge is in the area of data analysis. I have developed what I have called a bakhtinian content analysis (Chapter 5), a bakhtinian discourse analysis (Chapter 6) and a bakhtinian reflexive analysis (Chapter 7). Each of these analytical approaches seeks to bring a slightly different focus to the method of analysing data, and might be employed in other studies with similar kinds of data. Two concepts developed within Chapter 6 which I think may be particularly fruitful tools for future study are the distinction between implicit and explicit authoritative discourses, and the presence, role and influence of superaddressees (see Midgley, in press; Midgley, Henderson, & Danaher, in press).

Several important contributions to knowledge with regards to ethical implications of research were also drawn out in Chapter 7. The importance of considering relational ethics in research was one important finding that has been highlighted in autoethnographic studies (e.g., Ellis, 2007) but this study has shown that relational ethics is also an important consideration in other kinds of study (see also Henderson & Midgley, in press). The role of serendipity and the complex issue of ownership rights over data were also highlighted in Chapter 7. These are both theoretical and methodological issues, and I believe that highlighting them in this dissertation contributes to the important ongoing discussion of these aspects of research.

The final contribution to methodological knowledge that I would note here is the way that I have used fictional accounts to point to experiences that seemed to be important, but which for various procedural, ethical or practical reasons could not be discussed. Whilst I have not actually discussed the issues, I hope that through these fictionalised accounts I have successfully communicated my belief that there is more to the story than I have been able to represent in this dissertation. This same strategy might be employed in other studies where the person reporting on the research is aware of important issues that cannot be explicitly discussed in order to maintain transparency without compromising confidentiality.

*EMPIRICAL*

There are also a number of empirical contributions to knowledge which I would note by way of conclusion. One of them was the laughter infix which I discovered by accident through the process of deciding how to transcribe the recordings (see Chapter 4). The literature on infixes in English has not explored this phenomenon. As a matter of interest to linguists, this seems to be an area that might be examined more fully in other studies.

The primary contribution to empirical knowledge is contained, I believe, in the analysis and discussion in Chapter 5. This includes the summary of different expectations, differences and struggles that the Saudi students chose to tell me about (see Table 5.1). Another important empirical finding was the significant differences in attitudes and beliefs between two participants who otherwise seemed to be very similar, discussed in length in the second part of Chapter 5 (see also Midgley, 2009a). This empirical finding suggests that reductionist approaches to understanding student experiences may not provide a reliable foundation for meaningful engagement with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Another significant outcome of the analysis of the data in Chapter 5 has been to demonstrate that there are many aspects of the lives of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds that we may not be aware of, and these factors may significantly impact upon their lives (see also Midgley, 2009b). A constant effort on the part of academic, administrative and support staff working with students from different backgrounds to increase awareness and to remain open to the possibility of misunderstandings might enhance student support, learning and engagement.

A significant empirical finding that arose out of the analysis in Chapter 6 is that despite at times struggling with the syntax, grammar and lexicon of the English language, the Saudi students in this study were able to engage at a deep level with complex, multi-layered dialogue. This included very skilful attunement to the presence of superaddressees and to the operation of authoritative and internally persuasive dialogues. These findings support the notion that mastery of a second language is not necessary in order for people to be able to engage in rich and meaningful dialogue in that language. However, these issues were not explored further in this study.

FURTHER STUDY

The contributions to knowledge that I have highlighted here suggest several different areas of future study that might be explored. All three of the bakhtinian perspectives on analysis - bakhtinian content analysis, bakhtinian discourse analysis and bakhtinian reflexive analysis – might be tested in other contexts and with other data sets. This would have the double advantage of further exploring the investigative power of these frameworks, and also for providing new perspectives on questions or contexts that have been previously investigated with other analytical models. The findings of this dissertation suggest that this might be particularly useful for research in cross-cultural contexts, or for research that focuses on data that is collected in dialogic exchanges more generally. My colleagues and I have already utilised the conceptual framework of superaddressees in another context, with fruitful results (Midgley et al., in press).

Another area of future studies suggested by this dissertation is to continue to explore the experiences of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to gain a fuller understanding of the breadth of experience. This study has sought to add to the literature represented by Byram and Feng's (2006) anthology of research on the experiences of students living and studying abroad in a variety of different cross-cultural contexts. However, this study examined only one other context, using one other method. It seems to me that there is clearly space for many more studies to continue to explore these issues more fully. As studies such as this continue to probe into difference experiences and experiences of difference, the literature surrounding diverse student experiences will be enriched. Whilst this may not provide the kind of generalisable findings that policy makers seek, it may help to provide a greater understanding to the degrees of difference and breadth of experiences that students may have.

One final area of further study suggested in the contributions to knowledge section is to continue to explore the use of the laughter infix in the English language. In order to do this, recorded language data could be analysed using the audio file (without transcribing) in order to capture the laughter in its infixing context. This presents some difficulties for reporting, which may be overcome with the more widespread use of digital publications of research.

## CONCLUSION

The catalyst for this study was a concern that I had about how to best support Saudi students at an Australian university. I also wanted to explore the philosophical and theoretical questions surrounding the concepts referred to in the literature with the terms language culture and identity, and finally decided upon a new framework for thinking about those concepts which I called 'experiences of difference'. I also had a deep desire to explore ways to engage in this research in a manner that was both theoretically and ethically sensitive to the cross-cultural context. Hence, I developed three different research questions, and then I applied three different analytical lenses to the same data in an attempt to answer them.

The answers that I have found – outlined in some depth in this dissertation – clearly indicate that the issues I have tried to investigate are complex and inter-related. There are no simple answers. However, by way of conclusion, I have briefly outlined what I consider to be the first few sentences of an unfinalised response (in the bakhtinian sense) to each of the research questions.

1. What do these Saudi students choose to discuss when talking about their experiences as international students in Australia?

*The Saudi students in this study talked to me about their expectations, differences they experienced, and struggles they faced. Some of the stories they told me surprised me; others were more or less what I had expected. Not all Saudi students had the same experiences, and not all of them had the same perspective on those experiences. It seems clear to me that there is no one representative Saudi experience.*

2. What do these discussions reveal about 'experiences of difference' in this context?

*Language, culture and identity are terms commonly used to point to significant 'experiences of difference'. However, trying to isolate these experiences into discrete concepts is difficult to accomplish, and may not adequately represent the complex contextual dimensions of these experiences. New theoretical frameworks for exploring these experiences, such as the bakhtinian discourse analysis I have developed and applied, might provide helpful new perspectives.*

3. What ethical and methodological issues relating to cross-cultural context of this research can be identified?

*Engaging in ethical research – especially in cross-cultural contexts – involves more than simply meeting ethics review committee requirements. There are a number of important theoretical implications for conducting research in these contexts. The issues are complex and far-reaching, and deserve further exploration.*

ADDING ANOTHER WORD

Bakhtin championed the unfinalised word – always leaving space for something more to be said. I have embraced this approach in my own outlook on research, because I believe it creates the space for people to change and grow. Creating this space is, for me, an expression of hope. I choose to believe the best is yet to come. Nevertheless, a dissertation must come to an end, and this concluding comment represents an arbitrary drawing of the proverbial line-in-the-sand.

Almost two years after I began recording the narrative discussion groups, I took the time to listen to the recordings again. I laughed and I cried as I re-experienced the telling of these stories of the Saudi students' experiences as international students in Australia. I am still not an expert on Saudi customs,

culture and religion. However, I have come to have a much greater understanding of 'experiences of difference', how these may affect students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and how they might inform our approaches in relating to them.

The Saudi students I met with were – in so many ways – very different to me, and yet – in many other ways – very much the same. It seems to me that difference does not need to be conceived as the problem we sometimes think it to be. If we conceptualise difference as an opportunity for learning and growth, I think we can make progress towards learning to live together with those who are different; not in fatalistic resignation, but in the belief that things will be better as a result. In this sense, engaging with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds need not be seen as a problem to be dealt with; rather, it might be seen in a more positive light as a learning opportunity to embrace.

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# Saudi Nursing Students

Hello, my name is Warren. I am conducting a study for my PhD on the language and cultural adjustment of male Saudi nursing students at [this university].

The purpose of this study is to discover more about the experiences of Saudi nursing students here at [this university]. I hope that by understanding your experiences better we will be able to provide you and your fellow Saudi students with better support.

For the purposes of the study, I will run discussion group meetings during semester 1, 2008. Any male Saudi nursing students at [this university] can attend these discussion groups. At these discussion groups I will ask you to talk about your experiences here in Toowoomba. The discussion groups will be run at a time that is suitable for you.

I would like to invite you to participate in at least one of these discussion groups. You can participate in more than one if you like. If you would like to participate please contact me on the number below, or visit me in my office [office number] and I will tell you more about it.

*Warren*



Warren Midgley

[email address and contact numbers]

# Saudi Nursing Students Study
## Information Sheet

There are currently many full-time, on-campus male Saudi nursing students at [this] campus of [this university]; however, there are currently no studies reporting on the experiences of Saudi international students in Australia. This study will investigate the language and cultural adjustment of Saudi students, and also explore the way in which they use their second language (English) to describe themselves and their experiences. If you choose to participate, you will be invited to join in at least one discussion group made up of other male Saudi nursing students and me, the facilitator. The discussion groups will be held approximately once a week for one semester and you can attend as many or as few as you wish.

In the discussion groups, I will not ask a specific list of questions; rather I will encourage all participants to share stories of their language learning and cultural adjustment experiences since coming to study [here]. Others in the group will be allowed to add comments or ask questions. Because I do not speak Arabic, and one of the important parts of the study is to examine how you use English to describe yourself and your experiences, the discussions will all be conducted in English. If somebody makes a comment in Arabic, I will ask somebody to translate it for me (either in the group, or later).

The discussion groups will be held in a classroom at [this university]. They will be video-recorded, so that later when I am transcribing the tape I can tell who said what. I will not use real names when I am transcribing the data. All the information I collect will be kept confidential, and real names will not be used for any reports.

After the data from the discussion groups have been analysed, some participants will be invited to participate in follow-up interviews. The purpose of these interviews is to confirm and clarify the findings. These follow-up interviews are also voluntary.

## Statement of Consent

I ……………………………………… (please write your name here) agree to take part in the Saudi Nursing Students Study and agree to participate in at least one discussion group on the topic of language and cultural adjustment to Australia.

I understand that

- The study will be about language and cultural adjustment, and also about how Saudi students use English to describe themselves and their experiences.
- Participation in this study is voluntary
- The discussion groups will be held at [this university].
- I can decide to withdraw from this study at any time, and withdrawing from the study will not affect my studies at [this university].
- Any personal information in the data will be kept confidential.
- Data will not be used for any other purposes.
- Data will be kept in a safe place at [this university].
- No real names will be used in reporting data.
- I will have the opportunity to receive a short report of the findings.
- I can contact the Ethics Committee at [this university] if I have any concerns regarding this study.

…………………………………...

Participant's signature

…………………………………...

Date

For more information on this project, you can contact my supervisor, [email and phone contact numbers]

If you have any other concern regarding the implementation of the project, you can contact The Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee at [this university] [telephone contact numbers].

# Saudi Nursing Students' Study

Could you please answer the following questions? The information you give will be kept confidential. No names will be used in reporting on the research.

| | |
|---|---|
| What is your name? | |
| How old are you? | |
| Where do you come from? | |
| *(Where in Saudi Arabia?)* | |
| Are you married? | |
| *(Do you have children?)* | |
| What program are you enrolled in currently? | |
| What stage in your program are you in now? | |
| Where do you live now? *(kind of accommodation)* | |
| *(Are any of your family here with you?)* | |
| For how long have you been in Australia? | |
| Why did you decide to study abroad in an English speaking country? | |
| Why did you choose to study at [this university]? | |

NOTE: Questions in italics to be asked if answers to previous questions indicate that would be appropriate.