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TITLE	The salience of a prior relationship between researcher and participants: Reflecting on acquaintance interviews
YEAR	2022
DOI	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rmal.2021.100003
VERSION	Author's accepted manuscript
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CITATION	Anssi Roiha, Päivi Ikkänen, The salience of a prior relationship between researcher and participants: Reflecting on acquaintance interviews, Research Methods in Applied Linguistics, Volume 1, Issue 1, 2022, 100003, ISSN 2772-7661, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rmal.2021.100003 .

The salience of a prior relationship between researcher and participants: Reflecting on acquaintance interviews

Abstract

This article aims to contribute to the discussion on interviews in qualitative research. More specifically, we focus on acquaintance interviews (Garton & Copland, 2010), that is, interviews in which the interviewer and interviewees have already established a prior relationship. By using data from both authors' doctoral studies in applied linguistics (Iikkanen, 2020; Roiha, 2019), we illustrate how this prior relationship becomes salient and is made use of in interviews. In this article, we focus on two themes, *frame shifting* and *building rapport*. The data excerpts presented in the article exemplify the types of frame shifts that took place in our acquaintance interviews. The findings also suggest that acquaintance interviews can offer researchers a fruitful arena for utilizing the already existing common ground between them and their research participants; a prior relationship serves as a resource to build rapport with interviewees. The ethical aspect involved in acquaintance interviews is also briefly discussed.

Keywords: qualitative research, acquaintance interviews, frame shifting, rapport, pre-existing relationship

Introduction

In recent years, interviews have proliferated in many disciplines as a method of empirical data collection (Roulston, 2019). Although positivistic survey type approaches to interviewing (e.g., Singleton & Straits, 2012), where researcher involvement is kept to a minimum, have largely been abandoned in qualitative research, interviewees are sometimes still seen merely as *treasure chests* (Borer & Fontana, 2012) from which data should be extracted with as little researcher interference as possible. Now, however, there seems to be a scholarly consensus that interviews are “a shared

product” of the interviewer and the interviewee and that “what is in the mind of the interviewer influences the process and the content of the ‘data’” (Josselson, 2013, p. 1). However, there still remains some debate as to how this affects the actual data and their analysis. Although we are proponents of approaching interviews as sites of social action, we believe, with Josselson (2013), that it is possible to achieve some level of understanding of people’s experiences and perceptions through interviewing. Likewise, we agree with Whitaker and Atkinson (2019) who, while emphasizing the performative aspects of interview talk, that is, the view that all interviews are social encounters in which interviewees are performing certain roles contingent on the interlocutor, also suggest that interviews may have referential value and that broader inferences can be drawn from them.

This article was prompted by our doctoral dissertations, in which we both had a personal relationship with the interviewees (Iikkanen, 2020; Roiha, 2019), albeit in slightly different ways (see section *The research contexts*). When embarking on this method of data collection for our theses, we searched for articles and academic texts on the subject and, to our surprise, found relatively few, even though it is fairly common for example in cross-cultural research for the researcher to have a pre-existing involvement or understanding of the community they study (see e.g., Chaparro, 2019; Goncalves, 2013). It seems that Garton and Copland’s (2010) article is the most comprehensive work on the specific topic of interviewing one’s acquaintances. They aptly label these types of interviews *acquaintance interviews*, which is the term that we have also adopted to describe the interviews we conducted for our doctoral dissertations. According to Garton and Copland, in acquaintance interviews the interviewees can be the researcher’s friends, colleagues, family members, or associates, for instance. Garton and Copland’s article is an insightful piece of writing, and since its publication various questions connected with degrees of

familiarity between interviewers and participants have been discussed across different disciplines (e.g., McDermid et al., 2014; Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2014). Nevertheless, we believe there is still much to investigate concerning the issue of interviewing people with whom the interviewer has a prior relationship.

In this article we endeavor to contribute to the discussion on acquaintance interviews, and reflect on their potential benefits. We will first review how interviews in general have been approached in qualitative research and position the acquaintance interviews we have conducted in this discussion. We will then briefly summarize our respective doctoral research studies (Iikkanen, 2020; Roiha, 2019) and consider the role of acquaintance interviews in them. After that, we will highlight some of the distinctive features of our acquaintance interviews through authentic data excerpts from our research. Although our research is situated in the field of applied linguistics, we argue that the phenomena addressed in this article have wider resonance and implications across disciplines.

Conceptualizing interviews

Interviews have been conceptualized and classified in various ways and there have been numerous publications on the subject (e.g., Byrne, 2004; Edwards & Holland, 2013; Josselson, 2013; King et al., 2019). For instance, Talmy (2010) juxtaposed what he labels *interviews as research instrument* with *interviews as social practice*, which differ on the paradigm level. The former approach sees interviews as generating truths and facts, in other words, it focuses on the *products* of the interview, whereas the latter is more interested in the *process* of interviewing, in which meanings are approached as co-constructed accounts of, for example, the participants' experiences, attitudes, or beliefs (Talmy).

In the interview as research instrument approach, the researcher's role in generating the interview data is often left out of the analysis, as Talmy's (2010) review of several qualitative studies in applied linguistics indicates. Such an approach also fails to address the underlying power differences for example in the institutional status or age of the interviewer and interviewee. As Talmy points out, such differences can, however, seriously affect both the course of the actual interview as well as the ensuing process of data recontextualization. In contrast, when research interviews are approached from a social-practice oriented perspective, more attention is paid to challenging "the conception of interviews as a conduit into what people really think, know, or believe" (Talmy, p. 140).

Berner-Rodoreda et al.'s (2020) classification of qualitative interviews bears similarities to Talmy's (2010) distinction. Berner-Rodoreda et al. argue that qualitative interviews can typically be placed on a continuum of *doxastic* and *epistemic* interviews. In doxastic interviews, the aim is to gain an understanding of the interviewees' experiences and behavior, whereas in epistemic interviews the goal is to co-construct knowledge during the interview process. In their classification, interview types such as *narrative* (Rosenthal, 2003), *phenomenological* (Groenewald, 2004), or *ethnographic* (O'Reilly, 2012) fall into the category of doxastic interviews. Epistemic interviews, in turn, include for instance *active* (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003), *expert* (Kezar, 2003), or *confrontational* interviews (Kvale, 2007).

Berner-Rodoreda et al. (2020, p. 296) have further coined their own distinct interview type under the umbrella of epistemic interviews, called *deliberative interviews*, by which they refer to interviews in which both parties "reason together, have about the same speaking time, and that they can question, even challenge one another in the joint search for a better understanding or more suitable solutions to the issues at stake." Another characteristic of deliberative interviews is that

the interviewer and interviewee should have shared knowledge of the topic(s) addressed in the interview (Berner-Rodoreda et al.).

With regard to active interviews, Holstein and Gubrium (2003) have distinguished between the *whats* and *hows* in both the data collection and the analysis. The former refers to the content of the interview and aims to uncover the participants' thoughts detached from the interview situation, whereas the latter signifies the process of how participants construct meaning in collaboration with the researcher. According to Holstein and Gubrium, in active interviews both the *whats* and the *hows* are of equal importance. Byrne (2004) has used the terms *interviews as a resource* and *interviews as a topic* to make a similar distinction. In the former, the interest lies in approaching the data as unveiling the interviewee's reality outside the interview whereas the latter approach focuses on meanings jointly constructed by the interviewer and interviewee.

With reference to Berner-Rodoreda et al.'s (2020) typology of qualitative interviews, we would place our acquaintance interviews in the middle ground of the doxastic–epistemic continuum. A point to note here is that acquaintance interviews may vary in terms of the level of co-construction between the interlocutors. What these interviews have in common is the prior relationship between the interviewer and interviewee(s). Whether or not that prior relationship is utilized depends on the study. Some acquaintance interviews can therefore be categorized purely as doxastic interviews, whereas the types of acquaintance interview we conducted include aspects of epistemic interviews (Berner-Rodoreda et al.; Brinkman, 2007). Similarly, we consider Talmy's (2010) distinction between interviews as research instrument and interviews as social practice a continuum rather than a dichotomy; the acquaintance interviews we conducted for our own research fall somewhere in between the interview approaches presented above. With regard to Holstein and Gubrium's (2003) *whats* and *hows* and Byrne's (2004) *interviews as a resource* and

interviews as a topic, the emphasis in our studies was on the former in both cases, while not disregarding the latter: that is, although we were predominantly interested in the participants' experiences, we acknowledged the nature of the interview situation and its potential impact on the data and explicitly addressed this in our research reports (Iikkanen, 2020; Roiha, 2019).

Iikkanen's interviews could also be labeled ethnographically-oriented, which, in Berner-Rodoreda et al.'s (2020) classification, fall within the category of doxastic interviews. However, the interview situations in Iikkanen's research were highly interactional and meanings were partly co-constructed (see also Brinkman, 2007). In ethnographic research in general, it is an implicit postulate that the researcher is deeply involved in the research context, as observations are the primary mode of data collection (Gobo, 2008); as a result, the researcher has established a relationship with the participants, often preceding the interview (Davies, 2007). As opposed to other types of acquaintance interviews, in ethnographic interviews the researcher does not have a prior relationship with the participants but the relationship is established only through conducting the research (Garton & Copland, 2010). The relationships between the interviewer and interviewees and their respective roles in ethnographic interviews still bring a distinct element to the data collection. As the interviewer and interviewees have interacted several times outside the interview setting, the interview may resemble a naturally occurring conversation rather than a formal research interview (O'Reilly, 2012). This was also the case in Iikkanen's research.

Prior relationship and familiarity in interviews

In qualitative work in general, the researcher is often familiar with the topic and close to the people they are interviewing. The element of familiarity in interviews can therefore be considered more a continuum than an insider/outsider dichotomy. Although familiarity is present in many interviews

to one degree or another, the prior relationship between researcher and participants remains largely unexplored terrain. For instance, in his study, Palfreyman (2005) interviewed his colleagues but left this aspect of their relationship entirely out of the analysis. Similarly, Prior (2011) conducted ethnographic interviews with a participant whom he had met a year before the first interview. In the research report, Prior focused on the co-construction of the narrative but gave the pre-existing relationship little attention.

Among the studies that have explicitly acknowledged the prior relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is McDermid et al.'s (2014) study, in which the authors conducted an in-depth methodological review across multiple databases in the field of nursing studies. They assert that the dual roles of researcher and colleague need to be carefully addressed and acknowledged to ensure ethical conduct. In a similar vein, Owton and Allen-Collinson (2014) conducted an ethnographic study among sportspeople suffering from asthma with whom the principal researcher had a pre-existing friendship. The study concluded that friendship as a method (Tillmann-Healy, 2003) can help researchers to achieve a more dialogical and emotionally rich relationship with their participants. However, Owton and Allen-Collinson also remind researchers of the potential risks that such a deep involvement with participants may bring and emphasize the importance of researcher self-care.

A particularly interesting example of sustained involvement with research participants was conducted by Oakley (2016) to investigate women who were becoming first-time mothers. The initial study, where repeated interviews (2 before and 2 after the birth of the babies) were used as a method of data collection, took place 37 years prior to the follow-up study. Coming as it did near the beginning of an emerging feminist tradition, the original study was controversial and received a lot of criticism, mostly due to the researcher's high degree of personal involvement with the

participants. Oakley admits that some of the initial ideas about the researcher–researched relationship, “the complex conditions that shape familiarity and friendship” (p. 209), were somewhat naïve, and contends that the applicability of the concept of friendship in interview research needs further exploration. Oakley also suggests the notion of a “gift” as an alternative way of conceptualizing “the dependence of researchers on what research participants are willing to contribute from the memories and stories of their lives” (p. 209).

Weinreb et al. (2018) propose that on one end of the familiar/unknown continuum are insiders who are familiar with the community and the respondents. On the other end are outsiders who represent the traditional *stranger-interviewer* norm; that is, they are not locals in the community, nor do they have a prior relationship with the participants. Along the continuum are *local-strangers*, who are familiar with the community but do not have a pre-existing relationship with the participants. Weinreb et al.’s study showed that the participants disclosed more information to insiders and were also less inclined to lie to them than to outsider interviewers. The authors therefore suggest that insiders who have a prior relationship with the participants can “collect superior data on some items” (Weinreb et al., p. 95).

Greenleaf et al. (2021) made a distinction between two types of insider interviews, namely *insider-friend* and *insider-acquaintance*. The former relates to a pre-existing relationship between the interviewer and the participants, while the latter describes a setting in which the interviewer becomes acquainted with the participant through the research process, or has a passing relationship with them. Greenleaf et al.’s interviewers felt that familiarity resulted in more honest narration but overall felt that the participants’ personalities had the greatest effect, irrespective of whether there was a prior relationship. The interviewers made no distinction between friends and acquaintances and only contrasted them with unknown participants.

Shelton (2019) analyzed the epistemic shifts associated with one participant in a study that she carried out. She had a prior relationship with this participant as she had been the participant's teacher in an undergraduate course. Shelton interviewed the participant several times during a longitudinal study. She observed that the participant first presented themselves as a novice, an inexperienced teacher, but gradually started to perceive themselves as more knowledgeable, as an expert on the topic. According to Shelton, her role in the interviews contributed to this shift as she praised the participant's actions and reinforced their self-praise. Shelton recognized the benefits of interviewing one's acquaintances, suggesting that their pre-existing relationship encouraged the participants in her study to initially seek advice from the interviewer and report on their unsuccessful teaching moments.

Garton and Copland (2010) explored in depth the topic of interviewing people with whom the interviewer has a prior relationship. They propose that acquaintance interviews often capitalize on shared experiences and use them as resources for co-constructing meaning. The authors argue that the prior relationship between the parties affects the data and that not all data generated in acquaintance interviews are necessarily available to outsider interviewers. Garton and Copland underscore that the fact of being already acquainted needs to be made explicit in the research report. Garton and Copland's analysis shows that negotiations of asymmetrical relationships and certain types of *frame shifting* are distinctive to acquaintance interviews. Frame shifting refers to Sarangi's (2004) categorization of interview talk in three frames, namely *institutional*, *professional*, and *lifeworld* frames. In the institutional frame, the function of an interview is made salient and both the interviewer and interviewee take on their institutional identities and adhere to the traditional question-answer mode. The professional frame is characterized by references to one's profession, whereas the lifeworld frame refers to the interviewer and interviewee sharing

and discussing their personal experiences and perceptions (Sarangi). Aarsand and Aarsand (2019) see this kind of joint negotiation between various participant positions (or frames) as a highly fluid and dynamic activity. They argue that several activities may sometimes take place simultaneously, as different positions (such as acquaintance or professional in our context) are made relevant in the given situation. Garton and Copland suggested that shifting between the above frames is often typical of acquaintance interviews. Our own interview data also substantiate this to a significant degree.

The research contexts

Summaries of the research projects

In this article, we draw on data from two separate doctoral studies. The first is the first author's PhD research, in which he examined CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) from the perspectives of former pupils (Roiha, 2019). The aim of the study was to investigate how the participants perceived the effects of their CLIL experience on their lives, and it touched upon topics such as language attitudes, foreign language self-concept, and intercultural awareness. The participants (n=24), adults in their early 30s who had been in the same CLIL class as the researcher for nine years in the 1990s, were interviewed in 2016 and 2017. The researcher thus had a prior relationship with all of them, although the nature of the relationship varied from one participant to another. That is, while the researcher had been in close contact with some of the participants up until the interviews, with others he had not interacted since their CLIL times. As a result, he was better acquainted with some participants than others but nonetheless had a shared history with each participant, which resulted in the interviews being labeled acquaintance interviews. The interviews followed broad themes that were sent to the participants in advance. The interviews, which were

conducted in Finnish, were audio-recorded and translated verbatim. Consequently, the interview quotations from this study that are used in this article have been translated into English by the researcher.

The second set of data originates from the second author's longitudinal PhD study with migrant parents (n=8) and family clinic nurses (n=7) in Finland (Iikkanen, 2020). The study focused on the role of the English language in migrant integration. The overarching aim of the study was to gain a better understanding of voluntary migrants' individual integration trajectories, and the role perceived English proficiency plays in how these unfold. The parent participants were recruited through a multicultural parent-child group organized by a local non-profit non-governmental organization. The group convened once a week, and welcomed all parents and children, both migrants and native Finns alike. The group's goals were to provide a safe space for newly arrived parents to network and share experiences with others, and help them get acquainted with the region. The researcher first observed the group's activities and participated in them with her own son, and thus became acquainted with the members of the group through informal discussions and shared experience. The role of fellow parent made the researcher an "insider," a fully-fledged member of the group (cf. Greenleaf et al., 2021; Weinreb et al., 2018), which helped her establish good rapport and recruit suitable participants for the study. Since the researcher had a pre-existing relationship with her participants prior to the interviews, they can be classified as acquaintance interviews. Maintaining a good relationship with the participants was especially important due to the study's longitudinal nature and the researcher's wish to stay in touch with the participants throughout the three-year period of data collection. To investigate how the parents' integration and language learning trajectories unfolded, the participants were interviewed two to

three times between 2015 and 2018. Similar to Roiha's study, the interviews followed general themes and were audio-recorded and translated verbatim.

Interview locations

One typical characteristic of acquaintance interviews is the interview venue. Acquaintance interviews are often conducted in less formal settings than traditional interviews, such as the researcher's or the participant's home or a public place. The venue where interviews take place has received little attention in research in general (see e.g., Elwood & Martin, 2000; Sand et al., 2021). Following Elwood and Martin, we consider interview locations to have a direct bearing on the data generated; a less formal and institutionalized interview venue than, for instance, university premises, may induce interviewees to give more personal accounts than would be given in a different setting.

In Roiha's study, the participants were given an opportunity to choose their interview location. The researcher, however, suggested either his home, the participant's home, or a public place. This was a conscious choice: conducting the interviews on university premises might have created undesired power relationships in the interview, possibly highlighting the interviewer's professional and institutional roles. A deliberate attempt was thus made to diminish any such power imbalance. Out of the 24 interviews, 11 were held at the researcher's home, six at the participant's home, three in a public location, and four via Skype, for practical reasons. Notably, the interviews conducted at either the researcher's or the participant's home at times resembled a casual chat rather than a formal interview. During the interviews, the interviewer and interviewees were observed to reminisce about shared past experiences as they co-constructed meaning. The recorded face-to-face interviews were always preceded by "catch-up" conversations of varying

lengths. This informal exchange between two old friends can be interpreted as having an effect on the local power relations, putting the interviewer and interviewee on a more equal footing right from the start of the interview. Consequently, this had, in the researcher's view, significant implications for the data.

Iikkanen's interviews took place at the interviewees' homes, local cafés, restaurants, or at the university. The venues were chosen by the interviewees, who mostly based their decision on their family's current circumstances. In some cases, this meant that the participants were happy to invite the researcher to their home, since it was the most convenient location for the parents of small children to meet. Sometimes the interviewees' children were also present in the interviews. In other cases, the participants wanted to have some time on their own *outside* their home, away from the daily hassles of family life, while enjoying coffee or lunch. The university also served as a venue on some occasions. As for the language of the interviews, the interviewees were free to choose between English and, later on, Finnish. The interview excerpts quoted in this paper were all originally in English.

Although our two sets of data have different histories and contexts, we believe that we have also found interesting convergences between them. In what follows, we highlight some key aspects of acquaintance interviews that are prominent in our data. We have divided the section into two sub-sections, namely *frame shifting* and *using the prior relationship as a resource to build rapport*.

Key characteristics of acquaintance interviews

Instances of frame shifting

Our data are in line with Garton and Copland's (2010) views about frame shifting in acquaintance interviews. Note that we make no claim that frame shifting is an exclusive feature of acquaintance

interviews; rather, we acknowledge that it occurs in most if not all qualitative interviews. However, based on our data we suggest that frame shifting is often present in an interview between acquaintances, and manifests there in a particular way. Our interviews contained several instances when the roles of the interviewer and interviewee seemed to be shifting between institutional, professional, and lifeworld frames (Sarangi, 2004). For instance, in the following interview excerpt from the first author's data, in which one of the participants, Kimmo¹, is talking about the difficulties he had encountered in school when studying Finnish (i.e., his first language), this type of shift in frames is evident. Kimmo and Anssi had been close friends in primary school and thus knew each other's families:

Excerpt 1

- 1 Anssi: So you didn't have grammar mistakes in them but it was mostly the content or..?
- 2 Kimmo: Well yes. I'm sure there were grammar mistakes too but it probably wasn't the biggest
- 3 thing. Somehow it was just a bit too vague and then again because I haven't read literature.
- 4 Or I mean in secondary school we didn't, I don't remember that I would have. Maybe I
- 5 read a few books all the way through but many things you could pass just by reading a bit
- 6 from the beginning and the end of the chapter. And then you would give this kind of lousy
- 7 presentation of it and then people clapped their hands whereas I remember that you read
- 8 books and liked it.
- 9 Anssi: Yes in primary school. In secondary school I didn't. Or did I? I don't remember.
- 10 Kimmo: But in our family nobody has ever really read a lot.

¹ All the participants in both studies were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. The interviewees are referred to by their first names.

In lines 7 and 8, Kimmo makes a transition from an institutional to a lifeworld frame (Sarangi, 2004) by referring to Anssi's childhood and his reading habits. Anssi acknowledges the comment and responds to it, after which Kimmo goes on to talk about the reading tradition in his family. In our interviews, the shifts between the different frames were often relatively subtle and instantaneous, as the above extract exemplifies. An utterance in the lifeworld frame was directly followed by a move back to the institutional frame. It was sometimes challenging to rigorously distinguish between the different frames; it could, rather, be interpreted that the institutional and lifeworld frames partly intertwined and occurred simultaneously (see also Aarsand & Aarsand, 2019; Garton & Copland, 2010). In the above extract, for instance, Kimmo mostly sticks to the institutional frame and is determined to answer the initial question; at the same time, he makes occasional references to the lifeworld frame, which signal delicate changes from the more institutionalized interviewer/interviewee roles to the roles of two old friends. Despite the many instances of lifeworld frame, there was strong institutionality even in our acquaintance interviews. This manifested in the way the interviews were scheduled and arranged, and in the pre-determined themes that established their course (see also Sarangi, 2004). However, our data indicate that acquaintance interviews may naturally deviate from the prescribed scripts and can generate information that might come to light only in this type of interview.

Another example of frame shifting comes from Niko's interview, in which he is recollecting his past school experiences:

Excerpt 2

- 1 Anssi: Do you remember at all what kinds of emotions it evoked? When there was some English-
2 medium teaching, for instance in [teacher's name omitted] class, what kind of feelings
3 were involved there?
- 4 Niko: It didn't.. I can't make any other difference except that I clearly remember that
5 mathematics was always in Finnish. Maybe.. and then P.E. lessons were in Finnish.
6 Otherwise it's all very blurry and I can't even describe how big a percentage *we* had of
7 English-medium teaching. *You probably know how to answer this but for me it was more*
8 *like now we are just learning religion.*
- 9 Anssi: Why do you think it's hard to remember that?
- 10 Niko: It didn't.. Maybe *we* were able to learn.. study those things with such a good.. or the
11 content at such a high level that it never felt like studying the language. It just felt natural.
- 12 Anssi: Yeah. When you reflect on it, *do you think that because we covered those things in*
13 *English that we learned somehow less than others?* I mean did *we* learn the content less
14 than others or more or the same amount?
- 15 Niko: Well at least I didn't have the feeling that *we* learned less. Or I don't know what the reality
16 is. And also the fact that *we* had.. *Correct me if I'm wrong* but I think in practice *our*
17 *teacher* changed the language just like that. That there wasn't this kind of distinction that
18 now *we* are changing to English-medium teaching.

In the above excerpt, the shared history and prior relationship between the interviewer and interviewee become visible in several places. First, in the middle of his utterances Niko makes two similar references to Anssi's expertise on the topic being discussed (italicized in lines 7-8 and 16-17), which can be seen as a shift to the professional frame (Sarangi, 2004). Niko does not appear to expect a response from Anssi with regard to either reference but merely uses this speech act to clarify things and remind the interviewer that he may not recall everything that happened correctly;

at the same time, it explicitly points to the interviewer's professional and institutional roles. Second, the shared history becomes apparent also at a more micro-level. For instance, throughout the excerpt Niko and Anssi use the pronoun "we" when referring to their class (italicized in lines 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18). It could be that Niko uses *we* simply to refer to his classmates in general, but in his question in lines 12 and 13 (italicized), Anssi uses the inclusive pronoun *we* instead of *you*, which makes their shared history more salient, thereby reducing the power distance between the interlocutors (Talmy, 2010) and moving away from the institutional frame to the lifeworld frame (Sarangi). Niko seems to accept this frame as he continues in the same mode, using 'we' in his answer in line 15. In our view, these references illustrate how the shared history and prior relationship were used as a resource to co-construct the interview talk, and also to build rapport (see also section *Using the prior relationship as a resource to build rapport*).

Our third data excerpt about frame shifting originates in the second author's doctoral dissertation (Iikkanen, 2020). The researcher interviewed eight migrant parents over a three-year period. As the interviews proceeded, it became increasingly evident how important the common ground of parenting was for building trust, sharing experiences and establishing a more equal relationship between the researcher and the participants. The parents also sought advice for various cultural or child-related concerns that they were facing in the new environment—to such an extent that sometimes, as the participants turned to the researcher for information on the "Finnish" way of life, it seemed as though the interviewer's and interviewees' roles were switched. This, in the researcher's view, made the interview process more reciprocal, and significantly reduced potential power differences. The interview excerpt below, from an interview between Katherina and Päivi, illustrates the point very well. Katherina is originally from Hungary, and she had lived in Finland

for five years with her Hungarian husband and two children at the time of the interview in 2018. She initially moved to Finland because of her husband's work.

Excerpt 3

1 Katherina: But, that's what makes me a bit worry that I don't know how to imagine how, I'm not the
2 first mother with two kids who, who does everything in the household and additionally
3 also works, at least six hours a day, wants to work six hours a day but, you know, how to
4 arrange everything so that you also have some, some time for yourself and also your
5 partner.

6 Päivi: That's an eternal question I think.

7 Katherina: That's, yeah, but now and I know it's an eternal question, but I'm facing it at, now, today..

8 Päivi: yeah..

9 Katherina: That ok, my six hours work means at the moment that it's only five hours, because I take
10 the kids [laughter] to the daycare and then, and pick them up, and then of course our
11 whole apartment is a mess, and then, and then..

12 Päivi: Laundry, cleaning, cooking..

13 Katherina: Just, just to do, just that it looks a bit better, it takes, I don't know, at least half an hour
14 and then, and then there's some, yeah, lunchtime or something when you have to eat, and
15 then ok, we are at four hours aren't we?

16 Päivi: [laughter]

17 Katherina: So what do you do?

18 Päivi: Yeah, yeah, I guess there are at least two ways of looking at it, well, for one, it's, it's
19 temporary, children will on- only be small for a few years, and, well, who cares about the
20 mess, it's not the end of the world.

- 21 Katherina: Yeah.. [laughter]
- 22 Päivi: You just have to learn to live with it [laughter] or then take the time and do it.
- 23 (...)
- 24 Päivi: I've tried to find a sort of midway.
- 25 Katherina: Like the automatic Hoover.
- 26 Päivi: [laughter] that..
- 27 Katherina: For example..
- 28 Päivi: That was my husband's find, [laughter] 'cause he was (xxx) with the mess.
- 29 Katherina: We still talk about it with [my son], the automatic Hoover, the laiva ('boat').

Katherina first describes how difficult it has been for her to balance between work and keeping her family life organized, especially since she works from home for their own company. She is therefore unable to escape “the mess” before starting to work. After describing her own situation, she asks Päivi directly: “so what do you do?” (line 17), challenging her to reciprocate, and she comments on how Päivi has solved the issue. This can be seen as an instance of shifting to the lifeworld frame (Sarangi, 2004). A more obvious move to the lifeworld frame comes when, after Päivi's explanation, Katherina refers to a household appliance that her son was very impressed with (line 25) when they visited Päivi's house some months earlier. This shared memory also made the talk more personal. In fact, the visit itself seems to have been important for Katherina and her son, as the boy still, months later, remembered the appliance in question, and a boat that was parked in Päivi's driveway during their visit. Through these encounters, Päivi and Katherina had become much more personally involved and had developed a friendly and mutually rewarding relationship.

All the above data extracts illustrate how our acquaintance interviews utilized the prior relationship and shifted between different roles and frames. At times, the interviews resembled

casual conversations between acquaintances much more than research interviews between researchers and their informants, which is typical of ethnographic interviews (O'Reilly, 2012). As evidenced by the data extracts, acquaintance interviews may offer access to research material that would be difficult to obtain without an existing relationship of trust between the researcher and the participants. In what follows, we reflect on this point in more detail.

Using the prior relationship as a resource to build rapport

In qualitative interviews in general, rapport between the researcher and researched is considered important (Prior, 2018; Rapley, 2004). As Prior stated, especially in interview approaches such as narrative or ethnographic interviews, the researcher is committed to creating a personal relationship with the interviewee characterized by trust, respect, and consent. In an interview setting in which a personal relationship exists before the interview, the notion of rapport may have an increased role. According to Garton and Copland (2010), however, there is very little work on the role prior relationships can have in establishing rapport. Our data reveal several instances where the common ground and history shared by the researcher and the participants were used as a resource to create and maintain rapport during the interview talk. The following excerpt, in which the first author is talking with one of the participants (Jukka), exemplifies this.

Excerpt 4:

- 1 Anssi: Do you remember at all about our CLIL lessons that did *we* have any visitors in class?
- 2 In primary school.
- 3 Jukka: At least I remember the class trip we had.
- 4 Anssi: What was that?

5 Jukka: The trip to Norway.
6 Anssi: Oh yeah right, but that was in secondary school.
7 Jukka: Was it?
8 Anssi: Yeah it was. Tell me.. we were in the same family weren't we?
9 Jukka: Yes we were. And there was a dog this size [shows the size with his hand] there.
10 Anssi: Oh yes true. And I was all scared cause I'm afraid of dogs. I had totally forgotten about
11 this class trip.
12 Jukka: It was incredible the place where we were.
13 Anssi: You mean the house?
14 Jukka: Yeah, this kind of cabin.
15 Anssi: True.. Hey by the way, we spoke English there right? Tell me a bit about that, how was
16 it and so on?

The above excerpt between Anssi and Jukka showcases how the interview talk often deviated from the original topic of the interview, and the interviews often resembled an informal conversation between two old friends. In the excerpt, Anssi initially asks Jukka whether he remembers anyone visiting their CLIL lessons (e.g., foreign guest speakers) (lines 1–2). Therefore, at the start of this excerpt, Anssi is mostly adhering to an institutional frame, even though he once again uses the pronoun *we* rather than *you* (italicized in line 1) to underscore the shared history. Jukka, however, disregards this question and shifts to the lifeworld frame by starting to talk about a class trip to Norway during which he and Anssi had stayed in the same host family (from line 3 onwards). Anssi and Jukka then engage in a brief conversation about the class trip and co-construct meanings and memories associated with the trip (lines 4–16). The above type of situation, in which the interviewer and interviewees reminisced about shared memories, was a recurring feature in our interviews. This, in our view, can be interpreted as having a positive impact on building rapport

which, in turn, might have had an effect on the data. For instance, the above excerpt was followed by Jukka elaborating on his English language use during the class trip and how that contributed to his strong and robust English language self-concept. This was used as data in another article by the first author that focused on the role CLIL played in forming the participants' positive target language self-concept (see Roiha & Mäntylä, 2019).

Another example of the role of rapport comes from Iikkanen's interview with Thomas. He was the only male interviewee in Iikkanen's study and had had a very hard time settling in Finland. Thomas had originally moved to Finland to live with his Finnish wife, who was still doing her professional training when they got married. At the time of the interview in 2016, Thomas did not have a job, so he was staying at home with their son while his wife worked. In the following, he describes some incidents that had made him feel like an outsider in Finland.

Excerpt 5:

- 1 Thomas: Probably one of the hardest things I find is, I dunno, for example, we've had so many
2 people over here for dinner and stuff like that, but we never get that in return, so..
- 3 Päivi: Ok..
- 4 Thomas: There's always this one-sided thing, and I've just, ah..
- 5 Päivi: You feel like you're just giving all the time.
- 6 Thomas: Yeah..
- 7 Päivi: And not getting anything back.
- 8 Thomas: Yeah, and I find that, I dunno if it's a Finnish thing or if it's..
- 9 [...]
- 10 Thomas: yeah, well, but even one of the, one of the hardest things I've found is when we had [our
11 son], and just, this is a really big cultural difference, is, in Australia everyone visits you

12 and stuff like that, an' I find that in Finland, like, no one visited us, we had family coming
13 to see him, but it was like none of that, like we had to throw a party for people to meet,
14 an' I was like, I was gobsmacked, so it was two months or three months after we'd had
15 [our son], and then we had, we have to have a party for people to come, an' I said I found
16 that very, very strange.

17 [...]

18 Thomas: so, the other thing that I found really hard is to catch up with people, it's like booking a
19 doctor's appointment, it's so difficult in Finland, it's like, can we come and visit, oh yeah,
20 you can come visit us on Tuesday, an' at eight o'clock, we should be home then, and you
21 go there and there's like cake and coffee, it's like, no I just wanted to come and say hello,
22 look, I don't want the whole cake and coffee, I just wanna come over and say hello, you
23 can make me coffee an'..

24 Päivi: yeah, maybe people just take things a little too seriously, or they want everything to be
25 perfect every time they have company.

26 Thomas: yeah, but I dunno, that's, for me, that's a very big difference as well that I've found.

First, Thomas explains that he felt strange because they had invited a lot of people to their home for dinner but none of them had reciprocated their hospitality (lines 1–2). He had also been disappointed that nobody had really reacted to the fact that they had had a baby (from line 10 onwards). A third difference between the Finnish and Australian way of life that he mentions is how people go about visiting one another (starting in line 18). Thomas was apparently used to doing this much more casually. Overall, Thomas felt that Finns are not very considerate or flexible. Being already acquainted with Päivi may have helped Thomas to talk about these differences; he is unlikely to have talked about these incidents with an unknown Finn, since vocalizing such sentiments is in direct conflict with the general impression Finns like to have about themselves as

considerate and hospitable towards newcomers. To us, all this suggests that being well acquainted with one's interviewees and using one's shared history as a resource to establish and maintain rapport may allow access to information that might not always be generated in other ways, as Garton and Copland (2010), among others, also suggest.

Conclusion

In this article, we have discussed the idiosyncrasies of acquaintance interviews through two broad themes, namely *frame shifting* and *using the prior relationship as a resource to build rapport*, and have endeavored to demonstrate the advantages of such interviews. Despite the potential of acquaintance interviews, they also call for greater attention to the researcher's positionality and research ethics, for a variety of reasons. First, interviewing one's acquaintances can compromise participants' full anonymity, since the very fact that they are the researcher's acquaintances narrows down the possible field of who they might be. Even though the participants might be anonymous to an outsider reader, there is a chance that they will recognize each other in the research report. It is therefore essential that the participants have been sufficiently informed in advance about the research and the potential consequences of participating in it.

Second, the fact that acquaintance interviews can also become highly personal in nature can increase interviewees' concern that they may be recognized. Special attention must therefore be paid to ethical considerations, and great care must be taken to anonymize the participants and not disclose any background information about them that would be too revealing. Researchers must also consider very carefully whether highly confidential or personal accounts should even be considered research data. For instance, Iikkanen decided to leave a tragic family event described by one of the participants out of the analysis. As one solution, participants can be asked to review

the final research report before its publication, to ensure their consent to it. This was done in one of Roiha's PhD articles.

Third, when approaching research through a phenomenological lens, the researcher aims to capture and interpret people's experiences and the meanings involved, typically through interviews (Adams & van Manen, 2012). Consequently, both the interviewees' capacity to recount and narrate their life events as well as the interviewer's ability to interpret these accounts influence how these experiences are portrayed (Laine, 2018). Interviewing one's acquaintances means that the researcher has a lot of contextual information that may not be accessible to an outsider interviewer. At the same time, using acquaintance interviews as data calls for even greater attention to (self-) reflexivity, as Garton and Copland (2010) point out. Although it is generally accepted that the researcher is a central research instrument of their own research (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018), the researcher's pre-understanding and its impact on the entire research process, the data collection and the interpretations made, should be explicitly addressed in the research report.

In conclusion, in this article we have shown how a prior relationship between the interviewer and interviewees can affect the co-constructed and situated nature of the interviews and the data generated. We suggest that interviewing people with whom one already has a relationship (e.g., friends or colleagues) may make salient specific characteristics of the interview talk. In this article, we have discussed two of these characteristics, namely frame shifting and rapport. The data presented in the article illustrate that frame shifting occurred frequently in our research interviews. Only further research will identify whether this is a typical feature of acquaintance interviews. Similarly, we suggest more research is needed to explore the co-construction of rapport in acquaintance interviews.

Finally, from a practical point of view, we would like to encourage researchers to utilize acquaintance interviews as a data collection method when appropriate as long as this relationship and its possible effect on the data are carefully considered in the planning stages and in the research report. We second Rapley's (2001) call to address the interactional side of interviews in research articles much more than is done at present. In his words: "*at the very least* interviewers' talk should *always* be included" in the data extracts (Rapley, p. 306, original emphasis).

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